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Pedro Pietri

Puerto Rican Obituary / Obituario Puertorriqueño

SEMINARIO MULTIDISCIPLINARIO
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FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES
UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO
RECINTO DE RIO PIEDRAS



ISLA
negra

EDITORES

San Juan / Santo Domingo

Pedro Pietri is a prolific and profound poet, who has added to the literary discourse an array of original, deep and unique poetic images that speak the universal language of talent and beauty.

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 makebelieve steaks
 and bulletproof 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 superior to drop dead
 so he could get a promotion

It's 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
 It's very expensive
 It's very expensive
 Bur they understand
 Their parents understood
 It's a long nonprofit 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
 Cleancut lilywhite 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 a long distance away
 from the sacred phrase: Qué Pasa

These dreams
 These empty dreams
 from the makebelieve bedrooms
 their parents left them
 are the aftereffects
 of television programs
 about the ideal
 white american family
 with black maids
 and latino janitors
 who are well trained
 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 antipoverty programs

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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 trained 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

It's time
 to visit sister López 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 disabled
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 disabled
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 disabled
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 way
We know your spirit is able
Death is not dumb and disabled
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 Cómo Está 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
assistants assistant assistant
to the assistant's assistant
assistant lavaplatos and automatic
artificial smiling doormen
for the lowest wages of the ages
and rage when you demand a raise
because it's 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
Manuel
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
PUERTORRIQUEÑOS ARE A BEAUTIFUL RACE

If only they
had turned off the television
and tuned into their own imagination
If only they
had used the white supremacy bibles
for toilet paper purpose
and made their latino souls
the only religion of their race
If only they
had returned 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 underwear

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

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Tata

Mi abuela
 has been
 in this dept store
 called america
 for the past twenty-five years
 She is eighty-five years old
 and does not speak

a word of english

That is intelligence

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.
 were hanging out in the kitchen
 which was also the living room
 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 months ago
 and informed 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