

## ENTER DEEPLY

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### **About the Author**

Niccolo Rocamora Vitug, an alumnus of the Silliman National Writers Workshop, graduated with an MA in Literary and Cultural Studies from the Ateneo de Manila University. He is presently taking his PhD in Music at the University of the Philippines, while teaching with the Department of Literature, Faculty of Arts and Letters, University of Santo Tomas. His collection *Enter Deeply* was selected as a finalist for the 2020 Gaudy Boy Poetry Book Prize.

**ENTER DEEPLY**

And so do with me as you please.

—Lorenzo Ruiz

When you made your bed with your wife, Lorenzo,  
she bled by a force that ended  
in desire,

but blood, you would not see the end of it  
till it broke you and your companions,  
victims of a revolt not yours:

Your mission taken  
apart by scholars, Christianity speared  
by Ieyasu's ban,

impaled by grandson Iemitsu,  
lover and murderer of a young man  
under pretext of betrayal:

It was all a sea of red:

Your wife and your absence,  
shogun and daimyo,  
lover and lover

where red is the color  
of a violin's plaintive song. Will you have  
a song for your people, Lorenzo, if you lived  
today?

I have just bitten  
through summer's heart:

Zambales mango fully ripe, golden sap  
dripping from my mouth.

I know where sweetness lies. I look to your statue  
unsure if something beats warmly there.

I read the epistle  
and follow your singing  
of the psalm,  
note per note gliding  
down my ear.  
This is what I wait for—  
how the rostrum  
marble warms slightly  
to your touch,  
how my palm  
laps that all up  
despite the silences  
you throw in the lounge  
for volunteers.  
I give myself, volunteer  
as sacrifice to you  
if you will take me,  
if each avoidance  
is like the calling of Samuel—  
veiled, insistent, strong  
as the rise of my blood  
inside my pants,  
straining to be  
your song rising  
to heaven.

Inscribe records

Binondo  
 receipts over and over  
 for *frailes*  
 your shelter Spaniard  
 harbored you a  
 you not kill  
 did

Inscribe crosses

uphold your word  
 thousand reasons slit  
 cling to your upside temples  
 faith down  
 feet beams  
 tied to

*Amanuense*

oneness of force ward  
 sky  
 troughs crests align  
 and

I told him not to go.  
I told him I was scared.  
He said he would be back.  
He never came.

*Los frailes* already had use  
of his elegant cursive.  
His pittance of a payment  
I had lent partly for profit.

I sold vegetables in the market.  
I got into debt for more food.  
I sung to our three children.  
I always made payment.

I said he would return.  
I wiped their tears.  
I knew all along.  
I survived without him.

I built our home.  
The three found spouses.  
The eldest took me in.  
What else could I ask?

Did Lorenzo give himself to me  
the way he pushed me off  
when I clung on to him  
as *los frailes* pulled him aboard?

I veiled myself in church.  
You do not recognize me.  
Lorenzo you know. Should he  
be patron of anything?

The martyr's palm frond  
he holds in his hands?  
I had a tree full of those  
of the darkest green.

I, Lazaro, the leper,  
 have cherry blossom  
 prints of dark pink  
 from him who traded  
 sweetness with us,  
 cargo of a vessel  
 larger than our sampans.  
 His thick fingers  
 are expert in sea  
 parting. Together  
 we immersed  
 in brine's pull  
 and assault. He promised  
 to come back—a soreness  
 turned into rashes  
 that disappear,  
 that return. A tree  
 overgrows  
 my insides. Take it  
 to the people  
 who shunned my faith.  
 My skin crumbles not!  
 Give me leave  
 to join Fray Gonzalez  
 so that more dirty  
 blood colors  
 my Kyoto and its storms,  
 dark pink the shade  
 my petals  
 to be scattered  
 on the seawater  
 in the breeze

It is best this way: to make a show  
Of clot-stained water spouting  
As the board pounds my stomach  
Fever-high from all the tiredness  
While Lorenzo witnesses, torn linen  
Hanging at my side. He cannot see  
Gonzalez any less: lying in the same cell  
He calls *Padre* in pain, desperate  
For morning light to gentle the points  
On our fingers where knitting needles  
Were inserted. We are woven together:  
I took him in this mission, trusting him  
All these years, keeper of our records  
In cursive I can only hope to imitate.  
I cannot fray, if only for him, standing  
Stronger than the rest of us, likely  
One of the few offered martyrdom  
Among his people. I am not as gifted.  
May I have this bleeding before the pit  
A red stream as one last preaching.  
If he be granted a protomartyr's glory,  
I would like to have a hand in it.

This is how I died: *I forgot I was dead, fully into the beads I had learned to pray over and over, coming apart in wounds and flayed skin. Light entered my flesh, soaking me chanting, "Full of grace, full of grace." I had no more rosary in my hand, but I smelled roses: those my mother brought home from church, those my wife bought at the market, the scent behind her ears as she strode me taking me fully, all grace. Suddenly I was taking her place, penetrated entered deeply, side hands head all my body's places. No more beads on the way to the pit, only fullness of grace, smell of dung and earth fading, and there was light breaking slowly on my face, my rising shivering from the groin shaking until there was only lightness clouds no more pit, no more beads, no more death. My face was wet, the sheets I lay on were wet: I stood up alive.*