

La Piedra de los Doce Ángulos

- i. remember: only slow Spanish, italicize your mother tongue, keep it *gringo* friendly. make sure every tenth word is in *castellano*. but only the nouns, only words like *paloma*, *cielo*, *alma*, because this is an exercise in pursuing the exotic. because verbs are movement and movement is change. because we have been colonized and we must now serve as the colonizers. because your mouth has only learned the taste of powdered *chicha morada*.
- ii. Please Check All That Apply:
 - White (not Hispanic)
 - Hispanic (not white)
 - Multi-Racial
 - Latino
 - Latinx
 - Spanish / Latin-American / Chicano (the things white people call you)
 - Mestizo: una mezcla de vergüenza
 - Criollo, portraited as San Martín with epaulettes and aviators
 - Indio—Super Cholo armed with chullo
 - Runakuna, Inca, Manqu Qhapaq wielding tapac-yauri, un tumi mojado con sangre
- iii. If you tell them you are Peruvian:
 - members of the silent generation will not hide their surprise
 - women of a certain age will mention Benjamin Bratt
 - your peers will joke about the decade-old pan flute episode of South Park
 - and your otherness will swaddle you like q'ipirina
 - holding you to a body you refuse to understand

iv. I say *él nacio en el Perú*
and just imagine if your blood
pumped in the passive voice
and your tongue felt
like a rusted spade
troweling the fallow
earth of a forgotten
andén—a word I
have to look up
to remember. I say *al lado*
de mi padre because my
heart is a chirimoya
lazing in my throat
the flesh of which
is pitted with
veneno. I say
mitad, nunca
ambos.

quinto. your first word is *pato*
and years later
José will call you this
and you will know
why these sounds
touched your lips
first, why sword
is just one letter
from words
and both
doble filo.

not dad or mom
when you speak
this truth, this knowing
pain that echoes,
trace the vowels that
opened your throat
swallowing a memory
removed from time
still living
as bi—

isqon kaq.

I learned that my culture is something foreign to be consumed and enjoyed. Something for W.S. Merwin or Mark Strand to translate. Something for Hiram Bingham to “discover.” Some entheogenic brew to be greedily chugged and then vomited. And I have learned that I am la mancha. That I am the canchita stuck in your teeth. El escupitajo de una llama que se negó a moverse. I am what stayed. I am littoral, liminal, the interstice between floor and ceiling. En mis sueños estoy susurrando: *Saksaywamanpi pukuy-pukucha, Imallamanta qampis waqanki?* In my dreams soy un halcón jaspeado, un idioma perdido, sangre y movimiento. Soñé que yo era la encarnación de Don Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, que este poema era La Segunda Nueva Crónica, y esta es mi maldición—la idea de que puedo ser salvado through the power of words, that this fealty could buy more than my treachery. I dreamed I was more than just an amanuensis scribbling in the margins. I dreamed of being white and not white and when I woke neither was true. I woke to the light of el sendero luminoso, the sprawl of los pueblos jóvenes, the cant of Fujimoristas breaking como las olas en la orilla del Callao. En mis sueños Ines dijo: Fujimurimantaqa mastaqa yachani toledopin. Desperté y era un campesino, mis manos eran tierra y marga, mi aliento—humo y nube que ennegrece al sol. Desperté en la noche, en otro país, otro lenguaje. Nací fantasma, una blanca sombra, mis desnudas raicillas muriendo sin agua. Llevo el rostro de ayer, las ambiciones olvidadas de mi padre—las plumas debajo de la jaula. As a child I remember celebrating el veintiocho de Julio with an Inka Kola that seemed never-ending. I remember the slip of fingertips on the banana leaves that cradle the tamal; the stain of achiote like the sun through closed eyelid. I remember the billowing pride of the escudo de armas before I grew into a cornucopia spilling potatoes onto an unfamiliar escutcheon. Before I grew into my fear, before my fear became self-hatred and my memory became erasure. Look: I was a mountain that quaked into a boulder. I was a boulder that rolled over oceans to be hewn by my own cowardice. Look—this is my shame: I made myself a thing unlike I am and lived as this. I faceted my faces. I scourged my verdant flesh. I dispossessed myself of ancestry. I ran. Corrí hasta perderme. Y estoy perdido en todo menos en sueños. Porque cuando sueño soy un niño cantando: *Qaqa sikipi ch'iñicha hallwa, Qhachqa rumicha amparuchaykuq, Amparuchayki tukurqukuptin, Ñuqam mamayuq, ñuqam*

taytayuq, y estoy charlando con Ines, toqueteando los flequillos de su chal, admirando el fieltro de su bombín. No es inocencia lo que he perdido, es algo peor. Un conocimiento. Una manera de ser. La sensación de estar completo. Es como si hubiera un hueco en mi garganta o en mi corazón o en el ojo de mi alma. Me conozco a mí mismo como un ala rota revoloteando en el aire, algo roto que quiere volar. Pero quiero volar. Chinkasqan kashani. Pero quiero volver. Chinkasqan purishani. But I am trying to find the way back.

chunka kaq. O Inca Sol, how do I translate gamonalismo when it is a yoke I have created for myself? How do I translate the contours of a fricative hugging my teeth before exiting my mouth? How do I translate this agglutinating pain? When I was born I cried in three languages. Listen: these tears spill in the vulgate for mine is a history of empire defeated by empire. Mine is a bloodline miscegenated by the triumph of love over war. If you listen closely you will hear no weeping, just the ring of a name echoing through time.

O daylight, whose gaze cast the first poets as toponymists, we praise you because place has a meaning. Ayacucho—it means repository of corpses, the place of cadavers. This is where I am from. This is where Pachamama holds me to her breast, where machulaypa machulan drew breath. This is a land where the rulers were poets, where our poems were songs and language was spoken, never written. This is home, or rather, this is my translation of the home I never knew. There are words that cannot be translated. And if they could be translated I wouldn't know which language is mine. My language is a language of disloyal vowels, of Rs that refused to roll. My language has always been a choice between what lives and dies.

O father Pacha Kutiy Inqa Yupanki, you speak two languages but speak this in runasimi. Tell us your name means world overturner, transformer, one who returns earth unto earth. Sing us your hymn to translate as prayer to translate as poem. Sing us a song, because we have been told so much about what is lost in translation but never enough about what is projected onto words whose meaning we have forgotten. O father Pachacútec, tell me this is not a choice, not a translation; tell me this is transformation—my hymn, my song of myself. Place me on this altar of lodestone and point the way home:

Hailli Chunka
Oración Por Todos Los Yngas

A Punchao Ynca Inti Yayay,
“Cuzco, Tambo
cachon; aticoc
llasacoc cachun,” nispa.
Churac, camac
muchascayqui.
Cusiquispo cachon;
amatisca,
ama llasasca
cachuncho,
aticucpas, llasacpas,
camascayqui,
churascayqui.

Himno Diez
Oración Por Todos Los Incas

¡O Sol! Padre de luz
que dijiste que haya
cuzcos y tambos;
sean vencedores y
despojadores estos tus
hijos de todas las gentes;
adórote para que sean
dichosos si somos estos
incas tus hijos y
no sean vencidos ni
despojados sino siempre
sean vencedores, pues
para esto hiciste.

Hymn Ten
Prayer For All Inca

O daylight! Sun of Inca, my father
who says: “Let there be Cuzco
and Tambo, let them rule
let them be conquerors!”
Orderer, Creator,
we praise you.
Let us be happy and free;
let us not succumb,
let us not be dispossessed,
but instead let us reign,
let us conquer.
For this you have made us,
for this you have placed us here.

chunka hoqniyoq kaq.

If they ask me
what I am I will say: I am no longer running
but my heart still beats in the rhythm of chasqui;
my feet still pound the earth; I am the shared melody of a hocket whispering
up from la ceja de selva. If they ask me what I am I will tell them I am the b-
-eads of a quipu that can't be deciphered. Les diré que yo soy un lugar en la
lengua donde tierra y mar se conocen, la leche de tigre, algo que quema adentro; que
yo soy el pie derecho de Teófilo Cubillas, descalzo, pateando el globo crucífero dentro de
las mallas. If they ask me what I am tell them I am a slather of ají panca, the forgotten kiss
of rocoto, the sunshine of ají amarillo bursting on your palate. Tell them my bisabuela's
name means pain. Tell them my grandfather learned love was interchangeable with abuse.
Tell them I'm the product of rape, that I am the son of a deserter on the wrong side of a
war for independence. That I come from bastards who shared everything but a last name.
Tell them in Spanish we spell family s-e-c-r-e-t-o-s. That Ángel killed the puma that ate
his dog. That mi bisabuelo was the last one to speak Quechua y runasimta yachashani.
Rikhaspa rimakuy ama puñuqinaqa. Estoy despierto. Mi nombre deletrea conquistador,
cobarde, misbegotten, and unwanted. Me llamo David Joz Villaverde-Soldevilla
Sanchez-Kell. I am wayñu hymn of harp and quena and siku. I am crunch of bone under
chaska chiqui. I am the sword through Pizarro's throat, the cross he painted in his own
blood as he lay dying. I am andesite, igneous— a stone of twelve angles. I need no

mortar, no temblor will move me.

chunka iskayniyoq kaq.

I have been told so many ways
to say goodbye that I have forgotten
what I am supposed to be
saying goodbye to

mi padre me dijo:
*nada ni nadie puede impedir que sufras,
que los agujas avancen en el reloj,
que decidas por ti, que te equivoques,
que crezcas, y que un día me digas adios*

y Walt Whitman me dijo:
*Me voy, no sé adonde,
ni a qué fortuna o si alguna vez te volveré a ver,
así pues, adiós mi Fantasía*

e Ines me dijo:
*huq kutikama y tupananchiskama
no son sólo kacharparikunapas
pero otras palabras
para munakuy*

But this is not a goodbye,
I do not talk of beginning or end.
This is about becoming,
poco a poco, pisi pisimanta.

Because my father said:
*no es que no vuelva
porque me he olvidado—
es que perdi
el camino de regreso*

I will not say goodbye
because I have not forgotten.
I know what I have lost.
I am finding the way back.