



Michael Balili (b. 1995)
Come Armageddon, 2020
A poetry sampler

COME ARMAGEDDON: POETRY SAMPLER

“The Penitent” appeared in PEN Philippines’ *At Home in Unhomeliness: An Anthology of Postcolonial Poetry in English* (2007). “Come Armageddon” is a sampler original. The rest are from *Velocirapture* (Gacha Press, 2018).

Cover and last page: *Picnic in Normandy* (detail)
by Juan Luna y Novicio, oil on canvas (88.9 cm x 128.9cm).
From the Collection of the Jorge B. Vargas Museum and Filipiniana
Research Center, University of the Philippines

© 2007, 2018, and 2020 by Michael Balili
All rights reserved

Designed by the author

GACHA PRESS

CONTENTS

Come Armageddon 6

World Records 9

Velocirapture 12

The Penitent 16

Little Eddies 20

Wee Hours 23

Notes 25

About the Author 26

COME ARMAGEDDON

And that we cannot be deaf to the question:

“Do I love this world so well
That I have to know how it ends?”

—W. H. Auden, “The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue”

Come Armageddon

This lighting made of sun, veiled
in layers of clouds, gradating—

long ranges of red into pink tints gradating, gradating—
into gray—into

an almost silver derivation
of hexadecimal has made me a host.

Come, this invitation will never expire.
Come, pronounce absence and rhyme it with a flower's name.

Come, the image will later multiply into pocket-sized reproductions.
Come, I am speaking for the central figure

of Juan Luna's *Picnic in Normandy* (1875).
A lady trapped in a Victorian dress—laces draped

in fields of marigold, daffodils, witch hazels, etc.
Around her are people saturated in situations—relatives arranging

the mat—unpacking the picnic baskets—in the distant,
a stylized figure of lovers marrying each other's silhouettes—

in the more distant—surprise!—mountains.
The woman is waiting while her maid's bent down

picking flowers, a bouquet already in her hand.
As if the painter captured the protocol narrative,

paralyzed in the continuity: the lady
waiting, her gaze beyond the painting,

the provided space, *so come...* The moment
has put me in this position to look up

and follow the museum's lighting—the painting
expanding, expanding—and me dictioned in this point-of-view:

(Ensuring dimensions, resolutions, pixels.) (*Come*)
The situation gathering audio feed—

the sound of the mat rearranging—murmurs—the foot
by foot fall of the maid picking the flowers—the sound of dead

flowers, stems stepped upon—the wind blowing the leaves—
the sound of flowers blown by wind—

the sound of lovers in the distant—in the more distant,
the sound of mountains. Is this the TV movie of my life

I've always wanted? To look up and accept the situation,
my life referential and Luna's mood swings.

To reflect similar narrative, proper names altered
into less commonplace, my fucking big break.

(It happened again, I couldn't sleep last night).

To accept the concept's demands—girl, no—to accept the trite parallelisms.

The woman and me soundless—our stupid faces in phone glow.
To look up and be burdened by a bouquet of flowers, waiting.

To look up and down our phone, taking notes—
for analysis—for the simple pleasure of bullet journaling—

for the simple pleasure of becoming a moment removed from the original moment, a trice—
a cry for attention—to look up and confirm the narrative, *yes*—

to gradually look around, shift subject-position—
to forbid any insertions—no there is no time

to pitch my criticisms—to look down—
fields of marigold, daffodils, witch hazels, me, etc.—no there is no time—

World Records

for Sofia Guillermo

Brightest star. Heaviest twins.

Wealthiest cat. Largest house

of cards. Largest collection of garden

gnomes. Most toilet seats broken

by one's head in one minute. Heaviest

onion. Largest gathering of people dressed

as Mahatma Gandhi. Most people

twerking simultaneously. Largest number of bees

to cover a person. Largest prenatal

yoga class. Largest gathering of Elvis

impersonators. Most spacewalks

by a female. Largest skydiving free-

fall formation. Most people

in a sedan. Longest time spent

in solitary. Most number of people
applying facial mask at the same

time. Longest time spent in direct body
contact with snow. Longest juggling of three

motor saws. Tallest mohawk. Largest sumo
suit fun run. Most tattooed woman.

Longest aerial tightrope walk.
Largest ball pit. Longest handshake. Shortest

war. Longest war. Highest death
toll from wars. Longest human tunnel

traveled through by a skateboarding dog.
Longest highline walk wearing a blindfold.

Youngest ornithologist. Heaviest vehicle
pulled over 100ft by teeth. Most straws

stuffed in mouth. Most concrete block
broken while holding a raw egg. Most snails

on face. Longest time spent buried alive.
Farthest eyeball pop. Heaviest weight pulled

by eye sockets. Most t-shirts worn at once.
Fastest hundred meter hurdle wearing

swim fins. Brightest star the eye
can see.

Velocirapture

First, the thing must be earthly. It must be rooted
in the visible, provinces of the sensual,
conceived and Aristotelian. I loved a man once,

(was he careless?) he was careless.
The thing must also decompose, meaning,
the thing must learn. Or the thing must teach.

Gleeful animism. Water, loam,
forest. Put spirit here. Put idea.

*Everything in existence is worth
being destroyed,*
cackles Goethe. Destroy.

Forget your activisms.
Water passes through me, I,
loam, become a forest. Assume.

Also, gaze. Appear thinking.

*

Sometimes, an earthquake. Sometimes
the earth shakes.

Attach basic human emotions.

(Why was I born with such contemporaries?)

Leave your loom. Kill his son.

Say it's the faults. The plates contracting,
the Chinas shattering.

*

What is after description? Let the reader decide.

Reader: what is after description?

*

When the storm came, we jolted
across the sky-filled field

to look for shelter. I have
no choice but

to garb myself in
a coat of telling, and say (*Say*

it—) the sky was angry,
the sky looked at me.

And I looked back.
I told them the sky

wanted to be interrupted.
The sky wanted to be seen.

The Penitent

The wound stripped of all bandages
now bare for criticism.

*

The body ungarbing its black dress,
black trellis among the field of pews.

*

In the manner of bones, the irregular
spaces of tainted glass—
the clerestory attempting image—the parts whole
(illuminated by a flash of lightning).

*

In the manner of bones, the outline
of the image exposed to light.
How the light made flesh out of them.

*

The colors fracture in the manner of bones.

*

Then a great light happens at the monstrance
—the blinding gaze, the untouchable corrugations—

inside of course—

*

The clerestories suffer the converse of light.

*

The body unable to posit itself where.

*

(Which pew) (Which wound)

*

Hands clasped firmly each to each,
a loose translation of the gesture of
forgiveness. The body

*

slowly becoming a human figure

*

kneeling towards the vector of: monstrosity.

*

(The wound stripped of all bandages,
centuries of wound.

*

In the third century it became alive again; heave of
soiled bandages on the marble floor).

*

All details bulleted, every sin categorized, subcategorized.

*

The great light vanishing in a switch.
The human figure syllabifying, syllabifying

Jose Labrador, Maria Felicitas, Guadalupe, Joaquim

(Pray for us).

*

Viceroy, Messiah, Conquistadores, Ladrones

(Soy inmortal).

*

Once again, the clerestories verbing.

*

The human figure kneeling towards

*

its favorite binary opposition, its own chiaroscuro—

*

all bandages kept to fit,

*

the human figure the wound.

Little Eddies

So original.
Like everyone else.

Take a keen on
being the first to it.

Devise new trinkets,
sound bites,

something epigrammable and—
from the foam of it all

find Foucault's rubber ducky,
trip on Elizabeth Bishop's strap-on in the dark.

Gawk at the first production of Peter Pan,
act surprised from the cheap

seats, your Long Island Tea
getting warm on a fembot

moonlighting as a cocktail table.
Watch the world burn.

*

ongoingness arrested by the sudden appearance of,
the feast moved because of an unexpected cloud of,

letters unsent due to the unanticipated reaction to,
understudies activated at the late arrival of,

events unforeseen mechanized by,
abrupt end of an errand so,

swift missive of a quest so,
instantaneous meanderings programmed to

*

I hear voices plucked from
the fabric of their harping-ons,

forced to confront the map of their materials,
to pin down each button,

all selvages mended, unmended,
laces stitched when the sleeve for the moment is plain,

uneventful or just simply boxy. One
would ask where to go for the night,

an occasion? Why of course for a walk.
Never forget / we walked on hell /

gazing at flowers, falsettoed Basho.

*

How this tear is two folded
is the swollen tonsil

of its definition. As we look
away to

interruptions—this looking
away, a dry leaf

stuck in your hair.

Wee Hours

for Caloy

The kanji for love is written
in thirteen strokes,

monosyllabic,
its radical is heart.

But a heart is only welcome
if it is kind, anonymous,

tiptoeing in the middle
of the night on the crisp

tatami floor, sliding
the translucent shoji tenderly,

letting himself in. Sleep
is in a room. Rooms shuffle

in a dream. Beamed in a forest
of succulents chased by chicken

Vikings shouting
kampupot, kampupot,

the one flower I remember
to name in recitation

my first week in grade two,
but sounded funny,

so it became a chant
on my every turn in PE class. Woke

up in the middle of the night,
needing to pee. Snoring

gently, you beside me,
my huckleberry tomodachi.

Notes

Velocirupture: the velocity of rupture, an urgency; the rupture of velocity, a delay. “*Everything in existence is worth being destroyed,*” is from Goethe’s “Faust”, Mephistopheles speaking. “*Why was I born with such contemporaries?*” is taken from Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics Reprint, 2003).

The Penitent meditates on Felix Resurrección Hidalgo’s painting of the same name from the Collection of the Jorge B. Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center, University of the Philippines. The phrase “*illuminated by a flash of lightning*” is borrowed from Oscar Wilde’s comment on Robert Browning’s writing style: “*Chaos illuminated by a flash of lightning.*”

About the Author

Michael Balili lives in Manila with human Caloy and cats Syllabus, Villanelle, Amos, and Joey.

His first book, *Kaiju*, is forthcoming from Math Paper Press.



GACHA PRESS