



Mga Taho Gikan sa Akong Uniberso.

by Raul Moldez. Introduction by Omar Khalid

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In finding delight in the ordinary and the unusual in the commonplace, Raul Moldez revitalizes our perception and memories of little things. The little become big, the usual unusual.

For the poet, time is an indifferent reverser of situation. It says "I told you, it would all lead to this." The young get old, the strong become weak, the powerful, powerless. The human body and the earth become living testaments to the passage of years, the transition of values, and the sign of the times. The shriveling tattoos on ageing skin become a caricature reminder of youthful strength and vanity. The pierced tongue or pierced ear, the chain around the ankle, or the leaking rainbows from oil depots have become visual statements on increasing modernization. In these images, there's a wistful suggestion of the rural as the locus through which the body, in constant contact with the earth, derives primal wisdom. It is a body deeply in touch with August rain, the rhythm of sea waves and grass; it is a body ornamented with woven vine, with cigarette foil, or with chained rubber bands.

This rural-urban polarity, however, is not necessarily Romantic in mode; it is a trajectory through which the poet names the uneventful, the almost forgotten experiences residing in words that are aching absent in our new set of hybrid vocabulary. How many Bisayan speakers today use

“lansis” (deception), “alindanaw” (dragonfly/damselfly), “siglo” (century), or napukan (collapsed) in their communication? How many remembers the resonances surrounding the words “kulbahinam” or “pangagod”? These words, quite ordinary, may no longer be familiar to young Bisayan speakers, and yet the poet, while decidedly “poetic,” veers away from inflated diction and succeeds in not alienating young readers.

There’s a delightful easiness that runs through this book that plays on humor, twist, and irony. The poet’s voice is most distinct in personified objects, prompting us to pay attention to a toilet bowl or an American frog that speaks with a sly wink of a friend who’s just pulling our leg: “Wala sila masayod nga makahilo kong dako./ American Frog ko do!” While the expression is unmistakably colloquial, the poet strikes a thoughtful balance between casual and “poetic” diction as he engages in a playful juxtaposition of past and present, the poor and the rich, the new and the old.

In some instances, the contrast is drawn sharply and tend (or intend) to editorialize or make a caricature of social issues. But in many poems it is achieved delicately through wit and powerful suggestion. In one poem, the word “kulbahinam” assumes multiple meanings when it oscillates from a child’s innocent awe to a father’s silent affection which, to me, also foreshadows his eventual severity over the child: “Puhon inig kabanlas/ sa katuigan ngadto sa tanaman sa kagahapon,/ makita mo nga ang kakulbahinam diay/ hilom nga nagpahipi sa mga kamot nga/ mainampingong mitugpo us misapwang kanimo-mga kamot sa imong amahan.”

Sometimes the suggestion is merely a nuance, almost unnoticed in the poet’s unassuming stance. This can be seen in the poem “Dagang, Diin Ka Man sa Pagpanarap Kog Balak” where the poet self-effacingly talks about his craft which is as elusive as the moon that gets reflected on the shifting seawater: “Apan idlas ang mga titik sa bayabayon.” In the fifth stanza, the poet says “Taymsa, nganong was molutaw ang mga bituon/ Ibabaw ning dako-lapad nga lim-aw/ Nga gidula-dulaan sa mga isda?” and then he speculates that the absence of stars might be caused by the murkiness of squid ink. This kind of laidback building of ironic surprise I think is wonderfully achieved in the last poem whose first half is teeming with random kinesthetic images: “Lanog and tuktugaok,” “nagandam sa pagbirig,” “nangakha nga himungaan,”

“nagtuka sa ulod,” “Naghupo-hupo and iring,” “matukob ang piso,” “Mitugdon sa sanga.” From this robust activity, the poem slowly but unerringly settles into contemplation: “naglumlom,” “hilom and iro,” “Walay imik ilang tanan.” It is a contemplation that mirrors the poet’s own silence in the sacred act of breathing life on a wall picture where ordinary, little things make up the poet’s universe.

Sa Akong Lawak

*Lanog ang tuktugaok
Sa talisayon nga sunoy,
Nangandam sa pagbirig
Sa nangakha nga himungaan.
Laing sunoy, buwanting,
Nagtuka sa ulod. Samtang
Naghupo-hupo ang iring,
Naninguhang matukob
Ang piso nga nawanis panon.
Mitugdon sa sanga sa kahoyg
Narra and tamsi. Ang alimokon
Naglumlom sa iyang mga itlog
Sa salag. Ilalom sa payag,
Hilom and iro nga nagkitkit
Sa bukog. Way imik silang tanan
Nga mihuot sa poster nga
Gipapilit duol sa bentana
Ning mingaw kong lawak.*

R- Arlene Yandug