

PRAISE FOR *NO ROOM*

“Spare, fierce and powerful. . . . *No Room* is a revelation. Open to any page and have your breath taken away by this extraordinary writer.”

—JUNOT DÍAZ, author of Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award-winning *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

“It is a safe hunch that our best critical theology is done in poetic idiom that crosses boundaries, offends niceties, and dares beyond evidence. This collection of poems by Harold Recinos makes that bet a sure thing. Recinos is alert to the lived reality with all of its wounds, hates, and deathliness. He is, moreover, alive to holy force that surges among us. Best of all he is alive to the capacity of rhetoric to probe the depths of systemic violence to hope in honesty that denies nothing.”

—WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, author of *The Prophetic Imagination*

“As the counterpoint to longstanding American silences, the images in Harold Recinos’ *No Room* unlock an honest history. Border walls, desert crossings, plagues, and lynching trees—signs of a waning democracy—inundate this collection. Above all, the poems in *No Room* seek justice. Now and again, they also signal renewal, community, and joy.”

—TERESA LONGO, author of *Visible Dissent: Latin American Writers, Small U. S. Presses and Progressive Social Change*

“In this new collection of poems, Harold Recinos reminds us what it means to remember as a means of strengthening our gratitude for the precious gift of life. These poems come as prophetic words always do—to unsettle our complacencies and embolden us to face the indignities of this world with the stronger resolve of compassionate justice. They are the witness of one who dares to dream in the midst of this world’s evils, refusing to be silenced by the guardians of the old order of racism and disordered patriotism. They will offend those who insist that faith is simply another form of blind loyalty to the state, but will fortify all who desire to share the poet’s dream of a just and merciful world where dignity is a divine birthright given to all, and equality the measure of what democracy is meant to be.”

—MARK S. BURROWS, translator, scholar of historical theology,
and author of *The Chance of Home: Poems*

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HAROLD J. RECINOS

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NO ROOM

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SUNDAY

today we will sit in the
in the little park to talk
about childhood memories
stored in a vast room filled
with detailed books stacked
on strange shelves in us. we
will remember the torn-out
pages, the afternoon stories
of the disappeared, the bitter
knowledge passed around on
the corners of this world, and
the visits to the Cathedral which
was once the church of a martyred
priest where the poor went to find
rest for aching lives for a few
hours on Sunday. we will talk
about impossible things: the
innocent wish, the world that
needs a miracle to help it notice
the voices that haunt us. today,
we will enjoy the park, talking of
Saints visiting us in nightly dreams,
and feeling the breeze softly touch
our Brown faces perfectly made by
a divine hand.

TONIGHT

the evening came quietly
under the streetlights that
played with the voices on
the stoops while skinny kids
ran the sidewalks like birds
scattering in the sky and flying
into light. on the crumbling
windowsills, where flowers
blossomed, old women nursed
fragile beauty as if they were
taken from an ancient Spanish
forest and some divine being
kept watch over them. the
moon in a darkening sky cast
light on Joel's long black hair,
then floating in a gentle breeze,
and in the direction of the small
village she left hundreds of miles
away that has no English name. a
couple of old men sat in front of
Shorty's building watching busses
drive while they talked of love
poems written by Pablo Neruda
in middle age.

MARTIN

still you dream,
a world without
walls, convenient
lies, battering fists,
and pale masks with
hateful grins. still you
dream, freedom for every
race, a dark beloved
Christ offering equality,
peace, justice, and life.
still you dream, *un sueño*,
with the tortured Brown
spics you always welcomed
into a land where their mothers
and fathers, like you, departed too
soon.

WHITE JESUS

you asked me “what does color
have to do with faith?” without
saying a single word about your
White Jesus. the Savior from the
Middle East, the Palestinian Jew,
the unemployed dark man at the
margins, hanging with the wrong
crowd, pursued by cops, rejected
by the powerful, illegally arrested,
tortured, jailed, and lynched on a
tree, who never was a blond-haired,
blue-eyed, love-them-only-in-white
kind of being. you see, this dark-skinned
brother was born to a poor unwed girl
in the stench of a stable, before he said
a first word fled into North Africa
to avoid being killed, grew up wiping
away outcast tears, and hanging finally
from a tree, bleeding to death like a Black
slave who never said Whiteness is pure
and simple divinity. let Jesus be the
color of his skin again, darker than all
your pale dreams and greater than the
white supremacy the West for centuries
attached to him. Jesus was dark like
the night, a foreigner in Europe, a traveler
to America who did not speak English
and the one who still hears the ten

thousand cries of those beaten by
White sin.

THE CHOSEN

you call him president of
a free nation in need of a
Wall. we call him a dictator
with unclean hands who fills
his pockets with the milk and
honey of the land. you call
him the chosen from God up
above. we call him in history,
literature, and art a rosary thief,
fuming dung, a lover of tyrants,
the whore of Babylon, the White
Supremacist Christian poster boy,
and the devil's own kin. you call
him a follower of Christ in a world
of strife. we call him an impertinent
son of a bitch, Jesus' pimp hustling
White Christians for pieces of silver,
smashing the poor, strangers, women,
children, and the global meek with a
barbarous hammer into pieces. you
call him a leader of the free world. we
call him a vain liar, a brazen fraud,
and the most deplorable star-spangled
citizen the world has unfortunately ever
seen.

SUGARCANE BOYS

we talked in the quiet corner
of the block in elegant Spanglish
about the early morning candles
burning in the church, the many
tongues that over the years dragged
themselves with history from other
shores, the extraordinary love two
young men holding hands at the bus
stop shared and God shedding tears
for hypocrites spreading darkness
like it was light. we took a voyage
with words to experience the ocean
winds, reach for the clouds and hear
complete strangers obliterate storms
with happy thoughts. we talked about
the fragile hands of mothers and how
they quietly leave love signs at schools,
in churches, by the grave-plots and
the streets. we talked into the night
like travelers plotting a fresh course
in an uncharted forest, taking the time
to unmask the dreams that slept with
us in the desert.

RADIATOR

the radiator in my childhood
apartment hissed all winter, no
matter the audience. we hung
socks on it to dry to make them,
ready for a new day in school,
and in the kitchen the radio that
only spoke Spanish announced
news about the war in Vietnam,
and the night club featuring the
music of Willie Colon. that old
radiator witnessed the diapers of
three kids, mother's undergarments
laid out to dry, and two decades of
salsa danced in the living room in
dim red light. when the upstairs
neighbors were making too much
noise we banged a hammer on its
upright pipes like it was a marimba
sending a message begging blessed
peace. the radiator in the apartment
was never caged and it still loudly
rings in my ears on cold nights when
curled in bed, thinking about how it
cast Spanglish spells and chanted the
crowded *sofrito* apartment into deep
sleep.