

Mark ANGELES

Poems

Third World

I love your sunrise after sunrise
and the oil that marks your summer.
I love your dark brown skin—
porous as an earthenware
and sometimes phosphoric like bronze.
I love the scent of brine in your sweat
and the bread that rises over your firewood.
I love the lush of your fruits and minerals
and the fishes that burst forth from your seas.
I love the coiling tongue of your rivers,
the valleys that wary like shy birds,
and the forests that lie in their sleep.
I love your ballads and your lullabies,
the secret prayers that you whisper,
and your war songs—your thunderclaps
that terrify your enemies to their knees.
I love the stench of your sewages,
the persevering brigade of workers
that fuel your markets and factories,
and the dung that impregnates your fields.
I love the root of your tears
pressing against famine and poison.
I love the diamond of your history
forged in the very core
of your natives' culture.
And most of all, I love your slaves
who raise bullets in their backyards
and load their guns
with manifestos of resistance.

Concertina

If spoken, it wafts
on your tongue (tumble-
weed breath)

as though a woman
will readily claim it—bride to be;
solfeggio
master's unica hija.

Not hexagons,
but coils of thorns;
and hums one music

not by itself, but the wind's
as it stumbles
on every razor,

but not gently

and with no final warning.
The marchers hear it sing.

A Little Light Disembowelment

“Kokak!” said the frog
when it high jumped from the well.

“Kokak!” said the frog
when a roguish hand seized it
by the neck.

“Kokak!” said the frog
when it was laid on the table.

“Kokak!” said the frog
when a lateral cut was made
from its ear to ear.

“Kokak!” said the frog
when a vertical cut was made
from its throat to its hind legs.

“Kokak!” said the frog
when its sternum was severed.

“Gaddamit!” cursed the captor,
sneering. And said,
“This one’s still croaking!”

He thumbed its heart;
ripped its pericardium.

But the frog said,
“Kokak! Kokak! Kokak!”

(On October 2, 2010, I was invited by the group *Artist Arrest* to give a small talk on poetry to the 43 health workers—known as *Morong 43*—detained in Camp Bagong Diwa. The officer-in-charge at the women’s detention cell did not permit one page of my handout—a sample poem entitled “Kokak” by Gelacio Guillermo. The officer-in-charge at the men’s detention cell, however, confiscated the whole handout including pages that discuss the textbook definition and elements of poetry. The officer said they don’t allow “such kind” of material inside the prison. They took pictures of us and started interrogating our background. The officer said they will need the material for further investigation as though we were carrying illegal documents. This poem was published in *Sunday Inquirer Magazine* and *bulatlat.com*)

A Tree Faces Its Mirror

The tree on the road
unwrapped its boughs

like a huge green umbrella.
Engorged with leaves

that glint like sea water—
its pride, it stood tall

glaring past the spectacle
of everyone. Understand

its aversion when a sprig,
feeling like a mutineer,

shot a red leaf like flame
shooting from a hand flare.

How atrocious! A bird
would feel the same

when it finds one feather
that does not belong.

Imagine how it endured
its own disgrace, yielding

to its leaf like an illness
that will never leave,

saying to it, “Forgive me
now for this misgiving.”

This Summer

The sun steadies in the sky.
Enough to gild the field of grass
flexing towards the slit of horizon.
At the heart of it, you and I
lie serene. Underneath a hem
of drifting laundry: almost dry,
almost sullen like corn-flour.
Your eyes shut resemble
twin waxing crescents.
I knit a chary kiss into the arcs
of your slender eyelashes.
You say your mother
pruned those strands
when you were a month old.
I think about the *doña's* husband
in Manila where you work.
You yelp and leave a drop of saliva
on my shirt's shoulder blade.
I answer back with locked arms
but think about the duck eggs
I was not able to sell this month.
From a cloud's-eye view
we form a heart-shaped island;
as if beauty blows itself
into that coast of stillness,
like the strings of wind
of last year's summer we shared
with the cows and gerberas.

House

A house full of knives,
what are they for?

A small cube of
living space.

Think bachelor.
Think transient.

One light bulb
hanging from the center

like a fixed stare.
One chair.

Missing bedroom.
Missing kitchen.

Where the fuck
are the windows?

A doorknob appears,
a full door opens

then disappears again
after it is closed.

Two dogs tied
to each other

outside; their shadows
panting and barking.

Their names are called,
one for each purpose:

Bullet, then *Cloud*—
gunshot and smokescreen

—one for guarding,
the other for digging

a few more holes
for trapping

a few more pieces
of evidence

as the rest of the world
are forced down

on their knees
groping for something

to make sense of.

Body the Memorious

The body remembers what she
devours.

Your body, for instance, stands
on her hair

as she plows from one body
to another.

Strangers speak to your skin,
snivelling.

You let them
in—

rub them like potatoes,
rough and hard

and heaving with dirt;
peel off

their ribbons of pelt to expose
the flesh.

The body remembers flesh
and breath:

their heat and lithe.
What your body receives,

leaves bumps behind.

Dolores, your little
body, curious

and throbbing with those living
organelles,

welcomed me and harked
my name.

Did I wake her up like a bird-
song

that quenches an orchard

every morning?

She says, *Desire*, and there it is,
unseen, felt,

tailed with a man's scent—
his heat:

sweat that has turned into
steam;

his labor that has turned
into weight.

The burden of remembering
time and place,

the first liaisons, the first
tongue on skin,

the first prick. *Forever*
frayed,

floating like morning light.

Only Autumn Can Do This

The world lay on us like a mosquito net
trapping the air we breathe.
For hours, we have been sleeping
in each other's arms. You snore
like an elephant charging its enemy
while I dream a cat's dream of spool.
How peaceful it is to be with you.
I have put up with your bedlam;
even loving the stench of your drool
and the vinegary reek of your armpits.
You are the tangled thread caught
in my claws, wet with my teeth.
I will wake up sooner and just like before
you will open your eyes while my fingers
wind round the curls of your hair.
How I wish to stay trapped in this lattice.
But only autumn can do this to the trees
and we are but its roots waiting for snow.
