

LITERARY SECTION

PLACELESSNESS

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About the Author

Mark Anthony R. Cayanan obtained his MA in Creative Writing from the University of the Philippines. He has attended several workshops as a Fellow for Poetry in English, the most recent of which is the UP National Writers Workshop for “mid-career writers.” He was a finalist at the 3rd Maninangning Miclat Prize for Poetry, and is currently an Instructor at Ateneo de Manila University.

Author’s Note

The following poems form a lyric sequence.

PLACELESSNESS

1

Had it existed, the mind could not have sufficed
to preempt it, the mind with its love
for insight and thus stasis, its only concessions
being the occasional shifts towards foreseeable conflicts
with easily achievable resolutions.

See what I hold in my palms: it is a sapling,
it has two leaves and a spindly stalk, it is the future,
and my hands cannot weaken.
Something like that.

1

Had it been here, we would have gone on
thinking the best of things, since gravity no longer binds us
to ourselves, ourselves being made of what we have
and what is near.

: You are now no longer are. I can extend
upon myself the same luxury.

Oblivion, not dissipation, but buoyancy, but
expansiveness, the air and what it usually represents,
or water oh water.

1

Had it been acknowledged earlier on that it had in fact
happened to us, there would have been no reason
for _____, the white noise that promptly arrives
every night, despite the body's hunger for _____.
This occasion insists on questions: From which, or whose,
impossible idea does the sun come, and the moon
with its nonchalance, the rain with its sympathy, the human
with its claims?, How is nonetheless not like nevertheless?,
etc.

1

Had it lasted, there would have been no point
in hypotheses, magic, virtue. Why ask about the known.
If it must mean anything, then let it be a reward.
A promise that keeps the hours almost unbearable and almost
over. There it is, loping from the horizon; it's dragging
itself through the weed-strewn border of the meadow; it's rising
from the seafoam, ash, that hole in your head;
it peeks from a hat and waits for its cue. If you can
almost see it, so must you
so must you
so must you

1

~~: It is inside myself now. You want it too, you know what to do.~~

PLACELESSNESS

When the blindfold was taken off, the setting was all dust
and air, the unleashed light frenzied, the hands that gripped
the cloth frenzied, the room on its way to being a room. It was
fear, this effort to eat the rising up from the throat, the body
that had to be served in sight frenzied, the ropes wound
around the wrists, the wrists frenzied, the legs gone
to sleep, the muscles taut with potential, the stomach sucking its juices.
Reason, at this point, a reason for risk, a memory of safety, a wish
for it again, a cause, then a byproduct, then the steady steel in their faces,
the bullet in their pistols. Reason bouncing off the walls, a contagion.
Who among thought, First was the world the fight for it Then
there only was, could speak it, if only it had been heard.

PLACELESSNESS

The old god clinging to the privilege of silence:
Between limbs of trees, he lost himself
in apparitions: fickle sunlight, a wide-eyed animal
prancing back into the forest, the fire of Moses
with its impersonal burn. Still, bits of him lingered
in the air: the mist that made each moment taste
like new morning. Through him moved
those blessed but born or died too early,
the difference between their calmness and the joy
of Heaven caused by chronology,
by circumstance.

And then like a sin the world
is cleansed of it: Limbo—it has been decreed—
no longer a place but an errant concept. The words
taken as truth, the only problem being meaning:
How to erase space, given time? Has Limbo now never
existed? Or does Limbo never exist hereafter?
The old god and his symbols replaced by a shepherd
with his staff: Abraham and his brethren bleating
their way out to pasture. Must it be used: replace?
And what about the young? Do they grow wings
(had they grown wings?), are they able to fly
from one enclosure to another (to Heaven, but from where
or from what?)? Or do their souls evaporate like water,
then take shape in paradise, upon contact
with death? Does the novelty of Heaven astonish?
Does it astonish everyday? Will Heaven stay
in place? Will it stay so

in spite of us? This is what
the living do: deliberate. This is what the living want:
to be relevant. The dead are as quiet as god.
They have stopped asking questions. What answers—

PLACELESSNESS

This the last year finds the mind, ready
to denounce its need of body, whispering
its erasures The youngest son, the final
favorite And the wife she has always
hated The middle daughter she had tried
to give up Whose fingers must have scraped
her belly for it to cling What is left of the mind
now made unaccountable, and therefore able
to correct the lies it once repeated
to keep itself safe The eldest daughter, had cried too often,
she left alone at her mother's The eldest son
who disappointed Another, long dead,
who didn't Engaged in a dialogue she
maybe chooses to divulge but cannot fully tell
Everything at once in present tense,
the children, each weekend, talking not listening
to her Speech she knows almost
the guarantee of Also the children crawling to
meet her waiting arms And the children
when they weren't Herself, the man she married
and the man she almost had Now has
She calls the unmarried daughter by her mother's
name Her daughter has no name Her daughter everyday
takes her swollen foot, heel on lap,
and kneads it, each time from her body
without words, just sounds, a gurgling,
an asthmatic wheeze, a sigh, a coo, her body
urging itself to say I want to love, be loved,
say it, say it as if it were the only thing
And the daughter wanting to be named

PLACELESSNESS

Consider the wax figure in loincloth

To know history without context,
consider the wax figure in loincloth
shed off his thin skin, dried earth

Camphor a ghost in the corridors,
to know history without context,
consider the wax figure in loincloth
shed off his thin skin, dried earth
a nothing in the slow air that rubs

Where, for a fee, you are ushered in,
camphor a ghost in the corridors,
to know history without context,
consider the wax figure in loincloth
shed off his thin skin, dried earth
a nothing in the slow air that rubs
the surface of the visible; later, what is

Mimesis in action, who brings you to this:
Where, for a fee, you are ushered in,
camphor a ghost in the corridors,
to know history without context,
consider the wax figure in loincloth
shed off his thin skin, dried earth
a nothing in the slow air that rubs
the surface of the visible; later, what is
becomes an afterthought, a comment

The artist, dependent on photographs,
mimesis in action, who brings you to this:
Where, for a fee, you are ushered in,
camphor a ghost in the corridors,
to know history without context,
consider the wax figure in loincloth
shed off his thin skin, dried earth
a nothing in the slow air that rubs
the surface of the visible; later, what is

becomes an afterthought, a comment
overheard by the curator, who oversees

Memory so communal it is vapor,
the artist, dependent on photographs,
mimesis in action, who brings you to this:
Where, for a fee, you are ushered in,
camphor a ghost in the corridors,
to know history without context,
consider the wax figure in loincloth
shed off his thin skin, dried earth
a nothing in the slow air that rubs
the surface of the visible; later, what is
becomes an afterthought, a comment
overheard by the curator, who oversees
that moment, the funds will have to be

When to look back is to commission,
memory so communal it is vapor,
the artist, dependent on photographs,
mimesis in action, who brings you to this:
Where, for a fee, you are ushered in,
camphor a ghost in the corridors,
to know history without context,
consider the wax figure in loincloth
shed off his thin skin, dried earth
a nothing in the slow air that rubs
the surface of the visible; later, what is
becomes an afterthought, a comment
overheard by the curator, who oversees
that moment, the funds will have to be
in place, when life, its stoop and
scowl

Something can no longer be retrieved
when to look back is to commission,
memory so communal it is vapor,
the artist, dependent on photographs,
mimesis in action, who brings you to this:
Where, for a fee, you are ushered in,
camphor a ghost in the corridors,
to see history without context,

consider the wax figure in loincloth
shed off his thin skin, dried earth
a nothing in the slow air that rubs
the surface of the visible; later, what is
becomes an afterthought, a comment
overheard by the curator, who oversees
that moment, the funds will have to be
in place, when life, its stoop and
scowl,
is restored or replaced by one like

it.

PLACELESSNESS

Let be be finale of seem.
Wallace Stevens

There virtue is.

From the sky, electricity.
A point of interest.
Possible subject.

Distance, then fiction.

What splits the milieu, between lit and unharmed, now
a concern, now a paragraph.

In the real world, a bird streaks: from coincidence
to complication.

Watch how this mounts to an exclamation.

Or ellipses.

In which case, the need to start again.

There.

No. There.