

## Banaue, Ifugao Province,

### *Edwin Thumboo*

Edwin Thumboo is Emeritus Professor and Professorial Fellow at the National University of Singapore where he served as the first Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. He has received the National Book Development Council of Singapore Book Award for Poetry three times, the South East Asian Writers Award, Singapore's Cultural Medallion, the ASEAN Cultural and Communications Award in Literature, the Raja Rao Award and Singapore's Meritorious Service Medal. He has several books of poetry, the latest of which are *Singapore Pioneer Poets: The Best of Edwin Thumboo* (2012) with a critical introduction by Lily Rose Tope, *Word Maps of Singapore: A Chapbook of Edwin Thumboo's Select and New Place Poems* (2012), and *Edwin Thumboo: A Select Annotated Bibliography* (2012).

wherein

twists and turns and astounding views

never end

Until,

suddenly, that special one on thousand peso notes

pops up.

Under

the gloaming dreams begin to prowl, adjust, dissolve

remnant light.

Awake,

for morning in a bowl light display neat miraculous

hydraulic terraces.

Trying  
not to outdo them is trilingual Brad: Ifugao, young, fair  
compact. rippling,

Doing  
the tourist bit. He leads up sudden spurs, past a  
nunnery,  
to ancestral huts.

Assessing  
visitors and landscape, he feels the grip of custom,  
earth, water, air.

Balancing  
cash and courtesy, he decodes custom, roots and flowers  
and so receives, as

Chatting  
freely, Anantham, Anne, Noel and I gradually  
self-commune.

Breathing  
in the peaks at the point of sunrise, are thoughts we  
need,  
images we want.

I see families, in full colour, who have strung five hundred,  
Perhaps a thousand years, adding a terrace here, a bund there;  
A nuance further up, then turned to watch sunlight serrate  
Into strips of light and shadow, slip down slopes to the river  
Hard at work polishing rocks. Brad gives his smile of the day.

There must be moss where that renewing green shoots up.  
I hear Mandai waters; the crow of a cock with a sore throat  
Limps among memories' familiar hills. A cool walk along  
Waking market stalls, to a breakfast without balut. We leave.

Silent, automatic, gears of the Hyundai Starex Turbo Inter-Cooler,  
Engage past shining terraces, for Philam Village, Pampalona,  
Las Pinas, Greater Manila, jeepney traffic, shopping mall.

I reprise the past week, the road into and out of Bontoc, broken  
Roads for neat maps, the questions for Frankie J whose love for  
His country is larger than what he feels about most politicians.