

Surfacing

(An Ars Poetica)

Albert B. Casuga

Surfacing. We allow ourselves this one
salving act when every balm fails.

Bobbing up for air where it is rare,
we pray that this will hold long enough.

Enough for the moments at dusk when
we must dive again, submerge again,

into depths we know will one day hold us
down, and remain there to mend hurts

that in those magical spaces become
like pearls: prickly cutting dirt engulfed

into bivalved flesh that may in turn
become a magical gem from the agony.

Surfacing, we find ourselves some river
stream to rest with the rolling river stones.

Surfacing, we know we must go back
to the darkened depths, and like oysters

bear the pain cutting through our flesh
that we may surface soon with a new pearl.

(June 27, 2011)

Undiscovered Country

Albert B. Casuga

*Why do we return to/what we know? Do we uncover any anchors/or nets.
Homeward bound,/the song goes, which means heading for home/or tied
up in looking.*

– from “Homeward Bound” by Hannah Stephenson, *The Storialist*

Cups, bric-a-brac, milestone pictures, pillows,
even rarely-washed security blankets spell it:
it is the smell of knowing that makes us run
to her stove as soon as we drop our wee world
of toy trains, biscuit cans, disrobed barbies,
and ask if favourite cakes are cooking in the oven.

It stays with us, this habit of pinning the tail
on memorial behinds. We know them well.
On the darkest nights, on most tempestuous times,
haven't we gone back home quiet and blindfolded?
They know we would grow up and go away.
Folks enter into one-way contracts like these.

Then home becomes hazy in uncharted distances.
Looking ties us down, we follow familiar scents
only to lose them along the way. Pavement arrows
do not point to where the heart lingers and stays.
Is there no clear map to this refuge? In the fog,
how can the faithless promise he is home at last?

An undiscovered country before long, home
turns up around the bend, but we also find out
that it is the nook from which we cannot return.

(July 27, 2011)

Return Mail

(After “Letter to Green”)

Albert B. Casuga

Verde, que te quiero verde.

– Federico Garcia Lorca

It must have been in Andalucia
(or was it Bilbao?) when I got
your last note raving about blue
skies, verdant bluffs, laurel bushes
turning to green fire under trees
singe by fierce sun rays cutting
through a *fandango* of branches
swaying with winds roiling the sea
beneath the cliffs where you swore
we will be when you come this way
again —

I wore my green *pañuelo* then;
and running your fingers
through the stray hair mottling it,
were you not *recondite, mi amor*,
when you said: *Yo te quiero, Verde?*
Or coy perchance, when the green
you were declaring ardour for
was not the shawl on my shoulders
nor my short lime-sequined *vestido*
but my eagerly trembling haunches,
wondering how green the grass
would remain under our bodies
while we stared at the cerulean magic
of the patch of sky seen through leaves
of the tree trunk where you carved:
Verde, yo te quiero, Verde.

A covenant made when you last said
you will be back to engrave my name.
I can only see pale shadows there now,
and on the murky ground a patch of snow.

(March 1, 2011)

Rhythms at Sundown

Albert B. Casuga

On my hammock, on afternoons like this,
I have the whole sky for a taut canvas.

It is easy enough to paint a landscape
rolling on clouds that transform quickly.

That mass of cumulus moving toward
the hillocks of Nara is my father's face.

I can see my Chloe in a furious pirouette
among those swirling cirrus. A ballerina.

Are clouds the sum of all our memories?
Do they shape the fears that we run from?

Or have I just run aground, no wind
on my sail, no seascapes nor harbours?

On afternoons like this, on my hammock,
I cull the pictures I have collected, a collage

of dispersing dwindling drawings on skies
that darken at sundown drowning them all.

What have I rushed for, hieing to a country
of old men? These are empty spaces of empty

hours, a dull ache that stands for a leftover life
marking rhythms of time on a swaying hammock.

(June 15, 2011)

The Image of the Mirror

Albert B. Casuga

Sit. Feast on your life.

– from “Love After Love,” Derek Walcott

Although this invitation will prolong our wait
in the cold antechambers that we surround
ourselves with, we will cautiously accept it.

Why not? Sitting here, staring at a kaleidoscope
of the many faces we have constructed to meet
other faces, I celebrate a love affair with myself.

Who else will do that for me? There were lovers,
and there *were* lovers, but they held on to their
own chisels to pare and scrape their own image

of what they could have and hold not unlike
a wild-eyed Pygmalion sculpting flesh onto his one
desire, a Galatea of his rawest wants and dreams.

I will sit and wait for the feast of all feasts
to be served on my table, my head on a platter,
my heart seasoning a bowl of hope, a *soupçon*

of little mercies that lovers often do: a salving
of hurts, a troth of endless fealty, a promise
that the image on the mirror is finally, only mine.

(June 21, 2011)