

## 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](http://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.