

PUNTA SPARTIVENTO

& OTHER MOBILIZATIONS FOR OUR TIME

E. SAN JUAN, Jr.



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Time*

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PUNTA SPARTIVENTO

Innocence has flickered out, my Beloved,
The disrobed glory of the lake mountains clouds
is the gift offered by nature
From the distant shore burn the flowers
symbolizing the promised blessings....
But what wings of the past sneak in
shrouding the beauty and sanctity of
our meeting?
splitting the unity of desire, dividing our tryst?

Remembering the violated victims "plunged in the
grave of suffering and despair...."
Souvenirs of the future--
what tidings are trumpeted by the turbulent winds?

They killed Juvy Magsino, Benjaline Hernandez,
Eden Marcellana, Rafael Bangit, Alyce Claver...

On the shores of Punta Spartivento, the waves
encounter each other and separate--
right or left, here and there--as if without any
decision,
pushed to the right
or pulled to the left
divided by fate or fortune?
driven by hatred, attracted by hope?

What sails have traveled to the other shore--moving

to and fro,
up and down, hither and thither?

Famished claws of vultures are striking down--
Scarcely does the wanderer sense the crimes that
have occurred
and are now occurring--
755 murdered, 181 abducted and abused--

Was it all a waste, Salud Algabre?
"Even if a life is extinguished?" how many
more leaps?

Those tortured by this unjust order link us together,
they connect and are joined by what has
disappeared, drowned by barbarism....

Dusk falls on Punta Spartivento....
dividing and splitting the flow of experience....

In my solitude, all the combatants who have
perished are inscribed in the psyche, transcending
the claws and fangs
of this pier that divides and fragments—

My beloved, in your lips treads the dawn of the
promised beatitude,
grafted into the cut of grief and rapture,
of what is needed and not needed,
of what is valueless and what is valued,

while we embrace, our jaws clenched,
attacking the shore's whirlwind.....

Blessed are the thousands of victims of the
oligarchy and compradors in the fissure of the past

now sunk and tomorrow

heaving up, surging

Blessed are the comrades who separated and

divided, selected and cut up

The world will know who deserted

and who volunteered,

those who fought and those who fled--

Everyone will meet here

at the Punta Spartivento

of the revolution.

HALT, TRAVELER, SYNCHRONIZE
YOUR CALENDAR
IN THIS “LAND OF GRIEF”

Every morning
the militant Alan Jazmines counts how many weeks,
months, years that he has been imprisoned and
when the crooked ways can be straightened

Ash-heap now is the fire last night in the Sierra
Madre camp but there are still sparks and smoke
swirling up and down...

In the nest of embers,
the guard perceives, pregnant flame dazzles,
slumbers, soon a conflagration
that will destroy the rotten jails in the ripeness of
time

Every noontime
the detained Maricon Montajes counts how many
days, weeks, months were stolen
from her by the State, and when fate will be
overthrown

On the edge of the estero near her cell a vagrant
plant sprouts and puts forth buds, soon the red
flower will spread its petals

under the shadow of the guns and canons of the
State ignorant of time's flow....

Unbound, some prisoners escaped, while the armed
sentries gambled, all drunk

Every twilight
the activist Tirso Alcantara counts how many slaps,
blows, beatings, kicks
and pummeling he received as rewards from the
military — when
the vengeance of justice will come

From the mountain-fissure crawls the brook ignored
by time's passage....

In the wilderness the stream flows all night,
carrying the blood and tears of the conflict

The river dissolves the impatience of longing —
Vigil tonight has spilled over....

The people's warriors crossing the seas can no
longer be counted.

We have been counted.

Fulfillment has come to pass.

Now is the settling of accounts, the reckoning.

THE POET'S PREDICAMENT IN A TIME OF TERROR

Bereft This is extravagance, vanity indeed!

As State crime continues wickedness
Terrorism of the neocolonial behemoth
Military and police violence

The abduction continues the killings
How many victims of Oplan Counterinsurgency
dragnets-- innumerable....
Recently, 57 victims of the massacre in
Maguindanao

Their faces and bodies riddled with bullets
Even the private parts of female cadavers
unspared

Is there no shame Is there no more dignity among
us all subjugated?

Nauseating Hideous Sickening

After Auschwitz Buchenwald Intramuros
The barbarity of fascist Germans and Japanese
Those who perished in Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Theodor Adorno's counsel, master of art and
philosophy,
Art and poetry are useless—
Those who still try to versify are insane!
But has everything been assimilated by the politics
of state opportunism and violence?
by rape and corruption?

Comrade, is it okay to stray from the party line?
Is it okay to let out a sigh--
Opposition to perversion's rule?

Sensing the smile in the shuttering eye
Kissed and inhaled
Sweet glory sizzling

Sandali lamang

Penetrating every fiber total extreme
Bristling at the ferocity of the clawing and biting

Sandali lamang

Full intensifying extreme total

Reaching the final explosion of carnal desire
Sorrow of goodbye in knowing

Foreboding happens only once

The soul entwined in the arms and legs
In the throat, what sting and bitterness

Perverse sex from paradise
Though undying is forsaken

Sandali lamang

Ay naku, smoldering kisses
Kiss of fire no desperation no mercy everywhere
Unrelenting ceaseless

Sandali lamang

The soul entwined in the arms and legs
In the throat, what sting and bitterness

Ferocious sex from paradise
Though undying is forsaken

Sandali lamang

Ay naku, kisses burning

Kiss of fire no desperation no mercy everywhere

endless endless

TOMORROW, FLOWERS UNBOUND

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
yea, we wept when we remembered Zion...*

--Psalm 137

From Comrade Alegria, the *canción* of the socialist
struggle in Venezuela is a salutation,
wondrous news that you bear as a refugee—

Though thwarted and held back, the torrent of the
Revolucion Bolivariano spills into the land the
foreigners had enslaved rising steadily...

May the just overcome

While here in Babylon we trudge down the river,
waiting weeping over remembrances of our native
land—
when will it be saved?

How could we sing God's song in the quarantine of
exile?
How could we offer laughter to despair when seized
by strangers?

We pray the just will overcome

Sitting on the banks of this whorish river, sobbing
whimpering swept by the tide

clutching the memories of home left behind...
returning

In dreams drifting floats the occupied land a nation
broken apart
restless is the body's soul split by separation

Let's strive to make the just overcome

From the riverside lying weeping when you're
remembered

O vanquished land!

Those who abducted and raped us, asking—
ay naku—

Forcing us to sing

but how, comrade Alegria, I could not imagine

How to sing the redeemer's *canción* in this rotting

black hole of conquerors?

Yes, the just will surely surely overcome

PARABLE OF THE STRUGGLE

At the tail's end of the barricade we fled and hid...
Dusty were the streets we tracked and pursued
(Still raw in my memory up to now)

Who's running after us?

Soul and body tangled up, shrouded with
 gunpowder
 sweat and smoke of Molotov cocktails spit teargas
 No water on the rocks no mercy in this damned
 place—
 no care nor curiosity whatsoever—

*Snake slithering through the cracks...
Is there water spurting through the stones?
Rustling of brook-water birds' whispers in the
sagging branches*

Who is following us? Do you hear the trodding?

We ran away from danger, distancing ourselves
from terror
Retreated from the crowd pouring in to the Plaza,
stepped back
but we looked left and right, uncertain what
to do....
Were you and I the only ones who escaped,

no one else,
but who on earth is that one breathless beside you?

*What beast is crawling through the fissures?
Not raindrops or scraping of lizards' claws on the
boundary-stone
Not the brook's rustling nor the cogon-grass'
singing as they are combed
by the bountiful fingers of the wind....*

We broke away from the barricade's frontline,
believing that no one will trace search pursue
hound us
Here in this spot no cry for succor except the shriek
of cicadas
No sobbing or groaning or weeping

No water in the crack of the wall or sludge seeping
from the open pit
When I looked up I glimpsed the end of the trail....
Near the boundary-stone waits the shadow with
stained filthy hood—

What animal leaped across the fissure?

*The crows all scampered debouching to the edge of
the meadow
No water there at the barbed wire so quiet
No moan or noise behind trees fallen cursed*

petrified....

No hand that will stretch forth a piece of bread

Who is that treacherous spy stealthily hovering over
us?

His face masked, disguised, carrying a muddy
shawl—

Can't tell whether man, woman, gay, lesbian,
transgender, aborigine, alien—

*Rain rushing forth river's fury turbulent waves
pounding on the shore—*

Who is that beside you stumbling, accompanying
us?

What comrade of ours fled, scurried away, escaped
so that we shall encounter each other here,
foul-smelling and dirty

but still clasping each other, shoulder
to shoulder—

It was dawn then (I still remember) when we knelt
and kissed the scorched soil

thankful that we reached—

ay, alas, like a miracle, owing to the mercy
of the armed Virgin—

the destination

we swore to be faithful to,

right at the start.

REVERIES: “IN THE MIDDLE OF THE JOURNEY....”

A hundred miles away the snow perched on the
Dolomiti peaks

from where I stand here
at the Piazza Dante Alighieri
but the skin of your neck is warm to my touch

What destination may perhaps be divined
in the entrails of the doves flying around
the challenging hand of the poet?

Sorceress of winter, Giovanna, you sutured together
concept and metaphor

but to which circle of inferno will I be hurled
by the earth-borne angel?

Fire in the brain (wings of metamorphosis) between
the descent and the upsurge,

no sage guiding me in this wandering
except Antonio Gramsci

(nestled in the icy purgatory of his prison cell)

my only mentor in the labyrinth of
the garden of communism
but in the distance between the snow naked in the
open air
and the fiery dungeon—
liberate us, Giovanna, my beloved—
in that fissure

I grasped you, embraced you,
bound you in my arms while the masses take up
arms,

exploding in a conflagration in the mountains of
Sierra Madre

raging throughout the islands

(raging fire of paradise in your breast and hair)

ballooning in waves,
falling—

until the ravenous capital of conscience

and the bloody profit of virtue

are gutted by your kisses

REMEMBER, ALWAYS

We parted last December on the corner of
Blumentritt and Avenida Rizal—
Comrade Felix Razon, do you still
remember?

Dig up the skeletons in the lime and lichen of
memory
to unearth the truth opposing this wicked regime.

You exposed the decadence and duplicity of the
government and military
including the prostitution of laurelled artists and
intellectuals
not surprisingly, you were arrested and jailed,
beaten,
starved in the dungeon, testicles electrocuted,
unrelenting punishment.

Merciful God, who can play blind to this outrage
that happens every day to political prisoners?

Who are the witnesses that will testify?—
because (they say) you're a communist.

Twilight had fallen
when we parted, you were leaving for the asylum of

Utrecht, Holland...

Meanwhile in Isabela and Davao, north and south of
the archipelago,
the people's revolution continues, "un-spectacular
adventure" of ordinary citizens,
side by side with kinsfolk from the New People's
Army...

Years have already come between us...

You're still a tease, infuriating all with sly paradox
oxymorons antinomies—
myriad distractions.

But with your passage, I have sensed in your
writing
a trace of vexation loathing rancor dejection
resentment—is this true?
because (you say) forgotten is the sacrifice that
you've made for the nation...

You've left already, Comrade Felix Razon, flâneur
in urban forests, among the deserted
roads and sad cathedrals and musty palaces of
Europe,
while in Nepal, Venezuela, India, Yemen, Bolivia
and other countries
the communists, little by little, lay siege—
grim and determined—

to the modern conquistadors' outposts, this much is
known,
so, even if no one remembers your service to the
movement, no need, let it be--
your courage and loyalty will be celebrated,
however volatile and rarefied...

Comrade Felix Razon, wherever you may be, hear
my testimony:

Smog and traffic of convoluted streets in
Blumentritt and Dimasalang
were the witnesses to our last engagement,
these words drawn from debris and waste shall be
tombstones to your grave—
in whatever field of struggle you've fallen,
may the metaphors that I etch here be ironclad and
diamond-hard—
the violence and fury of mourning
stoking the roar of bereavement....

MAGRITTE'S WAR ON EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL MIGRANTS

When Magritte's lunar migraine
drifts into the blue dragon's
lair
--“What time is it?”—

mired among mermaids, lost in the karma of
fallen sparrows

What tentacled machine behind those ivory horns
unleashes such fury of discriminations?

Sussurus of mourning
 eclipses Artemis' blues
 rending the veil of
 appearances--
 "Is it time now?"

Who will risk murdering the murmur of
immemorial bees? Who will risk

recruiting Isis and Ishtar for the profit-less Apollo mission?

Border-patrols of imperial terror, they float
seducing Li Po, unmoored mariner, who
drown

unmindful of the azure undertow

Magritte's migraine at long last migrates beyond
borders

“What time....?”

Who will then map the cadavers of fallen sparrows?

What ghostly marauder drifts with white parasol,
demarcating
under coral boughs,
bifurcating the continuum of transmigrations?

Unleashing what tiger desire
leaping across mermaids lost among beehives

and striped stars where the solar cyborg's willpower
spreads out its pallid tentacles....

Now is the time to demarcate

the aura and penumbra of this lunar migrant

risking all chances, dreaming of deliverance

from unrelenting terror--greeting the azure presence
of what appears
absent dragon and tiger,

with migrants prowling behind.....

THE EXECUTION OF REBELYN PITAO

The Internet bore the news, of late, that the New
People's Army [NPA] will not avenge
the government's murder of Rebelyn Pitao.
But is this what the masses demand?
The masses demand justice and accountability: who
will pay for this crime?
The NPA's answer has already preceded us...

Has a rule been decreed by the party on misery
bitterness pain control of the masses' fury?
Has a rule been decreed on how to get furious or
laugh?
Has a rule been decreed when it's correct to hate
and when it's correct to love?
Has a rule been decreed when it's correct to be
doubtful and to be trusting?
Has a rule been decreed on how to be obnoxious or
obsequious? Has it been decreed how it's correct to
be smart and to be stupid?
Has a rule been decreed on all that has yet to be
experienced?
If fury is smoldering, can the waters of
disappointment douse it?
How long should patience last?

During the Filipino-American War in 1899-1913,

which killed 1.4 million Filipinos, the US Senate asked Gen. Robert Hughes, commander of the US Army in the Visayas, why civilians—women, children—were also punished, Gen. Hughes replied: *“The women and children are part of the family, and where you wish to inflict a punishment you can punish the man probably worse in that way than in any other.”*

Ay, *naku*, you wouldn’t guess—Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo & Benigno Aquino III’s military executioners learned Gen. Hughes’ lesson well, as well as their paramilitary goons... Senator Rawlins asked Gen. Hughes if what they did was *“within the ordinary rules of civilized warfare.”*

The answer: *“These people are not civilized.”*

There you go, friends! Despite almost a century of intervening time from our bloody occupation by the American “civilizers” — we might as well include the long Spanish colonization and the short but painful experience with Japanese cultural missionaries,

it’s quite true
that we’re not “civilized” yet....
so to speak, wouldn’t
you?

FRIDAY AFTERNOON IN OCTOBER, WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT

In the autumn afternoon a wound festers
in the crack of the asphalt roads in thIs city
 once a pasture and hunting ground
 for the native Mohicans.

What fraud and deceptions do the window-curtains
 hide?

Doves and pigeons do not know the color of hope.

My cigarette stubb I interred beside the Bridge of
Frogs
 while the traffic procession headed for the Foxboro
 Casino
 now owned by the Pequots.

But why does the Abu Sayyaf sneak into the mind?

In the Fall's twilight hour I sneak into memory 's
 fissure, a voyeur gravitating to dusky trails
 filled with apprehension
 and terror

on the eve of our journey
 to America.

ABOUT THE POET

E. SAN JUAN, Jr., emeritus professor of Ethnic Studies, English and Comparative Literature, is currently professorial lecturer at Polytechnic University of the Philippines. He was a fellow of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute, Harvard University; and the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin. Previously he served as Fulbright professor of American Studies, Leuven University, Belgium; and visiting professor of literature at Trento University, Italy; and at National Tsing Hua University and Tamkang University, Taiwan.

Among his books are *In the Wake of Terror* (Lexington), *US Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines* (Palgrave), *Working Through the Contradictions* (Bucknell) and *Between Empire and Insurgency* (University of the Philippines Press); *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora* (University of Santo Tomas Publishing House), and *Filipinas Everywhere* (De La Salle University Press). His recent anthologies of poems in Filipino are *Sapagkat Iniibig Kita*, *Kundiman sa Gitna ng Karimlan*, and *Ambil* from which some of the poems included here were selected for translation. Due this year is *Carlos Bulosan: Filipino Revolutionary Writer in the United States / A Critical Appraisal* (Peter Lang).

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lars palm – *case*

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Comprehending Mortality
Dan Ryan – *Swamp Tales*
Sheri Reda – *Stubborn*
Aileen Cassinetto – *B & O Blues*
Mark Young – *the veil drops*
Christine Stoddard — *Chica/Mujer*
Aileen Ibardaloza, Paul Cassinetto, and Wesley St. Jo – *No*
Names
Nicholas Michael Ravnikar – *Liberal elite media rag. SAD!*
Mark Young – *The Waitstaff of Mar-a-Largo*
Howard Yosha – *Stop Armageddon*
Andrew and Donora Rihn – *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
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For P-Grubbers
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Ali Znaidi – *Austere Lights*

Maryam Ala Amjadi – *Without Metaphors*
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Jackie Oh – *Fahrenhate*
Gary Lundy – *at / with*
Haley Lasché – *Blood and Survivor*
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Tom Hibbard – *Memories of Nothing*
Kath Abela Wilson – *Driftwood Monster*
Barbara Jane Reyes – *Nevertheless, #She Persisted, Number 3*
Maria Damon, Adeena Karasick, Alan Sondheim – *Intersyllabic Weft*
Barbara Jane Reyes – *Nevertheless, #She Persisted, Number 2*
JJ Rowan – *so-called weather*
Jared Schickling – *Donald Trump in North Korea*
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