

THREE POEMS FROM *KUNG SAAN SA KATAWAN*

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Translations by
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About The Author

Louie Jon A. Sanchez is the author of two collections of poetry in Filipino, *At Sa Tahanan ng Alabok* (University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2010), a finalist for the Madrigal Gonzales Best First Book Award, and *Kung Saan sa Katawan* (U of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2013). He holds the distinction of being honored “Makata ng Taon” (Poet of the Year) thrice (in 2006, 2009, and 2011) at the prestigious Talaang Ginto Poetry Contest of the Commission on the Filipino Language. He has won first prize in the Lumina Pandit Poetry Contest during the quadricentennial of UST in 2011. He has also won a Catholic Mass Media Award for the short story from the Archdiocese of Manila in 2004. He co-directs the Annual Poetry Workshop of the Linangan sa Imahen, Retorika, at Anyo (LIRA), the leading organization of poets writing in Filipino. He teaches writing and literature at the Department of English, School of Humanities, Ateneo de Manila University.

About The Translators

Marne Kilates has published four books of poetry, of which *Pictures as Poems & Other (Re)Visions* (University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2012) is the latest. He has also published numerous translations of books and individual works by leading Filipino writers, including National Artists Virgilio Almario and Bienvenido Lumbera, Rogelio Mangahas, Jesus Manuel Santiago, and Louie Jon A. Sanchez. He has won the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards, the NBDB-Manila Critics Circle National Book Awards, and the 1998 SEA WRITE Award given by the Thai royalty. Recently he was the holder of the Henry Lee Irwin Professorial Chair for Creative Writing at the Ateneo de Manila University. He publishes and edits the online literary journal, *The Electronic Monsoon Magazine* (www.electronicmonsoon.com).

Ken Ishikawa is currently a Junior Fellow in the Asian Public Intellectuals Fellowship Program. He co-edited the poetry anthology *Crowns and Oranges: Works by Young Philippine Poets* (Anvil, 2009).

DOMINGO DE RAMOS

May pagbating tulad nito na hinihiling nang huwag
 Sumalubong. Sa isang iglap, kumakaway na muli
 Ang mga batà, nagsilakihan na't sa pinakahuling
 Larawa'y pawang maliliit pa lámang. Kung maaari'y
 Manataling musmos na lámang silá habambuhay.
 Ngunit kailangan niláng lumukso mula sa kuwadro
 Upang wari'y ipamukha ang hindi maipagpapalibang
 Takbo ng mga siklo. Ganito silá tuwing magli-Linggo
 At patakbo-takbo sa hardin at nagmamadali lámang
 Na habulin ang bolang iniitsa at pinagugulong.
 Wala siláng muwang na ang bawat pamamalagi nilá'y
 Pagharap ko sa panahon, pagtitig dito nang mata sa mata,
 Maigiit lámang na milya pa ang layo bago magpantay
 Ang mga paa. Kunwari'y hindi ako natitigatig bagaman
 Nangangaligkig, nagsasanay na tanggapin ang kirot
 Ng kalamnan, diwang ligaw, at lisyang katwiran.

Sa Linggong ito'y nagtitipon ang mga batà sa harap
 Ng pinto habang isinasabit ko ang benditadong palaspas.
 Nagtatalo pa silá kanina kung sino ang dapat humawak
 Sa simbahan at makapagwagayway kasáma ng madla;
 Matapos, sandali nilá itong kinalimutan sa kulitang
 Nakipagtagisan sa kataimtiman ng dininig na Misa.
 Parang wala siláng naririnig. Palihim niláng kinakalabit
 Ang isa't isa, kinikiliti sa tagilaran. Kapag nagsawa,
 Biglang-biglang ibabagsak ang luhuran upang gitlain
 Ang lahat. Natutuhan ko nang iwasan ang pagsaway.
 Bakit pa, kung sa isang bandá, mabuti ngang naririto silá,
 Sa tahanan ng diyos, at sabi ngang minsan, kailangan
 Ding maging tulad nilá kung nasàng datnan ang Kaharian.
 Nakaiinggit silá sa kanilang kalayaang wari'y hindi
 Tumatalilis; isa pa, batid nilá kung kailan tatahimik.

Tulad ng sa pagkakabit ko sa palaspas sa mukha ng pinto.
 Ritwal ito ng mga tanong na humihinging tunghan,
 Bakit po diyan inilalagay, ano'ng mangyayari kapag natuyo,
 At pinakikinggan nilá ako na para bang isa iyong misa
 Ng kanilang mangha. Tinugon nilá ang mga aklamasyon
 Ng mga pag-uusisa at unti-unting sumilay sa málay
 Ang matandang mito ng bisà ng palapas laban sa kidlat

At masasamang espiritu na gumagala sa labas—mga bagay
Na di ko na dapat pinaniniwalaan dahil matanda na ako,
At iyon ang pagtayà ng mundo. Sino ba ang nagkuwento
Kundi matatanda ring tila hindi mabitiwan ang pagiging
Mapangarapin? At ngayon naman, ipinamamana ko
Sa mga supling na ito. Noon, ang bása ko, kailangan
Ng kahit anong mahiwagang pananampalataya kayâ
Naroon siláng isinisiwalat ang kakatwa. Kahit ngayon.
Kayâ pagdating ng mga batàng ito, tungkulin ko naman
Ang papaniwalain silá, ang bigyan silá ng paniniwala.

Habang patuloy na binabagabag ng laksang alalahanin
Na di ko matiyak kung didibdibin o ipagpapasadiyos
Na lámang, sakâ silá muling sasaniban ng paghaharutan,
Sandaling tatalikuran ang sinambang sagisag na para bang
Naroroon siláng muli sa simbahan, ngunit ngayo’y
Patukso akong tinatawag upang sumali sa paghahabulan.
Ang kuwento kayâ ang gasgas o ang nagkukuwento?
Hindi ko tuloy nasabing tinitipon ang mga palapas
Matapos ang isang taón at inaabo, upang maging tanda
Ng pagtalima, at ng butil ng wakas na daratnan ng lahat.
May ibang kaharian siláng tinatahanan at hinikayat
Nilá akong pasukin ang kanilang lungsod, habang sakay
Sa pusikit na mga alamat, tulad ng aking mga salaysay.
Wari’y galak siláng nakaabang kung muli akong maniniwala.

PALM SUNDAY

English translation by Marne Kilates

There is a greeting such as this that says 'no need
To welcome halfway'. In a moment the children are again
Waving goodbye, all grown up, when in the last
Picture they were all tots. Ah, if only they could stay
That way forever. But they have to leap out of the frame
As if to remind us of the inexorable turning
Of the years. You'll find them like this when they spend
Their Sundays here: chasing each other in the garden
And all the haste they know is in chasing the ball
They thrown around and roll on the grass.
They are unaware that each moment they're here
Is my time to face time, gazing at it eye-to-eye,
In order to insist I have a long way to go, my time
Has not yet come. I am the picture of calm
Though quaking inside, I practice getting used to all
The aches, the ominous imaginings, the rationalizing.

On this Sunday the children gather at the door
Watching me hang the blessed Palm branch.
A while ago they were bickering as to who would hold
The palm branch at church and wave it with the crowd;
Then it was all forgotten as they bugged each other
No end, in the middle of the solemn Mass.
They seemed to hear nothing. One would sneak up
And pull the other's ear, or tickle another on the side.
When they tired of this, they would suddenly drop
The kneeling platform at the back of the pew,
Jolting everyone. I learned not to plead or reason
With them. Why should I, when on one hand, it was
Good they were here in the house of God, and of course
It was said one had to be like them to enter the Kingdom.
I envied them their freedom that seemed not to slip;
And even more, that they knew when to be quiet.

As when I hung the blessed Palm branch at our door.
This was the ritual of questions asking to be answered,
Why put it there at all, what happens when it dries,
And they would listen to me as if I were saying Mass

For their wonder. And my words responded to the acclamations
Of their curiosity and slowly the old myths dawned
Once more in the consciousness: the palm branch's power
To ward off lightning or evil spirits wandering abroad—
Things that I shouldn't believe because I am grown up,
For that was the estimation of the world. But who
Else told such stories but the old who couldn't give up
Their own imaginativeness? And now I am leaving them
The legacy. Then, so I understood, any wondrous faith
Was necessary so they had to be there to spread the strange.
Even now. So that when these children came, it was
My turn to make them believe, to give them belief.

Harried by a thousand cares and worries, which I am not
Sure whether to take into my hands or leave to Providence,
It is then they become again their true imps, in an instant
Oblivious of the symbol they so adored with wonder,
As if they were again inside the church, but now calling me
Out and teasing me to join their game of tag.
Is it the story frayed or the storyteller? So I failed
To tell them palm branches are saved for the whole year
And then burned to ashes, to be used as sign
Of the faith, and as seeds of the end to which we all return.
Inhabiting a different kingdom, they entice me to explore
Their city on the dark wings of myth, like my own stories.
And they watch intent, to see if I would believe again.

PAGKABUHAY

Paglalantad higit sa pagbubukas—ito ang tinutupad
Ng gumulong-sa-gilid na takip ng libingang yungib.

Bilang isang pakana, inilalantad nito di lámang
Ang wala roon, tulad ng hinahagilap na katawan,

Kundi maging ang hindi pa mananahan doon—
Halimbawa, ang pagkaluoy. Inihanda para rito.

Ngunit walang uod ang nabiyayaan ng agnas
Na laman, walang pagkabulok na nakapagsiyasat

Sa himlayan. Isang kahangalan kung tutuusin.
Kasayangan sa kabutihang loob ng taga-Arimatea.

Ano mang kalabisan dito, tigib sa kahungkagan—
Hinahagkan ng liwanag ang mukha ng yungib,

Ang sepulkrong hubad, at namamalas ng mga saksi
Ang wala, na sa dibdib nilá'y walang-patawad

Na dumadagan. Sa mga susunod sa araw, bibigkasin
Ang mapapalad ang mga hindi nakakita at naniwala

At magugunita nilá ang kawalan sa loob ng yungib,
Ang labi ng kayo sa himlayan. Makakatagpo nilá

Ang kapayapaan at iyon ang buod ng mga aral.
Sa isang bandá, bago pa man manampalataya,

Hindi kayâ nilá unang namalas sa kanilang loob
Ang agnas na pagdama, luoy na pananalig

At sugatang kaluluwa? Hindi ang di nanahan
Kundi ang hindi akalaing doo'y mananahan—

Naniwala silá sa lalaking ito at sa mga himala
Ay binigo silá ng kaniyang pagpapakaaba.

Hindi nilá alam kung ano ang paniniwalaan
At maaari nating maimunakala ito, pagkamalas nilá

Sa dakilang takip na iyon na tapik sa kanilang
Pagkasawi. Sa pagkakagúlong, tila nabuhay na muli

Ang pagkabatid—wari’y libingan ang kaibuturan,
Hungkag na nakalantad, ulila sa bawat pagbangon.

THE RESURRECTION

English translation by Ken Ishikawa

More than the unveiling, revelation—this is the fulfillment
Of the rock cap that rolled to the side of the cave tomb.

As a scheme, it reveals more than
What's not there, like the much sought-after body

Or that which does not live there—
Like lamentation, rehearsed for this instance.

But there is no worm unblest by the decaying
of the flesh, no rot that has left the grave

Pristine. It's a folly for sure.
A blight in the kindness of the Arimathean.

What excesses may be here, nothingness fills—
The light kisses the cave face,

The naked sepulcher, and the witnesses see
the nothing which mercilessly heaves itself

on their chests. In the following days, they will utter
Fortunate are those who have not seen but believed

And they will remember the emptiness inside the cavern,
the remains of the shroud on the tomb. They will meet

Peace and the sum of all the scriptures.
On the other hand, before they gained this faith,

Have they not first witnessed within
The rot in their senses, the finiteness of belief,

The wounds in their souls? That which does not live
but that which hardly is believable finds its home there—

They believed this man and in the following miracles
they find that his meekness has failed them.

They do not know what to believe
And this is what we can assume, once they witnessed

That great seal, which is the onus of their grief,
Roll open, what they knew all along

Rose up – revealing that the interior is a grave,
vulgar in its vacancy, void of any resurrection.

BISPERAS

Papaubos na ang mga oras ng taóng ito—isang hindi maipagpalibang
Paglisan na malaon ko ring hinintay, at halos hilinging agad maganap.

Sa isang bandá, pinigil ko rin naman, sa pag-aakalang bakâ kasámang
Mawaglit ang mabubuting katupda't sari-saring nabuong katiyakan—

Sa hiwalayan ng mga taón, nagtatalaban itong mga damdami't
Hindi masawata ang pagsisikap na maunawaan ang mga nangyari

At ipagkibit-balikat na lámang. Sabi nga, hayaan na ang lumipas
At nagwawakas ang lahat; lunan ng pag-uusig ang bawat bisperas.

Wari'y iniaapak ko ang aking mga paa sa pagitan ng dalawang pook
At isinisigaw sa makaririnig na sa pagkakataong iyon ay aking nasakop,

Sa pambihirang pagkakataon, ang bawat lunan. Gayundin ang ganitong
Pag-aabang—Mistulang tumirik ang lahat habang tinatangkang alamin

Ang mga tanda ng bituin, inog ng napatapat na hayop sa taóng parating.
Sa pagbuklat ng almanake, lumukso ang Kuneho, at panahon daw ito

Ng pananahimik, ng pagkubli sa palumpon ng pag-iisa upang dilaa't
Paghilumin ang mga sugat. May pangako ng dali sa lahat ng gawain,

Ng banayad na takbo ng pamumuhay. Paniniwalaan ko na naman ito't
Papaslugin sandali ang duda, tulad ng madalas, sa piling ng mga nobela.

Binabása ko ang darating ay nagbabalik-tanaw rin; kinukuwenta
Ang nalustay na pananalig at naipong gatla at uban. Dala-dala ko lahat

Ng maaaring gunitain: ang mga masiglang pagsilang, mga pagkawaglit
Mulang kapinggot na susi hanggang alalahaning ayaw nang magpaalala,

Mga walang-sawang pananalanta ng bagyo, mga pagdalaw ng sindak,
Hiyawan para sa tagumpay ng kampeon, paninindigan ng mga politiko.

Sa isang nobela, ituturing ang mga ito bílang isang magulong banghay—
Na kung sa bagay ay bugtong na katangian ng kasaysayan. Hindi nauubos

Ang mga gunita. Para kang nakikipaghuntahan sa sarili, nagdiriwang
Sa bawat muhong nadaraanan sa pag-iral. Walang ano mang pagkaligaw.

Hindi tulad ng unang bungad ng taóng ito, at napaparam ang mga pailaw;
Pakapa-kapa ako nang ganap na lumukob ang huklubang kadiliman.

EVE

English translation by Marne Kilates

The year is running out of hours—a parting that cannot be postponed,
That I've been waiting for, and wished, almost, to happen at once.

On one hand, I had held back, thinking that with it would go
All the good realizations and the firmed-up certainties—

At the parting of the years, the emotions mingle and run deep
And I cannot arrest the will to know and understand events

Nor shrug my shoulders on them. Let go of the past, it is advised,
For everything has an end; every eve litigates, a turning-point.

It's as if I am stepping between borders, the in-between of places
And proclaiming to anyone that at that moment I had conquered

Within an extraordinary moment each realm. So is a vigil
Like this—Everything seems at a standstill while they try

To divine the signs from the stars, which beast matches which year.
At the opening of almanac, Rabbit jumps out, and thus it is

A time, it is said, of retreat, of hiding behind the clumps
Of solitude, to lick one's wounds. There is a promise of speed

To every task, a smooth flow of life. I would believe this and
Momentarily slay every doubt, like often, among the pages of novels.

Reading what is to come I also look back; I account for all
Loss of belief and the wrinkles and gray hair that I saved. I bring

Along all that can be remembered: lively births, misplacements
From tiny keys to essential concerns that can't be recalled,

Endless storms and devastation, the visits of terror,
Cheers for champions, the principles of politicians.

In a novel, these would be read as confused structure—
Which, in fact, is history's quality of puzzles. It never runs out,

Memory. It is like conversing with the self, celebrating every
Landmark as you survive or exist. No chance of getting lost.

Unlike this year's first blush, as the lanterns grow dim;
I stagger forward groping as the ancient darkness descends.