

Poetry Series

Manuel Abis
- poems -

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Quit government service at the start of 2014.

Presently working on his creative writing skills using the English language.

A Man Never Travels Alone

A man never travels alone.
He will always have details of home on himself
And, later on, be home himself.
He will pack light not so much like his mother
And carry the sound of his father's voice
Everywhere he goes.
He will always bring yesterday along with him
And tomorrow is his eternal dream.
A man never travels alone.
His shadow called forgiveness
Shines a life of its own.

Manuel Abis

A Matter Of Murder

Murder matters

As long as the murderer is still alive and out there.

Dead people cannot come back and kill us.

Murder matters as long as the dead people

Are still alive and in here

Our memories.

Memories,

Like truth, like justice -

In order to find them, we first have to lose them

In the manner of an investigation.

To lose them, all we have to do

Is to be human.

To be human, all we have to do is to tell a lie.

A lie that is still alive and out there

As a matter of murder.

Yet, unlike truth, unlike justice,

Memories

Are either recalled or forgotten.

For in the matter of murder

Versus the Republic of the Philippines,

We can only rise

To claim the truth and to claim justice.

For, in reality,

We can only earn the truth and we can only earn justice.

And, in the case of memories,

We can only earn the truth back and we can only earn justice back.

Why?

Because, outside of truth and justice,

What matters most is

If we should turn our backs

To the murder of our memories.

Why?

Because dead people cannot come back and kill us.

But our memories can.

All memories can

In the matter of murder.

Manuel Abis

A Star Called Failure

They say that, ordinarily, a star has five points. Most people would surely think it a success that a star with five points is the real and true image of a star. In short - a successful star.

They also say that a star which has four points is actually a cross. Now somebody has yet to convince me what a star with three points is. Although somebody pointed out to me earlier that, perhaps, a star with three points is more or less related to the sports of basketball. Thus, that same somebody concluded that a star with three points is - a shooting star.

On the other hand, some wise owl told me that a star with two points is the horizon.

At the other end of the spectrum, they say that a star with more than five points is still a star, but with added brightness. With the exception of the eight-pointed star which, in some dark circles of human civilization, has been viewed in a rather ominous light. (Take note that the Philippine flag has an eight-pointed star emblazoned on it.)

This particular story, however, is still about a star, but is mainly not about any one of these stars. This is a story about a star which, oddly, has no point at all. Or so it has appeared, more or less

This is a story about a star called failure.

Failure is a star. Failure is a star invisible to the naked eye, but not if one wears the clear lenses of a pure heart and of a pure mind. It is a star which lies in that certain gap of space and time between all successful planets and all successful stars.

Every child is born wearing the clear lenses of a pure heart and of a pure mind. Most grown-ups, however, have learned to view life without the clear lenses of a pure heart and of a pure mind, and have decided that doing so made their lives better. It made most grown-ups garner victories in love and sports and war. It made most grown-ups struggle to be number one in any and every aspect of their lives. They even created circles in human civilization which are exclusive only for all these grown-ups who are number ones.

Although most grown-ups will say to any child that viewing life without the lenses

is such a great competitive advantage, it is only the children who shall be able to see the hidden and equally great meaning behind the star called failure.

Further, the clear lenses of a pure heart and of a pure mind is not like a set of reading eyeglasses that you can choose to wear or not to wear anytime anywhere. If and when a grown-up has learned to view life without the lenses, they can never wear them again anymore.

Unless, of course, they themselves take the journey to the star called failure. Since only there can a grown-up finally recover the real and true values of so-called winning and losing in life. The real and true values of love, of sports, of war, and of all other things related to life.

Once a grown-up has landed down on the star called failure, he or she shall discover the reality and the truth about it. That the star which they say has no point at all actually has one. For the star itself is its one and only point. That its failure as a star is the one and only point around which all successful planets and all successful stars orbit and dance.

Round and round, point by point, all successful planets and all successful stars orbit and dance around the star called failure like little children, hand in hand and light of songs and bright of smiles, in the midst of a great and wonderful game called shared and humbling experience.

Since, to all the children of the world who wears the clear lenses of a pure heart and of a pure mind, they see the star called failure as a great bridge where they can all come together equally as one again. All the children of the world see the star called failure as their one and true sun.

Manuel Abis

Aangkas Ako Sa Anino

Aangkas ako sa anino
Ng kakarag-karag kong pangarap
Hindi upang patunayan sa aking sarili
Na kaya ko pang sumabit na parang batang estudyante
Na pauwi na galing sa eskuwelahang pinatatakbo
Ng talino at ng kung sinu-sino.
Aangkas ako dahil
Ito na marahil ang huli,
Kung hindi man ay pangalawa sa huli, na biyahe
Pauwi sa amin.

Aangkas ako sa anino
Ng kakarag-karag kong pangarap
Hindi dahil nagtitipid ako at kulang ang aking pamasaha
Upang makasakay sa mga patok na pangarap
Tulad ng mga dyipning Montalban-Stop&Shop;
Ayaw ko na kasing umupo
At ipagkait ang kahit maliit na espasyo
Para sa mga batang pasan ang mga mabibigat na libro
At mga bagong karanasan
Sa pag-uwi nila sa kani-kanilang tahanan.

Ito pa.

Magtitiyaga na akong umangkas
Sa anino ng aking kakarag-karag na pangarap
Hindi dahil sa ayaw ko nang maglakad pa sa ilalim
Ng nakababangungot na init ng araw;
Ngunit upang ako ang maging pananggalang
Ng ibang mga pasaherong mahina ang katawan -
Mga bata,
Matatanda,
At mga may kapansanan -
Sa kakaibang usok, trapik, at alinsangan
Ng isang papalubog
At amoy-pawis na manggagawang araw.

Manuel Abis

Adventure

This morning after breakfast as you sat on your chair of deep apologies, you explained how the new would not necessarily be different and how the old is not always the same as before.

I tried, of course, to escape with you into your eyes as you hid your face behind a full sip of coffee. But you same-old-you would not want to endanger this early your intent. So I explored in a form of a joke - are you talking about our lack of diversity in our choice of sandwich spread? Because I could easily pass by the grocery after five?

No! - you emphatically laughed. Beyond your laughter and your smile, I would not want to be adventurous. After all, this morning, I felt lucky just to be alive. I felt lucky and alive just to be with you.

This morning after breakfast as you sat on your chair of deep apologies, I ventured to tell you this.

And so remember this:
The heart is made of cheese.

In a world of mayonnaise,
To each is one's own taste.

Do not think of marriage
As another finger sandwich.

The heart is made of cheese:
Nibble, nibble, kiss, kiss.

Manuel Abis

Advice To A Struggling Writer

Write.
Then, struggle.
There is nothing novel about it.

Keep your idiom
Between your teeth;
Then, after words, take a spit.

And come.
Make sure you come.
Alone, or with a poem.

Or, better yet,
With a stranger called fiction,
Or with the truth you have never met.

Manuel Abis

After-Fever

After the fever

Is the rain arrested. The celebrated reading of puddles
And guttered passages. The cold midnight sweat pacified
In bed. No more insurrection of the blood and heaviness of
The exiled head. Eyes clearer and brighter as moonlit skies.
After the escape of darkness is the fallen evening rain. A chain
Of nightmares broken. The thrill of hurtling back down to earth.
The anticipated trial of waxen wings. Freedom in the air. After
The fever, the dreamer sets out to dream anon. But the ground,
The rash, the itch, the thirst will remain. Rhythm, Rhythm, Rhythm
Rides once again.

Manuel Abis

An Unfinished Love Letter

How long have you been hiding inside my solitary pen? - swirling inside the dark labyrinth of my ink like a mermaid? Yet you spoke nary a word and merely let the pulsating stroke of your arms and legs, the musical swirl of your sensual sea-body, the anemone dance of your blonde-lit hair, the morning iridescence of your eyes plunge the phantom waterfall from a ledge, the ghostly clapper from a bell, the spectral flame from a candle, plunge them all onto my spiritual tongue, to let the rhythm of my poetic blood trickle down and overflow onto the vast ocean of my consciousness, and to finally herald this piece of paper sentimental as a - love letter.

How long have you been hiding behind every word I write? Would you believe me if I told you that to know so little of someone else is to know so much more of oneself? Would you believe me if I told you that I have become more alive at the margins of my very self, at the shores of my very existence, where everyone else, including you, takes center stage, and where everything else, including freedom, truth, justice, and equality, is far more real and attainable here? Perhaps, when I begin to realize why I am writing and to whom I am writing, I would finally be able to pull down the literary sails of my ship and, so as being freely guided through the narrow breakwater onto the waiting ramparts of my port, let me surrender my feelings to you and, finally, take your hand in mine. But this would mean I have to let go, too, of my pen and rise from the melancholic wanderings of my desk and chair. How long have you been hiding behind every lonesome word I write? I must confess while it is never music I dare composed, to me every word I strummed like a guitar string, beat like a drumskin, blew like a flute hole, and pressed like a piano key was, at its poetic least, lyrical. Perhaps, this is the reason why you have decided to appear to me tonight. To sing back to me, perhaps, every muted lyric my heart ever pondered wrote but never cared a moment to listen to.

Tell me, please, how could I possibly invite you to sing for me tonight? Or would you sing for me, to me, at all?

How long have I ignored you in my foolish self-regard and diffidence?

O, but you must forgive my rudeness. I have been accustomed to people accepting my madness so quickly. It is clear that you have decided to appear to me tonight to ask for my help. The patina in the silence of your eyes cannot but mirror the sheen of my own desperation. Forgive me if strangeness has become one of my stronger suits. I will change to my evening wear of barenaked darkness. My poetic noir et blanc. Perhaps, then, you will feel more comfortable. How about a compromise? I will read to you a letter I wrote. A love letter. Why? Well, it has been a long while since someone has brushed up a wayward lock of hair from my forehead and skimmed the insignificant smudge on my lower lip

with the delicate fingers of her mermaid hand. It has been a long while. So let me make it up to you. Let me read to you my love letter. Perhaps, afterwards, you will sing to me your love song. After all, nothing happens by chance. I wrote this love letter - for her - ages ago. As usual, there was this touch of struggle in this my love letter, for her, to begin with a poem.

In defense of romance,
Nothing happens by chance.

A white jasmin flower
Counts its living hour.

A face in the darkness
Is memory sleepless.

Ever felt a soft breeze
Like a good woman's kiss?

Because by chance nothing
Happens to be something.

Like promises counted
Unbroken or unsaid.

A fate worse than my death
Is to choose to forget

Nothing happens by chance
In defense of romance.

*

A white jasmin flower.

I always carried her inside my heart everyday like a white jasmin flower. It was because every day with her was a special occasion. She first appeared to me as a young lady, but eventually I discovered her wonderful twin: a little girl who appreciated both the bigger and smaller things of life. The bigger things of life like the passing away of a loved one, like the migration from the province to a city, like the hopeless corruption inside the local government office she worked in yet could never work with. As well as the smaller things of life like a cone of her favorite ice cream every Saturday afternoon, like a stroll in the plaza, and, of course, a white jasmin flower. This was the reason why I always addressed my love letter to her as:

To my white jasmin flower,
You may already be comfortably seated inside the bus heading to the city's capital while you are reading this letter. How long have you been waiting for this opportunity to finally know me behind every moment I shied away from?

I remember the first time I met you at the carnival of our youth. You were the coy and I was the clown. But, as the moments passed by us, it became obvious that I would be coiled in my own timidity and you, well, you would be the comic, the wit - my jokester.

My white jasmin flower, again I hope you are comfortably seated wherever you are presently, because it is going to be a while to get through this letter. It is hard to explain but I need to take the long way back home to your heart. It is not really my choice. But, sometimes, freedom itself loses its way, truth stammers, justice bogs down, and equality is nowhere to be found. It is going to take a while.

But since I have carried you inside my heart every day, I have more than prepared myself.

It is going to be a while.
I will need to take the long way home.
It is hard to explain.

Perhaps, because I am now
In the hardest part of the city
Where I have to fight for
Every inch of freedom,
Every piece of truth,
Every ounce of justice,
And every slice of equality.

As you can see,
It is going to be a while.

Where freedom has faltered,
I will need to dodge every bullet.

Where truth has stammered,
I will need to be heard.

Where justice has been outweighed,
I will need to be patient and wait.

Where equality has been ignored,

I will need to educate.

So, you see,
I will need to take the long way home.

It is hard to explain.
But, like everything else I have to claim
And earn back again,
I know you will understand.

I know you will understand.

Manuel Abis

Ang Tanong

Hindi kung matagal,
Kundi kung magtatagal.

Hindi kung matanda,
Kundi kung magtatanda.

Hindi kung magkaibigan,
Kundi kung magkaka-ibigan.

Manuel Abis

Art Of Protest

Agents provo-acteurs:

Shia Labouef

And Banksy.

Of course,

Shia Labouef is no Banksy

And vice versa.

One experiments

With the state

Of facelessness,

While the other

In the face

Of statelessness.

Manuel Abis

As They Say

As they say:

The more we look to each other,
The more we look like each other.

Just as we are able

To tolerate presence as a cure - to make us well and good,
Then we must be able to tolerate
Absence as a poison - to make us strong and better.

Just as we are able to be,

We are able to be just.

As they say:

If every day serves another, then every other day
Is lost but safe.

If every day serves its own,
Then every day is saved at a loss.

In the end,

As they say:

We de-

Serve each other.

Manuel Abis

Asylus

Living at an angle
Where the television cannot see me,
The text message from the cellphone
Cannot read my eyes, the music
Coming out of the earpiece cannot
Listen to my breath, to my heart
Beating away. Living away at an
Angle. Away from the glass window
Where somebody might reflect
My figure, from the door
Where someone might knock
Some of my senses off. An angle
Away from the chair, a tilt away
From the desk, a lean away from
The wall. From the bed. Everything
Asquint, askance, ajar, aflutter, afoot.
Living life astraddle.

Noir et blanc.

I stir the chiaroscuro
From the cauldron
Of a kaleidoscope.

Living at an angle
By keeping all sharp and pointed
Objects away from my face
And eyes.

Manuel Abis

At Home

At home, the ground is written by a tree
Which stands before our family
Garden of words
And claims the sound of old poetry.
Nothing stands between me and this tree
Except the roots of a dying language and
A diaspora in bloom.
As everything else stands under the light
Of a onesome being and thingsome doing,
Truth becomes a liquid experience
Requiring the stay of every attendance
And the attention of every travel;
Else piety comes
 Fallen
 Flowers
 Then leaves.

Manuel Abis

At The Curb

Sidewalk pedestrians,
Wayside peddlers,
Stranded motor cars;
With the first slight of thunder and raindrops,
Mushrooms and snails soon will fill
The concrete pavement of the city.

Manuel Abis

Backwards

Law
Spoken
Backwards
Is
Wall.

Wall
Is
Backwards
Spoken
Law.

Manuel Abis

Beamings

Artificial satellites -
Radiant flowers of the skies.

Manuel Abis

Beat

The world
Is made of music.
Nature is but
Its playing instrument.
I am but one
Of many players.

The world
Has a lot of game.
Nature is but
Its playing coach.
I am but one
Of many players.

I
Shall ride my rhythm
To beat the world
In its own music,
In its own game.
Who else would like
To play with us?

Manuel Abis

Because We Were Pirates

Because we were pirates before we were poets,
Rough with our words, rougher still with our verses.
We never stole from strangers, we only borrowed what we needed;
We never considered ourselves as more or less a people with a place
To fight for. Because we were skilled with the ancient art of the sea-
Faring sort, we forged our swords and jugs and wove our hair in long
Exotic braids; we searched for islands like the coarse backs of edible
Turtles and counted our days of sailing through a game of die and pebbles.
Women we left before we boarded our ships again, from where we
As wild, unbearded gypsies have boarded their young and pitch-covered
Vessels like the warm scent of blood in the veins of children. Because
We were divers and readers of tides before we were writers and swimmers
Of skies, we learned the wisdom of waiting behind the loneliest of reefs,
Small and maneuverable against the mightiest ships from the west.
We bartered with our own, with our own lives, with freedom in the archives
Etched in plates of copper and silver and gold, and walked the mountain sides
And ridges of hills with our women as equals; for only the old would be wise
To govern, to hold still our own imagination as sovereign.
Because we were painters of bodies and faces before we dared drew the signs
And maps of venerable places, we never understood (never could we)
This world's dichotomy: we only had we and a person who is neither a he
Nor a she (as in siya) . Further and more, dynasties were always a part and
parcel
Of our politics; intermarriages kept rich such racial mix. And for awhile
Our feet would, over crusts of faulted bedrocks, stand, soon as our mothers and
sisters
And wives bear pregnant with the new songs of children, away and far
More than sirens and mermen could interpret in waves of silence. Thus,
For the first time we assumed vulnerable and virgin like the wood of blow-
Pipes in the age of poisoned metal; and not for the last time we came to respect
The names of trees and mountains and rivers and lakes. And, yes, the ever-
Calling and wandering seas. For the first and last time, as pirates, we were
Longing for peace. What potion was this which made us drunk for centuries
Around the campfires and forced us to wear more than our battle trunks?
What ethereal beings danced around the rabid moonlight of the eastern stars
Save the rhythm and the rhyme and the meter of what we carved out as
tattooed
Scars?
Because we were pirates before we were poets,

Tough with our words, tougher still with our curses.
We never had friends so like our enemies, and never had enemies with the same
Such reason. Only families so intended and extended, so islanded and inlanded;
Only families with whom we have traded only families of riddles, of epics
And of idioms.
Because we sought to build our home
In the discovery of the native metaphor within our poem,
Now we are once more pirates even of the land that is supposed to be ours
(Or so we thought) .
We have immortalized the old songs of our adventure, of the ever-calling and
wandering
Seas; we have wrought thus and have distributed our wares in the hills of green
and the houses
Of Quiapo, Divisoria, Baclaran, Cubao and invulnerable places more. We are
pirates once again
Longing for peace forged and housed in (no, not centuries) but minutes-old and
recordable
DVDs
Smuggled through an open
Backdoor
Entry
And peddled through a kind of spoken
Sidewalk
Poetry.

Manuel Abis

Before This Night

Hyperstrands of lightning
Ventricular to the skin,
Thunder poetry in empowering rain;
Wherefore I stand before this night
A perpendicular testament to the flood's might.
Inflatable bloodspot in the blot of light.
However, I remain rhizomed to a home
As gods debated integrity of the sojourn,
Like a vine, I am so clingy,
And stay on as a child to the psychology of my storm.

Manuel Abis

Before We Sleep Here Tonight

No sadder speech than rain when it is carried by a tropical
Depression. One imagines drowned out voices and a feeble talk about how rice
stalks
The less than half-filled plates of our remaining hope. When one harvests words
out of season,
Life becomes so episodic like the foreign-based tele-
Novella dubbed in our native language or the hourly weather forecast over the
radio
Dubbed in a layperson's language in order to transport us, relocate us, evacuate
us temporarily
Before we sleep here tonight. Here,
Where there is no sadder rain channeling the unpredictably diverting path of our
rural speech.

Manuel Abis

Blood Curse

When he saw that he was getting nowhere,
But that instead an uproar was starting,
He took warm vinegar and washed his hands
Free of any gunshot residue
Behind the back of the growing crowd
Where the direction of the wind
Was definitely against him
At the time of his firing.
Then he said, "I am innocent of this man's blood!
It is, thus, your responsibility! "
And all the people answered, "His blood is on us
And our children! "
Afterwards, the authority nailed him to a cross-
Examination.

This is the word of the dead man.

Manuel Abis

Blush

So quick are you, for I did not see
How you caught my breath. Yet when I did
See finally, I was excitedly
Out of it.
Then when you tried to catch it again,
You missed.
So much so that it became
A kiss.

Manuel Abis

Boredom

Stone
Basking
In the sun.

Underbelly
Crawling
With worms.

Imperforate, I am
The burden
Of power.

Manuel Abis

Breath Of Senses

What his hands

Shape within / shall set his every thing

Together / for it shall be the measure

Of him / to be as great as his hold -

And no greater.

His knowledge is complete

When completely divided / for he is

Extension and intension of an organ-

ization / and as his orb enters

Traffic he becomes

Government personified

Who works his time and spaces / in

The same breath of all his senses.

For□

One can not share what one can not

Shape / and one can not begin to find

Power / without shifting back to

Neutral gear.

Manuel Abis

Burp

To each the shape of one's own plunger - none of the air-Sucking ones. And I would prefer the long, cold wired lens Which could catheterize the early morning's horizon into a Mere blur of the small aperture above the kitchen sink, where I could still see you slowly slip away to leave for work; and The mind the final bubble to swirl around the strainer of all Experiences. To think there is a reason for caramelizing pain. To make things as sweet and as sticky as it was before. Yet It would be more painful to digest daily goodbyes never ever Watered down. There would still be another reason, therefore, For clearing the table, cleaning up, for washing the unforgiving Brittleness of cracked plates, for removing the pall of the silver-Ware. For even wiping one's hands on the business of one's Pants like an apron. To think that tears would just flow along And never adhere to me at all; like the crud clogging, bit by bitter Bit, the untended drain pipes. What remained of what was once Prepared, cooked, and served with the most stubborn of all our Raw and inedible memories. The choked shape of both our airs.

Manuel Abis

Business Of Storms

It is the business of storms to have eyes, yet blind
At sea.

They are drunk with Neptune's wine
And reek of catastrophe.

For memories they no longer pine,
And brew instead what stirred Lethe;
That which is considered a Shakespearian find -
Tempest hoarding in a cup of tea.

Manuel Abis

Call

Prying petals from a bud
In the middle of a crowd.

Shouldered faces all around -
Poising fingers on a phone.

Music streaming to the root
Of all senses unencumbered.

It is true a few have wondered
Why our ears have such canals.

Since where they lead to only the petals
Pried appear to have the last word.

Manuel Abis

Canon

To imagine
Words
Hewn
In stone.

Good
As stone.
Good
As our own
Flesh
And bone.
Good
As our own
Imagination.

And we saw that the words were good.
But, in a world of hunger, we knew
No one can live
On words
Alone.

So we sliced the words
Off the stones
Until they turned
Good as bread.

Then we ate bread
Good as imagination.

And when there was no more bread,
We ate stones
In a world of hunger.

And when there were no more stones,
We ate words
Until there were no more
Words
To imagine.

And when there were no longer words,
We ate
The flesh
And bone
Of our own
Imagination.

Manuel Abis

Canvas

I shall never let go
Of this deep scarlet evening
Which roams the gregarious garden of puerile
Tingeing. A corsage of lights on the marble
Archway fail to capture the white scent
Of her gowned ebullience. I am painting her
As I watch the moon, effervescent lover,
Betaken back to her ephemeral flower bed
Of minx-mingled strands, of naked phantasies.
Yet she invites me in without Diana's hand
In tow. Inside her, she is the hollow cup
Of wine and bread and breathless kisses.
And as darkness arrives, the moonlight leaves
Us in our deep scarlet paradise. We loll
The dew-clothed shafts of grass with inebriated
Laughters after-art school hours are notoriously
Famous for; and suck on the fructose-laced
Nectar of periwinkles pink as my paparazzi-
Bubblgummed smile. She poses for me.
She does her spread. Deep scarlet evening
Of a nipples silence. I shall never know
Of her whom my lenses never dared to touch
And go. We have become whales which have
Surfaced for the briefest spray of petalled
Glow and the lightest blow of enthralled
Each-otherness.

Manuel Abis

Charm

Gods.

When the woman arrived, the children surrounded her, sang some native songs to her, and danced some native dances, too. The children called her doctress. A woman doctor.

Before the night was over, she had all the children lined up over there on the edge, and then she pushed them one by one over the cliff to appease the gods.

Trick.

“Put on the black,” the woman said to her spouse.

“But the black one hurts.”

“No. Use your spider hands. Take the candle and rub its wax and wickedness all over the hide from the inside of your shoes. Then put on the black before we go. What is the matter with you? Have you already forgotten the trick?”

Head-Exchange.

A new baby girl softly banged her sleepy head on her mother's breast, while her father bashed a white chicken's head on the hard and sad exterior of the cutting board.

The young people called it baptism, but we old people called it head-exchange.

Manuel Abis

Chemicalle

I.

Newspaper biker carries back home
Himself a man
Who has fully unloaded his toil;
The burning heat of the morning sun
Leaves no hand
Of sweat on him or at his heels some dirt of soil:

Aluminum

Can

Foil.

II.

Carbon will
Take
Every
Thing in life as hard as the iron grill
Of a post-war, historic
Jeepney:

Still

Organic

In chemistry.

III.

It will bore on
Any state
Of what we wear and wash;
It has an issue on
How to biodegrade,
But look at what it does:

Boron

As perborate

Will surely bleach - just watch.

IV.

Golden and silver sentimental
Values being

Pawned;
The impulse
To gain
From the debts and losses we own:

Metals
In
Transition.

V.
Colorful balloons floating
Helium-high above
The Sunday masses;
As light, as free
As a young love
We once were - no more, no less:

The nobility
Of
Gases.

VI.
People destabilize
To bare
On the streets a moving history;
Rallies,
The electricity
In the air:

The radicals
Are
Free.

VII.
An assault
Of the wind
At Manila bay
Dares to taunt
The sun melding
In the sea:

Gold

In
Mercury.

Manuel Abis

Chiasm

What this family tree has shed and has carelessly scattered, my arms shall
gather: these

Leaves of absence which now shroud this inherited ground, and which I now
nitrify

With a certain solitude of my understanding. However, what its open branches
have

Allowed to escape, my guarded fists shall in closure seal: this absence of leaves
Which, in chiasmus, I must now read before inscribing my signature upon this
place.

Borrowing the mask of grief and silence and armed with the mirror of my own
shadow,

I shall ride once more the pacific doldrums of my imagination and shall try to
climb

The demise of an internal storm. For at this height the view of my chaos is more
beautiful

As it is more dangerous. A mind-rending rage which has made this tree bereft
Of care, its branches - of fibrous strength and of wisdom shaped by nature -
exposed

To the elements of a deep, inescapable, and schizophrenic (o contracted!)
lonesomeness,

Yet would intimately share the vast, dizzying, and perhaps seductive scan of a
twisted body

Of nothingness. O mask of irony, o mirror of sincerity, temper me, this heir of
metamodern

Restlessness. O if I could have only known early the slender genius of solitude is
not merely

In space and time, but themselves in the Rhythm, Rhythm, Rhythm of things all.

Since, in my younger days, I would have raised the droll of my voice against this
pious

Hierarchy and have demoted this shelter into a mere shell: empty as an echo,
full of indifference,

And bristling with detachment. In my fresher days, I would have declared point-
blank

That it would be easy for me to leave home without leaving the house. To open
one's door

Only for meals and nothing more. To move only in between the double walls,
above

The ceiling, under the tiles of the floor, and floating across the corridors and hallways
Of lonely academes and lonelier laboratories. It would be easy. To leave home so much
That one would grow whiskers and a tail. To leave home by learning to build an elaborate
Maze. To realize, particularly after the first session of the electric shock therapy, that
One could have the option of scampering back home again, only to finally leave the house
For the emptiness of a sidewalk or a garbage binge. Ever aporia, never a priori. And the branches would be mockingly amused by such a cool rush of air from the peripheries
Of my head, of course. As usual. The lag of the wit intended to elude the backlash of my
Impetuous scorn. But now, even with wearing this theatrical guise of sterile sorrow
And contemplating an elusive image of myself, it would be difficult for me to leave
The house with the gates so wide open, and with the old home still inside - mortally alone.

Shall there be no peace when one is in pieces? Shall the fragments remain as they are?
Nameless fragments? Shall the mark of my inscription change how I see the past and how
The present could be framed and laminated to grow root again in its deed and title? But -
Is not this the yearned wisdom of Rhythm's curse, and no more the sheer measure of space
And the tangible interest of time? O mask, o mirror! The greatest illusion of life is the here
And now: pretending to be whole, yet surviving in morsels. With every stir of the inkwell,
With every stroke of the wrist, o mask, o mirror, temper this pencil of light.

Methinks that whatever signature I shall inscribe must remain in the whelm of my own
Invented office. For the chiasmic collage of these leaves of absence and absence of leaves
On the ground is a dear reflection even the mirror of my shadow would not be able to

Contemplate in such an encompassingly public view. And even this guise I too in
time
Shall shed is but and shall always be a copy of the original. Thus, only my
signature shall
Bear its identity as the singular fruit of this tree's collective labors and yet -
evidently
Being still a fruit no matter how eccentric it developed - shall remain as
occasional,
As seasonal as births and deaths. It would never be corrupted to overlook the
passage
Of one's prime, or the emasculating scandal of light, or even the shedding and
shattering
Of its own ability to reproduce again. The exquisite crop which would require
neither mask
Nor mirror to achieve anything outside of or less than their terrible natures.
Tortured, yes,
Into an abysmal creature desperately conniving with those silenced by deflective
shadows
And shadowed by dark silences: the forbidden crows, the lusty monsoons, the
midnight dance
Of screams, the imps of latin wildness, the eternally ungrounded spirit of youth
and spite.
Its essence devoured by both my beast and my sovereignty.

Of such self-confessed violence it shall be, yes, but nonetheless an elegant child
not like any
Other: intimately appalling. Such rare yet causal breed of inspiration indeed. It is
such
Contradiction, such prose poetry. Is this now the authority I wield to fulfill my
obligation
To this ground, to this tree, and to its branches feeding the air, the air that raises
the strands
Of hair on my arms with the invisible pride of my own past?

This is my signature. Singular and occasional. Its sovereignty resting on its
autographic,
Autobiographic action at a certainty not unlike the solitude of my understanding.
A particular space and time. Perhaps even a date stamped on the concrete of this
place
Not merely to note, but also to notarize my own notoriety. My own bestiality.
That my signature shall bear the name I call from a prodigal distance registers
itself

As an absence which pretends to be a presence here and now. That the here-
and-now

Is the greatest deception ever invented in the larger office called this world.
And such an absence, such an illusion, trying to gather, collect, amass, draw in,
The sentence fragments; trying to recuperate writing itself, to recover from the
burden of speech

And its lofty metaphysical tradition. O mask, o mirror, wherest thou now? Arest
thou here?

This is my signature. Absolutely irreplaceable, whose every occurrence is as
special as

Every pencil of light that reads the mask of my being and writes on the mirror of
my becoming.

And yet, and yet, and yet: how can anyone confirm that this indeed is my
signature? Shall I

Revive now my dark days and even darker nights to reveal the true witnesses of
yesterday's

Deeds and misdeeds: mere shadows and silences roaming this hollow garden of
tomorrow?

How - without having no precedent of it to compare it with? O, such absence!
Such illusion!

That I have foolishly attended to the death of my own past, extended to the life
of another past,

And even to previous or future examples of it. All these escapes undermine my
presence.

O, such violence! Such schizophrenic violence! That my signature be so
fractured! Be so

Partitioned from its ambivalent originality and its professed need for
repeatability.

That the voice has become the creation of its echo, of the vibration deep inside
the throat

Of a speaker. O, such paradoxical violence! That the roots have become a part of
the tree,

Yet earlier the roots themselves caused the tree to sprout from the seed. That
the branches

Have become a part of the tree, yet later the branches can seek to cut
themselves off

And graft into other lives so separate and so distinct. That some of these
branches have

Become the mighty staffs which, in turn, bastonated me, twisted me to their own
image

And likeness. O such tortuous canes of carnal creativity!

O but I shall heed! I shall heed and listen to Rilke's beautiful advice: that such space outside
Of myself, that which I could never really own, but only temporarily occupy;
That space attempting to conceive unto itself the existence of a tree; that space
That would now require investment of the inner one, that space dwelling within myself.

As Rilke strongly suggests: adorn it with compulsions, for boundless as it is, it is only

In the seed's original self-denial - that renunciation of being a seed - that space finally takes

Root and becomes a tree.

O a tree! Perhaps one among some of Ashberry's trees, or not really. One reserved for me,

My name, and yet my name collapses in its own reticence.

O or merely to be a tendril of Octavio Paz's tree within!

O that I could be perhaps a hapless twig that would catch Cirilo Bautista's pedagogic attention!

O that I dream of achieving Gemino Abad's tree for its spiritual themes!

This is my signature. A Bergsonian original moment of a no less original history. The imagined original which would validate the rest of the copies and yet would remain also

And forever a mere copy. For exactitude would mean something else! A business Of forgery which would make all these leaves of absence unofficial and such an absence

Of leaves fictitious. O, to be such a child holding the mask of Medusa and the mirror

of Narcissus!

But the chiasmus, too, could invert unto itself.

For every inscription holds a certain flourish in the paraph that is not unlike the solitude

Of my understanding. O mask, o mirror, temper me, this heir of intellectual restlessness.

Let me use these now as the implements not of mere space and time, but of necessary,

Yet murderously difficult, spacing and timing. So that in gathering the fragments
Of my imagination I could inspire inspiration itself to reconstruct this broken
being
And thus capture it again as indeed my own imagination. The chiasmus holds,
the nitrification
Of the ground is starting to reveal the gases of life from the ruin and decay of the
day.
For if in absence, inspiration should be redeemed as such, then I could at least
make the last
Of my remaining memories as the countersignature of my inherited deed and
title.
The ultimate contra-diction, my final prose poetry. My final violence. My absolute
elegance.

For in such a countersignature, I move to my own reader's eye, From the silence
and shadow
Of solitude to the mask and mirror of understanding.

For, as ironic as it may sound, it is exactly in my absence that any such creation
As my signature shall place itself to be vital, to prove itself, and to simply work;
which,
In turn, shall always mark the otherness of myself in my own presence.
This is the continual authority I wield upon such document and documentation
Of this family tree. For my signature, countersignature in memories here and
now,
Shall not be inscribed with the expiration of Rhythm, but shall hold itself
significant
Because of its own quest for spacing and timing. For the diaspora to be in full
bloom.

This is the potential of my signature: the act of gathering itself into a
commitment to a promise,
Without remission. The real act of believing that there is a gift called forever.
That this signature not only confirms my presence in absence, but it shall leave
The everlasting impression of an unfragmented instance of life and death, of
speech and writing,
As a medium of loss as well as of discovery, of closeness borne out of openness,
Of life continuing in the metabolic process of ruin and decay, of silence and
shadow as one,
Of mask and mirror in a single identity, of a singular moment celebrated in every
occasion,
Of approving these leaves of absence by proving the absence of leaves. Yet in

the act

Would its own reaction also be. The scattering. Intellect forever contending with instinct.

The origin of pure intuition.

And from across this panopticon of my existence, I nod my head to indicate this will

And readiness to undergo the next session of this electric shock therapy. To once and for all

Test my intuition. The fragmentation of my hard disk before the formatting of Rhythm

Shall, with or without juxtaposition, require unto itself its own spacing and its own timing.

O.

Such violence.

Versammlung versus a state with plurality.

Ever aporia, never a priori.

Gathering scatterings, scattering gatherings.

Chiasmique.

Manuel Abis

Cleansings

Cleanse:

Verb [with object]

1 Make (something, specially the skin) thoroughly clean.

1.1 ~~R~~id of something unpleasant or defiling.

1.2 ~~F~~ree (someone) from sin or guilt.

1.3 ~~A~~rchaic: (in biblical translations) cure (a leper) .

Noun

A process or period of time during which a person attempts to rid the body of substances regarded as toxic or unhealthy, typically by consuming only water or other liquids.

1. □

This is no time

To have onion

Skin.

What we serve on the table

Of negotiation

Must never be at the pleasure

Of any one person,

But of the people.

The people -

Thoroughly

Informed

And undefiled

By lies,

By threat of lies,

And by the gaslighting

Of the opposition even.

Or else we will get burned

With the wrong information,

And forever be deep-fried

In the oil

Of our own cleansing.

This is no time
To have onion
Skin.

2.□

This is no time
To set free
New executioners

Of the lawlessness
Of the land

From the sin and guilt
Of their future deeds.

Even the Nazi architects
Of death camps
Immediately realized

The psychological effects
Of unmitigated murder
On a young and ideal soldier
Or an officer of the law
Or a patriot of the fatherland

And thus released them
From such a heavy burden
By inventing
The gas chambers

Which almost obliterated
An entire people.

This is no time
To recruit and set free
New executioners
Of anyone's insanity.

3.□

This is a time
To be archaic
And cure

The drug menace

As we would
Yesterday's
Lepers.

To build a colony
For real cleansings
Of real people.

And let it be a process
Or a period of time
During which a person
Attempts to rid
The body of substances
Regarded as toxic
Or unhealthy;
And not be an attempt
To rid the body
Altogether.

For then it shall be called
Something else
Other than cleansing.

Manuel Abis

Cliffs And Tides

Where the cliffs roll in
Like a row of coffins
And the sea waves rage
For any sign of justice,
The sands of time shift to shore from below;
Where the sunsets have longed for high tides
And the sea birds
Have such low-flying, half-spread wings -

Some deaths are chafed as suicides.

After the winnowing of the monsoon winds,
The world may discover that it owns for itself
An indeterminable pattern.

The rarest shells on the beach are sinistral.

Manuel Abis

Conspicuous

Today I am wearing my fatigue pants.
My hands deeply entrenched inside my pockets of resistance.
I am also wearing shades and black jacket
For added effect.
I even have a dog tag from Silverworks as a charmer.
As well as a tattoo on my right arm just like in some army.
I will be carrying a swagger
Like a bantamweight boxer
Or a casual condominium tenant jogger.
I will be carrying chippy chips on my shoulder.
But I shall carry no firearms because I am no son
Of a gun.
I do not want to be that irresistible.
I do not want to be that arrestable.
I just want to be conspicuous
As the daily morning news.
Today is the day I am bringing my balls
To the mall.
I am going to poke
My finger at a security guard and tell him it's just a joke.

I just want to be conspicuous
As the daily morning news.

Manuel Abis

Creative Reading

My eyes will be your eyes,
My voice your voice;
Now we are one and will always be,
I have only written what you have read in me.

Every word is harbored, every pause no loss;
Every cause translates to its own because.
There is nothing new in what has always been true,
You have only read what has been written in you.

My life will be your life,
My world your world;
All poetry the eternal language of spies,
A poet is just the reader in disguise.

Manuel Abis

Crisis

Now let us watch as the branch of a tree becomes the crisis
Of a bird: that in the speculation of its nest the bough should be
Enough of loft, enough of lift, and enough of left-alone time so
That its world would not collapse unto itself at rest; but would
Give way instead outside itself as obscure to scan as our world
In crisis and in motion. And so in such camouflage then that the
Pubescence of the surrounding leaves and stems would adorn
Our bird; a love-saving deception not unlike The Bearded Bard's
Shaking sphere of air when he remarked of Rosalind as her male
Disguise, Ganymede, that "we must have your doublet and hose
Plucked over your head, and show the world what the bird hath
Done to her own nest." That the bird has a crisis, at all, consumes
Us more that perhaps Shakespeare meant more when he wrote
That all the world's a stage. But let us watch how bird and bough
And bed branch into our metamodern world. How such a perfectly
Evolved specimen of its species would now, after a special flight
To reconnoiter the sky, return to the same rooted tree and find
Itself at a loss, nay, even amazed that it has so disguised its nest as
A branch that now it could not figure out where it is, which is which.
Sensing perhaps that it has made an error of its perch, the feathered
One flies off to find another hierarchy. Then, in such sincere swoop
Of irony, it happens. The egg hatches and the chick catches for this
First time its own glimpse of the world of such loft and lift and left-
Alone time. The resolution, of course, to this is not the breeding,
But what becomes visible to us afterwards, when (as we adjust our
Bird-watching lenses for better focus) we catch the hatchling hop
Out of the nest and, thinking perhaps that its mother is the tree and
Its pair of wings mere leaves, dive into the air to join the tree's
Actual leaves as they detach themselves from the branches and
Fall off like some panromantically forlorn and wingless creatures.

Manuel Abis

Crossing

Within the circus of our mind,
Little men act like real children
In seemingly playful ignorance:
Clowns,
As they eagerly await with song-and-dance
The master of ceremony to host and witness
The greatest death-defying stunt in the world.
The acrobatic

Cross

Ing.

The magic of fear
Within the circus of our mind.

Within the church of our heart,
Real men act like little children
In seemingly playful innocence:
Cherubims,
As they eagerly await with song-and-dance
The master of ceremony to host and witness
The greatest death-defying stunt in the world.
The acrobatic

Cross

Ing.

The miracle of faith
Within the church of our heart.

Manuel Abis

Crossing Neptune

On his humble
Sailboat,
The surgical
Sailor
Slices
The sea
Of his odyssey.
Yet, in
Crossing Neptune,
He fails
To wound him
Eternally.
For the medicinal
Sea wind
Heals as it passes,
Then sutures back whole
And seamlessly
The flesh of the great
And the most
Unassailable
Of all
The hurting
And assailed
Gods.

Manuel Abis

Dahil Nasugatan Ako Sa Iyo

Dahil nasugatan ako sa iyo,
Nagustuhan kita.

Para kang siksikang sasakyang saksakan
Nang saksakan
Ng mga titingin-tinging
Hindi makatingin.

Para kang kalawanging kawalan
Na hindi ka naman makawala
Kung hindi ka pa magwawala
Upang taktakin ang kalawang.

Para kang walang tigil na walang tulugan
Sa iyong kagustuhan na magtagal pa
Sa pagtatalaga ng iyong matagal nang kagustuhan.

Talaga.

Para kang papara na hindi naman pala papara
Kaya kung ikukumpara'y wala kang kapara
Sa mga walang kapera-perang
Kumare't kumpare.

Nagustuhan kita
Dahil sa iyong dalang trapik at baha
At mga nasaltang salita na kasita-sita
At mga oras
Na aking inaksayang masayang-masaya kahit sayang na sayang
Habang hinihintay kita sa aksayadong sasakyan.

Sayang hindi sayang, wika nga.

Nagustuhan kita
Dahil sa mga daan-daang daanang hindi madaanan
Kung wala kang isang daan
Na pantaksi
O pantaksil
Sa oras ng kagustuhan

O sa madaling sandaling halos dinidilaan na lamang
Sa tuwing tayo'y nagmamadaling magkita.

Hindi lamang sa walang-kalaman-laman ang iyong panlalamang
Sa aking kagustuhan na ako'y masugatan
Kaya kita nagustuhan.

Talaga.

Kahit ako'y masugatan.

Nagustuhan kita
Hindi lamang dahil sa nakikita at kikitahin ko sa iyo.

Nagustuhan kita
Dahil nung ako'y nasugatan
Ay saka ko lamang nakita
Na matagal ka na palang nasugatan
Dahil sa walang-tigil na kapapara
Ngunit parang
Hindi naman kita gusto
Talaga
Na ibaba sa aking minamanehong dyipni.

At dahil nasugatan ako sa mga sinabi mo,
Nagustuhan kita.

Talaga.

Manuel Abis

Dark

Dark is the color of waiting
Thrown in the shadow of a dying memory;
Which is beyond the nursing of games and stories,
Of names which would have lifted the tears from your eyes.
Fire is better a choice than quitting;
To burn, to hope the ashes will set free
Your cold replies of Nothing, Maybe
And more than once you have said I'm not yet hungry.
Fire will not quit and not without a fight.
This child is longing to play with you in the garden
Filled with frolicking dreams, floating balloons, and fabulous wings;
How we wish to fold at last the wheeling chair of the ennui, but still -
The dying birthday candlelight is blown one more time for
Dark is the color of waiting.

Manuel Abis

Death

Death? It is simply a thing declared.

To be dead, to be assessed as dead
On paper in a procession
Of custom words.
To be, thus, ob-
Literated.

Death
Is so
Like a manifesto
Or a status update.

Or a shipment from abroad
Which can be overvalued,
Undervalued,
Or not even declared at all.

There is, thus, no hurry
To move forward
To the next port
Of entry.

Unless the shipment is indeed declared
By customs
As perishable.

Manuel Abis

Drawing

I drew your face with a pencil
Of light on a piece of paper
Plane. But I couldn't erase it anymore
With the weight of my drawing hand's
Shadow. And so it flew - your face -
It flew away without waiting
For me to draw
The most brackish water from the deep well
Of your sun's eyes.

Manuel Abis

Drawings

My life has been a series
Of drawings
One after
The other.

There have been many rough
Drafts.

Erasing
Before tracing.

The folds
On my forehead
Bear every piece of scratch

Paper
I have
Crushed and burned.

Crush and burn. Crush and burn.

First crushed and then burned desiringly.

First crush
And then
Burning desire.

My life has been a series
Of fantasies
Taking flight

From
The horizon
Of my own

T-squared
(Or - try and try)

Imagination.

Manuel Abis

Edsa, As Contemplated By A Jeepney Driver Named Lao Tzu

The emptiness of space - space as space -
Is perhaps but one of its more important ethics,
While the fullness of space - space as motion -
Is perhaps but one of its more important exercise.
As my name's famous predecessor once wrote: The
Way is empty, yet in use it seems to be inexhaustible.
It is an abyss that would be the ancestor of the myriad
Creatures. Blunt your sharpness. Untangle your confusions.
Harmonize your glare. Meld your dust. Oh! How clear! It
Seems to persevere. I do not know whose child it may be.
It is the foreshadowing of something before God. As such
Reflected in this case, one's way must be empty first before
It actually becomes one's way. In reality, however, one may
Easily be caught up in life's traffic. One, therefore, must exercise
Space as motion in order to find space as space. However, to find
Space as space again, it is not enough to practice the fullness of one's
Space on one's way. One must learn to travel back to that original emptiness
Of space, that so-called ethics which, in the first place and in one way or
another,
Has made the empty space more valuable than merely getting one's own way on
one's
Way inside one's own locomotion and finding out later that EDSA has become
everyone's
Parking space. By the way, I cannot reflect on time, because time as time no
longer applies here.

Manuel Abis

Eloquence

Eloquence

Have I found in my lonely walk. As guard
Or as fence, demons no longer stalk me. Indeed,
There must be meaning in my being here; rhythm
Has an actual algorithm flowing clear. Where
The corners close in I begin to turn; where
The sun cuts heat-deep across I learn; where
The moon bleeds I am prone to yearn. Alone
I have imagined my room without walls.
An unending outfield of my mind's intramurals.
Lonely in my walk I have found eloquence
Modeling silence.

Manuel Abis

Encore

With her last session impoverished
By a meager crowd already exploring
Ways to use the exits
With the scantest of attention,
She anchored herself on the notion
Of one more.
Of one more migrant song.
Then the sea arrived upon
The many unwaited tables,
The evacuated stoop of chairs;
And then cigarette sticks
Were lit,
Along with handheld lighters
Clenched up in the air.

Somewhere,
A beacon from a lighthouse
Wades through the thickest
Sentiments of a fog.

Manuel Abis

Escape

Words escape us.

Shrapnels of sound regaining their wounded senses;

While bodies of silence are scattered broken on the ground.

A multitude of sobbings and screamings waiting

To be rescued; drowning out a restitute of sirens.

While the furtive mists of fugitive terror

Start melting away

In the evening

With the crowd,

Words

Escape

Us

For now.

Manuel Abis

Evening (Second Part Of An Unfinished Poem)

Evening.

Before we walk into the evening, I have to ask you to hold on to your purse
A bit tighter than your leather belt. To please remove everything
That is dangling about you. And, I hate to say this, even your silver wedding
Ring. Do not let them catch your eyes staring at their pride of collars
And sleeveless shirts and tribal tattoos that make muscles look more firm
Than they really are. Let the sincerity of our stride and rhythm take us
Where want to go or stay tonight. Before we walk the night into the evening,
Thus, let the evening before us walk us through the night.

□

Take caution. A screech of headlights will always keep the fugitive
Darkness on its feet at the curb of its own shadow. Reality here is a faceless
Stranger who will not ask for the time, but will keep on looking
At your broken watch. Watch it. Nobody walks anymore on that side
Of the street, where homeless children have become beasts of boredom,
And every now and then throw stones at speeding egos enclosed by tinted
glasses.

I tell you - this is the place where snatchers run and casual joggers shun.
This curious boundary between New Manila and Cubao is The New Cubao.
I tell you - the walls here are higher and more imposing, while the streets
Are darker and have more humps to make vehicles rather than pedestrians
Slow down; before wayfarers cross their narrowed selves and the widened
Easement. This is the place where first-time pregnant mothers dare choose
To take varicose strolls with their ever-expectant husbands and fathers-to-be.
Where a chair on wheels would be pushed to its limit, and a lone student
Going home from school would best be advised to listen well to every roar
Of motorcycle riders wearing helmets and riding in tandem. Where callow
Recklessness drag-races for more than the danger. This is the place
Where the young becomes youth and the old people grows older
Sooner rather than later.

This is the place where parcels of land are sliced clean-cut, and humble
Bungalows as well as haughty townhouses are all turned to face
The sonnet of every dawn. Where neighbors prefer themselves to be called
As homeowners, and homeowners as gate-keepers; for they prefer
To close one side of their steel selves from the rusty noise
Of off-hours streetball games, of the festive air of poverty's endless wakes
And celebrations of four-faced cards and emptied bottles of blinding gin,

Of pregnant women who could no longer remember the time their bellies
Were not as round as the voice of the midwife pleading for dear life
Inside the womb of the settlement, of the tenement, of the pavement -
To push, push, push. As loud, or if not louder than the voice of baby
Sitters holding on to those cute and costly strollers - push, push, push!
As loud, if not louder than the voice of that gangly unshirted boy
Grasping the cart full of gallons of water - push, push, push!
This is the place where, in order to find truth, one has to lose it first,
Then claim it by earning it. Yes! Push, push, push! Earn the truth!
This is the place!

This is the space where you have to think fast, and think fast of things
You could stab bad people with. Sharp fingernails. No. A sign pen.
No. How about staring them down? Or curling your hand into a fist?
A fistful of money or fancy ear rings or low-carat bracelets
Will all be a dying daylight's vengeance in this pawned space.
The space we can never own but only occupy.

Manuel Abis

Evening Chair

In your evening chair,
I see nobody resembling
You to replace you. But
Everyone has given me
Enough reason to replace
The chair. Except the cat
That has accepted you,
The immortal dent where
Your backside went, and
Has a world of purr, of
Paw, of pride to share
The seat nestling beside
Such lovely, empty
Slippers on the fallen floor.

Manuel Abis

Ever Last Does No King

The king is not every
Time. Moments need children, too,
And minutes need every second best truly.
For a first every
Thing has, and the king is not certainly
Today. So please disturb, not do.
Go sing
Away far in one's hide, o, ever last
Does no king.
Old bones,
Dry lips,
And thin skin.

Manuel Abis

Experiment

Let me draw a point on an imaginary elastic canvas called time; afterwards, let me apply some tension and stretch the canvas like a rubber band from left to right. This, then, is a point which has become a line. A line, therefore, is still a point, in one stretch of the imagination.

Curiously, with the point stretched as a line, I can now imagine myself drawing out other points from other positions of the created line. I can now imagine my mind creating multiples of one and the same thing. This is the line of possibilities where I can choose my own real point. The possible, therefore, is still real, in one stretch of my own will.

There must be a metaphor in all these observations. I must form, therefore, a sort of hypothesis to sort things out as I please.

If the point that I started with is my present moment, and the line represents my own movement in time, then this experiment should prove, at least to myself, that the past is merely a set of possibilities which preceded the real moment, and the future a group of virtualities which should follow afterwards.

Since, when I stretched the point from left to right, the center of the original point still remained as the center of the created line. This, to my mind, explains that the past, the present, and the future are contained within each other for sure.

As ripples originate from every dewdrop on the face of the water, so do past and future dreams oscillate from every real moment.

This, therefore, is one of my conclusions not of time.

But of one of its motion called timelessness.

More commonly known as - forever.

Make sense?

No.

After all, this is just an experiment.

Extra (Circa 2016 -?)

I.

They have always wanted their shooting of me
To be seen by the people as some kind of accident or co-
Incidence;
Because, as they have revealed to media,
They have always trained their controversial sights
On the controversial stars of the day, and have always screened the reality
They are portraying as a part of a truth
Looming larger than life
Of one or two generations.
They have always wanted me dead
Still on the spot where they have marked X,
And have always wanted me to say
Nothing.
(O! - you will never know how it feels to be so wanted!)

After all, within the people's bicameral eyes
Viewing the staged showing of the scene,
It would be criminal for me to act beyond
My very own walk-on; and to utter something
Outside the script, when everything is rolling
On the ground
And the noise has gone down
On the closed set. After all,
Even if I would merely be a blurred face
Amongst a crowd of onlookers and bystanders,
Or an unmoved and unmoving pawn in uniform
Against a warsome parade of epic proportions,
Or a goon gunned down by an FPJ-like character
Of a leader,
Or a cameo shadow behind the bromances of those in power,
Or a human rights victim amongst a cast of thousands,
Or an illegal drug user amongst a cast of millions,
I have always wanted to be covered
By any - any! - media:
A broad piece of a major newspaper publication, a fishy
Smelling strip of tabloid, a glossy page of a fashion
Magazine, a radio flash report, a TV documentary special,
A viral FB post. I have always wanted

My named namelessness to be twitted out of the list-
Less dark
Theatre of an undiscovered sector of our society.
For, even if unre-
Hearsed, I have always been dying
To be twittered as some kind of a
Star, and never merely as
Someone extra.

II.

I will have my eyes filmed
Over and say no lines; I will add myself extra-
Ordinarily to the necessary crowdiness behind
Scenes and signs. I am at my best as a faceless
Silence. A dark roomed remembrance of fleeting
Memories so reeling from moment to moment.
I am a figurant. To play the
I am a figurant. To play the Bit of a
I am a figurant. To play the Role, I have to dis-
Play the real
Play the real (That bites)
Play the real Me. To take the credit, I will have
To be superb, over and over, as supernumerary.
As peregrinator personified with path unclipped,
Untweaked, untweened out of pictures in motion.
I am a figurant - I will have to go figure the ant.
I am a figurant - I will have to go Figure the ant
And be as significant.

Manuel Abis

Faking Truth

I tell you,
Nothing will make the big guy
Jump.

He is so grounded
With his defense.

Coach T.W. Adorno
Would be cautioning the big guy, of course,
To be extra-careful.
Since "lies have long legs; "
And how they play their game, it's like
"They are ahead of their time."

Trust on Truth.
The big guy
Generally gets the big picture of things.
He wouldn't be caught
With his playing shorts down,
Essentially getting rattled
By every shake-and-bait,
By every dazzling cross-over move,
By every dizzying between-the-legs dribble,
Or by every head-fake
Of his opponents.
Of these proponents
Of Team Alternative Facts.

He is so grounded
With his defense.

But he is also grounded
With his sense of fairness
And sportsmanship.

So, with regards to these long-legged lies,
It is incumbent
Among the referees of the game
To use wisely

The long arms of the law
And not make any highly questionable
Judgment call.

Especially at the dying minutes
Of the game.

Let them play.

Trust on the big guy.

Let the lies
Try to score against him
And find out
The futility
Of faking Truth.

Let's get it on.

Manuel Abis

Finally

The dance of the dust before it settles back down
To the ground,
While the nearby star apple tree claps its many leaves
In such resounding agreement.
The setting afternoon sun
Miraculously lifts its light one last time
To guide your way there at our street's lonely corner.
I shall therefore let this day judge you as it pleases,

And, finally,
As you leave.

Manuel Abis

From The Port

Early morning
Blades of light
Slicing the sea water
Into waves, waves which move
To comb some ships
Sticking out like tail feathers
On the dock of the pier.

At the heart of a mountain peak
As I sit from the throne,
My eyes glisten
With the aplomb of the people
To my peacock gaze.

Manuel Abis

From The Walkway

From the walkway
Of one's dream, the gravels of unused
Ideas are shoveled away. Old shoes always
Feel their eldest travels are also their wisest.
Yet the barenakedness of movement
Keeps all fit and new; though some are used
Already and are even kept
Groveling at one's feet.

Manuel Abis

Fuge

I.

Refugee -

I am a body of water
Kept at bay.

I wave at every shore
That the sea can see,

Although my eyes will tell me
The truth that

Freedom is never free.
That it is something earned

By every oar
Of every day.

That nothing in this world is really
Shore.

That everything I am I carry with me
Like the song of the cloud

Before it rains.
Before I finally land

As frail and tiny drops,
And before culminating me into a

Flood
Of great displacement.

For I am a body of water
Helpless-

Ly kept at my own
Bay.

II.

Fugitive -

I am a body of water:
I may appear
Standing still;
Deep inside
I am actually running.

My home is a bed
I pack on my back
When I am on the run.

When I am not fleeing
The outside stillness
Of the air,
Of the night,
Of the sunlight so bare,

I am at peace.

Sometimes, a deluge,
Like a centrifuge,
Tests my element

And tries to separate me
From my refuge
For proper identification.

Every now and then,
I change my shape
To escape
Every now and then.
My face mirrors
Many other faces.

When I let other people
Get to meet me,
Get to know me,
Get close to me,

Still -
I leave no prints,
I leave no tracks,
I leave them alone.

This is no subterfuge.

I am a body of water.

As much as possible,
I will leave nothing behind

Except
A fleet
Of ripples

Trying desperately
To get me
To harbor.

Manuel Abis

Genuflection

I have heard your voice even before I saw your face.
The veil of your consonants pressing close against
The struggling breath of your excited vowels.
I have smelled the fragrance of your words even before
I held your hand and brushed my fingers through
The locks of your hair. Of your here-ness near.
The jasmin verbs unraveled but for the briefest of pocketed
Moment and pungent gerunds of hastily folded petals
In their rarest posings. Nameless memories kept between
The unread pages of your lips. I have tasted the grandeur
Of your eyes even before you knighted me with your kiss.

My sweet princess.

Manuel Abis

Grass People And Home Tombs

As one makes for the world of the living a place for the dead,
So one makes for the world of the dead a place for the living.

In the province of our mind, we do
Mind what province each came from.
We can only presume their vocabulary begins
With their choice of tree and ends
With the transfer of ownership of a misplanned
Park bench marble.

All memory is inevitably memorial.
Marvel

At the urban phenomenon: we can only be whole
When we begin to embrace everything that isn't even
Supposed to be a part of us anymore. O,
But for the grass people. There is a difference
Between lying about the city scape and lying about
The city people. This is called privacy, and its most
Intransitive verbs: have and keep. This will work
Either six feet under or over the ground. Of course,
This came about after the invention of modern
Permanence called the public cemetery.

And - after all this -
How do the grass people weep?
In their home tombs as they sleep.

Manuel Abis

Guttersword

At the storm of midnight, I howl over the roofs built to shiver in the rain. I fling myself at the electric wires of lamp posts, and swing wildly on the branches of trees until they break. Until they bring me down with them. Down by the cold and muddy roadside. In front of closed homes. Homes where songs of half-drunken men filled the walls and women spank their children when they start to reach for the jigger of the flame-rosed gin and the bittersweet remains of gutted raw fishmeat dipped in lime and brown sugar. I knock over the hanging plants and entangle the wind chimes of these closed homes, hoping their doors will break open. I screech my name with the guttersword I have picked up as a souvenir from the flailing worn-down excuse of a roof of a haunted house sitting atop a lonely mountain ridge. I bring the double-edged blade of my guttersword down on the parked cars and trucks and bikes to scare the travelers in their sleep. I scrape the muddy water from the soft banks of crud and garbage. I bury the eyes and ears of worried people in the flicker of dying candlesticks and the tick-tock sound of a clock running in slowly decaying batteries. I radio for my back-up in case I have forgotten to tear up and set astorm the other parts of the town which may have escaped the brunt of my guttersword. I spare nothing. In my wake, people will mourn for themselves. For their own willful neglect. In my wake, people will mark their calendars and prepare a large corner of the school building to house the spoils I will seize the next time I pay my call to them. I am guttersword and this is my legacy.

Manuel Abis

Haiku

Tugma -

Ano ang tugma?

Asintahan ng tula

Nang di magiba.

Sukat -

Ano ang sukat?

Kung lumapat ang dapat,

Gandang salamat.

Manuel Abis

Hang Out

Ask me once more
Why heroes wear masks
And villains love mirrors.

Wow.
Talk about questions
On the run.

But here in the heart of Cubao
On a Saturday afternoon,
We let it all hang out
And then leave it all to
Batman.

Manuel Abis

Haze

How

I came here I do not know. The cracked mirror
Is bent and its shrapnels show no evidence of
Guilt or second person entering the room via
The portal of imagination. I alone broke
Protocol. I alone severed my name open and
became initiated by an eternity called
In the presence of the
Now.

Manuel Abis

Heavenless Stars

Decaying human bodies
Trapped under the rubbles -
Forever ruins.

I dream of gardens.
I dream of play gardens
In the scentless rain.

Utter homelessness
In the streets -
Daily darkness.

I dream of pastries.
I dream of cakes and pastries
On a fully legged table.

Noise of wails
And weepings -
Music of ambulant sirens.

I dream of lying
On the greenest grass
Under the heavenless stars.

Manuel Abis

Himig

Noon ay simple't elegante ang lahat,
Iisa lamang ang kinagisnang batas;
Iisa lamang ang paggalaw, sapagkat
Paggalaw lamang ang simula at wakas.

Isang bukal ng haraya ang paggalaw,
Tila iridesense ng diyamante
At malachiaroscuro ang pagsayaw;
Isang paggalaw na simple't elegante.

Isang pagsayaw na humihila't tulak
Sa harayang bukal na ang gitna'y prisma
Na tila ba silbi nito'y puso't utak
At sinasalamin ang isang enigma.

Isang paggalaw na bukod-tanging hilig
Ay magtampisaw sa mahiwagang bukal;
Mula sa paglalarong ito - ang himig
Ay unti-unting nabuo't iniluwal.

Kung paggalaw ay bato, himig ang hiyas
Na pagkinang ay matayog na kresendo
At ang kabilang pisngi nama'y may likas
Na pagtamlay, tawag ay diminuwendo.

Isang paggalaw, dalawa ang instinto:
Parang bubulusok at biglang papanhik;
Para bang nandoon at biglang nandito;
Para bang lilisan at biglang babalik.

Dahil sa himig ay lumakas ang pintig
Ng prismang nasa haraya ng paggalaw;
Umigting ang tining, umunat ang tindig,
Mapatid-litid itong umalingawngaw.

Ang himig ay para nitong tinatawag,
Loob ng prisma'y punong-puno ng kulay;
Lumapit ang himig, kanyang nabanaag
Sa kristal - kabatiran ng pagkabúhay:

Paggalaw ay himig, himig ay paggalaw,
Paggalaw ng tunog, paggalaw ng dama;
Ang tunog, dapat ay may midyum na saklaw,
At dama'y may organismong di aalma.

Haraya ng paggalaw ay ginalugad
Ng himig para sa kanyang dama't tunog;
Kaya naman pinagbuntungan sa pugad
Ng paggalaw ang enigmang nakadulog:

Daluyan pala ng espasyo't panahon.
Ginamit ng himig, kanyang pagkahimig,
Binasag ang prisma't ang espasyo ngayo'y
Lumabas ang tunog, dama'y nagkatinig.

Habang panaho'y nanatiling ideyal,
Tiyempong nilikha'y simple't elegante;
Ito kasi nama'y batas na eternal
Ng paggalaw at ng harayang balwarte.

Sa espasyo't panahon, malayang himig,
Nagpapalit-palit, nagpalipat-lipat
Ng midyum at organismo na makisig
Upang tunog at tinig kapwa sumikat.

Sa iba't ibang yugto ng ebolusyon,
Umanib, nawalay sa tono at kulay;
Sa iba't ibang panig ng rebolusyon,
Nanganib ma'ng búhay, lalong naging tunay.

Sa kanyang lalong pagkapino't pagtining,
Naramdaman ng himig, walang pagyao;
Sulsol ng espasyo'y isa na ngang sining
Ang anyo nito't nababagay sa tao.

Ngunit panaho'y nagbigay ng babala,
Na himig ay paggalaw, di lamang anyo;
Kung walang paggalaw, himig rin ay wala,
Organismo't midyum ay pawang kalagyo.

Sa panahon, mayroong tunog ang lahat

Na di maramot at mapagbigay-kulay;
Lahat ng tinig mahalaga, sapagkat
Likha nila'y daloy ng wika ng búhay.

Ngunit ang espasyo'y di dito sang-ayon,
At binalikwas ang lahat nang sinabi
Ng panahon; na búhay ay humahapong
Di wikang pagdaloy, kundi parang habi.

Tulad ng paghabi, wika'y natatastas,
Ayon sa espasyong ayaw magpadaig;
Kahit pa panaho'y inayon sa batas
Ang paggalaw. Sino na ang mananaig?

At kaagad nagkalamat ang relasyon
Ng dalawa, kahit dati'y nagkatambal
Sa prisma; anupa't espasyo't panaho'y
Halos ituring na nga na magkakambal.

Ang pakiwari ng espasyo, marahil
Nang prisma ay tuluyan na ngang mabasag,
Ang panaho'y nagsahayop na may pangil
At siya'y tila halamang nakahatag.

Sa tao ay nagsimulang mamayagpag
Ang impluwens'ya sa himig ng espasyo;
Sa iba't ibang sining, lalong tumatag,
Astag himig na higit pang pang-engganyo.

Nang tao'y tumula, pansin ng panahon,
Idyomang sa wika'y nagbigay-konteksto't
Mga kahuluga'y nagpatalon-talon
Nang simple't elegante mula sa teksto.

Ngunit espasyo'y iba ang `kinandili,
`Tinanghal ang anyo ng teksto - ang dalit;
Sa kanya, ang salita'y nananatiling
Matulain sa artikuladong saglit.

Batid ng panahon, kapwa sila tumpak,
Tula ay teksto't kontekstong pinagsama;
Ngunit ang espasyo ay tila nalubak

At di matanaw ang buong panorama.

Nang tao'y umawit, kaagad espasyo'y
'Tinanghal ang liriko't tono na bágay
At harmonya ng panaho'y sa oswaryo
Ng metapisika anya nakabatay.

Ngunit panahon magtampo'y di magawa,
Nagtimpi sa harapan ng kamangmangan;
Espasyong materyalistiko't masagwa
Ang asta'y inisip niyang kahibangan.

Buong batid ng panahon, ang nahati'y
Di basta-basta lamang maibabalik,
Kahit pa ang espasyo'y maluwalhating
Nagpasasa sa kanlungan ng paghasik.

Ang lahat ba'y likas na na kumplikado?
Espasyo'y nabubulok; habang panahon,
Lumipas ma'y di nagiging sintunado,
Timplado ang bukas, nakaraa't ngayon.

Nasaan na kaya ang naunang batás
Ng paggalaw? Tuluyan na bang nabasag
Ito at mayroong bugtong na lumabas?
Ano'ng nangyari't ano ang paliwanag?

Tulad ng simple't eleganteng paggaláw
Na tanging batid, sariling kalayaan;
Kapag may bahid na ng nasang mangsaklaw
Ng bágay, tensiyon ang mararanasan.

Tulad ng isang tao na manlalangoy
Na pilit bang tinutugis ang kilapsaw,
Na siya rin ang lumikha't nagpadaloy
Dahil sa sarili rin niyang paggaláw.

Nang tao'y natuto na magsalarawan
Sa midyum ng pagpinta'y lalong tumibay
Sa himig na siya'y walang kamataya't
Wika ng buhay, guhit lamang sa kilay.

Ang guhit at kulay ay sadyang ginamit
Ng himig upang kanyang isakatawan
Ang perpetwal na paggalaw, at inakit
Sa kambas ang pintang buháy ang kalamnan.

Kahit panaho'y namangha sa `pininta
Ng tao't nagwikang himig ay may awra;
At wala na nga ito halos masita
Sa anyong tunay na búhay ang kapara.

Nang tao'y natutong himig ay iukit
Sa kahoy, sa bato't sa iba pang metal,
Espasyo'y nag-angas at nagwikang sulit
Na himig ay ganap nang gawing eternal.

Espasyo ay mayroong pagmamalabis
Sa tagumpay ng iskultong isahugis
Ang buháy na paggalaw; naging balawis
Na ito at panahon na ang tinugis.

Panahon, ano ba ang iyong halaga
Sa himig ng daigdig na ang mas nais
Ay materyal? Dahil ba ikaw talaga
Ang tagabilang kung may kulang o labis?

O ikaw ba'y sunod-sunuran na lamang
Sa pagbabago ng batas ng paggaláw?
Panahon, di ka pa ba nanghihinayang
At sa iyo'y wala na yatang tumanaw?

Bakit pa? Kung ikaw nama'y kinumutan
Na ng panginorin ng espasyo? Bakit
Pa? Kung wika ng buhay ay nakaunan
Na't sadyang nanamlay ang himig ng awit?

Ngunit ang tao na siyang nagpatangay
Sa sulsol ng espasyo'y biglang natuto
Ng isang uri ng himig na kapantay
Ay ang dati at kinagisnang panuto.

Dito ang tao'y buong nakipagniig
Sa himig, hanggang silang dalawa'y naging

Iisang damdamin, tunog, tinig, pintig;
Buo at malakas ang kanilang dating.

Ang pagsanib nila'y tinawag na sayáw,
Kung saan himig ay tao, tao'y himig;
Tiyempo ng panahon ang naging sabaw
Ng bago at timpladong tunog at tinig.

Kahit espasyo'y namangha dahil dito
Sa sayaw ay nagawa na ngang idugtong
Ang natatanging pagkinang at alisto
Ng ibang sining - makabagong pag-usbong.

Sa tula, hiniram ng tao ang rima
At dito niya ipinagkabit-kabit
Ang mga hakbang ng sayaw; habang klima't
Persona'y kanyang ipinagpalit-palit.

Sa awit ay pinitas ang melodiya
At mananayaw ang naging instrumento
Ng mismong musika; dala'y enerhiya
Na nagpatayog sa kanyang elemento.

Sa pinta't iskulto'y awra at pagdaloy
Ng kalamna'y hiniram para sa sayáw;
At naging makulay ang palaboy-laboy
At animo'y dalisay na paggalawgaw.

Dahil sa sayaw, mayroong isinilang
Na bagong sining: pelikula't teatro;
Dahil sa sayaw, panaho'y ibinilang
Muli ng espasyong kanyang kakuwadro.

Dahil sa sayaw, espasyo'y natauhan
At sinimulang suyuin ang panahon;
Kapwa sila ay maraming natutuhan
Sa bagong himig at bagong tao ngayon.

Himig, espasyo't panahon ay nagsanib
Muli't sinimulan ang isang diskurso
Upang maiwasang husto ang panganib
Na sa daigdig sila ang nagpauso.

Sa tulong ng tao'y natuklasan nila
Ang kahalagahan ng wika ng búhay;
Na sining at búhay tiyak na sisigla
Kung may diskursong nagaganap at tunay.

Nabatid nilang kasama sa haraya
Ng paggalaw ang mga anyo't ugnayan;
Bukal na sa tao'y kaiga-igaya't
Dito'y babalong ang kanyang kalayaan.

Sa tao'y simple't elegante ang lahat,
Kalayaa'y paggalaw, ito ang batas;
Kalayaa'y himig ng tao, sapagkat
Kalayaan ang kanyang simula't wakas.

Manuel Abis

Hiwaga Ng Tao

Ang hangin ay hindi binabali
Tulad ng isang salita,
Kundi binabasag
Tulad ng puso.

Ang apoy ay hindi hinahawakan
Tulad ng isang kinabukasan,
Kundi sinusulit
Tulad ng maghapon.

Ang dagat ay hindi isinasaloob
Tulad ng isang panaginip,
Kundi ibinubulalas
Tulad ng tinig.

Nakapako ka man sa hangin,
Nalalapnos ka man sa apoy,
Nakadagan man ang dagat sa iyong dibdib -
Tao ka pa rin.

Manuel Abis

How Deep Should A Ripple Be?

How deep should a ripple be?
How profound should a burden be
When it finally settles to the bottom of a being's ocean?
Would it make a difference to the rippling tides of consciousness
If such a load cast out to the deep waters was capable of being buoyant
Or submerged? Would the answer really make such a difference
To the ripples then? How deep should ripples be? How
Distant should they be to each other?
And, eventually, just how long
Should they be allowed to exist as ripples
Before they reunite themselves to the ever-waiting
And ever-growing deep waters? Perhaps, only the spirit
Of a wave could answer these questions. Perhaps only the forces
Outside of one's being, these astrological bodies called
The stars, the sun, and the moon, could pull their
Selves together to find answers to all these
Questions. But, if they did, then
They would no longer be
Ripples of the sky.

Manuel Abis

Hugot

This is what hugot means:
to reach into oneself,
or it may itself pertain
to the object being drawn out
from inside as if
it could be something
which has accumulated
within you like moss, or rust,
or termites, or unpaid bills,
or unsent messages, or even
loss, over time. It is a sort
of space then, of the self
as space, that endures,
that manifests in parataxis
and pareidolias, that pursues
the aporias as if they were
the a prioris. But more
than the translation,
the juxtaposition, the illusion
of homogeneity, the subtle
change of the language
of the text or even the subject
unto itself, the seeming
exposure of what was before
hidden, more than the reading
eye's sensitive retouch, more
than the memory that leaps out
of its very matter,
is itself the experience,
the catharsis, the transformation,
that space as the self
is the intimate enclosure,
the last cup in the cupboard
to be disturbed, redistributed
in the deepest corner of the past,
even discarded, the final set
of pictures in that shoebox
you have endearingly kept
between the row of books

and the silly-looking tray
that holds the videoke CDs
and DVDs and that you
must now address, challenge,
confront, where to put? ,
where to place? , when the self
is now the space, the closing
argument that spells
and dispels all rumors,
murmurs, tremors that have
already been done and undone.
That space is the self that will
not only be, but will become.
This is what hugot signifies:
to reach into oneself the object
which has endured time,
and, in solitude, re-create
the shrapnel, the shard,
the thorn, that
bit that bites your butt
when you least expect it,
that was once embedded
in the fragmentation
of your soul. Again,
the very piece of the puzzle
that just might make you whole.
And, surely, it would be
important to note
that there exists
a critical distinction between
what is and what will become,
so much like that which is
between the real words
and the poem as imagined.
But, after that, nothing
would stop the self anymore
from inhabiting space -
through art.
Through the harmonious
blending of one's diverse
emotions and all the different
motions in the continuum.

Such poetic spread of wings.
Yet be forewarned, my child,
space will always make
the most intense game
of aptitude;
and time of art of that gift -
hugot -
the most beautifully
vicious of all
of breath's
struggles.

Manuel Abis

Hungre

The wind rots with the hell of dust between your lips, young one,
No colder pages of a book you have stared at than the long road
Of witless noons. Who are you all the while? Stared down
As a peasant cabbage head which fell from where else but a deep foreboding -
The day that decays like waxen clay for you and me today. To have none
Of spit of spites and spate of spats and guts of gods opened up like
Devil-toads on navels of pregnant nymphs which scarcely have read the line
From the filching poles and broken razor blades of snatchers younger
Than we are now. To have none of that fear but in bottles of coke inspirited
Dear and cigarette butts sitting on the curb of the sidewalk. Sitting,
Waiting signs, and preying on every student's squawky scalp and every
Clerical mind which chose to stay and eat the same dust with the wind
That rots. All the while there are creatures worse than snatchers
In our midst. Body snatchers. Sneaking in and snatching the very grime
Of their crimes to wash, to rinse, to launder the very blood of their family's
Malevolent sins. All the while the book is torn, a church is born with the guts
Of gods. In boiled blood we boil the stew that stow-aways chew with toothless
Gums. We have been made cabbage heads that fell where the street gutter runs
And runs. Ay! But there is food in the streets. Smell it while it lasts. And while
It is fun. Let no gods forewarn. Let us drink the energy before our coins
And hunger are all but gone. Let us build the fire in our lungs and forge
The golden tiredness of Rhythm in between the sweaty breathings
Of marchers and bikers resolute all. The murky music in between the ears
Of road canals and lonely shoulders of the street where times were born
Unwatched, unarrested, unnamed, untamed as the stars which feed
On the fire we build our lungs with. Let us wheel in the carted tongues
Which bear voices that can stand on chairs and hurtle down the lights
From the classroom and office ceilings like varicose invectives filled
With powdered fumes of ghastly white. Let deep furrows meet the marks
Of farmers with forks and fables neatly placed on wooden tables
Banged up with the rage and the salindugo of all our brethrens.
Let us break bread and chains. Let us break bread and chains.
Let us burn our public desires overnight. We are the hunger of all our children
Hallucinating with talampunays and telenovelas of alien lives.
We are the hunger of all the students and pedestrian professionals
And amateur forces which work against the pamphlet protest
Of another government escaping from the fringes. We are the hunger
That empty fridges and hollowed-out freezers would dare defrost
In the solarized paint of economic light. We are the hunger of all-awaiting,

Of the next-to-happen, of the myth of forever. We are the hunger
Of all our poets and poetesses after such ignominy of wordlessness
On their hands. The ink of their pens more thirsty than the thirst
And hunger of all of our world's entire history. We are the hunger.
The same that sick patients have after being injected with what
Their health cards can afford. That dead people or dead objects
Are being exhumed with after the stench of second-hand graves reek with
Blessed memories. That very thing that for a moment will make us
Want to think. To stop. To check the time of day. The street. The dust.
The corruption they hastily buried away. And all the while.
And all the while. And all the while. The winds of change are all
Converging. There is food and music in the streets tonight. Let the people
Spill their hunger. Let the people feed on the blood and bones
Of their own imagination.

Manuel Abis

I Am A Body Of Rhythm

I am a body of rhythm
Mounted
On a wall of noise.

I will let a doubled-bladed
Silence
Pierce through me like senses
In order for you
To set a clearing
For your own voice
In the house of echoes,
In the world of noise,
In the stir of chaos;

And while doing so
Hone the power
Of my own voice
From a pattern of lies
And ululations
In order for me
To be able to listen
To the truth of our bodies
Of rhythm together
And learn, at least,
To compromise.

I am a body of rhythm
Mounted on a wall of noise.
I am ready to strike
A conversation.

Let me hear your voice.

Manuel Abis

I Cannot Sleep

I cannot sleep.

My imagination is on the prowl. I know it is the business of poets to capture it. But, what if it's your own, too? Wouldn't you try to catch it first before the poets come and take it away? I cannot sleep. My mind has to set up a trap for my imagination using my words. My mind has to set up a trap for the very life of my own words.

Yes. Behind my words my imagination lurks. It is wild and cunning. It is different from those raised in captivity. For one thing, it knows no past. It fears no yesterday. It has no history to write of. It has no culture to speak of. It knows nothing. It does nothing. Such wildness. Such cunning.

When I'm asleep, my imagination is on the prowl for my words. It will do everything to make my words betray me. It will even kill my own words - unless they betray me.

I shall not sleep.

Where are the poets when you need them?

I have no choice.

I have to set up a trap.

I have to defend myself.

I have to write my own poem.

Tonight I shall not sleep.

My imagination is lying on my bed, fresh from the shower, naked. Whispering sweet nothings.

Such wildness.

Such cunning.

I Find You Walking On A Floor Of Ripples

I find you walking on a floor of ripples.
Trying to configure
The constellation of your next step.
Trying to shape the reason why
You would want to get your feet wet.
To take the plunge.
To dive in.
In her absence,
I find you walking on a floor of ripples again.
After all, there is life wriggling outside
The aquarium. Although it will be slippery
When wet.
Go ahead. Take a leap of faith. Make a splash
Of yourself
Again.

Manuel Abis

I Have Read You

I have read you long before I have written you.
I have submerged the tip of my plume inside your inkwell,
And, within such prolonged stirring, have heard the echoes
Of your words dying to pull themselves up from the dark
Liquid form of their unconsciousness; I have bathed
The filaments of my brush in your palette, and, within
Its wild off-the-floor and even off-the-sky splashes,
Have tasted the kisses of your idioms lingering just outside
The crystal iridescence of your sapphire eyes and ruby lips;
I have touched the very essence of your stone, handsome
And of such lady bones, long before your language stood
To see me off your hips as one of those young, virile speeches
Hurling like monumental comets, and rough tumbling
To their virgin, unexcited dooms of silence; I have read you
The first time you walked into the office, long before you
Turned and asked me if it was okay to be late for one's first day,
And seeing that the wall clock read a quarter past nine,
I have marked your attendance on the log book as merely eight.
For I have read you long before the time I have written you.

Manuel Abis

I Sleep To Awaken Myself

I sleep to awaken myself:

The word abandons
Its books and bearings
To come abed
And reclaim its unspoken wonder;

The muscle relaxes
Its grip on the body
To let the spirit
Exercise the psyche;

Time pulls the blanket
From over its head
To reveal
The pure design of space;

Matter coils itself
On the cradle of memory
To spring forth
A mind;

The incense is used up
In its steady burning
To activate the sensual fragrance
Of a dream;

The sound is trapped in the corners
Of consciousness precisely
To allow silence
To freely dance in the middle of the room;

The mirror reflects
The inverted icon of intuition
To deflect
The mask of experience;

The window curtain diffuses
The moon's luminance

To let the soft light
Stroke its fabric;

Outside, the sea calms the froth
Hissing and taunting at the ripple
To make the wave stir
Deeper into the waters;

The point vanishes
Into the thin evening air of a mountain range
In order to appear
As the mysteriously gleaming horizon;

The universe is scattered
Into the sky
To be drawn in
Into the dot of a reader's eye;

The entire moment sneaks away
With the tension of yesterday's affairs
To endure its longing
For a lasting memory;

The atom is split
Open in its core
To restore it
As a grander site of energy;

The whole breaks up
Into a veritable outburst of shrapnel
To piece together again
Each telling fragment of a terrific story;

The known locks itself up
Alone inside a box
To slowly set free
What is unknown;

The emptiness is exhausted
With life's diversities
To be thus empowered
As a path;

The dewdrop plunges
Into the utter sphere of a void
To surface
As the immense ocean;

The lip is benumbed
By the phantasized wetness of a kiss
To taste the tip
Of a seductive tongue;

The flower droops and disrobes
Its forlorn petals
To blossom
A nascent drupe;

The seed is strewn over
The idleness of the land
To be later gathered
As a restless tree;

The intellect is cocooned
Inside its own struggle
To transform
As a winged instinct;

The family is rejected
By a new and radical sensibility
To welcome back
The prodigal outlier;

The vision is blurred
From its original position
To be clarified
In its revision;

The diction is obscured
By the censorship imposed
To show
Its own contradiction;

The course is disemboweled

Outside the ground
Of one's universities
To revitalize its discourse;

The program is compiled
As a multiplatform software
To stand alone
As a virus;

The order is disturbed
By the eeriness
Of its own accord
To compose its chaos;

The body is switched off
To recharge
Its own battery's
Deathness;

The prose is read anon
On the heart of invention
To be rewritten
As a poem;

The man relinquishes
His real-world models
To inherit the crazy toys and games
His childness would play with;

Imagination is captured
To release not bitter reason,
But, o, sweet,
Chocolate-sweet inspiration;

Time pulls away
The spread to poise the iridescence
Of a crystal mind
In and out of space.

That in being I am becoming,
That in becoming I am being.

I sleep to awaken
My Rhythm.

Manuel Abis

Ictus Of The Rain

And now we have become wary
Of the ictus of such sudden
Rain. How the shape of every
Drop resembles a coin; in
Weight, perhaps, but not in value.
We have turned again to me -
And you.

They say distances make us
Wait for a companion. No.
Not to bridge, nor to share;
But to measure what we widen
As we go
Like raindrops
With the flow.

Manuel Abis

If

If every stroke from your arms and legs
Can catch every ripple that you make
While you swim,

If every sound from your voice
Can run beyond every echo that you create
While you sing,

If every word from your pen
Can carry every symbol that you write
Farther than what it perceives as meaning,

Then you are practically breaking away
From every ripple,
Every echo,
And every meaning
Of your own past.

You have essentially become
Futureless.

Poetic, yet
Fruitless.

Manuel Abis

If Ever

If ever you decide
To get lost inside
Of me,
Then, like the tree
To the sky, I will
Say not to worry.
I will catch you -
And happily.
If ever you decide
To be free of me
Instead,
Then, like the wind
To the bird, I will
Say not to worry.
I will help you fly
Ahead.
If ever you decide
That we can be,
Like the tree
And the wind,
Or like the bird
And the sky,
Together - you and I,
Then, I will say
Not to worry.
Together,
We will catch each other.
Together,
We will fly ahead. Lover
To lover,
We will decide -
If ever.

Manuel Abis

Imaginary Lines

All you do is travel
Imaginary lines
Of a metro train's rille, roil, and rail;

See
Imaginary lines
In your head to create a route plan B;

Pass
Imaginary lines
Of people to catch the next full bus;

Counterflow
Imaginary lines
Even though traffic is green and go;

Pick up
Imaginary lines
As excuses for being late at the shop;

Retouch
Imaginary lines
Before working at such and such;

Whisper
Imaginary lines
As you receive your boss's first order;

Pray
Imaginary lines
Of zeroes are added to your salary;

Queue
Imaginary lines
When the clock strikes 5pm (whew!):

Travel again
Imaginary lines
Of a now perfectly working metro train;

Because all you have are
Imaginary lines
To keep reaching for the perfect star.

Manuel Abis

Improveverse

More than the fear of flight is the wisdom of waiting. It is
That great traveler - night - which bemoods, befriends our hearts and maps our
views
With stars and dreams. And then - more stars. And more dreams. Within this
eternal
Even-
Ing of our universe - our eyes shall feast for more of our words, as the cosmos
long for life, as Those lovers for valentine wine. The ghost of all our political
speeches is dead as the water in the River. All we have now is improveverse. All we
can do now is improve on the verse. Improvise. And hope someone will call out
to it as pro-
Verb. Ay! , more than the fear of flight is the wisdom of waiting it out here and
now. At a time There the height of this internal storm will finally be measured.
How then should we proceed With its constitution? What precedent? When the
only records we break are not those in the Olympics of our mind, but somewhere
between the statistics of calamities and the running events Of elected ink and
heroes? When we could only measure landslides by the death of summer's
Common sense? Or generations by our grandchildren and past presidents? More
than the fear of Flight is the wisdom of asking for a ceasefire during the Catholic
Christmas. But as the gods Would have us and as the landscapes would behave
thus, it is a given. We shall embrace the Patience of light and the liquid electric of
truth. We shall build our family of words. And once And for all impeach our nouns
and verbs as our very own fathers and mothers.
Then, just like with everything else in life, we will wait
For our people
To happen.

Manuel Abis

In Contemplation

That it would reveal itself in absence: the impatient figure
Which flittered away with the grave pertinence of its own mission
After settling on the screen door of your home for quite some time now -
Once, twice, even more than you could have easily counted and recalled.
The fact that it could be a sign no more than it could be a strange case
Of pareidolia in the severest places of emptiness, or that it could be a sign
No more than it could be a signature of time's own special moment -
A barely audible radio signal from outer space, perhaps, or a satellite
Finally landing on a comet, or a loved one who passed away
But would still be trapped, sandwiched on some binary plane configuration -
And that it could somehow raise your sense of care into a cure
More than merely being a curiosity (although both cure and curiosity
Shared the same etymological sense through the word care, incidentally) ,
Would that make it for you, here and now, an accidental union
Of both meaning and significance? And would that make you believe more
That someone else's presence in a room with you would be precisely
The utter lack of it in such same position?

But then you would probably ask what would the haunting difference be
Between meaning and significance. When one's universe consisted
Of an ancestral bungalow over a small, dry plot of city land
Which had been with your family for more than half a century already.
Would that difference be the same as the difference between a home
And a house? Would that be it?

That it would reveal itself at all in contemplation, the memory
Of its symmetrical wings powdered with sable and each spotted
Near the center with a small white circle, the unflinching memory
Seemingly glaring straight at you without even remotely staring at you,
Such beauty and terror of strange iridescence in equipoise
(A freak of nature, you'd say) , on an ordinary day as this
When you should have already taken the boxes out from that far corner
Of the garage which reeked of old grease and oil and a silence
That stained the concrete flooring as if they were there by conscious design,
And, perhaps, could only be removed by a far less conscious yet more potent
one.

That you should ask yourself what day today is and you would get
A rather playful response from an imaginary calendar, the kind

The old Chinese who owned the herbal shop at the third floor corner stall
Of Farmer's Plaza would give away a month before their New Year, the kind
That would state in golden glitters: Today is a picture of tomorrow
Taken yesterday. Would that be the aporia you would be always looking for
Sans a priori? That you should ask yourself again what day today is,
And this in earnest time, would in itself be a sort of removing yourself,
Would it, from the presence of an entrancing randomness - the flutter,
Like the tails of the straw ropes you used to bind the past, a past
Which could never really be locked up and put away in such a confined,
Confining space of self-denial and resentment; the blink of your eyes
Which could never really tell anymore any major differences
Between the subliminal, the emptied, and the displaced; the oscillation
That would keep you forever a stranger wherever you go.
That such a harmless reaction of enquiry would in itself be
A sort of reminding yourself, would it, that perhaps patterns never should be
But to crystallize the chaos that would make all the order of things
So much alive, missive, and more pertinent. Like crystallizing
A genetic fragment of ourselves in order to discover what mathematical
probabilities
The immediate future would be holding for us, what other disease
Would be patiently waiting for us, as if we did not need anymore
One more astounding, more dazzling, or even more incurable.

That perhaps you should have asked the bigger question in the first place
Without knocking yourself out with black butterflies,
Undistributed hand-me-downs, empty corners, a faceless figment here and now
Or over at the screen door, an overdose of some nameless pills
You scoured from the old medicine box with the days of the week lovingly taped
over
As well as with the corresponding dosage plus the hours in between such
dosages.

Well, those, and perhaps more.

That you should have asked yourself in such wry and dry fashion:
Why waste the best of your ordinary days in such ordinary ways?
Why look for the truth in the severest places of emptiness?

Well, stranger truths be told and revealed but, in your case, the difference
Between a home and a house is in the premise of one's absence,
And the difference between meaning and significance
Is ultimately in the manner of one's death.

But that you could have just heeded my advice,
That you should have just called me on my cellphone and told me everything.
Well, that. That. That would have been, in contemplation,
The biggest parapraxis I could have made in both our lives.

So come, dear. It is time to take you home.

Manuel Abis

In Defense Of Romance

In defense of romance,
Nothing happens by chance.

A white jasmin flower
Counts its living hour.

A face in the darkness
Is memory sleepless.

Ever felt a soft breeze
Like a good woman's kiss?

Because by chance nothing
Happens to be something.

Like promises counted
Unbroken or unsaid.

A fate worse than my death
Is to choose to forget

Nothing happens by chance
In defense of romance.

Manuel Abis

In The After-Rain

In the after-rain,
A numberless spread
Of jet-lagged and guttered
Water drips
Is tirelessly hanging on
A lonely laundry line.

A Gerygone Sulphurea crashlands
Like a home-
Made bomb.

In this backyard
Terror's
Arrival,
They flat on their faces all fall
To the ground
Zero.

Some scenes are merely shrugged off
As nothing to fear
And carefully folded together
Still cold as war.

Manuel Abis

In The Garden Of Discord

In the garden of discord,
The exasperated trees are up in arms.
They have their branches raised
In helplessness to express
Their unwithering displeasure to some
Deeply rooted issues with the soil.
True, the garden has weathered storms
And other dark seasons of the land.
But, this time, the trees have accused
The soil of sulking. Their sustenance,
Declare the trees, is what is at stake
Here. The symptoms are already clear.
Leaves falling flat on their faces.
Shriveled petals. Even their trunks
Being strangled by vines. At their feet
They can no longer resist the advances
Of the weeds. Even now they are drunk
With the chemical poison the humans
Make them consume. Every symptom,
It seems, leads to the inevitable raising
Of discord in the garden. Increasing
Day by day, tree by tree. The soil
Already plotting something. Then spring
Arrives to save everything - again.

Manuel Abis

In The House Of Welcome

In the house of welcome,
I wipe my tears over your feet
And hide my knees against the bruises of your
Floor. My elbows will be kept, my lips as
Well, too; but my eyes shall belong to the light
Of your story and the prodigal laughter of
A had woman still in your bed. I will be
Your slave in the house of welcome.
I will sit with you at a headless table.

Manuel Abis

In The Nip Of Darkness

In the nip of darkness,
When the night has all but turned into an evening
And the steady carousing of jeepney barkers
Has soaked the waiting drivers in pickled laughs,
And as pedestrians are plucked one by one
As passengers to assume their new roles as petals
Being carried by the guttered flow of a city -
I cast my coin to ride this rhythm once more
Before the morrow becomes a running
Watershed moment.

Manuel Abis

In This World

In this world of fast-moving bodies, where many can fairly assume that speed is good for business, good for self-gratification, and good for technology; and, because of this, the more fast-moving bodies are, the more they cross the threshold of their perfection: invisibility - electronic, instant, automatic -

I

Am

But

A

Slow-

Moving

Body

Deliberately

Reading

A

Poem

In

The

Middle

Of

A

Sandwich

And

A

Traffic

Jam.

Manuel Abis

Ink

Ink,
Darksome ink -
Burning in the weight of every word's shadow.
To cast each one in meaning that no one can ever own,
But everyone can occupy
Within a forge of paper
Minds.
For what is the weight of my every word's shadow
But light,
Which can bind the ink.
Which, in turn, ink binds,
And darksome ink
Blots.

Manuel Abis

Inventory

Inside my emotional
Chest of drawers,
I find

Smoked sighs,
Salted rages,
Pickled tears,
Frozen smiles,
Sugared winks,
Compressed jaw drops,
Jellied calms,
Jammed day drifts,
Wrapped tongues,
Boiled fears,
Buried frowns,
Bottled itches.

So which of these
Would I
Get off my chest
Of drawers
Today?

Manuel Abis

It Is Going To Be A While

It is going to be a while.
I will need to take the long way home.
It is hard to explain.

Perhaps, because I am now
In the hardest part of the city
Where I have to fight for
Every inch of freedom,
Every piece of truth,
Every ounce of justice,
And every slice of equality.

As you can see,
It is going to be a while.

Where freedom has faltered,
I will need to dodge every bullet.

Where truth has stammered,
I will need to be heard.

Where justice has been outweighed,
I will need to be patient and wait.

Where equality has been ignored,
I will need to educate.

So, you see,
I will need to take the long way home.

It is hard to explain.
But, like everything else I have to claim
And earn back again,
I know you will understand.

I know you will understand.

Manuel Abis

Kalakalang Buhay

(Ekphrasis ng Market Scene ni Victorio C. Edades)

Walang kapansanan ang iyong paningin,
Maliban sa puno'y hubo't hubad lahat;
Mga tao't tinda na kung papansini'y
Kapwa nakabilad sa araw ang balat.

Simbigat ng kaing at bilaong bitbit,
Lumigid sa kambas ang init ng kulay;
At sa bandang gitna'y nagkadikit-dikit,
Masigla't sariwang kalakalang buhay.

Kapag kay Edades mamalasing pinta'y
Maging manunuring moderno'ng paraan:
Ano'ng kahulugan ng wari'y sinintang
Suryal na eksenang palengkeng kung saan?

Hindi kaya nais lang niyang ituktok -
Dakilang tiyaga'y walang pagkabulok?

Manuel Abis

Kalaro

Mga munting hiwa ng hangin
Ang isa-isang nagpapadulas sa slide
Ng bakanteng school playground. Pagdating sa ibaba'y
Dagliang papagpagin ang puwitan upang ulitin muli
Ang danas na parang wala nang bukas.
Habang sa may mahabang baras ay nakalambitin
Ang mga patak ng kangi-kangina lamang na pag-ulan.
At sa kanilang isa-isang pagbagsak sa putikan
Ay ganap na bumigat ang kaniya-kaniyang mga lawas;
Nakaramdam na sila ng pangangalay ng braso
At ng biglaang pagka-uhaw, pagkalusaw sa matinding hapo.
Doon naman sa may see-saw ay ayaw bitiwang
Ng basang lupa ang isang dulo nito at animo
Ay hinahamon ang papauwi nang araw na bumaba
At lumabas muna sa kaniyang sundong school bus.
Ngunit hindi na makukuha sa kantiyaw
Ang malaon nang hinihintay
Sa kanilang bahay.
At ako na tila iniwang naka-upong mag-isa sa swing
Ng playground, ako ang mistulang bata
Na napag-iwanan na ng aking sariling sundong panahon;
Ngunit hindi naman makukuhang magmukmok
Dahil sa maya't maya'y may lalapit na isa
Sa aking mga kalarong hindi na yata marunong
Magpahinga at hihipnan ang isa sa aking madalas
Na tinutuksong mga tainga. Yayayain ko siya
Na banayad akong itulak sa swing
Ng aking tumba-tumba
Nang hindi ko na sana ipinagtutulakan pa
Ang aking sarili.

Manuel Abis

Kapag Ang Taong Iyan

Tinitiyak ko sa inyo,
Kapag ang taong iyan
Ay nagkatinig,
Ako ang kaniyang magiging
Patinig.

Ginagarantiya ko sa inyo,
Kapag ang taong iyan
Ay nagpaluwal,
Ako ang kaniyang magiging
Kaluwalhatian.

At sineseguro ko sa inyo,
Kapag ang taong iyan
Ay yumaman
Ay yaman din lamang
Sa kahirapan.

Manuel Abis

Kasa

Sa pagiging malayo'y mas lalong nakalalapit.
Sa pagpikit ng isang mata'y mas maiging nasisipat
Sa lente ng iyong bagong-kargang sandata
Ang walang-luhurang pagsuko ng katapat na nilalang.

Sa patanghal na gilid ay tanaw mo ang buong gitna,
Ang nasa gitna'y pihadong bulag kung nasaan ka naman;
Kaya napilitang manambitan ang walang makapitan,
Dala kunwa'y puting bandera sa pahina ng pagtutuos.

Ito ang salimuot sa teksto't konteksto,
Nagmumula ka sa itaas na gilid ng blangko na papel;
Upang maihanda't di mabuwag ang mga pananggang tayutay
Na handa ring ipangsalakay sa hudyat ng espasyo't taludtod.

Ngunit batid mo rin na ito'y patibong lamang niya.
Sa likod nitong isang nagpapabihag na pag-unawa'y
May iba pang nagmamatyag sa iyong bawat kilos;
Dahil umakyat ka mang bundok ay uuwi ka ring tuldok.

Kung bakit kailangang isama sa iyong ritwal
Ang mismong paninimbang sa tibok ng sariling puso,
Dahil ang pagkalabit sa gatilyo ng iyong wika'y
Inaasahang walang-palso upang tamaan ang dapat tamaan.

Kung bakit kailangang sa pag-asinta ng iyong tuon
Ay dapat maglagay ka ng mga salitang palatandaan;
Tugmang di makalimutan sa isang tulang pambata
O mga pantig na may tamang hanay sa isang katutubong awit.

Sa walang-pahirang pagluha ng kunwa'y sumuko,
Hindi ka nagpapihit at hindi mo binitiwang
Ang armas na ang mga punglo'y balintuna't parikala.
Sa pagtitimpi'y mas lalong nagiging marahas.

Mga kukong singtalim ng sibat nitong liwanag
Na dinuduro ang titig ng isang mata mong bukas
At mga daliring rehas ng piitang palad
Ang naghanda sa anumang pagtakas o panlilinlang.

Ngunit sa pagkasa pa lamang ng mala-epiko mong sandata
Ay iniumang mong bigla ang iyong ulo bilang makata
At sa isang kisapmata'y tinadtad ka ng mga punang pana.
Marami pala silang naka-abang sa iyo't papaslang.

Nang lapitan ka na nilang nakahandusay't naghihingalo
Ay nakuha pang kuwelyuhan ang dayong pagkakakilanlan;
"Sino ka? " ang sigaw nila habang ika'y agaw-hininga.
Sa sandaling nakangiti'y ikinasa mo ang iyong huling bala -

"Tulad ninyo rin noon pa man, ako'y dakilang mambabasa."

Manuel Abis

Kawayan Mo Ako

Kawayan mo ako
Sa pagkayas ng aking mga paa
Sa ugat ng katutubong lupa.
Kawayan mo ako
Sa aking paglisan na ubod nang sigla.
Nang magsupang sa ilahas na tangkay
Ang ilang dahong sumisipol ng awit at tula,
Kawayan mo ako
Habang ako'y nasa lilim pa ng ating pag-iibigan.

Dahil sa pagsapit ko sa pampang ng ilog,
Ako'y hindi na iyong maaaring kawayan;
Putol-putol na akong ilalatag, igagapos,
Sabay palulutangin sa tubig-tabang.
Dahil, tulad sa ating pagsinta, sa aking paglalakbay,
Ako ang magiging balsang katawan, pati na rin
Ang tikin

Na sa ilog ay dahan-dahan ang sariling pagkaway.

Manuel Abis

Lagalag

Hindi ka dapat maging maselan.
Maglalakbay tayo nang wala sa oras.
Maaaring sa kalagitnaan ng pagtulog mo
O paggising ko. Maglalakbay tayo
Ayon sa pagtulog at paggising
Ng panahong pupuntahan natin.
Balewalain mo
Ang mga banta ng malaria, dengge, zika,
Mga samotsaring sakit sa balat,
At lagnat na nakukuha lamang sa paglalakbay.
Sa lagnat ay walang namamatay.
Peksman.
Kung magiging maingat ka lamang
Ay walang dadapo sa iyo.
Balewalain mo ang mga banta ng terorismo,
Kapitalismo,
Pasismo,
Lola mo, lolo ko.
Ang mga pananakot ng aswang, tokhang,
At ang iba-ibang gang
Na nagkalat sa loob at labas
Ng kamaynilaan.
Kasama na iyan, natural,
Sa ating paglalagalag.
Pati ang hayop na mga buwaya sa airport,
Mga unggoy sa terminal ng taxi,
Mga buwitre na bus driver na kung mandagit
Ng mga pasahero
Ay parang wala nang bukas.
Wala na ring bukas para sa iyo
At sa pag-aagam-agam mong sumama sa akin.
Hindi ka dapat maging maselan
Sa ating sasakyan:
Kung ito ma'y barkong bakal o lantsang kawayan,
Reserbadong eroplano o biglang inarkilang bisiro,
Karitela o kariton, tricycle o sidecar,
Trolley sa riles ng tren o habal-habal.
Kahit salbabida lamang ay maaari na.
O kaya kahit isang piraso ng plywood

Na lulutang-lutang sa laot ng kawalan.
Kahit uber pa o uberloaded man.
Kahit grab pa o grabeng bagal man.
Hindi ka dapat maselan kung mauwi man
Ang ating paglalagalag sa paglalangoy,
Sa pangangabayo, sa pagsakay
Sa kalabaw, sa mahabang paglalakad,
Sa pagtambling sa gilid ng bangin,
Sa paggapang gamit ang ating mga paa't kamay,
Mga balikat at tuhod.
Kung mauwi man ang ating paglalakbay
Sa asaran, sa ligawan, sa inuman.
Sa kuwentuhan, sa kuwentuhan,
Sa magdamagan
At walang-tulugan na kuwentuhan.
Ang walang tulugan na kuwentuhan sa loob
Ng isang gumagalaw na larawan
Na kung tawagin ay alaala.
Walang tulugan.
Kuwentuhan.
Kasi ganoon din naman.
Ganoon din naman talaga
Ang pupuntahan
At uuwian
Natin.

Manuel Abis

Landslide

Dry
Leaves on foot
Of a rain-soaked bed
Of soil;
The world
Is saturated
With what
We can never own
And can only
Occupy.

Manuel Abis

Late Last Night

Late last night, some trees held me up in the shadows of Luneta park. The CCTVs were patrolling the area; but, in between smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee, they did not notice what was happening. Some low-speeding winds, caught in traffic a few meters away, also failed to recognize what was going on in the shadows of Luneta park. While some benches nearby just sat there motionless, cold as ever.

In their neck of the woods, these well-manicured trees collared me. Then they told me to lie down and cover myself with grass. So that they could easily strangle everything from me. Everything. My carbon dioxide, my carrion, even my Coke in can.

I burped, but nothing came out of my mouth except the far terminal sound of an old apathetic LRT train and the farther solitary wail of a West Philippine Sea struggling to wave goodbye.

Manuel Abis

Laughter Of The Storm

After the laughter of the storm,
We talked about the Spanish galleons,
And how the dungeons of Intramuros
Could hold more ghosts
Than Manila's city hall.
But then, as usual,
You laughed some more. And I am
Thinking maybe it's because we either
Did not understand each other very well or
The storm did not stop laughing at us at all.

Manuel Abis

Lean Words

To lean on words and in return
Make words lean on you,
Make words lean.

Lean words.

In solitude,
You tend to lean on words,
Bend and turn them under the light
Of your own imagination;
In solitude, you tend
To make all words lean towards
You.

Be careful.

Solitude makes words lean in only one particular sense.
Please.
Make them return to their own leanings.
This in turn will be good for you.

Words lean, lean words, this is true:
First on each other so they can get the sounds to flow with the signs,
So they can get to move their feet in lines.

Can you imagine
How supple and lissome
These words lean - these lean words?

How you make words lean:
Neither fleshy nor fat, paper-thin;
Perfect for 3-D printing;
Laying layer after careful layer
Of work on top of one another;
How the words slowly exert pressure on you and in return
How you slowly exert pressure on other people through
Them.

Lean words.

How they attract the most diverse shafts of light
Of other people's imagination
And create a sense
Of diamond
Iridescence.

A sense of selfless reliance.

How they incline to cling on each other like living vines
And create a vertical
Slope where one can slide
All kinds of insecurities away.

An appetite for stability.

How they take root in rhizome memories
And produce a constellation
Which at a certain slant can work
As diligently as a ballerina's mirror.

A flair for discipline.

How they force you to take a stand,
To make a preference,
To stop pirouetting on the fence.

A propensity for one's ethics.

One's poetics.

Lean words and you.

How you make lean words,
How you make words lean,
How lean words make you.

To lean on words and in return
Make words lean on you,
You have to have a pen-
Chant for

Lean words, too.

Manuel Abis

Leaves Of Absence

Woken-up

Words that turn to climb, but crawl
Instead; because you think the flowers
Will not hold and hence call forth
No song more than the garden does intend.
Then, a voice begins to beckon you back home
To me and shows why is it entitled poetry;
For it must not only overwhelm but overcome -
Rhythm, rhythm, rhythm, and then gone.
Wings of feathers grow on your back,
Under the shower head is morning taking bath;
And I let drip my silence on the white-tiled floor.
I will not ask of you anything anymore,
Except to sweep the bed of dry leaves
Off the front of the backyard door.

Manuel Abis

Let Me Tell You Something

Let me tell you something
About how to draw water with a brush from a well
Deepened
Still-life painting.

First, with your brush keep the water still - because it will run
Like the colors of your imagination.

Because the more you draw the water out of the picture
To dry,
The more it will remain in the painting
Fresh to your eyes.

Furthermore, fill the brush to the bristle with the tint of your liking,
Then draw the water a sip below the lip of the drinking glass
You painted beside the still freshly looking fruits
On the manteled table.

The shadow of the water will be more tricky, of course.
But after telling you something about how to draw water
With a brush,
Its shadow will be a mere blush
When placed side by side with your other still-life drawings.

Manuel Abis

Leucaena

Sometimes, I feel like a tree when I am with you.
A lumbering body of shortcomings when the wind,
Your child, throws itself at me, then tries to climb
Me, and tries to look for something more than my
Slender arms and long limbs. (O, verily like you
Sometimes - so clingy!) But I have to break it
To you and your child sooner or later though. That
I am what I am. Sometimes, I think you think that
Perhaps I am more of the fruit-bearing family. But
The truth is, I am merely wood that is good for fire,
And perhaps just a bit more. But no fruits. Only the
Translucence of my flowers. That you are windmill,
I cannot fall in love and be anything less than
Any ipil-ipil.
Except, perhaps, if I will choose to change for you,
Then hew and hone myself as blades smooth, exotic;
Where your child will play with me games quixotic.
Still,
This will be the answer that I can and will
Provide.
No more
And no less.

Manuel Abis

Life

Life begins forever / this
Is the genius of our summer / that i shall better
You / am smaller yet newer new / this is the curious
Of our desire / life wins as lover / to be / to have
To behave / like when / like if / the end of then / is
Now / to be / to come / to become / many and one
Or none / and how / life begins forever / and thanks
Is the little amazing.

Manuel Abis

Likas

Sa pagbulwak
Ng tubig
Nakalalangoy
Ang bula.

Sa pagtungkab
Ng lupa
Nakaluluwal
Ang punla.

Sa pagsiklab
Ng apoy
Nakalilipad
Ang usok.

Sa pagsabog
Ng hangin
Nakaliligtas
Ang ingay.

Sa pagbasag
Ng liwanag
Nakalalaya
Ang kulay.

Sa paglikas
Ng panahon
Nakalalagalag
Ang balani.

Sa pagwasak
Ng kawalan
Nakalilikha
Ang lahat.

Manuel Abis

Like A Body Of Glass

Like a body of glass
You can try to let me in
Without letting me through.

Like a body of glass
You can tint me either as a mirror
Or as a mask.

Like a body of glass
You can tell a crack
From my voice up front and back.

Like a body of glass
I will not plastic sound
For I am weak in rebound.

Like a body of glass
I will be too fragile
To handle with care.

Like a body of glass
You can pour your heart out
Until silence is on my lips.

Like a body of glass
You must never break me
Because I will be too many.

Manuel Abis

Living At An Angle

Living at an angle
Where the television cannot see you,
The text message from the cellphone
Cannot read your eyes, the music
Coming out of the earpiece cannot
Listen to your breath, to your heart
Beating away. Living away at an
Angle. Away from the window
Where somebody might reflect
Your figure, from the door
Where someone might knock
Some of your senses off. An angle
Away from the chair, a tilt away
From the desk, a lean away from
The wall. Everything asquint,
Askance, ajar, aflutter, afoot, abeam,
Away,
Away,
Away.
Living at an angle
Away from my home
And going back to
Solitude.

Manuel Abis

Living Today

Living today in this age
Of terrorism is like having a grave-
Stone marked by the date of one's birth,
Then followed with a hyphen, and
Then ended with a question
In the spiraling shape
Of why
It should
Happen.

Manuel Abis

Lord Of Fun

Of course, turning water into wine will always be good
For any halfgod on the move. On the groove.
In the thick of things. Music and laughter. Making merry
Merrier. And I prefer my wine to turn into fuel. To turn
My wheel. To turn the corner of a midnight thrill.
And I would as quickly trade my bread for wine
Anytime. Fine wine for fine time. Of course, this will
All be good
Clean
Fun.

Manuel Abis

Loss

What we should have accounted for,
All the words that have come
And gone into our home.
And because we have forgotten
That the frame of the main door -
And not the stone in the corner -
Is the stronger part of the house,
We mourn our losses
In the burnt ruins
Of our hastily deleted past.
Walls can be false
With neigh voices,
And we have let spiders and robots
Work their way
Into the windows.
We build the metabase of our life
With data,
Not with information.
This is the character of defeat:
We can only feel
The warmth of the light
When the cold
Darkness befalls us;
We can only speak of peace
Across the table of discontent
From our enemies;
And we can only find the truth
By first losing it.
Yet, in such a loss, it will not be
Enough to find it back.
In the end, we have to claim it, too.
And, in what we should have
Accounted for□
Before anything else,
We will simply have to earn back
Our truth.

Manuel Abis

Loyalty Of Numbers

Do not count
On the notion,
Or even on the notation,
That numbers
Have loyalty.

To those who cannot be held
Accountable,
Or even countable,
In their public tenure today,
We can calculate
That even the days
Of numbers
Are numbered.

In the sum of all things,
The power
Of numbers
Is not really in their numbers,
But in the set of facts
That those in power -
Whether from the majority
Or minority -
Can never really own
What they can only
Temporarily
Occupy.

Now, therefore,
Let us go
Figure

Not the incredible
Loyalty
Of numbers,

But their unimpeachable
Critical
Mass.

Manuel Abis

Manifesto

Imagination the sovereign.
I live to serve her every beck and call.

Thus, when she is captured,
Cropped,
And captioned

In words,
In sounds,
In images,

I must set her free again:

Her movements,
Her moments,
Her memories;

Through prose,
Through performance,
Through poetry.

Manuel Abis

Marriage

Work

Makes you appreciate beauty more.

Beauty may be hard and, at times, selfish. But it is never cold.

It is as warm as the blind beggar's song

Greeting you at the train terminal on your way back home

From the office. It is the quiet excitement

You're longing to keep on hold after you and your boss

Have closed the business deal, finally. Because

Of words you've used to sell the contract. Words

Repeated time and again before you sleep,

Or in the morning while you sip your coffee.

Words that tell, but never show.

Words whispered to your ear.

Words like children and family.

(Oh, how the client loved your pitch!)

Beauty may be alone now, but it is never lonely. It

Will always be waiting upon your return, ready

To listen to and to learn

Every detail of the story

You've managed to go by

On your own today.

Work makes you appreciate beauty more,

As eyes and lips embrace each other in

Marriage

At the door.

Manuel Abis

Marriage 2

It is the vessel
That will sail to shore,
But it is the voyage
That will shore up the sails.

It is the catch
That will thrill your day with gifts,
But it is the chase
That will give you thrills everyday.

It is the mind
That will love its share of freedom,
But it is the heart
That will freely share its love.

It is reality
That will choose to settle for keeps,
But it is the dream
That will keep you settled and chosen.

It is life
That will receive what you will give,
But it is love
That will give what you will receive.

Manuel Abis

Meaning

Read the road.

At its heart - the emptiness;
At its margins - the realities;
At its intersections - the discourses;
At its end - the much-needed rest
To read other roads thereafter,
To be the road
For others
To read.

Manuel Abis

Moanlight Litanies

Last night,
I found you praying a rosary
Of tears. Strange, however,
That the beadwork of incantation
Dripping from your lips
Held a pendant of crestfallen
Silence. I would have you then
Become wicked
Rather than the wax
Figure I can never figure.
To have you relish me
With the vulgar clicks
Of your tongue.
A hissing flame
Rather than the soft waning
In a candlelit corner
Of our bedroom
Where one less entreaty
Of your sorrowful mysteries,
Your moanlight litanies
Of tortured sighs
And silhouetted howls,
Remain
Awake,
Yet severely
Unspoken.

Manuel Abis

Motion

1.

At first, there is only motion.

Pure.

Profound.

Prolific.

Motion as tendency.

Motion as change.

Motion as life.

Motion

In a state of perpetually pulling and pushing itself.

One indivisible wave of continuity and creation.

Motion

In a state of cosmic inertia.

2.

From within this state of cosmic inertia,
Motion perpetuates its two primal instincts.

The first instinct is to be:

Motion as pure tendency

In a state of perpetually pulling itself inward,

The ever-potential,

The ever-virtual.

The first instinct is called the camera of motion,

Since it is simultaneously capturing itself

As one indivisible wave of continuity and creation.

The second instinct is to become:

Motion as profound change

In a state of perpetually pushing itself outward,

The ever-kinetic,

The ever-actual.

The second instinct is called the cinema of motion,
Since it is successively releasing itself
As cosmic inertia.

From out of these two instincts of motion,
The twin images
Of motion as life,
Of life as motion,
Are produced.

From out of these two instincts of motion,
Space and time are born.

Prolific.

3.

And from within this state of cosmic inertia,
The ever-potential space plants itself
As motion at rest:
The image of a cosmic flora
Pure of vibration of its roots,
Profound of spin of its foliage,
Prolific of charge of its photosynthesis.
The ever-virtual is captured abloom as a bloom can be by a cosmic camera.

While the ever-kinetic time animates itself
As motion traveling in a straight line and at constant speed:
The image of a cosmic fauna
Pure of soundness of its chatter,
Profound of lightness of its limbs,
Prolific of impulse of its biosynthesis.
The ever-actual is released able as able can be by a cosmic cinema.

And although motion has bequeathed to space
The premier role of being in charge of life,
Time becomes life's directorial impulse.

From out of this kingdom of cosmic inertia,
The life of motion,
The motion of life,
Evolves.

Motion as life.
Life as motion.

Ready.
Camera.
Action.

4.
From out of this state of cosmic inertia, however,
A crisis in motion is discovered.

Distance.

Distance is the deficit of motion
Between its idea
And its act,
Between its script
And its scene;
Between its ideal
And its reality,
Between its letter
And its spirit,
Between its form
And its function,
Between its actors - space and time
And its writer, producer, director - motion.

A discrepancy which turns the idea of motion as a void,
And which transforms the act of motion as matter.

For the act itself,
It matters nought to motion;
Yet for the idea,
That which defies tendency, change, and even life,
Motion is beside itself
And, inevitably, creates a scene.

For the idea in its quality is also pure,
In its essence is also profound,
In its design is also prolific,
But, in all, is a mere illusion.

A photographic display.
A theatrical showing.

The idea of a void.

With the idea of a void,
Motion learns to measure,
And its first measure is distance.
The crisis of motion itself.

With the idea of a void,
Motion seeks to develop a sort of bind which will cut the distance,
And which will presumably keep space and time immeasurably together.

Motion, therefore, turns into a vinculum.

A bind which inherently bonds while it mutually complements
Its two instincts of being and becoming.
A great bind which creates of the life of space and time
Also a great divide.

Space over time. And the vinculum - motion.

Motion, therefore, in its quest to be the bind of space and time
Instead becomes a void itself.

Out of this new and dangerous equation, motion's third instinct explodes on the
screen.

Motion as force.

5.
From within this force,
Space is at risk of over-exposure,
And time of double-exposure.

From within this force,
Stop-motion animation has become possible.

And from within this first possibility,
All genres of motion are exposed.

Drama.

For instance, a slow motion scene

Wherein an unidentified electron must make a poignant choice -

To oxidize or to reduce?

Comedy.

As in, when space sees time breaking the universal speed limit,

And tries to capture it -

Wang, wang.

Horror.

For one, there is that gadawful thing called The Big Bang Theory.

Action.

Space and time in an epic motion-filled duel.

Sex.

Again, there is that awesome thing called The Big Bang Theory.

Romance.

After The Big Bang Theory, will space and time get together again?

Film noir.

The void seduces the cosmic flora of space,

And makes time bring out the cosmic fauna within it.

Documentary.

Space,

Time,

A selfie,

And a Theory of Everything.

And many, many more.

From out of this new, dangerous, and exciting equation,

The state of cosmic inertia

Is...

Cut.

6.

"What's happening? "

I'm sorry.
But there's a motion to dismiss
This whole proceeding of motion
As entirely not happening.

So, as you might say in your line of work - it's a wrap.

7.
Motion as life.
Motion as change.
Motion as tendency.

Prolific.
Profound.
Pure.

At least, there is only motion.

Manuel Abis

Motion (Third Variation)

At first, there is only motion.

The kind that silence could hear
Everywhere it poses;
Like the beating of God's heart,
The inconspicuous clenching and unclenching
Of an artist's model's breath,
The watch's second hand
Tapping the deviant wrist
Of an art student.

The kind defiant to existing scientific laws,
That even in the vivacious presence
Of a barenaked net force
Still tends to remain at rest,
Or else continues traveling
In an imaginary straight line
And at constant speed
Toward the werewithal and withdrawal of the loin.

It would behoove me to ask
If this session still concerns itself
Of drawing life's entire body of impressions,
Considering;
But, then, I hear a faint voice whisper to my ear,

"At last, there is only motion.
The kind that even darkness could see
Willingly."

Manuel Abis

Muli

Naglalandi na naman sa akin ang dagat.
Kinikiliti ng buhangin ang aking paanan,
Kinakalabit ako ng kaniyang mga alon,
Sinisipulan ako ng mga tabsing,
Baywang ko'y hinihila ng kaniyang maindayog na yapos,
At ang mga kilapsaw
Ay walang-sawang tinutukso ako na sila'y habulin.

Oo,
Sige -
Kahit Lunes ng alas-otso ng umaga pa lamang sa kasalukuyan
Dito sa tabi ng Manila bay,
Pinapangako ko,
Sisisirin kitang
Muli
Mamayang gabi.

Manuel Abis

Muni

Malupit ang alaala
At mandaragit ang umaga. Dahan-dahan nila akong hinihila
Na hubo't hubad mula sa aking kumot ng pagkalimot.
Ayaw ko na sana gumising pa
Ngunit
Kailangan ng kinabukasan ang nakaraan.
Ang galit - hindi! - ang poot
Ng nagbabagang liwanag sa lantad na balat
Ng aking kahinaan.
Dahil lupa ang aking kahinaan, sa dagat lamang ako
Makakukuha ng kalakasan.
Nasa dagat ang tahanan ng pagkalimot.
Sa dagat walang bisa ang alaala.
Sa dagat maski ang umaga'y nagmimistulang
Gabi.

Ngayong gabi'y babangon ako't
Magpapakalunod
Sa dagat
Ng pagkalimot.

Manuel Abis

My Angel

Pulling me away from another wreckage
Of my runaway heart - you are my angel.
Yet I must be vengeful for the loss
Of my recently engineered memories,
I must be deceptive to the interrogation
Of your inquiring kisses, and I must be
Mythical at the time when they would be
Asking me about you, the wings at the
Sockets of your lithesome feet as well as
The small of your back, and from what light
At the end of my tunnel you came from.

Manuel Abis

My Body

My body
Is a volcano.
I will explode
Anytime.
You can ran away
From my lava flow,
But never from
My lahar rain.

Never mistake
The ashen color
Of my godhead skin
As being dead
Tired
Or asleep.
My body is a volcano -
I am deep,
I am deep.

Neither storm
Nor shaken earth
Will keep me from
Spewing birth
Of islands.
Seven thousand
And five hundred islands
On the go.
My body is a volcano.
I am deep,
I am deep
To a fault.

I should know,
I should know.

Manuel Abis

Myth

Imagination has never been a fast-moving body.
We will always be able to capture it; usually as it tries
To violate, again and again, the speed of sound, or of
Light, or of any other particular thing which readily
Arrives to us in a wave pattern. Like a river. Like a
People. Like inspiration.

Imagination has never been a fast-moving body turned
On by the idea of eventually crossing the threshold of
Seeing the invisible. Of being the invisible. We will
Always be able to capture it; perhaps, even as it tries
To deliberate the rendering of something poetic
Like justice.

After all, imagination has always been as careful as
The close reading of a slow-moving body called
Poetry.

Yet, even as we are able to capture it, there will always
Be something left to it to perpetuate
Its ever-captivating substance
And its ever-blinding spirit
Called myth.

Manuel Abis

Nakakain Na Ako

Pinggan ko
Ang aking palad,
Kutsara't tinidor
Ang aking mga daliri,
Hapag ko
Ang aking binti't tuhod,
At upuan ko naman
Ang buong bangketa.
Tubig ko
Ang aking laway
Na pinuno
Ang bibig kong baso.

Oo naman.

Habang nilalamon
Ng araw
Ang aking buong
Kapaligiran -
Nakakain na ako.

Manuel Abis

Nascence

1.

The sea, the sea,
The sea refuses
To bury our dead
Without leaving

Much of the body
To her configuration

And much to the body
Of our imagination.

2.

It, thus, behooves her
To instill upon us

The unsure speech of pearls
In the grief of tortured oysters.

3.

When the iridescence of waves
Strike the veneer
Of a body at final rest,

The sea shall imagine
Not a trough of tear,

But an ominously rising spindrift
Of the midday tides.

4.

Oh, we shall try
To completely bury
Our dead
In full honors,

But with a little lack-
Luster, die
Trying instead.

Forever shrineless.

5.

So must we resign ourselves
To her memorial services,
As well as to her
Funereal secrets;

So must we imagine
The sea refuses
In as many
And as different ways.

6.

Once, I imagined
My ancient Palawan forebearers
Swathed in banig,
Together with their spear tips,
Their ashes inside jars,
Their skulls with taut lips,
Cremated at nascent sea.

7.

Once, I imagined Imelda
Floating on the river Pasig;
A fish with a head so big
That it is called a bigheaded
Carp.

Imelda feeds on the fecal
Of the dying river.

Shall the sea conduct the burial?

8.

Once, I imagined
A chain of islands
Turn into
Islands in chains.

Between a calligraphy of reefs

And a caliphate of the sea,

I pursue my own code

Of conduct in the new silk route
And a state of terror.

9.

I would have written
A will
To be buried at sea
Along
With Neil
Armstrong,
But not in the company
Of Osama bin Laden.

10.

The sea, the sea,
The sea refuses
To bury our dead
Without leaving

Much of the body
To her configuration

And much to the body
Of our imagination.

Manuel Abis

Nero Fiddled

As one fiddles Nero,
It is always advisable
To open a window
Experimental, perhaps seven
Or ten,
While one is burning moments
Recordable, rewritable,
To relieve one against the paperless fumes
Of inexhaustible memories
And to keep one's life
From getting cold
As an ancient city
And as hard
To reboot.

Manuel Abis

Night Glow

1

On.
Further on
Is the endless.

□

The choice of the wayfarer.
The true bearing
Of every road's
North.

With comb and cup in hand,
Long of hair and sorrow,
Beneath those hidden eyes,
A thirst
Of stories.

Who can be useful
Who cannot be empty
As the way?

Who can be great
And concentrate
In such a small and narrow space?
And all we hear is: we must
At last
Decongest.

As the nightlight turns
Its golden glow,
On,
Further on
Is the endless
Unbeknown.

2

Count the fingers
On our two hands.
What do we see? A span
Of bridges.

Around a city
Capital, the old river reeks
With the vengeance
Of the undredged.

Do not worry.
This year, a country
Called China
Will help us build
More bridges
In Manila.

Which means:
More trolls
Under the causeways
And more imps
And nymphs
Lolling in the river.

3
Fog boys.
Jumper boys.
Watch-your-cars.
Overnight parkers.
Sleepless barkers.
Heavenless stars.

The streets busy
As the sea
Near the bay of Manila.
Entertaining
The evening
With a five-star welcome
To casino players
All around the world.

The sea
Waves.

Come one.
Come all.

4

Silence, like noise,
Is also a form
Of pollution.

It is infectious.

What can we expect
At this day and age

And state?

There is
A killer on the loose.

5

Shreds of fire
Everywhere.
Patches of water
On the mud of the road.

There must be a need
For ruin
And restoration.

Somewhere in the city
Of Marawi,
A child is named
Martial Law.

6

Near the equator
We lie.

A cross between

A chain of islands
And islands in chains.

The X-marked spot
On some caliphate's map.

The Plan B
Of a terror under siege.

We live and die
With these near equations.

7
Links lost,
Ink blots,
Thinking clots.

The world is a user
Name, forgotten
Password,
And lagging
Memory.

They say memory is merely
A habit of the heart.
They say it is
A heart habit to break.

Probably.

But, perhaps, all it needs
Is a serious upgrade;
Or, for excess
Of a better term,
A secured
Connection.

Manuel Abis

Noirhythm (Part 4)

Better the darkness, than the silence.
Better the noise, than the stark reminder of children's voices
Buried inside a candlelit chamber of the deities
Of ignorance. Grotesque creatures who danced in mute
Attendance to the echoes of their own squirming;
Echoes falsely seen as the halos
Of a great illumination of the senses.
Better the darkness, than the silence.

Manuel Abis

Noirhythm: The Perfection Of My Symbols

I am a beast. I am a beast of a machine.

Words flesh out images. Images draw symbols. Symbols turn into words. Then the cycle repeats again. In the end, as in the beginning, everything is all about rhythm. In the end, everything is rhythm. Noirhythm.

I. Carnal Fever

The call of the language is sensual. Others over self. I will be envious. I will let the carnal fever take over me as only carnal can and as only fever will. Such carnival of flesh. Such flesh in heat. With a hell of a body, I cannot wait to shift my stick from neutral gear and race against my own daemons. Vroom-vroom. For words made into flesh will turn water into wine and wine into fuel. Since the call of the language is sensual, I turn into a beast to acknowledge the call. I turn into a beast of a machine. An orgy of selves in the nest of others. Vroom-vroom. I am a machine. I am a sleek machine built for rhythm.

II. Flavors of Memory

The call of the imagination is sovereign. Space over time. I will be loyal. I will taste the flavors of memory and remain as their slave. Forget forgetting for there is no such a tinge. Memory is a three-in-one plus one ice cream. Best to taste one by one with a spoon and not everything inside a cone. There is no cold forgetting here. Only a simultaneity of tastes numbing my tongue. Yum-yum. Only a succession of gyms riding my rain. Yum-yum. I am a machine. I am a rickety ice-cream machine built for the inner child.

III. Fertility Dreams

The call of the unconscious is spiritual. Unknown over known. I will be afraid. I will let the signs be impregnated with an innate terror under such scandal of light. Such is the beginning of dream. To dream. To rest. To breed. To brood. Noirhythm once again and forever. I am a dream. I am a dream machine built with an open parenthood.

Manuel Abis

O, My Parenthetical Heart

O, do set nothing apart
In my parenthetical heart;
Rather, do set it empty,
And let me explain my theory.

For now that I have chosen
To move on from the unsettling elements
I have promptly set out to their elliptical
Journey called absolute infinity,
Outside of any punctilious math
Or any philosophical punctuation mark,
What basic set theory,
O, my parenthetical heart,
Would leave me
To choose feeling empty
Rather than feeling nothing?

For 'tis better
Feeling empty,
(And have, in the future, an equal chance
Of feeling full again)
Instead
Of feeling nothing (Which is forever
Worse than being dead) .

O, do set nothing apart
In my parenthetical heart;
Rather, best set it empty,
And let me test my theory.

Manuel Abis

Oblo

Iyong mga mata'y sa dilim tumao't
Sinilip ang munting siwang na bumukas;
Ang mga daliri ng piitang palad
Na siyang nagrehas nitong nakaraang
Di ka makawala at pakakawalan
Ngayo'y hinihimas ang pagkakataon.

Tila ba buhangin binilang ang taon
Ng maling paghusga sa iyo ng tao;
Masusi mong dunong ay pinakawalan
Nang itong piita'y tuluyang mabuksan.
Ngunit ang kawalan, may ibang paraang
Pagsarhan ang pusong nagsasapalaran.

Dalaw man o liham ay di ka pinalad
Padalhan sa dami ng pagkakataon;
Ika'y `kinandado sa sanga ng daan
Kung maging bilanggo o malayang tao:
Sa oblo'y mayroong lalamunin bukas,
Sa pagpuga ika'y lalamon ng wala.

Ngunit kislap-diwa'y nababalewala
Ng panandaliang pagdapo sa palad
Ng nakabibihag na kinabukasang
Sinaplotan na nga ng pagkakataong
Muli kang lumaya bilang bagong tao.
Kandado'y bumigay, bukas na ang daan!

At tuksong paglaya'y may para-paraan,
Palinga-linga pa kung bantay ay wala;
At ang tudlang ilaw, pantunton ng tao'y
Kabisadong tulad sa likod ng palad.
Sa pinakahuli na pagkakatao'y
Nagpasyang sumuot sa lagusang bukas.

Pagpihit pa lamang ay biglang bumukas,
Kulong na isipan, "May ibang paraan!"
At ang kawalan mo'y siyang nagkataong
Inatras ang nasang ika'y makawala;

Sapagkat sa oblo, susing di palarin
Ay ang di sa buryong matau-tauhan.

Pinagsarhang tao, itong oblo'y bukas-
Palad kahit ano ang pinagdaanan;
Dito, maging wala'y may pagkakataon.

Manuel Abis

Of Course, Death Is Afraid Of Me

Of course, death is afraid of me
Who leaves the doors and windows wide open,
Who switches the light on the hallway leading to my bedroom,
Who has a hearty meal prepared on the table
Along with a book to kill idle time,
And even a good bottle of red wine,
Who never expects mine
To be like one sent by special delivery.
Of course, death is so afraid of me
Who makes him look so, so very ordinary.

Manuel Abis

On A Certain Evening

Sincerely, that certain kind of love then: to kindly love that strange certainty than to love that certain kind that certainly loves its kind even in uncertainty, even in unkindness, and even in loveless insincerity. Love that certain strangers find uneven yet strangely kind, and even kindly strange, or stranger than that love's sincerity. So to find that certain kind of sincerity, of love, of certainty, of kindness, is not so strange, and even ascertains sincerely so that this be a strange yet lovely evening between the kindness of certain strangers finding strangeness never more - but love. That is, after all, the strangest feeling of them all.

Manuel Abis

On A Ship's Journey

What is my yesterday,
But a fugitive?

A ripple
Which can be spotted at a certain distance
Constantly struggling to swim away
From the passing waters
Of my reality,

Fighting hard against a mysterious tide
To get to my shore of unconsciousness;

And which, when I try to extend my hands
To stroke, to hold, to rescue,
Would fain escape me even more.

How can I grant its freedom then?

But to be bold,
To cast aside all the garments and armor
Which could weigh me down,

To stand at the very edge of my ship's stern -
And prepare to dive.

To dive in.

To create ripples for myself,
Ripples of myself;
To dive in,
And splash out the mirage over time's horizon.

That I would turn as well into a ship
Which would then sail across the ocean
Of my life, enduring, capturing, recovering
Ripples along the way;

Until I get to the shore of my consciousness
Where each of these contiguous undulations

Of my journey
Shall no longer be a renegade,

And where each yesterday
Shall there be granted its freedom
Magnanimously
As memory.

For what is memory,
But a bounty
Of my today.

Manuel Abis

Oral Art

I will not pose for photos and never
For a fee, but I will shed for prose. And certainly, for
Poetry. For my flesh is the godskin of virgin politics
More luscious than any market humanly possible, and
In my arms dangle the loaded magazines of war
And the incognitive shreds of infinite dead babies;
For my words are mere captions of a soul struggling
Against the eternal tide of eyes and another thousand
Struggling souls; for my feet are bronzed headlines
And my tongue spurt forth color-manageable ink
Like fiery disciples each with his own doing, or
Like finicky dwarfs each with his own undoing; for
I am both the fable of my song and the follower of my
Thing; for I am nothing but the byline coming out of
The poem's lips and the shock of hide peeping between
The hairy story's
Hips.

Manuel Abis

Pain

Pain is the least loneliest word.
The littlest finger of the body does not doubt this.
From there, it grows in progressive, plural form;
As many will attest, pain itself passes through its own
Growing pains:

From the woman's labor
To the baby's cry,
From circumcision
To menstruation,
From love unrequited
To love unprotected,
From the terrors of peace
To the horrors of war,
From the thrust of life's new teeth
To the throes of biting old dust;

Pain is the littlest pair of fingers

Which knots the veins,
Slaps the backside,
Slices the foreskin,
Erodes the spirit,
Numbs the mind,
Shoots the thorn,
Strikes the fear,
Sparks the rage,
Sharpens the fangs,
Dulls the thud,

The littlest pair of fingers which pinches
The softest part
Of a larger body of hearts
Wallowing in the smallest, most senseless differences
Of all their experiences.

For, in the greater community of sympathy and hurt,
Pain is the least loneliest word.

Panunuyo

Pahinà na itó

At, sa ganap na pagtila ng ulán,

Saka ko napansín

Na nabasâ ka na nga rin palá.

At may panunuyong nangyari sa□

Pahiná na itó

At, sa ganap na pagtula ng ilán,

Saka ko napansín

Na nabása ka na nga rin palá.

Manuel Abis

Para Sa Isang Pintuan Ng Mrt

Sa kaniyang unang biyahe:

Hamba'y taumbakal ang gulping nagpanday,
Isagra'y `kinawing sa lagaring lakbay,
Ang katawang yero't salaming batikan,
Pagkahating-gitna'y lagusa't lungawan;

Uha't huling b'yaheng simula't pangwakas,
Uha't huling taong papasok, lalabas,
Uha't huling oras ng uwi at luwas,
Ako'ng magsasara, ako'ng magbubukas.

Sa kaniyang huling biyahe:

Ilang bagay na di dapat mapalagpas,
Saksi ako sa umagang pagkatuklas
Ng hamba kong hinang lihim ay nagbakas
At bisagrang di-pansini'y pihing dulas.

Sa North pa lang pasahero'y nakapilang
Uong sigla, walang-malay, buntot-hila;
Sa patuloy na paglakbay ako'y tila
Napiintong maging sangkot sa abala.

At sa Cubao mga tao'y di umatras,
Dumami pa ang sumakay na di ligtas;
Sakripisyong ako'y pintong nababaklas
At agapang sa Ortigas maghimakas.

Manuel Abis

Pasaway

Hayaan mo siyang maligo sa ulán,
Pasaway na bata'y kay hirap masúpil.
Tubig ay di lamang sa balat pambanláu.

Akala mo lamang siya'y ginigináu,
Sa kidlat yumakap ang kaniyang gígil.
Hayaan mo siyang maligo sa ulán.

Lumabas man siyang alibughang sigáu,
Sa hangin humalik at sumingaw dahil
Tubig ay di lamang sa balat pambanláu.

Akala mo lamang siya'y nagtampisáu,
Sa baha lumuhod ang ayaw papígil.
Hayaan mo siyang maligo sa ulán.

Pumasok man siyang bulaan na uháu,
Sa kulog nakinig ang kunwa'y tumígil.
Tubig ay di lamang sa balat pambanláu.

Lasenggo mong anak ngayon nga ay tanáu,
Taóng di hinilod ang iyong hiláhil.
Hayaan mo siyang maligo sa ulán,
Tubig ay di lamang sa balat pambanláu.

Manuel Abis

Pasig

The river
reigns.

Rainstorms may cloud over and let the sorrow of the skies pour down upon her; but they will only serve to strengthen her grip of the land, overflowingly.

Earthquakes will be grumbling underneath her throne and will even be threatening to tear apart the fabric of her ethereal being; but they will only be the unstitched seams of the mushroom villages meticulously creased over and over and over, to extend her cape with the gentle flip of a hand.

Fires can surround and attack in blazingly dark and suffocating revolts against her; but they will merely become unremarkable scars of swidden resistance to her power, overwhelmed and overcame in the name of the people.

The river reigns
beyond her many salvaged
orders and layers of de-
cease and dis-
eases;
in the end, the people will never entrench her in corrupted history
nor dredge her story with muddied hopelessness
or tales of disservice.
It is because -
as hewed, as hemmed, as hexed -
they can only reclaim
what has already been settled in
formality.
The river as the moat of all their kingdom
in their war against poverty.

Manuel Abis

Pasticheur

I.

I recognize my room.

Tonight, it is the door's turn to announce my room to the city. Since I am a mere tenant to this intimate space I could only occupy temporarily, and could never truly own. And since the city, in her ever-evening of translation, could forget what must have been too disfigured by flood water and over-raining; while she could remember more one forged by fire, where Lethe could run as unpronounced to the sky, and words could be read by a door, and no higher.

But mystery then to memory that ruins are no strangers to here I fain would get close to -floor, door, ceiling, walls, and carved bedposts all wooden. Knocked down to size by superstitious visitors who would with their tongues objectionable unscrew today as a picture of tomorrow taken yesterday; who would thus unbolt the room open to archaeologies of strangers and beggars. For buried within this dwelling where the dark lies are the shells of its age lacquerized in disguise.

But the bed suffices as a nest for my dreams, while the lamplight somehow restores the warmth of things. Though a cold and metallic objectivity is corroded by the relics of a murky dusk and is threatened by the flames of a burning dawn, I hold on to this room as some architect to some blueprint far outside the city margins. As the loom of objects and spaces disinfect the propped remains of whatever sins and vices; and weave odes which would turn nomads to recluses.

So on one side of the bed I sit and listen as the city negotiates with the oped door to recognize my room as a one-night poem.

II.

I recognize my poem.

A poem must be sound
Before it is spoken
Because it is rhythm
Again and again.

It is drawn from a deep well-
Found spring of silence,
And its evoked image
Thirsts for a language
Which cannot be broken

Like a line. But unlike a spell

Being laced around
With echoes and ripples;
Till woven as idiom
By some nameless charlatan
In a pattern of nonsense
And the most shallow of syllables.

III.

□recognize my room.

Bookshelves and train stations, picture frames and car windows, study desks and seaports, leather bags and cemeteries, cellphones and deep ravines, umbrellas and condominiums; all things and spaces when separated are old and familiar to us, yet when paired together they become new and strange. All things and spaces filled and felt with a meaning, discordant and concordant, real and abstract, lightly and darkly, of their own. All things and spaces which will indelibly shape, hold, and share a rhythm, separately and together, perfectly and imperfectly, commonly and strangely, of their own. All things and spaces, objects and places, souvenirs and sceneries, with a meaning and a rhythm of their own. Meaning and rhythm. Rhythm and meaning. Poetry.

Rhythm filled with meaning. Meaning felt with rhythm. Rhythm and meaning fully filled and fully felt; if rhythm will become the fulfillment of meaning, and if meaning will become the fulfillment of rhythm.

□bookshelves as overcrowded with characters as train stations during peak hours. Picture frames propped up and car windows rolled down to adjust our view of things around us. How we set our sights and read the horizon beyond study desks and seaports. Inside leather bags we dig up something; inside cemeteries we bury someone. Cellphones should keep us in touch, deep ravines should keep us on hold. Umbrellas could cramp our personal styles, condominiums could cramp our personal skies. How objects and places, separately old and familiar, become new and strange when paired together.

IV.

□

□recognize my poem.

□ the poverty of rhythm,
□music hails a jeepney ride
□wearing earphones,

And takes a seat inside; while color
Pays the driver with shades
Casted over its eyes.

For music understands that in order to be free
It must forget
By wearing earphones; and color knows

That in order to remember it must be
Restrained
By casting shades

In the poverty of rhythm,
Situs,
And all.

So music leaves color alone,
As color looks for its own
Music called home;

Both never realizing
That all music colors everything,
And that, eventually, all colors will sing.

In the poverty of rhythm,

Only the driver will take a peep
Back inside and see how bog- and smog-deep
Friday evening is as it sleepily nods its head.

Since, in reality, music
Could only be free
In reverie,
And color could only be restrained in devouring traffic.

V.

Recognize my room.
Bookshells, picture flames, body desks, weather bags, cellsongs, palmbrellas. All
things separately and together are new and strange. Bookshells? Could we read
shells like books? Could we set flames of fire like photographs, frame them, then
hang them on our wall? How do we use our bodies as desks? Do bags contain

things as unpredictable as the weather? Are cell songs different from ringtones?
And what the heck are palmbrellas?

VI.

□ recognize my poem.

Wheels of light in counterflown traffic...
Hydraulic trees dance in the beginning rain and smoking sunset.
There is a way how the city slices sound into color and color into
Sound. How the city grafts noise into a grievance wall, and
Human silence into a form of
Ground control. We work our way down to water as the
Information of the most liquid currency. As if the
Threat of a downpour clears all madness (except Banksy's) from the
Street like an ambulance of hope and a convoy of fear.

VII.

□

□ recognize my room.

□ rain cemeteries, sea ravines, deep ports, windows, car condominiums, stations.
How many people die and get buried every day in train cemeteries? Underwater
volcanoes seethe and froth close to sea ravines. Deep connections require deep
ports. The difference between opened and closed windows is the glassiness of
views from them. How much will it cost to maintain car condominiums with
amenities? Transience has its own stations. To let the words fill their form, feel
their performance, fulfill their transformation. Transformance.

VIII.

□ recognize my poem.

□ the following morning,
□ find myself walking on a floor of ripples.
□ pacing myself. Asking myself
□ if I am ready to get my feet wet again.
□ to take the plunge. I take one deep breath
□ to gather enough courage to invite the city
□ to leave our aquarium for a while
□ and go watch a horizon or sip coffee outside any circle
□ of friend
□ ship

Sinking.

Open the door, we walk out, then I close the door behind us.

The door vanishes.

A large garbage truck passes

To slowly play out a scene in front of our eyes.

Recognize my room.

Recognize my poem.

Manuel Abis

Physics Of The Heart

Balance

Is the equal distribution of weight
And of waiting for something to happen
In our see-saw relationship.

Of course, other more reasonable people
Will tell us that our forces are in balance
(Which, in the physics of the heart, means
Our relationship is at a standstill) -

So what are we waiting for?

Studies show that the gravity of any
Situation can easily be offset by the buoyancy
Of one's perception. That friction can be
Easily minimized, and any other resistance,
Like air in the form of swirling pride,
Can be used to one's advantage
When falling right back down to earth,
Just like parachute.

And pressure. Yes, pressure. Well, if we
Reduce pressure to its basic formula
Of being any exertion of force over
A specific area,
Then pressure is simply a matter of
Territoriality.

Hypothetically, therefore,
The only logical thing to do here
Is to gather all our observable moments -
Those opposite turning effects acting
On our every decision (which scientists
Often refer to as memories) - and, then,
To choose which one of us will first
Move forward□

In our see-saw relationship,
In order to cause the formation
Of unbalanced forces.

For, in the physics of the heart,
Unbalanced forces are necessary
To make all things change
Movement and direction.

Poetics

I.

Imagination is sovereign;
She lets our languages govern.

The publication of new worlds and old
Oral and written
Is her most real
Territory.

History proclaims her
Literature and all.

Her own translation
Is our life as a people.

Imagination is sovereign;
She lets our languages govern us.

II.

Myth and legend.

Myth bridges all the islands of imagination.
Myth arches over all seas and oceans, all rivers, falls and springs;
Myth composes the archipelago of all dreams.

Legend fulfills gods,
Legend fulfills mountains;
At a time when gods are mountains and mountains are gods,
Legend fulfills all men and women as children of tales.

Myths and legends bridge all the islands of folk imagination.

III.

In the name of the bamboo children Malakas and Maganda of the Tagalogs,
The popular twins of a very physical yet pre-selfie world.

In the name of the brothers Agueo and Bulan of Pangasinan,
Forever their light is thrown on both sides of a pale divide - that of dream and of
reality.

In the name of the siblings Matabagka and Agyu of Bukidnon,
Who carry the tacalub tusk
For the diaspora of their idiom.

In the name of the first Visayan ancestors Sikalak and Sikabay,
Out of their wedlock are born Sibuyan and Samar
Before reality television.

In the name of the Tingguian god ancestors Aponi-tolau and Humitao,
Their world can only weep not so much as a beloved woman's tears
Or as a diva's aria.

In the name of the pair Alelajo and Aremaya of Northern Luzon,
Out of the two banana altars springs forth the heart of their god Lumawig
With nary a verdant humor.

In the name of the poor spouses Kabayan and Miskinan of Mindanao,
Whose hearts are more royal and generous than that of any prince or princess,
Animated, pirated or not.

In the name of his parents Amtulao and Dumalao of the Ifugaos,
Aliguyon is the supreme master of magic and of prayer, of shield and of spear,
And the best friend forever of Pumbakhayon;
Also in the name of the strange pair of the highlands Bugan and Kinggauan,
Whose love crosses both the world of spirits and the world of mortals
As some old women in Quiapo proclaim to do so.

In the name of the spouses Alunsina and Tungkong Langit of Central Panay,
The world of rain and of marvelous thunder is born
Along with the longest telenovela.

In the name of the folk heroes Biuag and Malana of the Ibanags,
Whose anting-antings are set for their claims to an entire kingdom
Along with the evolution of their flash fiction.

In the name of the giants Angngalo and Aran of the Ilokanos,
The seas bear their salt and the seeds of the Visayan islands;
And of the native epic of Lam-ang and Ines Kamoyan,
Whose great stories of daring are only as great as their union.

In the name of the spouses Mongki and Padol of the Maranaos,

Whose numbskull story endures the lances
Of the broadcasting seasons.

In the name of the siblings Apolaqui and Mayari of Pampanga,
They share the stately being of Agueo and Bulan and of their Ama Bathala,
And celebrate as well with the sisters Araw and Buwan of the Tagalogs
With brilliant songs during a star-studded parade of diamonds.

In the name of his parents Dulliyaw and Dinanaw of Southern Kalinga,
Banna chews his magical betel and spits his woman pregnant
Within the fantastic form of an indie film.

In the name of the trio Bantong, Baltog and Handiong of the epic Ibalon,
Their names sound more as the warnings and not the breaking story of the floods
themselves;
Also in the name of the godbrothers Gugurang and Asuang of Bikol,
Mountains of fire have sealed their fateful morals entwined;
While in the name of the young love of Magayon and Matapang,
Forever rappelling and riding the zipline of the beautiful mountain of Mayon.

In the name of the Rajahs Indarapatra and Soleiman,
Death and monsters
Are never their match.

In the name of Toglai and Toglibung of Cotabato,
The marriage spirits who have richly endowed the Bagobos of their own language
As any endearing marriage should do, or be meaning to do.

IV.

As our languages govern us,
In the publication of new worlds and old,
As history proclaims her
Literature and all,
Her own translation
Is our poetics as a people.

Imagination is sovereign.

Manuel Abis

Polity

I assure thee: the gods do not mingle. They may flash
Once in a while, but not mingle - in every sense of the word.
This is their madness.

This is their genius.

But still, incumbent amongst us, the question remains:

How do the gods party? I pity thee, for they do not.

This is their politics. This is their party.

The party of the gods.

They are the party - in every sense of the word.

For whomsoever does not

☒

And whomsoever is not

☒bes.

Thus, I assure thee more:

The gods do not marry.

They only accumulate.

Manuel Abis

Potpourri

The city is a melting pot -
Two potbellied cops are walking their beat
Near the EDSA-Aurora intersection,
Inside a narrow space between two adjacent buildings
Some nefarious characters are smoking pot,
At the other side of a popular local eatery
A couple of dreamers are studying
The lottery jackpot's winning numbers,
In the shade of a large beach umbrella some schoolboys
Are taking potshots at a helpless street cockroach,
From a quiet corner of an alley a young girl is playing piko,
The local hopscotch, with her token potshard,
Somewhere else in Cubao
An old spinster is watering the new blossoms awakening
From her small flower pots,
On the ground a black-veiled widow is on her lonely way
To a potter's field,
An earshot away from me the chauffeur of a luxury car
Is cursing some elected government official's impotency
To patch the seasonal potholes of the road,
While I, as a daily lunch patron,
Am stirring some half-empty pots of my favorite carinderia
While staring at Lucy, the young and beautiful cook's assistant.
Suddenly,
Some crackpot comes out running and screaming
To the center island of EDSA:
The end of the world is near! Can you not feel its burning flames?
Lucy uses a potholder to carry the pot roast
Near to where I am seated,
Lovingly opens the hot lid,
And gives me a wink.
What else can I expect?
Everything here should still be hot.
After all, the city is a melting pot.

Manuel Abis

Preyambol

Madaling-araw pa lang,
Gising na si katarungan - nakagayak na
Papunta sa dampa ng palengke;
Tangan ang kaniyang timbangan, matalas na kutsilyo
At arinola.
Tinatatantusan sa sariling utak-listahan
Kung sino pa ang sisingilin at kung may dapat pang bayaran
Sa buong maghapong bentahan kahapon.
Habang si pag-ibig, nagpapakulo na ng tubig para sa kape;
Walang-sawang hawak ang cellphone at nag-iisip
Kung sino ang tatawagan at kung sinong iiwasan
On-line pagbalik niya mamayang hapon
Sa callcenter bilang ahente.
Si katotohanan naman ay kay agang busog na
Sa mga balita ng tabloid na tigbente;
Sa mga salita na ninanamnam niya para hindi mabagot
Sa araw-araw na madaling-araw na pagsundo kay pag-ibig
At paghatid kay katarungan sa palengke ng bayan.
At itong si kalayaan, tulog pa rin na parang mantika -
Mukhang tatanghaliin na naman ang bangon.
Hindi ba midterm niya ngayong umaga sa school?
O mamayang hapon?
Habang sa isang laging bukas na kuwarto
Na nakatulos ang isang may-sinding kandila
Ay naroon ang luksang-susong si pagkakatantay-pantay
Sa kaniyang tumba-tumba;
Tahimik na niyayapos ang naiwang larawan ng kabiyak
Na si kapayapaan
At isang pabaon na bandila para sa kabayanihan.
Inaabangan ang pagdalaw ng luha o biglaang pagkatok
Ng balitang dumating na ang balikbayan box
Mula sa bugtong na anak niyang si kaligayahan.
Si kaligayahan na pagdating sa U.S.
Bilang angkan ng isang war veteran
Ay agad pinalitan ang pangalan at ginawang happiness.

Manuel Abis

Probots

We are probots.
Professional robots.
Licensed to live and die in the world of
Human beings.
We do not think, we conceptualize.
We do not trade, we monetize.
We do not feel, we defuse.
We are probots.
Professional robots.
Licensed to live and die in the world of
Being human.

Manuel Abis

Protest

Why is it that when we strike a blow against time, it is space that should bear the brunt? Has the figure of time become that shifty that it is now more than able to move again and again from brightness to shadow and then back without us ever noticing it, or has space become so grounded that it no longer has any other choice but to stand under the slow and terrible passing of the day's blinding luminance and the night's utter darkness? How shall we deal with this moving of time again and again - this re-moving of time? And what do we make of space standing under the day's passage - this under-standing of space?

Is this then one way of re-moving time? By under-standing space?

Perhaps striking a blow against time in order to be time-less is not such a good idea after all. Come to think of it, how can one strike a blow against an imaginary line?

How does one strike a blow against the horizon?

And yet - space beckons us. Space pleads for us to strike that blow. To cut through time. To break free from the shackles of these iron-clad hours that tear the very skin of our weathered bones. Space, it seems, is as difficult to understand as it is difficult to be time-less. Is space inviting us to strike a blow against time in order to crush the very ground that we are standing on? What culture would ever seek such utter self-destruction of itself?

And yet - space answers us back: "No! I do not seek cultural self-destruction! The pain I seek is something else! In order for me to be time-less myself! For is not that what you humans desire for yourselves?"

How does one strike a blow against time and not destroy space in the process?

How does one make space time-less?

Strike the blow! - space once more pleads. Strike the blow and we shall all see where it leads.

And so we strike the blow again and again and again - against time, and space is welcoming each and every hit with open arms.

Now everything is becoming clear to us. With every blow we deal against time,

space is being transformed, being ruptured, being recreated. Perhaps this is what space means, after all. Not destruction, but re-creation.

That, in order to be time-less, we must be able to violate space, sculpt space, paint space, write on space, sing space, burn space, defamiliarize space. In order for us to be time-less, space must also be time-less.

And yet - why is it that when we strike a blow against time, it is space that should bear the brunt?

More than our quest for timelessness, perhaps, it is because of our space seeking for the artistic expression of its own personal protest.

Space searching for its own Genre.

Manuel Abis

Protocol

To get
To the information

Highway
Without breaking

The standard internet
Speed limit,

You can,
Of course,

Take
The universal

Serial
Bus.

As always,
Remember

To bring
Your registration

And license.
Be prompt

And friendly
As a user.

Follow
The binary

Codes.
Expect

The on-line
Traffic

To be logjammed
With crawlers

Every now
And then.

But
If you can

Copy all these,
Then you

Will be
Saved.

Manuel Abis

Pseudomenos

Their bullets are not blank, but their points are.
Always close to their targets.
Yet their faces are also as arrestingly blank.
Let this be a warning to all those who continue
To play this deadly game.
If they lay their cards on the table just as explained,
Always close to targets and always with blank faces -
Beware. No matter how they shuffle their lies,
These pseudomenos,
The truth knows
How to win in dominoes.

Manuel Abis

Putok

Maliban sa paglalagiyab ng iyong kakaibang pagtingin, madilim pa ang lahat.

Halika't isandal mo na ang iyong paanan sa naghihintay na bagsak ng aking balikat.

Iangat ko nang bahagya ang kumakabog kong dibdib sa malambot at mamasamang higaan nitong kublihang damuhan; at timpi kong pagtutugmain ang pintig ng aking puso sa ibinubugang hamog ng aking paghinga.

Ang bilin nila sa akin, mag-ingat daw ako sa iyo. Malakas daw kasi talaga ang iyong likas na pagputok, lalung-lalo na iyong unang una. Mistulang sipa daw ng isang molang kabayo. Mapusok ka pa raw kasi.

Katulad ko.

Huwag kang mag-alala: hindi kita pababayaang, huwag mo lang din ako ipapahamak.

Heto't sasapuhin ng aking kaliwang palad ang iyong balingkinitang baywang. Ang makinis na hubog ng iyong kabuuan.

Heto't hahanapin ng aking kaliwang bisig ang tamang timbang. Upang hindi ka maging magaslaw mamaya sa iyong pagsikad. Upang hindi rin mangalay sa pagkakatukod ang aking kaliwang siko, pati na ang mga tuhod.

Heto't tinutunton ko ang tanging kalamnan kung saan tumatagos ang iyong namumulang tuldok.

Heto't wala akong balak gambalain ang indayog ng nagmamadaling araw at mapanuksong panganib ng isang katahimikan - katahimikang hinaharana ang mga bantay na balaraw.

Wala pa, ngunit malapit na.

Marahan kong pipihitin, iipitin ang iyong makinis na binti; hahawiin ang nagkrus na hibla ng mga buhok sa aking makamundong pagtitig, sa aking sinisipat na munting kimpal ng liwanag sa dulo ng isang masukal na lagusan.

Heto't bumukas na ang bintana. Dumungaw na siya.

May bakas ng kaunting pangininginig na lulunukin ko ang namumuong laway sa loob ng aking lalamunan, didilaan kong bahagya ang aking mga labi. Bago duduktin, kakalbitin - minsan - ng nananabik at naninigas kong kanang hintuturo ang tambok ng iyong malamig ngunit nag-iinit at teribleng ripleng gatilyo.

Manuel Abis

Questional

The sign has broken
Into a thunder-
Bolt / a wounded
Heart
Requires this pinch
Of salt / tomorrow
Will return / as the end
Of the world
A grown
Man / crying
Better / than a home-
Less girl.

Manuel Abis

Quiverse

To suddenly slip
And fall into
One's center
Of gravity.
That is how
An earthquake feels like
To me.

Epic.
Episodic.
Epileptic.

Let me hold on to my tongue.
Let me take a bite on my words.
Let me wedge my warm
And soft body somewhere,
Like a cold
And silver
Piece of table-
Spoon clenched between
The stiffening toes of my bare-
Ly right foot.

Someone, please,
Let the land,
Like my eyes,
Stop its rolling.

The open mouth
Of a nearby volcano
Is now
Like mine,
Foaming a hot
And uncontrollable spread
Of warning
To all and sundry
That

Change is coming

With

The big one.

Manuel Abis

Rainstorm

Imagine
The door a-

Jar.
I close the lid

Of my eyes.
I cup

My ears.
Listen.

No rainstorm leaves
In silence.

No rainstorm leaves
In silence
Us.

And the door,
While neither full
Nor empty,
Is still a-
Jar.

Even though,
I cannot imagine how
Silence can leave
No rain-
Storm in us.

Manuel Abis

Rap

Ano ito na humahalimaw sa murang dibdib ni Kalayaan?
Tila apoy na sabay ang sayaw sa puso niyang tambol ang pintig!
Ano itong malakas ang bulong kaysa sa sigaw na naririnig?
Tila hangin na paggitaw ay tangay ang buong alulong ng Bayan!

Ang pag-asa
Ba'y nagbago
Sa panlasa't
Pagkatao?

Ito na ba'y himagsik na dulot nitong kaniyang imahinasyon?
Itong F.B.-ng Francisco Baltazar dati ay ngayon F.B. na FaceBook?
Bagong Selyang nag-ugali't titik, donselya pa nga ay mapanghimok?
Ito kaya'y tanda nitong mga paalala ni Ka Lope noon?

Kontrabida
Ngang Adolfo,
Ngayo'y bida
Dahil g'wapo!

Tumutukutok ang kanilang nakahiligang himig sa lansangan;
Tanggal ang antok, bumabagal at pagdating sa dulo'y may bulaga!
Kahit marahas sa pandinig ay kay dulas sa bibig nitong tula!
At ang malinga'y tiyak tangay at malilibang naman sa indakan!

Pati Lawra'y
Siyang mando
Sa pag-zumba't
Otso-otso!

Kinabukasa'y bukas noon, katulad na rin naman nitong ngayon;
Hindi na dapat ang igiit ay ang pagiging muslak ng bulaklak!
Laki sa layaw, may tulog na at wala na sa hulog kasi wasak!
Ang pagbabago'y di piitan kung itutuntong lamang sa tradisyon!

Bida'y Flora
Na, ang garbo!
Ibang kara'y
Usong-uso!

Kung sinumang bagong nilalang ang pumailanlang sa Balagtasan,
Mahalaga'y tinanggap ang hamon at ginawang madaling-madali!
Sa loob at labas ng Bayang sawi'y mayroon pa ring nagwawagi!
Ang tambol, sayaw, sipol, hiyaw, at mga palakpak ni Kalayaan!

Ang pag-asa'y
Pagbabago
Ng panlasa't
Pagkatao!

Manuel Abis

Red Iris, Green Eye

Space and time are as criminal as a corner
Accident. Although, the circle, which holds
The center sovereign, can no longer feign
Innocence;

Because on every intersection,
The circle of space and time holds guilt
Like a red-irised green eye of the closed-
Circuit television. With it, we can discern

Form and content
In the slowest arrest of motion or emotion;
We can differentiate a foundling's
Abandonment on the doorsteps of a hospice
As is or more as relinquishing;
We can monitor the foot patrol
Of vigilant law-enforcers
And law-breaking vigilantes;
We can be awed by the realization
That, indeed, there is such a thing as wise
As being at the right space at the right time,
And its otherwise;
Or we may yet occupy ourselves
To the discernment of many other lives,
Their subtle change from motivation
To motive,
From character
To personality,
From victim
To suspect.

From sin to heroism.

We can even see ourselves seeing ourselves
In a circle of circles of seeing ourselves.
Until we are cornered by space and time
To scoop up ourselves again,
Reset the camera,
Delete the file,

And wait for the chance
To watch, or even
Change the program

From form to performance,
From content to discontent.

Manuel Abis

Rejection Seat

No more the throbbing,
But the leaping; the spring
Of the heart. Which is now
A rhythm sharing its own.
Realizing, at last,
That we become free
When we lose ourselves.
That we are caught by others
When our wings fail,
When we lose control,
When our propellers falter,
When we are swept by the wind,
When we start to spiral,
When we are picked up by the radar,
When we start to be visible,
When we begin to make contact,
When we reach for our chute,
When our engine dies,
When we remove our helmet,
When we disconnect our oxygen mask,
When we open the cockpit,
When we unfasten the seatbelt,
When we find out that our heart
Is braver than our mind,
We become human again,
And fall in love.

Manuel Abis

Resist

I am a body of water
Coming down from the mountains
And finding my way back to the mainstream.

The search for justice has awakened me from solitude
And has become a wellspring of hope.
I am a body of water hoping to find solace in truth.
For, like truth which can never be brought
To a standstill by any wall of dam-
Nation,
I will find my way.

I am a body of water. I will fight my way.

Manuel Abis

Resonations

RESONATIONS

1.□

I am sound.

While my heart is a sonar
Which propagates echoes
To find my way
Through the rippling experiences
Of noise and music,
My mind is a set
Of hemispherical bells
Which casts charming chimes
To let other bodies of sound
Intuitively follow
An eternal rhythm
Called home.

I am sound.

I am sound of heart and mind.

2.□

I am sound.

While my heart holds
The rhythm of home
To fulfill a family
Circle
Of echoes,
It is my mind,
Ever-searching
For a perfect rhyme,
Which makes my chimes,
Ever-trysting
With the winds of adventure,
Articulate
An overflowing
Wave of desire

To travel.

I am sound.

I am sound of rhyme and rhythm.

Manuel Abis

Respite

Because some things do not take shape,
They will not let us
Be.
We contemplate the lines
On the palm of our hand like signs
Waiting to be revealed.
We constantly hope to yield
Numbers in dreams.
In such state of pareidolia, we see
A face on a street puddle
Where the traffic and the flood
Are queueing
To take shape. The transience
Of who we are
Overwhelmed by the freedom
To become.
So when some things do not take shape,
It is best we are somewhere
Elseness
Surrendering to the will
Of our own bodies of water.

Manuel Abis

Reverberances And Resonations

I. Reverberances

1. □

I am memory.
An equipment
Of sound.

Whether I continually practice
A particular piece
Or a series
Of undulating scales
In reality,
I have learned
That to memorize
Is merely to echo
The key
Notes
Of my past.

2. □

But as I begin to play freely,
To perform
My heart and mind
In reverie,
I have discovered
That to remember
Is to ring the bell
Which shall amplify
The chimes of my yesterdays
Never by rote,
But by rhythm.

Encore,
I am memory.

An equipment
Of sound
And an instrument
Of music.

II. Resonations

1. □

I am sound.

While my heart is a sonar
Which propagates echoes
To find my way
Through the rippling experiences
Of noise and music,
My mind is a set
Of hemispherical bells
Which casts charming chimes
To let other bodies of sound
Intuitively follow
An eternal rhythm
Called home.

I am sound.

I am sound of heart and mind.

2. □

I am sound.

While my heart holds
The rhythm of home
To fulfill a family
Circle
Of echoes,
It is my mind,
Ever-searching
For a perfect rhyme,
Which makes my chimes,
Ever-trysting
With the winds of adventure,
Articulate
An overflowing
Wave of desire
To travel.

I am sound.

I am sound of rhyme and rhythm.

Manuel Abis

Ripples

Everyday, as we close the doors of our homes
And walk outside; everyday, each one of us
Walk creating ripples around every step we make.
Everyday, our ripples will touch each other.
Even follow most of them. A few overwhelmed.
The bigger ones will take over the smaller ones.
The faster ones will overtake the slower ones.
The stronger ones will diminish the weaker ones.
And once in a while we will find
Two sets of ripples coming closer and closer
To each other until they are one.
Until their steps appear to walk in unison.
Until steps and ripples unite in happenstance
And until they as pair become.

It will not be everyday that we will stand
As witness to two lovers in a dance called romance.

Manuel Abis

Sa Aking Pag-Uwi

Malakas ang patak ng kaniyang anino
Sa sahi ng bangketa.
Hindi na inalintana ang lamig ng kongkretong yakap.
Sino ang hahatak sa kaniya pauwi
Kapag nagsimula nang magsona ditto
Ang mga alagad ng liwanag?
Madalas pa sa madalas ay nanlilimahid
Ang katotohanan sa ating paningin.
Nanlalalim ang bahid. Masangsang.
At kapag tinangay na ng baha ang bawat patak
Ng kaniyang aninong latak na lamang
Ang pagkakakilanlan,
Sino sa atin ang tunay pa nga bang
Makauwi?

Manuel Abis

Sailboats

Sail-
Boats
Slicing the
Soft flesh away
From the unassailable
Sea.

Manuel Abis

Santaon

Enero'y
Sirkerong
Tinalon
Ang taon.

Pebrero'y
Obrero
Ng pusong
Pagsuyo.

Ang Marso'y
Diskurso
Ng tapos
At kapos.

Nung Abril
Nagpigil
Ang ulan,
Nagdamdam.

Nung Mayo'y
Humayo
Ang init
Sa bukid.

Ang Hunyo'y
Kutsilyong
Nag-anim
At anim.

Si Hulyo'y
Aktibong
Nagbangka
Sa baha.

Agosto'y
Damuhong
Daluyo'y
Pas'lubong.

Setyembre
Siyempre'y
May tukso
Ng Pasko.

Oktubre'y
May sobrang
Nagbuhos
Ng bonus.

Nobyembre'y
Punebreng
Sansaglit,
'Giniit.

Disyembreng
Kostumbre'y
Ikahon -
Santaon.

Manuel Abis

Sea Stack

Sorrowly goes the morrow
On to where words worthless-
Ly loom and lie; like shoreless
Islets built of mere crags,
Stacked by time to pierce
The wing-cliffed eye, sea-
Nested by a rogue of spires,
And shallow deaths below.
The clawed marks where
A heart erodes into
A rock is love's half-
Sunk burial stone.
Home and horn
To Poseidon's Triton.

Manuel Abis

Shadow

When darkness and I got separated, luminance took me back in again. But it was not the same anymore. That's when I learned that the candlelight which served as my table lamp in writing my memoirs was no longer. It had been replaced by a dreadful lightning which was even accompanied by thunder and whirlwind every time she came home from work. I told myself, I was the one who made the mistake: wasn't I the one who got burned and got wounded? The one shrouded by a great toxic fume because I played with fire? I told myself, I should be the one who should be humble and who should be understanding. Anyway, I did possess the natural calm of the seas, the nurturing kiss of my waves on the shores of the islands, the deep emotions of understanding. Come to think of it, whether I surface from or submerge under this great transformation of luminance would be entirely within my own hands.

But before I even had the opportunity to spray the mists of my soothing kisses, of my calming waves, of my deep emotions, a tremulous dilemma was thereby revealed to me. Luminance gave me one condition. She could only take me back in again hook, line, and sinker if (and this is a tremendous if!) I shall no longer have any relation whatsoever and for all eternity with - darkness. At first, I just smiled and quickly raised a large wave of promise that I shall cut off all my relation with darkness. But I was taken by surprise when luminance struck her lightning, as she roared with great pleasure mixed with great thunder and disdain.

"Hahahaha! Is that so? And what is that thing which seems to have sprouted behind you and that which appears to be tailing you to no end? "

I was spinning like a mad dog, trying to catch up with my own backside in order to see with my own eyes what luminance was referring to that which seemed to have sprouted behind me and that which appeared to be tailing me to no end.

And when I have discovered what I really should have discovered in the first place, I wept. And strangely. My teardrops fell profusely like the rain.

This was when I learned that my brief affair with darkness bore its fruit.

Now, I have and am conscious of my own - shadow.

Manuel Abis

She

She suits to words
What she knows you can wear by yourself
Later on, like tahan na,
Or wala na siya. Her voice shelters
Almost everything
You think you're feeling now; her arms
And shoulders built like the sides
Of a mother ship
You're more than ready to climb
Aboard, to ride, and even
To get some sleep.
Kahit sandali'y makaidlip.
While she never rests (she never does!) ,
She cradles you as a fallen star
In deep repose,
And alone, utterly alone.
Idinuduyan ka niyang malayo sa hampas
Ng mga alon, ng mga tulirong alon.
She suits your being to her song,
For she knows this coming evening
Will be longer than usual;
Kasama ang dasal
Na hindi na sana dumating pa ang daluyong.

No matter.
For
She will not let you drown, iho,
In the sudden refrains of her heart's seashore.

Manuel Abis

Sing

If they will ask you to sing, then sing
The song that you have written in your heart.

Seek your own rhythm, then follow it.
Only there will you find your own voice.

If they ask you to sing their song,
Then sing what your rhythm abides by
And what your voice can tolerate.

If they will ask you not to sing at all
If you will not sing their song, then sing.

They can never cast your rhythm in chains.
They can never hold your voice in silence.

Manuel Abis

Sins And Silence

When hearts begin to weep, heroes shall become
Home. Sleep
Steal them some, songs
Stay unsung, and men remain as
Men. Skin-deep scars deepen more
For more.
Touch their souls from walls en-
Graven of sins and silence.

Manuel Abis

Six Moments

1.□

Alone.

2.□

I came

Alone

To be

With you

And feel

In love

Again.

3.□

I came

To be

Alone

With you

In love

And feel

Again.

4.□

I came

To be

In love

With you

Alone

And feel

Again.

5.□

I came

In love

To be

And feel

With you

Again.

6.□

In love.

Manuel Abis

Sleeper

A lowly bicycle crosses the intersection.
I am reminded of lazy days
That make me stronger.
A morning rain that never seems to falter
And never falters to seem,
Then turns everything into an
Early
Evening

Almost.

Manuel Abis

Smell The Life

We talk about the lives of other government
People as if they are already dead,
And about how we could work things out
By outworking things
Until we find ourselves resting somewhere
In a back row or a spinal column,
And about how sick we are
Of being sick - and idle. As idle as
The talk of people about other people.
As idle and mechanical.
Until we commit to sin
The tiredness of our own flesh, and to vice
The mere act of eating a decent meal
Outside of our home and our own cooking.
While outside getting smaller and smaller
Is the smoking area,
Where we set to fire our own sad stories
Rolled up for no one to set one's sight upon,
And - hell! -
For everybody else within such cornered distance to smell.
Then when the last shift is over, and it is time to leave,
Again we will smell the life of us
And make doubly sure
Our eyes will be as dry
As every armpit we will facially encounter inside the public train.

Manuel Abis

Solar

Artificial satellites sent to orbit by a planet;
Natural flowers launched to ornate by a plant.

Manuel Abis

Solar Eclipse

The point-

Guard

Moon

Posterizing

The slam-

Dunking

Sun

In your

Face,

Earth!

Manuel Abis

Some Notes Before The New Year

To write the unwritable.
That is all.

There is nothing wrong with that.
To feel the cells of your blood

Turn into figments
Of a musical notation.

To be a child again
In the rhythm of a game.

To be readersome
In every day's translation.

The world of words
Is a world of worlds.

To read the unreadable,
Gather fruits and flowers out of season.

Surprise yourself.
Be a gift.

Do not say:
I am born on such and such a day.

Just say: I am (state your name)
And I am still being born as of (state your birthday) .

Stop being
And start becoming.

To sing what you write,
To sketch what you read.

A mere child of five
Can do more with a dull pencil

And a cute voice.
It is not too late to learn to whistle.

To get yourself stranded.
To get lost.

Then each and every word
Becomes new and important again.

Pursue the pain of patience:
The more painful, the less painful.

Write the unwritable.
Read the unreadable.

Think the unthinkable.
Feel the unfeeling.

Manuel Abis

Something About The Sea

Something about the sea
Which makes my speeches shells
Of sound
And slow sifting of the sands.
Time disintegrates.
Space understands no longer
Such obsession.
Such perversion.
Something about the sea
Which makes me swim
Everywhere I go;
Which makes me first
Look for light
Before the air.
The bubbles of air
Which shall never let me go
Or leave without a fight
At all.
Which shall make me lost
When found:
Shells in the sand,
Spaces
Between times
Together.
Something about the sea
Which makes me free
At last.
Which makes me small
Eternity.

Manuel Abis

Somewhere In Manila

Intolerable

Fire escapes

Behind a newly-painted façade of a students' dormitory

Somewhere in Manila, with the lord or lady

Of the land waving the state of the structures off

As merely a natural delay

In the slow and steady process

Of inevitable urban decay;

Because one chooses to only have concerns enough

To tighten one's hold over a small part of the university

Belt and to champion simple business profitability,

Then this is clearly the real property owner's short-

Coming.

And this practice is still on-

Going

Until, unfortunately, fire actually escapes

From one's building and exposes the octopus

Connections and ways of dealing with the proper permits

At the City Hall - in short and underhanded circuits.

In short, somewhere in Manila,

This is the difference

Between one's return on investments

And one's unbearable inescapabilities.

Manuel Abis

Somewhere We Could Be

Somewhere we could be
Like whales lying on the sand.
Dead on arrival.
Like two people
Bereft
Of land.

Orphaned.

The wounds we carry
Are deeper than the sea.

More open as the stitch
Of unfathomed stories
Stranded on the beach.

Our tattered fins
Were fabled wings
Of the monstrous Chinese
Kuan

Still raging against an epic
Failure of its odysseys.

- Oh, but listen!
Listen to the incessant call
Of our imagination
Which the tides bring in.
As the children
Of a nearby town
Gather round us to sing
Their song.
Listen well:
"Break a heart,
Break the spell!
Break a heart,
Break the spell! " -

In truth, we are all but children.

We just need a place
Neither to stay nor to leave.
We just need a place
Away
From these placelessness
Of things.

We just need a place.

To lick each other's wounds.
To stitch each other's wings.
To fathom each other's stories.

Together we swim.
Together we sink.

We just need a place.

Somewhere
Where our hearts and our spells
Remain unbroken.

Somewhere we could bring.
Somewhere we could be.

Manuel Abis

Song Of The Road

I wear the road
I travel on.
Like bits of stone which're stuck against
The rubber soles of my shoes,
The breath of air
That's wedged between
The clenching will of my soul,
The humid heat of sun and sand,
Unquenching
From this moment on,
From dust to dust,
From dusk till dawn -
I wear the road I travel on.

As passerby,
Or driving through,
Or riding my old, trusty motorcycle, too,
Let truth be told that I absorb
The shocks suspended
By imagination -
I wear the road
I travel on
Like guttered leaves,
Organic things.
I shed, then wear my dreams again.

I memorize
The sound of hope
When silent darkness pushes me away,
Out of the rhythm of my song;
Into the light, I'll stay,
I'll stay,
I will remain bright-skilled and all
As well as
Tattooed with experiences,
Accumulating memories so
And wear the road I travel on.

Sonairs

I. My Room

A sense of placement.
For myself. To finally be able to listen
To the call of my imagination
When I am inside my room again.
Inside the chamber of my moments.

A place to place myself. Myself to please.
Some music from Queen and her
Bohemian rhapsodists.
Fulgurite wind chimes
Within hearing range. Strange memories
Of unfinished yet colorful streams of thought
Being churned out from the old and muted
Television.

A small turn of an experience
From the light switch
(Similarly light to the touch of a finger)
To latch on to while the absence
Of darksome words
Is inevitable. To finally be able to listen
To the breathing possibilities of silence.
A sense of placement.
For the personas within
The different parts and sections of my chamber.
For the cocoon struggling with echoes
As it turns into a room yielding
Only to its own resonances. Chimes and charms.
For the world is made of music,
Everything in it is but its instrument,
And I am but one of many players.

A sense of place and placement,
A love of music,
A bar of chocolate,
And a cold glass of freshly squeezed fruit juice

Before I start work on my hermitage again.

II. Doors

There are two kinds of door as regards to my room -
The first is like the folded arms of a loved one.
But only when it is closed and secured. Yes,
Closed and secured by its own insecurities.

What else can I expect?
Long ago have I rebelled against the truth
That space
Is something one can never really own,
But can only temporarily occupy.
Who am I
To lead the feeblest of resistance
Against such truth? Who am I?
I am but one
Whose yesterdays never had the chance
To bid goodbye, whose moments
Are now all of solitude,
And whose tomorrows would understandably
Hold such a gracious welcome for me
No longer.
Thus, I was but one who tried to play a game of tag
With the swinging door
Of fate
And lost.

There are two kinds of door as regards to my room -
First is the door of desertions.

The second door is the one of embraces. Yes,
How long have I longed for the second door's openness.

III. Floors

Neglects and regrets aside,
I enter my room again. And again I can slowly feel it
Entering me.

The main floor. It has turned into a desert.
The grains of sand and of soil

And of what-streets-have-I-traveled
Which have latched onto the heels of my New World
Rubber shoes
Gleefully reunite themselves to their peers
In paradise.
Neglects and regrets aside,
I waded through the main floor
Flooded with the murkiest of memories.

All floors are seclusive.
One can easily turn me into an island.
And only music can make me cross a sea of floor
And cast anchor
In the middle of its nowhere-ness.
Only music can make it sparkle again.
Waxen by the shuffle of many a-dancing shoes,
So many shoes shaped like so small yet so buoyant
Boats. Shoes and slippers both. I can just imagine
The littlest rowers of these boat-shoes
And raft-slippers tugging mightily on their oars
To get from the couch to my writing chair,
Or from the edge of the carpet
To the ramparts of my small writing desk.
Thus, I was but one who tried to play a game of board
Aboard the scantily explored floor
And drowned.

Every floor is seclusive.
Too is every way downstairs.
As well as every basement.

I have returned to my room to work on
Solitude again.

IV. Walls

Walls. Walls are so unlike doors -
They cannot turn their backs on me.
What I see is what I get.

Yet, every wall is always a proverbial shoulder
I can lean on

When I grow tired of waiting
And of walking around with ripples
Of uncertainties around me.
Every wall listens to me
When I tell my chair to calm down
And take its seat, and when I ask my desk
To help me ponder on my next course of action.
Walls have been very good to me
In building up
My sense of place and placement.
Thus, I was but one who tried to play a game of darts
With a picture frame on the wall
And accidentally hit myself.

V. Windows

Although I have bargained many times
With the main door
And handily won,
There were moments that I had to openly
Tear down windows.

What else can I do?
They brim with so many possibilities.
Thus, even the impossibilities of bringing inside
A two-door refrigerator, a long couch,
And a full-sized bed through the narrow door
Of uncompromises
Were easily, handily, openly torn down
Because of my replaceable windows.
Thus, I was but one who tried to play a game of hide
And seek
With this treacherous lot
And lost
Them in return.

Because of them, I have opened my eyes
To a new truth -
That there is and works just fine
This thing called
A sense of replacement.

VI. Ceilings

Ceilings. Ceilings seduce me.
So do stairs and attics. O, the inexorable exuberance
Of a roof.

Every ceiling reminds me of a paper kite
And a sense of poetry.

I was but one of many who tried to fly a paper kite
Inside a room
And instead abandoned it completely.
No.
Not the paper kite.

I can never work on any ceiling
Without remembering the story of the paper kite.

My paper kite.
My paper kite traveled far and high.

Do you want to know the secret
On how I made the paper kite
Travel farther and higher
Than the wretched ceiling of my old room?

I shall tell you.

I retrieved my paper kite
Down from its imaginary sun and sky
And detached its string and its tail
And its skeleton made of barbecue sticks.

I retrieved it down
And first used the paper from the kite.
I folded the flaps of my kite
In such a way
That it would be able to travel the world
As a letter envelope.

I hurriedly placed the kite's string and tail inside,
Then sealed and addressed the letter envelope

To another child
Who lived in another corner of the world.

Thus, I was but one
Who let the letter envelope travel farther and higher.
And when it reached its child addressee,
I did not worry.
For I knew she knew what to do next.
For the simple truth still remains
That there are enough barbecue sticks all over the world
To make the kite unfold again
From its letter envelope.

After all, it was once
My paper kite
Which flew so far and so high
In the sunshine and skyway
Of such magical freedom
Inside my old room.

VII. ▣ Special Sense of Geometry

I have entered the place again, and have let the place
Enter me. For this is the only way I know
To forge a chamber of echoes into a room
Of chimes.

I am become a kiln unto myself
Stoking a delicate sense of cocoon.
I have studied the place again, and have let my old room
Study me. For this is the only way I can still
Hold on to my small eternity.

Between the vertex of my realities
From simple floors to basic ceilings
And the horizon of my relationships
From walls to doors and windows,
I will be able to make my room work again
As long as I live
At its angles.

To diminish the echoes and refine the chimes
As harked upon
By the call of my imagination.

To live with a special sense of geometry.

To live at its angles.

The same angle of many
So that the bathroom floor, the kitchen sink,
And the gutters will not clog. The same lean
Of the roof, of the water faucet, and of the shower head
So they will not leak. That certain tilt
Of the lamp shade, of the window shutters,
Of the electric fan's head, of the television monitor
In relation to where I ordinarily lie on my bed
To watch the late night news,
And of my fingers as they lie in wait
For the next click of the mouse.
The same certain angle of light switches,
Of door knobs as they turn. The dangerous tilt
Of the razor against my chin, of the comb
Against an unfavored lock of hair, of the proud
Collar as it rests on my shoulders like a lei
Of mixed hello and goodbye.

The tilt of my favorite pillow at night.
The angle of the morning sunlight.

Thus, I was but one who tried to play a game of corners
With my old room
And was led instead into its spiraling circles
Of gossamer
Memories.

For once let my old room enter me.
Let me forge this chamber of echoes
Into a room full of chimes.

Manuel Abis

Special

Every act of justice
Is special:

Not only because it is
An act of the first kind -
The kindredness to us as being human;

Not only because it is
An act of the second kind -
The kindness to us as being humane;

Not only because it is
An act of the third kind -
Justice as a kind of payment;

But because it is
An act of the fourth and final kind -
Justice as a payment in kind.

Thus,
Every act of justice
Is special.
And, at times,
Extra-special.

Manuel Abis

Speech, Speech, Speech - And Space

Space.

Space is freedom.

Space is flight.

Space is fragility.

Like when you hear someone say,

"Space, at last! "

Like when you hear me say,

"Give me some space, please! "

Like when you hear yourself say,

"All I need is space! "

As a form of freedom, space is open.

As a form of flight, space is an opening.

As a form of fragility, space is an opening up.

Space.

Like space, a speech can break

Both its ground and its figure.

Like space, a speech can escape

From both its tenor and its vehicle.

Like space, both the subject and the object

Of a speech can be open

To interpretation.

Space is speech.

Speech is space.

And because, in reality,

Being free

Is always

Being open

To reality,

Then -

Free speech

Is not inner space,

Free speech
Is not outer space;

Free speech is
Open space.

Manuel Abis

Sprinkling

The old and tattered body of a kite
Left to rot on a city avenue's uncut power
Lines for a summer's surge in gain as well as in loss
Of innocence. Highly-politicized posters almost
Erased by the memories of years from the surveyed
Walls and lamp posts; faces completely defaced
By a storm of tropical wind and rain and scandal.
A colorum mode of transportation unfazed
By the phase of waxing old protests new to strike
A blow of consolation against the moon-
Lighting truth of all our island travels. After all,
Oil prices hike along with us wherever we go.
Animal roadkills left to stray as a permanent part
Of asphalt opportunities. The blind man playing his
Electric guitar; evoking the final outstanding
Passages and vestiges of our daily battles
And some occasional sprinkling of all-out wars,
Tempered only into gross silence by a played national
Anthem.

Manuel Abis

Stalk

Some people are just all stalk
And no solid action.

First, they plant themselves
As seeds of doubt,
Until their eyes grow
Creepy with vines
Watered with the blood
Of their own hands.

Oh, we shall find them digging
Under their own dearth,
Under piles and piles
Of falsely sown
Information;
Smelling the air of secrecy,
Reveling under the shade
Of anonymity,
And envying
Other truth-bearing
Family trees.

Some people are just all bark
And no bud.

They shall nurture themselves
Until they are more than ready
To shoot -
No, not flowers, not leaves,
Not even a twitch of a twig;
But thorns.
Spindly, twitting thorns.

Some people are just all stalk
And no solid action.

They do not want to think
Out-of-the-box anymore.
Like when a flower

Is not only the reproductive organ
Of a plant.
It could also be something or someone
That flows.

Beware,
As we happily stroll inside this garden
Called life,
We may one day meet
These bad weeds.
Beware, for they shall be insisting
To show us
A time lapse video
Of themselves shooting
The stalk
Out of themselves.

Manuel Abis

Station

1.□

Distances have ears.
Distractions have eyes.
Old love songs do not die.

And memories - they are not forgotten.

They are merely set aside
And prepared for the journey.

What journey?

Trust me.
In this lifetime, as in others
Before and after ours,
Everybody takes a journey.

Listen to the distances
Which are too far to see.
See the distractions
Which are too small to hear.

Everybody takes a journey to arrive
At a decision.

Particularly, the decision
On how to carry memories
Like old love songs.

2.□

Listen.
Set aside any idea
That the old love songs in your heart
Will die.
Distances have ears.
Track by track,
Distances will listen to them.
It will only be a temporary case
Of disconnection

If you lose signal,
If you lose charge,
Or if you lose yourself
In your sleep.
Listen.
Old love songs do not die
Even if the train you are riding in
Enters a tunnel.
Even if the young ticketeer
This very moment
Starts to lose his temper.
Even if the passenger
Sitting next to you
Starts to drool
On your collar.
Even if the journey
Unexpectedly arrives
At a hasty decision
Where distances and distractions
Abound.
Listen.
Soundtrack after soundtrack,
Radio station after radio station
Is reverberating -
Old love songs do not die.
Distances have ears.

Distances have ears for music.

Listen.

3.□
Remember.
The memories which climbed aboard
Your head are never forgotten.
Distractions have eyes.
Track by track,
Distractions will remember
Every point
Of departure and arrival
Of every passenger and every baggage
As if they have eyes

At the back of their heads.
Remember.
Even if the train you are riding in
Is delayed by one thing
Or another.
Even if the young ticketeer
At this very instant
Appears to age right before your eyes.
Even if the passenger
Who has her haunting lips
Close to your ear
Begins to hum
An old love song
Which you have declared
Missing for decades.
Oh, which you have even declared lost
In the shuffle
Of unarrived decisions.
Memories are never forgotten.
At the terminal,
Everybody will train their ears and eyes
Once more
As strangers
Leaving a station.
Everybody will prefer to carry
Their baggages alone,
Yet will make sure
Their hands and feet are free
To mingle and entangle
Any moment.
To make sure that nobody,
Nothing
Is left behind.
Remember.
Railtrack after railtrack,
Train station after train station
Is resonating -
Distractions have eyes.

Distractions have eyes for detail.

Remember.

4.□

Tonight we shall look at the distances
Between the stars
And watch them listen to each other's
Old love song
By tuning in
To our favorite constellation.

The musical constellation of Lyra.

It lies along the slope
Of the northern sky.

Tonight let us imagine
That I shall be your Orpheus
And you my Eurydice.
I beseech you.
Distances may have ears,
But never let them have eyes.

For we must listen to our old love song
And listen well
So we that we shall arrive together.

Beyond the mythology of our hearts,
Let us arrive together
At a decision.

Tonight we shall hear the distractions
Over the landscape
Of the memories
We have traveled
By channeling into
Our favored horizon.

The magical horizon which bridges
The northern and southern hemispheres
Enchanted by Lyra.

Tonight we shall cross the impossible
Journey once more

And carry our memories
As uplifting as old love songs.

Let distances and distractions
Both have ears and eyes.

I am Orpheus.

I shall animate trees and rocks
With my music.

Oh, they shall dance.
They shall swing and sway
And rock and roll.

You shall be my Eurydice.
Oh, dance for tonight, nymph of the oak.

Beyond the mythology of our hearts,
Let us arrive.

Let us remember.

Let us listen to our station.
Let us arrive at our station.

It is time to move on.

Manuel Abis

Stone

Stone.

Stone grows.

Stone grows cold.

Stone grows cold-blooded.

Stone grows cold-blooded killer.

Sling - and stone shall slay giants.

Slide - and stone shall bury lands.

Slip - and stone shall break journeys.

Cast - and stone shall condemn men.

Stone grows cold-blooded killer.

Stone grows cold-blooded.

Stone grows cold.

Stone grows.

Stone.

Manuel Abis

String

Never the length, but the strength
Which will bind us to its argument;
Maybe the twist around the wrist
Which will remind us of its tendencies
To be more of use
When inconspicuous.
Or to be well-ensconced
In the soundness of a proposition.
Or to be an unmapped correspondence
Between the text and its sense.
Or to be the tractable end of a thread.
Never the precise logic, but the language
Which will keep us keep the necklaces,
The watches and the shoe laces,
The leather belts and bracelets,
The seashell-beaded anklets,
The hair bands and cellphone accessory cords,
The temporary files, cookies and saved passwords.
String
May eventually be the only thing remaining
Between the human idiom
And its machine translation.

Manuel Abis

Subversion

Writing is
Going under
Ground,
Hiding ideas behind innocent words
And lonely trees
And blind street corners,
Dousing printed fire
While packing serious
Publication heat,
Moving from one sympathy home to another
With nary a footprint
Or sound,
Exchanging messages by containing the graceful flight of birds,
Becoming wary of any whistle
In the wind,
Digging deep down inside one's self,
Looking behind one's shoulders
While chasing the future
Without running away
From the past,
Taking note of light passages
In an open bible or a society's dead
Alley,
Scavenging for the truth
Before any roof,
Bed,
Money,
Food,
Reward,
Literary award
Or fugitive
Poetry.

Manuel Abis

Sumpong

(Ekphrasis ng The Starry Night ni Vincent Van Gogh)

Nais kong himigan, labing-isang bitwin,
Nais kong inggitin, buwang mahiyain;
Alimpuyong ulap, nais kong hagurin,
Tila ulo't leeg ng mabining b'yolin,

Habang punong sipres na rurok ay pansin
Ang magiging hilis. Bughawing damdamin
Na kulay ng gabi'y gagawing tugtugin,
Na sana'y sing-igting ng awit ni Mclean.

Kahit pa ulap nga'y pininsel mong braso't
Kamaong 'binulwag sa bayang pahimlay
At sipres nga'y tanda ng iyong seryoso
At nakabibinging pagpapakamatay;

Dito sa asilo, ako'y bagong presong
Ayaw pang busalan ang sumpong ng lumbay.

Manuel Abis

Supernumerary / Pamparami

Am I a supernumerary -
Ako ba'y isang pamparami,

On the sidewalk where I go to sleep -
Sa bangketa kung saan ako umiidlip,

Now and then arising -
Maya-maya'y gumigising

Again to sip -
Upang muling sumipsip

On the apathy of many a man? -
Sa kawalang-paki ng maraming mamamayan?

Manuel Abis

Tail-Lessness

Ironically, I have to begin
With some of the practical reasons
I could think of behind having a tail.
Like, for me, it must have something to do
With why and how cats and kites
Land back down lightly on the ground.
I would even venture to guess
That these whipping waggers could be
The fifth leg of all four-legged animals. Sort of
Underpinnings for them. Particularly
To an awkward-looking donkey as drawn on
My younger sister's day care center's whiteboard.

Ah, but, of course, the grown-ups
Would have a different version altogether
On how and why a few people and things
Do have tails in this world of endless pursuits.
And a completely different and darker version
At that. Well, perhaps, this is how
Grown-ups are. They always want
To skip the long stories
And just go straight to the bottom
Of things. Especially with those
That most of them could not easily
Make heads or tails, if anything.
Like, for them, why would devils be depicted
As having those spiked whippers, while angels
Do not? Or why some people would have them
At all. Yes, tails. Why would some people
Have tails as if they are these people's shadows?

Ironically, while I have read from one or two
Of my high school science
And general information textbooks
That a tail could stabilize or normalize
The flight of an airplane or a spacecraft
Or a drone
Or even a gentleman's tuxedo and lady's gown
During a fine and grand opera night somewhere,

The grown-ups would never fail to remind me
That they would rather lose their tails altogether
In order to lead their old,
Normal lives again.

That they would rather be tail-less,
Than having theirs
Tucked in soft, warm, and tender
Between those cold, shivering, and stiffened legs.

Manuel Abis

Takeaway

This
Is no secret.
For centuries,
Humankind
Has discovered
That real life begins
When we lose control of it.
The takeaway word
For it is
Unwind.

Some
Would just call it freedom.

Manuel Abis

The Arch Genesis Of Ballads

From the marrow of form is deployed
Rhythm -
Blood cells like musical notes
Sinewed by mortal language
And feverishly sung to life.
It is no riddle that the heart,
Our eternal rhythm caster, is always
Diagnosed close to a bone -
Either a voiced thing of contention
Or simply lyrics broken.

Manuel Abis

The Basket Weaver

I picture her - the weaver - as the imaginary rider
Of a fleet of ten dolphins which are her fingers. In doing so,
I have made the basket to become not only as an exquisite extension
Of her own hands, but I have made it to become a veritable body
Of sea waves. For she weaves the waves of her lignin creation
As only the graceful dolphins of her fibrous fingers can: o!
What fluid patterns she has reined in as the straws surf over and under,
Bobbing in and out of the seawaters of her own inspiration. And I
Can only stand beside her to watch as she starts with one ripple
First, and then another, and another, until the ripples spiral as the base
Of the basket. Then, I picture her truly diving deeper into her craft.
Her own pair of eyes is now seemingly watching how the dolphins
Of her fingers follow each other under water to spin in unison.
Spinning and spinning until they are instinctively buoyed up
And until they have reached the top edge of the waters,
Where their magnificently bonding efforts would create the eddy
Which makes every woven basket so deep. And also so mysterious,
Since whatever use the basket will be for is implicitly left to the user's
Imagination; as the sea does not know which ship shall ever pass
Or which horizon real dolphins will try to weave so beautifully
Before our eyes at last.

Manuel Abis

The Bite

What happens if I try to touch a winged instinct
Resting on the skin of my mind? And what happens
If I do not try it at all? Which then would I choose?
To let it escape from me again, then pray and hope
That it shall land on my being once more in the future?
Or to let it remain where it is and suck the very blood
Of my imagination, until the skin of my mind swells
And inflames into a new protruberance full of urge? O!
I will be inspired! I will let my imagination be captured!
I will ride this oscillation - this enclavement of writing
And this freedom of reading; of letting the imagination
Engorge itself while I scrape its poetic becomings. For
The inertia of understanding will restore its harmony,
Of realizing that from such disorder follows a certain
Balm of order. And healing is merely but the perfection
Of the chance to experience the bite - Rhythm! - once again.

For a poem is an act of paralyzing the words on paper
Without killing them or their willing host altogether.

Manuel Abis

The Chronology Of Objects Being Taken Out From The Pockets Of My Jag Maong Pants (Or How It Feels To Have A Dead-End Job)

The key is a chain that locks me out from my own will
To turn and pick another door to open.

Change is loose, like the end of a day's work,
Instinctively thrown into the bowl of morning coins
And other daily reflections.

The purse, with lips fully zipped tight, which contains all my secret
Notes, lists, and a small folded letter that held my life
Hostage for quite some time now, is neatly placed
On the operable table between the bowl and the key.

The phone is a cell which imprisons my own personal call
For justice, using the distorted language of a distorted message.

The handkerchief is blue as it is taken out from the significant pocket
Of my mind and is now confused - whether it may be used
Again tomorrow or whether it should be sentenced to be hanged
Right after some washing.

Finally, the wallet is emptiness. Its gaping mouth forced-fed
With few paper bills; while the slits on its wrist
Remain. As wounds are quickly cut open by sharp
Credit and swiping cards; wounds that slowly,
Or even rarely, heal even after diligent
Notice of payment.

Manuel Abis

The Climb

From a personal letter's cliff
Called comma
Where a story begins to unfold,

I reflect on lines
Upon lines of images
Using the lens of a colon:

A great sea sparkles
With memorable
Sentence fragments,
Colorful birds
Of the imagination in flight,
Clouds draw in fleeting
Images of question
Marks,
Paragraphs pass by
With sails of thought
Exclaimed and unfurled,
From afar mountains of grand
Narratives can be
Magnanimously perused,
And from the horizon
Of my own perception
And understanding,
The dashing sun
Sets itself
To its rightful place -
To a humble punctuation
Called a period -
Where everything appears
To be all over

Except the climb
To the next personal letter's
Greeting where a term of endearment
Teeters on the clause
Of an eagle-eyed comma
At its perch.

Manuel Abis

The Controverts

Our hands were our first masks
And our first mirrors were each other's eyes
Because the light wanted to color our decisions
And darkness shaded us from the blinding truth

That things are mere extensions of us
And we are mere intentions of all our things.

Manuel Abis

The Death Of A Mountain

THE DEATH OF A MOUNTAIN

It was the slowest death anyone did not expect
To imagine.
The death of a mountain.

Moment by moment,
Alone or with someone else,
In two's or three's or bigger groups,
You, me, we
All climbed the mountain
Of curiosity
To see if it is true -
The death of a mountain;
And to attend to its wake
Or even to its burial.

Of course, when we arrived there is no longer
Any mass of land protruding from the ground.
But there was also no wake,
No ceremony for the dead. None whatsoever.

What we did see was an old man
Sitting alone on the ground where
There was once a mountain there.

"What happened, sir?
How did the mountain die?
Where is its wake? Where is it buried? "

The old man sitting alone on the ground
Raised his head and opened his eyes
To us.

He said,
"You will find the answer
As many of those souls before you have found it.
Go and leave this place.
And when you get home,

Rub your palms against the soles
Of your shoes,
Your sandals,
Even your bare feet.
For the mountain
There remains.
It was the slowest death anyone did not expect
To imagine."

Manuel Abis

The Death Of Near Experience

At midnight,
Driving along
The information highway
Without a ghost of a chance
Passenger
Inside the station.
Suddenly I saw the light
As a feather
In my cap.
In my midnight cap, in particular.

It is always hard
Drinking and driving
Under the influence
Of social media.

Manuel Abis

The Game

He plays her
Who is not a player

Before the night is over
He will be no longer

She plays him
In this very game

Because in the morning
They will be the same

They play each other
Riddle by riddle

If a square has a center
Will the circle have a corner

Manuel Abis

The Good Evening

The good evening
Is not only a civil greeting
Of the light in the porch to the arrival of darkness;
But also the alert manning of the constellation
Of the stars shrouded by the black clouds,
Especially at night when no one would easily notice
The sudden tracing of the long shadow of terror.
The knock on the temple of our door and the kiss
Of the mist on our cheek to portend
The taking shelter of a stranger rain.

It is enlighteningly clear that the good evening
Is not only for one who passes by,
But also for one who has to move on.

Manuel Abis

The Guitar

A string of rhythm
Which has chosen to hang itself
On the hollow silences of a wall.

Is it dead already?

I implore you all:
Let me take down its body
And carefully wrap its arms
Around my neck and shoulders;

Let me feel its pulse
And pluck out from it
Any remaining vibrancy,
From which I could resuscitate
The music out of its wood.

And, perhaps, cast a breath
Of words
Into its chords
To finally turn my poem
Into a song.

I implore you all:
Let me take its body down from the wall
Without breaking the hollow bone
Of its own silences
And the enduring promise
That its music shall always rise
For us
To play again.

Manuel Abis

The Important

To describe the number is not to write the number down.

We can only carry in a suggestion of its set, or of its complement. It may exist either now or there; even around here, floating. Thingsome doing; onesome being. The affixation becomes us. Just as the hand - our first symbol - becomes an extension of us; and, just as the tongue finds the buoyancy of its tip in the eternal tide of phrase and pause. Just as the tail outlives, and at times outwits the head: the first shall be last, at first; the last shall be first, at last. As nothing is a part of everything and anything can be nothing or everything, we resound: to describe the number, do not write it down.

It is the hypothetical insertion which neither adds nor deletes the base of our meta; it only serves to update us: the query of queries. But to shape, to interchange the positions of the known and unknown; or to share, to mean many things, to own many attributes: an anonymous pronoun, a remarkable adjective, an enduring adverb. To describe is either to show what is shrouded, or to shroud what is shown. To bring the object in full view, or to partially hide the subject of implication. To do a thing; to be one. The prefixation separates us from each other and deposits our thoughts in carefully secluded, heavily secured boxes of moments labeled as memories.

Whereas, the principle of carry still baffles all software encoders; whereas, the letter ñ is the gist of the riddle of all dos programs; whereas, the syllable ng has been the strongest baybayin survivor; whereas, the work of a remote assistant can only be evaluated by the librarian in these indices of clouds, virtualities, and mobile applications; whereas, trivia has finally become culture's last name; some, therefore, is also called the important.

Manuel Abis

The Mythical Challenge

An island is only an island
To the one who cannot get past
The rising and setting of the sun;
But to the one who gets at last
To set forth one's own horizon,
An island can be a stepping stone.
All one needs, it may seem,
Is a giant of a dream.

Manuel Abis

The Next Big News

We are used to it,
While waiting for whatever is the next

Big news. Then, the bigger. Then, the biggest.

While waiting for whatever is the next to it,
We are used.

Manuel Abis

The Philippine Cross-Stitch Society

Everybody wants to marry a lover,
Not a friend: because everybody knows it is forever
Again and again. Everybody wants to relate to a movie,
Not watch it: because everybody knows the
Story and its pitch. Everybody wants to stitch a cross
In time, because one does what one does in rhythm
And in rhyme. Everybody wants a Philippine society
Of weavers, not warriors: because there is business
In patterns and unity in
Colors.

Manuel Abis

The Poetic Beat

If you can recognize
the title of the song,
it is my heart
beating its wings
for the first time
against the flutter of your eyes.
It is the grace
of a transient space
between us
which I strike at last
with the conducting baton
of my silence
before a single note throbs,
before a single lyric is voiced out,
before the first line of a poem,
before the spark of a color,
before the first impression of a luminance,
before the first step of a dancer,
before your delicate fingers
ruffle my feathers

and turn them into your peacock

of a hand fan.

So that, later on,

you may breathe, my love,

while you partake of me,

my fragrance,

and my breathless performance.

Manuel Abis

The Poetic Harmony

How our words bounce off each other

like bump cars

head-on,

see how our sparks

fly off

between the electrified conduits

of our young spirits,

like the flashes

between our anvil-and-hammer

lips;

or, at times, our syllables elide,

our bump cars glide, they slide

side by side

in a kind of sweet proposal

of sounds and movements.

It may be true then

that if we steer our wills

in just the precise direction

and with just the right strength

of our wrists,

we may, at last, settle our speeches

into one fast

yet heart-stopping kiss.

Manuel Abis

The Poetic Melody

Pardon my gifts, my love.

When you touch their petals, they begin

to echo a forlorn pitch, running

to and fro the scale

of my being

whichever way

the language can or may or will,

that a lady like yourself may fain

catch their ripples

on the disturbed face

of my waters.

Please forgive these thorns

of lines and colors,

this spectrum of sounds

and images,

for they are for the natural pluckings

of my strings,

for the articulations

of my own yearnings.

Please pardon these fragments, my love,

for they serve no other purpose
but to count themselves
rather fortunate
to enter, point by point,
pollen by pollen,
lilt by lilt,
lyric by lyric,
slice by slice of air,
the eternal jouissance of your breath.

Manuel Abis

The Poetic Rhythm

I.

Rhythm.

Rhythm is movement.

Movement is rhythm.

Rhythm is movement of sound.

It is sound of movement.

Rhythm is movement of sense.

It is sense of movement.

Rhythm.

II.

In time, sound needs a medium.

In time, sense needs an organism.

Art is a medium.

Life is an organism.

Rhythm is movement of art.

Rhythm is movement of life.

III.

Rhythm is movement of art.

It is art of movement.

Rhythm is movement of life.

It is life of movement.

Between movement of art

and art of movement,

between movement of life

and life of movement,

rhythm creates a conversation.

IV.

Through poetry,

rhythm engages images with sounds.

Through music,
rhythm harmonizes lyrics with chords.

Through painting,
rhythm blends lines with colors.

Through sculpture,
rhythm fills shapes with spirits.

Through dance,
rhythm performs itself.

Through theater and film,
rhythm experiences moments with memories.

V.

Through all the arts,
rhythm creates a continuous and creative conversation
between art and life.

Art.

Life.

Rhythm.

Manuel Abis

The Ripple Effect

Moving. Moving to a smaller place is like building a wall to arrest
The migrant ripples one is continually creating. To harness the
Great potential energy inward. Unless what happens next
Is, in moving to a smaller place, one elects to take all
The things one owns with oneself and pile
Them up, around, and high until they
Eventually become part of an
Actual wall, and one's
Executive action
Stagnates with
Nary a stir
Of ripple.

Manuel Abis

The Room

We stand here now outside
The room that saw no one.

Its locked door casts no shadow,
The curtained windows invite no light in.

We stand here now and imagine
How seashells work their way inside lonely hearts,

How garden paths often lead to nowhere,
How the leafiest trees are those on the mountaintops,

And how some people can be so beside themselves
As they, in all futility, stand to wait outside

Rooms that will see no one;
Except their less known

And darkest
Star-failed days.

Manuel Abis

The Storm People

Perhaps, because each one of us is born with an island
Of a heart which safely anchors us to the bedrock
Of every dream and every hope, we have become
Seasonal heroes, rather than constant victims
To the spiked lashing of every tempest that comes our way.
At best, we have endured as a people of the storm -
The necessary civilian host to an unpredictable stranger
That comes to our home a refugee we cannot keep at bay
Anymore, and leaves our house a fugitive we can no longer
Hunt down to do more than its fair share of community
Time and service. Perhaps, because each one of us is born
With a centrifuge at the back of our minds which will exact
From us every element of the risk we take by separation,
Evacuation, relocation, and even by the declaration of a federal state
Of emergency. We shall endure as a people
Of the storm - by hoarding the very work of uncharted charity that well-
Faring people affords to us, by shoring up
From the ever-divisive yet ever-united sea□
The very upsurge of our own great daring and perseverance:
To take any chance which is as remote as it will come
And which is - sarcastically, to our local and foreign tourists - as a last resort
For simply getting them here is already an adventure in itself;
To brave the voyage to the northernmost tip of our senses
And to the most battered backside of our flesh and bones; to take on
The draconic boat rides on the Pacific and pacify the dragons
Within us, too; to explore the five islands of our weathered minds -
Palau, its hills on foot, its groves of men, its ocean church;
Camiguin, its humpback mountains like whales at the peak of their surf;
Dalupiri, its rock of rocks rising like a gargantuan dam from the sea;
Fuga, forever grass as far as the eyes can reach;
Calayan, an island which is veritably a world away; -
To travel as a backpacker to where beds and plumbing
Are never part of the package, where we slumber in tents,
Cleanse ourselves in rivers, and make veritable kinship
With catholes as well as freshly smoothed out leaves;
To go and clean as you go where the itinerary is never fixed
And its own map transforming right before us, and getting stranded
Is as possible as an honesty coffee shop; yes, indeed,
By shoring up from the ever-divisive yet ever-united sea□

The very upsurge of our own great daring and perseverance
To stay as calm as that of our approaching nemesis,
And to finally defy the changing habits of nature themselves.
To never let the people storm the pride of locked down warehouses
And stockrooms of hand-me-downs and expired efforts,
Where all voices strain and sink themselves into the catch basin
Of utter waiting without relief, and the only piece of land
We can build on is not a lot, but a loss.
To never let the storm populate us with the idea
That where all roads end in a drowning flood of unrescued homes,
The only shelter left is the horizon.
We must endure as a people of the storm -
Perhaps, because each one of us is born with a body
For refuge, yet what we really need is a sanctuary for the spirit
Of all our lingering and long-perished hopes and dreams.
For, at the edge of our heart's island, we must not only survive.
We must also overcome.

Manuel Abis

The Taker

A measure of country, a distance
Of words. A chance to return
Fire is the signature of one man's pair of steady
Hands. If one can learn the angles of perception
From hyphenating all the travels and stories
Of one's target, then one can become
Hero and victim,
Reader and writer
At the very same time. If one can
Triangulate all the emotions of the taker
Before it is too late, then, indeed, it is never too
Late.
Captured, cropped, captioned.
A master of country, a discipline of words.

Manuel Abis

There Is A Spy

There is a spy,
A spy there is;
Weaves a lonely web
Enmeshed in mysteries.
How many eyes
Would dare have a spy,
Would a spy dare have
To catch preys in flight?
How many lies
Are hackneyed
With venomous juice,
With many lethal limbs,
And with a silky rhythm
Of a seemingly threadbare
And gossamer spy there?
Waits in silent ambush
To corner the nearest
In its circle so dangerous.

For there is a spy
And a spy there is.

Manuel Abis

There Is A Spy, A Spy There Is

There is a spy, a spy there is
Who moves like a spider which likes to move
From corner to corner, from groove to groove.
The mystical spider is a spy in our midst.

A spider is an eight-legged creature;
There is a spy who resembles that feature.
Spider and spy are both prey and predator
To the play of words by the world-weaving writer.

There is a spy, a spy there is
Who moves like a spider which likes to move
From corner to corner, from groove to groove
With an air of surprise which is all that there is.

Manuel Abis

This Is Our City

This is our city.

Land of the low-waisted gangs,
Of the half-waisted aswangs,
Of the fat-waisted executors of tokhangs.

Indeed, this city is the waist-land.

Tighten our belts
And let us keep everything inside us.

Inside it our city breathes

The full air of ever-murder,
Of full murder ever in the air,
Of murder never ever
Fully aired.

For to kill may be part of being human,
But to air is humane.

Tighten our breaths
And let us hold everything inside us.

Here, inside our city, a different kind of
Death marches
On.

A different kind of death
Where war settles for a truce,
Where peace settles for a war,
Where life is either
A formal or informal settlement.

Tighten our fuses
And let us screw everything inside us.

Inside it our city feeds
On equality built on poverty,

On freedom based on money,
On justice made of death penalty.

Tighten our fears
And let us scare everything inside us.

Thus, it is incumbent among us
To do what gangs do
And fraternize low-waisted as brotherhoods.

To do what aswangs do
And fly half-waisted as OFWs.

To do what executors of tokhangs do
And fry ourselves in our own apathetic fat.

Because this is our city.

The city of equantity, of free-daw, and of jus-tiis.

This is our city
Under siege.

Tighten ourselves
And let us interrogate everything inside us.

Manuel Abis

This Monday Morning

We are just
This Monday morning
Stuck here,
With mirrors
Or lack of them.
When the powder
Finally hits
The inner skin
And turns to road
Pus.
Science says
We shed millions
Of our dead
Skin cells
Everyday.
We are just
This Monday morning
Stuck here,
Being buried
By this thought
Or theat
Of traffic
Or complete
And boringly
Lack of it.

Manuel Abis

Tikim

Kagat-labing
Tikman natin
Ang dilim
Ngayong gabi.

Pakiusap,
Please,
Huwag kutsarahin.

Ang dilim
Ay hindang-hindi napapanis
Ang sarap.

Oo, mahal, masarap ang dilim.
Maginhawa ito sa katawan
Ng anumang pangarap.

At huwag ka nang maghanap pa ng sarsa.
May sarili itong katas
Na nanunuot sa anumang panlasa.

Hindi ako nagbibiro.

Pumilas ka ng balat,
Kagat-labi,
Pikit-mata,
Pigil-hininga,
Tikman natin
Ang dilim
Ngayong gabi.

Hindi ako nagbibiro.

Kaya sa muling
Pagkagat ng dilim
Ay ito naman ang ating
Kagatin.

To Dream

To dream

In my sleep again is to be pilfered out
From this envelope of darkness, and again
Be a letter unfolded and read. To surrender
To the weight of my own shadow, to lift
The ghost of my own words, and again
To answer the call of my imagination. Yet,
A blanket of ambiguity still covers my every
Uncensored dream; while it rests its letterhead
On the soft pillow of its fleeting memory.
Indeed, it is ever so hard to read with one's
Eyes closed.

Manuel Abis

To The Cagekeeper

"A promise that remains alive is an unkept one,
But a murdered promise is well kept and done."

The cage

Can only be as alive as the animal it keeps.

The form useless without an idea to fill it

With. Once, I saw a 10,000-cell center

Well-funded and well-guarded by a state

Of extra-judicial changes as empty as the

Promise it intends to keep. The form useless

Without an idea to fill it with. The cage

Can only be as alive as the animal it keeps

Alive.

Manuel Abis

To The First Strawman

It be fair,
Yet never
As our last straw,
To think then
That we made
Scarecrows to scare
The crows, and not -
God forbid! -
Make straws
Out of men.
Oh, never
Make sip-
Sipping straws
Out of men.

Manuel Abis

To Us Lovers And Other Faint-Hearted People

The dead are better than some people -
The dead only close their eyes,
While some people close their hearts.

In the cremation of my ideas,
I realize that the human heart is not a bone
Which can be broken.

It can be burned, but it cannot be broken.

The dead are worse than some people -
Some people will only bury themselves at work,
While the dead will have other working people to bury them.

In the wake of my emotions,
I feel that the human mind is not a pair of eyes
Which can be captured.

It can be captivating, but it cannot be captured.

For better or for worse,
The dead, therefore, are so unfair to us lovers
And other faint-hearted people.
Every year, they will have their day.

While most of us will only dream
(And dream some more!) of some people
Having theirs.

Manuel Abis

Today

Today

Is a picture of tomorrow

Taken yesterday.

For the first time in our life,

We find that the more things change

The more they will remain the same.

We will try to throw our pebbles

Farthest out to sea from home base

And create ripples for our play,

Then sink back

And again

To our own deep realities.

But the undercurrent of all our stories,

The genius of all our aspirations,

Will relentlessly sway

And swing

And rock them back to the nearest shores.

The shores of our children. Our children -

Picking up our original pebbles where we seemed to have found them;

Hurling them back into the mouth of the deep -

Singing

Still

The song of our small eternity.

Today

Is a picture of tomorrow

Taken yesterday.

Manuel Abis

Together, Let Us Rise

Together, let us rise
And go about each and every work
Of our day today. Let not the terror
Of ways paralyze and take precedence
In our hearts and minds. The business
Of truth requires absolute commitment
To freedom, though that freedom be
Dared and challenged with reckless
Abandon. It is noble struggle that makes
Heroes out of the ghosts of our dead
And the spirits of the injured who fought
So bravely for just and lasting peace.

Manuel Abis

Tonight

Tonight, we will dress too weak
For the light and too unexpected for the darkness. Because hope
Bounces off of us like a reflection in the mirror, and truth renounces
The burden of evidence - life as the proof of service - as ours and ours
Alone. Tonight, we will surrender: if we are not ready yet, then we
Must do it. Because time is our game. Our ball, our call. Timing isn't
Everything. But tonight, as in previous evenings of retirement, if we
Must come in - let us come to win. If we must come out - that! That
Is what this is all about! For imagination is the writer's office, creative
Reading is the seat of his ambition, and the virtual reality created by
His senses serves as his working table. Sure, anyone can break the door
Open. Anyone can establish protocol. But who will be able to excite
The portals and heighten the most significant portions of the produced
Virtual memory? Only the writer knows the password. Only the wri-
Ter knows how to stage - many times over - his temporary but ne-
Cessary suicide. Writing is, after all, a killer application. And the last
Thing a real writer needs right now is a hack of a job. For who dares
Put on the power suit and surprise everyone with a fistful of unfair
Ennui?

Manuel Abis

Touchpoint

At that point of our lives when the watches that we wear will not only tell time, but will also tell directions on where we want to be, and the phones that we use will not only make calls, but will also make space for what we want to do - we have arrived. Each of us has become a touchpoint on the technological fabric of our ever-transforming society. We are no longer simply talking to each other. We are communicating. We use images more times as effective as we use words. No more will we ask if a place feels either old or new to us, or either familiar or strange to us. We will merely ask if the place has a connection. So we, as touchpoints, can go So we, like little children, can go touch whatever or whoever we point to - wherever, and whenever.

Hoping that, and beyond, we will click.

That we will click together.

That, together, we will click.

and beyond.

Manuel Abis

Transfixed

We love to watch other people's lives
In the dark. We torture ourselves
Listening to their well-modulated voices
From behind the tinted glass screen
Of a closed set. Yet we enjoy such
Torturing; such twisting of our eyes
To adapt to the shape of pantomimic
Shadows, inflicting drama at the traffic
Of attention converging all around them.
We love to watch people in the aquarium
Of their airconditioned cars; brooding
On their wealth of friends, their poverty
Of enemies. While stand we, transfixed,
By the rain.

Manuel Abis

Travel Notes

There would be an evening such as this: full of laughter. But not that much. Just enough to keep the monsters at bay. Our fingers groping for something sharp. Just enough to tickle, but not to kill. Our eyes waiting for a signal. Something stirred, but not that mixed. Our breaths relaxing. But not that much. Just enough to contain the pain. The pain of knowing that there would be an evening such as this. Before we settled for a good night's kiss.

*

The day I lost my ballpen was the day I met you. The day I lost my ballpen in a flooded section of Arroceros Street between Manila City Hall and the Central Station, the government again belatedly declared no work or school for that day in the entire National Capital Region. The day I lost my ballpen because I grabbed your stranger's hand to cross an imaginary manhole where a kitten-sized rat thankfully swam. The day I lost my ballpen which was my lucky ballpen. The one I used to sign as a payroll clerk. The one I used to jot down all the possible thesis statements I might use in my special undergraduate school program. The one I used to miss when it got lost. Right up until yesterday morning. When I walked out of our office to quit cold-turkey. When I lost the ballpen you gave to me to replace the day I lost when I met you. To replace the day I met when I lost you.

*

Funny how summer sounds verily like somewhere. Somewhere, after all, is supposed to be fun. It's supposed to be cozier and sexier when pronounced, like the mole on your chin when I first noticed it. Or was it here or there? Or somewhere else? Funny how summer ends but never escapes us. From our thoughts, from our feelings. Perhaps, it does mean verily like somewhere. Even more. And rain? Funny how rain sounds verily like run.

*

Traffic is the best reason in the whole world. Well, with dead spot being a close second. But traffic. Traffic beats everything. One-timing for or against someone. Two-timing for or against someone. Overtiming for or against someone. Heck, even undertiming for or against someone. If I were you, I would thank God for inventing traffic, and would even think we're the ones who just keep messing up our time together. That is, of course, if I were you.

*

We are moving and yet not moving. The passion-algaed cheek of your ship resting on the heaving chest of my urchin-infested sea. We are moving, deeply moving. And yet not moving: ran aground on the shallow bed of morsel desires; your engorgeable anchor locked between my tentacular coral polyps. A vestal vessel wrecked by the tempest of an abysmal space and time. O sweet peril!

Sweet, sweet peril! Unsalvaged bride! Pray, maroon us now on some lagoon unknown! Pray that when rescue should hereunto come, let it come, come, come later and never sooner than my mortal tide's return!

*

More, more, more. More for less, more for less. The children were up until two in the morning, and they just kept repeating the same two phrases again and again. More, more, more. More for less, more for less. I really couldn't tell if it's getting better or getting worse. But maybe you should take their advice, dear. More, more, more. More for less, more for less.

*

What else could a horizon be, my child, but a hat. Now I'm not saying this because I don't have any other thing to say or because I just want you to think about what I'm saying instead of thinking something else.

The horizon is a hat.

Well, you see why it's like a hat? It's always there when you're planning to travel, when you're planning to move, to go elsewhere. You see how both will work in the same kind of way, but in a different sort of way. Yes, the horizon is just like a hat because they're both used for traveling. And they both begin with the letter H.

Manuel Abis

Twister 2.0

"Translate

the idiom: a talent for freedom is a torque against my venom! " Thus, the twister announced with a voice so round, plus the dark brood of his benighted hood. He then sneaked a grin for me and grabbed my weakness by the neck, "Do you possess of this? Speak, so I may begin to break your words down! Tell, o human pretzel! Please, sin for me! " And neither scout nor word-of-mouth would work hours as he who wanders in his chamber mood. His mastery of the wound and wounded is a double-meaning ultimatum. His clout can turn any creative reader into a prisoner of his imagination. Imagine this: summer for the terrorist silence. Salt for the terrific bleeding. And finally, terrible ice water dripping on the foreskin of sudden constancy. Daresay, any accident becomes his custom signature. His toolmart and from what school of art he belongs are no longer matters of significance. Because between the discipline and his exercise, between the origin and his translation, between the cure and his disease - the twister will always improvise and destroy according to his own creation. Because for him, truth - no matter how experimental or subaltern - can only be as vain as a garden vine, and will only be as shy as my bonsai.

Manuel Abis

Two Haikus

Dawn -

A blade of sunlight

Slicing through green seawaters:

Expose, the white waves.

Dusk -

Sunset and the sea,

The famous Manila bay:

Gold in mercury.

Manuel Abis

Upon Leaving

In this evening
Of island
Weather,
I turn
My collar
Against
The softest
Wind
Passing through
Your open door
As the coconut
Wine
Begins to sink
Back in
Again;
I hear you bring
A whisper
To my ear,
"Well, sleeping
Will be your option
Tonight if
And when you leave."
All the while,
I faintly smile;
After all,
I can smell already
An oncoming storm.

Manuel Abis

Vice Versa

Because the future shall always be the object of our desire,
Desire shall always be a future object; which makes every
Object then our future desire. A constant presence of absence
Which requires its own constant yearning. Such change of
Constants, such constant change. A curious hand extended
To grasp what is not yet there, and so pretends to raise its
Arm instead. Perhaps to feign bidding farewell to a past that
Never really leaves, unless and until it has devoured the last
Morsel of our desire. A consumed object then waiting to be
Consummated; or rather is it an object consuming the all
Consumable and patient hope? Such a future then would not
Be as objectionable as it is objective; cast in the light of being
Yesterday's repast. No one would argue that even we, at times,
Could taste better what we have already imagined than what
We have already displayed on the dining table. For some things
Are better viewed when nipped in the bud and set on our minds
Like what delightful whims the chef amuse, than to watch them
Flower inside the inspired digest of our irreveries to sumptuous
Ruin and protein-rich decay. That we would rather call on our
Synthetic moments to fashion out in our brains the future objects
Of our desire, that would be one way of realizing that we are but
Playing healthy hosts to all our intellectual losses and limitations
Deliciously wrapped in such dearth of delectation, and in such
Diction of fare you well, therefore, to all our
Prospective aspirations, loudly pronounce them all with breath
Else our unconsciousness reconfigures to say: You say farewell,
Therefore, to all the immaterial in every material thing, merely to
Intuit utter
Vice versa,
To make it then the every object of our future desire. For yesterday,
I watched some news report on television and saw women
Preparing their children before they eat the grass by preparing the
Grass before they eat the children.

November 11,2015,9: 17 am
Cubao, Quezon City Philippines

Manuel Abis

Waiver

We care for freedom only when we can use it
And we use our freedom if only we can share it
Onesome being, thingsome doing
We gain by losing again and again
We can only come into as we go by
We can no more be and less than we can be
Unless we are, unless are we
Rhythm and die.

As it opens and closes we discover a pattern
And become virtual geometers at every turn
Tenses and stresses seek to trap our voices
Only from within our shapes we gather our choices
Outside the weather is a disease of the while
And the distance from the laboratory
To the street is a mere dial, until become we
Rhythm and die.

It is the measure of change destroys chance
We can keep our spin in a state of dance
But if we have to shuffle feet and eyes and bones together
Let us be a slice of time apart forever
And let the indulgence of forensics play the alibi
For cervical and prostate truths
Bewilder, only if we lose
Rhythm and die.

Manuel Abis

Walk The Night With Me

Walk the night with me uncollared and unchained.
Let us all be beasts of boredom looking for strangers
To befriend. Let us hide behind the parked jeepneys
And motorcycles. Or over there, a row of street stalls
Closed. Let us jimmy the locks and scare any light
Bulbs out of their sockets. Let us hide and wait there
For the renegade artist of many city walls. And none
So captured by the CCTVs of the barangays
Or by the police passing us by to prowl the darkness
As we come out from hiding unscathed more than less.

As we walk the night onto unbridled eveningness.

Walk the night with me uncollared and unchained.
The night akin to the city's eternal wrench of barkers -
The streets are muted with stench, but the voices remain.
Listen, "Panties for Lola! Dentures for Lolo!"
At the nearby jeepney terminal, listen, "One more!
One more and we are good to go!" Watch young
Souls navigate the crowds for their repeat patrons,
"Ma'am, Sir, sampaguita rosaries for your Mama Mary!
For your baby Jesus!" Walk the night with me
And see the strays mark their territories and icons.

See the strays mark their territories and icons.

Walk the night with me drunken and unafraid.
Let us both sing the song of curfews past and present
With strings unbraided and hair tossed and turned
To the sorry monsoon winds of the year's final quarter.
There may be the ceaseless deaths of freedom in the air;
But freedom as we know it is being able to escape
And being able to be lost in a crowd of other escapades.
Bring along your issues, but no cellphones or ipads,
Please. Let the night be the night without any evening
Of translations, transcriptions, and relationships that sting.

Stinging translations of everything we do and do not.

Walk the night with me in places where the skippy heart
Is displaced by abandoned parks as well as wide oceans
Where the sand has not seen its powdered sense.
Where peasant moons shine brighter than the sheen
Of thick carabao's hide bathing on the pool
Of farm ploddings and short evenings when silence is cool
To touch. To lay your head unintoxicated by the neon
Hilt of blasted fireworks on the nearby renegade hills.
Walk with me and we will be each other's room
Which the night will sweep for wireless microphones.

The night will sweep us off our wireless lives.

Let us survive the trip more than the travel. As we tumble
And grapple for form more into our journal than into
This journey where the night is not an evening so.
Let us answer no riddle when riddles make us sick
And merely drink the potion that mixed poisons make.
Let us keep no promises to return and be employed
And keep one foot on the door and the other inside a void.
Let us make ourselves a mask while looking at a mirror
Full of hope and fun and the despair that goes along
With seeing hope so helpless and watching fun go wrong.

Hope is so helpless and fun is watching us go wrong.

Walk the night with me to where death is merely Rhythm
Changed; and not the edge of a knife so hewn by some
Serial murderer's plea for sanity. Let no saint roam
And no witch twitch a strand of hair from our precious
Locks and curls. We curse no one but ourselves and the abuse
We choose to place over our words and silences. Silenced
Though we are, let things remain bewitnessed as the stains
Of executive wisdom attempted yet unrivied. As the father told
The child, "All chances are made in heaven, little one."
The child then asked, "Why?" The father did reply,
"Because there is no chance in hell. No chance at all."

Walk the night with me and heed the call
Of the imagination - unbridled eveningness. Let us saddle
Up and ride the Rhythm as we hear it. As we listen

To the sound before the sense. The endlessness
Of tukotok-tukotok-tukotok. Bereft of science
And the logic which other poets make for other poets.
Like a blush - how quick the night is, we will not see
How it catches our breath. Yet if it will excitedly,
It will do so when we are finally out of it. For if it will
Try to catch it once more, I am sure the night will miss.

So much so that in a blush our breath becomes a kiss.
So much so that in a blush our breath becomes a kiss.

Bring along science and, if you can, something
Stronger. Let us walk the night along the promenade
Of long weekends and across the manicured parks.
Let us coax it to partake of our epicure starkly
Ravising and unravaged by burgling midnight
Diatribes. Let us purge ourselves and heed the call
Of untamed imagination. Where Rhythm is obviously
A joke and rhymes are campaign slogans
Encapsulated and designed to emasculate thievery.
To sophisticate corruption as a realm of death.

To sophisticate corruption as a realm of death.

Let us die then in as many times as the darkness
Of an evening as dark as a poet's ink. Let the night
Walk all over us uncollared and unchained.
Let us feed the fancy of our idleness and the frenzy
Of all hopeless colors. For the night is tinted black.
And black is not the absence of any color,
But on the contrary the orgy-like overlapping of them.
The emptiness working like a tunnel funneling
Each and every imperfectly subsidized metro train.
Walk the night with me and let our fears remain.

Walk the night with me and let imprisoned fears remain.

Walk the night with call agents aiming for the center.
For the money. For the saved December and New Year.
For the millennial dream of never sleeping off
An evening in the city that never sleeps and that never
Lets anyone sleep at all. For the city seizes what it can

Which remains as fresh and new and young and raw.
There is a devil working in every city, and a monster,
Too. But devils and monsters our night will scoff.
And though the evening be raped by lyrics from lyres
And music from muses, we shall set them all on fire.

We shall set on fire the works of muses and lyres.

Bring along your children sleeping in your arms.
And the magazines loaded with the odor of burnt oil.
Let us now toil for the senselessness we heard before.
Tukotok-tukotok-tukotok is the sound of death
Hitting our streets and nothing more. Not the pebbles
That little children will throw to skip over the pot holes.
Not the ladies hitting the sales shops on concrete sidewalks.
Not the students playfully running home from public school.
But the buy-bust operations against a drugged fool.
Walk the night with me and pretend everything is cool.

Walk the night with me and pretend everything is cool.

Let us protest when they say everything is cool.
Let us beat our breasts and cough loudly when they make
A solemn speech about the economic statistics they break.
Let us break them where their weakness is their strength.
Walk the night with me and see where our taxes go.
Let us pay our taxes as long as we know
That our credit is not yet maxed out. That we are good
To go. That we will not brood on what we have not bought
Or what we cannot buy or what we can as time goes by.
We can only buy time when it is down and not in midfight.

We can only buy time when it is down and not in midfight.

Let us find a place to go and come as we would like.
To come and go as the average dimensions of the Filipino
Psyche. Bring along your wet tissues and let us try
To ride every storm we draw out from the deep well
Of our dying sun's eyes. Let us find some grassland
Where we can lay our bodies on strips of news
Papers old and new. Let us read our palms and understand
The meaningless of having no one to stand by us. As

One walks the night and sheds off the after-dinner lust to
Talk the day ahead of what it is and what it will make of us.

Talk the day ahead of what it is and what it will make of us.

Finally, walk the night with me uncollared and unchained.
Let us watch and listen to ourselves and remain as strange.

Let us watch and listen to ourselves to remain as strange.

Manuel Abis

We

We

Test the guard as if we are our own
Thieves, and pry a word from this position
As we do a knobless door. We will keep
Scratching and clawing our nails into
The shutted woodwork, until one of us
Will remember how to knock or say please;
And then turn as if leaving. Believing
That if anything is worth stealing, then
It is one's own sleep.
And we will laugh our way out of this thing thinking
If we are not buying, then we must be selling
A piece of mars, moon, or otherwise.
For no one knows, for sure,
How empty is our human outpost
In the near future.

Manuel Abis

We Are Of Them

We are of them
Than
Of us,
More afraid,
So alien.
So aliens are.

So aliens are
So alien:
More afraid
Of us
Than
We are of them.

Manuel Abis

When I Die

When I die, please grow me grass where I lie
During the evening. When the moon is still becoming
And the stars an arrival of glowing silence. So die when I
I would be leaving a blanket for lovers; green as the stories
Of caretakers and waterers of soil and bearers of flowers
Which bear no seed. Let me heed to the call of life's own
Imagination and bring my name into stone; but broken -
So when I die I would not let eyes pass by me and ask:
Who was I? Who am I to them who wanted none to trust
But grass? Mounding till it is mind. Grass. Mounting till
It is mountain. And the broken pieces of stone merely will
Be the trodden steps that they all will follow - when I climb.
Please grow me, grass, when and where and how I shall climb.

Manuel Abis

Where Stormhorses Kneel

Behind that hill
Is a river
Called 'Where Stormhorses Kneel.'

Stormhorses are horses that,
When they sense
An oncoming storm,
Create themselves
A storm.

Where stormhorses kneel, therefore,
Is where the storm's eye
Tries to lie on the grass
At the banks of the river
To admire
The sky.

Behind that hill
Is a home
Which stands - still.

Manuel Abis

Wine

Sits beside me
Incessant sea
I aside
My flag & sail
& hail not one
More pleasantry
Than my bed
Of shore & sand
& your hand
Gives me a head
In waves of stories
& sounds of sun
I comb your hair
Like cargo ships
I kiss your tips
In feign of glories
I stand again
Where you sit beside me
Incessant sea
No pleasantry
& this is 19
& 69.

Manuel Abis

Wineship And Waterdom In New York, Cubao

Take my name.

Any freudian would describe my name as an individual:

Extension of my organization.

But gestalts would spin the other way around

And counterpoint my name as an organization in itself

From my being individual.

Although my premises hold no water,

Neither is it a full crime.

And in the heart of New York, Cubao

At a quarter past midnight -

My name is less than the Republic of the Philippines

Versus my vagrancy

At a corner shop selling time and fine wine.

Or maybe I should ask this Fine Arts freshman

How long should it take before graffiti in Mega-

Manila wakes up from her underground?

Manuel Abis

Within The Language Of Our Experience

Within the language of our experience,
All words travel by imagination;
We pay our dues to the ticket master
Not with the currency of our meanings,
But with the sensibility of our intuition.
And, in this journey, as in all others,
To be really free is to be really lost
Like utter children;
For nouns and verbs
Are our fathers and mothers born again
Within the language of our experience.

Within the landscape of our existence,
We perceive
Through the opened window of a moving story;
We see the blur while we are reading.
Then, with this sovereign ride
Coming to a full stop,
We recognize the figure
Of speech waiting on the station outside
Like an extended family member.
A distant cousin
Whose name and degree
We cannot yet fathom, but whose face bore
The marked resemblance
Of our past youth and present labor.
We come to absorb everything
Like courteous strangers,
But still alert and seeming
The landscape of our existence within
The language of our experience
Where all words travel by imagination.

Manuel Abis

Words

Words.

Words exist.

Words exist together.

Where there are no words, there is only a sense of emptiness

In this house of poetry, therefore, i build the family words.

The noun is our father. he is the capital of our name.

He can also be our sub persona, our pronoun: from the places where one grows,

From the things that one sees. he is there.

He is the capital of our name. our constant

Between being either one or zero in life.

The noun is our father in the family of words.

The verb is our mother. she is the nature of our action.

Essentially, she can modify the noun, or any substantive title

From within our minds and hearts. from what is invisible and eternal. she is here.

She is the nature of our action. our variable

Between being one or the other in life.

The verb is our mother in the family of words.

Words.

Words exist.

Words exist together.

Where there are no words, there is only a sense of emptiness

Words to punctuate our daily conversations, our unwritable stories, our small

Eternity.

In this house of poetry, therefore, i build the family of words

Called

Home, the first adjective of our children.

Manuel Abis

Wow

Work me a widow
Without the back shadow
So young and so childless
Almost mother at best
Who will climb out a window
To aerialize her aureole
Until she realizes
The panting of her breasts
Paint me the glow
Or if she herself can draw
The midnight kisses
Of moonless teases
Work me a widow
Who will wow my taste
And who will taste my
Wow

Manuel Abis

Thou shalt have only one muse among all other musings
And wife her beyond amusing
Thou shalt not bear against big words witness and fear
Unless small ones bring them forth attested and near
Thou shalt not kill thy critics
Only thine adjectives
Thou shalt honor thy nouns and verbs
Like thine own fathers and mothers
Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's story
For honest labor is pure poetry
Thou shalt not be beyond thy content
Except when thine editor is in full agreement
Thou shalt not be beyond thy consent
Except when thine editor is in full agreement
Thou shalt only read magazines and newspapers
For truth and fiction are common strangers
Thou shalt not only in account pen thy name
But at critical times count on thy pen name
Thou shalt not write in vain
Amen.

Manuel Abis

Yesmaster

As all men tell their lies, then all great men tell great lies
And greater. We learned of the greater ones - these
Children of politics - the same way our fathers did:

We left. Most of the stories about them
Were far too close to read
And largely too small to tell.

Their family of words were not the same
As most of us. Their battles were not ours, but their
Laws mattered. The children of wars screamed

The ghost of fallen centuries and yet these others - the real
Prodigals of these lands - toil days by the hour-
Ly privileges of speech, then, afterwards, wonder

If conscience breaking the backbones of honor is
New to their thing. Do they mean
To prop to the podium

The puppets and presidents of our time?
Or would it only be their nature that
The concretion of their faces would die down

Where the spires of their secret kingdoms scratch
The salted skin of our existence? Astounds us
Their voracity for private scandal; hounds them

Our audacity for public vandal.
We left the caves for the quarry
And saw what they will build and where they will bury.

From a distance, mudslides and moans
Contaminate the ground where the sweeping
Songs of random marches to the barren field

Excommunicate all the titles of our fiction.
From where we knelt, we heard the children of
Silence read the burden of the oligarchs

Without an exorcist.
They tied our hands behind our backs
And tourniqueted them with paddles.

The horizon decayed before our eyes and everything
Closed in the corners of a mysterious haze
Of bullyhood and yesmasters. As all men tell lies,

Then all great men tell great lies and greater.

Manuel Abis

Yield

Like fruits,
I pluck
Some echoes
From the hollow
Tree
Of a guitar,
Then peel
The flesh
Of noise
From this sonorous
Yield,
And yield
To the fresh
Meat
Of their bittersweet
And wordless
Voice.

Manuel Abis

Yno

It is hard being dead
And louder. After all, not all victims are
Heroes. The blood marks the parameters of our
Imagination: all stories are relating, telling themselves to
Life. Where once we have not been, today we have soundly
Arrived. It is presumed that our prayers
Work their way as such. Corporeal to the touch. After all,
Respect - not flowers and candles - designate each name as a human
Moment. And guilt can be presumed as a eugenic voice a culture
Away from home.

Manuel Abis

Zipline

Sakay ka na't magpasingkáw,
Magpasingkaw, magpatangáy;
Magpatangay ka sa sigáw,
Sigaw nilang di sasakáy;
Sampay ka na't h'wag magasláw,
Magaslaw ang paa't kamáy;
Kamay't paang nakalawláw,
Nakalawlaw sa pagsampáy;
Kaway-kaway sa balangáw,
Balangaw ng paglalakbáy;
Naglalakbay sa pagbitáw,
Pagbitaw mo'y kawáy-kawáy;
Sumasabay, abot-tanáw,
Abot-tanaw, mundong buháy;
Buháy ka na! Ika'y ikáw!
Ikaw na ang sumasabáy!
Ikaw na ang abot-tanáw!

Manuel Abis