

The Beauty of the Sea

Ralph Semino Galán

On a clear day like this,
the view of the sea
from the promontory
where you stand

is breathtaking,
its surface breaking
like a precious gem
into prisms of light.

So you scamper
to the beach below,
the sand crunching
beneath your feet

and scoop a cupful
of blue in your hands.
But already the humor
inside you changes,

since always beauty
betrays, making you sigh,
for once captured
it begins to slip through

your fingers, the way
water escapes your grip
no matter how long
or hard your try.

Time and the Beloved

Ralph Semino Galán

When I am with you
time moves differently
it accelerates
like a bullet train
a speed boat
a jet plane
the surroundings blurring
into a haze of faces
a labyrinth of landmarks
a whirlwind of words
as I focus my attention
on you and you alone.

Or it decelerates
into triple slow motion,
so that a second stretches
and lasts a lifetime,
a gesture takes forever
to accomplish, an utterance
becomes comprehensible
only several centuries after,
and I end up remembering
the timbre of your voice,
the texture of your arms,
the tint of your eyes.

Silence and the Beloved

Ralph Semino Galán

In a love poem like this
only the lover speaks,
articulating both heart
and mind, connecting
this stark image
with that emotion,
this metaphor
with that state of mind.

The beloved remains silent,
whose absence
determines his presence,
whose mutable face
is likened to the changes
in the weather:
sunny as a summer day,
grim as a stormy night.

But he is always there:
the minty taste
after the torrid kiss,
the shadow cast
by the departing figure,
the musky scent
left on the damp sheets,
the empty room's silence.

Two Ships

(Iligan City, December 2011,
After Tropical Storm Sendong)

Ralph Semino Galán

On the night
 of the Great Flood
two ships appeared
 in the rising waters
a ship of light
 and a ship of darkness
one sailing downstream
 the other upriver
mysterious in the heavy rain.

The ships started
 to gather passengers
both the drowning
 and the drowned
the young and the old
 the rich and the poor
to destinations
 and destinies
uncertain unclear unknown.

The ships were nowhere
 to be found
the morning after
 no visible trace or chart
of their sudden passage
 except perhaps maybe
days and weeks later
 in the bleeding hearts
and the countless wakes.

After Watching Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*

Ralph Semino Galán

Removing my black faux leather jacket
in Café Adriatico, I notice an ink stain
on my pink shirt the color of cherry blossoms.

Earlier in the evening, second act of the opera,
while my heart was fluttering like a butterfly
inside the gilded cage of my heavy chest,

Cio Cio San appeared in a western dress:
hothouse flower, a carnation off season
against the snowy white of the shoji screens.

How many Pinkertons are bound to betray me,
I wonder? How many bushido blades
would attempt to plunge into my heaving guts?

Why do I still sing *Un bel di vedremo*, aria
full of hope despite the diminishing odds?
Diminishing like my hair, beauty, youth ...

I guess I have survived all these years
by allowing words to flow like music
from the bottomless inkwell of my heart.

(June 23, 2012)