

COLA'O

A Bilingual Trova

A Play in Verse with Music

Music by Pedro Emanuel Franco Fraticelli

Book and Lyrics by Paloma Sierra

Translation (English) by Abigail Salmon

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no, not yet, no, not yet
i will not proclaim myself,
a total child of any land,
i'm still in the commonwealth
stage of my life, wondering
what to decide, what to conclude,
what to declare myself.

Commonwealth – Tato Laviera

The boy tilted the green shell overhead
and drooled coconut milk down his chin;
suddenly, Puerto Rico was not Coca-Cola
or Brooklyn, and neither was he.

Coca-Cola and Coco Frio – Martín Espada

PERSONAJES // CHARACTERS

RENÉ, puertorriqueño/a criado en Puerto Rico; cualquier género
[Puerto Rican, born and raised in Puerto Rico; any gender]

ALEX, puertorriqueño/a criado en EE.UU.; de tez blanca; habla español con acento
estadounidense; cualquier género.
[Puerto Rican, raised in E.E.U.U., white-skinned; speaks Spanish with an American
accent; any gender]

LUGAR // SETTING

Díaspóra. [Diaspora.]

TIEMPO // TIME

Presente. [Present.]

ACLARACIÓN // NOTE

Debe haber una leve barrera idiomática entre RENÉ y ALEX.
[There should be a slight language barrier between RENÉ and ALEX.]

HISTORIA DE PRODUCCIÓN // PRODUCTION HISTORY

Reading, Theatre Now New York Sound Bites 7.0, 2020

Workshop, Nuyorican Poets Cafe, New York, NY, 2018

Reading, WRCT 88.3FM Barrio Latino, Pittsburgh, PA, 2017

Workshop, Carnegie Mellon School of Drama Playground Festival, 2016

Residency, Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship, Carnegie Mellon, 2016

PREMIOS // AWARDS

Finalist, City Theatre National Award for Short Playwriting, 2020

PUBLICACIONES // PUBLICATIONS

Print, Bridge: Bluffton University Literary Journal, 2019

ALEX serves two cups of coffee, pouring milk. RENÉ stops ALEX from pouring milk into the second cup.

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RENÉ Pero, ¿qué haces?

ALEX What?

RENÉ What do

you mean “What,” Alex? No, la leche quita el sabor. Drink coffee like all of us do. Don’t add milk. Drink it as though you are Hispanic, Latino – ¡puro negro, todo tinto!

ALEX What is it that you are saying?

This coffee makes me un-Hispanic? Where’d you get that idea? ¡Dios mío!

¿Por qué me vienes con eso? Why are you? What is the meaning of this? I am Puerto Rican.

RENÉ ¿Siempre estando de aquí lejos, a mil millones de metros de distancia? Ser patriota es sudar la gota gorda, no abandonar o la espalda darle al seno de la patria, aún sea la ocasión corta.

Fácil disfrutar sus playas, y, entre la arena y las olas, sentir que te apasiona, sentirle encanto y amarla, que por nada has de cambiarla jamás. Sin imaginarlo, vete, fácil distanciado, cuando más te requiere. No le amas suficiente, no le amas demasiado.

How can you say you’re here to try and reconnect with “la patria” when you soften your coffee, taint it with sugar.

ALEX But that’s how I drink it back home.

RENÉ Where was the fight for your heritage lost? ¿Tu hispanidad y folklor?

RENÉ What are you doing?

ALEX What?

RENÉ What do

you mean “What,” Alex? The milk takes away the flavor. Drink coffee like all of us do. Don’t add milk to your coffee; drink it as though you are Hispanic, Latino – fully black, completely tinto!

ALEX What is it that you are saying?

This coffee makes me un-Hispanic? Where’d you get that idea? My God!

Why are you telling me these things? Why are you? What is the meaning of this? I am Puerto Rican.

RENÉ A billion broad meters from there, so far away, and still you dare to make that claim? To be patriotic you must sweat blood. You can’t leave even just for a short time, or turn your back on your Motherland. Such a lack of loyalty is treasonous.

It is so easy to relish its beaches, to feel overwhelmed by passion while inside the realm of its sand and waves. The charm hits your soul. You’re sure you’d never wish for anything but that land, such beauty. But though to this you clutch, you’re pushed away by one small shove. No, you do not love her enough. See, you don’t love her too much.

How can you say you’re here to try and reconnect with “la patria” when you soften your coffee, taint it with sugar.

ALEX But that’s how I drink it back home.

RENÉ Where was the fight for your heritage lost? And when did you lose your folklore? Your sin

Y es que no sólo al café, ¡ah!
 ¡Has de americanizar
 nuestro bello español!

goes deeper than coffee! You still
 fail our lovely Spanish. You chill
 its warmth by mixing English in.

ALEX Reafirmas, mas niegas
 nuestro hablar bilingüe,
 que es lo que más nos distingue,
 un istmo entre olas y arena.

ALEX You affirm, yet deny our shared
 bilingual speech that makes us rare,
 between sands and waves
 – an isthmus.

RENÉ Ni sabes “La Borinqueña.”

RENÉ You don’t even know our anthem.

ALEX doesn’t hear RENÉ.

ALEX doesn’t hear RENÉ.

ALEX Listen, sometimes we must stray
 just so we can find our way
 through uncertainty, searching in
 the midst of everything, so we
 know ourselves leche con café.

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 just so we can find our way
 through uncertainty, searching in
 the midst of everything, so we
 know ourselves leche con café.

RENÉ ¿Café con leche? ¡Qué va!
 You either are or you are not.
 No middle ground. No sabes na’.
 Haz dejado enfriar
 tu café. Its taste is too far
 gone to ever return. Perdiste //

RENÉ Coffee with milk? No way!
 You either are or you are not.
 No middle ground. You know nothing.
 Look, you have let your coffee’s stark
 flavor fade. Its taste is too far
 gone to ever return. You have lost it all–.

ALEX ¿Qué?

ALEX What?

RENÉ Tu identidad – si una – en el
 triángulo de las Bermudas.
 La estrella cincuenta y una...
 Y con ello el nombre también.

RENÉ Your Puerto Rican identity – if there
 is one – in the Bermuda triangle.
 The fifty-one star...
 With it, your name, too.

Porque te has dado a ignorar.
 No a vivir cual asignado,
 poniendo muy en alto
 lo que al nacer te han
 nombrado, y nada más.
 Hay que vivir de acuerdo
 al nombre y origen nuestro,
 como su significado
 – para nos, el ser hispanos-.

Because you have chosen to ignore,
 to not live as destined. To place
 above all else the name that graced
 your birth, there is nothing to do
 beyond that. To live by your true
 name and roots, to flourish. To strive
 for your name, to exemplify
 its meaning. To center your heart
 in its truth. This is how we start
 being Hispanic, Puerto Rican–.

ALEX Simplemente no te entiendo.

ALEX I just don’t understand you.

RENÉ ¿No te resulta molesto
 el que otro tenga tu nombre?
 ¿Qué de él se apropie
 alguien que le es ajeno?
 ¿Quién que a quien le brindó el seno,
 sin más le dio la espalda?
 ¿Ese a quien las palabras
 le hacen falta en español,

RENÉ Isn’t it disturbing when someone
 else snatches your name?
 When someone misappropriates
 your roots? One who’s turned his back from
 his mother’s home, one with no sum
 of respect for his land? Who calls
 out to you in Spanish with false
 accent and words, who says he is

dice ser de corazón,
 más del plátano la mancha¹

 no tiene?

a ‘boricua de verdad,’ from his heart,
 but in truth is not Boricua at all.

ALEX is uneasy.

ALEX is uneasy.

ALEX No sé a qué viene...

ALEX Why are you—.

*RENÉ code-switches languages as to be
 best understood by ALEX.*

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 be best understood by ALEX.*

RENÉ No hay porque ser discretos;
 el café, sin leche – negro.
 No hay que mezclar con leche
 lo hispano que nos difiere...
 Mírate: toda una gringa –
 tú bien fácil podrías
 pasar como blanca. No puedo,
 así, tomarte en serio.
 ¿Quién, si ni contigo misma²

RENÉ You
 must never restrain yourself. Put no
 milk in your coffee, and forgo
 cream – drink it black. There’s no need to
 water down our Hispanic roots
 with milk. Look at yourself: a full
 gringa... You so easily could
 pass as White. I can’t at all take
 you seriously like this. Wake
 up, if you can’t arrive at a whole

te comprometes, me dice
 que sí lo harás conmigo?
 Si ni a tu patria has querido,
 vendiéndole, tú dime,
 ¿cómo creo en tu amar, bilingüe?

commitment with yourself, how can
 you reconcile us? If you’ve not
 loved our country, and if you’ve sought
 to trade it away, then how can
 I know your bilingual love stands?

ALEX Coffee’s coffee, however it’s
 made; the method makes no difference.
 I’m Boricua in English, too.
 You can do naught but accept this.
 ...This, our beautiful dissent,

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 made; the method makes no difference.
 I’m Boricua in English, too.
 You can do naught but accept this.
 ...This, our beautiful dissent,

all of us but a charming mix
 of this, our Hispanic culture,
 we’re the Americas’ gesture.
 We cannot do without
 these Anglophone gestures.
 We can’t leave them aside,
 these gestures that, like me,
 gradually infuse themselves
 in our Latin essence. They spell
 our heritage. There is for me

all of us but a charming mix
 of this, our Hispanic culture,
 we’re the Americas’ gesture.
 We cannot do without
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 these gestures that, like me,
 gradually infuse themselves
 in our Latin essence. They spell
 our heritage. There is for me

no need to choose, de escoger,

no need to choose. Not an urge

¹ Also known as a “café au lait” birthmark. Reference to the Puerto Rican “jíbaro.”

² If Alex is male, use: “Mírate: Todo un gringo. / Podrías pasar, facilito, / como blanco. Yo no puedo, / así tomarte en serio. / ¿Quién, si ni contigo mismo”.

ni por qué justificarme.
 Así que tómate, dame
 café, for what I can change,
 and wine, so you can accept
 lo que no. No existe una
 definición absoluta
 de amar, de lo que es amor,
 lo que es nación. ¡Por favor!
 Siendo nuestra fortuna,

el compartir en común
 tanta historia, una lengua,
 tanta cultural riqueza,
 ¿me la deniegas, aún?
 Who are you, René, that you
 rob me of these? Who are you
 to label me as impure?
 When our heritage has always
 been a mix. Who are you to say
 I do not belong to my culture?

Who are you, René? Who are you?

When one feels entitled – like you –
 to question my name, is that not
 disturbing? Our whiteness was brought
 from Spain, was it not? It's infused
 with African, and it is brewed
 with Taíno? No; you think that,
 because of my ways, I'm from the States.
 That I'm no longer Boricua.
 Still, I do seek to know
 this place to which I've never been.

They say whoever leaves
 does so as the deserter
 they've always been.
 Yet, I beg to differ,
 having sailed the ocean, this storm,
 this Diaspora and more.
 La distancia solo aumenta
 mi amor por mi patria,
 y su ausencia o falta
 de mis raíces no me aleja

ni me hace menos patriota,
 o de menos corazón.
 Por esto es que insisto yo
 en regresar a esa costa,
 a aquella isla hermosa

to justify myself. So come,
 pour us coffee for all the sum
 of things that we can change, then serve
 wine, so you can accept with nerve
 those we can't change. Explanations
 of what love is, what a nation
 is, of what it is to love our
 nation – these have no concrete power.
 It endures as our great fortune

to share a common tongue. We do
 hold our history in common,
 so much cultural wealth. How, then
 can you deny this from me, too?
 Who are you, René, that you
 rob me of these? Who are you
 to label me as impure?
 When our heritage has always
 been a mix. Who are you to say
 I do not belong to my culture?

Who are you, René? Who are you?

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 because of my ways, I'm from the States.
 That I'm no longer Boricua.
 Still, I do seek to know
 this place to which I've never been.

They say whoever leaves
 does so as the deserter
 they've always been.
 Yet, I beg to differ,
 having sailed the ocean, this storm,
 this Diaspora and more.
 The distance only increments
 my love, and, likewise, the lack of
 and absence from my native Home
 does not remove me from my roots

nor makes me less patriotic,
 or of lesser heart.
 This is why I still insist
 in coming back
 to that coast, to that beautiful

donde a la vida le vi,
pues desde el día que partí
sigue la duda conmigo
sobre el qué hubiese sido
si me hubiese criado allí.

RENÉ A la patria no le eres fiel.
No le amas suficiente,
no le amas demasiado,
siendo leche con café–.

ALEX Not again. I won't feel displaced.
Mi herencia, mi cultura
es mía, tanto como tuya,

AMBOS de un pájaro, las dos alas.³

ALEX You see, nothing divides us
and there's no distance in the world

that could tear us apart, since no
one can change nor deprive me of
all the things that I feel, the love
I have for you and for my Home,
and that is not strange or unknown.

RENÉ Okay, basta ya de engaños;
el café, hecho y colado
como se crea y quiera –
no importa cómo le beba,

AMBOS Siempre seré borincano.

They both drink from the same cup.

RENÉ Entonces, deja eso ya.

ALEX ...Mas... yo te quiero colar
más que solo el café.

RENÉ ¿Ah? ¿Dijiste algo? ¿Qué fue?

ALEX Nada. ¿Le sigo o ya?

RENÉ Más. Sólo un poco más.

ALEX Así o... ¿cómo te gusta?

RENÉ Contigo.

ALEX ¿Con mucha azúcar?
¿Qué? ¿El café?

RENÉ ...Sí. Eso, también.

ALEX Aquí tienes tu café.

RENÉ Y aún nos tenemos, dulzura.

End of Play.

island when I first knew life.
See, since the day I took my leave,
the doubt remains with me –
of what could and would have been
if I was raised and born over there.

RENÉ You swerve from our culture and ways.
No, you do not love it enough.
See, you do not love it too much,
being just leche con café.

ALEX Not again. I won't feel displaced.
My heritage, my culture
is mine as well as yours–.

BOTH Birds of a feather.

ALEX You see, nothing divides us
and there's no distance in the world

that could tear us apart, since no
one can change nor deprive me of
all the things that I feel, the love
I have for you and for my Home,
and that is not strange or unknown.

RENÉ Enough, then, no more self-deception.
Coffee can be served as wanted
and no matter how I drink it

BOTH I will always be Puerto Rican.

They both drink from the same cup.

RENÉ Well then, leave it.

ALEX Yet, I want to make you
more than just coffee.

RENÉ Ah? Did you say something?

ALEX Nothing. Do I keep going?

RENÉ More. Just a bit more.

ALEX Like this... or how you like it?

RENÉ With you.

ALEX With a lot of sugar?
What? Coffee?

RENÉ ... Yes. That, too.

ALEX Here you have it.

RENÉ And we still have each other, sugar.

End of Play.

³ From *A Cuba* by Lola Rodríguez de Tió.