

The Body Aches

[Poems and Hay(na)ku]



Ernesto Priego

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The poems and hay(na)ku published here were previously posted on the author's (previous, now defunct) blog, <http://neverneutral.blogspot.com/> (sometimes in slightly different form), as well as on other online publications, anthologies and blogs.

The "hay(na)ku" is a Filipino and diasporic poetic form conceptualized by Eileen Tabios, as inspired by the character "Cameron" in Richard Brautigan's novel *The Hawklime Monster* and Jack Kerouac's thoughts on the "American haiku." More information on the hay(na)ku's background were made available in the June 2003 posts at Tabios' former blog "WinePoetics" at "<http://winepoetics.blogspot.com/> as well as in her Hay(na)ku blog, at <http://eileentabios.blogspot.com/>

I am profoundly indebted to Eileen Tabios, Amy Bernier, Mark Young, Jean Vengua, Nick Piombino and Alli Warren.

Cover: "Convalecencia II", ink on paper, by Rodrigo Priego

Back cover: "Convalecencia I", ink on paper, by Rodrigo Priego

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Thanks, bro.

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Ernesto Priego now blogs from <https://epriego.wordpress.com/> and tweets from @ernestopriego.



The body aches

How difficult it is, the body tells you, to keep a promise:
To say, painlessly, *j'-accepte*, and keep your word.

I mean the words in those books,
The lips imprinted in pale red, almost purple.

The first page that so quickly became the last,
Among us, what a title, you think now,

How come the book is still here, unread,
Waiting patiently for the ache to go away.

I have nothing.

Objects reflect an absence:
an anguish
to fulfill
a wound.

We all know this.

To miss is not to be here:
a void
a crack
a blank line.

I think of you, staring at the silence.

After Amy's Photograph

Somewhere
Sunflower seeds,
glimpses of dead yellow suns,
distant mirrors in the desert.

Somewhere
Someone lives
recording memories in the dust
recovering the past from lost hot winds.

Somewhere
-not here-
Someone has a name and holds to it
no matter what, no matter who.

Somewhere
-right here-
I think of someone with her name.
I can't, indeed, but think of yellow, giant sunflowers.

An English House

The key is in your hand.
You wish you could smile,
But something stops you.

The sky is overcast. A bird cries.
Your house is blue, of course,
As the sky above you as you open the door.

August is a form of fading.
The beginning of something.
The windows have no curtains yet.

You walk with small steps.
You listen to your own echo in the new floor.
The light gets in like blood drips from a bathtub.

The kitchen is pristine white.
The sink drips a sound of time passing.
The wind blows outside, as you breath, slowly.

Soon, the house will be inhabited.
Warmth will fill every corner.
Your room will become eternal music.

I see a smile in your weak voice.
You look around and remember.
This is the way things are, after all.

Dreams
like water
keep me dry:

Yesterday
I lost
my floating board;

Screams,
alarm bells,
phone ringing again.

Voices
unknown, uncertain,
strange, aggressive, cold.

Dreamt
with angels
with torn wings.

She
was crying:
her pain hurt.

Grass
moving slowly
the sculpture watches

I
you, him
three is crowded

Only
you can
tell me off.

Purple
like a
crushed flying insect.

Red
like roses
dead by water.

White
like hands
untouched by time.

Blue
like eyes
multitudes and scarcity.

Black
like dogs
running together, gasping.

Colors
not seen,
experienced like dreams.

For Eileen--

Unreal
city -landscape-
where I live

Rage
the word
comes haunting back

Monochrome
crowd smells
of weary hours

Love
is not
what they think

[Love
is just
seen, not felt]

They
kiss randomly
like drunk teenagers

They
met, quite
early, one, morning:

And
then, slowly,
dirty, tired, sleep.

Maybe
the cactus
in your throat

Doesn't
let you
sleep at all

Keep
you awake
all night long

Is
nothing else
but the stone

Rough
and dirty
in your throat

Swallow,
come on,
if you can

Now
do it,
try to say

Something,
the cactus
and the stone

Get
in there
like a desert

A
white page
full of sand

The
green, black,
dusty present pain

That
won't go;
all night long.

Espinas,
la piedra,
Let me say

Whadda
want to
say without pain.

Für Eileen

I
thought I
wanted to write

Something
in three
very simple lines.

I
thought I:
subject becomes object,

Phrases
become sentences,
poetry becomes destiny.

I
thought I
could do it

Without
much pain
or unusual effort

Took
me hours
I tried wine

I
thought I
was somewhere else

A
dog on
my warmed lap

Had
more wine,
closed my throat.

I
couldn't write

what I wanted

I
thought I:
poetry is received:

It
is never
given away free.

Listening
Same deep
water as me

Long
and winding
road indeed ahead

Thinking
of images
pictures never seen

Long
and tall
trees cast shadows

Sailing
star-filled sea-ship
the moon pales

Long
and arid
deserted nameless streets

Going
places, who
would have thought

Long
and tired
morning, fire veins

Dying
eyes, going
towards my dream.

You
feel, like,
sleeping you know

Instead
you do
what you, like

Like,
you know
what I mean

If
this were
poetry I would

And
then, what
is it you

Like,
I wish,
whatever, you know

If
conditions grammar
meaning is useless

When
liking is
an underrated verb.

Tolls
across highways
Sun hits harder

Here
desert's nowhere
but the heart

Spines
pieced, bleeding,
the stomach feels

Years
of religion
never cured it

Being
con Ella
blues got names.

Oh,
how the
ghost of you

clings,
sings Ella,
slowly, coolly, she,

blueswoman,
black sorceress
fails her exorcism.

These
Foolish Things,
she sadly sings,

How
strange to
find you still.

Oh,
how the
ghost of you

*If
you don't
want me I*

*don't
wannna live,
sings the poet.*

I
think of
this as I

wake
up slowly
from my sleep.

Why
is it
that I mourn,

this
morning this
day I am,

therefore
I remember,
therefore I mourn.

In
dreams you
appear as yourself

a
famous actress
playing her name

on
the stage
of my memory.

I
am nothing
but pure remembrance,

a
dream series,
your whole recollection.

Again,
while sleeping,
you were there,

or
should I
say while dreaming,

you,
always you,
golden lights name,

you,
the woman
behind the mask.

One day we will, no doubt,
be dust.

A slight cover
over every key
of the black dashboard
spelling our luck.

One day our names
will be read at the entrance of buildings
unrecognizable shadows
of a somewhat somewhere
a coincidence in time and space
once a trace, a signal, a landmark
indicating nothing, nowhere.

These words, one day, will
also cease as days go on
and be not even objects no one
recognizes in the lost & found.

You will remember my face, though:
A blurry memory as deep as your own wounds,
those dusty scars abandoned by the years,
a remembrance as forgotten as typewriters
and old journals on a wooden drawer.

The dust will become mud.

Extra Time

A suspension of time. For a moment, a parenthesis.
It is a sort of echo. A sound you can't delete.
You can't move: it is yet too early. If you opened your eyes,
you would like to see her. You don't.
The bed keeps you down, holds you firmly.

It is as if clocks had stopped. You are afraid that if
you moved, the sound would go away. The memory
of the sound. With it, there comes a paragraph, a whole
chapter, an encyclopedia of shared instants.
You know that if you wake up, everything will vanish.

The alarm goes off, as if in an emergency.
You wrap yourself in the blue duvet and like a zombie leave the flat.
No slippers, your fingers begin to freeze. Your hair looks like a birdnest.
There is no fire. Maybe only in your bed, but nobody notices.
You are dreaming again: a form of remembering.

Morning will never be the same.
Remember the gigantic kitchen: the window for the kids.
Somebody else eats there now; someone else draws those blue curtains.
Something remains, though, either here or there.
It is you laughing.

Praise for *The Body Aches*:

“ERNESTO PRIEGO DISPLAYS WHY BREVITY AIN'T THE SAME AS MINIMALISM IN POETRY. Ernesto surprises -- therefore delights -- me.”

-Eileen Tabios

“Ernesto Priego's poems magnify minutiae. When each poem closes in on dust, colour, emotions, flesh -- its aches and pains, every word must tremble on the rim of falling. I observe how 'miss' is loaded: abstain, avoid, fail to hit its mark, yearn....”

-Ivy Álvarez

“These are delicate, spare lyrics of love, loss, and introspection.”

-K. Silem Mohammad

“Most of the poems in *The Body Aches* are written in relation to the absence of the beloved, and the same ache. In a sense, then, this book is a sequence. I don't think it's a narrative. At least I don't sense a resolution, an end to the aching.”

-John Bloomberg-Rissman



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