

Poetry

The modern martyr

Hussein Macarambon

I dare you, my brown-skinned compatriot
to bow your head, eyes on the ground
whilst your foe kindles a riot
tramps his feet, brass kris unbound.
tin waves of his blade are tides
that break against the face of a precipice,
slashing the sinews of heart and hide.
hear me! that is proper apotheosis.

then when the world starts to weep
as fast as a Samal fixes his stilts,
the enemy honors his guests, lets them sleep,
only wakens them as they are to repent.
by then, you have been forsaken.
the enemy is our new *patrón*.
his blood runs deep in your kin,
declares himself a martyr and a proud *ladrón*.¹

¹ Spanish for thief.

Marahui and her son, Amai

Hussein Macarambon

her name, Marahui.
 Amai was her son's.
 a portrait, adorned the wall
 and captured the lushness of their story,
 their heritage, their land, this shelter-
 her foremothers called *mala-a-walay*.²
 the house reeked of durian and marang,
 of cracked shells of chickens,
 colourful as the *Sarimanok*,³
 it hinted the scent of dead relatives
 swathed in white buried
 in nothing but loose soil.

Oh but times had changed.
 her cousins brought news-
 news of the white man,
 wearing six golden crosses,
 around his neck, and four fat fingers,
 and around his head,
 a cross on a black biretta.
 her cousins fled their farmland
 in the plains of Tubod⁴
 fearing for their lives,
 or afterlives.

² Literally, big house.

³ Sarimanok is the mythical bird found in Maranao and other cultures of the Southern Philippines.

⁴ Tubod is a municipality in Lanao del Norte.