



Abstract

“Bell in the Rain, a Jungle” is a suite of five poems which is part of a larger body of work titled *I am a wound shrouded in devotion*, a book the author is working on. These pieces the author’s attempts at experimenting with form and telling stories are poetry.

Keywords

Image, text,
experimental,
memory, sound

BELL IN THE RAIN, A JUNGLE, AND OTHER POEMS

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LOST THINGS

On a boat en route to an island a woman sat next to me. It was a hot, damp summer. A child on the seat in front of us cried and cried. His skin was covered in little red dots. Allergies or maybe insect bites. Snot ran into his mouth as his father held him. Stoic and impenetrable, the father had arms that had only known lean years. His stoicism did not only manifest in parenthood. It extended to all aspects of his life— waiting for harvest, tariffs, laws, loans, and reforms that have bled him dry, pestilence and typhoons, dark months, days without hope, land grabbers and their private armies, guns, and yet the insistence for a solution however temporary. On the horizon, a mountain, the island. The woman beside me began to talk. A freight company had lost a package of hers. A care box that contained precious things: perfumes, t-shirts, shoes, cans of corned beef and Spam, jeans with money tucked in the pockets, dresses, toys, lotion, shampoo, soap, jewelry, trinkets . . . the fruit of her life's work to be offered to family members who may no longer recognize her. A visitor to the homeland, curious and confused at the change so immense that it has circled back to a place we do not recognize. After being away for so long, I am confronted with a present moored in the past imagining itself as the future . . . We lose them as fast as we gain them. The woman scoffed at my remark. All these years chasing clout and all I ever learned was to shrug things off and look the other way. We all sat in silence. The child laid his head on his father's bony chest. Beside them was a bag of everything they needed and nothing to lose.

A SARDONIC BOY

His family mistook his laconic ways
for a disdain of life, but
there were things that gave him joy
like garlic bread and Spider-Man,
there were things he did with a touch of grace
like sitting at an eatery with friends
and laughing at despair.

BELL IN THE RAIN, A JUNGLE

Pongkan was training to become a cultural guide in the town of Antik. For five days out of a week, she would meet visitors and accompany them to important places in town. Sometimes, there was much to talk about. At other times, she stood by while visitors took photographs of themselves with the places as a backdrop, enhancing their image, in turn making them important. Which place is considered important and why? One day, a man from the city went with her to the ruins of Santa Clara church, once known for its sonorous bell. The town had an appreciation of noises, considering itself also home to a number of species of cicadas, their sounds pressing and rushing over the body with the persistence of tides. An important place, perhaps, is where one can be soothed by noise as one can be with silence. Where noise and silence are one. The bell of Santa Clara is said to be made of gold and brass, and commissioned by the saint herself when she manifested before a blacksmith named Bulatao in the year 1639.

The manifestation began with a thunderstorm.

A place gains importance when the ordinary and the miraculous—a manifestation, visitation; conversely, an infestation—merge so that myth can take place. Pongkan spoke as she walked ahead of the man through a jungle path. The man held a sound recorder, and captured the sound of her voice, the sounds of the jungle. The blacksmith Bulatao went into a temporary state of madness as he created the bell; he refused to look at his wife, bathed in a storm, and offered flowers and mangoes to a Balete tree—genus ficus, also known as the Strangler Fig. Sometimes Pongkan would insert random trivia.

She often tells herself she does it to not lose her knowledge of the names of things around her.

The same tree must still be alive in the same jungle they stood in. The bell?
the man asked. It's no longer here, stolen. Pongkan begins to put on a raincoat.
Shame,
the man responds. The sky darkens, and so does the jungle. We are almost at the ruins.

The man thinks about Bulatao Having visions
and turning them into images are lapses in the mind. The phenomenon happens
to only one, and even if he spoke of it no one understood, no one would truly know.

Bulatao felt his consciousness dissolve at the sight of the saint; he was a man
unfit for spiritual visions.

Santa

Clara appeared before him hidden in the belly of a giant cicada
that surfaced from the ground. Coming out of the belly, she said to him, "I am
a wound shrouded in devotion."

Just as

they reached the ruins, the sky grew darker. The ruins were pockmarked with
holes. The ceiling a gaping maw, turning the sky into earth, earth into sky. The
path grew
narrower, trees appeared to crouch down upon them. If they
could whisper, what would have they said? Golden flashes issued through the jungle
through the dense green, in time
with the tolling of the bell.

FRAGMENTS FROM AN AUNTIE

a street corner in New York City
eyes shone with oppressive luster

[]

There are only a few places

Welcome.

Our home is open only when we ask you to come.

mingle with anybody but your own

You can't trust anybody. I don't even trust you.

If you fall in love, don't.

Remember, nobody and nothing here is
yourself

make no mistake, you deserve to be here.

The chance

to subjugate

more desperate, do it, don't

Don't think, Just take.

God bless and good luck you're somebody

we can brag about to others

Remember, nobody and nothing

Remember where

you can always make a case of how it is better here than there

motherland I know nothing

ignore the begging of your tongue for a taste of home, your bones
rattling in the cold

You come here

to suffer

and be better than us

?

Tse!

just be

like us

with fear and indifference

We form our bonds with our wounds.

EVENTS PRECEDING THE GREAT FIRE IN THE 12TH DISTRICT OF SANTA LUCIA CITY, 1997

The body of an unidentified child washed up along the shores of Santa Lucia River. Approximately six years of age, the child had no eyes. Over the sockets of their skull was smooth, unbroken skin, leading detectives to believe that the child had been born without eyes.

About five kilometers from the eyeless child, a juvenile whale shark also washed up dead. It was covered in shreds of tarpaulin printed with movie posters from the nineties. Local veterinarians determined that the young whale lost its way into the polluted waters of the river.

Filomena Arcangel, who belonged to the wealthiest family in the city and an accomplished theremin player, succumbed to old age and died in the arms of her fifth husband, a doctor of ill repute.

Rumors of another chop-chop killer gripped a subdivision within the 12th district, where a former beauty queen—a Miss Atang's Tocino Queen 1989—was found dead in her apartment. Witnesses reported a fair skinned man, middle-aged and seemingly well off, leaving the woman's apartment the night she died. All witnesses confirmed that the man had a dahlia flower in his shirt pocket.

Dr. Lucio Magtanggol, a professor of Geography, perceived as a madman by some citizens, roamed the city for nine days and nine nights. He proclaimed that maps were for the shortsighted and challenged any pedestrian to tell him the exact and true dimensions of Santa Lucia City. He would then tell them that they were wrong: the city was so vast it might as well be the universe.

A widow, Mrs. Reyes-Greer, called the police to report that it had rained rose petals in her living room. Each petal bore the faces of dead nineties comedians Babalu and Redford White.

The kiln behind the old potter's house had been burning for forty days before the tragic fire. When visited by the police, the house was empty. The potter and their two cats were missing.

Francisco Cruz Concepcion, the well-known and beloved mortician of the 12th district, after attending to the bodies of Filomena Arcangel and the Miss Atang's Tocino Queen of 1989, died in a peaceful nap. He was fond of telling stories with prophetic undertones. According to his two living sons, his last words were: "I walked with my father on the path surrounded by tall flames. The fields where my ancestors labored were on fire. In the distance, we saw the old church and the mansions on the plaza, the shadow of their bones emerged from the fire. That was the night I swore service only to the dead."

Two people died in the great fire of 1997. Forty-three were injured, and eighty were reported missing.

The cause of the great fire was determined to have been caused by faulty funeral lights.