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Poems from I Look at My Body and See the Source of My Shame: Ecstasy Facsimile ("Canvasbacks will swim in the polluted river," "Meanwhile, real life," and "The river is a stadium")

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MARK ANTHONY CAYANAN

From I LOOK AT MY BODY AND SEE THE SOURCE OF MY SHAME: ECSTASY FACSIMILE

Canvasbacks will swim in the polluted river, predictable
in their hunger. I've been meaning to be present.

A dove above my head. I will hear the rustling of nacre wings
inside my ordinary life, what you are will be made plain.

My assassin, I love you because I've known it all along,
you will conclude me and, like the Lord, first remind me
of my wickedness. My last words are of my distress.

I've been meaning to never die. I will minister to the sick,
my hands cauterize the infection. I want to slip these skins
on you: animal's young, the one whose name I promise
in the night, my conscience, who drops a coin in a tin can,
you shall be all time. I will offer prayers to someone who
owns so many souls they're nothing. Though you don't see it
from the roles we play, I've been meaning to be happy.

Meanwhile, real life rolls
its eyes at the soul, how it wishes dead this body
then is stock-prodded by its calendar

Daily I wish divine wrath upon the traffic
dream hyperbolic dreams about money I don't earn
nights dissolve with the TV on

I'm not really a place for fear, only
desire like a child I find nothing unknowable, only
withheld. Because I see others with lives

Like passport pages I've quit trying
pleased myself by praying away hunger
Decent at imagination, I'm better at resentment

It's not enough; it is, but
without submission whose do I become

The river is a stadium, and inside, the lives you don't own are merciless and waiting.
The murmur of insects insinuates itself in the air, unavoidable but separate
from the kingdom of mallards, here where the dull water laps at the shit on the grass.

2

My wish is to have the sun-smell of skin hold me down into the patient dark.
When I try using my eyes, I don't see your face rippling in and out of a fickle sky
and we haven't yet arrived at each other's tragedies. Touch is a word with no end.

3

Someone's horse out in its field looks around before it submits its body to instinct.
I walk into another's days, which curl around me in cinders I inhale and cough out.
My day is one cloud after another passing through with no design apart from mine.

4

Should be time now, unsheathe the knife for me, let its glint unerringly give me you.
You who are my hands, tear my limbs off their sockets, have my head
found in a wolf's maw. And hair shall grow from secrets where you try to know me.

5

I lie on the boulder as one would in sleep, a door pressed on top of me.
Here's a heavy stone. Here's a basket of stones. I keep offering you my sureness.

MARK ANTHONY CAYANAN is from the Philippines. He obtained his MFA from the University of Wisconsin in Madison and is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Adelaide. Among his publications are the poetry books *Narcissus* (Ateneo de Manila UP, 2011) and *Except you enthrall me* (U of the Philippines P, 2013). His new work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rogue Agent*, *Cordite*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Lana Turner*. A recipient of fellowships from Civitella Ranieri and Nuoren Voiman Liitto, he teaches literature and creative writing at the Ateneo de Manila University.