



Joel M. Toledo \SIX POEMS

Pantoum: DALAW

I keep getting visits from insects:
Beetle, firefly, grasshopper.
Tonight, it's a praying mantis.
Again I've missed the mass.

Beetle, firefly, grasshopper.
They congregate, no childhood reprieve.
Again I've missed the mass.
(I pray, *Enough of these encounters.*)

They congregate, no childhood reprieve.
Centipedes ignited, lit up under my feet.
(I pray, *Enough of these encounters.*)
Last I went to church was for a funeral.

Centipedes ignited, lit up under my feet.
A single moth stayed during Mother's wake.
Last I went to church was for a funeral.
Too hard, too hard to just forget when

A single moth stayed during Mother's wake.
Tonight, it's a praying mantis.
Too hard, too hard to just forget when
I keep getting visits from insects.



Duende

Sunlight everywhere,
even in places
that don't recognize it
nor what the rays mean,
pushing past the canopy,
digging into stones.

This is true, yes,
of rain as well.
But wouldn't you prefer
this kind of persistence,
something you cannot hold
altering the color of your skin,

driving you toward shade?
No wonder love
or grief sends you
howling into night,
where whoever wakes
wishes you were just the wind.



“Is the Fear of the Dark”

— Tears for Fears

Is the window shut
and heartbeat pressing out

of the skin. *Is the beat
of the drum.* Is a magnet.

Is a shrill melody
that upends the furniture.

Is Mother not talking, is
the grass that grows and grows
until it's time to cut again

so the dew could settle
pleasantly. Is evensong.

Is another vein
on an orchid's petal.

(What is it again about brilliance
that ruined the bird's vision
that day, on the fence?)

Is the complex throat
starting a sound.

Is candlelight keening
in diligent response.



The Dead Stagger

In the rain. Against it, in spite of it.
Beside tombs, among relatives.

Hands over their lips when they speak
so that even the rain is hushed.

Grief, which cannot be alone, watches.

One doesn't come up with these things
without care for elaborate bouquets.

For the dead who have to wake up early,
language is an artefact; all evenings

should be problematized. In turn,
the sliver of morning, a fog

rising sunward. Harsh focus,
dew gathered on the moss.

When the dead hesitate,
the remaining fails.

So they keep going,
unsteadies paper and the hand

and they strain until they shake
because wind is not proof enough,

is not lonely enough.



You Find It

hard to hear the register of *rounding*—its pitch is weight, sound
blast. dogs cannot take it; they wail, whimper. each beam
crack an assertion of presence: phantom, sepia, under
foot-snapped twigs. just how much power full-
ness keeps, the tide understands. moon
stress heaves up its many crests. *cre*
scent be the waxing candles imp
lying wait, lying in wait



Circular Shadows Form Behind Trees at the Exact Moment

Nothing about waiting is worth a leaf pressed inside a notebook. The cocoon is useless to the butterfly. The caterpillar can argue all it wants, eat its fill, avoid the birds. You still end up scrawling nonsense onto the bark. Years later, on a rainy day, you think of visiting or do visit, realizing that what prompted it all was the occasion. The party demands that you drink. So you do.

The tree would turn into ash. Another sun would fall behind the bushes or mountain or sea. Meanwhile, night conjures all these lights. At some point, you'll move to the city and start to understand: shadows grow more defined under manufactured glow. You wish to study your back, how it throws itself onto the asphalt, why whenever you look away, the brilliance flits past before resting on



POETRY

another fixed point. The page is open and the dead reanimated. There are flowers in every book. Sometimes they look like leaves or insects. Or where they begin, inside lost, ribbon-adorned boxes in a forest that is where all pasts come from, anyway. You get drunk and you feel happy. Friends cheer before retreating into the shadows.

It is a perfect shadow, though; you reach out and your hand passes through it. You think of the word, *permeate*. It hovers above your head like philosophy, an opaque thing, something overheard, tone undetectable. You are the wave of your hand saying, "Goodbye, all. It's late." The blandness of it, the formality. A passage, the passage, that obscure passage that is the way back but is never the narrative.

There is a heart on the tree.