



Pornotopia

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Abstract

The poetry sequence “Pornotopia”—in coupling the words “pornography” and “utopia”, a world infused and suffused with desire—is an attempt to respond to the idea of “porno-tropics” where the white conqueror “feminizes the earth as a cosmic breast, in relation to which the epic male hero is a tiny, lost infant, yearning for the Edenic nipple” (McClintock, 1995, p. 22) and connects the “relationship between pornographic fantasies of the tropics and the brutal, often violent facts of conquest” (Balce, 2016, p. 40). “Pornotopia” continues the legacy of literary resistance that uses the linguistic tools of the master to subvert the insatiable lust of the empire, like in the poem “Land of Our Desire” by the Philippine poet Amador T. Daguió (1934/1989, p. 195), whose early works mark “the turning-point in Filipino poetry from, rather than in, English” (Abad, 1993, p. 23). Borrowing lyrical and stylistic tools from the 1984 poem “Sex Without Love” by Sharon Olds (p. 57), “Pornotopia” also explores the topography of voyeurism and the landscape of loveless sex.

Keywords: Philippine poetry, poetry sequence, porno-tropics, language of resistance, landscape of desire

We tilled there our desires.
But we could not find the ruby
On the navel of the earth...

—Amador T. Daguió, “*Land of Our Desire*”

How do they come to the
come to the come to the God come to the
still waters, and not love
the one who came there with them...

—Sharon Olds, “*Sex Without Love*”

Drain again and again
this metal bucket

full of spring water.
From the lonely groin

of two forking rivers
to the gaping mouth

of an underwater cave
who knows where

to replenish this
cold ecstasy that

when we finally come
to the end, we come

into the light
empty of grace.

I have come to a lonesome conclusion
that every other person I meet in life

has a nearly comparable counterpart
in the mute presence of wet wildness

pictured on the golden light of desire.
By chance I discover my childhood

reflected naked, slithering, exposed
like young lizards around the holy tree.

How they look back at me, squarely,
damned without shame, in defiance

and in control, inviting me to a hunger
as ancient as the powdery grey moon

and as fresh as small white jasmines
stringed into drops of broken rosary.

These are the desired rubies of Mahabharata.
These are the red stone Syamantaka.
These are the jewelled flowers of Kuruvinda.
These are forged in the valley of Mogok
These are sought in South Vietnam.
These are Yankee soldiers, reckless and young.
These are the guerrillas waiting by the riverbank.
This is an ambush in the dark.
This is abandonment.
This is for death to come.
These are their damp bodies.
This is fever.
This is the flesh-eating rot.
They sought what they thought they could possess.
They were merely boys.
They were on the cusp of manhood.
They held on to their breaths for too long.
These are the spicy dreams of the forest.
This will never leave their body and their blood.
These are the aircrafts that lifted them out of Bien Hoa Air Base.
These are those who made it to Clark, Pampanga.
This is West End and New Hollywood.
This is a retelling of their anguish and burn.
This is how they cry and sing on stage and on screen.
These are the gems no one ever saw again.
These are the old civilizations they toppled.
These are the fledging nations they burned.
These are the fields of barren ash.
There is too much left to raze.
There is none left, but to be desired.
There is none left to be desired.
There is none left, but desire.



Most of the time
I follow them willingly

into that crosscut
to the sacred grove

filled with heavy crops
and swelling fruits.

Unable to grasp,
my tongue reaches

for them. Liquid fire
ignites in my throat—

a scorching thirst
no water physical

or icy chemical
can quench.

In the foothills of Tamugan
they speak of the lonely old fool

who throws stones into the river
who leans as he holds a lamp over

who, above the water, rows slow
as he whistles over the ripples

over the dipping of his paddle
waiting for the darkness to boil.

Sometimes in wandering, he gives
the stones away to the starved

as if they were rations in bundle
for the naked and the starved

as if they were flints and sticks
to start and feed a forest fire.

Like handpicked rejects
from a spoiled harvest

like cheap luxuries
of porcelain wares

like the glazed eyes
of dead lizards, he

peddles as if to rid
as quickly as he could

to passersby these small
fragile pits of desires.

Still he recites the old chants
in his guise as a ragged witch:

sometimes a bird, sometimes
a muddy wild pig. In his pouch

he travelled with from Marilog
to the grimy streets of San Pedro

are the rubies, heavy rattling
like talismans: tiny globes

picked from the naked heart
of a sacred fruit, as naked

as red cherry tomatoes, apples,
strawberries, overripe grapes,

bright acrid makopas, broken
persimmons, luminous seeds

of pomegranate, red flakes
of crushed chili pods, torpedoes

of sour and succulent iba.



In my room, I rub
in my rough hands

the rubies together
until they ignite

in consummation
of inexhaustible fire.

Dying comes in the form
of fevered dreams. Orbs

under my lids shift
rapidly. The friction

blisters the soft corners
of my fiery sleep. Wood

becomes pyre, oil becomes
perfume, bed becomes

a boat rowed by an oarsman,
skeletal and grimy, down

a black river. My face
turns into a death mask

and I wake up smelling
of bog and funeral smoke.

All I can pray for now is cool air
to breathe fresh on the wounds

from the suffocation of the flesh,
the rot, the chafe of raw arrows,

the lovelessness of my hands.
Bone rises in the east and sinks

in the burning paradise. The fury
I have veiled in different faces

will come to me in shifting light
from the gaping mouths of lesions

like crystal fire, like glass prism,
the wet crimson flames of mercy.

Here, I can finally sleep,
lie in the gnarled vines

and thick brackens, sleep
on a bank, my head dipped

in the still waters, sleep
gowned in frosty aureoles

of garden mist, sleep
with rattling cold breath

upon my rubbery skin, sleep
with bony fingers of ruin

choking and strangling
the light out of me.

How I have come
into the light

come to the end
empty of grace.



Some days it goes on for hours
until the closed room smells

of earth and damp loneliness.
Fragrance of the orchard sun

trapped in the ground explodes
and I am now dusty and old,

impotent to the wasted years
of not loving and not being loved.

If I could do it again, I would enter
the longer path-walk of brambles

into the garden of swells, spend
tilling time and planting my own

no matter how lonely it seems
or long it takes to bear fruit.

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Jeffrey B. Javier teaches literature and writing at the University of the Philippines Mindanao. His poetry has appeared in *The Loch Raven Review*, *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, *聲韻詩刊* *Voice and Verse Poetry Magazine*, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *SOFTBLOW*, and *Kabisdak*. His works have been anthologized in *Davao Harvest*, *Lilinaon: An Anthology of Young Writers*, and *Best of Dagmay*. He received The Hawker Prize for Southeast Asian Poetry and won first place for Asian Cha's "Reconciliation" Poetry Contest. He writes from Davao City, Philippines.