

PIANO TEACHER

Maria Luisa Aguilar-Cariño

for Concepcion Atienza

Who can tell how many fingers
Swept into position
Under your gaze, or trembled
Through a solfeggio ?

Those afternoons rest
In memory, so much like blooms
Of an indecipherable hue
Under a dome of glass:

And there you sit, one hand
On the far end of the keyboard
To catch all my slipped notes.
Afterwards there is weak tea
With little white cubes of sugar.
In the moist air of your kitchen
My mother helps you with English.

Later, you speak of your lost
Girlhood. You show photographs
Where you laugh in your new straw hat
With cousins in Antipolo; in another,
You wave your hanky from the boat
That will take you and your parents
For a holiday in Barcelona.

From the shadows, among the hatboxes
Smelling faintly of *agua de colonia*,
Almost forgotten amid the talk,
Suddenly I understand how
To play the *kundiman*.

I close my eyes, imagining you
In a long, heavy frock
In the walled garden of the *colegio*
Where you learned music
And how it cannot entirely
Diminish love.

1 January 1990

LEAVE-TAKING

Child
Your name dies
Upon my lips
As though the very air
Had taken its
Substance.
Henceforth
No one
Shall say it
Except in pained
Whispers,
Or when a census is taken
And we who live
Must account
For this moment
When you
Are severed from me
Forever.

25 May 1990