

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

Ronn Andrew Angeles

What the Tongue Teaches

The mind believes
the wisdom of the tongue,
quick of breaths
scaling a rhythm.

See how the tongue
glides,
cutting sharp
over a swale of flesh,
slope of a hipbone,
to trace
the undergird
of dawn.

Where it finds the body's fault-
line, the skin turns flint.

See how the mouth
now persuades into an O,
each breath quickening finally
into one constant
compulsion.

As now like fire
fastened to another,
the small hours

prove somehow of use:
genius of what stays
the end: a body given
to what it knows.

After the Dance

After Juan Luna's *Despues del Baile*

You do not have to tell. You do not have to harden your jaws as you do now, waiting. You have only to let your body lean in silence to get your ruse perfected, the harder composure after the dance when music no longer flares and a kiss coarsens to nothingness. Say no more the long walk, the fevered dream, the unencumbered conclusions. Touch as mother of necessity. What there is left, memory is to do. Unbraid you now these hard attachments—the night foregone, the wished-for riddle so briefly known but meant again and again and again. You do not have to tell. Lady, let your hair down.

Passing the Hours

Just when the car lights have slinked away
And the night's tidied up the sighs of the city

Dear, you swagger in so late, unbandaging
The door, cleaving the marriage bed.

The argument the night skirts. The soft thud
To mean the approbation of but only release.

Woman: Accustom yourself to the changing register of your lives.
Man: Tell me what beg is a precondition for.

In another time I will have rearranged the furniture
For freedom, the slow navigable order of

Giving way that makes sparer
The enumeratives of choosing and not choosing.

To read loss as a suture for the what-can-be,
We will have taken things to mean—

Speak, the unfinished list on the fridge.
I wait, the lone chair by the window

The still parted curtains.

What We Presume to Know About Mornings

Have you discerned
the world enough
through mist of age
and ache?

The moving
from year to year,
the swift sagging
of her skin.

Is it also
how one chooses
to make it?

One day it's all shock
of white hair—
then you're locked out
of your own life.

And what did it
cost us?
Something else
this house
could not carry.

Not the broken plates.
Not the birds she uncaged
one afternoon
because *they should belong
somewhere else.*

Not even the days
blindly shaken by rage
we only half understood.

Something else in the way
her gaze
transfixes us—
our names spinning
in the abandoned
dossier of her mind.

And how did we know
it would not have cost us?
Faces, love
fallen between the cracks.
How come mornings
presume
their own surviving?