

CURRENCY and Other Poems

Francis C. Macasantos

Currency

Sand dollar, sinking, turning into sand,
Its font eroding—rose window receding, homing
Back into ghostliness, infinity—
Something snatches away from Caesar
The things that are God's.

Caves That were His Eyes

(to my father)

Your eyes had sunk into their sockets,
Withdrawing into the shadows of the caverns
They had just started to be. Perhaps to sleep,
Perhaps to keep secrets they had always known
And avoided—a deepening, encrypting, loth to hurt
By the inevitable passing of years—
And so the silence.

No gaze will ever beam on the walls as of old
When eyes opened unto the fields
Of levitating deer and bison—no.
And my own eyes, owl-like-wiser now,
Watch as I scratch lines into paper that will fall
Because they are leaves, after all.

Simulacral

(an apostrophe)

We both took the plunge—you plunged,
I took, as I do every time, a habit
Of suicide, but from the thicket rose such a voice
Sighing it loved me, drunk and lost
As though at the point of death confessing,
Knowing no one and nothing—it seemed
Most dear and true, dice thrown up in the air,
Mere words, yet surviving life itself—
And I believed as at the very first time.
Why shouldn't I? I can't lie cold to endearments
That help bear the load, even those
Addressed to someone else, even to the nameless.
Besides, playing dead is also play, requires
Effort, imagination. Either way
You drop into life—and so I loved again.

Calvin Again

We can say that like the poor,
They shall always be with us,
So blessed are they with eons of patience
Waiting for the cradles that we are
To leap into.

Prophets they were
In shorthand, on the threshold of literacy,
With their loops, corkscrews, sickles,
The merest tatters of signature—
Initials, though, of the web of life
Yet to be,
As though it would be cast for them, especially,
For them to knit with adroit hooks,
These who seem to always know
Where Nature will set a tryst,
And settling snugly there,
Wait for the moment
To spring and cling to
Or loop around
The tree of life.

One must have had
From the very start
A foretaste of foetal brains.

White Stones

“The Whiteness of the Whale”---Melville

The smoothness of those roundish stones
Would easily put to shame the merely human
Workmanship resulting in what is called marble polish.
Only hands of water, over time,
Must have been allowed to shape them,
Each seemingly sized like a sibling
Though all strewn apart on the beach,
A few just small enough to snuggle into
The earnest squeeze of a child’s hand
To mock it with baby smoothness,
Softness that stone in all hardness
Could ever be—weight
With absolutely no air in it,
Unfathomable opacity of milk richness,
A stubborn refusal to unveil—
Egg turned to stone,
Each nestled in sand, each separate.

Mother said to pick some and take home:
“These are for the dead, to line their graves with.”
And I did not ask why—I agreed,
Seeing the stones in my mind
Bordering a grave mound like a garland
In half-light sweetly beautiful.

Elegy for a Midnight Painter

Handpicked from some memory of coral
Of a distant holiday, a jaunty fragment
Of hushed crimson, a moon now hangs in space
Above your town now glowing softly beneath
Like a lantern of motley
Hugging the earth, emerging
From your blowing from under it
With your own breath-bellows, softly into being,
The jewellery of city block and city block,
Wrapping the hills, embracing them with colors
Full to bursting, candy-tones soft on the eyes, embers
Of a cancelled, fierce history.

Gamueda, only color knows
Your best-kept secrets,
And the frame is box but also window,
Case as well as casement—casket—
Open but impenetrable—a hiding place.
We may never reach you,
But you gleam through.

The Spurner

Mouth shaped the words to say *stop pummeling*
That raggedy Ann down there. Look up here!
I'll be right down. But can anyone hear?
I'll dive into my body from the ceiling.
From then on this heart has fought back, beating
For every right to what it holds most dear.
Humbled, it vowed never to leave this sphere.
But what are the clouds—the sky—concealing?

Birds crisscross the garden, having returned
From wintering south—not somewhere in space.
Like sap the blood is conjured by the sun,
Yet the heart's the burner till itself is burned
To power flight—but to what dark embrace?
Likely nowhere but to desolation.