

● First Prize-Winning Poem

by Miguel Montejo

(a) Reflections

Rain drizzles over Palo roofs, like a cross-cut saw,
it hammers a staccato on nipa shingles,
the amber dawn approaches but the day is gloomy,
day that falls like a shroud, sombre without joy,
day that recalls morbid thoughts of the dark cell,
the narrow chamber, the lifeless norm,
day of falling pellets, pelling, soaking the skin, —
day that travels over lands devoid of light,
what have you witnessed, what have you glimpsed,
by what motives came you here?
why do people hurry, like walking on a flying tropeze,
what cause them to seek the elusive bluebird?
life without meaning, why do they live at all?

Why does that man driving piles for Luntad-US army bridge
do it? what impels him?
why this motley crowd of giggling girls and boys,
men and women too, no longer young go to Ilawad Outfit?
what motives urge? why this endless hurry to seek a living
if life is death? how can we trace desire, assume shape,
corporeal or incorporeal, choate or inchoate?
what Promethean fire seek they, when in final synthesis,
Anteus-like, they go to earth, whence they came?

Why clow for mesons and positions, if we die after?
why this endless jangle from jeeps, from blasting gravel,
from bulldozers, from amphibious ducks, from rivets of bridges,
from helicopters flying loose? toward what end?
for what purpose, whither are these wage-earners bound?

This pell-mell humanity, this crazy inferno,
what pit and pendulum, what Midas riches seek they?
why pile money if in final analysis you leave them
as you die? why seek joy when happiness is mixed with pain?
when life is nine-tenths misery.
when Faustus wasted his, looking for elixirs of joy,
only to barter his soul in the end with Mephistopheles?
when Lareleis of sin seduce inveigles, with pain,
when Ponce de Leons pine for fountains of youth
that turn a mirage, when sorrow and sweetness,
pleasure and pain alternate on this poor earth,
ruthless nemesis that confronts them, dare they ignore?
when the end of pleasure is retribution? steeped in libations
of the ego, can they escape life's inexorable law,
can they forego pain, can they?

Tabors we glimpse daily, flaming visions of fire,
visions splendid when the soul reaches for stardust,
for shining minarets lovelier than Bagdad's,
for turreted towers vaster than Rome's,
for alabaster temples and shining cupolas
and richer domes, splendor than Rheims or Notre Dames

for temples of truth, cathedrals of conviction;
Daily sin weights us down, pulls bottomward,
precipice after precipice, bastions after bastions....
Man strove for Sinai but ah,—that was ages ago;
on the altar-pyres of the soul, burn we incense
daily go GOD, but man, brute man, tarnished from infancy
with perdition since first of Adam's fall, yields to mud,
over alternating striving for rising and ebbing virtuousness.

Thus, in the sanctuary of our inmost soul
we witness a daily battle of good and evil
we see in a death-grapple, as in a *ju-jitsu*,
forces of right and wrong in eternal tug,
with no one seeing save the eye of conscience,
to record winnings and losses,
Man asserts for triumph of good, for victory of right,
but he falls....
life after life, surging and surging,
battles after battles besieged,
only to succumb, when doom stares at him;
But triumphant is the Soul.
'tis deathless, formless, fleeting, eternal,
soaring unto lights supernal, dream of lunar nights,
as it meets God from the nameless grave,
unto the eternal throne.....!

(b) Introitus

The branched tendrill of your life's tree
all coil from Christ—Bethlehem, Galilee,
Nazareth, Capernaum—they bear testimony
of God's love and truth till eternity.

Soul, whose bosom is made a homeing nest
of the Holy Infant's true, everlasting love
lift up your eyes toward Paradise,
behold the flambeau of the skies,
today is the Infant Jesus' natal day,
weave rondelles, sing a roundelay,
join Tacloban's festive throng,
blessed by the Child's loving song:
Of peace!—Ah ponder this: If Tacloban
is quiet today, 'tis because of Child Jesus' loving hand.

(c) Testament of Faith

This majestic sweep of the arching heavens,
this rosy flush of daybreak that tints the skies,
this eternal sobbing of the sobbing sea,
this upraised acacia that mumbles a benedicite,
this grandeur of the eternal hills,
this soul-healing stir of breezes in the leaves,
this placid calm that assails the soul
this holy communion of land and firmament,
the lyric tempo of songbirds in the woods,
on this segment of earth where none intrudes,
this velvety sweep of white rosal blooms
that recalls the infinity of You, O GOD,
this eternal cycle of days and nights,
These—and all else around me
are testament enough of thee, G O D.