

Gémino H. Abad Literary Awards for Poetry and for Literary Criticism Awardees

Thomas David Chaves

IMELDA SEQUENCE

1

Muammar Asks Her to Convert

In the desert tent she came
to reply to his horror that he
couldn't teach old dogs
new tricks. He couldn't have
known four decades on
she'd still be lapping
on the rancid milk
of power he'd blasted
in the sand.

Pick your friends, he advised
and she did on the side
of history dogs knowing only
sole masters and
friends come and go.
Ours is a faith of peace.
Ah so is ours.
Ours is gentle as the moonlight
the moonlight as lovely as you.
She unclasps her bag to fan herself
and then fishes out the pearls
to throw before the swine.

2

Fidel Drives Her in His Jeep, August 1975

The cameras blister in the sun
as in the old days, pomp blazing path

for circumstance. In the open jeep,
he shows her a hundred meters of Havana

no one had seen before in the patent garden,
he with a free hand thrown in the air,

she with two fingers on her butterfly sleeve,
trading quotes from El Cid and Don Quixote

familiar as their favorite fictive feudals
would allow them for show.

They beat each other's breastplates
to brag their own brand of revolution

for beauty say, or those festering brutes,
the inequities of vassalage borne

of conquest, passed down among the pure
of blood, or half, who take the rein

like in the islands, the bowl, the bread
have not gone out of fashion

such for all half of history, a delirium
these shoes, cigars, bullets in the cranium.

3

All Roads to Rome

Of course she met the Popes in all their finery
ornery disposition to proclaim innocence
or sin upon the land, where kisses on the hand
of winning gladiators or twins suckling teats
of wolves founding cities are such indulgence
like here with Paul, bearing South Sea pearls
for a rosary and honeyed gluttony for these
gift mangoes from Cebu in repeat of old simony.
She plays the part only too well and too he
in this agony for the press or paparazzi where
few words are exchanged for ceremony like
in a game of naughts and crosses where one
keeps count of the smallest indiscretions like
when she kisses his hand for her diamonds to dazzle.

4

We Can't Work it Out

Try to see it our way
And that's the use of the royal we
Rule this land no doubt
So if you turn down this invite
We'll have to kick you out.

We will kick you out.
We will kick you out.
Life is very short and there's no time
For fussing with our royal rhyme.
The two of us and the four of you
Make our lives a little scurrilous,
A wee bit rather scandalous.
And so we proclaim
With our tongues aflame
Out, out, out you go
For we can't work it out.

5

The Kindness of Dictators

How she keeps still the mouth
ajar by the piano upon which the
old boys are propped for votive
recollection, or agonal gasp—Mao

Say, after how she brought a hand
on her coiffed, careful head and
how he returned it with a kiss
from old Versailles, the cadres

Sweating in their seat. How she said
much later he was a flirt, which he was
only giving his love in exchange
for respect, giving her ideas

Of the choreography of marches
or unshod doctors to the hills. How she
demurred on his suggestion she
was naturally beautiful inside and out,

Spending an hour before the looking
glass for world leaders, and two for
the masses for they needed more
brilliance from their darkened days.

Say again how she unfolded her
umbrella in Persepolis, tracing
Darius' long-gone sun for the shah's
final days, or fear she saw in the Empress's

Eyes watching the quadrigae parade.
She could have caught glimpses
everywhere she looked of the dying haze
even as she sat on Lyndon's seat

To try it on for size, or what gaze
she gleaned for training mercenaries
across the seas, which she then bargained
for peace with the Colonel, and oil

To proclaim she ended the Cold War
in a quarter's hand, or that day
with Saddam begging for the Hanging
Gardens that she got within the hour.

But that had been sometime.
But that had been sometime. Now
as she freezes in his crypt, she recalls
the kindness of dictators, all of whom

She said were much ahead of their time,
were all misunderstood as she
collects dregs from those storm surges
for her online fashion jewelry, and

Ecology, yes, the recycling of old glove
in hand the heap or ruin, such refuse
for old time's sake scraps all the debris
mislaying memory, or yet here lies love.

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