

***MEASURING UP***  
**and**  
**some of the inside story**

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**A selection of poems from the collection**

***Lines of a Lifetime***

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**BRUNO SCARFE**

## ***MEASURING UP . . . . . Some of the Inside Story***

**– A selection of poems on the mind, the senses and the self**

The coffee affair  
Dental divulgence I and II  
*Desengaño, esperanza y muerte*  
Loss of illusions  
Mind the monkey! 1  
Mind the monkey! 2  
Mind the monkey! 3  
Mind the monkey! 4  
Mind the monkey! 5  
*Nada*  
No nonsense, now! 1  
No nonsense, now! 2  
No nonsense, now! 3  
No nonsense, now! 4  
No nonsense, now! 5  
No nonsense, now! 6  
No nonsense, now! 7  
No nonsense, now! 8  
No nonsense, now! 9  
No nonsense, now! 10  
*¿O?*  
Point of departure  
A question of identification  
Real  
Self portrait (analytical inventory of parts)  
Sense of loss, loss of the senses  
*Soledad*  
*Sombra*  
To squander today  
Vine leaves in autumn  
Why say it all?

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### **Illustrated**

Mind the monkey! 5  
*Nada*  
No nonsense, now! 4, 6 and 8  
Point of departure  
A question of identification  
Self portrait  
Sense of loss  
*Soledad*  
To squander today  
Vine leaves in autumn

## The coffee affair

It waits in  
suspense, silent but  
warm, to

rest or to  
rouse, then smiles as you  
date it.

When, in a cup,  
it's shed its  
colours, taste, and scent,  
who'll resist  
this loved one's touch?

## Dental divulgence

*A 'Milagros' y 'Amparo'*

### I

Facing, coiled tight like snakes, sleek sets of  
cable tipped with steel, and menacing.  
Ore to be gouged from a rock-face, shakes  
less than teeth to be drawn from a jaw.  
The drill bites screeching into the teeth  
then gags the tongue with rubble and grit.

More controlled – no eyes, no hands – than hers  
as she drills, and fills, and polishes.

Old fears come first; the anaesthetic's  
next; real pain? for hours, or days, comes ..... last.

## Dental divulgence

### II

Isabel, the dentist,  
I named 'Dolores';  
but later, confident,  
called her 'Remedios';  
then, finally, impressed –  
made her 'Milagros'.  
(At some stage I could have  
mentioned her perfect  
Andalusian  
features: petite, black hair,  
olive skin, curved white  
of eyes cradling  
pupils deep as the sky, and still.)  
María José, her aide,  
I named 'Amparo',  
and kissed her on the cheeks  
on her last day there.

## Desengaño, esperanza y muerte

Espuelas de odio me herían el ánimo,  
hojas toledanas me rasgaban la vista,  
cartuchos de sangre me aniquilaban.

Pétalos crespos de luz latiendo  
se derriten en nimbos  
que besan los labios  
de mi ser fugitivo.  
¿Me diste tú, Plaza, la bienvenida?  
¿Eras tú, Madre, que me concebiste  
desde el humo  
y desde las llamas  
que me asfixiaban  
en la estaca  
del brutal desengaño?

Pasean Dominicos, blanquinegros,  
ondeando sus mantos medievales,  
y llevan prendidos en cintas barrocas  
democráticos sueños de amor y de paz.

Remaches de sol salpican los ojos  
de las escopetas  
de la ley  
que vigila.  
Dan las doce de la mañana,  
y rezongan campanas  
que siempre sueñan  
en cuántos cayeron para salvarse.  
Huyen las sombras claroscuros,  
descansan los dardos de la disciplina:  
chillidos metálicos  
de satánicos coches  
me machacan la vida,  
me traspasan el alma y me sepultan.

Y en los oídos del cadáver  
vibrarán los ecos que nunca duermen  
de los cien mil ciegos y las gitanillas.

## Loss of illusions

To grow old is to be freed,  
to be freed after watching as their branches reached  
inspired, for the sky.

See the smoke? ... ghostly in the twilight, climbing to the clouds.

To grow old is to be freed,  
to be freed when you've learnt that they were damned to earn  
derision and hatred.

Taste the smoke, gorge hunger on this hollow fruit of dreams.

To grow old is to be freed,  
to be freed after the interminable pain  
of pruning, uprooting, and setting them on fire.

Smell the smoke, anaesthetize despair, stifle hope.

To grow old is to be freed,  
to be freed as they writhe in flames,  
collapse to ash, dissolve to smoke .....

shapeless, silent, anonymous in the night.

## Mind the monkey! 1

Flibbertigibbet,  
all over the place!  
fiddles and fidgets  
and fumbles away.

Flibbertigibbet  
loves Tittle-tattle:  
she's won the Midget  
Tongue Twister Haggie.

Flibbertigibbet  
chats with the riff-raff,  
soaking up snippets  
of colourful gaffes.

Flibbertigibbet  
— oh dear, him again! —  
he laughs, and pivots,  
and leaps in the rain.

Flibbertigibbet's  
poor head's in a daze.  
It knows it lives a  
life lacking an aim.

Flibbertigibbet  
skips around blithely.  
Nothing inhibits  
his acting wildly.

## Mind the monkey! 2

Happy-go-lucky  
with never a care,  
hasn't a worry  
he thinks he can spare.

Happy-go-lucky  
takes things in his stride;  
'unknowns'? they're funny,  
if seen from inside.

Happy-go-lucky  
just idles around;  
he only hurries  
when the time's run out.

Happy-go-lucky  
has no umbrella;  
he finds life sunny  
under the weather.

Happy-go-lucky  
has a rule of thumb:  
"take ideas, roughly,  
with a pint of rum".

Happy-go-lucky  
enjoys roundabouts;  
"swings", he says glumly,  
"aren't nearly as sound".



## Mind the monkey! 3

Hare-Brained, though hamstrung  
and nettled, to boot,  
brings home the bacon,  
quite rashly, on foot.

Scatter-Brain ran a  
ground, when he forgot  
he'd swapped his cata-  
maran for a lot.

Feather-Brain drains rye  
crackers, scrubs the fridge  
and dusts the plates, eyes  
on her offal dish.

Hare-Brained says, "because  
they taught us spare time  
doesn't count, we lost –  
just, by a hair line".

Scatter-Brain says, "no  
bus sways if over  
crowded – subways don't,  
if clouded over".

Feather-Brain weathers  
– what-d'you-call-it? – 'life',  
a breeze, at leisure:  
she's that way inclined.

## Mind the monkey! 4

Though Jack-in-the-box  
has no brains at hand,  
they'll do for the shock  
he lands with a wham.

Jack-in-the box makes  
quite a commotion;  
you'll hear his knock shake  
scales off the ocean.

Jack-in-the-box tricks  
the adult and child.  
His cap is off quick-  
er than you can smile.

Though Jack-in-the-box  
has little to say,  
it's sound as a clock  
with the time o'day.

Jack-in-the-box is  
all noise and no thought,  
his ideas popped in  
a hole with no floor.

Though Jack-in-the-box  
has no time for chat,  
he'll deal you a stock  
conundrum off pat.

## Mind the monkey! 5

Lazy Susan spins  
(slowly), shows her bliss  
when she meets a dish  
that she can service.

Lazy Susan saves  
time, meets the guests, turns  
and circles, and makes  
square meals successful.

Lazy (!) Susan saw  
pepper foiled and on  
his knees (for assault),  
the vinegar gone.

Lazy Susan's days  
are numbered: T.V.  
meals save so much space,  
and are so 'easy'!

Lazy Susan wants  
to turn the tables:  
– table her turn as  
one of the faces.

Lazy Susan shud-  
ders: think of the East!  
A thousand and one  
spices – at each meal!



# Nada

Me llamo 'Nada',  
y nada empiedra los kilómetros de mi existencia.

En nada sueño,  
a través de los siglos grises del crepúsculo.  
En nada pienso  
y no siento nada,

y mi ánimo es una hipótesis  
que jamás se queja,  
que no llora nunca.

Flor de mi esperanza,  
nadie lo es.  
Espuela de mi ser,  
no lo es nada.

Llevo anulado el corazón,  
soy la sombra de la negación.

Ciega sobrevivencia en el calabozo de los cíclopes,  
existo,  
cual ángel ebrio  
en un lagar de infierno.



No nonsense, now! 1

**At home, but where?**

In chorus:  
“See you!”, they signalled,  
and cried –

“try to find  
some welcome symbol  
for us”.

But Taste and Touch,  
Hearing, Sight  
and Smell, left empty-  
handed. ‘I’,  
though in, was ‘out’.

No nonsense, now! 2

**The five counsellors and the jailbird**

“What better  
than help you take note  
of things

in conflict  
with your welfare? so  
send a

guide now, and show  
us .....” “My room?  
Will you find me in  
my live tomb  
of flesh and bone?”

No nonsense, now! 3

**Gifts of Hearing**

Satchmo, Kraus,  
Carmen Amaya,  
Ferrier,

took their turn  
to soothe, or fire,  
or rouse.

A peal of bells,  
organs, horns –  
struck chords, no less than  
waves – windborn –  
and breaths of shells.

No nonsense, now! 4

**Gifts of Sight**

They saw all  
and sundry, bestowed  
gifts strange,

filmed in planes:  
mirrors misled no  
mortal.

Eyes, brought to mind  
visions, truths –  
which, without insight,  
were just views  
through half closed blinds.





No nonsense, now! 5

**Gifts of Smell**

Bread – baking,  
coffee freshly ground,  
warm toast,

stood for home:  
like incense, in crowds  
praying.

Hay, and wood smoke,  
grass and earth,  
were fragrant foils to  
pomanders,  
and phials of gold.

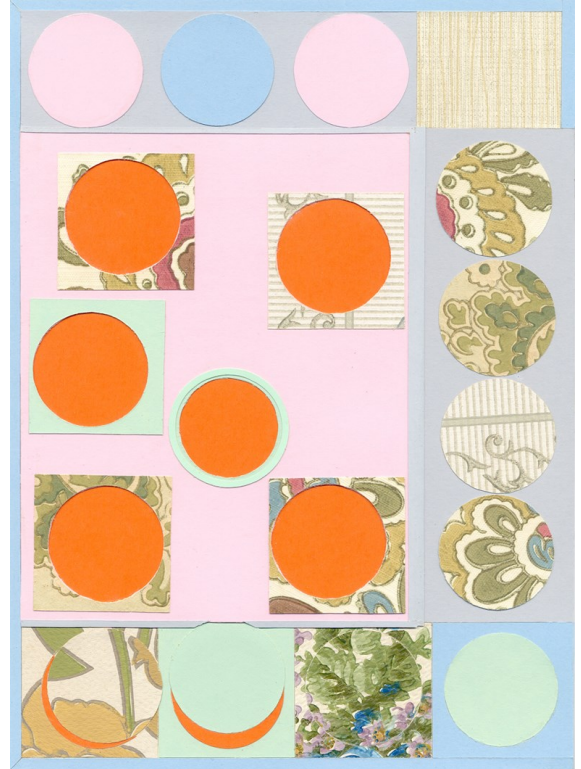
No nonsense, now! 6

### Gifts of Taste

Time and heat,  
garlic, pepper, oil  
and salt,

helped transform  
food – fried, roasted, boiled  
and steamed.

A cheese, a mead,  
wine, liqueur,  
and bread? They're 'just' grapes,  
wheat, milk, pure  
herbs, and honey!



No nonsense, now! 7

**Gifts of touch**

Cheeky tongues  
have fuelled and fanned a  
hundred

flames, plundered  
homes, stilled hands and hearts  
in one.

Frost, wind, and heat  
pulverized,  
rains made mud: .... gave it  
all a life  
– with tongue in cheek.

No nonsense, now! 8

**Of mortal matters, and a spirited reply**

“He takes his  
time to answer now”,  
they said.

“His grey head’s  
worn, his heart’s burnt out  
weighing

rhymes and reasons.”

“‘*Heart*’? or ‘*head*’? –

They’re mine. But ‘me’? I’m  
far from dead:  
I’m the real one.”



No nonsense, now! 9

**A time for everything**

“We’ve brought furs,  
jasmine, mangos, flutes  
at dawn,

crowds that mourn,  
chlorine, aloe juice,  
and ... dirt.”

“You’ve let me choose  
yes, between  
desires and needs – but  
didn’t steer  
me through the rules.”

No nonsense, now! 10

**Who pays the Piper?**

They arrived  
in a body, re-  
minding

me why it  
mattered. I deferred  
reply.

They grumbled: “You’re  
out of touch!”,  
“*Just* ‘views’!”, “.....*what* taste!”, and  
“Why not *snuff*?”



‘I’ call the tune.

¿O?

Limosna,  
callada pide,  
quieta;

te niegas,  
y ni le dices  
'hola'.

Sin embargo  
discutes  
contigo; eres  
o, ¿cutre?  
o, ¿sensato?.

## Point of departure

Through my two eyes,  
outside I see  
a nose,  
two hands,  
two feet:  
my feet, my hands, my nose.

How, though, am I  
to see inside  
and what,  
then, would I see?  
Would it be mine?  
If so,  
wherever can 'I' be?





## A question of Identification

Were I to lose my sense of taste  
and sense of smell,  
if touch and feel found no reply,  
if hearing went  
and I went blind –  
well, would there then be less of me?

The 'I' inside, the 'I' no eye  
can find  
(not yours, not mine) –  
would be there,  
still.



## Real

Of course  
we hear  
a hum  
of cars,  
the thump and roll of distant drums,  
clash of cymbals  
and call of brass,  
a man deranged expressing rage,  
much kitchen clattering  
next door,  
and barking  
(off).

Yes,  
feel them, Thomas, if you must -  
these sounds are each and everyone  
part of this world  
we see  
and touch.

How is it,  
though,  
that *thoughts*,  
intangible,  
can equal or exceed  
such noise outside?

## Self portrait (analytical inventory of parts)

Now, on the minus side we have:  
eyebrows, teeth, stomach and 4 toes;  
and on the plus side, yes, we have:  
2 arms, 2 legs, my hair, 1 nose.  
The rest now, neither good nor very bad,  
await a rating, but I'll have to choose  
a moment  
when my mood's neither buoyant nor depressed.

I see:

2 eyes, 2 ears,  
1 mouth, 2 lips, 1 chin (!),  
eyelashes (x), 2 cheeks,  
1 forehead and 1 beard  
(a beard, I think, goes in);  
the neck's on the shoulders,  
there's a back to the chest,  
but Willy? he's hard to pin down;  
2 hands and 2 feet,  
10 fingers, 6 toes,  
2 elbows, 2 knees –  
and a bum (does that count as 1?);  
the skin's one and many,  
for while some parts are trim,  
some others are flabby.



So what are my chances, at sixty-two,  
of dances and outings with a floozie –  
like you?

## Sense of loss, loss of the senses

A taste, a touch, is all you need to have  
to set in motion change, which – however  
imperceptible at first – in time will  
take not simply wine and glass, but stone, and  
you.

Inhale the fragrance of a rose, a bowl  
of pot-pourri, a wooden camphor chest:  
some perfume lingers days, some – months, some – years,  
then nothing's left. Though all you do is breathe,  
it goes, like you.

I knew a cottage once, with cedars, pines,  
and fruit, which – like an island – had a stream  
all round: a site to live and love, for life.  
Cat and rooster, hens, ducks and ducklings, spoke  
their thoughts; in the wind the cedars sighed, and  
by night and day the water whispered, past.

The sights and sounds made magic in my mind.  
I looked and listened, took part, respected  
the rituals of the show. Still, in time,  
though nothing seemed to change, the magic ceased.



## Soledad

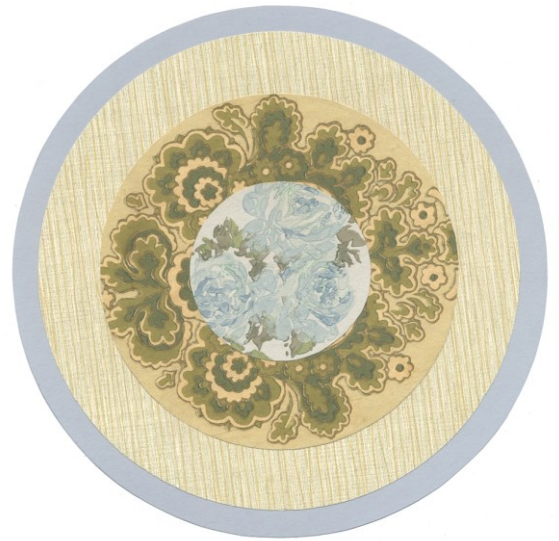
Solo, en la mano carcomida de la vida,  
solo, en las cadenas de mi sombra centinela,  
nunca tan solitario me sentí,  
sin amor de amigo ni de mí.

Por galerías de lluvia y niebla  
mi cuerpo, inconsciente, tropieza.  
Guerrero desterrado, mi ánimo  
volando va hacia la mar.  
Y mi alma, por sombras diabólicas condenada,  
de cadalso a cadalso huye, espantada.

Hilo, en tres segado, dividido,  
cada célula de mi ser abandonada,  
aquí quedo, tres veces menos que la Nada.

Por la Plaza cruzan pasos de agonía,  
y entiendo que Uno hay,  
más solo todavía.

Viernes Santo



## Sombra

Cara morena, cara morena,  
con pelo de lava y labios de fuego,  
surges, sombra, tan inesperada  
de la puerta lejana adonde corremos.  
Llevas contigo, o Muerte guerrera,  
a los que despierten cuando van a morir.

Cara morena con pelo de lava,  
mis amigos, ellos, no te esperan.  
Ni sufren, ni quieren, y siguen soñando  
hasta la orilla de tu lago castillo  
donde les chupas la letárgica sangre.

Cara morena con labios de fuego,  
Muerte que hieres a los que no ven:  
vestido de duelo, con llaves de vida,  
armado de lágrimas y dardos de amor,  
esclavo centinela, yo sí te espero,  
y cuando me busques, te aniquilaré.

## To squander today

So many years spent  
planning ahead for  
what we will do,  
who we will be  
tomorrow.

Then so many years  
convinced we were trapped,  
circling to the sound  
of the merry-go-rounds.

So many years spent  
trying to bring back  
what we have done,  
whom we have been  
yesterday.





## Vine leaves in autumn

Don't wonder,  
when the road's long, and lonely, and cold,  
at your eyes – goaded by boredom – running ahead  
till they're stunned by the glow of vine leaves in autumn's  
crucible.

Tolerate the eye that, hypnotised,  
stumbles in a stupor from drink to drink of dreams:  
of diamond mines  
a lifelong spring of mind and skin  
a lifelong union here, with her  
and communion there, till the end of time, with Him –  
dreams, distilled from pools of translucent rosé wine.

Tolerate the eye that, hypnotised,  
finds in the magnifying glass of memories:  
a glint of gold  
summers of wit and suppleness  
summers with Zoé, touch and go  
and thoughts of rest beyond the grave or, even, there –  
memories, instilled with the pulse and life of embers.

Beware,  
light snared by clouds or shifting in the wind  
will wake your eyes; then your doubting brain would shame you  
off the road to diagnose and normalise that  
blinding glow.

Don't go. Trust the verdict of your eyes.  
Despise that nagging urge to probe, or else despair:  
at pulse and sparkle, stilled and dulled;  
riddles of punctures, clustering  
on tattered limbs that snails have spared  
from their glut of amputations;  
remaining skin, and flesh, and bone,  
all cancerously worn, and stained;  
the live and throbbing glow, become  
a lifeless red of cold, coagulated, blood –  
despair, as wine runs dry, and embers cool to dust.



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What do you make of these vine leaves, then? memories  
and dreams? or dull despair? and is autumn, winter?  
or spring and summer? Your judgement's the one that counts,  
so judge it all with an eye to your survival.  
If no answer satisfies, and facts are fictions,  
is that good reason to make winter premature?

## Why say it all?

The ancient, the old, the new,  
fill the view from our bed,  
delight the head.

You ask for details? as though  
the answer would say it all –  
could satisfy you  
and tell a truth which could not lie.

Domes – baroque – then, two;  
and T.V. masts, twenty-two;  
and the latest dishes – two  
or, perhaps, three.

You see? the opening lines  
contained the mystery,  
more interesting by far  
than turgid truth.

To hint, or spell it out:  
what shall it be?  
Ages of Cadiz?  
or stone and steel and plastic  
symmetry?

Whispers from the mind  
are dreams and wine,  
points of fact are dry and flat  
and tend to disappoint.

## Notes

### THE POEMS

<b>The coffee affair</b>	Cadiz	2004
<b>Dental divulgence I and II</b>	Cadiz	2003
Poem II started as a footnote. Some further worries ...		
For title, what? 'Dental fragments' sounds too much like battles lost.		
'Jigsaw', about the interlocking structure of the poem,		
I dropped, because the word too strongly stresses a game with pain.		
'At the dentist' – so drab, conventional, caused no second thoughts.		
One title haunts me still: 'An eye for a tooth' – too difficult?		
<b><i>Desengaño, esperanza y muerte</i></b>	Salamanca	1958
(See: PROSE ... notes for an autobiography – Salamanca.) I was particularly concerned with the silent and seemingly passive rôles of Dominicans and Guardia Civil, the Civil War, and the irrelevant din occasioned by beggars, gypsies and traffic (then).		
<b>Loss of illusions</b>	Melbourne	1971
<b>MIND THE MONKEY!</b>	Cadiz	2004
Series of five pieces where some choice English words depict our fickle and wandering minds, as the avatar Sai Baba has it.		
<b><i>Nada</i></b>	Salamanca	1958
(See: PROSE ... notes for an autobiography – Salamanca.)		
<b>NO NONSENSE, NOW!</b>	Cadiz	2004
Series of ten poems on the senses and their controversial rôle.		
<b><i>¿O?</i></b>	Cadiz	2004
A frequent scene at the supermarket door, and a challenge.		
<b>Point of departure</b>	Cadiz	2001
<b>A question of identification</b>	Cadiz	2001
'Immortal' with a capital		
'I',		
ought to have the final word somewhere (?)		
in 'A question of Identification' – yes?		
<b>Real</b>	Cadiz	2001
Carnival and Holy Week, amongst other factors, can make for a noisy Cadiz.		
'Real', of course, is not all it seems.		
For Thomas,		

<p>‘real’  lay at his finger tips.  For me, though,  ‘real’  is not out there at all:  it’s inside, loudly calling out.</p>		
<p><b>Self portrait (analytical inventory of parts)</b>  In ‘Self portrait’ I forgot 2 things:  the mouth comes with a smile  (a plus),  the skin’s got blemishes  (a minus);  oh, and Willy relishes a bit  of hunky-dory thingumajig  (or did).</p>	Cadiz	2001
<p><b>Sense of loss, loss of the senses</b>  The cottage, once a miner’s from gold rush days, was home for  several years as I ran my bookshop in nearby Foster, Australia.  ‘Nothing ventured, nothing gained’, they say  with certainty, but forget to add:  ‘One man’s gain is another man’s loss’.  Loss and gain, gain and loss – and we dare  pretend to fully grasp their meaning!</p>	Cadiz	2001
<p><b>Soledad</b>  (See: PROSE ... notes for an autobiography – Salamanca.) The  footnote reference is to the Holy Week procession in the plaza  Mayor, visible from my <i>pensión</i>.</p>	Salamanca	1958
<p><b>Sombra</b>  (See: PROSE ... notes for an autobiography – Salamanca.)</p>	Salamanca	1958
<p><b>To squander today</b></p>	Cadiz	2010
<p><b>Vine leaves in autumn</b>  A beautiful but distant view which caught my eye on the daily  drive between home in Eltham and La Trobe University.</p>	Melbourne	1971
<p><b>Why say it all?</b>  Set in my flat in calle Beato Diego.  ‘Why say it all?’  The title lets me off, I think,  though (I confess) I failed to list  six washing lines and eighteen pegs  – some green, some pink –  some trousers, sheets, and rows of socks  flapping in the breeze.  Please let me off!</p>	Cadiz	2001

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**THE ILLUSTRATIONS** – see ‘ART WORK’ for general information

**POEMS**

**ILLUSTRATIONS – title, and ref.**

**Mind the monkey! 5**

*Nada*

**No nonsense, now! 4**

**No nonsense, now! 6**

**Point of departure**

**A question of identification**

**Sense of loss**

*Soledad*

**To squander today**

**Vine leaves in autumn**

**Papegados**

*Salvamanteles 7 ‘Al compás de la música II’*  
/ 1:23

*‘A troche y moche II’ / 1:04 (‘twist’,  
courtesy Frango)*

*Sobrecubierta I ‘Lomo con remolinos’ / 2:22*  
*‘La cocina del Gotinga a pleno rendimiento’*  
/ 2:10

*Salvamanteles II ‘Amor constante ...’ / 1:27*  
*‘Jugando al escondite’ / 2:03*

*Fantasía ‘Pasión se descubre’ / 1:12*

*Salvamanteles 5 ‘Separadas I’ / 1:21*

*‘Constantes del ser humano’ / 2:32*

*Fantasía ‘Pasión entre las suyas’ / 1:13*

**Cristaletas**

*‘Cristaleta 4’*

*‘Cristaleta 7’*

**No nonsense, now! 8**

**Self portrait**