

# PRAYER TO THE SMALL GOD OF MISNOMERS

KEITH S. WILSON

Muhammad as in "most praised one," as in you ought to shave  
before entering American temples, airports,  
out of reverence for the dead. Muhammad who ascended

before there were planes and deigned to return to where the white  
light unbrightens the skin. You have called me Pedro.  
José. Pablo. Muhammad: who smuggled God

back in through security. Who never heard *We're going to catch  
you in a lie, or why are you really here?* As in this is my particular  
skin, not Muhammad's, who had 99 names and if you need, anyone

will assure you none of them is mine. Or, instead, Pedro. As in "Rock,"  
or brick, or *upon this I will build my church; as in and the gates  
of hell shall not prevail.* As in *Hell—the place of judgment.*

As in isn't Hell suspiciously like the Royal Palm  
Yacht and Country Club? As in who do you think they  
pay to shovel the driveways? And, as in all cases, you know exactly

who *they* are. You wouldn't think snow would be a problem  
in hell, but that's history as performed by the snow. Pedro,  
Pêro, Peter, stone. As in *let he without sin*, as in divine

foresight, as in again, let he without skin lighted by twilight  
cast the first vote. As in freedom, son—what does English  
have to do with it? As in the Venn diagram of the Middle East

and Mexico might seem to form this bow, these lips,  
but does it? But so what? But even if it didn't.  
As in let me tell you of my people. As in the children on my street, American,

who touched the broken-winged pigeon with sticks and chunks of black-  
top, and I will save you the trouble of caring for it  
because my father did (everything my father did was black)

and we named the seraphim Router, whose wings were grey  
like me, instead of Dove white, instead of the color of those children—  
the cherubs that fill European Renaissance paintings of the Middle East.

As in Pedro is not my name, and neither Muhammad, though they are splendid  
names to have, polished as they are—finer than the shared prayers of a people—  
but they are not mine. As in my skin is not brown but *this* brown.

If I find a bad-colored feather I am sure to hold it  
to my skin. Praise Muhammad. Praise Pedro.  
Hollow is my name, its bird bones. My father, who art

cannot properly describe, but my body tries, in whose name  
i learned this skin, to nurse it back; to make it fly. Amen.