

PARAMETERS

Joel M. Toledo

Om

Rhyming, it invokes sound clarity—
To break it is to give in to pure silence
and surrender everything, accept patience
as the monk closing his eyes to memory

having just read Lao Tzu. He is hearing loss,
inhaling the stench and counting all the deceased
history keeps pointing to. The mind on lease
comes back to the beautiful clear. How to cross

that line? Exhale. The world is coming back
immensely, slowly. What touches its face
is wind, is deliberate. Amen, that shock,

Amen, that thunderbolt in the night sky. Place
is its own discovery. The monk awakens to black:
evening, listening—*Om mani padme om*. Grace.

Penitence

We kneel down and hurt at that sharpened joint.
Hours we've counted leading us to this need.
When all this time we keep missing the point.

I see no burning tree, none to anoint.
The sky relents from blue. Now watch it bleed.
We've knelt down and hurt at that sharpened joint.

The well inside the heart, that much appoint
To root, to quench the thirst of burning seed.
(Though all this time we keep missing the point.)

The cracks along the path lead to disjoint.
Locate that fault and fix with blinding speed!
Let's kneel down and hurt at that sharpened joint.

Scrape and bruise, the skin will reappoint
With scar, or heal. The sound will never plead:
"All this time we still keep missing the point!"

Go palm the beads, go feel from point-to-point,
Until you reach that cross where doubt is freed.
We kneel down and hurt at that sharpened joint
When all this time we keep missing the point.

Para Que—

Everything amounts to fourteen pesos.
Only one's underground: Katipunan.
All these stations I have to cross.

A palace stands embraced by moss.
Anonas station, before Diliman.
Everything amounts to fourteen pesos.

Two trees grow wild between the loss.
Confound these names! All these declarations!
All these stations I have to cross!

I count the change that bridges cost—
To arrive at trees, to get to Quezon.
(Everything amounts to fourteen pesos.)

Eleven stops. They called it *centavos*.
Divisoria sale's always the reason.
All these stations. I have to cross.

Spaniards came. Renamed the host.
Spell Recto backward and it's Santolan.
Everything amounts to fourteen pesos,
All these stations; I *need* to cross!

Heart Against Noon

Flag and wind become indistinguishable
on some days. Today it's in the middle
of a pole.

To arrive at any gentle

measure is to grip firmly the rope.
The science behind flag-raising: hoist, pull,
place, secure. And that other thing called *grope*—
each day begins with that. The blind is full

of it; he compensates with *feel*,
a different awakening. He knows how
to relocate. Synesthesia's keel
is never off-center. Try balancing
prow

with stern. Heart against noon casts the perfect shadow
(and water, too, is its own window).

Oath

Rhyming invokes sound clarity—
Slate of unblemished sky, unguarded sea.
I want to keep living in this possibility.
Nowadays barely enough space for epiphany.

I wish of the world to dismiss all impunity,
all disturbances, disappearances. Welcome, company.
Loneliness is never sadness; it is but calligraphy,
grace offered, not to be auctioned off. Dear family,
watch me get lost, watch me intently. See
the clouds coming in, how they become canopy,
denying light, this little song, this synecdoche.
I am ready to be, to face mercy, confront frailty.

To hum and to die when bothered is given of the bee.
I am letting go of all useless, unnecessary fury.