

NOEL QUIÑONES

TRANSLATION

Huracán, translation Taíno God of the wind. Your name was the first compromise between god and our people. We proved translation does not dilute divinity. But how many decades does it take a prayer to forget the face of the priest who first uttered it?

Huracán, mantra whispered, translation allowed in the barrios until we remade you from our lungs. Meaning carry forth, translation kidnapped, meaning float upward, translation swelled belly en la aguanegra.

Huracán, is this another test, another harvest, a reckoning come back again. In 1901 Hurricane San Ciriaco allowed America to reshape the Puerto Rican peso, worth half their dollar. I imagine a maelstrom of coins, I imagine a fury of paper bills as what we thought was gold became worthless translation I am watching what I thought was pride become worthless. La isla, a translation in progress, as I speak my grandmother is reminiscing on a place that does not exist anymore.

Huracán, do your dozen names make you feel like a saint? San Ciriaco, Hugo, Irma, Maria, I know I should not mock divinity, especially a god so content with it's halo, it mispronounces noose and an entire island says Jones in perfect English translation we could rename you a thousand times more and still you would resemble the same repetitive wailing.

Huracán, I am so tired of being proud of you, so tired of our endless ballads, so wasted off our dinner table conversation. You say *But at least they love our culture* translation is that saliva or salt water, are you thirsty or drowning? Are you mispronouncing mirror as morir on purpose?

I would trade anything for a place to call home that does not have an identity crisis every time a rich man opens his wallet.

ARS POETICA

My poems must be redacted,
I fear my Mami will find them
strange
obsession with tongues
and saliva for lovers, my favorite
words
are in-between, abandon,
translation
I want
too many men in fantasy.
Ay dios, this is the way
I feel on some mornings.
Yesterday my best friend told me his mother
painted his nails, alignment. I want
the certainty poems do not bring.
I am very lonely.
There is a reckless translation in me always.

Inescapable but god, I am
thrilled by the heat of you.
Mami, will you hold me
as I am? Will you hold me
to the sun.

A POEM FOR SAINTS

after John Wieners

I sit in St. Brendan's. At 10:22 AM with
Mami the divorcee. She teaches me
Communion. Take your sin hot
at the mouth. Up the street under belt
buckles my spine cups her gift—The ritual.
We make it. And have made it.
I am blood and blood is beckoned.
Soon I will pick up the phone
Papi, please take me. The poem
does not lie to us. But she does,
alive in the glamour of her work.

MR. QUIÑONES

Papi hangs the gold trimmed frame
with our last name embroidered,
a history scrolled from a Spaniard's mouth
everyone loves. Actually, no one
questions it. Not even me.

Papi takes me to his office in the financial district.
American Express, where the yachts encircle all
the exits. From the window you can see
the city so thick with its polluted movement.
*Where did he apply to college again? I'm sure
they have affirmative action for him there.*

I've seen my father salsa step his temper
into eloquence. He once flooded a train car
when a woman called my cousin a spic. Outside,
through the 4 train window a sign says
ALL BRONX-BOUND SERVICE DELAYED
but we don't go that far uptown anymore.

My face lines the balconies of my father's desk,
I can't turn away from this collage of aging,
all I did to follow him, all he did to run away.
Somewhere in the attic of my father's throat
is a manuscript he wrote under the name
Julian Quinn. *If I ever pursued my passion
I would have used that pen name.*

In my father's new house, upstate there is a door
with my name hanging as a false blessing.
All his guests say *He must love escaping up here.*

I type my name, accent-crowned, into the computer.
I follow its crooked, red carpet to the doorway.
I disrobe and enter.

STAY

with lyrics from 'Worth It' by Dreezy

I call him when I know I am wrong, smug in his greeting
with the knowing trial, the satisfaction of error. Papi,
stopped bickering with love when he met his husband.
When we argue, he says what you're saying is air,
you need to listen to the river, tu ere presentao
except when it comes to your own choices.

Only right I confess, inside I'm a mess.

She, as in all the rocks in the current, converges
at my throat. Where I learned to lie and lay, tell
women I am very, very lonely / I am very,
very busy draining swampwater from my thoughts.
Serial in my wanting, I blame the divorce yet again
perfection is the last deer in the open field I thirst for.
Antlers you could carve a heart into, presenting flesh
as wood. I hang them on the top shelf of my closet.

Only right I confess, inside I'm a mess.

When my face is damp, I bear the scent of abandonment
the snake who knows its skin best when it condenses.
As I shed this failure, I grow accustomed to running
upstream where I confuse desire and deserve. I drink
smaller and smaller handfuls knowing I cannot stay.
I see my reflection in the water, I call home again.

Only right I confess, inside I'm a mess.

BRONX RIVER FOREST

If you hated being home why not go and live in the forest.
Wild thing only getting wilder, tall as the trees living in the forest.

He wanted to join the army, fingers caressing hollowed bullets
hanging from his neck, he tested himself living in the forest.

He spent afternoons throwing snowballs, stones in their wombs,
at cars driving by, said he practiced on animals living in the forest.

M1903 Springfield is a bolt-action rifle, only a disciplined reload
required. A steady eye as he fed the tree's carcass, living in the forest.

His father came to visit him twice in his life, once when he was born
and again when he was *a man*. Said he learned more living in the forest.

I loaded the clip, he squeezed his brown thigh into the airsoft muzzle
I want to know, Daniel said. I pulled the trigger, the echo living in the forest.

PARALLEL

At Bainbridge Avenue, McDonald's and McKeon Funeral Home sit parallel. When Grandma can't take the grief she asks to go eat, her husband becoming an illusion of distance. She ungreases each french fry with a napkin and a scowl, asks for no salt but they don't do that shit here, only permutation of sickbody. Us, enough but no, my family follows her here like stones sinking. My uncle arrives with his blood replica of Grandpa, herding five children from the children's room downstairs in between cigarette pulls. I do not want to die. Someone is wheezing but I cannot tell who, they all have Grandpa's last name.

I find a picture from 1998, a primary colored stethoscope in my ears. Listening to his heartbeat, he pretends he is dying. I save him, again and again I save him.

GROWING OLD IS LEARNING TO USE YOUR HANDS TO HOLD

My Mami doesn't leather her insults
on her palms anymore, they bounce
atop the furniture like baboons
leaking their circus hearts, what joy
My reckless vines of lineage, never
have I professed to own them as
mammals relearning their thumbs.
*Your grandmother use to swing
a thousand chanclas like rain*
falling across the house, I willingly
become the next knotted love
I follow this raucous nature to its epicenter:
Tata, how harrowing to find fingers still
practice passing after death. What if
growing old is just a slow transition of sorrow:
My Welo in Tata's fingers, My Papi in Mami's
palms. A fist full of women, I count my children,
they know how I feel by the way I hold the air.

UNTIL THE NEXT PLEBISCITE

119th, the seven dead anniversary
(hold this for Blanca)
this little fight, Jones and his hunger
for pesos, you can read English
now, don't waste this gold.
Savages always waste regalos
from / home / not home.¹
She thinks Gabriel committed suicide²
because being both a country / not a country³
takes a toll on the mind.
Can you point to us on a map?
I swear we look like ().⁴

¹ The old Taino gods gave us words that snuck into the English language and stayed. Am I the spy or the traitor? There is no difference now.

² There is a history of dying and/or dead Puerto Ricans whose talent surpassed that of the normal artista. Maybe I am using suicide as a plot point, maybe Gabriel, native to la isla, had other intentions.

³ If the proudest people in the world cannot decide what they are proud of, our loyalty is out on loan.

⁴

FROM MIRE, TENDERNESS

after Aracelis Girmay

Say *Mire*, here is my saddest thing. That's all.
Mire, your father snapping tickets at Bay Cinema
now abandoned, funny king of soft mold, malleable. Mire
across the way, Mami, bracelets of popcorn butter and staring
at a language she couldn't master. Mire your first reversal, dirty
and playful sin. You see them laughing, watching movies.
Mire you lied, mire, your mother, not alone. Your father in love.
Mire the butterfly effect, your birth a butterfly, your stupid unsatisfied heart a butterfly.
Mire mire, Victor Hernandez Cruz, speaks of Puerto Ricans, speaks of how
they ask you to look at language, mire use your eyes to hear nene!
Mire, coño your voice
What an unletting, rivers of look
at what is not there, concrete. God damn, mire magica y santeria, and mire the old gods
because the new god is damn biblical, mire the bible, mire the bible as a glass
of Merlot over time. Even Mami drinks now but only when joyful.
Mire the Dinosaur Park, your first childhood
memory. Mire your memory, your only happy, insignificant memory, of them together
that's all. Mire the dream where your father opens his mouth
and only the sound of slamming doors. Mire why are you crying? You don't exist
anymore. Mire your bruises, your bruises untethered to a mother, what a beautiful
color you can't remember. Mire, nene isn't that the point.