

Balsa: Poemas Chabacano

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Francis C. Macansantos

Chabacano Poems
Translated into English by the Author



National Commission for Culture and the Arts

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It was Ateneo de Zamboanga writer and professor of literature Ben Halili who masterfully organized the first reunion of Zamboanga writers in 1997. Without that homecoming, there would have been no renewal of vital links with my hometown. Not infrequently, I have visited since then, and have made contact with writers of the region, old and new. I thank Ben for starting it all, and for sustaining the link with Zamboanga, and with Chabacano.

Almost singlehandedly, Carlos Macansantos, my first cousin and bosom buddy has kept my cultural connection with Zamboanga alive, simply by maintaining intellectual contact. Along with Ben Halili, Carlos was my most reliable consultant on matters having to do with the Chabacano language.

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I thank Linguistics Professor Aizon, formerly of WMSU, who by his fiction in Chabacano gave incontrovertible proof that Chabacano literature was possible.

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The title poem, *Balsa*, first saw print (with a Spanish translation) in the first issue of *Perro Berde* (June-December 2009) published by the Instituto Cervantes. Here it appears in a slightly revised form. *Na Pantalan*, was published with translations into English and Spanish in the second issue of *Perro Berde* (December 2010) published by the Spanish Embassy. *Kinaadman* (Volume XXXII, 2010) of the Ateneo de Cagayan (Xavier University) also recently published a revised English translation of *Na Pantalan*. Muchas gracias con todo.

-- Francis C. Macansantos

PREFACE

To my knowledge, this book is only the second collection of Chabacano verse written by a Zamboangueno ever to be published, though I certainly wish there had been more. The very first saw print in Zamboanga in 1997. While on a visit to Zamboanga to be a panelist in the first-ever Western Mindanao writers' workshop, I came across a copy which I was able to browse through, hurriedly, because I had to return it to its owner before I took an early flight to Manila, and from there the long bus ride back to Baguio.

Mr. Domingo Narag, the author of that first book, was a familiar figure on the Ateneo campus in the '60's. He worked with the administrative staff--first as foreman, and later as property custodian. But to those of us who were campus writers then, he was no ordinary fellow. He had had the enviable distinction of having seen his poems (in English) published in the Philippines Free Press. To the aspiring writers on campus, this was an incredible feat, as, to a man, we had been rebuffed by its editors. But Mr. Narag never did get to have a book of his poems in English published. Why or when he did decide to switch to Chabacano will perhaps always be a mystery to me.

Mr. Narag did not provide translations for his Chabacano book of poems. Perhaps he felt that none was necessary. I however believe there is a need to reach out, in the many poetic and linguistic ways possible, not only to those who know no Chabacano but also to those who no longer remember. English may be one of the roads back to one's own language, and to one's own way of experiencing reality. I hope that such will be the case for this book of poems with English translations.

The publication of that first book and this second one is separated by a period of more than a decade. That there has been such a hiatus between them does give us pause. And why only two books, ever?

English, that beloved—and sometimes hated—colonial heirloom, may mainly be to blame. It has weighed us down with such a sense of inferiority that, under its spell, we forget who we are. True, writers from our region have won acclaim: Kerima Polotan and Ibrahim Jubaira of Jolo; Toribia Maño, Jolico Cuadra, Antonio and Emigdio Enriquez of Zamboanga City, Cesar Ruiz Aquino of Zamboanga and Pagadian; Antonio Nieva, Anthony Tan, Mehol Sadain, Rene Fernandez, Noralyn Mustafa. . . the list is long and is bound to get even longer. Yet every triumph in English also seems to serve as a painful reminder of the lackluster careers our own native languages have taken, on by-ways so dismal they may even lead to extinction. How we would survive—or succumb to-- such a self-inflicted punishment with identity intact should be an intriguing subject for scholars.

Without a literature, no language can endure for long. Literature provides language with a soul -- it animates, it invigorates. Its transforming influence raises the level of daily discourse, and consequently, the very quality of life.

Happily, there seem to be signs of a cultural awakening. There is music and poetry in the air. The visual arts of Zamboanga have always been outstanding. Young writers of great promise, filmmakers — there are more and more of them each year. Perhaps the times are changing. May this book be a part and instrument of that change.

When I began to write seriously in Chabacano over half a decade ago, the prospect of an overall cultural revival was for me rather distant, even conjectural. I merely wanted to express myself in my own language. It seemed a primordial need, a fundamental right. But rights, though inherently personal, when shared, already transcend the self. And poetry is surely a way of sharing.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO:

Emilio Rene R. Fernandez
dear classmate and comrade-in-arms

Emilio Escudero III
hermano mayor y ejemplo

and

ADZ high school class of 1966

BALSA

(para con mi anak)

Na basio del aire en cima del ancho mar
Del infinito --
Daw alli yo ahora ta man lutaw,
Como na tiempo cuando no hay pa tiempo,
Y el cosmos simplemente un gran ancias
Y el nada ta espera pa con el sero
Antes pa que ya sucede
El primeramente kalandrakas.

Amo este el de mi unico consuelo, anak,
Aqui ta sale mi lenguaje que ya nace na viento.
Y si tiene pa ya que queda un isla, ta erodia alrededor:
Ta man timpak cada sampak del marijada
Hasta no hay mas lugar para na pies
Que ta resbala na maga grano del a playa.
Como ansina ya gayot seguro
El di atun lugar de residencia
Que como maga grano del reloj
Ta sumi ya na mar del olvido.

Anak, donde man tu bolbe?
Ya nace tu na maga monte del Luzon
Y ya tiene años de pakabata talla tu na America.
Y de tu lenguaje, Ingles de Americano,
Con acento, tiempo por tiempo omentao del Tagalog --
Cosa-cosa pa seguro lenguaje
Ay que aprende tu, cosa-cosa naciones mira.
Ay queda tu dueña
Del todo el maga isla y continente
Que el di tu pies ay pisa.

Tupa ba se kanaton que estrañoso?
Maskin cosa ta lliba kanila: biento, mar,
Binta, barco, pajaro, buyuk o eroplano,
Ta man kalayat donde-donde el maga similla,
Y siempre, si no hay playto, de credo man o atitud,
Gente lang kita todo, no hay ni uno extranjero,
Y tata y anak pa kita dos
Na mundo que uno lang siempre,
Y siempre di atun.

Pero que modo tus este habla?
Pakilaya tu este lee,

Que modo tu pronuncia el maga vuelo y consonante
Del sentimiento y del pensamiento?
Mi lenguaje, daw perdido el ancla,
Ahora como un balsa, utas-utas, y ta man-lutaw
Na medio del ancho mar para donde y donde.
Embarca tu aqui junto con migo,
Pisa tu aqui, pija en buena mente,
Con el tejida del maga palabra y prase,
Y si no hay mal biento o marijada,
Contento kita dos na balsa
De rastro, de sunor, y de resuello.

Freelipiniana

RAFT

(for my daughter)

In the emptiness of air on the wide sea
Of infinity—
It is as though I were afloat there, now,
Seemingly in a time before there ever was Time,
And the cosmos still just one vast anxious waiting,
And Nothing was still waiting for Zero,
Long before the incidence
Of primal chaos.

This is my only place of solace, my child.
From here emanates a language
That was born in the wind.
And if there were an island left to me,
It erodes all the way around
Until there is no more place to stand
For feet that slip down on the sand.
Such perhaps is truly our place of residence
That like the sand grains of an hour-glass
Sinks into the sea of oblivion.

My child, where will you go home?
You were born in the mountains of Luzon,
And spent several years of your childhood in America.—
And your language, English of the American,
Spiced, now and again with Tagalog.
Perhaps you will learn so many more languages,
See so many countries.
You will own
All the islands and continents
You set your foot on.

Is all this really quite incredible?
By whatever agency disperses them: wind, sea,
Canoe, ship, bird, bee or aircraft,
The seeds are spread all over the world,
And if there is no conflict of creed or attitude,
We are all human beings, no one a foreigner,
And you and I father and daughter still
In a world still one,
And still our own.

But how will you speak these words that I write?
How will you be able to read,

In what manner pronounce
The vowels and the consonants
Of feeling and of thought,
My language which seems to have lost its anchor
Is now a raft, ragged and torn,
Floating in a wide sea without direction.
Come aboard. Note with special care
The way the words and phrases are woven—
And if there is no strong wind or wave,
We will rest content on a raft
Made of traces, of sound, and of breath.

Freelipiniana

NA PANTALAN

Abajo y alrededor del pier,
El agua del mar bien dasuk,
Daw culado siñido que ajuntao el puersa.
Mama y Papa, ostedes dos
Ta sigue ya na corriente del cambio—
Agarrao del tierra
Pero sigue siempre ta man biaje
Na canto hypnotico del tiempo eternal.

Aqui na pantalan, antes,
Ta lliba ostedes conmigo
Y ta llena conmigo de estraño.
Cosa ba ostedes ta gusta aqui ?
No hay man ningunos
Que ta hace kita jatud
Para munta na barco
Que ay sale
Para na maga pabuloso lugar.
Pero aqui siempre ostedes, contento,
Ta come mais asao duro
Y ta mira-mira con maga uno o dos gente
Que no hay que hace si no pesca balu,
Diutay, plakit, y matunuk.

Pero ta lliga aqui el biento
Siguro ta sale pa desde na isla de Basilan,
Y otro pa maga lugar na su detras
Hasta na otro punta del mundo,
Cruzando con el mar para aqui
Na pantalan del Zamboanga.
Y mira con el grandeza del cielo aqui
Adornao con su largo y lejos
Butada de estrella
Con su ansiedad confirmao,
Y el mar que hende gayot mas joven
Ta man tupahan na un distancia
Alumbrao del luna
Na linia secreto del horizonte.
El mar ta abrasa con el maga isla;
Agua, biento, cielo y tierra
Ta man agarrahan.

Amo siguro, Pang, Mang,

Pirme ostedes ta anda aqui,
Para pidi el pulso del maga cosa elemental
Y conectao na infinito
Por pabor dispensa
Con este anak de ostedes
Que no hay aprecia en buena mente,
Cosa ostedes ta sinti
Y mucho beses na su vida
Desalejao
Na maga cosa grande, anciano,
Y hende ta tupa el edad
Que amo siempre ta mobe
Con el corrida del sangre
Y con seguro ta pone na su propio lugar
Con el corazon.

Hende mas nicisita biaja
Para sinti con hondura.
Hende nicisita anda pa na cine
Para encontra un storia de amor.

Freelipiniana

AT THE WHARF

Under and all around the wharf,
The sea-water is dense and heavy,
Tight like sinews gathering in their strength.
Now, Mama and Papa, you follow
The tidal currents of change.
Held in the earth's grip—
You continue traveling
In the hypnotic chant of eternal time.

In times past
You would take me to this wharf
Making me really wonder
What it was that you liked about this place.
There was never anyone
To send off to the ships
Going to fabulous places.
But you kept coming here,
And here you tarried, contentedly,
Eating tough roasted corn
Hawked by vendors,
And watching the sundry men
Who had nothing to do but fish
For coastline swordfish—
Small, scrawny, and full of sharp bones.

But the wind that blows here,
Comes all the way, perhaps,
From the nearby island of Basilan
And from many other places behind it
Till the other end of the world,
And crosses the sea towards this place,
This wharf in Zamboanga.
And look at the sky's grandeur here,
Adorned with its long
And distant spray of stars,
Confirmed in its ancientness,
And the sea that is really
Not much younger
Meeting in the distance
Lighted by the moon
Along the secret line
Of the horizon.
The sea embraces the islands.
Water, air, sky and earth together

Hold each other in place.

Perhaps this is why, Ma, Pa,
You were often here:
To feel the pulse of things elemental
And connected with the infinite.
Please forgive this child of yours
Who could not fathom your feelings,
And who has, for much of his life,
Kept himself away
From things that are large, ancient,
And ageless—
Things that ever
Move the tides of our blood,
And have kept the heart securely
In its proper place.

We do not have to travel
To feel deeply.
We do not have to go to the theater
To find a story of love.

FreeLipiniana

UN PASIO TROPA DE MAGA DIUTAY NUBE

Ya abuya lang 'se sila na bista
Cay na di suyo subida el sol
Ya tupa con su maga rayo
El entero del aquel parte del cielo
Donde ese grupo asemblao
Daw mapa de archipelago na aire
Arriba de estos maga monte del norte.
Como tamen sila un bulada junto-junto
De maga pajarito—
O kahâ soplada lang del resuello.
Ya man encuentro 'se sila con el luz subiente
Na un colision quieto, sangrino,
Y si sumiso su hechura
Na noche que ahora pa lang ya bolbe,
Un blando tantiada lang del sol,
Ya aparece ya sila, daw magic.
Talli sila, un butada de maga nube diutay
Que ya hace bibo el sol.

Pero no hay pa pasa un media hora
Ta perde ya el color--
Primero ta queda palido,
Acabar, blanco ya lang.
Y poco-poco ta'n kalayat ya sila na biento—
Pero bibo pa siempre,
Talli pa gayot, tiene presencia,
Incluido na maga birada
De maga estrellas
Amo que maskin padecido ya ahora,
Maga sol siempre que ya queda ya alma,
Ta mobe siempre daw maga bision
Na detras del arde luz del sol.

A SLOW FLIGHT OF CLOUDLETS

They suddenly came into view
Because as it rose, the sun
Hit with its rays the entire portion
Of that part of the sky
Where that group was assembled,
Looking like a map
Of an archipelago floating in the air
Above these mountains of the north.
They also look like a flight
Of little birds in close formation—
Or an exhalation.
They met the rising light
In a quiet, bloody collision-
And though they may have looked subdued
In the night that has just departed,
One soft touch of sun
And they magically appeared.
There they were, flung cloudlets
That the sun brought to life.

But in barely half an hour,
They have begun to lose color--
First pallid, then plain white.
Slowly they fly apart in the wind,
Though still alive, really still there, a presence,
Included in the circuits of the stars
That while now quite faded,
Are still suns, though turned into spirits,
Still moving, like ghostly visions,
Behind the blaze of sunlight.

UN ADIBINANSA

(Para con W. Pater)

Si tiene man con ese ya hace,
Siguro tiene como maga mano del biento
Que amo ta suba para porma
Con el maga marijada—hende ‘se aire—
Hende ‘se biento lang—y si el Dios
El ya crea el todo y ya dale todo,
Tiene maga mano adentro
Que ta masa con el maga flores
Ajuntao na de aton pondo
Para desde alli subi el humedo presco
No hay ni un poquito olor de uling.
Hende ‘se creao ya, kita ‘se el ta hace.

Hende se aire lang, hende ‘se maga flores,
Hende lang repleccion del canto del maga pajaro
Sino vino, resuello de perfume consagrao
Que ta entra para rellena de prescura
Con el espacio del Imaginacion,
Y para entra na corazon
Y sigui na corrida del sangre
Un bonito espiritu
Para nabega alli.

Si Dios man ‘se ya dale,
Ya debilbe ya kita ‘se con Ele,
Para espanta ‘Le--doblao :
El alegria y el pena
Cambiao y encantao.

A RIDDLE

(for W. Pater)

If at all it was created,
It must have been by hands such as those
Of the wind that shapes waves.
It is not air—it is not merely wind—
And if it is true that God
Created all and gave all,
There are hands within
That blend the flowers
Gathered at our very depths
Whence a fresh mist rises
Without the slightest hint of burning.
That was never created--
We make it all by ourselves.

It is not just air, not flowers—
Not just a reflection of the singing of birds
But wine, breath of consecrated fragrance
That enters to renew with freshness
Imagination's space
And allows a beautiful spirit
Into the heart,
To follow the flow of the blood
And travel there.

If God gave it,
We have given it back to surprise Him
With double the amount:
Joy and pain transformed, enchanted.

EL HERMOSURA Y EL BERDAD

El hermosura daw, ta habla maga Ingles,
Hasta pellejo lang de ondo.
Hende 'se tupao.
Quita tu con el cuerpo, el laman, el hueso,
Y resbala lang el pelleho paabajo,
Daw tiene quien ta desnuda,
Maskin no hay ni uno.
Si no hay porma, no hay hechura--no hay engaño,
No hay con quien, delicamente, abrassa el cutis.
Adentro del cuerpo
Ta empesa el plano del cuerpo,
Y si tiene ba, el alma pa alli.
Hende ba ta habla sila
Que el dos ojos
Amo el maga bentana del alma?
Pero el maga ojos bonito puede tamen esconde
Con el umalin, el buluk adentro.

Quiere decir el hermosura amo un mascara
Que puede esconde o descubri con el corazon.
Hende todo el bonito bonito costumbre.
Hende todo el buen gente plantudo el corte.
Daw ta man escondihan kita con ese,
Si tiene ba kita gana pa busca.
Pero el engaño amo mismo ta hala.
El hermosura amo mismo ta tenta.
El porma del hermosura ta imbita adentro,
Daw el dentro del de su corazon amo su cueba
Daw el dentro del de su corazon amo su casa,
Y alli el ojos del imaginacion ta mira bision
Que no hay porma, puro ardor, alegria ganadoso—
Mistico, encantao, hymno, maga hutik del cielo.
El que ta dale porma con el mentira, un mentira--
Que ta pretende que tiene pa mas ondo
Que na porma del cuerpo, que el cuerpo,
Que el pelleho.

Pero, amor mio, si no hay tu porma,
Cosa kahâ ay pasa con de mi corazon?

Sigue lang 'se siempre ta busca
Maskin no hay ta esconde na detrás del hermosura—
Maskin pa el escondido
Hende mas bonito que el ta esconde con ele.

BEAUTY AND TRUTH

Beauty, the English say,
Is only skin-deep.
This is not precise.
Take away the body, the flesh, the bone,
And the skin just slithers down
As if someone were disrobing
When there's no one there.
Without shape there is no one to look good, to be alluring,
No one that the skin can softly embrace.
It is within the body
That the body's plans begin—
And if there's any soul remaining,
Within that, too.
Don't they say that the eyes
Are the windows of the soul?
Yet eyes that are beautiful
Can also hide ugliness—the rot within.

That's to say beauty is a mask
That can hide or disclose the heart.
Not all of the beautiful are kind.
Not all kind people have fine features.
It would be a game of hide-and-seek,
If we had energy left for it.
But it is allure that hauls us in.
It is the form beauty takes that we find inviting,
As though the interior of her heart were her cave,
As though the interior of her heart were her house,
And once within it the eyes of the imagination
Is given a vision of a spirit without form,
Made of pure flame, triumphant joy,
Mystical, magical, hymn, whispers of the sky.
That which gives form and shape to a lie is a lie
That makes it appear there is something deeper
Than bodily form, than the body,
Than the skin.

But, my Beloved, if you had no shape,
What would happen to my heart?

It will go on searching
Even if nothing hides behind beauty,
Even if what is hidden
Is not as beautiful as that which hides it.

RUINO DE LOCURAS

Una bes, antes,
Na andada para na Fort Pilar
Alli na bolibard
Cuando no hay pa 'se queda linia de hotel
Que ahora ta tapa ya con el di atun bista
Del isla montañosa de Basilan
(Asul na distancia, grande y plantudo)
Tiene un bariao
Que alli na kanto del aplyaya
Ya manda lebanta un ruino.
Buen idea—
Que si pensa tu en buena mente,
El escogido lugar tupao gayot:
Amo donde quebrao el sangga-agua
Y ta entra el maga marijada
Que soplando pirme de cuanto años,
Ya man cagut 'lli un diutay lagun
Lleno de grande quebrao cemento caido,
Que ya queda daw maga isla
Donde ta queda ya maga sigay,
Y cubrido ya de barbas de lumut.
Entre medio de esos maga pedaso de cemento
Ta entra y sale maga pescadito
Daw na de ila mismo casa.
Alli tamen ta sambulli paparao,
Y con orgullo ta abantia el pescao caballito.

Y el locuras? El picardias?
Cosa galê si no alli mismo,
En prente de ese kalandrakas
De tumbao cemento na pampang del lagun
Que ya man cagut el marijada,
Alli 'le ya manda hace un pantalan concreto,
Y donde 'se ta apuntia para na mar
Ya manda lebanta
Un pilar Griego de estilo Ionia,
Daw un guardia alto ta bisia con el mar--
Con el maga binta y barko
Que ta entra y sale na asul pasada
Entre el Zamboanga
Y el isla de Basilan.

Pilar sin techo, parola de piedra solo,
Sentinel desde otro lugar y tiempo—un alieno—

Lider del nuevo ruino arriba del daan—
Daw el Tiempo ta man awat con ele mismo.
Pero ansina gayot el locuras, no?
Ta hace bira-bira con el cabeza.

Amo se un monumento que ya hace-hace lang,
Un dulce broma que ya transporma con el lugar.
Peke, si ta habla sila, pero si na deberasan lang—bonito--
Tiene pa paunten de molde clasico desde donde ta salta
El agua que estaba pa na monte—
Hende del maga tuburan del Monte Olympus
Si no desde maga altura del Pasonanca
Donde ta sale el probision del agua
Para del entero ciudad desde antes pa.

Del decada sesenta ba aquel o setenta
Cuando ya hace con aquel ruino?
Ta ulbida ya gayot yo.
Cosa ba el mas antes que el antes—
El anciano pa na anciano?
Maka-equiboca gayot.

Pero mira tu con aquel,
Que modo que el quien man 'se ya crea locuras
Alli na kanto del mar
Que no hay mas ahora si no linia de maga hotel
Amo el daw ya dale arreglo na kalandrakas
De quebrao-quebrao cemento y piedra,
Na un vision que ta pidi subi—
Ta eboca,
Maskin no hay pa gane tene
Un tiempo de gloria, un gran history.
Aquel alto pilar de stilo elegante,
Pintao blanco daw mármol—
(Daw multo de mármol)
Solo lang como un obelisk
Ta para abajo del sol del Sur,
Orgullo concreto, arriba donde
Ta man timpak el kanto del aplaya
Cada entra el maga marijada.
Aquel un aparicion de un autor pillo
Y encondido—y galante,
Ya gasta para hace un broma
Que maskin pa quebrantao ya todo
Permanente el punto--
Ri man tu o hende, imbentao o hende,

Talli siempre el vision
De un gran tiempo que no hay mas ya
Maskin que habla sila que no hay gayot pa.

Freelipiniana

A TRICK RUIN

Once, long ago,
Beside the road you take
To get to Fort Pilar,
By the boulevard
Before it became a line of hotels
That blocked our view
Of the mountainous island of Basilan
(Its massive grandeur blue in the distance)
There was a madman,
Who right beside the sea
Had a ruin built.
It was a good idea
When you think of it,
The location just perfect,
Right by the spot where the breakwater
Had been breached by waves
That for many years had bashed the shore,
Carving out of it a small lagoon
Full of the broken pieces of concrete
Fallen into it, looking like islands,
Encrusted with shellfish
And covered with beards of seaweed.
As though quite at home in the water
Between the broken pieces,
The fish came in and out.
Here, too, proudly erect in the water,
The little sea-horse advanced.

And the trick? The practical joke?
Nothing less than that on the very spot
Fronting all the clutter
Of fallen concrete, on the bank of the lagoon
That waves had dug out,
He had a concrete wharf constructed
And on its seaward tip erected
A Greek pillar in the Ionic mode,
Set up there like a tall guardian of the sea,
Watching the boats and ships that pass--
That enter and leave the blue passage
Between Zamboanga
And the island of Basilan.

Pillar without roof, lone light-house of stone,
Sentinel from another place and time—alien—

Leader of the new ruin built above the old—
As though Time were mocking itself.
But that's in the very nature of foolishness—right?
It turns your head around.

Such was the monument—a fabrication,
A sweet joke that transformed the place.
A fake, people would say, but if truth be told—splendid.
It had a fountain to go with it, of classic mold, from which sprung
Water that came all the way from the mountains—
Not from the springs of Mount Olympus
But from the heights of Pasonanca that from earliest times
Has been the source of water for the entire city.

Was it in the sixties or the seventies
That that ruin was built?
I really can't remember anymore.
But what is older than old,
More ancient than ancient?
It's really just so confusing.

Yet look at how
Whoever it was
Who fashioned that trick by the sea,
That now is no more than a strip of hotels,
Seemed to have lent some order to the chaos
Of broken concrete and stone
By a vision that pleads emergence,
That evokes
--Even if such has never been—
A time of glory, a great history.
That tall, elegant pillar painted white like marble
(Like a ghost of marble)
Stood all alone like an obelisk
Under the southern sun:
Concrete pride above the bank
That eroded with every wave that rushed in.
This was an apparition, a trick by a plucky
And anonymous author—
Generous too,
Spending so much for a joke
That asserts that even if,
In the end,
Things do break apart,
The point of the argument survives:
The vision, invented or not--

Of a great past that is no more,
Even if some would say
That it has never been.

Freelipiniana

“PRIDAM”

No hay gat ‘se antes.
Habla sila amo daw ‘se
El “libertad.”
Pero el maga Español
Ta latiga kanaton antes.
“Libertad?”
Calle lang ‘se
Na distrito de Tetuan.
Nuebo ga’t palabra el “pridam.”
Tiene tu pridam.
Tiene tu pridam habla
Maskin cosa tu quiere habla, come,
Corre-corre daw bata—
Hende contigo regaña el padre,
Ni el pulis.
Tiene tu pridam.
Cosa ba ‘se na Chabacano?
No hay pa ‘se palabra
Cay antes no hay ga’t pridam.
No hay pa gane ‘le ‘quel nace,
Porque man dale nombre?

“FREEDOM”

Nothing like it in the past.
They say it's what the word “libertad” means.
But the Spanish were the ones
Who used to whip us.
“Libertad?”
That's just a street in Tetuan district.
Freedom is a brand new word.
You have freedom.
You have the freedom to say
Whatever you want to say, to eat,
To run around like a child—
Neither the priest nor the policeman
Will scold you.
You have freedom.
What is that in Chabacano?
There was no word for it yet
Because in the past there never was freedom.
It wasn't even born yet—
Why give it a name?

DESAPARECIDO NA BASILAN

(Para con *Dito*)

Si entra tu na mismo interior del isla,
Lliga tu donde ta esconde el rio puro
Que ta cae desde el altura del maga monte,
Brillando na sol, ta'n pisik daw perlas na ojos,
Y ta abaja basiendo na un pul
Asulao del su mismo hondura.

Ta imagina ya yo con este cay libre ya yo
Imbenta con el hechura del ese maravoso vista
Cay no hay mas man si Expedito, primo hermano mayor,
Para corecta conmigo cay ele man 'se ya mira
Y ya pone cuento conmigo—cay un dia
Ya oyi ya lang yo que ele ya desaparece
Na isla del de su nacimiento
El mi primo de manada bonito cuento,
Y ya sigue junto con ele perdido tamen el maga storia
Si no siguro el poco que ta acorda pa mi mahina memoria,
Una de todo el su recoleccion de un hermosa
Caida de agua que ya mira 'le cuando solterito pa 'le
Alli adentro gayot del isla de Basilan.

Un dia, ya perde lang 'se maestro de maga bata,
Siguro matao del maga bandido
Que ya mata tamen con su compañero,
Un capitan del barangay,
De su uban na aquel pesca de muerte.

Ya encontra con el cuerpo de su amigo,
Pero nunca con el de suyo.
Siguro ya pone 'le bonito storia
Que ya encanta kanila.
Mas bueno man gayot el storia
Que el ransom que sen lang man
Y hende durable.
Baka hasta ahora ta cuida pa con ele
Como el Sultan con Scheherezade.
Pero lampas ya ahora de ciento y un noche
Desde ya saca sila con ele.

Ya lliba kahâ con ele
Alli adentro na dianguel del isla?
Ansina era ya sucede
Para ya puede sila mira con de su sangre,

Sangre que anad corre
Entre el maga risas del maga bata,
Sangre de joven siempre, presco—
Asul pa siguro, de un herencia puro,
Ta cae na agua
Y ta hace con aquel mas puro.

El recuerdo que ta lliba-lliba yo,
El cuento estaba con ele que ta conta yo
No puede maskin lang principia llena de luz,
Hende aclarece como un madrogada
Si no hay el memoria del sangre—y joven sangre—
Que amo ya dale vida con el dos ojos de ese hombre
Cuando antes solterito pa
Mirando, con su corazon ta salta,
Con el milagro que amo un caida del rio
Que ta basia desde mismo na cielo
Alli adentro na isla de Basilan.

Alli na interior del isla, su muerte
Y el maga memoria del su juventud
Amo el ya man junto na centro:
El porest y el memoria del porest
Que ya abraza con ele y su muerte
Presco como un caida
Que ta empesa pa lang cae
Desde el cielo de hondo asul
Para na agua del pul que asulao del cielo
Y del de suyo mismo hondura.
Ajuntao abajo
El principio y el fin del storia.

VANISHED IN BASILAN

(for *Dito*)

If you get into the heart of the island,
You will reach the place where the pure river hides
And falls from the heights of mountains,
Glimmering in the sun, spilling pearls in your eyes,
Pouring as it descends
Into a pool made blue by its own depth.

I am imagining all this because I am now free
To invent how such a marvelous sight was
Because Expedito, older first cousin, is no longer around
To correct me, he who saw it all and told me about it,
But is no longer here because one day in the island of his birth
He suddenly vanished, my cousin of the many wonderful stories
That are now lost along with him, except for the few
That my poor memory can still recall,
Foremost of which was his remembrance of a waterfall
That he had seen when he was just a lad
In the very heart of the island of Basilan.

One day, this man who taught children, just disappeared,
Perhaps killed by bandits
Who had also killed his companion,
A barangay captain,
In that fishing trip of death.

His friend's body was found,
But his own body, never.
Perhaps he told them a beautiful story
That cast a spell on them.
A story is far better
Than mere ransom money
Which won't last too long.
Perhaps they still keep him
Like the Sultan kept Scheherezade.
But it's way past a thousand and one nights
Since they took him away.

Could it be that they took him
Into the jungles of the island?
I wish they had done so,
For then they would have seen his blood,
Blood that was used to flow
Between the banks of the laughter of children,

Blood that retained its youthful freshness,
Perhaps blue, even, of inherited purity,
Falling into the water
To make it purer still.

This keepsake that I take with me
Wherever I go--his account
Of an experience that I now recount
Could not even begin to fill with light,
Could not clarify like a dawning
Were it not remembered in the blood—young blood,
At that—that gave life to those two eyes
Of that man who was yet a lad
Looking with a leaping heart
At the miracle of a falling river
Pouring down from the sky itself
At the heart of the island of Basilan.

Deep in the island, his death
And the memories of his youth converged—
The forest and the memories of the forest
That embraced him and his death
Fresh as the waterfall
That had just begun to fall
From a sky of deep blue
Into the pool of water made blue by the sky
And by its very own depth.
Gathered below
Are the beginning and end of the story.

TIENE BA TU TA ESCONDE, PANG?

(para con Armando B. Macansantos, Sr.)

Tiene ba tu cosa ta esconde, Pang?
Pues, no mas ya tu man huya conmigo,
Cay cosa man yo puede dale mira
De pakabaliante, de grandeza de corazon,
De saber y experiencia?
No hay yo calidad
Que hende queda diutay
Si hace junto del de tuyo.

Ni no sabe gane yo baila!

Cuando una bes ya pregunta yo con Mama
Cosa contigo el una ga't 'le ya gusta,
"Bonito 'le baila," habla 'le,
Con dulce sonrisa de recuerdo,
Como daw na porma de tu cuerpo
Mobiendo na mucho clase
De corte y angulo,
Amo el ya hace contigo encantao, guapo.

Amo kaha lang 'se?
Cosa pa tu ta esconde?

*Trompo que t'an bira-bira na centro del de tu cuerpo
Que ta sigui, como el eje del mundo
Na humba del birada, na musica
Del maga planeta y maga estrella.*

Guapo tamen tu siguro—basta lang ta mobe,
No lang descansa, cay si hende ta man bira-bira
Daw caido el cuerpo, daw ya tupa bala—
Sapao el color del carillo.
Pero dipisil contigo tupa!
Poreso siguro ya escapa tu muerte
Na maga Japon.
Mucho gayot ya muri na guerra mundial,
Y mas mucho pa ya muri
Na invasión del Americano
Mas antes pa que aquel.
Bien dificil deja bibo.

No hay cine na tiempo del Japon.
Pero sigurao yo que secreto-secreto
Ta baila ustedes dos.

Tu ya queda Fred Astaire,
Y si Mama ya queda Ginger Rogers.
Ta baila siempre ustedes
Como na tiempo del paz.
Alli ustedes ya saca poder, un trago
Desde na paunten del olvido,
Un serum que ta entra na sangre
Para apacigua con el puersa
Que era ay machaca con el corazon.

T'an pitik-pitik lang el maga pies,
Y tiene bes ta man lutao, ta bula,
Daw si apu de libiano—
No hay sospecha ningunos
Que de tu maga pies ta puede pisa tierra,
Y ta cae tu mano na laman
Con otro clase de pesadez.

Cosa tu ya mira alrededor de tuyo
Na tiempo del guerra mundial?
Hende kaha na maga cuerpo t'an arrinking
Na golpe del maga tiro?
Testigo siempre tu, bailando man
Na musica del bala, maga putuk
Del aquel maga estrella na cuerpo.
Cosa tu puede habla acerca de ese crimen?

Pero no mas ya gasta ni un palabra.
Ya sale ustedes bibo di Mama
Na cine del bida.
Y acabar el guerra ya nace yo
Con quien ya cae el mano pesao
Con el pesades del rabia, tristesa, y miedo mesclao
Desde un corazon que ay padece ya lang
Si oyi pa na bos de paka-aburrido.
Cuanto sila ya mata, quien-quien ya muri?
El hermosura del Zamboanga
Desnuda y cuchinao, el laman
Penetrao del bayoneta—
Ya desperta tu desde na pisadilla actual
Y ya labanta hende quemao desde el impierno,
Y tu ya baila.

Baila, Papa, baila junto con Mama—
Maga peyri ustedes dos, escapao del maga garganta
Del kapre amarillo no hay pelo,

Del kapre blanco mapelo.
Baila, man lutao na aire el vida.
Para na olvido el vida—
Si el vida hende ta acorda, el vida ta queda mapuersa,
El vida ta sonri, espantao na rico regalo
Que amo el vida.
El vida ta dale renacimiento.
Donde 'le saca puersa si no con ele mismo?

El vida ta sigui na ritmo del mundo,
Del maga planeta y maga estrella.
El vida encantao.

Freelipiniana

DO YOU KEEP A SECRET, PAPA?

(for Armando Macansantos, Sr.)

Do you keep a secret, Papa?
If you do, don't be ashamed of it—
Whatever can I boast
Of courage, of greatness of heart,
Of wisdom and experience?
I possess no quality
That would not look diminished
When set side by side with yours.

And I can't even dance!

Once when I asked Mama
What was the first thing about you
That made her like you,
"He was a beautiful dancer," she said
Smiling in sweet recollection,
As though the shapes your body made,
Segueing into many varied
Stances and angles
Turned you into an enchanted being,
And made you look handsome.

But is that all there was to it?
Is there something more?

*Top that turns at your body' center,
That follows, as the earth's axis does,
The hum the spin makes, the music
Of the planets and the stars.*

You might have been handsome,
But only if you kept moving,
Only if you didn't stop to rest.
If the spinning stopped,
Your body looked famished, fallen in,
As though you had been shot—
Your cheeks sapped of their color.
But really, you were hard to hit,
And that way you avoided being killed by the Japs.
So many people died in the world war.
Even more died
In the American invasion
That happened long before.
Survival is hard.

There were no movies
Under Japanese rule,
But I am absolutely sure
That secretly you danced.
You became Fred Astaire,
And Mama became Ginger Rogers.
You danced as you did before the war:
From this you drew power, a swallow
From the fountain of forgetting,
A serum that entered your blood
To quell the force
That would have shattered the heart.

Feet flicked about easily,
And sometimes floated, and flew
With such elfin lightness
No one suspected then
That your feet could land on solid ground,
Or that your hand could fall on flesh
With remarkable heaviness.

What did you see happening around you
All through that war?
Weren't there bodies that jerked back
From the impact of bullets?
Surely you were witnesses even as you danced
To the music of bullets, the explosions
Of those stars in the body.
What can you say about that crime?

But never mind, don't waste a word on it.
You made it through life's movie,
And after the war I was born,
I on whom descended the hand
Heavy with the weight of anger,
Sorrow and fear all mixed,
From a heart that would have simply perished
Had it listened to the voice of despair.
How many did they kill—who were those who died?
The beauty of Zamboanga
Disrobed and sullied, the flesh
Penetrated by the bayonet.
You woke from this actual nightmare
And got up unburnt from hell--
And you danced.

Dance Papa, dance with Mama—
You are fairies, you have escaped
From out the throats
Of the hairless yellow ogre,
Of the hairy white ogre,
Dance, life will float on air—
Life sends us towards forgetting—
If life does not remember, life grows stronger,
Life smiles, amazed by the rich gift
That is life.
From life comes rebirth—where else
Could life draw strength but from itself?

Life follows the rhythm of the world,
The planets and the stars.
Life is enchanted.

Freelipiniana

NA PUNTA FLECHA

Imposible esta presco el pescao
Na gula, na pakaharagan del ojos
Que ta mira con el aplaya como tresiu
Del Conde de Monte Cristo.

Alla na Punta Flecha antes,
Na tiempo cuando no hay pa yo nace,
Habla mi Tio Naning, ele,
Y su manga hermano
Ta anda na aplaya para pesca--con balde.

Siguro aquel maga pescao ta man cordon
Arrededor del de ila maga pierna,
Ta admira con esos maga troso morable,
Y con esos maga ojos daw maga blando sol
Que ta bisia kanila—cosa ya gayot! Que maravoso!
Daw ya abaja estaba de azul cielo maga dios,
Que con dedo que ta mobe daw rabo,
Ta palpa kanila, ta hace calam
Con el de ila maga diutay barriga,
Ta juga kanila, ta hace cariño.

Aquellos maga gigante
Que ta brilla el maga cabeza
Daw arde peguera
Alabao del maga pescao como manga anak del sol.

Y ya bira esos maga dios
Hende ta lliba sihut—
Balde lang para man hakut
Con el maga pescao que ni uno ya sale.
Daw ya tupa kanila saway-saway.

Pensaba siguro sila
Lliba kanila na cielo.
Pero embes de aquel, ya lliba kanila
Na aire abierto donde sila ya sopoca.

Tiene de ila ya guinda na impierno
De kawa, lleno de ta irbi aceite,
Pero el mas mucho ya queda sahao y saliao—
Ya deja abajo del sol para seca
Cay bien mucho sila, sobra ya gayot.

Hende kanila puede acaba come
Na un dia.

Tiempo que bien inocente—
Glorioso na un maravoso estraño,
Poco el gente, mucho el pescao.
El cielo mismo
No sabe cosa ta sucede na tierra.
El sol ta hace lang abaja
De su calor na tierra
Donde el maga inocente
Ta seca en buena mente,
Y con quien el sol
Ta hace puga, daw ta hace sale el dugâ
Del de ila maga brillante color.

Freelipiniana

AT FLECHA POINT

It's impossible for fish to keep fresh
When confronted by gluttony, the greed of eyes
That look at the sea as it would the treasure
Of the Count of Monte Cristo.

Long ago, at Flecha point,
Long before I was born
(As Uncle Naning recalled)
Together with his brothers
He went to the seashore
Bringing pails to catch the fish with.

Likely, the fish that cordoned their legs
Came to admire such moving timbers,
And those eyes, as well, that watched them
Like gentle suns. Wow, how marvelous!
It was as though they emanated
From the blue sky—those gods who would,
With fingers that moved like tails,
Touch them, tickle their bellies,
Played with them—petted them.

Those giants,
Whose heads burned with so much shining,
Were lauded by the fish
As sons of the sun.

Those gods returned,
Not bringing nets, no—
Just pails to haul in the fish
Who never left their places,
As though a spell
Had been cast on them.

Perhaps they thought
They were being taken to heaven.
Instead, they were brought
Out into the open air where they suffocated.

Some of them ended up in the hell
Of pots full of boiling oil,
But most were sliced and salted
And left in the sun to dry.
There were just too many, so much in excess.

You couldn't eat them all in one day.

A time so innocent—
Glorious in marvelous strangeness—
Very few people, so much fish.
Heaven itself
Did not know what was happening on earth
Where the innocents
Dried up pretty well,
With the sun squeezing out
The sap of their brilliant colors.

Freelipiniana

ALUMBRAHAN

“Si tene ya tu amor conmigo habla lang tu—
Maskin hende pa ahora—espera lang yo.”
Amo ‘le ya habla--pero como na biento.

Cay cuando man con ele querè si hende querè?
Maskin casa pa, maskin bibi pa junto cien años,
Si hende lliga, hende; si hende dale, no hay gayot que dale.
Sin no hay gana, no hay calor—no hay amor.

Cay el amor ta conoce dayun con quien ‘le quiere.
Amo ga’t ‘se el positibo na amor.
Que si busca pa ‘le ropa para muda con ese
Para lang esconde con el umalin
Que ta pensa ‘le ta mira’le--
El oscuridad que ta tapa ‘le
Cay no hay el luz
Que quiere ‘le tene adentro—
Bueno pa muri ya lang.

El luz, maskin ta sale desde adentro,
Ta anda siempre con todo ardor paapuera.
Cuando, cuando ta man tupahan el dos luz?

Pero el amor del nana con su anak, luz.
El amor del su anak con ele, luz.
El de ese clase calor
Amo ta dale kanaton bida.

MUTUAL ILLUMINATION

“If the time comes when you begin to love me,
Please tell me—I can wait that long.”
That was what he said, as though speaking to the wind.

For how could she love if she did not love?
Even if they got married, even if they lived together
A hundred years—if it won't come, it won't,
If nothing is given, then there is nothing to give.
If there are no feelings, no heat--there is no love.

In an instant love recognizes the beloved.
That's what is most positive about love.
For if she had to look for clothes to dress things up,
To hide the ugly truth
That she feels sure she sees
As that darkness that she conceals
Because the light she longs for
Cannot be found within—
It would be better to die.

Although it comes from within, light
Flows ever outward ardently.
When, oh when, do two beams of light meet?

But the love of the mother for the child is light.
The child's love for the mother is light.
Such is the warmth
That gives us all life.

DEBOLBIDA

Todo sila ta deja kanaton,
Ta sigue na corriente del maga hora,
Del maga dia, maga año.
Tiene ya muri ya,
Tiene no sabe kita cosa ya ya pasa—
El casa leña, el cuerpo tierra,
El mismo memoria agua y biento.

Mas makamiedo si pensa kita
Que el mismo silla donde kita ta sinta
Ay destronca solo-solo y bira
Na palo, debolbido--na un segundo
Establisao otra bes el porest,
Y el de aton cuerpo cae na espacio
Donde ya desaparece ya el piso,
El cemento ya bolbe ya na monte,
Y el arena na aplaya. El pesades
Del buli ay guia kanaton paabajo.

Freelipiniana

RETURNING

They all leave us,
Following the flow of hours,
Days, years,
Some already dead,
Some we have no information on--
The house turned into firewood,
The body into earth, memory itself,
Turned into water and wind.

Even more terrifying, when one considers it,
Is if the chair we are sitting on
Dislocates itself and turns back
Into timber—and in a second
The forest reestablishes itself,
And our bodies fall through the space
From which the floor has disappeared,
The cement having returned to the mountain
And the sand to the shore. The weight
Of our butts will guide us downward.

UN ESTRAÑO

El que tene kita miedo
Amo si el silla, mesa, kama,
Cada día ya
Daw ya sale de otro lugar—
Daw no hay ya sinta, come, dormi
Ni una bes kanila—
Ta mira contigo
Desde maskin cosa de ila parte
Sospechosamente,
Impacientemente.
No mas nega.
Ya sucede ya ‘se.

Freelipiniana

A STRANGENESS

What we should be afraid of
Is that time when chair, table, bed,
For days on end
Seem as though they came
From some foreign place,
As though no one had ever sat,
Eaten, or slept on them.
They look at you
From whatever part,
Suspiciously,
Impatiently.
Don't deny it.
This has happened before.

Freelipiniana

STRUCTURA SUMIDO

“El miedo na Señor amo donde ta principia el buen juicio.”

Escondido el miedo adentro del laman,
Na hondura del manga hueso,
Pero apenas punciuana, ta brilla dayun
Na un pitik del swich adentro del ceso.
Daw haula hecho de barra cone-conectao,
Ta arde ‘se con luz prio que ta emana
Desde un cueba de hielo.
Este ba el altar que ta imbia
Resos de señal que ta man kislap
Paapuera na vacancia del cosmo?
Este ba el Arco donde ya pone
El pundacion secreto del mensahe divino?

Tiene bes ta sirbe de patada para corre,
Pero alguna bes no sirbe nada ya,
Daw para espera ya lang cuhi con uno
Que ay muri ya lang cay no puede mas mobe,
Paralisao na un pisadilla,
Desesperao, con ojos palido.

Baliskat, cay siguro ese un tactica animal
Del de aton cuerpo, automatico.
Para hende con este hace apas
Ta pretende muerte—daw un loco gayot.
Pero ta sigui ‘se siempre
Con el mandato del vida
Que amo tamen siguro el mandato del Dios—
Un estructura sumido que kita ta obedece,
Para con cosa no hay pa imbenta
Ni un palabra humano.

Papa, este siguro
El berdadero secreto del gente,
Un clase de mando
Que maskin no hay pa pronuncia,
Ya man suut ya adentro kanaton:
Un silencio
Que entendido ya,
No necesita señal o símbolo.

Pero porque yo bungul el laman
Con pellejo matibay ya maskin bata pa.
Con cinturon ya hace entra conmigo el miedo

Para queda yo lediao con ele,
Para empesa ya de mi educación na “buen juicio.”
E si bibo pa, dinigrido lang
Ay lebanta lang ‘se.
Desde un marinada de golpe ay abuya
Un buen gente
Na un penomeno
De renacimiento.

Freelipiniana

INFRA STRUCTURE

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Fear is hidden in the body's flesh,
And in the depth of the bones,
But being stirred, it gleams at once,
From a flick of the switch in the skull.
Like a cage of interconnected bars,
It glows with a cold light that emanates
From a cave of ice.
Is this the altar that sends
Prayer signals that flash
Toward the cosmic spaces?
Is this the Ark which keeps
The founding secret of the divine message?

Sometimes it serves as a kick to spur flight.
But sometimes it serves no other purpose
Than to keep one waiting to be captured,
To die because immobilized,
Paralyzed in a nightmare,
Desperate, with a blank stare.

Ironically, such a reaction of the body
Is likely its automatic animal response.
To elude capture it plays dead—like a genuine fool.
But this accords well
With the laws of life
Which are perhaps the laws of God—
A structure sunk deep down
Which we obey, for which no human word
Has yet been invented.

Papa, perhaps this
Is, truly, the secret of humanity,
A command,
That though unspoken,
Has sunk deep into us:
A silence
Long understood,
Having no need for sign or symbol.

But why was my flesh deaf,
Tough-skinned since childhood.
With a belt was driven in
Fear, to familiarize me with it, to begin

My education in “wisdom.”
*“Well, if the guy is still alive, just bruised,
He will be back on his feet.
From a marinade of blows will emerge
A good man,
In a marvel of rebirth.”*

Freelipiniana

MI NANA, TA LE

(para na recuerdo de Peregrina Catis Macansantos)

“Le duro,” habla tu conmigo,
Y ya abri yo mi libro mas ancho
Na di mi leccion—
Si cosa man ‘quel, ya olvida ya yo.
Pero ya le yo,
Pihando con el maga palabra
Uno-uno,
Daw el tiempo andando
Segundo por segundo,
El tiempo na una nota
No hay tono, na un raya
No hay culicut,
Hende ta crisi plores
Sino derecho-derecho,
Bungul y apa, y campante
Na su pakatrapiento.

No hay pa yo acaba,
Habla tu conmigo: “Dale tu conmigo.”
Y ya dale yo con dos mano
Pa arriba contigo
Que ta mira yo daw un torre—
Y desde alli na tu altura,
Arriba un poco el tuyo boca
Na libro del tercer grado,
Ya le tu.
Donde kaha ya origina
Aquel maga marijada de tono?
Hende cancion pero como cancion.
Conversada pero musica,
Nacido entero, dulce y lleno,
Maga palabra que todo tiene manga nota,
Palabra que hende mas palabra
Sino vida que ya queda sunor—
Sunor que hende mas sunor
Sino vida que amo mismo su resuello,
Ta sigue junto na mobimiento
Del realidad natural,
Hende derecho-derecho
Si no marijadando.

MY MOTHER, READING

(To the memory of Peregrina Catis Macansantos)

“Read aloud,” you said,
And I opened my book wider
Where my assigned reading was—
Though what it was about
I have forgotten.
But I read,
Staring at each word
One after another
Like time passing second by second,
Time moving on one note
That was toneless, in a line
Without twists and turns,
Where no flowers grew—
Just plain and straight,
Deaf and dumb and content
With being tawdry.

Before I had finished, you said,
“Hand it over to me,”
And I lifted the book up
With my two hands
Toward what seemed
Like a towering height
From where
With your mouth showing a bit
Above the book for the third grade,
You read.
Where did the waves of sound
Originate?
Not song but song-like,
Speech, yes, but music, too,
Born whole, sweet and full,
Words each of which had tones,
Words that were no longer words
But life become sound,
Sound no longer sound
But life that simply was
Her very breath,
Following the flow of natural things,
Not straight out
But moving like a wave.

EL OSCURICIADA

(por mi maestra Erlinda C. Espinosa)

Cada lliga el tarde
Na su punta de cansancia,
Ta oscuricia.
El sol que ta man uput
Hasta un pedacito de brasa ya lang 'le,
Ta deja en paz con mar y tierra.
El calor pesao ta subi ya na aire,
Y ta abaja ya el sereno
Para apresca con su humedo
El piedra y sacate.
Na, amo ya ga't este el entrada del noche.
Ta sinti ya kita empesa el sueño,
Y todo quiere ya descansa.

Si quien man ta hace pa duro di su cuerpo,
O ta hace pa abuya su culado,
Rebelde man 'le o muchacho—
Con el uno debe pone na preso,
Pero con el otro deja abri
Su carcel de casa
Para pasea abajo na techo del cielo
Que na un ratito ya lang
Ay llena ya de estrellas.

Hende este como imbento lang
Que un dios caprichoso
Ya pensa hace un dia,
Y talli ya dayun ya abuya.
No, cada dia ga't este ta sucede,
Pundiao ya na movimiento combinao
Del tierra y sol.
Hende mas tu necesita alcanza
Na pampang mismo del mundo
Donde ta abaja el sol.
Aquí kanaton mismo ta lliga
El oscuriciada
Que desde antes hasta ahora
Ta lliba paz.

TWILIGHT

(for my teacher, Erlinda C.Espinosa)

Whenever the afternoon
Reaches its point of weariness,
Twilight begins.
The sun
That has shrunk into a tiny ember
Leaves in peace both sea and land.
The heavy heat now climbs the air,
As darkness descends
To freshen with dew
Stone and grass.
This truly marks the entry of night.
We begin to sense the coming of sleep,
And everything desires rest.

Whoever hardens his body still
Or flexes his muscles, whether rebel or servant,
Jail the one, but allow the other
To open the door of his prison-house,
And walk leisurely under the roof of the sky
That in a little while will fill with stars.

This is not a mere fancy,
Something that a capricious god
Thought up one day
And brought suddenly to being.
No, this occurs day after day,
It is founded deep in the combined movement
Of the earth and the sun.
You need not travel
To the very edge of the earth
Where the sun goes down.
Twilight comes to us,
Twilight that from then till now
Has brought us peace.

CRUZANDO CON EL RIO

(na Arena Blanco)

Madrogada prio estancao
Que no quiere mas queda dia—
Cosa esos maga nube
Que ta cubri con el sol?
Talli ba 'quel kita
Adentro na un sigay,
Daw armor de gigante tortuga
Con un blancura sinisao?
Y el rio, na de su templa de color,
Daw ya sale na ese mismo
Alto dindin de nube blankisco
Que ta detene con el sol.
Hende monte el ya cuida con ese
Si no nube ta basia corriente mapuklá.
Escondido maga porest alla lejos—
Daw todo lang gayot nube masucio.
El rio que espeso y inchao
Color de leche mesclao con lodo,
Espeso como el serrao silencio.

Ta sinta 'quel kame de mi tata na binta,
Cruzando con el rio,
El de amon detrás, na direccion
Del de amon destinacion.
Na, con quien man gale kame pija el ojos
Sin no contigo?
Tu el ta man saguan, con quien kame ya paga
Para lliba kanamon
Desde un punto hasta na otro
Del aquel madrogada cuhido na trampa.

Bien claro yo contigo ta acorda
Siguro cay dificil olvida que un batâ
Amo el ta lliba kanamon
Cruza el rio
Que silencio ta man abinida
Hasta pinalmente man choke
Con el crisiente mar.

Hende mas yo ahora ta acorda
El razon que talla kame de mi tata,
Y porque kame necesita cruza.
Tapao ya 'se del olvido,

Daw talla na detrás del nube—
Hende como el madrogada arrestao
Donde tu talla na centro de aquel
Como un retrato
Que hasta ahora taqui pa conmigo.
Porque kahâ yo ta cuida con este?

Aquel tiempo cuando ya cruza kame,
Bata pa lang yo
Y necesita guia y proteccion de mi tata,
Quien, si cae man yo na agua
Sigurao ay sambulli
Para salva con su anak,
Y amo el ta dale ropa para usa
Para maskin ta cruza lang kame rio
Plantudo siempre— no debe hace muja con el camisa.
Donde kahâ de tu tata aquel mismo tiempo?
Donde kahâ 'le
Cuando ta aprende pa lang tu camina?
Ele kahâ ya enseña contigo
Usa saguan?

Si malisut contempla, mas dificil mira
Entero el cruzada
Que modo ta agarra con el palo el palito,
Pakilaya ta crisi culado na bukuk,
Pakilaya ta sonri sumiso, divertido,
Observando kanamon que plantudo el camisa,
Planchao el pantalón y ta brilla el sapatos,
Con pelo bien peinao ta cruza con el rio.
Ya buga un poquito con el prieldad
El quieto ardor del de tu cara
Que maskin diutay lang el sonrisa,
Daw igual na un deberasan madrogada
Que ta hace empesa con el dia.

Abuyao man el linia del su maga hueso,
Bata siempre aquel y bibo, ta subi y baja
Su pecho que placo como pajarito.
Asigurao vida aquel--
Ta esta bibo solo na aire.
Malisut gayot aquel situación.

Ta pensa yo ahora,
Man mirahan pa kaha kita olê?
Pero si yo ganê viejo ya,

Siempre tu cerca ya tamen na bejes—
Si taqui pa tu.

Pero si lliga ya gane
El tiempo inevitable
Que yo necesita pinalmente
Cruza para na otro orilla,
Era tu el ta lliba,
Cay tu tiene man paciencia
Kanamon de mi tata,
Y el de tu pedasito de sonrisa
Puede gayot alibia
Con el pesades del corazon--
Y maskin ondiao de tu maga ojos
(Que siguro amo el marca
Del de tuyo propesion)
Lleno siempre de simpatia.

Mi tata ya larga ya, antes pa—
Tu ba el ya lliba?

Na, oyi tu con el cosa yo ay habla
Como un testamento:
Si hasta na ultimo
Mi alma tiene pa ojos,
Ay busca yo contigo, hermanito.
Cay si tu gane tene lastima connigo,
Siguro maskin el Dios tamen.

CROSSING THE RIVER

(at Arena Blanco)

Cold dawn stranded
That no longer wanted to be day—
What were those clouds
That blocked the sun?
Were we in a sea-shell,
Some gigantic turtle's armor
Ashen-white?
And the river, by the look of its blend,
Seemed as though its source
Surely was that high, pale wall of clouds
That detained the sun.
Not the mountains but the clouds
Nurtured it, poured into it
A pallid stream.
Forests in the distance were hidden,
Looking merely like murky clouds.
The turgid and swollen river,
Viscid as the clogged silence,
Looked like muddy milk.

My father and I sat in the vinta
As we crossed the river, our backs turned
Toward the point of destination.
So who would our eyes be fixed on
But you?
You were the oarsman
Whom we had paid to take us
From one side to the other
Of that trapped dawn.

I remember you so well
Perhaps because it is so difficult
To forget that it was a child
Who was taking us across the river
That flooded silently
To collide, finally,
With the rising sea.

I can no longer remember now
Why my father and I were there
And why we needed to cross—
That is locked away in oblivion,

As though hidden behind a cloud
Unlike that arrested dawn with you at its center
Like a portrait
That till now is still with me.
Why do I safe-keep it?

On that river-crossing,
I was a mere child
Who needed the guidance and protection
Of my father, who, if I fell into the water
Would have dived in to rescue me.
It was he who had provided me
With the clothes I wore for the trip,
Smart clothes one wouldn't want to get wet.
Where was your father that very moment?
Where might he have been
When you were just learning to walk?
Was it he who taught you
How to handle the oar?

If it was difficult to think of such things then,
It was even harder just to watch, all through the crossing
How a stick could hold wood,
How bone could grow muscle,
How with a subdued smile of amusement,
You observed us wearing such nice shirts,
Ironed pants and shined shoes,
How our hair was so well-groomed as we crossed the river.
The chill in the air was dispelled a little
By the quiet glow of your face—
That bit of a smile
Which was so like what dawn truly is:
Night that begins to turn into day.

Even if that bony frame
Seemed to show from under,
That still was a child there, alive,
With the rhythmic rise and fall of a chest
Skinny as a little bird's.
Such, too, surely was Life,
Living solely on air.
Those were uneasy moments.

I wonder,
Will we ever get to meet again?
But as surely as I have reached old age,

You couldn't be too far behind--
If you are still around.

But should the inevitable moment come
For me to make the final trip
To the other side—I wish for you to be
The one to take me across,
Because you showed so much patience then
With my father and me,
And because that little smile of yours
Can really lighten the heavy heart--
And even if you have such such sunken eyes
(Perhaps a feature of your profession)
They will always be full of compassion.

My father took the trip long ago—
Were you the one to take him across?

Listen now to what I say next
As though it were a will and testament:
If to the very end
My soul still has eyes,
I will look for you, little brother,
For if someone like you
Can have pity on me,
Surely God can, too.

EL BAILADORA DEL PANGALAY

(Obol, Isla de Simunul , Prov. de Tawi-Tawi. 1966.)

(Dedicao con Prof. Sabdani Bulante)

Aquel na baile
Del ofrecimiento,
Solo lang 'le,
Dalaga de dies y ocho
O dies y siete—
Quiere decir,
Mayor con migo de dos
O un año
De aquel tiempo,
O maskin ahora.

Necesita tu aquel bisia, pija,
Cay na un porma de inmovilidad,
Como statua,
Quieto-quieto lang andando el baile—
Y ta sabe lang tu que ta mobe gale
Cay ay mira ya lang tu
Que cambio ya el posición
Del mano y pies,
Del cara,
Del ombro y brazo,
Pierna y rodillas,
Junto-junto con preciso.
Entero su cuerpo
Encontra tu
Na nuevo postura ya.
Ta sabe lang tu cosa ta pasa
Pirme cuando ya pasa ya.

Alla na Thailand manada 'se mujer,
Un multitud de mano y pies.
Pero cada uno 'se sila
Ta mobe solo-solo,
Cada uno como un particular aspeto
De un gran cosa vivo.
Idealmente,
Quiere sila mobe sequenciamente,
Pino el pakaligero
Como un cine
Que ta emana
Desde un rollo de retrato,
Iras-iras de esos,

Diferente pero semejante,
Para mobe naturalmente
Como un baile
De seda el gracia,
De manada mujer
Na un dios, bailando.

Y na Bali un basiliska—
Pupilo liquido de ojos hipnotico—
Un batâ lang 'se, bien inocente,
Que ta buta
Na uno y na otro direccion
Di su arde bisiada
Que ta man bantâ
Donde-donde,
Daw todo na un momento lang,
Batâ con su maga brasito daw alas
Ta pega na aire,
Maga mano daw diutay bela parao
Que na mismo tiempo
Ta bula y ta nabega tamen,
Un bata bailadora que unico
Eco de aquellos maga mujer na Bangkok—
Y de un Dios (o Diosa ba 'se) bailando.

Aquí na Obol
Del mio memoria,
Hasta ahora
Este dalaga ta baila
Bien pasio gayot siempre
Maskin viejo ya yo,

Y maskin viejo ya pillastron siempre!
Tiene como ta tenta conmigo
Camina arrededor del bailadora
Cay concentrao man gayot 'le,
Hende ta sinti o pensa que yo
Puede observa con ele, literalmente
Desde mucho punto de vista
Y maskin no hay pa 'le acaba baila.
Si ele ta anda como na ruta del reloj,
Puede yo bira baliskat de ese,
Y na un ratito llega na tiempo pasao.

Pero sabe yo bien
Que si quiere yo olvida que el tiempo andando,

Yo mismo necesita baila tamen
Siguiendo con su preciso mobida,
Punto por punto tupahan,
Tiempo con tiempo jugahan,
Pares na baile,
Uno y otro bisiahan.
Pero dificil aprende un viejo
El baile del ofrecimiento.

Bueno pa
Lliba ya lang yo un brillante:
Diamante, dalaga, piedra puro—
Piedra de luz que ta contesta na luz
Con luz,
Y desde todo su punto junto-junto ta brilla,
Si el luz del sol
Ta tupa con ele na todo parte
Na un golpe.

Freelipiniana

THE DANCER OF THE PANGALAY

(Obol, Simunul Is. Tawi-Tawi Prov., 1966)

(Para con Prof. Sabdani Bulante)

In that dance
Of the offering,
She was alone,
A young woman of eighteen
Or seventeen years—
Which is to say
Older than I by two years
Or just a year
At that time,
Or even now.

You had to watch intently,
For in a mode of immobility,
Statuesque,
Secretly the dance proceeded—
And you could only tell she moved
When you suddenly realized
The altered position
Of the hands and feet,
Of the face,
The shoulders and arms,
Of the legs and knees, executed
In one precisely synchronized movement.
You would find her body suddenly
Already sporting
A new stance.
You'd only know what was happening
Always only after it had happened.

In Thailand the dance is many women,
A multitude of hands and feet.
But every single one of them
Moves on her own,
Each like a particular aspect
Of some grand living being.
Ideally,
They move in sequence,
Fast and smooth
Like a movie
That emanates
From a reel of pictures,
Rows of these

Different but similar,
But so life-like
Is the movement they create
It seems there is only one dance
Of silken grace
Of many women
In one god, dancing.

And in Bali a basilisk—
Liquid pupils of hypnotic eyes—
That's just a girl there, so innocent,
Who flings
In this or that direction
Her watchful glare
Sending a warning
Everywhere
As though all in one moment,
Child with her small, wing-like arms
Beating the air,
The hands like little upright sails
That both fly and flow—
A child-dancer, and most singular
Echo of those women in Bangkok—
And of one God (or perhaps Goddess) dancing.

Here in the Obol
Of my memory,
This young woman keeps on dancing,
As slow as ever,
Even though I have grown old,

And even though old still mischievous!
Something tempts me
To take a walk around the dancer,
So very self-absorbed as she is,
With no inkling that I
Could observe her, literally
From so many points of view,
And even before she has finished dancing.
If she went clock-wise,
I could go the other way around,
And in a little while reach time past.

But I know for sure
That if I want to forget
That Time passes,

I myself would have to dance,
Following her movements precisely,
Matching her movements with mine
At every point,
Time with time playing,
Dancing as partners,
Alert to each other's movements.
But it is hard for an old man
To learn to dance the Offering.

It would be easier
To bring along a jewel:
Diamond, maiden, pure stone—
Stone of light that answers to light
With light,
And from every point shines
If the light of the sun
Hits it everywhere
In one blow.

Freelipiniana

MAGA ESTRELLAS

Sobra de lejos, no puede alcanza con esos,
Pero talli sila,
Muri ya kita, talli siempre.
Tiene sila compiansa,
Mas mucho compiansa que de aton.
Ya queda ya sila símbolo de permanencia.
De lealdad. De amor.
Si tiene amor aquí abajo de ila,
O alli mismo na cielo,
El oscuro
Que como bestida de luto
Ta abrasa con todo,
Hende puede apreta su pichida
Para apaga con el luz
Del maga estrella
Con quien kita ta mira
Para compara y carcula
El de aton edad.
Ay, que bien joben gayot kita
Maskin cuanto beses pa kita
Ay bibi!

THE STARS

They are too far away for us to reach,
But they are there.
Even after we die they remain.
They have confidence,
So much more confidence than us.
They have become symbols for permanence.
For loyalty. For love.
If love exists under them,
Or with them there in the sky,
Darkness,
Which hugs everything like a shroud,
Cannot tighten its hold
To extinguish the light of the stars
Which we look at
For comparison
To measure our age.
Oh, how young we are,
No matter how many lives
We will live!

Freelipiniana

EL JOBEN CIUDAD , 1955

Acabar laba el madrogada
De luz con el joben ciudad,
Na limpido aire,
Plantudo 'le y preparao
Para na entrada del dia.
El linia del costa,
El linia del maga monte,
El circular techo azul,
Con porma blando y elemental,
Amo el maga division
Que ta marca
El natural pigura del ciudad,
Y desde donde 'le ta abuya
Con su porma
De mucho corte,
Y su cara
Que tiene manada otro-otro
Hechura de prentera.

Ta crece desde reis de acero
Con orgullo maga estructura,
El de ila valiente color
Bañao na maga rayo del sol
Y na biento del mar.
Suksuk gayot na pondo del tierra
El de ila maga pilar grandoso—
No hay sila duda que sila el tiene derecho
Na tierra, na aire, na sol del Sur,
Y na mar
Con quien sila ta bisia como dueño.

THE YOUTHFUL CITY, 1955

After the dawn has washed with light
The youthful city,
In the limpid air
It is well-groomed and ready
For the entrance of day.
The line of the sea-coast,
The line of mountains,
The circular blue roof,
Soft and elemental forms,
Mark the natural shape of the city
From which it emerges
As a form with many shapes
And a myriad facets.

Proudly rising from roots of steel,
The buildings display their brave colors
Bathed in the rays of the sun
And the sea-breeze.
Sunk deep in the earth
Are their enormous pillars.
They are certain of their rights
To the land, the air, the Southern sun,
And the sea
Which they watch like owners.

MI ABUELO FRANCISCO

Mi abuelo Francisco, Lolo Kikong,
Que el trabajo hace muebles,
Maskin na tiempo ya del su bejes mapuersa pa.
Puerte 'le corta palo, amulao pirme el herramienta,
Pero blando el corazon, malastima.

No hay 'le mata ni un gente
Na entero de su vida
Que ya alcanza lampas de noventa.
Tiene ba de ese clase dejao vivo
Na mundo y cielo que ya hace kanila?

No necesita mata para tene largo vida.

Pero na orejas daw 'se, cay largo gayot
El de suyo, maskin ya que una bes
Ya corta ya un poquito con el uno de ese.
Cuando joben pa 'le, ta trabaja na terreno,
Ya curnia con ele un carabao
Que asolas ya queda loco
Y ya cugi con el punta del cuerno
Un pedacito del parte arriba
Del de su un orejas.
Pero ya hace lang con ese agudo
Daw un cuerno tamen.
Ya queda 'le bautisao, armao,
Con un diutay señal de maldad,
Y ya dale siguro con ele poder
Contra maga mal intencion.

Ya mira lang yo con ese
Usa puersa
Para defende con su apu, mi hermano mayor,
Contra con su tata—mi tata,
Que bueno gayot usa cinturón
Na di suyo maga anak.
No sabe yo donde ya aprende castiga mi tata.

Mi lolo que mas blanco con ele,
Mas sincelao el porma del cara,
Europeano, daw invisible el paka-Asiano,
El herencia, del stricto conquistador,
Amo el no hay ni una bes
Pega kanamon maga bata alboroto,

No hay maskin alsa su bos,
No hay ni una bes usa palabra malo.
Maskin blanco, daw tiene herencia de trabajador—
No hay ni una bes tene muchacho na su casa.

El verdad, no hay gane ‘se palabra “esclavo”
Na Chabacano.
Y mi lolo hende ta usa clabo
Para uni el maga parte del muebles--
Ta conecta y ayusta lang
Con uno y otro,
Y tiene bes lang ta necesita usa cola.

El Dios gayot siguro ta protege con ele
Entero de su vida de noventa y siete.
Tiene ga’t ojos que pirme abierto ta bisia con ele,
Sabe que ele un buen gente
Maskin ya sale desde un rasa
Famoso de crueldad y maskin brutalidad.

Na de suyo cuento conmigo
(Cay yo mapregunta, quiere-quiere oyi storia!)
Ya agarra ‘le pusil
Na tiempo del revolucion,
Pero no hay ‘le ‘se tira ni una bes.

Aquel tiempo ta sale ya el maga contrario
Na un bapor desde el pantalan,
Y el mando kanila, mata con aquellos.
Pregùnta yo con ele, “Porque tu no hay tira?”
Yo que un bata alegre mira cine de guerra.
Habla ‘le conmigo, con un bos cansao y triste,
Y de su maga ojos coloriao na orilla,
“Gente man tamen aquellos,
Igual lang kanaton.”

Pero ta acorda yo que una bes,
Cuando ya marcha el maga beterano del reboolucion
Adelante del todo na parada del independencia,
Alla na puerta del su casa
Ta para derecho y atentito mi abuelo Francisco,
Mudao na su terno blanco,
De pormal camisa y pantalón,
Y ta pichi con su mano derecha
Contra su pecho su sombrero de caballero.

Y cuando ya acerca ya el maga viejo unipormao,
Adornao con todo de ila maga medalla,
Cae el maga lagrimas de Lolo Francisco
Y muja con suyo manga carrillo.

Ya estraña ga't yo con aquel vista—
No hay ga't yo quita mi ojos.
Ta pensa yo hasta ahora,
Aquel momento, ta oyi pa kahâ 'le
Con el maga tiro
Que ya dale kanaton
El de aton libertad?

Freelipiniana

MY GRANDFATHER FRANCISCO

My Grandfather Francisco, furniture-maker,
Remained strong till late in life.
Cutting wood was nothing to him—
And he kept his tools sharp.
But he had a kind, compassionate heart.

He never killed anyone
In his whole life
That reached beyond ninety years.
Do people like him still exist
In the world and under the sky that made them?

There's no need to kill to live a long life.

But they say it's all in the ears, the tell-tale sign
Of longevity, and his were really long,
Even though a tiny part of one
Had been nicked off.
When he was yet a young man working on the land,
He was gored by a water-buffalo
That suddenly went crazy,
And caught with the tip of its horn
The upper tip of his left ear,
Consequently making it sharp,
And making it look like another horn.
Thus was he baptized, armed,
With a tiny sign of evil.
Perhaps that gave him protection
From those who would do him harm.

Only once did I see him use force—
To defend a grandson, my elder brother,
Against his father—*my* father,
Who was so good at using his belt
On his children.
I don't know where my father
Got his training.

Grandpa, who was fairer-skinned than he,
Possessing chiseled, European features,
The Asian in him hardly showing,
His heritage that of the harsh conquistador,
Was also the very one
Who never raised a hand against us, noisy children.

He never once raised his voice, never cursed.
Although his skin was white,
It seemed as though he came from the race
Of humble workers.
He never had servants in his house.

The truth is that there is no word for “slave”
In Chabacano.
My grandfather never used nails
To join together parts of the furniture.
All he did was shape them
So they could all fit—
And he rarely used glue.

Surely god protected him,
All through his life of ninety and seven.
Eyes that were always open
Watched over him,
Knowing he was a good man
Even if he belonged to a race
Known for cruelty—even brutality.

Once, when I was a child.
Eager to hear stories, asking many questions,
He told me he had carried a gun
During the revolution—
But that he never once fired it.

The enemy forces were then fleeing
In a ship that was slow to leave port,
And the order was for them to shoot.
“Why didn’t you shoot?” I asked,
I who as a child was so fond of war-movies.
With a tired, sad voice,
And eyes red at the rims, he said,
“Those were people, too, just as we are.”

But I remember when, once,
The veterans of the revolution
Led the independence day parade,
With Grandfather Francisco standing straight,
Watching them intently
From the doorstep of his house.
Dressed in his formal white suit,
With his right hand he pressed against his chest

His white gentleman's hat.

And when the uniformed old men came closer,
Adorned with all their medals,
Grandpa Francisco's tears fell
And wet his cheeks.

I was mystified by that sight,
Never taking my eyes off.
Till now I wonder
If the shots fired for freedom
Were at that point
Still ringing in his ears.

Freelipiniana

LOLO SALAMANQUERO

Na Ingles pa, si Lolo Panoy,
Amo un tiboron de baraja.
Pero negroso 'le,
Un gato del noche
Protegido del su oscuridad.
Si tiene 'le bangkil,
De noche siguro aquel ta sale.
Malanduk 'le y bien escaparul,
Un panter ta pasea de noche
Na maga rama de camino
Del soñando ciudad—
Y todo el noche si Epifanio Masuerte,
Ta busca con Doña Suerte.

Herederero 'le del palo negro,
Sacao donde 'se ta esconde
Na ubod gayot del pono.
Daw parte que ya hila
Desde el poste negro del mundo su baston.
Dividido 'se a mediao,
Que si hila tu na mango,
Ay sale daw na su baina un puñal—
El bangkil del panter.

No hay ni uno ta busca con ele plaito
Si no na mesa lang del juego,
Cay si apuera de ese asiguro el perdicion.
Quien man el imbisti, queda lang enterrao na noche,
Y el ay descubri con ele
Amo el madrogada prio.

De su anak mujer, su Flor del dia,
Graduao del universidad como pianista,
Pero con su maga dedo ligero
Ya conta 'le sen na banco
Mientras ta soña con Schubert,
Con el rubato di Chopin,
Mientras asolas ta tuca
El ritmo variable, el maga combinación
Del universo—y el cen que amo siempre
Ta hace bira con el mundo.

Pero hende 'le gana con su tata—

Ta pega concierto na piano de Chino.

II.

Tiene de pakadiutay su cabeza—
Daw si querubín de pakasuabe.
Como ‘le un Cupido moreno
Con pelo marijadando.
Pero aquel cara, blando gane el corte,
Abandonao ya del de su guapura,
Si tiene man antes na su juventud.

*Viejo-bata, bata-viejo,
Entra y sale na agujero.
Hay, Lolo Panoy, Lolo Pinoy,
Smarte muda como palikero,
Maga mano daw pala de ligero,
Maga pies gato-silencio.
Ya evita tu con el guardia civil.
Ya esta dormido de ila pusil.
Ya pacha tu na pundillo
Con el juez de cuchillo.*

III.

Y hasta ahora, ta mira yo, vivo pa,
Ta man suut donde-donde.
Ya entra ya na de aton utuk,
De atun cuerpo—ta bombia animo
Na de aton corazon.
Que modo man gale kita
Ay esta vivo
Si no sabe kita escapa,
Y no sabe kita busca tresiur
Na lugar que lubrigo de todo?

Na maga storia de Don Epifanio,
El conquistador blanco,
Amo ta bastonia,
Ta latiga,
Y ta tira para mata.
Pero ele ya sale ya, ya sale ya.

Y sabe ba uste, Don Panoy?
Na su apuro, dèja ‘le su lengua!

GRANDPA CARD-SHARK

In English, the word for him would be “card-shark”.
But his skin was deep-dark,
He was a night-cat
Protected by darkness.
If he had fangs,
They came out, likely, only at night.
He was smooth and slippery,
Walking on the street-branches
Of the dreaming city,
And every night Lucky Epifanio
Went to look for Lady Luck.

He was scion of the black wood
That’s taken from where it hides
At the very pith of the tree-trunk.
His cane was so black,
It seemed as though it had been extricated
From the black pole of the earth.
Half-way down it was cut around
So if you pulled out the handle,
Out of its sheath would appear a knife:
The fang of the panther.

No one ever dared challenge him
Except on the gaming table
Because out in the streets defeat was certain.
Whoever picked a fight
Would end up buried in the night,
Left to be discovered by the cold dawn.

His daughter, his Flor of daylight,
Had a piano degree from university,
But her quick fingers ended up
Having to count money in a bank
While she dreamed of Schubert,
And of Chopin’s rubato, as, unbidden,
The varied rhythms of the universe played on,
With their many combinations, variations,
While money, as always,
Made the world go around.

She couldn’t outdo her father, though,
Who played concerts on a Chinese piano.

II.

He had a smallish head,
Delicate as a cherub's.
He was a dark Cupid
With wavy clouds for hair.
But that face, though soft-featured,
Looked as though it had been abandoned
By the beauty it once had in youth,
If, indeed, it once had possessed it.

*Old-young, young-old,
Going in and out of the hole.
Wow, Grandpa Panoy, Grandpa Pinoy,
You who dressed like a dandy feller,
Your hands as fast as a propeller—
Cat-silent, your feet
Eluded the Spanish guards on the street.
Their rifles dozed throughout your beat.
The judge who waits in the dark with his knife
You kicked in the groin--and he ran for his life!*

III.

And still alive, I presume,
You sneak into everything.
You have entered our minds, bodies—
You pump spirit into our hearts.
How else could we survive,
If we were not escape artists
And were no good at all
At discovering treasures
In the darkest of places.

According to Don Epifanio,
The white conquistador
Would use a cane,
A whip,
Would shoot to kill.
But he is gone—he is gone now.

And would you know, Don Panoy?
In his hurry, he left his tongue behind!

INCIDENTE NA RIO HONDO

Dia por dia acabar el incidente
Del mi caida na hondura,
Donde el salao y el agua fresco
Ta uni na un bocana,
Donde el agua del tierra dulce
Ta ledia con cariño con el stricto sal
Onde el rio ta saca el poder del océano--
Dia por dia acabar mi caida,
Mi abierto corazon ta recibi
Sal agudo que ta buta mi tata.

Ta abaja ya aquel el sol,
Y maskin no hay culihi con el luna,
Ta subi ya 'le,
Y na mismo tiempo ya uni sila
Con el de ila dos clase de luz,
Mesclando con el de ila impluencia
Para templa el tono del tiempo.

Bata pa lang yo aquel, na elementaria,
Y hende pa bien sabe nadà.
Ya lliga kama aquel
Estaba na un pesca muntao na un yate
De un rico amigo del de mi tata.

Ta pundia ya aquel a lo largo el barkito,
Y ta arrima ya cerca na orilla del rio,
Y el sol daw ya nada ya para na lejos,
Y cerca ya ay sambulli.

Brinca de mi dos hermano mayor,
Na un salto ya alcanza dayun na pier.
My un primo de largo pierna,
Ya man lakang lang para crusa
Para na tierra.
Còrre yo para tene vuelo,
Pero antes ga't de salta,
Ya sinti yo el mano de mi tata
Agarra na mi hombro,
Deteniendo conmigo
Na diutay parte de un segundo,
Y ansina ya hace corto my salto,
Y acabar na un momento suspendido na aire,

Cae yo derecho-derecho na agua
Pies una.

Aquel, ya resbala siempre su mano,
Y ya escapa mi ombro na su pichida.
El resulta alli hende lang mi caida,
Sino el dolor daw quema del raspa na hombro
Que ya esta cuanto dia.

Estos ba el maga imagen
Que ta man señal kanaton
Daw quiere que sila el lliba
El tema del de aton poem?
Daw ta pregunta sila:
*Hasta cuando detene con el Libertad—
Hasta cuando kita necesita esperà
Antes que dale puersa con el gente
Para tene 'le conmpiansa con su mismo?*

Amo siguro 'se—
Cay dia por dia acabar el incidente,
Enchilao pa yo y tiene huyâ,
Mientras mi tata ta man bugal
Con el suyo pakahiro como un laipgard—
Mas mabiento pa que salbabida.
Si no hay era 'le agarra conmigo,
No hay ga't yo cae na Rio Hondo.

Na mio secreto rabia ya olvida ya gale yo,
Como que ta olvida kita na un sueño
Aquel de mi entrada na otro mundo,
El anchura del mi maga ojos na espanto
Que de repente yo ya llega na maravoso,
Na color templao del sol ta sumi y luna ta subi:
El agua, gana pa na laman de blando,
Intimo pa na seda—abrasao, abrasao ga't yo
Enteramente na un momento
Que ta espera lang gale 'lla con de mi lligada,
Y daw ta dispone ya con el futuro
Que daw talla lang tamen.
Hasta que ya sucede 'se conmigo,
No hay pa yo sinti de aquel clase de pakajunto.

Pero sinti kahâ yo ansina
Si no hay conmigo prepara mas antes pa?
Que modo volve el quien

Que ni una bes no hay pa tene casa?

Càsa el agua, ubas del ubas del ubas,
Sin pellejo o laman--primer vino.
El quien ta acorda no puede que olvida
Cay hende mas 'se memoria lang--
Convicción.

Freelipiniana

INCIDENT AT RIO HONDO

Day after day after the incident
Of my fall into the deep water
Where the sea and the river
Became one at the river's mouth,
Where the water of the sweet earth
Appeases the harsh salt with its caresses
As it draws into itself power from the ocean--
Day after day after my fall,
My open heart received the sharp salt
My father threw on it.

On the day it happened the sun was going down,
And even if hardly anyone noticed,
The moon had started to rise,
And at that same moment
The two mixed their two kinds of light,
Fusing their influences
To compose the tone of the hour.

I was a boy then, still in grade school,
And was just a beginner at swimming.
The fishing party was returning from a trip
On a yacht owned by a rich friend of my father.

The boat was docking side-wise,
Slowly approaching the bank of the river,
While the sun, having swum far out,
Looked poised to dive under.

My two elder brothers jumped across,
Each with one leap making it to the pier.
My cousin of the long legs
Simply extended his legs across the gap.
I took a running start to gain momentum,
But before I got to jump,
I felt my father's hand
Grip my shoulder,
Holding me back
For the fraction of a second,
Making my leap too short.
After a moment suspended in air,
I fell straight down into the water,
Feet first.

What happened was that I
Finally freed myself from his grip.
The result was that I not only fell
Into the water but felt for days
The burning pain from that abrasive hold.

Are such images
Sending us signals,
Offering themselves as vessels
To take on the theme of the poem?
It seems as though they are asking:
*Until when will we be deprived of freedom—
How long will we have to wait
Before men will be empowered, self-confident?*

Perhaps so—
Because for many days after the incident,
I remained incensed and ashamed,
While my father went on boasting,
About his being a hero, a sort of life-guard.
He was pumped up with more air than a life-saver.
If he had not been in the way,
I wouldn't have fallen into Rio Hondo.

In my secret rage I had forgotten,
As we forget a dream,
My entry into that other world—
My wide-eyed amazement
At suddenly arriving at the marvelous
In the blended light
Of setting sun and rising moon:
The water, softer than flesh,
More intimate than silk—embraced,
So embraced was I entirely in one moment
That was there, just waiting for my coming,
And seemed to be planning for the future
That also seemed near at hand.
Until that moment
I had never felt such closeness.

But would I ever have had such a feeling
Without having been prepared for it
A long way back? Can anyone return home
Who has never had a home?

Water is home, grape of the grape of the grape,
Without skin, without flesh—first wine.
Whoever remembers cannot forget
Because it is no longer just memory—
It's conviction.

Freelipiniana

CONTRA BIENTO

(para con mi tata)

Hielo del biento
Ta agusa su puñal
Alli apuera, na mar oscuro,
Ta humba, ta queda mas agudo.

Aquí adentro na hotel
Alboroto gayot el banda,
Ta harta grita de ila amor,
Ta calenta con el lugar adentro
Del maga dindin de cemento.

Ta mira yo paapuera,
Pero el ta puede lang yo mira
Amo el oscuridad,
Daw un dindin tamen
Que ta tapa con el vista
Del isla de Basilan.
Ta oyi yo na sunor,
Y ta sinti na bibracion del tierra
Con el puerza del mar
Na cada golpe del marijada,
Daw ta regaña, ta manda calla
Con el maga cantor.

Estancao yo aquí,
Pero salbao na rabia
Del biento y mar.

*Que modo ta nabega con bela
Contra na biento?*

Este pregunta
Amo ta bira connmigo
Salido desde na mar del memoria—
Un pregunta que ya abuya
Na mi pensamiento
Cuando antes tu, mi tata,
Ya habla connmigo
Que el maga Samal Làot
Amo el maga experto
Na de ese clase de maniobra.

Ta saca ba 'se
Na mobimiento del saguan—
Na pino-pa-que-aguja
Ayustada del bela?

Cosa ba 'sos que ta queda na mar?
Daw nunca man kita kanila
Mira ajuntao
Na un angulo del pantalan.
Ta man dalaw lang
Para sambulli saca sen
Que ta buta kita na mar.
Siguro el permanente lang kanila
Ay queda na tierra
(Siguro na un paborito isla diutay
Donde no hay quien ta queda)
Amo si sila muerto ya,
Y no quiere que hace kanila laya-laya,
Y hace jurguesa el bagueo
Y queda pudrido del agua y tiempo.

Siguro na angulo del bela el secreto,
Pero hende derecho-derecho el encuentro.
Ya mira yo 'se ilustra una bes
Na un libro de Americano.
Sabe kita con esos—sistematico,
Y de numero ta analisà
Maskin cosa clase de proceso,
Pero angulao el direccion de aquel,
Tiene punto-por-punto curba
Que puede alinia—
Hende derecho el ruta.

El binta del Samal derecho ta abantia
Derecho daw lanza encima na agua,
Como el pihada del maga ojos decidido.

Pero Pang, ansina ba gayot el direccion de aton?
Aquel tiempo, no hay man tu explica,
Y yo no quiere dale mira mi duda--
Pero por ultimo ya decidi yo que deberas,
Cay sabe man yo que modo tu ta trabaja:
Practical pero honesto
Y derecho na punto.

El baguio, Pang, talla apuera na oscuro,
Pero taqui tamen adentro,
Donde manada ta celebra con gritos
El de ila triunfo.
Pabor dale connmigo fe,
Y mucho pa fe—hende analisis—
Hende puede saca con este ahora
Na maniobra, na angulo.
No mas ya explica.
Directà ya lang connmigo
Derecho na corazon del oscuridad.
Tu el conoce na baguio,
Tu el Sehè.
Dale connmigo
El de tu clase de pakabaliente.
Dale connmigo el pakabaliente del fe,
El ardor que no hay ira.

Freelipiniana

AGAINST THE WIND

(for my father)

Ice of the wind
Sharpens its knife
Out there on the dark sea.
It hums, it gets even sharper.

Here in the hotel
The band is noisy
Having a great time proclaiming love,
Heating up the space
Within the concrete walls.

I look out,
But all I can see
Is darkness,
Like another wall.
It blocks the view of Basilan Island.
By the sound it makes,
And the way it makes the earth vibrate
I feel the power of the sea—
With every blow of the waves
That bashes the shore
As though to scold the singers,
Telling them to shut up.

I am stuck here,
But safe from the rage
Of wind and sea.

*How does one sail
Against the wind?*

This question
Returns to me
From the sea of memory—
A question that suddenly loomed
In my mind
Long ago, when you, my father
Told me
That the Sea-Gypsies
Were the experts
In this type of maneuver.

Does the secret lie
In the way the oar is handled—
In the finer-than-a-needle's
Adjustment of the sail?

An incredible people who live on the sea!
It seems we'll never see them
Assembled in some corner of the wharf.
Occasionally, a few will visit
To dive for coins
That we toss into the sea.
Perhaps the only ones among them
Who will reside permanently on land
(Maybe on a favorite uninhabited islet)
Will be those who die
And don't want to be tossed about,
Turned into playthings by storms,
And be dissolved by water and time.

Maybe the secret lies in the precise
Angle of the sail.
Surely it's not a head-on encounter.
I once saw a species of this type of sailing
Illustrated in a book published in America.
We know the Americans—
Systematic, analyzing step-by-step
Whatever process—but there is a slight swerve
In the navigational diagram
Marked by successive points,
In a curve you could trace.
The route does not follow a straight line.

The Samal's canoe travels straight forward
Like a lance above the water—
Like the fixed gaze of two determined eyes.

But Papa, is this the way we must take?
You didn't explain then,
And I didn't want to seem skeptical,
But after some thought I decided to believe,
Knowing the kind of man you were,
And the way you did things.
You were practical but honest
And direct.

The storm, Papa, is out there,
But it is stormy in here, too,
Where many are celebrating
In loud cries of triumph.
Grant me faith
And more faith—not analysis.
This one can't be solved
By a maneuver, by a mode of approach.
I ask for no explanations—
Just guide me to the heart of the dark,
You who have known storms.
You are my Gypsy friend—
Grant me your courage.
Grant me the courage of faith,
The flame that burns without hate.

Freelipiniana

EL PANTANO AZUL

Una bes lang con ese ya encontra mi nana
Y no hay mas ya mira olê--alli na bu-uk
Que antes ta alcanza hasta cerca na aplaya.
Ahora no hay mas quien ta cuida el vida
Del ansina clase de reserba de agua,
Y si tiene pa ya queda, abajao ya,
Conectao ya na tubo.

Na tiempo pasao tiene pa maga pono y baguing
Que ta proteje con el maga tuburan—
Con el maga porma de agua
Que ta esta bibo y ta hace bibi.
Pero bien unico 'se pantano asul,
Agua que si espejo man 'le, del cielo lang,
Imagen del cielo que ta abaja cruzando
Un gran espacio, y por ultimo ta entra
Na un abiertura de maga rama del maga pono
Para queda unido con el agua.
Claro que el ya donà ta mira paabajo, ta bisia.

Mil nueve cientos treinta y cinco
Cuando el dalaguita ya encontra con ese
Como ya encontra 'le un un brillante safiro,
Un corazon del cielo, cara del cielo,
Alma del cielo entrenchao na tierra,
Dalaguita pa el nana de mio,
Mil nueve cientos treinta y cinco
Dalaguita pa el ya encontra con ese
Azul como cielo del su hondura,
Altura baliskat, repleccion y verdad,
Uno en prente con uno,
Dos sila solo-solo
Na un silencio igual, contento,
Bonito sila ta sinti junto,
Hende ta man rebatahan.

Hondura chamba que ideal, alli ya sambulli
Mi nana, ta'n ugùt entra na agua, hangul
Na primer y ultimo suerte, pribao,
Que man junto 'le na mismo pondo del cielo.
Mil nueve cientos treinta y cinco
Ya encontra 'le con ese
Cuando ta pasa 'le solo-solo, no hay miedo,
Aguardao del porest, lleno de birhen compiansa.

Cuando el maga pono y baguing, maga siembra,
Y por ultimo el pantano azul
Ya conseja con ele, ya oyi 'le.
Pero no hay sila dale poder de encanto
Sino anting-anting de animo azul que desde aquel
Ta lliba 'le pirme na de su corazon.

II.

Ma, na tu vida, casi todo el dia,
Tiene tu libro que ta le:
Maga nobela, maga misterio.
Alli siguro tu ta busca escapo
Para na un birhen soledad,
Alli ta tantia, tiene bes, el pondo.

Desde alli, ta subi ba tu 'quel represcao?
Era, cay desde ya para tu entra escuela,
No hay mas tu escribi nada, si no, ralas beses,
De tu nombre na maga documento oficial
Que ta marca el maga gajo del de tu vida.

Cosa kahâ ya habla contigo antes el agua—
Que puede tu siempre encontra con ele
Na un pribao hondura?
Cosa kahâ 'le ya promete?
Azul ba el color del alma?

THE BLUE POND

My mother saw it once, and never again,
In the area that was then jungle
That nearly reached the sea-coast.
No one takes care of the life
Of such reservoirs—and if a few have survived,
Their levels are down, their water connected to pipes.

Long ago there were trees and vines
To protect the springs, and the bodies of water
That were alive and that gave life—
But that blue pond was one of a kind,
Water that, if mirror, was the sky's alone,
Image of the sky that descended traversing space
Until it entered an opening provided through the branches
So the sky could be one with the water.
Clearly the donor was looking downward, watching.

Nineteen hundred and thirty-five,
The young woman found it
As though it were a sapphire gem,
Heart of the sky, face of the sky,
Soul of the sky set in the earth,
My mother, still a young woman
In nineteen thirty-five,
As a woman she found it,
Made blue by its depth like the sky,
Inverted height, reflection and verity
Each confronting the other,
Two of them alone
In an equal, contented silence,
Feeling good together,
None getting the better of the other.

Pure luck was this ideal depth
Into which dove my mother,
Avid to enter the water, avid to take
The first and only chance to be,
Privately, at one with the depth of the sky itself.
Nineteen hundred and thirty-five,
She discovered it all by herself
As she strolled alone, fearlessly,
Guarded by the forest,
And full of virgin confidence.

When the trees, vines, bushes,
And lastly, the blue pond,
Counseled her, she listened.
But they gave her no power to enchant,
Only the amulet of blue spirit,
The courage she always would have in her heart.

II.

In all your life, Mama,
You always seemed to have a book in hand:
A novel, a mystery.
Perhaps, through those you found escape
Into virgin solitude
Where sometimes you touched depth.

From these, did you emerge refreshed?
Hopefully, because after you stopped schooling,
You wrote nothing but your name
On official documents
That marked the stages of your life.

What did the water say to you
On that day long ago?
That you could always find it
In some private, secret place?
What did it promise you?
Is blue the color of the soul?

EL ANGEL DEL AYALA

(para con Yesnoy)

Temprano pa gayot aquel—
Ta man kislap-kislap pa
El maga estrellas,
Mientras el madrogada
Ta man ti-it na detrás de ila
Para apaga kanila,
Y yo, un bata,
Abrasao pa na nube del sueño
Cuando tu, mi hermano, mayor lang de dos años,
Ta decende ya desde el puerta del cielo,
Anunciando el resurrección del Señor.

No hay ga't yo puede mira contigo
Abaja aquel madrogada,
Si no na practis lang cuando vísperas,
Na temprano parte del noche.
Ta man tangâ yo para mira contigo
Ta abaja con blanco alas, brazos extendido,
Tu cintura, habla sila,
Conectao arriba con el torre de palo,
Con amarro que ta hace contigo resbala
Poco-poco paabajo,
Mientras tu ta canta
De Latin que nohay ni uno di aton ta entende—
Cay cosa ba el lenguaje del maga angel?
Cantâ ya lang que cantâ.

Pero a la mañana temprano
Dormido ga't yo na un silencio hondo.
No hay yo puede mira ni oyi
Con el Angel del distrito de Ayala.

Y ahora que despierto yo bien temprano
(Cay ansina man el maga biejo)
Aquel diutay angel ya bula ya,
Y yo dejao aquí na tierra, pesao el cuerpo.

THE ANGEL OF AYALA

(for Yesnoy)

It was still so very early—
The stars still blinking,
While the dawn
Came on tip-toe from behind them
To snuff them out,
And I, a child,
Was still wrapped in the embrace
Of the cloud of sleep
When you, my brother, just two years older,
Were already descending from heaven's door,
Announcing the resurrection of the Lord.

I never got to see you
Coming down that dawn—
Only on the evening before that
During a rehearsal.
I craned my neck to see you
Descending with white wings, arms extended,
Your waist (so they said)
Connected to the tower with a rope
While you sang a song in Latin
That no one understood--
What, anyway, is the language of angels?
Sing, just go ahead and sing.

But early on the very next day,
I slept in deep silence,
Unable to see or hear
The Angel of the Ayala district.

And now that I am awake so early
(As is usual with old people)
The little angel is gone, has flown away,
And I remain here on earth, my body heavy.

EL TRESIUR

No sabe man kame cosa 'se "tesoro".
Español. Daw apellido lang. No hay mining.
Pero el palabra "treasure" de Ingles sabe kame,
Na maga storia de comics
Y el que ta sale na cine
Del maga pirata na barko de bela
Que ta recoge de ila riqueza
Adentro na baul de hierro,
Y ta pundia na algun lejos isla
Donde sila ta enterra
Na un lugar escondido
Con el de ila tresiuur.

Hende ta lliga na de amon cabeza
El rason porque necesita esconde
Daw na un ritual de un religión,
El entierro silencio como secreto del maga secreto
No hay luha, y en bes de ese,
Lleno el corazon con alegria hondo,
Con el promesa de riqueza
Que puede resucita
Na un glorioso dia na futuro.

Y cosa clase de riqueza aquel?
Tembla y admiti, 'Noy,
Que no hay otra cosa que bridio lang 'quel,
Que kamo mismo ya quebra-quebra
Y ya machaca con pukpuk de piedra
Hasta diutay ya gayot
Y cerca ya man añicos—
Bridio hecho de maga botella
De cosa-cosa color,
Cay como quebrao ya resulta
Que tiene mucho prentera que presenta
Para recibi con el maga rayo del luz,
Y refleja, y contesta con el luz con luz
Trasladao ya na lenguaje de color.
Alla sila na cemento, maga brillantitos,
Kalayat, luminoso como alajas.

Recògi kame con esos, kame maga bata pirata,
Na un cajuelita de posporo,
Sigue kame de pakadiutay con ese paquete

(Para el resulta, queda mas grande el mundo)
Y ya performa un solemno, silencio entierro,
Abajo del sombra del maga pono
Que na imaginación ya queda mas alto
Para ayusta na nuevo grandor
De aquel pakete que ta contene con el alajas,
Y kame mismo ya queda diutay daw apû
Para queda grande el de amon tresiur.

Sigurao que una pa ya tupa el destroso
Con el ataud que con el ya enterra.
No hay mas bira maga bata pirata na isla.
Tiene ya queda ya rico, tiene olvidon,
Y tiene enterrao ya tamen na tierra.

Y yo? Taqui, no hay riqueza que conta
Si no el aventura de maga bata,
Y ta pensa que todo el vida na mundo,
Maskin del maga brillante piedra,
Como de ila maga primo, bridio,
Necesita el luz
Que absolutamente ausente abajo na tierra
Desde donde sila todo ya sale.

Diamante el mas comun brillantito,
Cay mucho botella transparente,
Como luz ya queda solido, no hay tiñida.
El esmeralda, botella berde de sopdrink.
Escaso el safiro,
Botella azul que dificil encontra.
Y el colorao el de todo ralo.
Quien ba ta hace botella
Color de sangre, de venenoso pruta,
Señas de vida o muerte?

Pero bonito rubi si tupa el sol,
Sangre o vino solido
Que ta tembla na luz.

Pero luz lang 'se todo.
Si enterra tu kanila,
No puede entra el luz
Na de ila maga ventana
Para coloria kanila, y resucita kanila
Desde el hondo noche
Que amo el de ila muerte.

Sabe yo 'se, pero kame antes
Ta imagina que maskin enterrao,
Tapao na entrada del maskin cosa de luz,
Ta brilla pa sila siempre, loyal.
Hende ta man traición maga brillantitos,
Y asiguro kame
Que puede kame bira olè visità,
Vivo kame todo, diutay y joven,
Y grande pa gayot el mundo—
Y el fascinación que ya hace kanamon loco
Amo el luz del sol, el origen
Del todo hermosura.

Freelipiniana

THE TREASURE

We didn't know the meaning of "tesoro".
Spanish. Like a mere surname. Without meaning.
But with the English word "treasure" we were familiar
From stories in the comics,
And those that were shown in movies
Of pirates in sailing ships
Who would store their riches
In iron chests
And would drop anchor
In some distant island
Where they would bury their treasure
In some secluded place.

It never got into our heads
Exactly why the manner of burying the treasure
Had to be done like a ritual
Of some religion's secret of secrets,
Silent and tearless, where instead of grief,
The heart was filled with deep joy
From the promise of riches
We would resurrect
In one glorious future date.

And what kind of treasure was it?
Even as you tremble, admit, Boy,
That it was all nothing but broken glass
That you and your friends cracked
And pounded with rocks to pieces,
So tiny they were nearly smithereens,
All glass from bottles
Of various colors
That when broken, presented
So many facets to receive the rays of light,
And reflected and responded to light
With light that was translated
Into the language of color.
There they lay on the concrete pavement:
The tiny bright things spread out,
Luminous as jewels.

We gathered them up, we child-pirates,
And stored them in a little match-box,
As we ourselves seemed to have shrunk in size
To follow suit (to the end of making the world bigger)

And performed a solemn internment
In silence in a secluded part of town
Under the shade of trees
That in the imagination had grown taller
To give room to the sudden growth in size
Of the packet that contained jewels,
As we ourselves were reduced to elfin proportions
To make our treasure large.

First to destruct, surely, would be the coffin,
Ever before the stuff it contained.
The child-pirates never did return to the island,
Some having become rich, some forgetful,
And some having been themselves already
Buried in the earth.

And I? Here I am with nothing to count,
But having something to recount: the adventure of children,
And thinking, while he does it, that all life in the world,
Even that of gem-stones,
Just like the life of their broken-glass cousins,
Need light,
Light that is absolutely absent under the earth
Where they all come from.

Diamond was the gem most commonly found,
Because there were so many bottles
Made of transparent glass that was
Like solid light, unstained.
Emerald came from green soda bottles.
Sapphire was rare, bottles of blue color hard to find,
And red glass was the rarest—
For who would make bottles
The color of blood, of poisonous fruit,
Emblems of life or death—
But it was beautiful ruby
When the sun struck it,
Solid blood or wine
That trembled in the light.

But it is all just light.
If you interred them, no light would enter their windows,

To color them and resurrect them from the deep night
That is their death.
I know that—but we imagined long ago,
That even if buried, insulated
From the entry of any kind of light,
They still shone brightly, loyally,
Those tiny gems—and we were sure
That we would make it back to visit,
All of us alive, small and young,
With the world as big as ever—
And the fascination that made us insane
Came from the light of the sun,
The origin of all beauty.

Freelipiniana

EL BIRHEN DEL LODASAL

Na un lao del Fort Pilar
Que ta emprenta con el lugar de reso
Donde tiene imagen del Birhen y del Niño Jesús,
Y maga querubín abajo y amboslao de ila—
Estos maga imagen abultao un poco, escultao
Encima del muralla donde sila ponido
Como un gran retrato de grupo—
El Reina, cargando con el bata, arriba de todo,
Hende el un lao de su cara ta dale mira
Si no su prentera gayot,
Y el su mirada daw ta travesa na distancia
Lampas del altar abajo su pies,
Lampas pa na maga banco de iglesia
Que en prente de ese—
Alla gayot mas lejos
Que el cementao tierra
Arrededor del lugar sagrado,
Para hasta àlla donde ta empesa ya
El gran lodasal, anciano proteccion del fort
Contra el ataque de tierra--
Ancho y largo, un laguna de lodo.
Hende tu puede corre
Si alli contigo cugi el cañonazo.
No hay 'lli ta crisi ni un zacate,
Y el maga pono antes talli,
Muerto ya, preserbao lang,
Siguro na sal del aire que ta sale del mar.
Pero maskin mucho parao pa, sin hojas sila,
Daw maga maligno,
Puro cuerpo cortao-cortao,
Sin mano sin cabeza—
Y si tiene man hechura de cara
Boca de agujero lang que ta grita su dolor.
Lugar de muerte el con quien ta bisia
El blando pijada del Birhen Lastimosa.

Si camina tu alli na lodasal,
Puede tu tene presentimiento
Del pena na camino eternal.
Na cada paso ta sumi el pie
Na lodo mapilit que ta chupa pa-hondo.
Si puede to alsa un pie,
El otro ta empesa ya tamen sumi.
Lejos pa tu na medio del largura de ese,

Daw ta sinti ya tu que modo el bejes
Ta principia entra na cuerpo,
El sufrimiento que ta queda mas largo
Hasta no sabe mas tu donde o cuando acaba.

Si hende tu puede escapa alli, na--
Baka queda tu palo estancao
Que tiskuk na momento del muerte,
Y queda tu duro na un postura,
Aunque eternamente activo,
Y sigue siempre ta navega
Na de tuyo turbulente viaje,
Ta man balicutut na viento del agonía final.

Este siguro antes verdante mangle,
Tiene pa pono, agua corriendo, y pescao--
No hay pa entra el delubio mapilit.
Pero maskin cosa man, taqui ya este,
Impierno de lodo donde dejao
Maga palo pungkul el maga galamay
Que ta pidi ausillo na cielo
Ancho y claro arriba de ila.

El Birhen na muralla del fort
Nunca ta meña su ojos—
Ta bisia lang gayot,
Daw alli con ele ya pone
Para mira lang con el lodo
Y maga palo muerto.

El Birhen joven pa siempre,
Pero minutos de siglos
Ta pasa na su vista.
Cosa lang ‘se tierra mujao, ese danao,
Si no recuerdo, si no jurgueza del pensamiento?
Tiene ga’t ‘le poder sobre con ese,
Y puede ga’t ‘le calma kanaton
Con ojos que ta habla
Que ay escapa kita siempre
Na trampa del lodo,
Na trampa del muerte
Donde kita ya nace.

THE VIRGIN OF THE BOGGY FIELDS

On that side of Fort Pilar
Facing the place of worship,
There are images of the Virgin and the Child Jesus
And cherubs below and beside them
Arrayed on the wall in low relief
To form an extensive group-picture—
The Queen, with babe in arms, above all the others,
Offers to view not her profile
But her very visage
With a faraway look that seems to traverse
Way past the altar at her feet below,
Way past the pews, and the paved yard
That bounds the sacred space
Towards where the boggy fields begin,
And way past that, to the entire,
Vast defense of mud against assaults by land,
Wide and long as a lake.
You couldn't run away
If a cannonade caught you in it.
Not a blade of grass grows there—
And the trees that used to thrive
Are dead, though well-preserved
Perhaps by the salt in the air
That enters from the sea.
But they are leafless, though erect,
Looking as though possessed,
Amputated bodies without hands, without heads—
And if any did have anything
That resembled a face,
It would be a mere hole of a mouth
That cries out its pain.
It is a place of death the Compassionate Virgin
Watches over with her tender gaze.

Walking in the boggy field
Will give you a presentiment
Of the painful trek on the eternal road.
For every step your foot takes it sinks
In sticky mud that sucks it from under.
By the time you get to lift a foot out,
The other has started to sink in.
Long before you get midway
Of the whole stretch,
You would have gotten an inkling

Of how old age starts its entry
Into the body, how the pain
Gets to be too much to bear,
With no way of knowing
Where or when it will end.

If you never get out of it there's the danger
That you become like one of those trees
Caught in *rigor mortis*,
And stiffened in one posture,
Albeit forever active,
Drifting along the stream of your turbulent voyage,
Distorted in the winds of the final agony.

Once this must have been
A verdant mangrove swamp,
With trees, flowing water, and fish—
Long before the sticky deluge moved in.
For whatever it's worth it's here to stay,
An inferno of mud wherein remain
Abandoned trees with amputated limbs
Crying out for help
To the wide and clear sky above them.

The virgin on the wall of the Fort
Watches on with unmoving eyes,
As though she had been put there
Just to look at the mud and the dead trees.

The virgin is always young,
Yet minutes of centuries
Pass before her eyes.
Of what worth would be,
That piece of wet earth, that mud-pond,
Except for a keepsake, a plaything of the mind.
She certainly has power over this—
And she can calm our fears
With her eyes that assure us
Of escape from the trap of mud,
From the trap of death
In which we were born.

EL EXILIO

Desalejao de todo—
Hende lang del lugar
Si no na maga gente na lugar
Y aquel maga tiempo
Que pasao ya
Y hende mas ay bira—
Ese el deberasan exilio.

Quien man que ta acorda
Con su mismo cuerpo
Hende mas aquel mismo.

Y porque pa kita ta acorda?

El muerte ta espera.
No hay pa kita alla,
Sabe ya kita que talla.

Cuando kita ta sabè
Que kita exilio ya?

El corazon, el corazon sabe.

THE EXILE

Banished from all—
Not only from places
But from the people in those places,
Of those times
That are past
And will never return—
Such is true exile.

Whoever remembers himself
Is no longer
Exactly what he was.

And why do we still remember?

Death awaits.
We don't have to get there
To know that.

When do we know
That we are exiles?

The heart, the heart knows.

FreeLipiniana

CESAR

(In memoriam *Cesar C. Climaco*)

Desde alli arriba na monte, su alma,
Abajo del de suyo maga paborito ponoy-puego,
Ta bisia paabajo
Con el ciudad que ta brilla na noche
Como un caja abierto de alajas.

Pero puego tamen 'se.
Ya agarra ya 'le con ese una bes,
Y ya sale quemao.
Amo 'se el unico quèma
Que no hay 'le puedè apaga.

Amo ba 'se el ya habla si Padre Florentino
Que debe buta ya lang na mar—
Cay el riqueza
Amo el ta mata kanaton?

Puego, puego na noche,
Maga constelación del tierra,
Amor publico,
Amo ta arde siempre
Na corazon de un Cesar.

Maga ladron y marderer
Vivo y libre ta man libut.
Dios ya lang gayot el sabe
Que modo dale con Cesar
El debe dale con Cesar.

CESAR

(In memoriam *Cesar C. Climaco*)

From the high mountain, his soul,
Under his beloved fire-trees
Watches the city below
Gleaming in the night
Like an open chest of jewels.

But *that* is also fire.
Once he held it and was burnt.
It is the only kind of conflagration
He could not put out.

Didn't Father Florentino tell us
To throw all our riches into the sea
Because it is wealth that kills us?

Fire, fire in the night,
The constellations of the earth,
Public love
Is what burns still
In the heart of one Cesar.

The thieves and murderers
Are alive and mingle freely.
Only God knows
How to give to Cesar
What should be given to Cesar.

JUVENTUD NA ZAMBOANGA

Viento del mar, porest del monte, ambuslao,
Amo el ya dale de ila buen influencia,
Y el sol ta subi y ta abaja amediao kanila,
Igual el dalida del de su luz
Na izquierda y derecha, Sur y Norte—
Sùbi 'le o bàja,
El sol ta marca un linia donde yo ta pasea,
Balancio como na amarro del cirquero,
Campante que hende cae
Na un pino ecuador para Este o Oeste,
Donde ta munta yo un bicicleta,
Desde donde ta subi, hasta donde ta abaja el sol,
Un sapâ largo donde yo ta man saguan un binta,
Mar na un lao y monte na otro
Amo de mio dos katig,
Y si yo ta dormi
Na medio de ila,
Daw na un duyan,
Que hende ta meña.

YOUTH IN ZAMBOANGA

Wind of the sea, forest of the mountain,
From either side gave me their blessing,
And the sun that rose and set between them,
Shed an equal share of light
On the left and on the right, the south and north.
Whether it rose or whether it set
The sun traced a line where I leisurely walked,
As though balanced on a tightrope,
Confident I would not fall
Down from the thin equator
Between east and west
Where I rode a bicycle
From where the sun rose to where it set,
A long brook where I paddled a canoe,
Sea on one side and mountain on the other
My two outriggers,
And when I slept between them,
It seemed I was in a hammock
That did not rock.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francis C. Macansantos was born in Cotabato City, grew up in Zamboanga City, and has been a resident of Baguio City since 1981. He earned his MA degree in Creative Writing from Silliman University in Dumaguete City, and is a five-time Palanca Award winner in English Poetry. He won the NCCA Writer's Prize for epic poetry in 2003, and has four books of poetry : Snail Fever (UP Press 2016), The Words and Other Poems (UP Press 1997), Womb of Water, Breasts of Earth (NCCA 2007), and Balsa: Poemas Chabacano (NCCA 2011). Macansantos has taught at several universities, including Mindanao State University and the University of the Philippines Baguio, and has served in panels of critics in creative writing workshops throughout the Philippines.

ABOUT THE BOOK

This book is a collection of poems in Chabacano with translations into English by the author. Most of the poems are based on the author's experiences in and memories of Zamboanga, but also of Basilan and Sulu – places that are dear to his heart. This is the first book of its kind (Chabacano poems accompanied by English translations) to be published in the Philippines.