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# P.I.: POETRY AND THE IMAGINATION

## A Thesis

# Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English and Comparative Literature

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

by

Higino Francisco V. Penones Jr.

May 2009

UMI Number: 1470959

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## SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Thesis Committee Approves the Creative Project Titled

## P.I.: POETRY AND THE IMAGINATION

by Higino Francisco V. Penones Jr.

#### APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

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#### **ABSTRACT**

#### P.I.: POETRY AND THE IMAGINATION

by Higino Francisco V. Penones Jr.

The idea of a nation, a political concept spread during the Enlightenment with the invention of printing technology, has long been expressed through various representations. As a concept showing racial commonality and filiation, the notion of nation has been represented in various media, like printing and painting. Long before my country, the Philippines, became a sovereign state, it had been imagined and represented in various ways by early sea explorers, adventurers, writers, artists, cartographers, anthropologists, and its subsequent colonizers.

These representations, consistent with Benedict Anderson's definition of nation as an "imagined community," underlies this creative thesis project. My poems attempt to reimagine, recall, and reconstitute my native country as represented by its colonial abbreviation, P.I. This project proceeds from, and responds to a mixture of visual and textual representations of my country, as well as from the generous wellspring of poetry. My poems negotiate the interstices of the words, *imagination* and *nation*. Such negotiation is expressed through poems that remember and reinscribe my own and my country's historical experiences, which are transformed as a verbal imagination of a body polity or community called nation.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

In our native way of the *tigsik*, a terse oral drinking poem, I offer a toast to:

- \* the International Ford Fellowship Foundation, its staff in the Philippines, Ate Luisa Fernan and Dada Doble, and Tammy Langan of the New York main office, for bringing me in the U.S. for my MFA;
- \* my adviser Alan Soldofsky, for mentoring me, for showing me the thread of influences that runs through contemporary American poetry, and for collaborating with me in a project which gave me my first experience in academic paper presentation;
- \* Sam Maio, for offering his friendship and humor, and for making me better appreciate the beauty and importance of form in poetry;
- \* Persis Karim, for bringing humanity and heart to the cold texts we read in her class;
- \* the Iriga Bicol America Association, for giving me a home while I was away from home;
- \* my friends and members of our KABULIG writers group in the Philippines, especially Dr. Judith B. Salamat, for her continued concern and the virtual exchange of ideas;
- \* my beloved family, my wife, Comla, and my children, Uriel, Ursula, Francis Xavier, and Gino, who stood by me through the distance and the years of my separation from them; and
- \* God, for the gift of life, imagination, and poetry.

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#### Preface

Writing as an act of imagination is, for me, also an act of remembering and searching for a home – a home that has been displaced and altered by my particular colonial experience. In this project, the notion of nation provides me with the trope for such remembrance, self-definition, and imagining. To borrow the words of Homi Bhabha in <u>The Location of Culture</u>, "The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor" (200). The nation, as metaphor, becomes a mnemonic for a lost home.

In this search, I find affinity with Eavan Boland, whose poems are haunted by memories of her Irish homeland. "Atlantis," a sonnet about the legendary lost continent, is appended with a descriptive title, "A Lost Sonnet," to emphasize the complete absence and loss that is a recurrent theme in her poems. Here, the form of the sonnet adds to its meaning through the alteration and irregularity of the lines, while the displaced volta further underscores its sardonic humor and hyperbolic turn:

......Maybe
what really happened is this:
the old fable-makers searched hard for a word
to convey that what is gone is gone forever and
never found it. And so, in the best traditions of
where we come from, they gave their sorrow a name
and drowned it.

(63)

The theme of loss of home and poetic roots in "Atlantis," contained in "gone forever," is repeated in another poem, "Amber," where the vanished countryside landscape of the past is memorialized by and remembered through a piece of the hardened resin, a natural memento given to the poem's speaker by an absent lover:

The clean air we need to find each other in is gone forever, yet this resin once

collected seeds, leaves and even small feathers as it fell and fell

which now is a sunny atmosphere seem as alive as they ever were

as though the past could be present and memory itself a Baltic honey -

a chafing at the edges of the seen, a showing off of just how much can be kept safe

inside a flawed translucence.

(31-2)

The lachrymal beginning of amber, its past, and its transformation in the present that is given resonance in the repetition of the "e" sounds and in the image of the honey, is an appropriate yet ironic parallel. The image, along with the fricatives in "itself," "chafing," "off," "safe," and "flawed," also provides the last line of the poem with "inevitability," a character in good poems which Harold Bloom defines as a "phrasing that cannot be avoided, that must be" (36-7). It is an image necessary in the poem's own integrity.

Boland, who lives in the United States, tells Pilar Argaiz Villar in <u>The Poetry of Eavan Boland: A Postcolonial and Subaltern Reading</u> that writing about Ireland is inevitable on her part. "I knew that as a poet I could not easily do without the idea of the nation" (120).

This inevitability of return to a homeland through writing is also present in this poetry project, where I embarked on an exploration of the interplay of the words "imagination" and "nation," in accord with Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation as an "imagined community" (6). This "coming home to one's roots -- to an imagined homeland, to a cultural and ethnic heritage, to a native tongue, to an indigenous imagination," according to Leny Mendoza Strobel in her 2004 study of the poetry of Fil-American Eileen Tabios, "is made necessary when we find ourselves feeling displaced, alienated, not properly belonging to a place" (277).

My physical separation from home in the course of my stay in the United States has given me the time and space for this imagination and hope for return, a common migrant's desire that, I argue, is represented by the ubiquitous care package called *balikbayan* box, which migrant Filipinos regularly send back to their relatives in the Philippines. In my paper, <u>Balikbayan Box: Homing While Away From Home</u>, which I presented in 2008 in Singapore at a conference on return and migration, I explained the *balikbayan* box as an appropriate metaphor for the expatriate's desire and imagination of home: "As a poet and visual artist from the Philippines, my current scholarly concern and creative focus (as an MFA graduate student) is the writing of a collection of ekphrastic poems which are the verbal explication and translation of the contemporary as well as colonial visual imagination and representation of my country during the Spanish and American times, and thus, of home. The *balikbayan* box readily provides me with the image, imagination and representation of home, homing, and return."

Like the balikbayan box for migrant Filipinos, writing provides me with the medium for return and for locating my displaced self and subjectivity, and my imagined nation becomes the metaphor for such return. As explained by Vicente Rafael, "The distance between the patriot and the patria enables the former to establish the latter as an image of loss as well as the space for locating loss as such" (n.p.). In locating the lost image of my nation I harken back to the ritualistic act of the Philippine pre-colonial tribal priest called asog, or his female counterpart, the babaylan, in their ancient animist act of healing a sick native whose soul was believed to have drifted away. Filipino scholar Resil Mojares says this act "involves the act of finding (Bisayan bulong: to heal, to find), restoring (Manobo *uli*: to heal, to return), locating a soul distracted or lost. Locating the soul typically involves the act of reading signs and communicating" (230). I show this in "The Painted Prince," a poem in this collection based on a lithographic print of a southern Philippine native who was sold to the English pirate William Dampier in the seventeenth century. Dampier brought him to England for exhibition because of the tattoos all over his body. In the poem, the speaker is a fictitious priest addressing the soul of the abducted native.

The particular dislocation and loss that I write about in this collection, however, is not the result of simple geographic distance or caused by economic necessity, as in the case of millions of Filipino migrants. My personal feelings of dislocation and loss stem more from my country's colonial history. Colonialism, explains Mojares "created such a divide in our collective consciousness that Rizal and the nineteenth-century nationalists lamented the loss of memory of our ancient nationality, dreamed of lost archives, and

imagined the long colonial period as a dark age that separated a people from their roots in the past" (301). To this cause, Rizal, our country's national hero, devoted his research while studying in Spain in research to prove the existence of a nascent Filipino nation before the Spanish colonization.

Because of this past, most of the poems in this collection have been drawn from the materials of history, its cultural products through the years of our country's formation, and its repositories like archives, museums, and libraries. These include visual representations like maps, lithographic prints, and paintings. Poems based on visual representations are called ekphrastic - from the prefix ex and phrasein, which means "to tell in full." Ekphrastic poetry, according to James Heffernan in The Museum of Words, is "the rhetorical description of a work of art" (191). The ekphrastic poem is the verbal expression of a visual representation.

My first exposure to ekphrastic poetry was through Edwin Markham's "The Man With The Hoe" which we know was based on a Millet painting. At the Jesuit university that I attended in the Philippines, Markham's ouvre was a favorite piece used for the weekly elocution contest in our high school English class. It was also seminal in raising my social consciousness at a time of widespread political repression in my country during the Marcos martial law regime.

During the course of my MFA studies, I became further acquainted with ekphrastic poetry in a workshop with Alan Soldofsky where we wrote poems based on works of visual arts or paintings, or in the style of poets who write ekphrastic poems like John Ashbery, Eavan Boland, Jorie Graham, Edward Hirsch, Wallace Stevens, William

Carlos Williams, Frank O'Hara and Charles Wright. Frank O'Hara's poems appeal to me in particular because of the conversational tone, spontaneity, and cerebral complexity. In "Memorial Day: 1950," he conflates the personal with images of war and art which are characteristics of Dada or Surrealist painting:

How many trees and frying pans
I loved and lost! Guernica hollered look out!

but we were all busy hoping our eyes were talking to Paul Klee. My mother and father asked me and I told them from my tight blue pants we should love only the stones, the sea, and heroic figures. (SP, 7)

Marjorie Perloff (1998) describes this as a "poem that shrewdly and humorously assesses what it means to make oneself an artist in a world that distrusts art" (51). Ashbery also recalls a visit to Frank O'Hara's Boston room in the same year this poem was written: "The room looked out on a courtyard of trees and was practically bare except for an army cot and blanket and a frying pan on the floor, used as an ashtray, an idea he got from George Montgomery, a sort of arbiter of Spartan chic who had been at Harvard with us. Hence, no doubt, the line, "How many trees and frying pans I've loved" (n.p.). Ashbery's observation shows how O'Hara makes the events of his personal life the subject of his poem and of poetry itself.

In 2008, I presented a paper in Indonesia, which I co-wrote with my adviser, Alan Soldofsky, on teaching ekphrastic poetry aided by the use of SMART Board Technology. In this paper, I talked about the evolution of a poem that I wrote in the workshop. Titled "The Hanged Man," the poem was inspired by a painting with the same title by the Colombian artist, Fernando Botero. In the conference I argued that the figure of "The

Hanged Man" "is associated with the act of letting go, of emotional release, of accepting things as they are, of enduring the struggle and accepting God's will. While seemingly helpless, 'The Hanged Man' draws his power from his position where he can see and upturn the world and therefore see things from a different perspective. Thus, he has the power to reverse and subvert the old order" (357).

During the workshop and because of the immediacy of change provided by the use of the SMART Board, my poem underwent a formal alteration which added to its thematic trajectory and effect. I reversed the order of the lines, and thus the text of the poem imitates the figurative position of Botero's subject. The reversal made the poem itself the metaphor for poetry, which is really about discovering an alternative means of seeing and saying things, that by doing so reveals an inherent truth otherwise hidden.

This creative project, by relying on the aesthetic strategy of ekphrasis, is in itself another way of writing poetry about one's own imagined nation.

I P.I.

1

# The Rising of the Land

Seething as in the meeting of fire and water in the sea and the smoldering mud, crawling in a curl of steam and stream of molten rocks, the red blob plunges downward into the abyss far deeper than what light can reach in the haze before its rise as primeval a simmering land. Beneath, igneous crusts crash and crack in the crushing of mantles that now creak, crumble and tumble, sending bubbles and eddies up the surface, stirring tidal waves smashing on the mass that continues to shake, shape and re-shape, pushing mounds to become mountains, diverting routes of rushing rivers, sinking spots where hills had been and there a lake now boils, as continents tear apart and continue in their restless drift and drive.

# Cartography

From their sextant, our land was all spaces of black, open for them to explore and mark. The rivers were arteries that bled seaward or roots of tortured trees that gripped the valleys. Our mountains were drawn ulcerous and the plains scarred like porous rocks. So they embarked on their galleons and crossed the oceans where lurked serpents so large they could devour even the largest craft. There was too, the wind sprite that could lead them over the edge where as if on a cliff their ships will tilt and fall to nothingness. In all, that's what they plotted on their maps that is, our geography of darkness and disease where we were made the tawong lipod, the invisible beings of our mythical race, to them our people were untamed, tailless monkeys that need to ape, them, their exalted ways, our towns were uncharted, the streets untrodden. an open country for clearing or their taking in honor of their king whose blazon on the cartouche meant more than staking a claim but the interment and obliteration of our own Oriental names.

# Petroglyphs

Survival, swift as hoofs or paws among the thickets or as arrows whizzing by, darted and left disheveled paths in the forest. In the evening before the fire, a sun, they gather around like planets in the stony cave, one of them picked his spear and etched lines that reminded them of a comet's tail as it streaked past the sky, or in that morning's chase, the routes their prey took, its scared dash towards refuge betrayed by a trail of broken twigs and parted tufts of grasses. For a while, the limestone galaxy fell silent stunned by the mind now visible with the clarity of ensuing dawn. From then on, the lines would mark the march of the human race into the open road of the present, the past recorded in the lines and assemblage of typefaces and letters recalling Nazca and Nasdaq, the taut lines of twin skyscrapers crumbling from the straight line arrow path of an exploding jet, colors in frenzy and boogie-woogie grids, the rigid line of rhetoric of a preacher or a president justifying a line of attack on the ground in D.C. or Kirkuk, or the bowed heads of factory workers going home from the night shift standing in line like a line of trees on the street shorn of leaves. And so, I, Frank Penones Jr., inheritor

And so, I, Frank Penones Jr., inheritor of those rugged scrawls on the stonewalls hereby make them dance and jump in these last lines, joyous or perhaps terrified of the slow drag of that long, long, night after the hunt.

# Magellan the Night Before

In the Chile and Kuwait of the night

I shall Rome your Teheran.

There'll be no Russia in my Hungary for you

as you lay there on the Sofia,

Perth and merest of Beijing.

O keep still, Kenya?

Zaire all mine,

I'll Venice and go Oslo.

Norway that I will Delhi

for I am Amman too.

So let my Iceland and Greece on your Holland,

my hands cup your Brussels and the Bucharest underneath,

my lips kiss your Naples Tangiers and Zurich

with Hanoi.

Niger the gods can stop me.

They Congo and be the first to Haiti me with Iraq.

They can Bern and leave me a Belize.

Let them rage,

and go Madrid,

But I will Kiev this Wales

Denmark this moment

that it may not Paris.

Oh, sweetest Seoul,

I Libya!

# The Burning of the Idols (After a 1958 painting by Philippine National Artist Fernando Amorsolo)

"A hecho mucho dano entre los Pintados porqe el demonio hace de las suyas, los religiosos an procurado el remedio desto con quitar les los aceytes y castigarlos."

- Miguel de Loarca in Relacion de las Yslas Filipinas

Serpent-tongued flames lapping at skin and screams flapping high above the stake pulled the rope in your brain and tolled the obliteration of our own imaginings, like sea waves the sand's hieroglyphs. Numinous yet you deemed them the devil's writings and handiwork for their shouts still ring in your head among spires and cobbled stones. So here fire becomes both the sentence and synonym for your scary certainty: whoever is out of the line you had drawn must be by the furnace consumed. Still this line, stiff as burning poles, brace the twisted posture of new conquistadors and, fire, the easy syllable in their speech and writ that betrays their short reach and grasp of our own tropical trope and graven image.

## Yrago

"The country Ma-yi is located north of Poni. About one thousand families inhabit the shores of a river which has many windings."

- Chao Ju-Kua, a Chinese geographer, writing about the Philippines he visited sometime in 1280.

These windings, the water's own serpentine mark on the landscape, lent my navel its ancient name that recalls the act of travel, of crossing swirling seas seeking other places and countries. From Sundaland, before it sunk from melting ice which made the water rise, she freed herself from an invisible net, the old barrier that restricts the thirst or spirit for a niche in the hierarchy of crawling species. Our fathers, who obeyed the wind long before the flood came, saw her familiar scales, gleaming like the sun's rays on leaves or the rippling water in this new land promised them by their daring. Her journey, like theirs, flowing with and like the ebb and rise of the river, was the beginning of a legend, the crossing over of a matter of winding motion of matter winding to the imagination, winding up to a myth, to a poem, like this.

# Spice Birds

"The island of Manila also produces nutmeg and cloves. The wild birds spend their time in those spice trees, particularly when the trees are in bloom and the blossoms are wide open. At that time the birds over-indulge and eat so much that they faint. Then the hunters easily catch them and sell them. But these birds are very delicate and have such little strength, few of them remain alive in captivity. In all the surrounding islands as well there are birds that are very strange looking and have beautiful colors."

- Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim,1680, Secretary to the Envoy of Persia to Siam, in writing about 17th-century Philippines based on stories from friends.

i

perdrix in a pear tree sauteed basquaise

ii

hyacinth macaw cloven with serpolet a' l'etouffe'e, oui!

iii

ortolan served with pain and tarragon

iv

aile a l'ancienne stir fried with aubergine in autumn moon

## Qasida to an Amazona

"I was told that in the army of this Queen there is a regiment of women, who fight with her like men: that she made war upon a certain king, who was her enemy; and that, when her army was near being put to the rout, she made so furious an onset upon the king with her regiment, that she overcame him, put him to death, and routed his whole force."

- from The Travels of Ibn Batuta, an Arab from Tangiers, who in 1347 reached the legendary land of Tawalisi, believed to be the present province of Pangasinan in the Philippines, where he met the amazon daughter of King Wahi Arduja, named Princess Urduja.

They still talk about you, your feet sore from the long march among mountains, and from crossing rampaging cataracts.

They pluck your legend like wild fruits found along the way their tone and tang you dream will encircle the city one day.

How you embrace your rifle or how you press your finger tighter on the trigger, oh, how your enemies tremble in fear.

And how you sang: "we are timeless and all times are ours," of your just war, but alas in the end, you were just the war's.

# Tipos Filipinos

With an average cephalic index of 72mm, Mr. Clemens, they are clearly dolicocephalic, meaning, in simplest terms they are just a little better than their simian cousins. Just look at those - breasts, so...

In short, they are unfit for governance and thus require our Great Nation's benevolence, the downy cloak we must bring to their state of undress.

## Agua de Pataranta\*

"What was known as the 'water cure' was often used by our army in efforts to compel Filipino prisoners to reveal hiding places of arms and other information."

- George Curry, former governor of Ambos Camarines in the Philippines, and New Mexico during the Taft administration.

First, it came like the intermittent drip from a faucet in summer on my face, covered in linen. Next, as the rushing feet of children playing under the cold rain, then the torrent, a cataract that headlong splashed on my nostrils making me gasp for air, grasp for anything near. I sunk and sunk deeper as thousand hands grappled to take hold of me, push me down among floating bodies in agony. And everywhere, the faces of comrades whose names tottered on the thin line between salvaging a life or my betrayal, from so fluid an ocean formed in my brain.

<sup>\*</sup> a slang for any alcoholic drink, the Bikol word *pataranta*, being something that confuses.

# Amigo Poem

"For the genuine amigo is the protecting and uplifting hand; for the irreconcilable and treacherous is the blow of the mailed fist."

- Theodore Williams Noyes in Oriental America and its Problems (1903)

my poetry
is a brown twig
hanging on your tree
of a different language.
or rather seemingly
just a dried stick,
without leaves.
if you poke it though
or when the wind blows
it moves, unnoticed
and turns incognito,
amigo.

Bud Dajo (Homage to Billie Holiday)

This was in 1906 at Bud Dajo, the brave fruits had been dumped in a ditch. Much like in Masada, they clung to their twigs against the onslaught of the wind. A strong wind that blew their Southern way until they all had been blown away. A thousand in all, all fallen for the tree they call liberty. Strange fruits against a far stranger wind that now blows and splatters on the ground ripe dates and shattered palms.

#### Fire Islands

"...further sailing eastward through the Chang Sea for more than thousand li, one arrives at Tchih-Jan-Ta-Chow or Great Self-Burning Island. On this island, there is a kind of tree growing in the neighborhood of Huou-Chang-Chow or Fire Center Islands. People strip off its bark and spin and weave it into cloth; the longest possible to get is of several feet only. It is not different from Chiau-ma, only the color is slightly greenish black. If it is a little dirty then put it in fire and it will become fine and clean again. Sometimes it is used as a wick of a lamp and people know not when it can be used up."

- Yao-Si-Nian, in the Annals of the Liang Dynasty (502-577 A.D.), writing possibly, about the island of Luzon in Northern Philippines which is dotted with active volcanoes.

How great indeed are your works, O Lord like fire that flows in the bowels of the earth. We have seen your glory and we are in shock and awe at the flash on the screen and the burning of the bush. Who dares pluck your light shall by the sun be burned and chained on a cliff as food for the birds. The Black Widow in her web, flaunts her flaming thread but she too in the end shall be justly unravelled. Your feet shall stamp on the works of the wicked but your deeds shall flourish like palms in the desert. As for me, I shall die in your nest my Lord and like the sand, multiply my days in these words.

## P.I.

"When I next realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps I confessed I did not know what to do with them. I sought counsel from all sides - Democrats as well as Republicans- but got little help. I thought first we would take only Manila: then Luzon; then other islands perhaps also. I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way - I didn't know how it was but it came:"

- Pres. William McKinley

This business of colonization is all a matter of abbreviation.

For as in poetry, imagination engraves the legend of a nation.

Brand as brigands, insurrectos those who dare go against you.

Write P.I. for their thousands of scattered islands.

In their heads, plunge a wedge: our white language.

#### Palindrome

Track where the bolos of Balintawak began or first unsheathed and here in this cramped studio at 175 Boulevard Pereire you'll find a gilded mirror frame, the looking glass already dissolved and merged with their bodies brown and familiar with the tropical sun.

Eye the images that float on the surface and in their mind, the friar's soutane or their whips reflected on their faces, shadowy figures they wanted illuminated, bared in print and salons in Paris or Madrid, they, our Indios Bravos.

Named after Bufallo Bill's Wild West Show, by Rizal, they are the illustrados who like the god Kabunian lurking behind sees and hears the cries in the islands: Sator Aredo Tenet Odera Rotas, inversions of the padre's sermons?

Eye too, one last detail: the framed smaller painting on Luna's right side. Is this another version of the Spoliarium where the vanquished, their shield now displayed on the wall like a relic, were dragged after a combat on the arena?

Trace then the path to Bagumbayan, the new nation our brave sons envisioned, and here we'll find it is what we conceived or dreamed of, a belief like a leaf, veined yet, golden and forever suspended in mid-air level. Dog (after Santi Bose's painting, *Warning*)

The Senor's gaze is much more fierce than the canine at his feet. His eveballs are agates that obtrude from their sockets. On the side, the unshod stand and watch us, who gaze back, as if someone had just been shot and died at our front or perhaps they remember a boy being chased by a gray local dog on the street. But this Senor's pet is tall, black and big its lunge can make a boy fall flat on his feet which is why they are here or rather, stand a little distance behind the Senor in white overalls in a posture that says he's the new god of enlightenment shown by the halo round his head, his gaze alone can make you transfixed and follow his bid, "stand" or "sit". The dog's stance, too, stunned the natives as if they were set in place by words scattered and etched on their chemise and skirts: atol amatom adaraceam atalum babalac abinariam acuta mactam anima sola Oh, come on, you can't be serious the artist says in a bullet pointed at the new godhead with these letters: E.L.O. C.O.O. Hey, dude, look, oh, he's mad, GORINA deus, du-ug, deus yes, dawg, dog posing as god.

#### The Painted Prince\*

"Natural freedom is the only object of the polity of the savages; with this freedom do nature and climate rule alone amongst them."

- Jean Jacques Rousseau

Pardon my moving your dislocated bones marked by a mossy stone hidden in some foggy white sepulchre. This is blasphemy, disturbing your repose would arouse the anger of our ancestors, our god Bathala would send me seven plagues for seven generations, including seven evenings of pirated poetry. But I heard your scream echoed in swirling clouds of purple, blue and incarnadine among the whores on 7th Avenue, asking for this summoning of your soul, lost in the edgeless hole, for this singing to recall your history tucked in shelves among accounts and tomes on the Wonderful Sights in the Orange Days. Here, of the Bold Grimace Spaniard, who as a child was said to have been snatched and nursed by a beast and could shape his mouth as a bird's beak, or his eyes, like an owl's, and lick his nose with his tongue, like a cow. There, of the boy from Brazil with a face so long like a serpent and with which he feeds himself as an elephant does with its trunk. Of the Suffolk lad, whose body is covered all over with bristles like a hedgehog. Of the Fairy Child, toothless, but was the most voracious and hungry creature in all of England. And of your journey, told in a handbill, today's junk mail, where off the coast of Mindanao, your boat sank near the Spice Islands, and the chief of a rival kingdom, forced your sister to be his concubine and how you and your mother were sold as slaves to the buccaneer, William Dampier. Yours is a tale much more like the story line of a Mexican soap called tele-novella in Manila which make housewives curse the villains walking the corridors of power, who snatch the food meant for children,

and bend the law like a contortionist in a freak show. It is the pamphleteer's genius, of course, at work here, he, the master of the packaged phrase, the copy charmer who was himself charmed by you, Prince Giolo as he branded you in his text that said your imperial highness is impervious to bites of snakes, because of the tattoo that covered your body, the brown archive of your tropic days which he made an atlas of his imagination, "where the arctick and antartick merge on your neck," and a continent of darkness as you speak "no English." John Savage, in his print, also showed you in a pose reminiscent of the Belvedere Apollo having just let go of the arrow that slew Phyton at the coast of Delphos. If this were 1904, you will be at the St. Louis World's Fair I'm pretty sure among the dog-eaters. There is a light that glowed in your torso as he drew you now a noble salvaged which changed your life, from the primitive and welcomed you to their brave new world where this raree show, this commerce is the summum bonum of their existence, their alpha, their omega, yes the sum of it all, the soma, yo, some muh, and nothin' muh

<sup>\*</sup>refers to a tattooed Mindanao native who was sold as slave for the buccaneer William Dampier, and exhibited in London in the 17th-century.

#### Ties That Bind

Fagen was a traitor, and died a traitor's death, but he was a man, no doubt, prompted by motives to help a weaker side, and one to which he felt allied by ties that bind . . . He saw, it may be, the weak and the strong; he chose, and the world knows the rest."

-An Indianapolis newspaper editorial on David Fagen, a regular in the U.S. Army who defected to the side of the Filipinos in the American imperialist and expansionist war in the Philippines in 1899-1901.

Crumbling bilboes bind this bas-relief of your footmen across the Pacific a century ago with David Fagen and my tropical islands. Outside, a balloon string loosened and slipped from a tiny finger, its blessed break the rupture and airiness this hotdog-munching spring strollers have in their heads for history. Thank Sainte-Gaudens you still have a girded and gilded tie to the present, thank Cal his mind was right you needn't worry about ever falling into a ditch again. They're all here, your men, his words have all them accounted for. At the park, the balloon-man's strings point to the direction of dates and palms scooped by a sickled moon, farther. A 'Nam vet reading today's paper said roped sands do not tie the umbilicus of this country's children to the rhetoric about the republic, not worth giving up everything for as your men did, as David did.

Among mosquito insurrectos he bound his blood with the pygmy arms of my fathers seeing too his skin as kin to our sun-browned flesh and land, our betrayed republic. No slingshot saved us from a praying mantis, its assimilating treachery, bound us in your language, made us like scattered beads of a rosary, left us with taste for patties and soda, made us borne you as an added burden.

Back in the islands, a young agriculturist was feared to have kissed the soil courtesy of the military, which tied this to the war on terror, a common vocabulary taught them by advisers from the Pentagon.

There are no foxes in our lush forests, but it is a howling wilderness, with foxholes in them, nevertheless.

# The Hanged Man (after a Fernando Botero painting)

you'll see. You can too, you know I already did. ages and ages hence, we have reached some peace. That will be great, we can tell the kids down some swigs. some ancient inn where we can sit us down, but some more informal and cozy place, not The Hague, for heaven's sake in between which is to say, we can meet somewhere, you know what I mean? sending me easily nearer heaven, Your ceiling is my floor which is my sky, We just can't simply see eye to eye. which is the whole point of this exercise, understand? your down is my up, your up is my down, let me put it then simply this way: Because I cannot say, down or up here, It's planar perspective, you see. I forgive you. Don't be sorry, its okay, really. in between as collateral damages. by surgical bombings that leave those caught Islam and Times Square, and those others in between better said now I can see clearly the gulfs of the centuries, our countries, ideologies, Oh thanks soldiers my angels of satori Salaam alaikum!

II. Pi

# Pi

If you are to roll a rock to Proxima Centauri which is 4.2 light years away think of furrows of impasto in R over R in F Major spread against gray or red and black like dying star dusts swirling in the galaxy. What I mean to say is, yes, you can, in your imagination. For like this number it is beyond us, out there in a rising continuum.

### The Tattoo

As writ, it is some old and curled standard curved round her navel that seems to lay claim a New Foundland meant to warn one or ward off others. "Been here, it's under my name." On her brown skin and grained, it is a rune enameled red, as if slithering out silently from the howling desert dune ready for any prey that strays about. Hush, I stilled my over-wandering mind. T'is a way of loving, his art that made him do it though on a different kind of canvas, and she agreed as she dared:

"Are you just going to stand there and stare at my tattoo, my dear poem-lover:"

# Mango Tango

La nuda mujer de Botero so ripe for picking like a mango.

### Post-Confessional Jam I

Efflorescence of tropes marching down the ramp, clad in whatever shocks, or in slack phrases that arrest us dead on our tracks as we scout for something new or rings true or the unfathomable metaphor of textures which trace provenance to a lichened gravestone forgotten in the woods, a frill of irony kin to our native chili in its pungency, a tone of carnelian beads that conjures joss sticks and miserere for whatever sins of omission or indiscretions, glittery bells of apostrophes that call attention to themselves. All in all as their feet spindled scenes lit by our gazes we hurriedly scribbled lines, trying to catch the passage of time and motion in this spectacle of images, fleeting, untended like a feather falling from a scarf, to which this, our hunger we have been left, gaping, grasping for the right words.

### Post-Confessional Jam II

On the bus or the streets I have become mythical. People pass by and through my body and I do not disintegrate or blow up like the fizz in soda pop. At the check-out counter they look at me as if I were in a soup line, begging for my meal. Their "how yar doin" like a recording, with the battery fading. Most often, their silence as on a moonless evening, transforms into crickets the brisk rustling of the plastic bags they slid my purchases in. This country is the best school for poetry. People's subtlety teaches tropes that make real toads imaginary, or invisible like me. And if you do not see how I long to take the next flight home, then you can say I have learned so much from Marianne Moore, yes, so much more.

Space Girl and Bird (after a Banksy graffiti)

If at all you inhabit what are available to guerillas with aerosol, walls that hide the sky and the sun from children in Palestine like the helmet heavy on your head. So the golden bird sings in the palm of your hand of olives crushed in the land or of a pink heart dripping at the end of your mind.

# Spiked

Steadily, the blade cleaves through the grains like a hawk circling over the plain, a cornfield, golden where near somewhere, the smell of something roasted. It hovers and glides still, its arc, precise and clean as it dives for the kill, eyes set on a seamless wood, now bleeding from the sharpness yet thought fit for a tabletop that will be host to a bonsai dish, or measured teacups. Mr. Lumberjack made sure of that, scouring this and that timber, for whatever ugly marks.

Among the tall pines and proud mahoganies, he eventually picked this teak, so wickedly straight.

And then the sudden tick of something that stopped and cracked.

If this were an archaeological find, we would have leapt in the air. Or if a knot, some dead branch left, or even two arrowed hearts carved by a speechless lover; we would have just lopped off the defect. But this was something we did not see nor the saw could bear. We stood back, muted by how something looking so perfect can be so scarred within, how a trivial thing can wound our lacquered dreams, how some acts in the past can haunt us as a crime hidden and forgotten in time or a family secret in a mothballed chest suddenly revealed, like this spike, corroded yet blue and true and whole, and wedged deep, in this wooden core.

# This Morning A Thrush

This morning, a thrush flipped the sun from its throat sunny side up on my plate with crackled bacon, toasted bread, and coffee from beans freshly roasted.

But I couldn't get started.

In the garden, button buds nippled the twigs and sprigs of the plum while yesterday's N.Y. index closed with hoofs on the page.

And yet, I couldn't get started.

Back home, our country's president displayed her diploma in economics while down South, a girl hanged herself with a note she hadn't eaten for weeks.

That was why I couldn't get started.

My bones rattled in the cold, and my poems howled like wakened hounds on a darkling plain where a friend was dumped, riddled with bullets.

So still I couldn't get started.

But when you emerged from the shower and brought Botticelli into my room and leis of *ylang-ylang* from our tropical island:

I flung myself out of my painted bed.

Tropical Depression (after Rousseau's Tiger in a Tropical Storm)

"Death is the mother of beauty."
- Wallace Stevens

Death is not at all an imagined thing. It is what stirs here and there all living, leaving traces of its living presence. The leaves, the trees in this forest so dense. It is the wind that made the tiger leap towards where it can creep and safely sleep.

Yet it's not here where beauty rests at all in that the leaves in time destined will fall or fall silent on the branches the wind.

Or even that the trees will no more bend, the tiger with its stripes will have no more stealth, speed, sharp eyes and sure fangs of terror.

Beauty rises from stubbornness, in how despite the wind the leaves still clasp the bough, bowed yet the trees snapped back and proudly stand giving rest, nests to birds, verdure to land, ambush point for the tiger on the prowl once more, before the next storm comes and howls.

# At Tully and King

The flapping fission of startled pigeons that sat serrated on the crimson wires, lit ancient and apocalyptic fires which set or will snuff out our dear visions.

# Two Flowers

From where I drink the amber beer he seemed to be only at play his hands, at first, a conductor's then a piano player then a DJ as he kneaded the white lump and tossed it in the air in a roundness that twirled thin like a vinyl.

What came out of the kiln, minutes later was a flower, fragrant with cheese, bacon and pepper.

Thousands of miles away in a far country,
I recall seeing a man on his boat gather a sinewy mass and hurled it on top of the water forming a white petalled flower that turned silver as fishes beat, flip and twist in the closing net.

Woman Before a Mirror (After Utamaru Kitagawa's Woman Putting on Make-up)

It could not have been the autumn wind that nudged my aching nape.

I glanced at the cedar door, it is shut as on an evening at the temple.

My hair, the stretch of road at the mountain pass he takes going home is now set in place, ready for his unleashing.

I looked again, and at my powdered face, the creases now well hidden and erased. I imagined the wings and shell of the cicada as he went in another gate.

# Semarang Sea-gypsies

Silken surah glided from the taut minaret gilded by a bedouin moon. What swaddled though the baby on her breast was tattered and tied around her neck like a hammock or a wind-blown sail that brought them here, fleeing what ravages their land, their camouflaged nightmares. So they wandered as flotsam at the threshold of our wariness. their arms like battered kelp that tugged at our feet. They were no strangers to us, even if we were only passing by. They seemed to multiply, day by day, like flies anywhere that blood is spilled in the name of the land. In mine, one day, like water lilies, they just emerged from under the bridge spanning the river that links us to their houses on stilts by the sea down South. Badjao, they are called. A movie poster in my childhood showed Hassan sitting on his boat, his eyes hauntingly looking at the boundless sea, which since then, had framed his thought or ours about his people, them. This morning I read a Darwish poem with his wish at the bedouin moon over the minarets of his fair Andalucia he can only now sing about in his qasida, haunting like the cicada on some tree or the wind on the sea of sand that stretches far, far like the lands his people had been walled in like a weeping fortress.

Nighthawks (After Hopper's Nighthawks and Van Gogh's Cafe Terrace)

Something there is that hovers here and there, centuries and continents apart where you have been sometime in the past like when you were laid off from your job the time and place the most appropriate for the circumstance. Because the dark makes us seek this certain kind of brightness from whatever aches inside or needing some filling up that only the stillness of this moment as when the doors of stores are shut or the neon put off can soothe or hush. It doesn't matter if it is at Phillies we stopped for a shot or at Cafe Terrace, whether inside enclosed in oh so transparent glass, facing a now deserted street, or outside under a starry, starry night sitting by a cobblestone lane. Still we home here and there unarmored and utterly vulnerable to arrows that flieth by night.

# Near The Foot Of My Banana

Near the foot of my banana there rests on a pair of boulders, my dark and sweet senorita.

We met on a sultry *dia* her body shaking and in fear near the foot of my banana.

Weakened, she asked for some *agua* said some gringo was after her, my dark and sweet senorita.

Red sky smeared her white *bandana*, from a quick shot at the border near the foot of my banana

She dreamed of a new *manana* where bare children know no hunger, my dark and sweet senorita.

And she sighed "hasta la vista", pale and limp as she wilted there near the foot of my banana, my dark and sweet senorita.

### Little Bastard

My eyes a fly caught in the web of the Porsche Spyder that just parked by the Golden Arches at Katips. It's vintage, I thought, a rarity in our Third World state. Same car that James Dean rode to his death in '55 on his way to a race. From my pocket, I fished a pliant piece of wire, the reliable tool of my motor trade. Inside, the romantic pair of riders bite on Big Macs, their mouths as wide as the gapes of my small siblings watching them outside, their gaze like the eyes of flies on the wide window glass.

# Lipstick

"It was shortly after the British Red Cross arrived, though it may have no connection, that a very large quantity of lipstick arrived. This was not at all what we men wanted, we were screaming for hundreds and thousands of other things and I don't know who asked for lipstick. I wish so much that I could discover who did it, it was the action of genius, sheer unadulterated brilliance. I believe nothing did more for these internees than the lipstick. Women lay in bed with no sheets and no nightie but with scarlet red lips, you saw them wandering about with nothing but a blanket over their shoulders, but with scarlet red lips. I saw a woman dead on the post mortem table and clutched in her hand was a piece of lipstick. At last someone had done something to make them individuals again, they were someone, no longer merely the number tattooed on the arm. At last they could take an interest in their appearance. That lipstick started to give them back their humanity."

- Excerpts from the diary of Lt. Col. Mervin Willet Gonin DSO, one of the first British soldiers who liberated Bergen-Belsen in 1945, and recorded in the blog of British graffiti artist, Banksy.

Who will bring them in past these walls? Allah must be somewhere else as a pale green horse prowls the hills and villages.

There the eyes of children, men and women melt as though they were black chocolate, exposing so much bones.

Let us draw a mural of their faces ala Warhol's Marilyn Monroe, their lips red and ripe and luscious as a cherry on top of a sundae.

At least for once all their barb-wired history they will become finally, human.

# Just Like The Led Zeppelin, This Makes Me Wonder

That's all fur now hairs that once stood on end the teakettle-spout tail, its nimble feet, its blood and flesh but mere blackened and splattered splotches on the pavement.

Must have been the Michael Jackson wannabe who surprised me last night, when it popped out from behind the palm trees lining the street where I live.

Like it, they're all over the place.
Here you see them,
guerillas in coned hats
waging wars among garbage heaps,
for aluminum cans and perhaps
some other valuable things they will find,
like genie bottles and plastics?
There, fingering slits
of telephone boxes
for loose change left
by harried and hurrying callers.

You can only think of San Andreas and this land of lights where they remain invisible among the hedges at night. III. P... I..

# P....I..

How easily they can get away like a sperm through a hole of a condom, with murder, in my country.

### P.... I..

Were that the dots of elided letters in this Tagalog curse, a textual euphemism for whore mother or more like muddah fuckah that comes out of the mouth of wannabee rappers loosely like their baggies as they walk and strut like a silent tramp in a dark alley, become the tip of sharpened stakes I will drive deep right into the heart of their bloody appetite.

#### Graft+ed

Because his caveat was on the grapefruit in the orchard I thought it was accursed some unseen spirit lives or lurks behind its shade. This is America, padre, no kapre\* smokes his big wad of tobacco on that tree. It was grafted on a lemon stock that's why its fruits came out like sauerkraut. Back home I thought of what the old folks would do to make it sweet: bury a hard and brown muscovado at the roots. Whatever link or philosophy of causality was involved there I kept to myself as on the belief the fruits would turn sour when a conceiving woman eyes them with desire her mouth watering and so. The grapefruits hang like the bright street lights of the city, far from the paddies of our childhood nights.

In summer, we would become victims to pranks of the big boys in their ruse called, "Want-to-see-the-juicy-Big City?" If you agree, they would make you stare at the rind of the pomelo, the grapefruit's ribcage, as they squeeze its bittersweet liquid right at your eyes. You turn around, your tail curled, wiser though to know why it is called the forbidden fruit.

<sup>\*</sup> a Philippine mythological tree-dwelling being, imagined as always lazily smoking a big wad of tobacco.

# Twilight of the Mimosa

I believe in personal defense systems of protecting someone's magic coat from being taken or the prayer beads pressed between one's fingers, round like lotus flowers on a pond. Noli me tangere if touch be your assurance I am come from the dead, or the fingertip on my palms the scaffolding of your faith. The scraggly thorns divide our paths and flesh, as these lead to the spirit. It is a night I must cross until I am risen. My words are no mere shadow than they are lurking in your mind. They are as real as the parched land crying for rain, for the children left by their fathers, for the mothers who lost their sons in the dark, for truth blown smooth in summer like dust. You demand form, an apparition like some soreness for your ablution. But I am the state of my imagination. Tomorrow, these wounds will explode in pink balls and all my leaves will unfold like serrated thorns.

# Pulpified

**adj.** pulverized, crushed into a soft, shapeless mass:

The coroner said Daliwar had died of pulmonary embolism and that his legs were pulpified.

or tenderized, as meat to the consistency of jelly the blood, blackened as it clot under the skin and the bones became a useless structure to hold any flesh or limbs.

(From, the Latin pulpa), which rhymes with the Bagram culpa.

#### Arrival

Stepping out of the arrival area into the cold outside to wait for my countryman who will pick me up, I nearly slipped on a puddle, the morning's collected rain. On the wall, the billboard says "Welcome to San Francisco," the span of the ubiquitous bridge like arms spread wide in the fog. I thought of how I have only seen this self-same scene on a cover of a notebook we used in the grades or a glossy sent by a relative who settled in Oakland after his retirement from the Army and is now buried under bamboo trees back in the islands to where in 1901 was bound the USS Thomas, as it sailed past this bay with its cargo of The Baldwin Primer and Ma'ams and Sirs who taught my father's apoon sa tuhod or grandfather-in-the-knee to say: "I lub da neym of Washington. I lub my cuntry, too, I lub the flag, the dear old flag, of red and white and blue."

This language which spanned our history brought me here and one day, my countryman will drive me around to see the city and take my photographs, the bridge and the bay as a background to send back home I left behind as if to have an evidence I have truly arrived in this land that gleamed only in my mind while I lay on the back of a carabao looking at the long trail of smoke in the sky from B-52s perhaps just through dropping the day's cache of tangerine terror below paddies and forests aflame in horror.

### **Balut**

Evenings find him on the streets peddling balut or boiled duck eggs, this quaint ovum of Filipino taste for 18-day-old chicks believed to add verb and verve in the bed. It's a nocturnal trade that at least made his family cross the delicate bridge called survival, each day. In so many ways, his may also be termed a duckling existence. Inside the shell, its fetal position forever in suspended animation, like his own. Last night, when police reporters took his photographs, he was curled, holding on to his stomach, with his bloodied basket and the broken eggs scattered on the pavement.

#### Manhattan Stories

i

As the old woman was wheeled into the ambulance, her neighbors went out of the street, their heads like prairie dogs, alert and on the look out for answers. What happened? Where are her children? It was good the house cleaner came in the morning or no one else could have seen her fall. At the charity ward, a solitary and rusty dextrose stand stood guard at her iron bed, her graying hair unkempt spread like battered kelps on the faded blue bed sheet, her toenails, wedged with dirt and unclipped. An attendant asked the cleaner for names of the patient's nearest relatives. Dunno their names, she said, only come to badger their mom for their inheritance, the house, the car, the antique piano they do not know are now in the name of a bank, but yes, she'll tell them when she sees them. And sure did, they came, with chocolates and fresh flowers a week after, just missing a day before she was transferred to the freezing room in the hospital basement.

ii

He stands in line at 7:00 a.m. as everyone else at Starbucks, a regular fixture there like the individual slats of a window blind.

Asked what makes him do it, he looked up the towering steel and glass, as if an answer like a confetti will fall from above.

Not for the brand for sure or how it is brewed he said just perhaps to see the steam rising, or for the scent to stir his mind to start the day's grind, or just for the sake of holding on to something hot, while crossing the street or waiting for the bus.

I really dunno, why do you asked? Just get in line yourself. Here, you just sip it. There's no need to find the answers or clarify your motives

iii

The poet, from our tropical islands, waited for me for our date at a coffee shop I'm sure he is a regular the Italian at the counter calls him by first name.

He'd been here three decades earlier when he wrote about women disrobing at the river

by the roadside in Magarao his hometown known for its coconut oiled body massage. In the 70s, we grieved for old men in his poems who had only themselves and the squirrels they feed at Stuyvesant Park for company the way we did for the mothers back home whose sons got picked up in the night by the tyrant's henchmen and never returned, perhaps rotting in some unmarked graves in the mountains. In between, we learned about the honors he reaped as his lines got the nod of the critics. Lately he imagined himself one of the planets in the vast universe, neatly aligned and balanced in its orbit with all the others. That morning I saw him, he ordered his favorite veggie sandwich he said will make him last more years to see the establishment of a new world government he will willingly give up his current passport for. I discovered there is no basis or reason after all for my prescription for him to see the barefoot orthopedist in his birthplace if he dislocates his bones on the way to his rented room.

# Coup d'etat

It came on a winged seed then wedged itself between lightning cracks of the parapet. At once, it was all over the place, its roots, anchored on whatever they can seize or grip. Then its arms swept away all my walls and defenses. Love has overthrown my throne and now I am all in shambles.

Cracking Coconuts
(After Leon Golub's Interrogation II)

This is the subtlest of all arts, the bell for caged mongrels, this palace infidel, to snap whatever strand left in his will. And I do it exceptionally well. Oh, look here. "Ecce homo." Behold him. I do not raise hell or threat I will kill this account. Mine is more the ways of Zen: the clink of empty shells on the pavement, the cracking of a coconut, a thud, are enough to drive a desperate man - mad. But better the laughter of children - his overheard near his segregated cell. People don't really care much for their lives except when pushed or they are on the edge. That time, they plead, calling all the angels and saints, and whoever can be of help. That's the time for their singing unbidden, the spilling, like black blood bubbling out of a hooded head, the plotters' prized secrets,

pink cerebellum still quivering in a cracked skull. The horror, the horror, and anguish of it all. But it's a call, a done deal due for liquidation, (for the national security, and actually, the firmness of the throne). I have bid remorse farewell, though I have not lost in me all human good as well. I take my kids for a walk in the park, and listen to my Mozart in the dark. Tonight, I plan to wash my angus steak done rare with an '83 Sauterney. Then perhaps fly to Tangiers Tuesday or some Caribbean Island next week to meet the Secretary for the pay, and another order of coconut juice, with the young meat, scooped out, if he'll excuse.

# Beggar

Not quite a Strad the one clipped in his armpit he nevertheless, holds his instrument as if it were a fledgling still all down in its nest. Beside an angel holding a bowl of nymphal water standing stiff in its cemented silence, he squats, his back pressed against one of its half-spread wings. He lays down a canister, its top open like a beak of a nestling, awaiting its fill of worms. He wipes his dark glasses as if the act will let him see our presence watching him in his mime as he smoothes his sombrero, its edges now tattered like dried ferns, curlicued. Then he cradles his violin up his shoulder, his chin on its rest as he grips and takes his bow, taps a note, that made the scroll looked like a bird, spreading its wings, and poised for its flight this morning.

Homage to Frieda (On the Centennial of her birth)

Kahlo: kaluluwa: (n). Tagalog for soul -

O Soul of my bleeding heart pigeonholed in tin *retablos* hung in antiseptic wards unwind your bandaged flesh and let me in your body its plains of crumbling rocks and howling dust is no strange country to me. *Buko kanakong estranyo 'di*.

Back home, the land cracks and opens wide throwing up the bodies dumped at night. Its womb refusing now any stirring of seedling despite so much marrows in its furrows.

O Nuestra Senora de Dolores y Triestesas wrap me in your leafy arms as you did Diego Rivera or yourself in infant's bodies yet with your lusting faces in a kind of pieta, in a loving moment caged in the canvas.

Arog ka kanakong banwaan, (like my country)
Natusok naman ako. (I am pierced too.)
Pero en sus autoretratos por ejemplo,
I am not pricked by the thorns of the cactus
which thrusts up like a pen against the sky
and my brows are as high and thick and black
as your brushes and your gaze - a doll's,
set in place and silent in a corner yet forever
replicated in the peaceable braces of our mind.

### Double Performance

Stainless wings swish and slice the air shrinking time and space and matter, tumbling and turning towards each other towards their certain end.

Yet just as they reach that sure arc, they flip and split apart, this way and that, nudging the hands to clap, taunting the human heart to stop.

Below a powdered man enacts
a simulacrum of his art,
as if he were without a skin,
a soundless and stringed mannequin,
which the children now ascertain
if its heart really stopped beating.

# Salutacion al Aguila

Tigsik\* ko ding Amerika I offer a toast to America

mag-ingat ka kalis niya beware of her chalice

ta baka mapaling ika or you fall into hallucination

ag di na makauli pa and you can't go home again.

<sup>\*</sup>Written in my native Iriga language, one of the more than seventy languages in my country, tigsik is a Bicol traditional oral poem spontaneously composed and recited as a toast during rural gatherings. The alternating lines is patterned after the catechetical ladino-style of writing during the 17th-century in the Philippines.

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