

## NUEVA YORK 1987

A Julia de Burgos

Salta el olor a uvas, a pescado  
desfilan Deco las antigüedades  
allá un balcón entre el acero  
y una matita de rojos geranios  
que prematura asomarse atreve  
negro el tráfico inmune a la  
multitud que espera para asaltar  
el semáforo desafía con su con-  
versación los agresivos camiones  
yérguese hermoso y tentador el  
puente de la cincuenta y nueve.

Es Nueva York del Este este Nueva  
York que ignora los cuchifritos, el  
tostón, el chicharrón de puerco, la  
alcapurria, a Rubén Blades, a los  
tambores que convierten las azoteas  
en noches de verano, en Areítos,  
Convites, en altares, ron, cocaína  
Changó, Ogún, navajas, revólveres  
Anaísa y ramos de azahar  
flores amarillas, blancas, moradas  
para evitar del rencor las maldades.

Pasaje, túnel, excursión a los  
siete infiernos de Dante, no el  
italiano, sino aquel bongosero  
argentino que sobrevivía en el  
VietNam de la Avenida Manhattan  
Ho Chi Ming lavó platos en tus bares  
Juan Isidro, Bosch, Máximo Gómez  
todo el exilio de las ideas, la poesía  
agonizando en todas las Julias.

¡Oh Nueva York, mi dolor descamado!  
¡Oh Nueva York, humanidad sub-yacente!  
por ti entendí que la primera  
definición de Patria es la nostalgia.

## NEW YORK 1987

To Julia de Burgos

Up leaps the smell of grapes, of fish  
Art Deco antiques parading  
aloft a balcony between the steel  
and a clump of red geraniums  
that all too early sprouting dares  
black the traffic immune to the  
crowd that waits to assail  
the traffic light contends with its con-  
versation the aggressive trucks  
erect it looms handsome and alluring the  
fifty-ninth street bridge.

This is New York of the East Side besides this New  
York knows nothing of the pork frizzles, the  
fried banana sizzles, the cracklins, the  
stuffed yucca fritters, nothing of Rubén Blades, of the  
drums that turn the terraced roofs  
on summer nights, into Areíto historytelling dances,  
Feasts on Offer, into altars, rum, cocaine  
Shango, Ogun, switchblades, revolvers  
Anaisa and orange blossom bouquets  
flowers of yellow, white, purple  
to avert rancor's festering evils.

Ticket, tunnel, trip to the  
seven infernos of Dante, not the  
Italian but that bongo-beater  
from Argentina who lived on in the  
Viet Nam of Manhattan Avenue  
Ho Chi Minh washed dishes in your bars  
Juan Isidro, Bosch, Máximo Gómez  
the full exile of ideas, poetry  
undergoing the agony of death in all the Julias.

Oh New York, my aching stripped of its scaly skin!  
Oh New York, humanity under-neath!  
through you I understood that the first  
definition of Homeland is nostalgia.

### Note on Sherezada (Chiqui) Vicioso's "NUEVA YORK 1987"

Dedicated to the Puerto Rican poet Julia de Burgos (1914-1953), this evocation of New York City conjures up a sensory experience of the bustling metropolis alongside references to its international, and especially Latino, ingredients. Vicioso depicts a city that is infused with but strangely unaware of its Hispanic heritage, which her enumeration of food, music, contraband, Afro-Caribbean spirits, and expatriates calls to the surface. The poem's minimal punctuation, idiosyncratic line- and word-divisions, wordplay, blend of archaic and current diction, and sporadically disjointed syntax underscore a crowded, onrushing, almost incantatory medley of past and present, local and transnational. In its cascade of allusions, the poem invites the reader to reflect on a New York City that bridges the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Caribbean in its amplest sense (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Panama), and Latin American more broadly. The city, Vicioso reminds us, has been a brief home for intellectual, political, and military leaders of the Hispanic Caribbean, whether in official or self-imposed exile, as it was for Julia de Burgos.

translated by Tyler Fisher, December 2018