

### DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT WPS

(apologies to Dylan Thomas)

Do not go gentle into that WPS. Trawlers scarred the seabed at close of day; Rage, rage against the Palace BS.

Unwise men think Chinese might is the best, Inevitable, their rule they thought. But no! No! Do not go gentle into that WPS.

Good fishermen sail by and are treated like pests; Their frail boats carrying their catch and lives. Rage, rage against the Palace BS.

Our men casting nets, hoping for the best, Learned too late not to depend on Duterte. Do not go gentle into that WPS.

Brave souls with no fear of death's caress Dare Roque to stop the wet excuses Rage, rage against the Palace BS.

And Father Digong, jetski nowhere in sight, Curses those who made him wake up. Do not go gentle into that WPS. Rage, rage against the Palace BS.

### I SING THE BODY PANDEMIC

#### Intro Pandemic:

Openings aplenty for China
To nine-dash our hopes and bodies
With pestilence and presidential maladies.

### Verse Pandemic:

In the Palace, the President is praised
For the mosquito net he raised
Over the disconsolate country
To protect the sick, the poor, and the hungry.

In the streets, voices and fists are raised Against Davao's drugged disgrace. With hammers from a fed-up foundry, They rise: the sick, the poor, and the hungry.

## Chorus pandemic:

"Ano ang ambag mo?"
"Kawawa naman si Tatay."
"Sumunod na lang kasi!"
"Eh di ikaw ang mag-presidente."

## Bridge pandemic:

The people are lifting their voices Singing the hymns of anger. As generals decide with discord Our memes strike a hopeful chord.

## Chorus pandemic:

"Ano ang ambag mo?"
"Kawawa naman si Tatay."
"Sumunod na lang kasi!"
"Eh di ikaw ang mag-presidente."

# Outro pandemic:

Now roars the once devout: "Enough! Let's kick him out!" Our hope for change -- doused. With one voice we shout: "Oust!"

### THE MEMORY OF ARROWS

You were a man of fifty Bontoc summers crouching in front of the Padre Faura Gate of Robinson's Ermita.

Wearing a pair of cut off denim pants and a crimson vest adorned by eagle and rice stalk patterns, you told me for a thousand pesos I could have your bow and arrows.

A dismissive "Too expensive," shot from my lips and I asked you why you priced it like that.

You said it was your father's.
A great hunter:
arms as steady as the Ifugao mountains
as he eyes a boar with the arrow.
You said you would hold
your head high
as you carried his weapon
while he carried his catch on his shoulders –
blood dripping on his body,
running on his tattoos like the Chico River.

You told me of the gongs your people would hit, the children lining up like strawberry patches all trying to touch your father; and the *mumbaki* would smile his approval for the village fires would touch meat that night.

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And you would be at his side, eyes aglow with pride, bow and arrow in hand, hoping that someday you'll have your own boar to slay.

"So, that's why you're asking for a thousand," I said. "Will you buy it from me then?"

"No, I think it's still too pricey. But I have to admit you have a good story."

### **RACE AND PRIDE**

Faster than the boars of Bontoc, Father would race his palayon scooter during the *Imbayah* and be a blur of red, white, and black.

Down the streets, his wooden wheeled wonder would be as fast as his arrows shooting through the pine trees of our forests.

Lining the sides of the streets, our tribesmen would bang their gong and cheer him on.

Whenever he would turn a corner we would turn almost sideways like an eagle, and fly by the faces of the admiring crowd.

His name would be their anthem of triumph and I would be so proud for he shared his name with me.

When Father wins and our tribe cheers his victory with pinikpikan and rice wine, he would carry me on his shoulders and for a few minutes he would be my scooter.
Then I would dream of my own race.
I would see him, long past fame's finish line, scars like medals all over, shouting my name, shouting his pride, telling his friends:
"I taught him how to ride!"

palayon – Philippine Oak imbayah – a harvest festival in Banaue pinikpikan – a chicken dish

### THE BINUKOT'S SONG

Beauty borne by *Ligbok*: your skin was the fairest of all -- like a pearl's; your hair black like pools of water in the night; your face veiled like a secret we guard.

Yours are the choice cut of veal for you were our choice to sing our stories: why dogs howl at the moon; why snakes hiss their hymns; why crows lost their chance to croon.

I remember how we used to gather around you to listen to your songs that we may partake of your memories: our epics of struggle against outsider blades; our spears flying straight into the chests of conquerors; our dances of victory after those bloody beats of battle.

Now we can only gather inside our houses and cower because of that cacophonous coughing caused by that dissonant disease.

Now we fear, as your song fades out, that no child will learn our history for no young tongue learned *Ligbok*. We can only wail our past will no longer sound when your feet finally touch ground.

binukot – a woman considered the most beautiful among the Panay Bukidnon. She is never allowed to step on the ground. She is the vessel of the community's heritage as she is tasked to remember and sing about her people's history. Ligbok is a language found in Tapaz, Capiz that is in danger of being lost since it is now only the Binukot that knows how to speak it.

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### **POETICS**

My very first regular reading material was Mad Magazine, the foremost satirical publication in the United States. Known for biting commentary about everything, nothing escaped its ridicule, even its own staff. A regular feature in Mad would be song and poem parodies. I admired how the new lyrics could still fit the meter of the original material. So, I started making my own parodies. Up until today, my predilection for parody has never waned. That is why whenever I would write a collection of poems, a piece or two would be parodies.

I see poems as commentaries about life and making parodies of poems is like having two commentaries in one, commentary about life and commentary about the poem itself. "Do not go gentle into that WPS" was made to criticize government inaction regarding the West Philippine Sea. Knowing how each fishing trip for our fishermen is like courting death, made me decide to use Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" as the frame for my piece. Juxtaposing defiance against death and what our fishermen were doing everyday was my intention. I wanted to pay tribute to our brethren who cast their nets every day and also rebuke the government that was supposed to protect them but ends up bending over for Beijing.

"I sing the body pandemic" is a piece meant to create parallels with the state of mind of a lot of our countrymen and the usual structure of a song. I was inspired by the Filipino version of the song "Do you hear the people singing?" from "Les Miserables" which was becoming popular because of the discontent people were feeling towards our government. I wanted the poem to be defiant in nature. In an arena of slogans, perhaps the most important that came out was "Oust!" which was, of course, the last word of the piece.

The Memory of Arrows, Race and Pride, and the Binukot's Song were manifestations of my desire to provide a venue for our I.P. compatriots. These people are always marginalized, often left scrounging for leftovers from the national budget. I felt that even in our arts and literary community, their place at the table is always precariously set. In the pieces, I wanted to show how heritage is slowly getting lost to urbanization. The inspiration for "The Memory of Arrows" is the Igorot who goes down to Manila to beg or to sell their handicrafts. "Race and Pride" is a discussion of the process of handing down culture from one generation to another. In the blood

shared between fathers and sons, culture is passed down. And that is a process which should not be cut. "The Binukot's Song" was inspired by a GMA-7 documentary. I was fascinated by the Binukot, chosen to be the vessel of the heritage of her people. Knowing that the tradition is in danger of disappearing because no one wanted to follow in her footsteps pained me. Here is a situation where cultural preservation clashed with modernity. While the stories of the Binukot can be recorded, the best form of documentation is one that is lived.

Writing poetry is a continuous process of pruning. I always go for the "short but sweet" since I find it more admirable to be able to say a lot using fewer words. With the line cuts, I prefer to have shorter lines. I cut when I feel that a line has enough thought in it. And for someone who likes listening to music, I tend to "listen" to my lines. I try to hear music within the words. That is why I tend to have alliterations and rhymes in most of my pieces. Poetry while a joy to the mind, should also be a treat for our ears.