

# **An Isle Full of Noises**

By

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In fine, they took all, and gave what they had with good will.  
It appeared to me to be a race of people very poor in everything.  
—Christopher Columbus, journal entry of October 11, 1492.

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,  
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.  
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices  
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,  
The clouds methought would open and show riches  
Ready to drop upon me that, when I waked,  
I cried to dream again.  
—Caliban, in *The Tempest*.

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**for Sophia**

**when I'm not easier to be played on than a pipe**

madness can hardly be feigned after the pills—the smokes—  
the rum—the spill over—that wenge table—this black ashtray—  
the unamused phone—Hughes' *Crow*—silence—not silence—  
the loneliness of middle age pasta—the white couch—the cool  
cat chasing spiders—the moonglow—my heart lows—the hi-hats  
lazy—the inside of my chest blown like breadfruit—I slumber  
slide into a deep thick—a bird and she's a city—or a cemetery—  
she appears and looks at me—the golden bright eyes—the sharp black  
beak—top hatted and lean—oblivion is a screensaver turned  
on every three minutes—the wills—the chokes—the mill  
over hell where my beautiful nothing hatches lies  
besides poisoned blades and white chickens

**I hope you never know the pain**

“Two Officers Shot” was the headline  
and we’re past our curfew

but we just don’t understand

truth is what makes us human  
as objective condition  
this truth like green mold  
on tombstones

*please don’t let me die*

what is this unlawful assembly  
thing full force—peace will be implemented  
as they Louisville-slug people in the area

*I can’t breathe*

*please don’t let me die*

*I don’t have a gun*

Nuances and booms like houses and rooms  
are full of perfumes—the shelves are crowded  
with perfumes—that smell like fear  
comes from the church’s parking lot—it is sanctuary

see the flashing lights?  
into dust I chant a dry chant

*I don’t wanna die, please help me*

the smoke of my own death  
ricochets, swells, buzz-mutters, honey-dews,  
Twitter-threads, crawls like a vine

stop this night and dawn with me and you shall  
tremble at the origin of all crimes

where are we going, Walt Whitman?

no officer involved in Breonna Taylor's case  
was indicted. this is simply not  
justice—deep racial divide

[say her name. say it. say her name]

play on people's fear compose the night  
like a disease morbid and arrhythmic

the length of cries rises like thermometers  
and pains Ohio river-deep

anger is volatile matter  
like black lives matter  
like afrolatino lives matter  
like trans lives matter  
like women lives matter  
substantive hurt's the heart of the matter  
and what I assume y'all should assume

truth burns holes in the demelanized  
palm of our diminished hands

these hands that forged this country  
this country made of vast differences  
this country made with the silk of dreams  
this country that plows unrest  
this country seducing death

please don't let me die

*I hope you never know the pain*

I hope you never know the pain



**of being and hustling**

I am the starlight path to your shell  
back where all normalities reside  
dressed up as flowers  
spasmodic and slow  
like harbor lights in the mist  
I try to break with my fist

the dawn planks above with serenity

I'm all the subjects that you have<sup>1</sup>  
and yet I'm fixing the elsewhere where  
I come from—the one they whine nowhere

palm trees are not intimidated  
by lightning—they elongate to the sky

it's the thunder what bridges the gaps

my body weaves my being visible  
not my hustling in the world

hustling is being  
when skin tans darker

yet resists

---

<sup>1</sup> Lines spoken by Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

**grace by fire**

grace is my ginger mother  
 coloring her hair so brown  
 her redness would not sizzle

my mother coiled up in a spiral  
 and went to live in the ear of a seashell  
 complete with the burden of things

grace is not discovered

grace is an instance that matte  
 black puma jet—we never had  
 Mama Inés<sup>2</sup> in my house pouring  
 coffee and singing songs about black  
 people drinking coffee

my bones and my teeth gnaw  
 at purple—praising Columbus  
 as an anthemic hero—San Juan’s so full  
 of colonial Euromania and we fill  
 the air with holes and drink light  
 beer shooting bass vibes down Ponce  
 de León Avenue—killing time for freedom  
 constantly risking bitter hallelujahs  
 in the name of something ‘or indefinite  
 pronouns like possible fires burning still

grace always strikes by fire  
 like my mother’s hair

---

<sup>2</sup> “Mama Inés” is a Puerto Rican mammy figure used to advertise Café Yaucono, a popular coffee brand.

**wild honey**

wild honey drunk at four in the morning  
I'm casting luminaries in a jar  
like fluorescent flies spilled from my mouth  
on a cold September night where  
all my dead miseries toothless as starfish  
drink moonlight on the soft shore  
where the earth ends and dies  
and the night is fever oxidized  
by songs of the sea inside seashells

**pain is not surrogate**

they want our heads on a string  
 down the street where the tourism company  
 washes away the guilt

we sit by the bay and watch the sea  
     roll out in departures  
 as light mocks the shadows of tears  
     convinced they're just rain

secrecy swollen in the tongue like a jellyfish sting  
 we drank oceans that edged the end of the world  
 when we were sold on the idea of sunrise

we tell ourselves epic phrases to lighten the load

at the end of the day we drag them  
 home where they lie down by the living room  
 window—sleep silver under the moonlight

until next day, when we plow back  
     into ready-made a.m. radio babble

the wound forgives the pain, eventually  
     as we concede a truce on Lotto night

get cheated again—hit rock bottom—  
     lumpenized on the bedrock

we blackened our lungs smoking  
     promises acrid as racial hate

but we're not the stale bread under the Crow's beak:  
     we're the *chango*<sup>3</sup> foraging in your dead eyes

you should've let us free a long time ago

---

<sup>3</sup> The "chango" is also known as the Antillean grackle. It is often confused with a crow, but it is fairly distinguishable from the latter.

**moonflowers**

water curves lazy caves in  
on the soft sunlight of June

bullet shells constellate red  
the wind brushes the sun's wig

the traffic light pauses-play the world  
with such indistinct stoicism

the flowers by the sidewalk are yellow  
yet unrecognizable from this distance

I think I hear a shot  
I'm almost the last human on this isle

I think I hear a shot—  
    I watch a man meth-crash  
I think I hear a shot—  
    I watch a man meth-crash bad  
    like a loose stolid kite

there's so many ants over him  
I think he is a sugar lump

around the corner, San Juan is a sphinx  
and my life a riddle I must solve

a car passes by blasting Bad Bunny  
I look at the driver, but he just looks through me

I'm little pieces of glass spread all over the sky  
I'm shattered stars in the eyes of Miranda

moonflowers bloom under the light of her eyes  
salty bitter water will wash away the silence

come the darkness  
come the primordial sea

**like light, she said**

incendiary as a nomad whim  
a star unzips the mouth of the sky

falling in love with speed and time  
until it's consumed in ablation

you lay your hand on my forearm  
and rest your head in amazement

what are stars made of?, you ask  
and I have one possible answer

light—I say—stars are made of light  
from the corner of the sky's mouth

stardust brittles in the angle of my eyes  
like us—you say—and the world stops

**your mouth is a dangerous place**

your mouth is a dangerous place  
where death winks at me  
and all I can do is bite back

I might choke someday  
on the fishbone of your breath

in your mouth a stately pleasure dome  
I decree—a cavern measureless to man  
or woman—but you won't be able  
to swallow the world whole  
but if you look at death to the eyes  
you will fear having not lived at all

stoicism will be a drink flavor  
we both get at a convenience store  
where they don't sell truer answers  
but where we can quench our thirst  
and make all wet again: tongue, teeth,  
gums, tonsils, soft palate, dark nothing  
at the back where the uvula hangs  
like a panopticon overseeing the heart

your mouth is indeed a dangerous place

beware . beware

you drank the milk of paradise

**lockdown blues**

I sit on a beach chair by  
my front lawn with a baseball  
bat to scourge the Sahara desert  
dust shroud that the solstice's cat  
dragged in. my daughter asks me  
where did I put the future she was  
keeping by the flower vase

I don't know what you are  
talking about, I tell her

I haven't seen one of those  
since 1898, I add—sipping  
on Barrilito rum. such symmetry  
knuckles my fallen corporeality  
in a space filled with stillness

my daughter misses her old life  
and bakes chocolate chip cookies

I unwind the yellow afternoon  
erasing faces from old photographs

we both might as well forget  
subjugation is a structure

our thick lips burn with salt



### Sycorax's in vitro children

America you slur the apologies  
and stretch them into yoga mats  
(they're not Persian and they won't fly)

America barbiturate your Monroe doctrine  
tally your blessings in the bones of your slaves

there's some founding retrograde biology  
and a broken compass that lost me  
in the white cartography to these Indies

all this for a loaf of bread?  
whose idea was to celebrate Columbus?  
what deepening shadow spills over and palimpsests the light?  
what light is this that blinds us from the rest of the world?

America the mothership has already landed  
and Allen Ginsberg is coming dressed as a grim Black Caesar  
(Oh, Google it, will ya')

Claude McKay saw your priceless treasure sinking in the sand,  
because America, you have a problem  
beyond George Floyd's murder  
America I can't breathe  
America I'm Ahmaud Arbery  
Open carry my heart  
America I'm Breonna Taylor  
America: *casus belli*  
America I'm Elijah McClain  
Carotid-hold your manifest destiny

this is your capital *ism*

America, Boricuas are not part of your history  
we're just food for populism and photo ops  
America coo-coo-ca-chu your saudade  
a black person murdered in broad daylight  
is the heart of the matter

America you fish in our stomachs with blood money bait  
you live in my clothes and my speech and my lethargy  
I wear the privilege I fear my daughter won't have

I'm bloodstained with wars I've never fought  
the pain is unique; the experience irreplaceable

is there more toil?  
since thou dost give me pains,  
and I'm no Ariel who complains

America, I'm not your bitch—  
you taught me language, and my profit on 't  
is Caliban's : I know how to curse

dreaming is an art  
I do it exceptionally well

I don't have to be black to be black  
I come from the zenith of all colors  
I come from the future of race  
I come from Borinquen, the land of the good people

rub the lamp : I melt daybreaks  
this isle is full of noises  
& I'm just your colonized

**bomboclaat**

I got mocked           canned tuna for food  
                           I loathe                           Zulu-bang on           my blood  
           I street-drive           sand-wheelers           at risk  
 I cheat-code           conventions  
 as currency   for democracy

the problem with the problem is the problem

I Tweet names of bullets           I'll shoot  
           I sweet-talk trap-bullies       for keeps  
                   you don't       understand   the struggle   of slapstick  
 comedies on publicly                   owned       TV

there's a universal declaration of the right to freedom  
 and I have a surplus market serfdom

I am born free and equal  
 endowed with reason—reason done passed down

I foam-sperm           in the kitten's mouth  
           I deliberately complicit with           melancholia  
                   I the sad *jíbaro*<sup>4</sup> wearing       off-price  
 Calvin Klein's briefs           from Marshall's

I ink Miranda's pelvis           skyline  
                   where my tongue slithers       like Sycorax tail  
           I shave the sweat of summer with frenzy  
                   moontan-offenses

I lick on the spruce pines

                  Miranda's that slick           Phillie       filler  
*chambea, jala* in porno-illusion  
           I lick the wounds       of servants and soldiers  
 I spin counterclockwise           to oblivion  
                   and dead-mall memories

I take agate-line leftovers  
           Miranda sure-sulfurs home-grown rice  
 she cooks beans on fire primeval  
 on the ashes of       Prospero, master of lies

---

<sup>4</sup> Native Puerto Rican from the mountainous part of the island.

she hands joy and non-stop lit-ness  
I bear the black seam

I rimmed clear like neon amoeba  
Miranda's a Bad Bunny blunder  
I deaf jam Maelo<sup>5</sup> on the speakers  
and *salsa* spice *lamentos*<sup>6</sup> rolling  
in miniature landscapes  
dancing on the beads of maracas

I slow-cook her sweetness  
she krav-maga bang moves  
when this island disappears  
nothing obliterates the beauty  
of dying in her mouth

I witness and wait like Walt

this is my murmur of yearning:  
a stainless steel promise or a theory  
of creeds I don't believe in

I fail better in this poem

---

<sup>5</sup> Refers to Puerto Rican salsa singer Ismael Rivera.

<sup>6</sup> Laments.

**revolution number 19**

*You will not be able to stay home, brother  
 You will not be able to plug in, turn on and drop out  
 You will not be able to lose yourself on skag and skip  
 Skip out for beer during commercials  
 Because the revolution will not be televised*  
 —Gil Scott-Heron

that summer of 2019                      we went  
 low                      *hasta abajo*<sup>7</sup>  
 in splendid                      noise  
 key                      before salty got angry

—you won't be able to stay at home  
 brother—                      silence became *v*

dull with the alibi to play  
 dead in the mouth of anathema  
 or the circuits of injustice  
 made with                      the bones of                      fear  
 after we burned                      our dead  
 blind to hide the green  
 skin of ill babies that were never  
 held in their mother's arms

—there'll be no reruns  
 brother—                      catch us live  
 under the scorching sun

we endured a different  
 storm in the form of things  
 learned too late                      yet in  
 time for the awakening  
 surge that licked the walls  
 of San Juan for fifteen  
 uninterrupted days of sunken  
 oaths                      sweat                      tears  
 we kept as we spit on bye-Felicias  
 and spiced with pepper spray

—we only want to see you in the pepper rain—

---

<sup>7</sup> Go down.

as we outsmarted reason within

          broadened and trill pulsations  
that spoke of truths unknown  
to logical stabilities of misery

          —we weren't misers simply because we had  
something in our hearts or a picture of Clemente— big and cray  
like crows pecking at the starlit sky

          and once the smoke dissipated  
we came back on a loop  
till the loop choked like a noose  
around history's neck—  
and, yes, brother Gil, it was televised

**those are black pearls that were his eyes**

oftentimes I drip like ink  
out of a story written in 1982

down the lonely hole  
in my heart and oversized head

heaven bracketed within  
my temples and my body

running wild like water  
down the city hall drain

where the big clock lost  
its needles and time's a concoction

of rum and anise and woe-  
begonne with cold weather

and fog whereas I'm solar  
plexus bilious with a dead wrist

and my father's coral bones  
drift by as sucked-up sugarcane sticks

black pearls were his eyes  
his eyes—his eyes

## blues and slide

we kind of have a problem with  
the problem—we never get the art

of theogonies or drifting miracles in  
rum punch and surplus colonial dreams

our parents once had and passed on  
to us through the genetics of resilience

myth *panderos*<sup>8</sup> at midnight in Calle del Cristo  
slapping-skin *plenas*<sup>9</sup> for departed ships

that won't come back for us  
because the island they lied about

floats vanishing like Utopia  
in the bubble of a water pipe

and that's the way we hit and bomb  
rhetoric with submissive exoticism:

we dog-out *perreo*<sup>10</sup> in wide blasphemy  
on the steps of centuries-old colonial cathedrals

---

<sup>8</sup> Afro-Caribbean musical instrument.

<sup>9</sup> Afro-Boricua musical rhythm invented in Ponce, Puerto Rico.

<sup>10</sup> Also known as «sandungueo», *perreo* is a sexually suggestive way to dance to reggaeton. The word *perro* alludes to the way dogs copulate.



**landscape of the red haired woman**

muster the light  
of an electric sun  
to charge the spaces  
slit between the leaves  
and branches of the blood  
trees cold-turkey the drought  
during that summer  
when you tinted your red  
hair brown but couldn't conceal  
the freckles that shattered  
over your face and shoulders

carry all the unspoken charms  
of toads, beetles, bat—words  
outside and let them crawl  
soft parasitic—worm-blind  
vermicomposting the breath  
of your silence in ways  
you only practice on front  
of your lake mirror  
when nobody sees you

the present is always  
vindictive with the past

like authenticities of a science  
that unravels like the first  
sounds of a universe  
impressionistic and dying  
like a wonderless miracle  
or sterile moors where  
dead fish feed the seagulls

and you cry, and I want  
to ease the loneliness

but I'm not born yet

**though this island seem to be desert**

skin melancholy from its bones  
 as I sit here by the flame of  
 memories buried in high school lockers  
 when I had no idea of what was beyond  
 the fog that nested : upon the mountains I pastoralized  
 the figments of nightmares

silence was a common thing : on moments like that

I had all the answers but couldn't find  
 the questions

the rain didn't help either

I was thunder trying to catch the lightning  
 I spun a different text bent  
 corners at the lonely Plaza  
 smoked black  
 cigarettes  
 and swallowed  
 white rum

I made fathers out of empty beer cans and pool sticks

one by one they faded  
 washed out images  
 pulsing to the bottom of nothing

and then I thought I forgot  
 and then I forgot I had forgotten

I took the idea of hope to the concrete city  
 not marble, not ivory, just expansive Portland  
 gray desert  
 eating up : the landscape  
 the escaped land  
 under our sore feet

there's not a forever left  
 without promise godhead prime  
 in fuzzy down city trapped  
 in hipsterdom

delusions of revolutions on push-notifications  
self-lit under the dim street lights

love is the North Star on fish-taco smelling nights  
and I am wide-ranging my arms to embrace the idea of you

pardon my mourning flag: its stripes are black  
like Icarus's skin  
or the soot-dead bottom of my heart

I should've been a sea urchin scraping  
the rock bottom of the ocean clean  
dying away in the light

**Setebos spill**

the image depicts myself as a kid  
asking death for a hitch almost

as my thorax grinds the gravel  
teeth pebbled in the dirt urged

to swallow the blood full  
of beds that sway sorry

with birth-control pills  
and brochures on family planning

this is the day I burn  
my mothers' bed and she never

forgives the perfection of fire  
sparkling stars in the middle

of the night—stained on the ceiling  
the black smoke serves anger

and drives out the screams  
of me hurting from the future

**Rodolfo González #15**

color me black with grackle feathers  
after the sunset showers of August

when I'm dusting the smell of fresh bread  
creeping in from the bakery two

blocks down and the cars seem  
to have disappeared from the black

wet street that leads the way out  
and the way in to the town

I want wings and desire it's always  
present perfect in humble hops over

the puddles that open like eyes  
on the back of a frog

the air is full of the wet smell  
of dampened gardens after the rain

and it burdens me blue like Crayola  
birds that dapple in memory

the world spins on my finger tips  
and I suspect there won't be

a silence big enough to basket  
the shadow child running after me

**I hear America**

I hear America singing loud and pissed  
off. the air filled with brown noise  
and Marconi-bled transmissions  
you swept under the rug of time. soldiers  
marching with their daughters' pictures  
on a pendant beating against their  
hearts in the desert heat. up across  
the barren blue dome suffocates the song  
of hedge funds vultures stalking  
like a cancer on my mother's lungs  
and liver and Fallopian tubes charred  
with babies America didn't want and oh  
the varied carols I fear when Koepernick  
kneels and the tv networks shake bad with  
Malcolm Maelstrom and Lolita lipsticked  
gun. gone-mad with shopping malls  
as graveyards for the soul's wonders  
and implausibility in a country made  
with not one past but clusters  
of stories—each singing what belongs to him  
or her or them and to no one else but the dream  
that drowns the pipe and saves a song

**Ariel makes themselves a nymph o' the seas**

my heart turned to disco ball  
spins with bright teeth

a Cheshire smile that vaunts  
aloof and self-evident  
like truth or the sky

if silence deterred lowers  
down—all processes are slower  
like hooves of clouds

at sunset during the time  
of false and lying white gods—  
the sun is not fading away

it's the Earth that's spinning  
with the promise to be free

**self-evident truths we lie about**

my people pawn their yampee heart  
to drag the papaya sun every morning

my people pawn their yampee heart  
of time deaf to memory and as they butter  
the grass and the solum—their mouths  
open like an empty iron cast *caldero*<sup>11</sup>  
that braises songs like mother Africa blues  
my people pawn their yampee heart

my people in the mountains bury  
the dead clouds the wind deems useless

you cannot miss us: we make your fire,  
fetch in your wood and serves in offices  
that profit you. What, ho! slave! Calibans!  
Thou earth, thou! speak.<sup>12</sup>

my people in the mountains bury  
the sun and distill an anthropology  
of water where poverty floats—a shadow  
unattainable—bleak like aborted days  
and promises the sky sucks in brown  
my people in the mountains bury

my people wink eternities of soft  
spoken silver rivers like milk from the moon

my people wink eternities of soft  
while their cows and horses  
drink time as they rig their *güiro*<sup>13</sup> gourds  
with stars left over from last night  
my people wink eternities of soft

---

<sup>11</sup> Cauldron.

<sup>12</sup> In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Prospero tells Miranda: "We cannot miss him: he does make our fire,/Fetch in our wood and serves in offices/That profit us. What, ho! slave! Caliban!/ Thou earth, thou! speak.

<sup>13</sup> An idiophone Latin American musical instrument.



my people go gently to sleep at night  
with lucent serenity—old and tired

my people go gently to sleep at night  
hands sore with undoing and wrong  
that cushion litanies and thirst for  
redemption—a revolution so aphoristic  
as to allow us to drift homeward alone

**that anthem where Prospero is a poet-hero**

lift that fallen star from last night's  
showers because there is no flag

or divide in distance—just longing  
and the smell of moist grass

and the elongation of breath  
gloved to the November air

like a skin or a sky where poems  
about birds want to fly—cradle

with *isms* my failure as the son  
that came from the dead

just to live the rest of my days  
undying—with faith as placebo

for a wrath-ravaged land that still  
sings allegiance to genocide

**river crossing to abuela's house**

hopping on stepping stones  
 untethered—I stop and watch  
 the tadpoles dark as molasses  
 frantic swimming by the puddles  
 formed as a consequence of  
 the river—is time inevitable  
 like me going to my abuela's  
 in Algiers where sweetness licks  
 the gable roof and there's a big cake  
 posing as heart for future years?

the river is green with cool  
 water running

I stop right in the middle of that path  
 made with the hands of people  
 who wanted to get somewhere  
 great, a place of *pan*, a piece of *tierra*,  
 the mock of *libertad*—wearing pava  
 hats that smell of sugar cane and roasted  
 coffee straight out of ephemera postcards  
 or the Tourism Company posters simulacra  
 of common wealth—the voice of the river  
 drills bass with the frogs and the prayers  
 of mothers who dig holes by the shore  
 and whisper their prayers into them

when the rain falls, the voices drain  
 into the river and I hear them cry

**water hearts are complex**

on Saturday afternoons, the rain bathed  
the trees with the wings of a water angel

as the smell of wet chickens filled the house  
when they ran for cover under the porch

where abuela smoked her Kent cigarettes  
slowly and puffed wheels of time that drifted

perfect in the familiar fog that masked  
the patio garden—the mists of Adjuntas

hiding the sad happiness we shared  
in silence—we just stared at the water

distance—those blue mountains made  
of water trees and watercolors as my heart

evaporated into rainclouds—a reason why  
my town was made of water—with water

streets and water city hall and a water bakery  
so every time mother broke into tears at dinner

no one could tell where the hell all this water  
underneath our floating island had come from

**sunset wreck**

cut off the *hamaca*<sup>14</sup>  
and fat the illusion of yesterday-

we have nowhere else to look  
but the darkness that heals the blind

dawdle over the brewed figments  
of broken sunsets that tethered us

like mules that whimper a lie  
harnessed with intention

sleep comes unfurled like a flag  
evaporating in the trade winds

that cradle the coconut palm  
yellow inflorescence in the sunlight

we have no roof above our heads  
but the shifting allegories that milk

our bones and skulls and ribs made  
of stardust and mud and breath

---

<sup>14</sup> Hammock.

**man mending memory**

words dripping sick in mud  
café con leche brown on a gray  
Saturday afternoon when the wind  
has shaken naked the orange  
tree after eight hours of rain:  
some hurtful words my dad tells my mother

my teeth screech against  
the sky           and I sit outside  
under the washed-out moon  
waxed on my chest full of summers  
swamped in yellows and greens  
and all its concomitant abundances:  
they rest impervious to the suicide of day

**those are fish floating in my wound**

I sowed the breath of the morning  
watered my sleep with silence

the aroma of coffee rolling out  
the musty room full of aging light

and the coiling memory of a stoned  
god persevering like darkness

broken into fetishes that perch  
on my shoulder of infamy

I replace words of spurious beauty  
with tactual images beyond

a pain that makes language exist  
as feelings blossom into matter

in my wound, fish of salt  
float dead and gray

**can the subaltern s\*\*k?**

Dear Prospero: can I, as subaltern,  
speak? I wait for tender densities

to sing from your body  
made of false limits like language

or race—past is not  
a luxury yet but a need

for reconciliation with all inner  
worlds that move within me

or the mouth where  
your kiss names a reality

I find whole notions  
only by fragments

and little moments perceptible  
in your eyes, where light

remains as poems from  
an architecture of multitudes

that sound like patchwork  
of blood and stories live

free—the method  
of flowers—the order

of all things made  
of flesh and heart—

the light beyond a formal  
terranean lack of completeness

Dear Prospero: can I, the subaltern, s\*\*c?



### Nommo song in the sugarcane field

I roll my dark and drink the stars  
 dripping from the mountain's nipples cold  
 with the light of the evening lifted dewy

*cunya elemué*  
*cunya elemué*

a spit of sky echoes in the empty eye  
 sockets of the *cañaveral's*<sup>15</sup> ghost. fading  
 to brown sugar and green memories

*elemué cunya caneco*  
*elemué cunya caneco*

like I'm somewhere between the sound  
 of tolling bells from an empty church  
 and the ascending whistles of *changos*

*cunya elemué*  
*cunya elemué*

the air threads the lost howl of *bomba*  
 songs or poems left unfinished as the sunset  
 sweeps tangerine and lemon-yellow

*elemué cunya caneco*  
*elemué cunya caneco*

history's busy sitting as an aging rum  
 and the truth of pain and sweat and death  
 spread out as a landscape ductile with shame

*cunya elemué*  
*cunya*

---

<sup>15</sup> Sugarcane field.



**this must not be the place**

cracks in the heart tell time  
and mimic the rings of a tree.

your age is always older  
and death is a bartender  
with a Jesus beard in Santurce

wallflowering against a Heineken ad  
wrung to a sense of gravity

women smell of weed and fruits  
when they hand choke the night  
under a thousand yellow lightbulbs  
and hip mustaches flap as Barcardi bats  
with beer foam and *hipsteria*

it's fascinating. stupor and all

if they were to exist  
souls could be cellphones  
screening in mock peace  
like desire by the rim  
of red Solo cups

on Friday night  
it's mojitos for keeps

I want to go back home  
but I'm never there

I lifted up my wings

**losing my religion**

consider this : hast thou not dropp'd from heaven?<sup>16</sup>

there's a whine—a wine—for things  
to texturize meaning in all  
kitchens and the smell that tastes  
of memory—beetles like apples—wasps  
like pine nuts—worms comparable to fried  
bacon—illusion is a melting ice  
cream while I listen to loud  
rancheras in the midst of  
my parents fight and my mouth  
shapes into a beak of fire

I've said enough : there's enough wood within

this is the part where I  
run into the dense eye of a god

---

<sup>16</sup> Caliban addressing Stephano in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

**things I overlooked before**

sweet guava *panatela* viscid on  
the tip of my tongue like mystic  
fishbone-dry syllables of a taste  
much too dangerous to swallow  
and much too fused with chance  
to spit out in waste and neglect

the vanity of *almendra*<sup>17</sup> lips parts  
the breeze full of saltpeter to self-  
corrupt in the ruin of absence  
that makes the shells grow emptier

a watched sea never reminds us  
of absences or uncertainties— it can  
only lick the shore with servitude  
and possession— and stay awake  
when moonlight paves a silver path  
above the water where seaweed  
island floats heavy and lazy  
I lie barren woe on your belly

---

<sup>17</sup> Almond.

**where earth meets ocean**

this poem ends on any given evening  
with the cat on my lap and whiskey at hand

when the tangerine sunset spills over  
the withered plants by the picket fence

I promised to fix it six months ago but didn't  
I promised to fix it six months ago, again, and I didn't

now the more I write, the farther I stray from you  
because you can't hear me as I age in a slumber lull

those are marbles that were your eyes and they steer  
blind away from my scales made of poems

you think that by not reading them you hurt me  
and I'm probably lonelier than a lone liar

I have remained silent like a barren land  
dead land dull dying of nothing—being nothing—

the sun bakes the beach and my face turns  
the color of spiced rum—a harsh Pantone, if you will—

I rake poems with the fronds of coconut  
palm trees and sweep them under the rugs

I've spent full nights alone by the bonfire  
where I burned my hands while I wait

for my body being pulled from the dark water  
that roars my name at night when you get home

**standing outside by a blind lamppost**

right before dawn, all remaining pieces  
of sky scattered on the roof  
of buildings lashed out by salted  
winds that come in the breath of the sea  
we let cigarette butts fly by like  
fireflies freefall from the top  
of the world we have built  
out of the terrace and the salsa music  
we stopped listening a long time ago  
but everyone was too busy to notice

I find my silence next to the empty  
beer-cans and I'm smoking words  
that repeat themselves like flames  
in a fire or the echo of light

the morning is a bright pool  
where water gleams with silver  
fish scales on our sick heart

I should've told you the night  
wears a mask with leverage  
but I kissed Death's lips instead

**the body unfurls like a flag**

inside me there are rivers silent  
 with poems and dregs of *melaza*<sup>18</sup>  
 like dark boats of memories  
 lurking in the mangrove  
 waiting for the moon  
 to light the way.

I listen to the rain as it weaves  
 my skin shed away  
 like an old shame

trucks and cars speed  
 in the distance  
 on a sprig of dawn

I keep my breath inside a box  
 in case I drown and need to shoo  
 the seagulls away

and I'm old. and tired

and I wait                    I wait  
 and be better

I do things to improve myself  
 it's a chore                    a task                    a duty

I pick after my mother who waited  
 all her life for better and got none

I eat her ashes so she can stay within me  
 the way I ate sweet *gofio*<sup>19</sup> she made  
 for me when I was a kid

she ebbs and floods my blood foaming dry

we                    both                    strive

---

<sup>18</sup> Molasses.

<sup>19</sup> Gofio is a sort of Canarian flour made from roasted grains, oftentimes blended with sugar. Its many uses makes it very popular in Western Africa, Canary Islands, and the Caribbean.



we find sadness is  
*ciguatera*<sup>20</sup>  
our hearts

we are the sick fish.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ciguatera is short for Ciguatera Fish Poisoning, also known as CFP.

**postcard for Walt**

I feel Puerto Rico sliding, electric and loud  
to the sound of *plena* litanies—clean and sweet  
is my soul, too—under *brujo* moonlight veil  
that licks the top of our wet heads under  
the rain—welcome is every organ and attribute  
of you and me with blood of a new blood  
effervescent and wild and free with the taste  
of victories we never tasted before—we didn't have  
the language then—we found it buried  
in the cobblestones—sketched in our little black book  
of redeemed promises you will try and buff tomorrow  
but won't sweep away from the memory we piece  
and kill and chill beyond the fact there are no yard  
trains but old colonial buildings that murder  
silence and the chant of the ward and the city  
I live in, or the nation that lives in me singing  
blithe and strong as in a Whitman poem  
that's as hip as dope with sweat and anger  
put to shame *ad hominem* and there's an ocean  
of restless hearts with open mouths and a thirst  
for tomorrow—plenty of terrible beauty and light  
and I swear, Walt, I will send you a postcard

**let there be commerce**

sound is always late and we don't carry the remains  
of light and fury on a mid-April afternoon  
before the starlings return in inkblots  
that stain the air iridescent and purplish  
green like a fugitive sea we thought smart  
blue enough like truth conceals the fact  
that there is no truth but commodities  
pigeonholed as the gleaming presence  
of futility in the promises of martyrs and worms

perversion masks and denatures the idea  
of somewhere or something close to white  
sand beaches and palm trees seen from afar  
on a yawl full of sad salsa songs and beer  
while we fish for those stars that fall and sink  
on the dark *laguna* where cars and plastic  
drown indistinctly amid caimans and glass  
bottles painted like zombie still nature  
and this island doesn't fly, least superfly

blistered and littered in a handful  
of useless stars choking in the naked  
night impractical and throat-slit waning  
moon-like yet terrible and electric  
like neon daffodils fluttering and dancing  
by the rim of my wandering red eye  
dilated with spasmodic fear and Elvis  
Costello singing Burt Bacharach songs  
that smell of whiskey and patchouli

the dawn liberates the light from its jail  
of glass and silence deep—a fossil  
tattooed like an absence of things we dreamed  
about because we were told they were  
possible and true as famine is possible  
and true or otherwise empty—paradox  
or pain bruised the insides of our dry mouth  
jaw-dropped perceptible of the past  
not because it's past but because it's present

### reality check in Malmö

your bones blossom as you loaf with me  
 on the cold grass and I feel as bad as raw fish  
 left outside good enough to become gourmet  
*surströmming*—a dish Jean made for you  
 but you'd never eat anyway or tell her  
 it was delicious unless you chug your pride  
 like shameless beet juice

there are reputations worse than a tilapia

but then it's not Malmö—it's Adjuntas

you see two girls eating Spring mangos offered  
 like hearts of a tree—ripe with yellow sweet pulp  
 squashed clumsy around the little girls' mouths  
 and cheeks and school uniforms and it's beautiful  
 and innocent and melancholic because you  
 will never go back there where dreams upheave  
 with a thin patina wearing out the soles of shoes  
 useless and impossibly far from home

and then you're back in Malmö

the *surströmming* smells and tastes like death—the present  
 is inevitable as it forks my skull cold and lazy seduced  
 by shadows of distant palm trees

you die slowly and more comfortably now

### Betlegeuse should be named Chango

the fracture—blind like an accident—  
 diminishes    Babylon        to rubble  
 blood clot black                  in my mouth  
 of broken truths and false teeth

      a kid with a grackle pet  
 offers me gum

      I ask him what's the bird's name  
 Betlegeuse, he says                  he's a dying star

      the bird's red eye dims  
 the kid also says I need a bath  
 before I supernova into something else

      the old people on the sidewalk  
 sweep the clouds in the sky  
 and beg the rain to  
 come back another day

insolvent                                  mindless,  
       my heart                                  is a miser  
               sunburned        homeless

              it bleeds  
               islands

      the hungry dogs soon shall start  
 eating each other and there's no mana

      falling from their gods  
 or their semantic pluralities

      the night utters tremors  
 that make my breath tremble  
 so I'll eventually vomit sunshine  
 and patriotic anthems

and the green bile  
of pharma-media news

I must concoct forms  
alibis faith—performing  
contradictions unify the universe

I don't own my mouth-  
or the voices inside it

I empty myself in distances  
that hover in gardens of words

pour on me secret music  
of existence as I fade out

in the soft stroke of wind  
rest is silence

## Arecibo

*For small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love— Carl Sagan.*

we depart	<i>frequency modulated</i>
like an angel of noise	<i>to the globular cluster</i>
diving into the mouth	<i>looking for extraterrestrial life</i>
in the sidereal silence—	<i>21,000 light years away</i>
dust and gases and dark matter—	<i>with stick figures of you and me</i>
signified as the whole	<i>23 lines storing history—</i>
humanity dissolved in a signal—	<i>like the chromosomes of a poem—</i>
the soul, after all,	<i>zeros and ones at 10 bits per second</i>
doesn't exist by itself	<i>in the vastness of space</i>
it needs to take the form	<i>as meaning is to a word</i>
of the things it inhabits	<i>so poetry dwells in the poem</i>
and we, galaxies apart,	<i>like an S.O.S., or Mercury's spit,</i>
gobble on the distance—	<i>the corporality of a code</i>
our nervous selves	<i>embedded in a radio signal</i>
triggered by body dynamics—	<i>waiting to be heard—</i>
my world will collide into yours	<i>flying through the void</i>
like Matthew McConaughey	<i>through dust and gases and dark matter</i>
disrupts Jodie Foster's life in <i>Contact</i>	<i>a convergence across the Cosmos—</i>
-I'll give you the Cracker Jack compass	<i>in the interstellar parallax</i>
so you can find you way back	<i>-«we are here; this is us»-</i>
and eat my heart like a <i>cetí</i> turnover—	<i>that overturned SETI failure</i>
there's Moon cake for dessert	<i>to convince our selves</i>
and a love story to tell the kids	<i>of our existence</i>

**saudade for two**

mother roams around her own ashes  
inside a wooden urn with a rosary  
of soursop seeds and hope  
for a *hamaca*<sup>21</sup> beyond the light  
that bend her eyelashes like fishhooks

our loneliness, sis, is a wharf stuck  
in the bottom of a dark pain  
we're letting go as we reel in  
back to these pieces of ghosts  
we turned into last night

outside we hear children play  
and laugh and it sounds so  
much like us in a distant time  
drowned now by thunder  
and hail and elaborate grayness  
that billows the hurt or the truth  
our flesh has surrendered to

take your casket and leave us  
here in the candle-lit living room  
still damp with last night's storm

---

<sup>21</sup> A hammock.



**all the wrongs that make a right**

eternity bubbles      silver  
 like drowned                      constellation  
 in pink and purple      sigh  
 particles of desire              spattered  
 like stucco on a wall      at the end  
 of the universe where babies  
 melt                      in the idea of stars

my lips slow-burn in              the night  
 we went out                      we got gassed  
 we became a song to file      under the beauty  
 of anger              and grackles on the ledge  
 of history turned to Gucci

the city streets steams              with darkness  
 in the *calina* haze              shawled around  
 the stupor of pot-banging      chants we know  
 as immediate truth

it's LA, Minneapolis, Jefferson, or New York

we might be witnessing a different kind of hurt

the one that makes breath      tremble

our empire of so-called wrongs              might for once be right

**crow moon, Chango moon**

a crow moon pecks at  
the last throes of winter  
when the worms start to surface  
as the night sips tea  
and it's Gucci while  
eating pigs in blankets  
like Ninjas of discontinuity  
tiptoeing over the void  
and time—the Janus of March  
defying the limitations  
of structure—we'd still keep  
the pixels when there  
is no film for grain  
to exist within

## **bomblues**

let the *buleador*<sup>22</sup> bully eloquence shred the night  
 and beat those drums like innocence's a bastard  
 getting pounded on nighttime radio talk shows  
 where only the old know how to grief a wrinkled city

left to smell of camphor and menthol senility  
 manspreading and quicksilver sultry yet

steep as the depth of withered faces collapsed  
 by doctrines with a due date for the shock

and a slimmer view of paradise lost in economies  
 of lackluster times sunk hard in the skin inglorious  
 teeth of hunger and lost lands delighted *bomba*<sup>23</sup>  
 in the production of time and oblivion in sounds

of *blues* and brambles barb-wiring the heart  
 on the loss of those who blacked out and melted

in infinity and those who merely leave a country  
 that once tasted sweet as baked potato yams

spread with the syrup of the night that licks  
 pigments from our skin milled in the *trapiches*<sup>24</sup>  
 where poems are harvested out of the loneliness  
 into cauldrons of light and anger and pain

---

<sup>22</sup> Main drum player in African-Puerto Rican bomba music.

<sup>23</sup> Traditional drum music of African roots in Puerto Rico.

<sup>24</sup> The wooden mill where sugar cane was produced by African slaves in Puerto Rico.

## heathens of Babylon

saved by Europe and brought  
to America where white people  
assigned our destiny of inadequacy  
blackenized and segregated

we're the heathens of Babylon  
what do you know, Walt Whitman?

George Floyd is the history  
we derive by any means necessary

the pain is exhaustive  
the rage inextricable  
humanity unskinned  
we are all bare bones  
sound and still as frozen  
stars hanging from a silt sky

I mind it and it resonates in  
me—I come and I depart

I find answers revealed in the real  
weakness of a false strength

racism is the dark Crow fluttering  
its wings in the dense night of nothing

we are the cornfield, the cornmen,  
the hurt, the torment, the blackcorn

nilly-willy discord and no dovetail  
racism—a feebleness of the soul

in those who think they own  
the sun, time, and truth

outward—since inward we all slouch  
and dodder hungry for the same

light like uncontained broken music  
that bleeds from the corner of my eyes

**post-Caliban blues**

I wish I could have a better story  
                                   for the sky so they would listen to me  
           in stone          morn          splendid          heroics  
 cohere          beautiful          exact          painful

like the first burn of love  
 in the trembling dark skin

shoot ornate denunciations and mystic reggaeton  
 chants varnished in tangerine sunsets

                  tarnished          oblivions          dry-mouths and guilt  
                   blood made of bloods  
                   and wars fought for Sam

equality smirks because it only  
 happens when we die

and we die all the time,  
 but they never tell us

equal but separate  
 Jim *Chango* laws

we are moths flying into the  
 blue light of history

                  you see my own death comes with a dirge  
                   funeral wreaths          white hearse  
                                   with freckles  
                                   just like my mother's face

we're all erasure bandying melancholic sushi  
 down the gentrified misereres of third  
 world regrets and *pachanga*<sup>25</sup> ad-lib  
 as selling cheap watches to Father Time  
 on Easter Sunday Missa Luba

(*I drowned that Missa Luba*)

we're so backdoor Bacardi

---

<sup>25</sup> Caribbean rhythm that blends son montuno (Cuba) and merengue (Dominican Republic).

pharmakon with bula drums and timba sounds  
from forests catching fire

we might not find the way back to greater  
it was better when it was lonely

it's always lonely

we're so *jornalero* notebooks<sup>26</sup> my ancestors carried  
in their hearts      a graveyard shift      dead ringing  
in splendid isolation  
of starlit clots

we're so the loneliness of hot iron black codes that still pervade  
the lack of freedom    we're an island      built on servitude

I'm so asylum displacement

we're so IRA so ire so irie  
with this self-governing piece of land

we even write our own constitutions  
while the Uncle provides financial aid for infrastructure

we are no commonwealth  
we are a Latino reservation

a dying country paints the shadow  
of a dying mother

mother  
mother  
please  
swarm fireflies from your mouth

I clutch my nails to the bottom of the sky  
feed me a name before I forget what I will be

---

<sup>26</sup> Worker's notebooks free people were required to carry In the 19<sup>th</sup> century to work in Puerto Rico.

**my now is your two years ago**

Anaximander, the Greek  
philosopher, thought of time  
as a story where things transform  
one into another according to necessity

in the kingdom of my will  
I wanderlust to the point  
where I'll never tell if things  
change because of time or if time  
exists because things change

the one thing your razors,  
your toothbrush and your earrings  
prove is that pain can never be  
a cause of anything

memories move  
time passes slowly

I am the Antillean grackle perching  
on the light pole like a quiet story

**moonbow Miranda**

you sat still, Miranda, and heard the last  
 of our sea-sorrow  
 watching fireflies burn  
 the air we spoke softly into  
 the vastness of silence cathedrals  
 that crawled surreptitiously  
 through buildings and car  
 dealer signs that mocked  
 the nearby  
 hills where people hid like fears

I, the mooncalf, held your hand and told you  
 jokes that stole a laugh  
 or two  
 as we learned about the reinvention  
 of happiness in a stolen land

we promised ourselves we'd be  
 strong enough to umbrella the dome  
 of the night. we said we'd never be  
 sorry for letting our hearts breathe  
 the silver light of the moon  
 before we ate it  
 as cake

we could never tell  
 the colors of the moonbow



### future memory for elusive reasons

must our mouths be cold—my flag withered  
 as dried off insects echoes nothing—a star with trains  
 of fire and broken faces of pregnant teens  
 shot dead and disposed of in McDonald's dumpsters  
 where the lipsticked rims of their soda cups  
 soak in blood—parenthetical blasé—without  
 a whimper—the sky aloof and solitary  
 swindles the weather report lady who swore  
 today there'd be lovely beach sunrise under 80  
 beneficent degrees—wolfish and eyesore  
 in the flesh of time—my own skin populated  
 by hunger and loss—I am a small kid—again  
 I see my Dad shave his beard and disappear  
 in his ARMY uniform—the one he wore with a rooster's  
 pride—he always wore his military dog tag  
 like an English Sheppard—he thought he mattered  
 and lived as if he did—feed the dog while I'm away  
 he said once—he never returned—I drop down  
 and give time fifty—until I'm faceless with tears—  
 until I bark back I am not Spanish—I spic  
 Puerto Rican—hidden in mom's Frida Khalo's eyebrows:  
 dense and deep and I won't curb my self-expression  
 to meet your expectations of me—I owe my nothing  
 to nobody—like Julia— I won't go back to wherever  
 the fuck you think I came from—I'm told “Speak English”—  
 whaaa?—You're in America—Yo—You live  
 on welfare—bleed as my bones break—my heart  
 aches—you're nobody—he says—many times—  
 my bones break—Dad's dead—for you, sir—  
 you're so vane you probably think the sun spins  
 about you and I don't know how I got here—  
 stay, illusion—brevity is the ghost of dreams  
 and, yet,            must our mouths be cold  
                           must our mouths be cold  
                           must our mouths be cold  
                           I won't sink with the king<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> «Must our mouths be cold» and «I won't sink with the king» are lines from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.