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Poetry

Rime of the Spirit's Quest

Word without End

Care of Light

Gemino H. Abad

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GÉMINO H. ABAD

Rime of the Spirit's Quest

A ten-year-old far afield with slingshot and
in his pockets stones, what unseen hand

moves this figure of memory to center
stage, and next curtain fall, will demand

restoration of a waylaid song
that once had trilled over the land?

O shadow to a reckless act, cease
from haunting still the little brigand.

Perhaps in the wild syllable throbbing in air
he glimpsed a lay of his spirit's heartland

and thought to ferret out its mystery's Word
from the puny warbler's body in hand.

Since then, though he has long forgotten
his quest has seen no end, from sun to sun;

his words like scattering thunder only weave
bits of script on his book of sand.

How far has he traveled, O ghost of him
who would be his spirit's firebrand?

There's only light that breaks one's heart,
there's no word for the spirit's Writ, none.

Word without End

Let loose and rip such verseletting
 as if the poison were in
 the sticky verbatim—from mind's
 hot alembic, the world's castoff skin.

O, how post- after post- aporitic,
 our latest guesses rather brazen
 I can't follow this rut, sir, to its end
 where mind "melts like cheese."

"Stale, flat, and unprofitable" all uses
 of speech, our words gutted like fish.
 Look where "the hooting throng" thrashes
 for beer, for movie stars all far to sea.

Why strangle thought's rhetoric or twist
 the bright thews of its writ? What demon
 in language devours its progeny?
 How long can a starved species survive?

Our words, sir, upon the world's blank
 hubbub are for song, and steep
 their speech where the tongue exfoliates
 and landscapes flower into morning.

Our truth loves all manner of adornment,
 her secrets brim our delight in play
 as the foliaged sun scribbles on the ground
 stipple and glare, and only we are found.

Oh our words but follow after,
 without interest in doubt or denial.
 It is only we who corrupt their current,
 But clear-eyed,
 They carry our meaning without hurt.

Care of Light

As soon as it gets dark, I turn on the lights in my old professor's cottage, and the following morning before office, turn them off again. With one key I open the iron gate, and with two, the main door. I turn the lamp on in her library the vigil light for the Sacred Heart on the shelf jutting out a wall; then I switch on the single electric bulb outside the kitchen, and last, the red and green halogen like Christmas lights below the front eaves.

I follow strictly her instructions. She loves order in her life, and requires a similar order in other people's behavior—a discipline of mind sometimes terrorized by the haps and hazards of thieving time. She needs to be always in control, but she's old now and frail, can hardly walk, deaf and half-blind, and often ill, so that, having no choice, no maid able to endure her sense for order, she had to leave and stay at her sister's place,
 finally dependent.

In the half-darkness and mustiness now of her deserted cottage, all its windows closed, her books and papers, once alive with breath of her impetuous quests, are filmed with dust on her long working table, awaiting it seemed her return.

I think of how a time ago she'd walk briskly to her early morning class, dressed in style to shame old maids, then call our names as though each had irreplaceable post in her invincible order of things; and then, her shoulders hunched, teach with a passion that, before the imperious gale of her questioning, drove us bleating on the open plain of the world's sharp winds.

So, at the day's end,
 I'm her lamplighter on her silent asteroid,
 among books, papers, rubble of chalk.
 I close the gate behind me as I stride out,
 making sure I hear the lock's tiny click.
 I follow strictly her instructions.
 Down her street the street lamps cast
 my shadow ahead. Crickets in the bushes
 whirr according to their nature.
 In the same order, the sun too will rise
 tomorrow, and I shall be back.

MILA D. AGUILAR

Fat Mayas

In D.C., in front of the Jefferson Building
 While taking my snack,
 I saw a small bird, much like
 A fat maya, alone.

In the Philippines,
 I mused to myself,
 Mayas come in flocks,
 Merrily.

Here they are fatter;
 Still brown, after having
 Earned some black,
 But much less

Lithe than
 Where they come from.
 And they are
 Called something else,