

Almanac of Black and Other Poems

Carlomar Arcangel Daoana

ALMANAC OF BLACK

Pulsing, oceanic, like the womb's
Originating dark, but vaster,
More complex and compelling
Than death, it's creeping towards me,
With its sheets and treatises,
Its slew of paraphernalia
And accoutrements, flicking
With the mamba's forked tongue,
Slow-thighed like a panther in
Its pivot-and-pounce maneuver.

Around my ankles now, pooling
And hissing, it offers me a multitude
Of gifts: carbon, coal, graphite,
Blood-veined dahlias, the side
Of the moon unbesieged by sun
And meteorite, the motive
Of generals, the hair of the be-
Headed, the inheritance
Of poets, the gravity of words,
The gaps holding together

The paper-thin strips of history,
History from the perspective
Of God, God Himself, abyss-filled,
Displaced by absence. Should
I kneel down and accept them,
What light would crack across
The sky and save me? *Video sed*
Non credo. I stand mute and
Transfixed, freed of poetry,
The night gouging my eyes of onyx.

AFTER LISTENING TO GUSTAV HOLST'S *THE PLANETS*

As Performed by Manila Symphony Orchestra

What do I know of music, this orchestral piece
In seven parts, each plucking a planet's singular note
Or feel, as imagined through the centuries: Mars
In its fiery, fleet-footed temper, war-ready;
Neptune's scherzo which is a kind searching
Underwater with a beam of light; and Jupiter,
The centerpiece, rolling giddily across the space.

There are, of course, the other planets, which
Somehow fail to register and the planet Earth,
Conspicuously absent, because the point of listening
Is to train the mind's eye towards the skull's
Planetarium as the music knives open the darkness
Of the body—space-deep—until all the bent cells
Of the platelets are stars. But that can't be right.

If at all, the music simply washes over like a shower
Of meteors, heard superficially, wave upon wave
Of notes from flutes, strings, glockenspiel, relentless
And uncompromising, insisting its nervous energy,
Expanses of placidity until the air itself—strung,
Beaten, reverberating—becomes the complexity.
Here is a level of safety we can expect: locked

Into the solitude of their respective orbits,
All the planets merely turn in soundless space,
Seven points sparkling around the sun, free
Of collisions from asteroids and planetary dust.
The music has made it so. I step out of the venue
To Manila's night sky. Minor, forgotten gods
Are making their sad leaps across the heaven.

WEDDING OF THE CENTURY

From the outside, floodlights blast
Through the cathedral's grilles,
Approximating daylight. Nothing

Should unhinge when the scenes
Of television's "wedding
Of the century" will be stitched:

Not the façade decked out
In white orchids flown from
Thailand, not the pool of people

Kibitzing by the stone gate who,
Intruding into the frame,
Will be excised promptly

And replaced with a shot
Of an open cobblestone street,
Trees, the horse-drawn carriage

Where the bride, shielding
Herself with a parasol, pretends
No one watches her. Now,

She is affixed at the start
Of the aisle, waiting to walk
The walk of the severely

Punished now justly rewarded:
A hand-embroidered gown,
A good ending, the marriage

Of the only man she ever loved.
(Waiting for his turn, the actor-
Husband cools his heels

In his airconditioned tent.)
Everyone rides this conceit,
Calling her Katerina

And by now she is really into it,
Her character, that she begins
To weep through her veil

Even before the take.
Does she wish it to be real
And think that for life

To be beautiful it has to be
Staged? The trompe l'oeil
Ceiling soars and is grandiose.

From a corner, St. Agnes looks
At her askance while holding
A town in the crook of her arms.

When the gapper finally
Makes his determinate click,
The cameras—handheld,

Set on tracks, mounted
On doilies—begin registering
Her wedding walk among

The extras who are clapping—
Happy for her—unwittingly
Refining the scene's sublime

Deceit. Top view, she glides
In a svelte wave of fabric
Amid crystal-strewn branches.

It seems forever, that walk.
Good! howls the director,
And the cathedral deflates
Back to its lesser version; lights
Are turned off, cables snarl
On the marble floor.

The actress, she can laugh
Again. A week later,
Viewers will work themselves up

To an equal joy as the bride's
As they see her in their
Own image—released

From evil, eternally loved—
Malignant tears burning
Through their only life.

FIGURATION

Someone draws water from a well, so this is evidently
A village, rural. Beside her, a cow mournfully chewing
On grass, her hide an accidental map to God's kingdom.
One can detect a glint of metal by her magnificent throat.

A child rushes to them with a wooden sword.
It is presumptuous to think of the earlier figure
As her mother, but that's beside the point. Perhaps,
It may be the cow that he's interested in, triangulating

The scene to one of disguise or premonition.
He may be the devil. He may poison the well once
He grows up. A slope rises behind them, blue-green
Like a bottle in a cupboard. Quick brushstrokes

Suggest either houses or creeping fire. The sky
Is a flat, indeterminate blue, asterisked with stars.
Because of the expectation that there should be no sea,
A band of cerulean glimmers. Small boats smolder.

No object casts a shadow, even the jug beside the woman.
Perhaps, an allegory antedates the awareness of negative space.
If so, the fire will be pointless, bearing no heat. The figures
Don't carry the burden of ever being once alive.

The sheen betrays the oil of the medium. You can slash
The canvas and you will be charged with vandalism,
Not murder. You are responsible only to things that
Tame you. Someone has yet to paint everything I said.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EMPTYING

Wear a crisp white shirt, a simple watch.
If there are letters, burn them. Put the key
Under the mat. Outside the house,

Think of the neighborhood for the last time.
At its edge, someone will meet you,
Impressing upon you a new name.

There will be a train. Here's the ticket
You will show to the inspector.
Mutter your thanks. When the train hurtles

Through an ever-tightening space,
Your ears shall scream from the noise.
The first blast of light shall rip you apart.

When you alight and anyone tells you
They've not seen you before, say
You have lived here all your life.