

*LABAW SA BULAWAN:  
TRANSLATING MINDANAO  
POETRY FROM CEBUANO  
INTO ENGLISH (PRELIMINARY  
NOTES TOWARDS A THEORIA  
AND A PRACTIS)*

by Ralph Semino Galán



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In this day and age of rapidly increasing globalization and the concomitant rise of migration and cross-continental cosmopolitanism, literary translation plays an important role in the preservation and dissemination of regional literature. This is especially true for local languages whose literary productions are under the constant threat of being diminished, if not totally eradicated, due to the constant pressure being exerted by the dominant presence of Anglophone and European writings in world literature.

It is a sad fact that, although Cebuano has the second largest number of native speakers in the Philippine archipelago—approximately 18.5 million people, or roughly one-fifth of the Philippine population—and is the language being spoken not only on the island province of Cebu, but also in the rest of Central Visayas, parts of Eastern Visayas, and most of Mindanao, the translation work being done on its body of writing lacks sustained institutional support. Except for the Cebuano Studies Center of the University of San Carlos—established in 1975 by its founding director Resil B. Mojares (National Artist for Literature)—and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, with its intermittent grants given on a rotation basis to the different languages of the Philippines, institutional support for the literary translation of Cebuano writing is few and far between.

Even within the ambit of the Cebuano Studies Center, most of the translation book projects that have been done and published in Cebuano literature are focused on fiction (short stories and novels), seldom on poetry. And the few anthologies of poetry originally written in Cebuano translated into English contain, sadly, only a few Mindanao poets, despite Mindanao's geographical size as the second largest island of the Philippines, next to Luzon.

With this in mind, I have decided to undertake the task of translating Mindanao poetry from Cebuano into English, not only because of the fact that a good number of poets writing in Cebuano prefer to be

translated into English, “a neutral language, as far as the Bisaya is concerned” (Alunan, 2015, xvi), rather than into Filipino (Tagalog) with its perceived linguistic hegemony over the other indigenous tongues, but also because of my nearly impossible dream that key Mindanao poems written in my mother tongue should be made accessible to a wider readership, and thus become more significant to Philippine, if not world, literature.

### **“Matud Nili Ako Dili Angay”: Of Poetry and Song, Translation and Transfiguration**

When I first undertook this translation project, little did I know that it would open a lot of linguistic doors for me, not only as a literary translator but as a creative writer and a literary critic as well. My decision to focus on translating Mindanao poetry from Cebuano into English had proven to be both serendipitous and serviceable. It was the right time and place for me, initially, as a perpetual literary apprentice—my innate humility preventing me from ever considering myself as a potential master wordsmith—to explore the metal of another language, and to practice yet another aspect of what Dylan Thomas refers to as “my craft or sullen art,” which is literary translation.

I had previously worked in the English, Filipino, and Spanish languages both as a poet and as a translator, though my attempts to write poems in Spanish must remain unpublished forever. Translating poetry from my mother tongue (source language) to another idiom (target language) was the next logical step in my growth as a writer nearing his golden year. A return to one’s roots must surely trigger a new efflorescence that would yield more fulfilling fruits—hence my decision to translate Mindanao poems from Cebuano into English.

It was also imperative for someone like me, who has deep roots both in Cebu and Mindanao, to pay due attention to Mindanao poetry in Cebuano.

*Bisaya Magasin* is just a decade shy of celebrating its 100th anniversary; having been established in 1930, it is a surprisingly resilient publication, having survived World War II. Its literary section has been featuring Mindanao poets right from the beginning, and as a child and a preadolescent in my paternal grandfather's house in Cebu, I used to peruse its pages during the summer months. I felt that it was high time for an anthology of Cebuano poems by Mindanao poets, with my English translations, to be published, which would be contiguous to, but contradistinctive from, the mainstream poetry in Cebuano written by the poets in Cebu, and the poetry in Cebuano written elsewhere in the Visayas.

My attempt to establish the characteristics that distinguish Mindanao poetry in Cebuano from the Cebuano poetry of the Cebuano-speaking regions of the Visayas would free the former from the long shadow of the latter (especially of Cebuano poetry written on the island province of Cebu), and the tendency of literary critics to consider Mindanao poetry in Cebuano a mere branch of the sturdy tree of Cebuano poetry. Note, for instance, poet-translator Merlie M. Alunan's overview of Cebuano literature in her groundbreaking anthology *Sa Atong Dila: Introduction to Visayan Literature*:

Among the five major Visayan languages, Cebuano has the most fully developed body of literature with an unbroken history, despite the gaps and fissures resulting from colonizations, wars, and political upheavals...Cebuano literature is not confined only to the island of Cebu but covers all Cebuano-speaking areas in the Visayas and Mindanao. (Alunan, 2015, 135)

For some strange reason known only perhaps to magic and sorcery, I took inspiration for this endeavor from a well-loved Cebuano love song

titled “Matud Nila” (“They Say”) popularized by Pilita Corrales (dubbed in the 1970s as “Asia’s Queen of Song”) and Susan Fuentes (dubbed as “Queen of Visayan Song” also in the 1970s). “Labaw sa Bulawan” (“More than Gold”), a phrase from the song, struck me in particular as an apt alchemical metaphor to describe my translation project. I believe that the art of translation is a transformative act, for from the base metal of language emerges the elixir of life that is poetry, and the nuggets of wisdom about and insights into the human condition that might remain after everything seems lost in translation—the dross between languages having been extracted—are indeed more worthy than the purest gold.

### **Binisaya ang Pinulongan sa Akong Mga Katigulangan: Returning to My Mother Tongue**

I was born in Iligan City on February 21, 1972, exactly seven months before martial law was declared by the late President Ferdinand E. Marcos. Both of my parents were born and raised in Cebuano-speaking provinces: my dearly departed father Allan Lim Galán, Sr. in the island of Cebu, the heartland of Cebuano language and culture, and my vivacious mother Annette Zagado Semino in Bonifacio, a somnolent town in Misamis Occidental, in Northern Mindanao. Their ancestries were typical of the Central Visayas and the Northern and Western Mindanao regions: my father being of Spanish, Chinese, and Filipino descent; and my mother, having Spanish and Filipino roots, and I suspect the Mexican too, based on her melodramatic flair and unabashed sentimentality. Back then, her highly emotional and empathic everyday language was punctuated by figures of speech, which I found quite fascinating: “Murag gikumot ang akong kasingkasing!” (“It was as if my heart had been wrung/crushed/squeezed!”); “Gahuruhuro ang akong kalagot!” (“My anger was bellowing!”)

But since I was in school in the late 1970s to the middle 1980s, when the “English Only” policy was in full sway both in basic and higher education, I did not get to appreciate the beauty of the Cebuano language until much later, when I began studying regional literature on my own, particularly Mindanao poetry in Cebuano. In fact, when I was in kindergarten and in the elementary grades, I only spoke English inside the classroom, since speaking in what was then referred to derogatorily as the “vernacular” (“language of the marketplace, language of the home slave”) had a corresponding fine.

As a result, I associated the use of the Cebuano “dialect” (another demeaning term that at the time indicated not only regional linguistic origin but also social class and status) with the housemaids and the intellectually inferior. This was of course predicated by the fact that my mother, who was educated by the last of the Thomasites, taught English in primary school, and therefore addressed her children as much as possible in English at home, to further enhance our facility with the language.

### **Duhay Pasabot sa Pulong nga Balak: Cebuano Poetry and Its Intentionality**

In his chronicles, *Historias de las islas de Indios de Bisayas* (History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands), Rev. Fr. Francisco Ignacio Alcina, SJ, observes that the inhabitants of the Visayan islands have many poetic and verse forms: “*Sus modos de poesías varios, y según su variedad y las materias de que tratan, tienen sus nombres y calidades...* [They have several types of poetry which have their names and characteristics according to their variety and the subject-matter which they treat.] (Translation by Cantius J. Kobak, OFM and Lucio Gutierrez, O.P.)

He mentions and describes, in particular, the following verse forms: *ambahan* (unrhymed couplet with seven syllables per line), *bical*

(poetic jousting between two men or two women similar to the Tagalog *balagtasán*), *balac* (poetic debate about love between a man and a woman to the accompaniment of the two-stringed musical instruments known as *coriapi* and *curlong*), *siday* (poem of praise oftentimes about the heroic exploits of ancestors, the beauty of women, or the courage of men), *haya* (also known as *anugun* or *canugun*, dirge chanted during a wake interspersed with howling) and *awit* (boat song or sea chantey). Although Alcina does not mention it in his chronicles, there is also a Cebuano word that means “verse,” which is *garay*. (The term is included in the dictionaries of Juan Felix de la Encarnacion, Matheo Sanchez, and John Kauffman, among others, as pointed out by Erlinda K. Alburo in her *Dictionary of Bisayan Arts*.)

Fray Francisco Encina, in the chapter of his *Arte de la Lengua Zebuana* titled “*De la Poesía Zebuana*,” begins his discussion of Cebuano poetry by noting the difficulty of the Cebuano language due to its highly metaphorical nature: “*Pues en esta lengua Bisaya en que todo su hablar, és por Methaforas, hay muchísimos tropos y figuras, que solo en sus versos y enigmas se oyen.* (Encina, 2017, 454.)” [In the Visayan language, they all speak in metaphors, and there are a lot of tropes and figures that can only be heard in their verses and enigmas. (Translation mine.)] He then describes the *balac* and its related poetic forms of the *gabai* and the *cachorinon* as “*muy dificultosos, pero muy discretos, y enigmatico...*” (ibid.) [“very difficult, but very concrete, and enigmatic... (Translation mine)]. He also differentiates the *balac* from the *bagay* and the *garay*: the *balac* and the *bagay* are both metaphorical and enigmatic, but the *bagay* does not maintain the consonance of the last syllables of its versification; on the other hand, the *balac* and the *garay* have the same meter, but the *garay* is not enigmatic for it does not have any comparisons (metaphors).

Interestingly, the two poetic forms most associated with love and valor have become, through common usage, the generic terms to refer to

Cebuano poetry (balak) and Waray poetry (siday), respectively, perhaps indicating the romantic and heroic nature of the people of the Visayas, and by extension the settlers of Mindanao who migrated from Central, Eastern, and Western Visayas.

In the current usage of the Cebuano language, the words balak and garay mean “poetry” and “verse” respectively but are often deployed interchangeably. This is also true of other literary traditions, although technically speaking, “poetry” and “verse” do not exactly refer to the same linguistic entity. But the distinction is a very subtle one. As William Harmon asserts in the seventh edition of *A Handbook to Literature*, the term “poetry” can be “applied to the many forms in which human beings have given rhythmic expression to their most intense perceptions of the world, themselves, and the relation of the two” (Harmon, 1996). The term “verse,” on the other hand, has two possible meanings: (1) the metrical line as a basic unit of poetry, and (2) any form of metrical composition. The term “verse,” in the second sense, refers to a metrical composition, usually one with a regular rhyme and rhythm, but does not indicate its quality. In contrast, the term “poetry” or “poem” is “often being reserved for verse of high merit.”

In the context of the Cebuano language and literature, Mojares has this to say in his introduction to the anthology *Cebuano Poetry/Sugboanong Balak (Until 1940)*, which he co-edited with Erlinda K. Alburo, Vicente Bandillo, and Simeon Dumdung Jr.: “Balak is the term that has survived to this day to refer to poetry in general, although it is often reserved for the more elevated creations, with garay used for more informal, less accomplished ‘versifying’” (Mojares, 1988, 3). Mojares also elucidates on the word origin of the term balak and its dual meaning, but does not further elaborate on the implications of its secondary meaning: “It is intriguing to consider that, etymologically, the word (as in the Tagalog balak) refers to intention, plan, or design” (ibid.). This is where I would like to enter the conversation,



by positing that this very intentionality of design makes the conceptual framework of Cebuano poetry writing unique among the country's various literary traditions, especially after the advent of American New Criticism and its overwhelming influence on how Filipino creative writers and literary critics think of poetry.

As a formalist movement, the American New Critics emphasize that poetry is an autonomous and self-sufficient linguistic artifact, "a verbal icon" that has no function beyond its own existence as an aesthetic object. They also believe that this "verbal icon" must have organic unity for it to be artistically successful. William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley claim that authorial intention, along with the related fields of biography and history, does not really matter in literary criticism, since a good poem, like a "well-wrought urn" to use the term of Cleanth Brooks, will yield its meaning and/or meaningfulness through a close reading of the text.

The balak, therefore, challenges the prevailing ideological hegemony of Western-influenced literary criticism, by acknowledging the importance of intentionality right from its conception. The Cebuano balak, if allowed to flourish through private and public support, can also bring back poetry writing and reading to the larger society, so as not to limit the practice and appreciation of versifying and verses only to a cabal of fellow-minded writer friends, the so-called "literary barkadas" who have been edified in the country's top universities, which needless to say are patterned after the American educational system. And by bringing back the balak to the heart of the people like in precolonial times, when "poetry permeated local life; there were verses for practically every occasion and everyone was a poet" (ibid.), and by developing an indigenous set of literary aesthetics to determine the quality of each poem written in Cebuano, then there might be a true flowering of the Sugboanong balak, and the long-standing debate between

the camps of José García Villa (“art for art’s sake”) and Salvador P. Lopez (“art as social commitment”) might be one little step closer to resolution.

### **Dili Dali ang Pagpili: The Difficulty of the Selection Process**

The initial coverage of this research project is the translation of a hundred Mindanao poems from Cebuano to English that will showcase both the stylistic renditions and thematic concerns of the Cebuano-speaking people of Mindanao, the latter being of more importance since the Mindanao-specific issues are the ones that will make Mindanao poetry in Cebuano more distinct from its counterparts in Cebu, the rest of Central Visayas, and some parts of Eastern Visayas.

But after doing my initial spadework online and in the Cebuano Studies Center (CSC) of the University of San Carlos (Talamban Campus), I have realized that there is a plethora of materials available, especially if I take into consideration that *Bisaya Magasin*, the oldest extant magazine in Cebuano and perhaps the most widely circulated, has been consistently publishing poetry and fiction in its pages since its establishment in August 1930. Unfortunately, magazine copies of the first forty years can only be retrieved mostly through the Cebuano Studies Center, whose archive is not one hundred percent complete, after the flooding that occurred in the basement of the University of San Carlos Main Campus which destroyed a large number of the *Bisaya* issues of the early decades. Fortunately, the retrieval of the missing issues through private donors and other sources is currently being undertaken by the CSC under the leadership of its current director, my good friend Dr. Hope Sabanpan-Yu. Nonetheless, accessing the more recent issues is not much of a problem, although it requires a lot of work hours of actual retrieval.

Therefore, I have decided to work backward through time, especially since online journals and more recent literary anthologies and workshop proceedings featuring Mindanao poetry in Cebuano are more readily available, and can provide me with additional materials for translation. I am thus abiding by the following timeframe: “Labaw sa Bulawan” (1991-2020)—Most Recent Decades: Post-EDSA Euphoria, Contemporary Period; “Bili Ning Kinabuhi” (1961-1990) – Middle Decades: Martial Law Period, EDSA Revolution; and “Damgo Kog Pasalig” (1930-1960)—Early Decades: Prewar Period, World War II, Postwar Period.

I have also decided to group together the poems I have collected from the most recent decades, and their respective translations, according to the following thematic clusters, for the sake of facility: I. Himamat Kanako: Mindanao Ethnic Identities and Cultural Beliefs, Aesthetics and Poetics; II. Pagprotesta Panahon sa Pandemya: Mindanao Politics and Political Upheavals, War and Peace; III. Katong Nagbinahinay tag Saging: Poverty and Other Social Problems in Mindanao; IV. Bisan ang Pagkapulak sa Usa ka Dahon: Mother Nature and Environmental Disasters in Mindanao; and V. Kon Dunay Pako ang Kamingaw: Love, Desire and Passion in Mindanao.

### **“Ilad sa Dila”: The Limits of Literary Translation**

Almost all practitioners and theoreticians of translation and translation studies are in agreement that poetry is the most difficult of the literary genres to translate. This is because, unlike fiction and nonfiction whose main focus is on the narration of a plausible story, the essay whose main aim is explication and meaning-making, and drama whose main intention is scene-building through dialogue and action, the main purpose of poetry is the generation of sensuous pleasures through imagery and sound devices. Therefore, poetry is the literary genre that relies most on figures of speech and idiomatic expressions to achieve its desired effects and affects. And since

tropes (figures of thought) and rhetorical figures (figures of sound), as well as locutions and set phrases, are inherently language-bound, the translator of poetry has the extremely difficult task of ferrying across the shores of two different languages the sensory effects and emotional affects of any given poem, without completely losing the distinctive flavors of the source language, in terms of its particular turns of phrase and thought, in the target language.

Because of its built-in intransigence as a unique linguistic performance, one of the key issues in the translation of poetry is its basic translatability or untranslatability as a literary genre. As Alexandra X. Jacobs observes,

Questions of fidelity, issues of translatability, and the anxious calculus of loss and gain have freighted the translation of poetry, and its discourse, for centuries. On one side of the coin, we have Robert Frost's assertion, often taken out of context, that "poetry is what gets lost in translation," or, on the flip side, Joseph Brodsky's proclamation that "poetry is what is gained in translation." (479, 2014)

Translation studies scholars who proclaim that poetry is utterly untranslatable, it being the literary genre that is the most interpretatively challenging—even in the original—adhere consciously or unconsciously to the statement by Frost. They argue that accuracy and precision in the translation of poetry are impossible to achieve since the words that constitute any given source language do not necessarily have all the corresponding words in the target language.

But translators who believe that poetry is still translatable despite the difficulty of the genre, myself among them, attempt to find the proximate and approximate words as necessity dictates, without failing to recognize the limits of the act and the art of translation as applied to what Samuel Taylor Coleridge refers to as "the best words in the best order."

However, I encountered a complete translation impasse early on in this ongoing project when I read with much pleasure but with an equal amount of regret—because I could not translate it with the least level of acceptability in terms of fidelity to form and content, try hard as I may—the brief anagrammatic poem by Marianne Hazzale J. Bullos below:

### **ilad sa dila**

tagak nga katag  
piang nga aping  
wala nga lawa

nituo ang nauto

A quick inventory of the words in the poem and their probable meanings would yield the following: *ilad* (deception, swindle); *sa* (of); *dila* (tongue, language); *tagak* (fallen, autumn); *nga* (that); *katag* (disarray, mess); *piang* (crippled, lame, fractured); *nga* (that); *aping* (cheek); *wala* (nonexistent, left [the direction]); *nga* (that); *lawa* (spider, lake [in Tagalog]); *nituo* (believed); *ang* (the); *nauto* (fooled). Needless to say, the best approximation I can come up with does not only lack any anagrammatic resemblance, but it is also bordering on linguistic incoherence even on the level of meaning/fullness:

### **tongue's deception**

autumn's disarray  
crippled cheek  
nonexistent spider

the fool believed

## Ang Hubad nga Walay Paglubad: Translation as the Unchaining and Re-chaining of Signs

Like *balak*, the Cebuano word *hubad* has dual meanings: primarily, as a noun, it means “translation” and “version;” secondarily, as a verb, it means “to unchain, to unloosen, to untie,” and is most likely related to its Tagalog homonym, which means “naked, nude, bare, or devoid,” and by extension “bereft of clothes.” I have further explored this interesting interlingual connection to bring into the conversation the Spanish Nobel Prize laureate Juan Ramon Jimenez’s concept of “*la poesía desnuda*” (“naked poetry”), and, to a certain extent, the poem of Cuban poet Jose Martí (“The Opposite of Ornate and Rhetorical Poetry”) which has a similar trajectory. Also known as “*la poesía pura*” (“pure poetry”), “*la poesía desnuda*” recognizes that the essence of poetry is not found in its artifices and ornamentations, but in its innocence, something that is more elemental than the fripperies of wordplay and language games, like water.

Mojares further elaborates on the nature of the Cebuano word for translation: “*Hubad*... is used not only to signify the translation of written texts but the act of explaining an enigma or mystery (say, a riddle, conundrum, or “*tanghaga*”), or of untying a knot, or of undressing” (Mojares, 1990, 80). *Hubad*, the Cebuano act of translation, therefore, does not only signify the intention of “ferrying across” the meaning of a text from one language to another, like its English equivalent, which is derived from the Latin *translatus* (transference, carrying across, conveyance, handing over), but also, more importantly, the illumination of an insight into the human condition through revelation and exposure. Furthermore, Mojares emphasizes the pedagogical importance of *hubad* and “its consequence, of the beholder or listener becoming knowledge-filled, his learning increased... the sense of a sharing in knowledge, of mutual openness.”(ibid.)

Hubad is also etymologically related to the Cebuano words *huwad* (“to pour”), another watery connection, and *hulad* (“copy, duplicate, facsimile, replica, or reproduction”), which can be descriptive of how water mimics the shape of its receptacle. Interestingly, the Tagalog word for translation—*salin*—carries the same notion of pouring a liquid substance from one container to another. This suggests that in the conceptual framework of the translation process both in the Cebuano and Tagalog languages, there is recognition of a so-called essence, something elemental and substantive that can be transferred from one vessel to another, from one language to another, or from one medium to another, like water.

To further explore the possible linguistic and conceptual connections between Cebuano and Tagalog in their respective framing of the art and act of translation, the Cebuano homonym *salin* must also be mentioned, which means “leftover, remainder, or residue,” as well as “leftover food, crumb, or morsel” through a specifically gustatory expansion of the term. In this translation project, I am strategically recuperating the Cebuano term *salin* to refer, not to the dross or dregs that remain after the transference of a poem from source to target language, but to the alchemical gold that stays behind after it passes through the many alembics of the distillation process that have extracted the base metals, the unchaining of signs in one tongue so that it can be relinked and rekindled, and made to sing and glisten again in another tongue.

Here then are sample translations, one each from the five thematic clusters, which have been chosen either for their iconic or iconoclastic representation of Mindanao: “Nahabiling Kalibotan” (“Remaining Earth”) from *Himamat Kanako* tackles the loss of the ancestral domain of Mindanao’s indigenous people; “Pagprotesta Panahon sa Pandemya” (“Protesting During the Pandemic”) from *Pagprotesta Panahon sa Pandemya* belies the notion that the politics of Mindanao’s inhabitants are at best apolitical and

at worst extremely right-wing; “Sayal” (“Skirt”) from *Katong Nagbinahinay tag Saging* paints the sad portrait of a Mindanao female student who works at night as a streetwalker due to poverty; “Bisan ang Pagkapulak sa Usa ka Dahon” (“Even the Falling of One Leaf”) from *Bisan ang Pagkapulak sa Usa ka Dahon* harks back to a more harmonious time in Mindanao when man and nature still followed the order of things; and “Kun Unsaon Paghigugma ang Lalaking Straight” (“How to Love a Straight Man”) from *Kon Dunay Pako ang Kamingaw* countervails the prevailing image of Mindanao as a place brimming with macho men and machismo.



# NAHABILING KALIBOTAN

by John R. Saguban

Kabiling yuta, liboan ka ektarya:  
sulod na lang sa hanap nga handurawang  
lumad Subano, Higaonon, Manubo, Mandaya.

Ang nanganawkanawng' kayutaan,  
kalasangan, kabatoan, kabalasan, kasubaan,  
gihulagway sa lakon sa di matapos nga panghayhay,

ingog' makapakurat nga damgo  
sa lawom nga kagabhiong pintas ang katugnaw  
sulod sa mga gubaong' kamalig.

Sa lagyong dakbayan atua ang nindot  
nga mga talan-awong ikatandi sa madanihong bulan—  
mga tore sa kaugmaran, dangpanan sa kaalam,

balay nga bulawan... Gihandom na lang kining tanan,  
ibabaw sa kanhi lapad nga kapatagang gilaktan  
sa hanap putling mga lapalapa sa ilang katigulangan.

# REMAINING EARTH

Ancestral land, thousands of acres:  
existing only in the hazy indigenous memory  
of Subanon, Higaonon, Manobo, Mandaya.

The loss of extensive lands,  
forests, ridges, littorals, rivers,  
are expressed in the coils of unending sighs,

like a shocking dream  
in the bitter cold of a dark night  
inside dilapidated warehouses.

In distant cities are the beautiful  
sceneries comparable to the alluring moon—  
towers of progress, sanctuary of learning,

house of gold... All these are but a memory,  
above the formerly vast plains traversed  
by the blurred pure soles of their ancestors.

# PAGPROTESTA PANAHON SA PANDEMYA

ni John Gilford Doquilla

Luyo sa nakatabon nga mga nawong  
ang mga baba nga andam mopadayag  
og kaguol, kasuko, ug paglaom  
nga ang moabotay nga ugma hayag na unta.

Sa pagpahid sa singot sa agtang  
sa pila ka oras og siniyagit sa kalsada,  
dili moundang ang pagtuo  
nga ang kainit sa mga panawagan ug pangamuyo  
mudalag alimuot nga moalisngaw  
sa bugnawng kalag sa gaharing buraot.

Mutulo man ang luha o  
mokurog man ang tingog sa kasuko,  
maski pa og tutokan og pusil ang baba  
arun muhilom,  
walay makapatay sa tawong  
kamatuoran ang anting-anting.

Murag aso nga bisag kapila pa taguon  
gamit ang kinumo,  
mangita gihapon ang kamatuoran og  
kagawasan.

# PROTESTING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Behind the masked faces  
are the mouths ready to express  
sorrow, anger, and hope  
that tomorrow would be brighter.

While wiping sweat from forehead  
after hours of shouting on the street,  
the conviction does not stop  
that the heat of clamor and entreaty  
would stifle and steam  
the cold soul of the ruling troublemaker.

Even if tears fall or  
voice trembles with anger,  
even if a gun is pointed at the mouth  
to silence it,  
no one could kill a person  
whose amulet is truth.

Like smoke many times concealed  
using the fist,  
the truth would still seek  
liberation.

# SAYAL

ni Ton Daposala

Matag Domingo suoton nimo  
ang bisteda nga ang palda mubo pa  
kon itandi sa kagabhion.

Ang takon sa imong estileto  
sama kahait sa bolpen  
nga gamiton nimo sa tingklase.

Imong mga tawo-tawo danaw  
sa dalang aspalto diin nasamin  
ang arko sa Bulan nga gakipat-kipat

ibabaw sa motel. Taliwa sa dulom  
mikidhat ang mata sa itom nga Altis.  
Ug gihipos nimo ang kasingkasing

ilawom sa pitaka aron mabakante  
ang mga kamot kansang hawid  
labaw kahugot sa imong blusang pula.

Samtang gakaduol ang sakyanan,  
gahinam-hinam pod imong pag-ampo  
nga makasul-ob pod unta ka

usa ka adlaw puhon og bisteda  
nga pang-Domingo nga dili  
sama kanihit sa damgo.

# SKIRT

Every Sunday you would wear  
the dress whose skirt is shorter  
when compared to the night.

The heel of your stiletto  
is sharp as the ballpoint pen  
that you use during class hours.

Your pupils dilate to lagoons  
on the asphalt road that mirrors  
the arc of the flickering Moon

above the motel. In the darkness  
the eye of a black Altis winks.  
And you stash away your heart

inside a purse to free  
the hands whose grasp  
are tighter than your red blouse.

While the vehicle approaches,  
you also hanker in prayer  
that you too would be able to wear

one day in the future  
a Sunday dress which is not  
as scanty as a dream.

# BISAN ANG PAGKAPULAK SA USA KA DAHON

ni Gumer M. Rafanan

Nganong mohilak ang bag-ong himugso  
inig sugat sa kahayag,

unya mokatawa bisag way mohadla?

Nganong ang dagat mohunas-motaob,

ang adlaw mosubang mosalop,

ang bangaw motadlas sa panganod?

Nganong ang panahon mohayag-modulom,

usahay moulan, usahay mohulaw?

Nganong ang langgam ganahang moawit,

ang bulak mobuklad, ang sanga

manalingsing?

Daghang ngano ang buot tang tugkaron

samas kalawom sa lawod, kahabog

sa langit.

Kalipayg kasakit modangat kanato,

bukas-palad tang gidawat,

bukas-dughan tang gihangop

kay nakulit na sa sabakan sa

panahon nga anang panghitabo

adunay HINUNGDAN...

Bisan ang pagkapulak

sa usa ka

dahon.

# EVEN THE FALLING OF ONE LEAF

Why does the newborn cry  
when it meets the light,  
then laughs even if no one amuses it?  
Why does the sea ebb and flow,  
the sun rise and set,  
the rainbow arch across the sky?  
Why does the weather brighten and darken,  
at times rainy, at times dry?  
Why does the bird like to sing,  
the flower unfurl, the branch  
produce shoots?  
Many whys that we desire to fathom  
like the depths of the sea, the height  
of the firmament.  
Joy and sorrow would reach us,  
with open palms we receive,  
with open hearts we embrace,  
since it is already engraved in  
the womb of time that each event  
has a REASON...  
Even the falling  
of one  
leaf.



# KUN UNSAON PAGHIGUGMA ANG LALAKING STRAIGHT

ni Alton Melvar Dapanas

Huna-hunaa ra god, auntie,  
nga usa lamang siya ka amigo.  
Kon wala siya gatan-aw,  
tutoki ang iyang lasangong bangas.  
Pugngi imong kaugalingon, dzai,  
nga maghunahuna kon unsa  
ang bati-on sa mga kamot mo  
kon laagon niini iyang buhok—  
kon asang buhok ikaw na’y makatubag.  
Kon sa imong kakiat,  
ma-imagine mo na gyod unsa  
siya nga pagka-amahan sa damlag,  
hinumdomi, imaginary sab imong matris.  
Kon mangutana na siya  
unsa nga tipo sa lalaki imong ma-bet,  
girl, ipatadlas ang kaluoy sa iyang mata.  
Kon mabutyag na kaniya  
ang imong tinuod nga pagbati—  
salamat sa barkada mong traydor—  
ayaw lang kaluya, bayot.  
Wala ra na sa iyaha. Kebs lang.  
Kon makig-shot na siya nianang gabhiona,  
ayaw intawon pag-expect og afterparty.  
Kon pagkabuntag, makita mo siya  
nga gahagok sa imong sopa,  
ter, andama ang humok mong kaunoran nga makuniskunis  
sama sa nabitas nga pink foam sa imong dughan.  
Bes, mata na. Dili siya maimo.

# HOW TO LOVE A STRAIGHT MAN

Just think of him, auntie,  
as no more than a male friend.  
If he is not looking,  
stare at his bushy beard.  
Stop yourself, missy,  
from thinking of how  
your fingers would feel  
if they comb his hair—  
which hair, only you could tell.  
If in your flirtatiousness,  
you could already imagine how  
he would be as a father in the future,  
remember, your womb is imaginary too.  
If he would then ask  
what kind of man you prefer,  
girl, let the pity in his eyes wash over you.  
If he would then discover  
your true feelings—  
thanks to your treacherous chums—  
do not be frazzled, faggot.  
It would be nothing to him. No big deal.  
If he would drink with you that very night,  
do not expect for an afterparty.  
If in the morning, you would see him  
snoring on your sofa,  
sis, prepare your soft flesh to be torn apart  
like the ripped pink foam on your chest.  
Bestie, wake up. He won't be yours.



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