

JOEL TOLEDO



Nocturne

What more difficult burden than this,
the bird's singing outside my room
this midnight? The sharp melody,
sweet and dark,
darkness slicing darkness.

He never rests. Night after night
the lilting sound grows louder,
longer. Now I think of opening the window
to see the outside covered with sound,
as if nothing else exists but birdsong
and dark, one and the same,
the bird is the dark.

Night after night, I am tempted
to step out and be part of this union
of bird and dark. But I fear it terribly.
For definition is the task of day,
where light makes things easy,
like the walk to the great perching tree,
where the bird should be,
but never is.

Thirty

Walking out of the apartment
on a midsummer day
heavy with abandonment,
like a lost cause,
like the passing of love,
like the burning asphalt you endure
for that terrible fear of thirst,
the strange human need
that drives you out,

you feel the world
stopping in the middle of things:
the half hour, the recurring joke
of endless time, the great resting place
between to and fro, here and there,
leave and arrive. Now

you question the point of movement,
choosing the standstill, the deadlock,
the tie. Quiet and loud,
in the halfway of things,
you drink deeply,
from the very heart of time.

KRISTINE DOMINGO



Juan Luna's "Puesta del Sol"

As from the beginning, for it is
how light could become: melody,
chiaroscuro, mirror,
forever or the everlasting,
shards, and the rest of the now unloved
unto pavement once uttered.

There shall feel
as finish to the end,
this house and a little bit of the river,
house and its field chipped off all
emotion the wind water's either-or
cannot help but carry. And how

can the sound not help but carry,
sound neither morning, noon, nor starless
sky of the above? For once,
here it had been, not yet
living, love in this world, without end,
and on the seventh day, he rests.

Alunsina's Return

Mid-air September threads

one more town left with
two, three wires
at times time, at times cradling

a swelling absence of
weather, a spirit perched, or the above,

and often simply
close enough to the earth from
swiftness of even

the smallest of flights that is here
the inaudible

Speak for goodbye.

Alunsina's Guilt

Late December, first post of
The evening lights

Up later than usual

A hinge that is desire
Overcome

By its dark doors.

MARK ANTONY CAYANAN



Recede

Mirrors begin to recede—
lately, everyday reveals to you
an unleafing, the autumn
settling on your pillow
being that former
forest on your head. While
your scalp encamps by patches,
the rest of you turns into

bark—annual rings as
a thickening here, a cleft
of wrinkles there. You
recall what you once
heard—the moment
a baby's sleeping
breath curdles, decay starts

its work, claiming unknown
organs, cells, something
neglected for the first
word, or steps, everything
else: memories
of fruits for which the mind

is basket. Too late: what
you acquire from the world

is still bounded
by your body's sure sag—how
do you demand perfection,

with this erring
vessel that cannot
contain it? The bald
truth mirrors present to you:

maturity does not dwell
on what can be
changed. Rather, it lives by

what can be melted into the quiet
streets of your after-

noon, sun in place as always.

Anonymous

Past midnight, and the city has
turned its shadowy back, its spine
the rows of unlit buildings that border
the avenue. The occasional snores
come from the heavy chugging
of decrepit jeepneys trying to get
as many remnants of the day's
passage as they can.

I wobble with
the motor's rusted spasms, my body
just another aching particle against
which the wind is someone's
stale breath. Beside me, a middle-
aged man with halved eyes the color
of a dull wound is snoring away one
street after another. The sweat
marking the hours he must have
spent awake is his extra skin, glossing
over his sooty white shirt down
to what seems to be the acrid sheen
of his gold bracelet.

From some
place in the anonymous dark, two
boys with limbs alert to the slightest
grunt of the still-shut city jolt
the man out of stupor to snatch his
bracelet from his inert self, the metal
a momentary vise to his wrist.

A crackle
of curses and spittle sends the rest
of the jeepney to crisp attention,
the noise lacerating the road's wan
surfaces. But after a few minutes,
the wind's unsourced mumblings can be
heard again. Sleep abounds. I huddle
about my self, and wait for my stop,
grateful for these bare arms.

SID HILDAWA



To Someone Somewhere Else

You're in another place:

Chatting online at your sister's apartment
In a country time zones away; I can still
greet you a happy birthday, even if tomorrow's
already on this side of the globe (You inform me
brb means "be right back.")

In Quiapo church lighting three red
candles, after falling in processional line
to wipe even smoother the Black Nazarene's
whitened heel with your checkered handkerchief (Sorry,
I was too tired to join you.)

Impatiently trapped at a bar along Pasay Road
While outside the rain whines, and inside
Your girlfriend whines even louder, so you
Think of bringing her home (Then dropping
by my place for a cigarette?)

Managing your father's watch store
Where time shuffles and scurries
Like the crowds of Tutuban market
And still you ask about the hour (It's time
to buy yourself a new watch!)

I'm gathering you all here, together
under common roof, one room
with me, all seated around this dinner
table of a candlelight poem. (Who
will say grace?)

In Absentia

The sadness within these walls is the quiet sadness of space itself; invisible, inescapable. And hollow like a forgotten well I'd like to fill up with flood waters, lava, or quick-drying cement. Departures are never as swift as the flick of a light switch, or as definitive as the collapse into dust cloud and rubble of a tall building under engineered blasts of planted dynamite. You walk out in particles, leaving granulated good-byes like very fine sand. I'm sure some remnant of your reflection is still around, bouncing off yet another conniving surface. Like once, stepping out of the shower towel-drying my hair, I caught the elongated image of your naked body mirrored by the metal door frame's shiny handle. So, you're still within these walls, zipping in perpetual motion, an amorphous mass of energized atoms in some theoretical physics equation where the effect of friction is suspended. You're still here, though not as I would have it: seated on the bed, your back against last night's pillows, your arm outstretched, pointing the remote control at a flickering screen. You're still here, but in fragments. I gather your presence by each sweeping of the floor, the way a poem remembers its former drafts, collecting dead skin cells of former selves.

Set Design for Act Three

I will stage the remainder of my life this way: black iron stairs spiraling to upper floor, leaving behind all clutter at ground. Upstairs, white. White plastered walls and cathedral ceiling; floor of tongue-and-groove planks, six inches wide, bleached. Large frosted windows at both ends, north and south, with sheets of canvas draped like a thin slice of sunrise. By the brighter end, a potted cactus to soak in the filtered light. Slightly off center, a weathered boat for a bed, with bamboo outrigger to the floor's wooden lake. And a light bulb hanging low from the ceiling to lure before next dawn the errant fish. In case it comes.

JOSE WENDELL P. CAPILI



Hometown

A place for parting with lips,
spleen and other hidden selves.

Within its walls

I bury secrets
no one dares to see.

I keep from my children
the dispossession
of a family name
story books
nomads heap on
this antimony.

I must leave this place
with a fishing pole
tucked under my sleeves
to consume the edge
of my private fears
leaping through
each headwater.

My birthing's complicity
achieves its dying state
within finite chambers.

Ohtaue

(Prelude to a Rice Festival)

Call it staple.
Marsh grass with stems
veiled in leaf sheaths.
From a farmer's thatched
cottage, it is the speech
of earth nourishing
a roothold, green and firm
like frogs torching on a path.
A cool breeze of fall
spells harvest.
Rice grains are hard,
mellowing when cooked,
a passion flickered
when ascetics donning
orange robes reflect
the shape of parasol pots
containing each grain.
A luminous space
of children strumming
arpeggiolike strings
invite settlers to wear
pearls and summer kimonos
dyed from playful
shades of light.
Bamboo flutes hum
while people eat rice.

RAFAEL DY-LIACCO



Things Which I Have Seen in New England

(Autumn, going into EDSA II)

Things which I have seen in New England:
Trees of gold
Mirrored tall in smooth rivers.
And in my heart's imagination,
My country's people,
Golden now,
Mirrored tall in life's rivers,
More beautiful than any tree could ever be.

*They shall be called terebinths of victory,
Planted by the Lord to show his glory.
They shall rebuilt the ancient ruins,
They shall restore the ruined cities.*

The wind blows, rippling the water,
The wind blows, detaching the leaves.

When We Go Skating

(with a nod to Plotinus)

When we go skating—
Gliding wing to wing—
Loving you is simple,
Like the glow of gold,
Like the stars we see at night,
Or the distant lightning.