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**Coming Home**  
**Woman of Many Voices**  
**Kay Gabriela Silang**  
**Pulotgata**

Danton Remoto

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DANTON REMOTO

### Coming Home

*News Item:* "The Italian government gave \$55,000 to Pampanga for the remapping of towns devastated by the Mount Pinatubo eruption."

When my friend's mother  
returned to her hometown  
after the eruption

she had to ask  
for directions.  
She could not find

the street  
of her childhood.  
She could not find

her backyard  
ripening with guava and *gumamela*.  
She could not find

her house,  
its wooden floors waxed  
with banana leaves

to make them shine  
like mirrors.  
She could not find

the room where she grew up:  
mother-of-pearl windows turning yellow,  
cabinets full of old letters,

the pillow she hugged  
at darkest  
night.

## Woman of Many Voices

(To the memory of Ella Luansing)

First you are Maria Clara,  
in your hands a letter  
read many times over,  
speaking of the arrivals  
and departures  
of dear Crisostomo Ibarra.

Then you become Salome—  
woman exiled  
on the very margins of the page!—  
a bundle of clothes in hand,  
remembering the fugitive words  
of Elias:  
"Your memory and my home  
have become one."

Then you turn into Sisa,  
mother of our colonial pain,  
singing a song of names . . .  
beginning to skip, to hop,  
to dance the black dance of grief  
while the light slowly  
dims, and is gone.

Finally you become the mother  
of all our mothers:  
Maria of the face  
calm as a lake,  
whose sorrow  
is that the thorns and spear  
piercing her son  
should have instead pierced  
her very heart.

Woman of many voices  
now grainy with pain,  
now turning into love's wings  
brushing against  
our sadness and fears,

woman of lovely bones  
 (an inner light glowing  
 inside your skin,  
 lamp in the night),  
 you will forever roam  
 the detours of our dreams.

### **Kay Gabriela Silang**

(1731-1763)

Ang lubid na ito ay singkitid ng Ilokos.  
 Walumpu silang nakahilera sa plasa,  
 kakulay ng tuyong dahon ng tabako.  
 Ang araw ay sing-init ng mga buhangin.

Ngunit parang hangin ang mukha ni Gabriela:  
 bukas, mababakas ang lalim  
 ng kanyang katahimikan.  
 Sa harap ng lubid na kumikiwal,

Ahas sa plasa ng Piddig,  
 walang anino sa kanyang mga mata.  
 Alaala lamang ng mga panahong  
 nilusob nila ang mga garison,

Pinatumba ang mga sundalong puti,  
 niluwangan ng kaunti ang sakmal  
 ng mga prayle sa kanilang leeg.  
 Ngunit ngayon, parang pilak ang langit.

Ang araw ay nakabilad.  
 Pero and poot nila'y hindi,  
 hindi malilingkis  
 ng kahit anupamang lubid.

## **Pulotgata**

Sa labas, dinidilaan  
ng ulan ang mga puno.  
Ang hangin ay bumubulong  
Sa tainga ng mga dahon

Habang

nakaupo ka sa akin.  
Ang pilik ng iyong mata'y  
pumipikit, bumubukas.

Makintab ang pawis  
sa paligid ng iyong labi.  
Lampara  
ang iyong mukha.

At ang iyong mga daliri'y  
naglalakbay, pumapasok,  
nawawala  
sa mga ulan ng aking buhok.

DM. REYES

## **Milkstone**

Randy brings me a stone  
from the gray Antique shore,  
the seagreen stretch  
of his Monday walk,  
untended by the dogs  
growling on his way to work.

And the milkstone glows,  
an egg-shaped mold  
of cream and swirled  
grays, a thin crack  
on its cheek, like a near-  
perfect cake baked  
on the griddle.