

YOU

ALREADY



POETRY

SAMPLER

PAOLO

MANALO

YOU ALREADY: POETRY SAMPLER

“A most pleasant and excellent conceited poem, As John Falstaff, and the merry rap trio Urban Flow” is a sampler original. The song referenced here is “Miss Pakipot” by Urban Flow from the album *Test the Flow* (1996). The rest of the poems are from *E is for Epal* (Gacha Press, 2018), *Happily Ever Ek-ek* (Gacha Press, 2019), and *Jolography Retconned* (The University of the Philippines Press, 2020).

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Sampler epigraph is from “Mak’s Riply” by Ildefonso Santos writing as Dimas Indak, from *Sa Tabi ng Dagat at Iba pang Tula* (2001) by Ildefonso Santos.

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Cover: From *The Nine Lives of a Cat: a Tale of Wonder* (Griffith and Farran, 1860) by Charles Bennett

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YOU ALREADY

*Oh, tenks tu yu, bat ay regret,
Ay du nat want tu day as yet!*

—Dimas Indak

Epal the Sonnet

You already are here and somewhere else:
At someone's wake hearing wedding bells.
Your name's on the sash of a beauty queen
While your epal face on a tarpaulin.
You float with the rest of the overflowed sewer
While people around are making you mura.
Pump up your smartphone's volume and smile.
Nod like you mean it and say "for a while."
Head in the clouds but with feet in a banca,
Head on the shoulders of Paul Anka.
The water's kadiri and kakainis.
Your Metro Manila's now Metro Venice.
You have one motto: Time is gold.
You have one joke that's very old.

Super Idol

Shaking hands with the poor
Everywhere
He tours.

And they can sing
His songs, they have
His voice.

“They know for whom they are.”
Singing with no microphone,
Very much game.

The quivering tonsils
Reach for his pitch
And what is missed is

Carried over by the echo
Of their arching limbs,
Those desperate gestures

To the sky.
The voice that even he
Mouths to. Open and close

Open. While the air is his tonight
Never will he ever
Have their hands.

Still.

Truth was, the moment
When either epal or fig
Or figment of epal was partaken,
the tongue sharpened
Into the serpent form.

*

Food for toot: the tongue knows they serve no apple pie in fastfoods.
It cannot be tricked, servant to substitution, while it knows chayote as its filling, it's feeling
The gap where the teeth should be.
And then biting the fruit pit:
The *bale* borrowing lost meaning.
The *kuwan*.
The *ano*.

*

Bale, all my friends' kuwan
Begins and ends with bale:
It's more kuwan than habit, more
Kuwan, you know, bale.
Bale, I can get your kuwan whole-
sale from Kuwan, bale.
Bale, but if it's free, it's free,
hindi bale, size doesn't matter,
It's the toot that counts.

*

Anong toot? What do you take me for,
Granted? You think I don't know
Anything? Now I know everything.

What do You think of me,
Thinking of You? I can think
Of many things now. Before You toot

Of the moon, I invented the moon
Buggy, the yo-yo. Now You can't look down
On me, I invented the dictionary.

Look me up. I'm somewhere
Between *agnostic* and *idiot*.
I'm *catholic* ("Of broad or liberal scope;
Comprehensive"), *Filipino* ("The Austronesian
language, not the people"); Ano?

Sigaw ng Kurimaw Romantiks

Broadway Centrum Studio, New Manila, Quezon City (ca. 2004)

for Kris Lanot Lacaba

This noontime show's ratings are always number one
Thanks to the S Girls, the gameshow's background fun
Dancing as one wave and singing with one voice
Echoed by their fans' chants, those Kurimaw Boys:

Laban, laban? O bawi, bawi?

We will al-ways choose to fight:
La-ban, la-ban burn-ing so bright
In the fo-rests of the night.
(Olrayt!)

Their diehard fans in red shirts say they're number one.
What can ail these knights-at-arms, haggard but not woe be-gone.
From the top of the bleachers, there's screaming yet to come:
Sumakit ang tuhod ko, Sexbomb, Sexbomb, Sexbomb!

One million, one thousand, ano kaya?

The mo-ney don't mat-ter while you we see
In Broad-way this stu-dio where we are free
To roam this stately pleasure-dome decree.
(Decree!)

This is the place where we all belong
And now the S Girls launch into their famous song:

Si Shelley, feel ko, may gusto siya sa akin.
Si Blake—ser William, mukhang may pagtingin.
Si Byron, nag-offer ng Chillon Castle sa akin
Pero the best laid schemes of Mice and Men pa rin.
(Awwww!)

Screaming happy with them I am the Broadway noise
Of Ispageti, C.o.P., and Kurimaw Boys.
If you can't hear the chanting ilalakas ko loud:
I wandered so lonely as a noontime cloud.

Laban, laban? O bawi, bawi?

We will al-ways choose to fight:
La-ban, la-ban burn-ing so bright
In the fo-rests of the night
Even in the afternoon delight.
(Delight!)

Barok Eclogue

in memoriam, Yoyoy Villame (1932-2007)

SPINOZA:

When Barok say his love persistent
Me think of a leaking roof
Whose drips are inconsistent
While me heart is waterproof.

BAROK:

Sabi Spinoza ikaw parang sisig,
Sizzling lang sa umpisa.
Kung isang init lang: pag-ibig!
Order na lang sana pizza.

ME:

And that's the love story Barok/Spinoza.
Alone they are so deep thinking of ethics
But face-to-face they are two shy mimosa,
Their stalemate shyness: metapetiks.

SPINOZA en BAROK (Coda):

And if you find that our love story is beaten
We should have cooked more than we eaten.

bowl limn yeah

see cell yeah who bought
who bad sew cat cut
a one mass a rough

he mass in moo
comma put luck seek
moo rah mass socket

the hill doom ooh do
wall doom ooh do wall
pay roe Hindi boon tease

Galing

*for R. Zamora Linmark, Katrina Tuvera, Rudy Quimbo,
& Isabelita Orlina Reyes*

Outdoors the lovers are kissing.
The whole world should see their perfect kiss
But no one's around to see them. With eyes closed
They don't see the sun dropping further in the horizon,
With eyes closed they choose to be blind to their kissing
As though this moment that they can't see becomes
More precious to their touch. Then a thunderstorm
Wakes him from his dream. He is in bed
And no one is with him
But his bladder which is about to burst.
Quivering, he makes it to the restroom in time
But the feeling has passed. In front of the toilet
With his trousers down, he is overcome with the shyness
Of an amateur who is accidentally
Called to the stage and into the spotlight. Below him
An eager crowd waits with their tomatoes.
He sneaks away but the music cues
And the opening lines of song stop him in mid-step.
His open mouth, like the prop the stagehands forgot
To retrieve during intermission, hangs beautifully
Misplaced for lyrics to lift free from it
Without struggle or desperation. The song is perfect
Inside his head but once free of him it is the sound

Of a cat being skinned alive—a beautiful cat with enough lives
To survive the ascending notes of undying love
That he is only able to reach here in the confines
Of the toilet. So the dead cannot help but waken
To aid him in chorus: his former neighbors,
The high school suicides, the elders of the clan
Who said he would amount to nothing without their help,
The unborn child that wasn't really his, and all those
Who were killed for singing "My Way." They are all here
And now he is peeing.

A most pleasant and excellent conceited poem

As Sir John Falstaff,
and the merry rap trio Urban Flow

for Mark Anthony Cayanan

Please answer me for I am old:
What's the use of beauty when no one will see?
What use for love if you won't tell me?
I'm the lonely saucer waiting for a cup,
The deleted file without a backup.
You're like a schizophrenic teapot
That's cool when heated and hot when cold!
You're my C.T.G., Mistress Pakipot.

Poem Ending with Misheard Lines from José Mari Chan

As he waits for the beloved to finish the song
In that rundown neighborhood videoke bar,
He hears in the lyrics where it all went wrong:
“Two less lonely people . . .” they are.
Prince Juan, in his quest for the Adarna bird,
Self-wounds with razor and knife to stay awake.
The lover thinks him so absurd
To stand there with his pain in wait
As the bird poops magic that turns men to stone.
And this is the lover’s secret truth, his metaphor
For being with someone while feeling so alone,
A helpless emptiness he can no longer ignore.
All songs are the birdsong, his hearing destroyed:
We can’t quite return to the way before.
I remember the void,
Now I don’t remember the feeling anymore.

Naks, People Power Again

for Isabela Banzon

But I haven't

Gone home from the last one.
You know how it is on Edsa—the traffic
Has stayed on, it has its own cedula
Which I long to rip once found.

Did you see me on TV waving
The red flag? Bearing the yellow streamer?
I was in purple, I was in blue.
I take no sides, only shirts.
It's the whether-weather here.

Interviewed once I said something about
The unquestionable future of the country:
"...to which we have alternative solutions
On how we can sleep soundly
And where we can all get our next meal."

But the reporter said that was too long.
Like FPJ, I clapped both his ears
So he could hear me better, and—thank you—
There was applause.

But they cut that too.

Bahala Na

It comes easy—loneliness, happiness,
And everything in between:
The half-filled glass someone kept refilling,
The mismatched socks you wore in the dark,
Even the hair you stroked by accident
In a crowded train, these are yours to keep
Just like stars in the sky that will neatly fit
Your pockets. The simple way to walk
That we must keep learning every day
Is like the laughter we hold back when we say
It was not us—but a passerby—who broke wind.
We want to complain about the sad fate
Of our country but all that plagues the mind
Is that last song we couldn't help but hear.
If we've a coughing fit it only means
We're being dreamt of by strangers
We'll later meet in some exotic journey
When we're more mature to handle "real love"
Or something more real than that.
Maybe someone thinks of us back home:
People we've wronged who want us more than dead,
People who want so much of us that their love kills.
We think of them sometimes when we pick
Our noses. Like the house keys that we misplace
They'll always be where we forget to look.

Confucius Say Never Give Sword to Man Who Can't Dance

for Ruth Pison

The steps are basic but hard to master.
At times too stiff, no grip,
Too steady for even a basic flip.

If a simple gesture of the wrist
Brings peace, I will see peace
But never know it. The master says

“But what you see is easy but without ease.
Just as the traveler leaves with every breath
The dance's every step is the sword's release.”

About the Author

Paolo Manalo is the author of the poetry collections *Happily Ever Ek-ek* (Gacha Press, 2019) and *Jolography Retconned* (University of the Philippines Press, 2020). His first poetry pamphlet is *E is for Epal* (Gacha Press, 2018).

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