

Memories of War

Romeo P. Peña¹

Polytechnic University of the Philippines

Memories stir in the secrets buried within mysteries:
if burial is a rite for those long laid to rest;
if learning the wind's sacred paths is a holy endeavor;
if catching the light and the dark is a delicate dance.

The city is cleaved in times of passage,
rising and falling, bearing the weight of pain upon our chests.
Lips burn in the grave—
bones,
skull,
teeth,
and nails—
these are our companions on this journey, all that remains.
You must be exhumed and moved, from one grave to another,
forbidden to mingle with those fellow bones, skull, teeth, and nails.
If you're fortunate, soul,
come—be patient and feel
the sorrow that was once anger, and pain that lingered
in the left side of the heart.
I traveled, scaling the heights of your grave,
hearing the whispers and echoes stacked on your coffin.
That was where you were buried, but not where you'll lie,
separated from unknown bones.
You'll lie beside my father,
for my father is your grandfather, and I am his son,
bound by the same breath.

I led you to the new rite,
if it can be called that—

¹ **Romeo P. Peña** is a poet, novelist, and Professor of creative writing and literature at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines in Manila. He is the author of the Filipino novel *Isang One Dalawang Zero* (Single One Double Zero) and the poetry collection titled *Mula Bondoc Peninsula* (From Bondoc Peninsula). Email: rppena@pup.edu.ph

though no definite ceremony exists.

From Bondoc Peninsula,
everything is cast adrift in this journey—
trees, houses, posts, roads,
breath, imagination, life, and memory.
Is this the ceremony?

We halted in Sariaya,
there, beside the road's grave,
where the eyes perceive uncertainty,
as you were lifted from the box.
In that space, heavy with the scent of flesh,
wrapped in the smoke of the body.
I thought it was you, longing for trust,
belief, and faith,
but all was lost.
The space remained undisturbed.
I'll visit your true home,
not in the hollow that tradition calls for,
but atop your fellow dead.
In the city that claimed your life,
in the city brimming with tension of *Oplan Tokhang*.

Everything, like a resurrection,
sat on the bus.

Why do we hear and feel the soul of the place
where you were laid to rest in Lucena?
There's no need to break the laws of burial.
The feeling endures,
all we see is flight,
until rain pours upon the road.
Everything rises and falls with every pass.
Emotions twist and coil,
until they reach their limit,
challenging the sadness and pain of Manila.

Carrying the image of your burial,

this is the rite of searching for a space.
The box to be opened,
after a few years of silence.
In the path of images,
there, we'll find you.
At the summit,
observing.
Your clothes were revealed,
you were there, the firstborn in sleep.
In that moment, darkness steals the light,
everything is understood,
as we return to consciousness.
“You were meant to be here,
in the embrace of my hands.”

The new ritual involves being enclosed.
What remains will be carefully examined,
wrapped in the mystery of the killer scent,
before being sealed away.

Before, your mother and siblings could hug you—
now, you're just a part of our memories.