

Maybe *baby* is another way to say *bye*

Christian Jil R. Benitez¹
Ateneo de Manila University

I mean, it's not like I'm gonna leave you the next day.
It's more like, we gonna leave anyway, as we should,
as soon as we've been given names. Like how I'm *Chris*
so I can't be *Adam*, or *Matt*, or *Evan* anymore.
So unlike my shadow, in the smallness of it – inside
another – I just crouch and suddenly, I'm a rock
or some animal, and I don't even have to tell you why –
in fact, I *can't* even tell you why, I'm just that, all
pitch black, inert and flat. Sorry we have to speak,
it's always too much, or too little, or too loud
for love. I mean, I apologize I can't love you
the way I would've wanted to love: tenderness
and hunger, simple as simple must, it's just all hands,
open and I turn to your touch. It wouldn't have even mattered
if you call out another name, because it's just us,
baby, and it's all ours. I mean, we're nameless
but all the names could've been ours – call me *Smart* –
ass, call me *Whatnot*, I could've been a flower vase
or the water in it, unreplaced for days, and I wouldn't
have it another way. I mean, my God, imagine lying
beside me, and it turns out I'm also the bed we're in,
softness and sweat and all, and I'm still the lucky one.
Call me *Afternoon*, call me *Midnight*, and I still would've come;
in fact, we could even not die, like really *die*, we could've been
air instead, monsoons and their rains, all kinds of it,
and I would've still found a way to beckon
to love. It's such a shame, really, if you ask me,
that you can whisper to my ear that *I love you* - no matter
how much, I think it shouldn't have to be heard.
It's not like because it's a secret to be kept, it's more like it shouldn't be
needed to be said – you know what I mean?

¹ **Christian Jil Benitez** teaches Filipino at Ateneo de Manila University, where he obtained an AB-MA in Filipino literature. In 2018, he was named the Poet of the Year by the Commission on the Filipino Language, and his works have appeared in *Katipunan*, *Kritika Kultura*, *Likhaan*, *Philippine Studies*, and other literary outlets. Email: cbenitez@ateneo.edu

I know you call me *baby* before you even open your mouth,
this earth seems to tell me this, it just knows,
maybe we can't lie with the way we stand, you know?
Maybe there are other ways to speak, maybe we're just too
human – and language is the biggest scam.
I mean, don't rob us of love, spare us some, don't make me
ask for it, please, it's already a lot.
We could've been born as algal blooms, and perhaps
then, life would've meant so much more: it's light, it's water,
it's just that. Maybe somewhere, there's still war,
but at least I can feed myself, and cooking is one less thing
you would've worried about. Maybe you wouldn't be
calling me *baby*, that's for sure, maybe it's *spore*,
or something fancy only algae would know.
Sorry I'm apparently human – I mean, I'm sorry
I'm apparently human, for otherwise, I could've loved
you less selfishly, and maybe, you know,
more wordlessly. Like, no need to call me names
we invent ourselves through: in some other time, maybe
you could've just pushed me up the wall,
and I would understand. Or you could've just, you
know, be, and I still would understand.
History, with all of its boredom, led us here, sadly,
inefficient lovers, having to ask if we understand
clear enough. You get what I mean?
It's like whenever you tell me you love me,
or I tell you how much I love you, we just cleave
each other a little too much: *I* is a bit too lonely,
and *you* is always already a little too far. I mean,
it's sad, like really, really sad, I couldn't even
begin to tell you why, or how, with the force enough
to substitute a pat on your back, to mean
at least, no matter how much I don't understand it
myself: *baby, baby, maybe it's all just love.*