TRANSLATIONS OF POEMS FROM MORPO

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About the Translator
Jose Perez Beduya earned his BFA in Painting from the University of the Philippines and his MFA in Creative Writing from Cornell University. His work has appeared in *High Chair, Beloit Poetry Journal, Colorado Review, Ploughshares, Fence, Toad Suck Review, Lana Turner,* and *Boston Review.* He has received the Madeleine P. Plonsker Emerging Writer’s Residency Prize, a Lannan Foundation Scholarship at the Santa Fe Art Institute, and a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship. His first book *Throng* was published by Lake Forest College Press/\&Now Books in 2012. He lives in Ithaca, New York.

About the Author and Co-Translator
Allan Popa is the author of ten collections of poetry, including *Drone* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013) and *Laan* (De La Salle University Publishing House, 2013). He has received the Philippines Free Press Literary Award and the Manila Critics Circle National Book Award. He earned his MFA in Writing (Poetry) at Washington University in Saint Louis, where he won the Norma Lowry Prize and the Academy of American Poets Graduate Prize. He received fellowships to the New York State Writers Institute at Skidmore College from 2006 to 2011. He teaches at the Filipino Department of Ateneo de Manila University and is currently the Director of Ateneo Institute of Literary Arts and Practices (AILAP). He is pursuing doctoral studies at De La Salle University-Manila.

Notes on Translating Poems from Morpo
In working with Allan Popa on translations from his second book, *Morpo* (which signals both “shape” or “form” as well as the linguistic “morpheme”), I came to realize that translation is a transcoding of not merely meanings but more importantly processes—a pantographic performance of the author’s manipulation of words as concrete materials, with an awareness of the properties of the original language.

Filipino, unlike English, generates meanings through echoing: In most cases, changes in verb tenses, degree of qualification, and word forms are effected through
reduplication, where part or all of the root word is repeated. Popa foregrounds this peculiarity in lines such as this, from “Imago”:

Ang dami, dumadami, ang dami-dami.

Here the root word dami, which means “number” or “the many”; becomes the present tense verb “multiplies” through the addition of the bound morpheme “um” and then transforms into the “too many” or the “overmuch” through the doubling of the root word. Needless to say, preserving the morphemic/phonemic repetition—a crucial element—was a challenging negotiation, with all alternatives freighted with losses. In the end, to create an analogue for the original, we settled for:

Amounting-to, mounting, surmounting.

This sequence encapsulates the book’s intertwined animating drives: the desire to mean and the desire to be—the yearned-for unity of logos and ontos, Word and Flesh, in a world of emergings, crestings, and dissolvings. Popa enacts these twin movements through repetition and permutation, the innate mechanisms of Filipino and the very engines of desire.

In Morpo, Popa brings the stutter inside words into relation with the voluminous silence of finitude. It is a book most of all about poetic making and unmaking, at language’s atomic level. The reduplications inherent in the original language register as echoes bouncing off of limits, which are both outside and inside itself. For example, in “Alingaw”, Popa elides the last syllable of the irreducible word alingawngaw, meaning “echo,” to make audible through negation the echoes that travel backwards from silence to speech, from fragment to whole.

Through the use of homonyms, Popa also calls attention to the chasms between and underneath words, signaling the separation of meaning and being. Consider this brief yet aporetic ultimate line from “Imago”:

Walang labing nilalabi.

Wala/ng translates simply to the negative adjective “no,” but the last two words carry different meanings. The root word labi here could mean “mouth” or “lips” as well “remains;” while nilalabi could mean either “to mouth” or “to leave remains of.” These variants and the chiasmic sonics of the original line present us with at least four translation alternatives: “No mouth to speak from,” “no speech remaining,” “no remains to speak,” or “no remains remaining.” Any choice among these possibilities is inadequate.

Ultimately, in translating Popa’s poems and working in the space between languages, I am made aware of the act of choosing as an acknowledgement and a refusal of the finitude that Morpo traces and erases.

—Jose Perez Beduya
Wayang Kulit

Where’s the sense in a small hole
in a flimsy wall?
(look inside)

In the light-bulb’s glow, nakedness
flickering.

The flesh in pieces.

Sometimes, other hands parting
the veils.

Sometimes, my own hands passing through
the narrow in-between.
(a jab in the wall’s gut)

Tugging the light ropes.
Untangling the knotted strings.

*Whore.*
(the savoring of a filthy word)

Afterwards, a moan-glimmer.

(claws to the back) (stray limbs)

(the famished palm’s clutching the breast)

(scarlet welts to rippling skin)

Parts not building up
to a human shape.

Sometimes, mounting desire
gathers in the thick hair.
(a tug against the fist’s restraint)

*Whore.*
Don’t move.
Someone is making an image of you.

Tracing over your body
the strife of light and shadow.
Wayang Kulit

Ano ang saysay ng munting butas
sa manipis na dingding?
(silipin)

Sa lamlam ng bombilya, kahubdang
aandap-andap.

Pira-piraso ng laman.

Minsan, ibang kamay na humahawi
sa tabing.

Minsan, mga kamay kong lumalagos
sa pagitan.
(suntok sa sikmura ng pader)

Humihila sa magagaang tali.
Kumakalas sa mga buhol ng sinulid.

Puta.
(linamnam ng mumurahing salita)

Pagkaraan, aninag na halinghing.

(kalmot sa likod) (ligaw na mga biyas)

(kapit ng gutom na palad sa suso)

(pulang latay sa kumikilapsaw na balat)

Mga bahaging di nagbubuo sa hubog
ng pagkatao.

Minsan, nagkukuyom ang natipong
pagnanasa sa malagong buhok.
(hatak sa pigil ng kamao)

Puta.
Huwag kang gagalaw.
May kumukuha ng iyong larawan.

Iginuguhit kung paano nag-aagaw sa iyong katawan ang liwanag at anino.
Rorschach

There is a thin film of water over the eyes.
Easily shattered.

And so darken the gaze.

Melt and let drip on paper.
Shadow over.

Forbid the mirror
to whoever wants to mirror here.

Allow no image-making.

Afterwards, a disturbance will be heard.
(ink spreading in water)

Listen.

A thousand bats streaming.
(the shock of the startled)

So close to the face is their hurry.
Almost colliding.

Now, catch the stare for an instant.

The unrenderable terror in the cave
from where the eyes were plucked.

Remember, fear hides
in the narrowness of the folds, in the corners.

Remember, how patiently waits
the all-of-a-sudden.

Remember, this is not over-reading
(this is not a poem).

What do you see?
A butterfly?

O, don’t you move!
It flew and landed on you.
Rorschach

May manipis na luha sa balintataw. Mababasagin.

Kaya't pagdilimin ang paningin.

Tunawin at patuluin sa papel. Umanino.

Huwag hayaang manalamin ang sinumang nais manalamin dito.

Huwag hayaang maglarawan.

Pagkaraan, may maririnig na ligalig. (tintang lumalabog sa tubig)

Dinggin.

Dumadagsa ang sanlaksang paniki. (bulabog ng binulabog)

Kay lapit ng hangos sa mukha. Halos bumangga.

Ngayon, saglit na hulihin ang titig.

Ang di maipintang takot sa yungib na pinagdukutan ng mata.

Tandaan, nagtatago ang kilabot sa kitid ng tupi, sa mga sulok-sulok.

Tandaan, matamang naghihintay ang bigla.

Tandaan, hindi ito labis na pagbasa. (hindi ito tula)

Ano ang nakikita mo?
Paruparo.

Ay, huwag kang kikibo!
Lumipad ito at dumapo sa iyo.
Lighthouse

To be noticed.
Not symbol but object of use.

Accurate.

If unmindful, it comes to visit,
this lullaby that intrudes
from the oblivion of the waves
from the slumber of dissolution
in the depths of the rocking cradle

(by design language leads astray)

Now, the letting-drift out to sea.

(flap of volition in the sails)

(gash of direction in the water)

(oar-push of the clock hands)

Afterwards, deep exhalation.

Relief in the pacific distance.
(as though time ceased)

All around, sky and sea merging.

Afterwards, words.
(cover of clouds unraveling)

Afterwards, more words
(dark)

Afterwards, downpour of words.

Now, tracing the scar
in the charted course's having healed over.
(detour of the ellipsis)
Now, the solitary glimmer:
mending the veils of curtains upon curtains
for a strand to hold on to.

Immovable point-of-view.

There is no end to the sea’s calling.
Parola

Upang mapansin.
Hindi sagisag kundi gamit.

Tiyak.

*Sakaling malingat, hahalina
ang oyaying pumupuslit
mula sa mga lundo ng alun-alon,
sa himlay ng pinaglahuan,
ng malalim na duyan.*

(sadyang nakapagliligaw ang wika)

Ngayon, ang pagpapatangay palaot.

(pagaspas ng balak sa layag)

(hiwa ng direksyon sa tubig)

(tulak-sagwan ng mga sandali)

Pagkaraan, buntonghininga.

Ginhawa sa payapang layo.
*(para bang tumigil ang panahon)*

Sa ligid, ang tagpuan ng tubig at langit.

Pagkaraan, mga salita.
(talukbong ng nalalatak na ulap)

Pagkaraan, mas maraming salita.
(dilim)

Pagkaraan, ulan ng mga salita.

*Ngayon, ang pagbabakas sa pilat
ng hilom na nilandas.*
(ligoy ng elipsis)
Ngayon, ang mapanglaw na andap: 
sumusulsi sa kurti-kurtinang tabing 
upang ipaabot ang hiblang kapitan.

Punto-debistang hindi natitinag.

Walang humpay ang tawag ng dagat.