

PEDRO

S E L E C T E D P O E T R Y

PIETRI



Edited by Juan Flores and Pedro López Adorno

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Edited by Juan Flores and Pedro López Adorno

City

Lights



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# City Lights

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# City Lights



**PUERTO  
RICAN  
OBITUARY**

**City  
Lights**



## PUERTO RICAN OBITUARY

They worked  
They were always on time  
They were never late  
They never spoke back  
when they were insulted  
They worked  
They never took days off  
that were not on the calendar  
They never went on strike  
without permission  
They worked  
ten days a week  
and were only paid for five  
They worked  
They worked  
They worked  
and they died  
They died broke  
They died owing  
They died never knowing  
what the front entrance  
of the first national city bank looks like

Juan

Miguel

Milagros

Olga

Manuel

All died yesterday today  
and will die again tomorrow  
passing their bill collectors

on to the next of kin  
All died  
waiting for the garden of eden  
to open up again  
under a new management  
All died  
dreaming about america  
waking them up in the middle of the night  
screaming: Mira Mira  
your name is on the winning lottery ticket  
for one hundred thousand dollars  
All died  
hating the grocery stores  
that sold them make-believe steak  
and bullet-proof rice and beans  
All died waiting dreaming and hating

Dead Puerto Ricans  
Who never knew they were Puerto Ricans  
Who never took a coffee break  
from the ten commandments  
to KILL KILL KILL  
the landlords of their cracked skulls  
and communicate with their latino souls

Juan  
Miguel  
Milagros  
Olga  
Manuel  
From the nervous breakdown streets  
where the mice live like millionaires  
and the people do not live at all  
are dead and were never alive

Juan  
died waiting for his number to hit  
Miguel  
died waiting for the welfare check  
to come and go and come again  
Milagros  
died waiting for her ten children  
to grow up and work  
so she could quit working  
Olga  
died waiting for a five dollar raise  
Manuel  
died waiting for his supervisor to drop dead  
so he could get a promotion

Is a long ride  
from Spanish Harlem  
to long island cemetery  
where they were buried  
First the train  
and then the bus  
and the cold cuts for lunch  
and the flowers  
that will be stolen  
when visiting hours are over  
Is very expensive  
Is very expensive  
But they understand  
Their parents understood  
Is a long non-profit ride  
from Spanish Harlem  
to long island cemetery

Juan  
Miguel  
Milagros  
Olga  
Manuel  
All died yesterday today  
and will die again tomorrow  
Dreaming  
Dreaming about queens  
Clean-cut lily-white neighborhood  
Puerto Ricanless scene  
Thirty-thousand-dollar home  
The first spics on the block  
Proud to belong to a community  
of gringos who want them lynched  
Proud to be a long distance away  
from the sacred phrase: Que Pasa

These dreams  
These empty dreams  
from the make-believe bedrooms  
their parents left them  
are the after-effects  
of television programs  
about the ideal  
white american family  
with black maids  
and latino janitors  
who are well train—  
to make everyone  
and their bill collectors  
laugh at them  
and the people they represent

Juan  
died dreaming about a new car  
Miguel  
died dreaming about new anti-poverty programs  
Milagros  
died dreaming about a trip to Puerto Rico  
Olga  
died dreaming about real jewelry  
Manuel  
died dreaming about the irish sweepstakes

They all died  
like a hero sandwich dies  
in the garment district  
at twelve o'clock in the afternoon  
social security number to ashes  
union dues to dust

They knew  
they were born to weep  
and keep the morticians employed  
as long as they pledge allegiance  
to the flag that wants them destroyed  
They saw their names listed  
in the telephone directory of destruction  
They were train to turn  
the other cheek by newspapers  
that misspelled mispronounced  
and misunderstood their names  
and celebrated when death came  
and stole their final laundry ticket

They were born dead  
and they died dead  
Is time  
to visit sister lopez again  
the number one healer  
and fortune card dealer  
in Spanish Harlem  
She can communicate  
with your late relatives  
for a reasonable fee  
Good news is guaranteed  
Rise Table Rise Table  
death is not dumb and disable—  
Those who love you want to know  
the correct number to play  
Let them know this right away  
Rise Table Rise Table  
death is not dumb and disable  
Now that your problems are over  
and the world is off your shoulders  
help those who you left behind  
find financial peace of mind  
Rise Table Rise Table  
death is not dumb and disable  
If the right number we hit  
all our problems will split  
and we will visit your grave  
on every legal holiday  
Those who love you want to know  
the correct number to play  
Let them know this right away  
We know your spirit is able  
Death is not dumb and disable  
RISE TABLE RISE TABLE

Juan  
Miguel  
Milagros  
Olga  
Manuel  
All died yesterday today  
and will die again tomorrow  
Hating fighting and stealing  
broken windows from each other  
Practicing a religion without a roof  
The old testament  
The new testament  
according to the gospel  
of the internal revenue  
the judge and jury and executioner  
protector and eternal bill collector

Secondhand shit for sale  
Learn how to say Como Esta Usted  
and you will make a fortune  
They are dead  
They are dead  
and will not return from the dead  
until they stop neglecting  
the art of their dialogue—  
for broken english lessons  
to impress the mister goldsteins—  
who keep them employed  
as lavaplatos porters messenger boys  
factory workers maids stock clerks  
shipping clerks assistant mailroom  
assistant, assistant assistant  
to the assistant's assistant  
assistant lavaplatos and automatic

artificial smiling doormen  
for the lowest wages of the ages  
and rages when you demand a raise  
because *is* against the company policy  
to promote SPICS SPICS SPICS

Juan  
died hating Miguel because Miguel's  
used car was in better running condition  
than his used car

Miguel  
died hating Milagros because Milagros  
had a color television set  
and he could not afford one yet

Milagros  
died hating Olga because Olga  
made five dollars more on the same job

Olga  
died hating Manuel because Manuel  
had hit the numbers more times  
than she had hit the numbers

Manuel  
died hating all of them

Juan  
Miguel  
Milagros  
and Olga

because they all spoke broken english  
more fluently than he did

And now they are together  
in the main lobby of the void

Addicted to silence  
Off limits to the wind



Confined to worm supremacy  
in long island cemetery  
This is the groovy hereafter  
the protestant collection box  
was talking so loud and proud about

Here lies Juan  
Here lies Miguel  
Here lies Milagros  
Here lies Olga  
Here lies Manuel  
who died yesterday today  
and will die again tomorrow  
Always broke  
Always owing  
Never knowing  
that they are beautiful people  
Never knowing  
the geography of their complexion

PUERTO RICO IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE  
PUERTORRIQUENOS ARE A BEAUTIFUL RACE  
If only they  
had turned off the television  
and tune into their own imaginations  
If only they  
had used the white supremacy bibles  
for toilet paper purpose  
and make their latino souls  
the only religion of their race  
If only they  
had return to the definition of the sun  
after the first mental snowstorm

on the summer of their senses  
If only they  
had kept their eyes open  
at the funeral of their fellow employees  
who came to this country to make a fortune  
and were buried without underwears

Juan  
Miguel  
Milagros  
Olga  
Manuel  
will right now be doing their own thing  
where beautiful people sing  
and dance and work together  
where the wind is a stranger  
to miserable weather conditions  
where you do not need a dictionary  
to communicate with your people

Aqui  
Se Habla Espanol  
all the time  
Aqui you salute your flag first  
Aqui there are no dial soap commercials  
Aqui everybody smells good  
Aqui tv dinners do not have a future  
Aqui the men and women admire desire  
and never get tired of each other  
Aqui Que Pasa Power is what's happening  
Aqui to be called negrito  
means to be called LOVE

## THE BROKEN ENGLISH DREAM

It was the night  
before the welfare check  
and everybody sat around the table  
hungry heartbroken cold confused  
and unable to heal the wounds  
on the dead calendar of our eyes  
Old newspapers and empty beer cans  
and jesus is the master of this house  
Picture frames made in japan by the u.s.  
was hanging out in the kitchen  
which was also the livingroom  
the bedroom and the linen closet  
Wall to wall bad news was playing  
over the radio that last week was stolen  
by dying dope addicts looking for a fix  
to forget that they were ever born  
The slumlord came with hand grenades  
in his bad breath to collect the rent  
we were unable to pay six month ago  
and inform us and all the empty  
shopping bags we own that unless  
we pay we will be evicted immediately  
And the streets where the night lives  
and the temperature is below zero  
three hundred sixty-five days a year  
will become our next home address  
All the lightbulbs of our apartment  
were left and forgotten at the pawnshop  
across the street from the heart attack

the broken back buildings were having  
Infants not born yet played hide n seek  
in the cemetery of their imagination  
Blind in the mind tenants were praying  
for numbers to hit so they can move out  
and wake up with new birth certificates  
The grocery stores were outnumbered by  
funeral parlors with neon signs that said  
Customers wanted No experience necessary  
A liquor store here and a liquor store  
everywhere you looked filled the polluted  
air with on the job training prostitutes  
pimps and winos and thieves and abortions  
White business store owners from clean-cut  
plush push-button neat neighborhoods  
who learn how to speak spanish in six weeks  
wrote love letters to their cash registers  
Vote for me! said the undertaker: I am  
the man with the solution to your problems

To the united states we came  
To learn how to misspell our name  
To lose the definition of pride  
To have misfortune on our side  
To live where rats and roaches roam  
in a house that is definitely not a home  
To be trained to turn on television sets  
To dream about jobs you will never get  
To fill out welfare applications  
To graduate from school without an education  
To be drafted distorted and destroyed  
To work full time and still be unemployed

To wait for income tax returns  
and stay drunk and lose concern  
for the heart and soul of our race  
and the climate that produce our face

To pledge allegiance  
to the flag  
of the united states  
of installment plans  
One nation  
under discrimination  
for which it stands  
and which it falls  
with poverty injustice  
and televised  
firing squads  
for everyone who has  
the sun on the side  
of their complexion

Lapiz: Pencil

Pluma: Pen

Cocina: Kitchen

Gallina: Hen

Everyone who learns this  
will receive a high school equivalency diploma  
a lifetime supply of employment agencies  
a different bill collector for every day of the week  
the right to vote for the executioner of your choice  
and two hamburgers for thirty-five cents in times square

We got off  
the two-engine airplane  
at idlewild airport  
(re-named kennedy airport  
twenty years later)  
with all our furniture  
and personal belongings  
in our back pockets

We follow the sign  
that says welcome to america  
but keep your hands  
off the property  
violators will be electrocuted  
follow the garbage truck  
to the welfare department  
if you cannot speak english

So this is america  
land of the free  
for everybody  
but our family  
So this is america  
where you wake up  
in the morning  
to brush your teeth  
with the home relief  
the leading toothpaste  
operation bootstrap  
promise you you will get  
every time you buy  
a box of cornflakes

on the lay-away plan  
So this is america  
land of the free  
to watch the  
adventures of superman  
on tv if you know  
somebody who owns a set  
that works properly  
So this is america  
exploited by columbus  
in fourteen ninety-two  
with captain video  
and lady bird johnson  
the first miss subways  
in the new testament  
So this is america  
where they keep you  
busy singing  
en mi casa toman bustelo  
en mi casa toman bustelo



# City Lights

## BEWARE OF SIGNS

Beware of signs that say  
“Aqui Se Habla Espanol”  
Dollar Down Dollar A Week  
until your dying days

BUEYNOS DIASS  
COMO ESTA YOUSTED?  
AQUI SAY FIA  
MUEBLAYRIA  
Y TELEVECION SETS  
ROPAS BARRATOS  
TRAJES Y ZAPATOS  
PARA SUSHIJOS  
AND YOUR MARIDOS  
NUMAYROSAS COSA  
PARA LA ESPOSA  
KAY TIENAY TODO  
KAY BUEYNO CREDITO  
PUEDAY COMPRAR  
MACHINAS DAY LAVAR  
VACUM CLEANEROS  
YOUSTED NAME IT  
AND IF NOSOTROS  
NO LO TENAYMOS  
WE LO INVENTAYMOS  
IMMEDIATAMENTAY  
JESS WE WILL  
NADUAQUIESIMPOSI  
BLAYBLABLUDAGHAZ



OOLADUYAJAYEAHAZ  
SI NO SAY NECESITA  
NINGUNO DINEROS  
SOLAMENTAY YOU SIGN  
AQUI ON THIS LINE  
Y TODO WILL BE FINE  
MUCHAS GRACIAS SENOR  
MUCHAS GRACIAS SENORA  
AND DON'T FORGET  
TO VUELVAY AGAIN  
TELL ALL YOUR NEXT  
DOOR VEYCINOS THAT  
WITH EVERY TEN DOLLAR  
PURCHASE THEY MAKE  
LEY DEMOS UNO DISCO  
DEY LA CANCION  
DEY SU FAVORITO  
TELEVICION PROGRAMA  
simpleymentay maria  
simpleymentay maria  
maria maria ETCETRA  
HASTA LA VISTO AMIGO

Beware of signs that say  
“Aqui Se Habla Espanol”  
Do not go near those places  
of smiling faces that do not smile  
and bill collectors who are well train  
to forget how to habla espanol  
when you fall back on those weekly payments

Beware! Be wise! Do not patronize  
Garbage is all they are selling you  
Here today gone tomorrow merchandise

You wonder where your bedroom set went  
after you make the third payment

Those bastards should be sued  
for false advertisement  
What they talk no es espanol  
What they talk is alotta BULLSHIT



# City Lights