

LITERARY SECTION

POEMS

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About the contributor

Francis C. Macansantos was born in Cotabato City, and spent his childhood in Zamboanga City. He was educated at the Ateneo de Zamboanga, MSU-Marawi, Xavier University and Silliman University where he obtained a Master of Arts degree in Creative Writing. He has taught at Silliman, MSU-Marawi, University of the Philippines-Baguio, and Baguio Colleges Foundation. He has served as panelist-critic at various writers workshops including the Dumaguete Writers' Workshop, the Cordillera Writers Workshop, and the Zamboanga Workshop. He has won four Palanca awards for his poetry in English, and in 2003, he was adjudged winner of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) Writer's Prize for poetry. He has two books, *The Words and Other Poems* (U of the Philippines P) and *Womb of Ocean, Breasts of Earth* (National Commission for Culture and the Arts). He lives in Baguio City with his wife, poet-mathematician Priscilla Supnet. He is currently putting together a collection of poems in his native Chabacano, with translations into English.

Lingua Franca

Dawn broke right before us, remember?
And we broke through the breach.
No one had really told us about it before.
We had left our homes, the past
And its trove of words, we had broken through.
Even the words we shared were merely a mask,
The words of the languages we used were merely
Bridges to each other, merely the lingua franca
To dress the blinding light with.

Often we slink back guiltily
To where we are children always
With our first words—touching,
Tasting them again, knowing their meanings
As they emerge from the glimmering silence,
Our first home. But dawn is always leading us away
Into the light—first light. We climb over mountain rims
Beyond all the words ever invented.
Every word we say about it is always outstripped.
Where the mad tangle of language has no meaning
Is the silence. We have broken free.
We have returned.

My Aunt's Garden

Flowers, like birds, proclaim their territory, too,
But silently. There is no troop of geese honking here,
But angel's trumpets, jolly yellow bells, will do
Just as well. The star-like hibiscus struts out
Its pollen-dusted flute. Bougainvillae choirs,
En masse, quiver in the breeze silent chorales.

These are soldiers of great fortune in battle array,
All as though their natural beauty were sufficient
To strike fear in the hearts of predators,
And their elegance--and royal decorum,
Instill instant respect that is traditional awe.

My aunt Flor's form, tall, stalk-like, moves among them
With placid beak in the air and pleased demeanor,
Not at all disdainful, oozing goodwill, almost.
All is gently peaceful in the garden, flowers flaunt
Richness in the air for passing bees and butterflies.

But there's a ripple of apprehension in paradise.
High walls can no longer keep chaos from storming in.
The long spell of peace instilled by conquest
And enslavement dissipates. In the misty past,
She only had to say, her lips pursing, "Common!"
And they were put to rout. A magical word!

The spell seems broken, but her steps
Are straight and firm, her bones are sleek.
She will enforce the semantics of her blooming realm.
She remembers her childhood, and wears a little smile.
Beauty and difference will not keep them out,
And hedges will not do so well as a higher wall,
Yet it has taken them long, many generations
Just to pick up the courage. Maybe the smile is right.

Windows

"I am large, I contain multitudes."

- Walt Whitman

At night the houses shone out to you
Like open lanterns. There were no bus movies then
To distract you from the darkness and the lights
That flowed past. Often you were passed through
Places without signposts, only unbroken darkness
Like a dungeon seemingly motionless.
A light, any light along the road
Came like the saving breath of air
After nearly drowning. Oh the benison
Of an open lighted window then!
The framed flicker of a passing candle,
Was humble, transient, and holy.
For these, too, were lives, nothing less venerable,
No matter that they were only the short movies
Of a trip that soon, too, would end.
For they had many wondrous beginnings
Opening out to you, and never really ending
Were they not filed away back
To a sudden pastness, or the mind
Coming to a sudden blank stop,
Or a slow one, out of weariness.
But you had to be quick to fully seize
Their endlessness, to cherish it
At the very moment it was offered.
To a voyager voyeur every window
Is like a dawn into a life, a trajectory
Of longing for what it is like to possess, to be
In another body whose only fault
Was to open a window to a lighted room.
Oh the pain domestic, the joy,

The bewildering despair, perhaps!
What is it like to take a trip
Into the destinies, deaths,
So many various times indefinitely
With nostalgia in reverse, for endless possibility,
Where even boredom has its fascination,
For being different, like a pause in music.
What is this wound for which I seek the balm
Of momentary hospitality? For though I know
I have trespassed, and surely I am not worthy
To come under your roofs,
I am sure that my heart has been healed
Countless of times.