

# CROWN FOR MARIA

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## THE DELAY

Adept at putting things off indefinitely,  
Throwing them like house keys on  
A surface easy to miss because apparent,  
We suffer the malignity of our neglect:

The books and sheets ruined by burst pipes  
And leaks, the debt whose interest has  
Trebled, the wall bereft of a college diploma,  
The liver turned to pumice by hepatitis.

Words, spare change to our family's  
Unloveliness, remain unspent, ungambled  
So what transpires in their stead is a kind  
Of rasping silence hooked to the ear

Of the nearly dead. A basket of flowers  
Affixed by the bedside should have  
Arrived years earlier, with a tender note  
Pre-dating coma and cardiac arrest.

This is our curse: the delay rises, cools,  
Precipitates only to streak through  
The air, carve potholes of apprehension.  
We are its notable subjects, its underlings.

Meanwhile, our better selves, spotless  
In their reputation and good shoes,  
Rap at train windows, gesticulating at us,  
Pulled by an inviolable resolve so swift

We have not even thrown a scarf  
They can wrap around their throats,  
Pressed an amulet into their palms.  
Befuddled, we trudge on the pavement

Rehearsing the departure in our mind,  
Determining the point when our nerve  
Has failed us. Regret and remorse are  
The same thing under a magnifying glass.

Had we been them, would we be safer,  
Happier, more acceptable to the world?  
How would we appraise the selves  
Crippled by evasion and indecision?

Some things recur to be righted: my father,  
For instance, arriving from the hereafter,  
Wearing a fake Rolex and a lab coat similar  
To the one he wears in the only photo

I have allowed in the house. "Papa," I say.  
"I'm not yet ready to make amends."  
Just like that, death reclaims him like a bond  
As a stay against some terrific act of God.

The poem heals the gash of his entrance.  
Reckoning is what the living do all day.  
Punctual, well-behaved and benign,  
The dead have all the time in their hands.

## AMPUTATIONS

“When I asked [David] to describe how his leg felt, he said,  
‘It feels like my soul doesn’t extend into it.’”

-Anil Ananthaswamy, *Do No Harm:  
The People who Amputate  
their Perfectly Healthy Limbs,  
and the Doctors Who Help Them*

Because the soul is thought of as the primary  
Intelligence, the animating force poured onto  
The fontanel at birth – or way back into the womb –  
It’s not hard to establish the relation of its quality  
To light, water or sand, for it seeks out, insinuates  
Into the tight folds and corners of the body,  
Inflating it with consciousness. Soul is to flesh  
As what a hand is to a glove, except the soul  
Overwhelms the container, becoming it. The eyes  
Of the body, for instance, are the soul’s too,

Blinking through and apprehending the world  
From a perspective pitched high up on the head.  
When the body feeds the dog, washes the dishes,  
Walks past the threshold of the door, the soul  
Is complicit to the act. Involuntary urges, it is said,  
Are purely of the body and the soul – witness  
And victim, both – suffers from them. In others,  
The soul misses out cracks and grooves,  
Sometimes whole arms and legs, making a man,  
Healthy and well-adjusted in other respect,

Regard the offending limb contemptuously,  
His hate so consuming he freeze-dries it, cuts off  
The blood supply, attempts to saw it off.

*Apotemnophilia – the desire to be an amputee.*

More well-known are those who feel they are  
Entirely in the wrong body, have the wrong sex,  
Electing surgery to align the signified to  
The expectation of the signifier, the soul itself.  
When we say we're broken or we don't feel  
Like ourselves, what do we imply in the light

Of those who drag an alien limb or body in their  
Waking lives? Why is the evidence of the body  
Secondary to the testimony of soul? How to force-  
Direct it to the fugitive part which we own?  
If Plato were to be believed, all of us are just half  
Of who we should be, haunted and disfigured by  
The absence of our other half who may be riding  
A train or drinking a cup of coffee on the other side  
Of the globe. The main pursuit then is to conjoin  
Our ragged edges with someone else's and see

Whether a seamless fit is achieved. Some of us  
Will be blessed by recovery. But there are those  
Who seem whole, fully adjusted to their bodies,  
Quick of limb and musculature. Their souls,  
Full of quiddity, sustain the posture of grace,  
Their hair, the pale, drifting flames of a deep,  
Emergent season. Their genitals sit at the center  
Of their bodies like something that should have  
Been there all along, predetermined. Only when  
They make love do they become odd, eight-limbed.

Once, I developed an infatuation for a man whose  
Arms end at his elbows, rounding to a stump,  
Stitched to a brief pucker. A dancer, he swims  
And darts across the stage like a fish from shallow  
Depths, only to emerge in the glittering air, stirring  
His half-arms as though teasing a secret to rise  
To the surface. Nothing in his movement suggests  
Those arms should have continued and fingered out  
Though I must I admit I never had the heart  
To ask him if he ever felt pointing at something.

## BALISONG

Sprung from the grooves  
Of the handle's interior,  
Fanning out from two  
Pivot points – fulcrum  
Of mechanism – the blade  
Flicks into place as  
He secures the lock  
Of the copper latch.

Holding the knife  
Against my side,  
He requires from me  
An abrupt intimacy  
I fail to read for a split-  
Second until I realize  
The blunt argument  
Of what's being asked.

Shocked into compliance  
By inertia, I hand  
My phone to him,  
All the while eyeing  
The naked blade  
Whose complicity  
Is the faultlessness  
Of its own making.

It's the flash of metal  
That facilitates  
This familiarity which

Will soon be over  
Once the proffered  
Matches the expectation  
Of his appraisal.  
I cleave to his approval.

Both satisfied, we meet  
Each other's gaze  
And nod to an agreement  
Of pretense and tack:  
No transaction has  
Transpired now that  
The knife – innocent –  
Has been swung back.

## ODE

Even in this monsoon rain –  
    Vestiges of a typhoon uncurling,  
        Disintegrating its ropes over the Pacific –

The men paid in minimum wage  
    Are working. Risk their lives, it seems,  
        But the problem is not in the tumble

And slip but in the steel bars  
    Tempting lightning. Wearing  
        Regulation blue shirt and no shoes,

They tolerate the soft whips of rain,  
    The after-the-fact insistence of thunder.  
        In childhood, I'd seen how Junior, flung

From the roof of our house,  
    Land on wet stone, the black of his eyes  
        Wrenched into the inside of his skull.

He has a family now, a job as  
    A policeman, no noticeable injury  
        From the fall. Some of us are resilient

Like that. Some of us,  
    Shouldering the many sacks  
        Of lack, still get to a hundred years.

Meanwhile, a group of shirtless men  
    Are playing cards, stacks of coins  
        On the table increasing, decreasing.

Meanwhile, some teen-agers  
Are confessing their loneliness  
To a videoke machine as if no love

Will be ever possible for them.  
I wish to praise their heartaches,  
Their simple labor, their tears loosened

By alcohol, their rightful fear  
Of death, their spite of the rain  
But their sufficiency forbids me from

Claiming joy in their behalf, which  
They negotiate and pay for daily,  
Dearly, receive in installment, lump sum.

## THE SKY OVER OUR HEADS IS A RUSTY ROOF

*Meaning to be Modern: Philippine Paintings 1907-1959,*  
Finale Art Gallery

### I. *Laoag Seascape*, Ricarte Puruganan

O sky marbled with flames of yellow, orange  
Pink and mauve, you betray your blues  
To the sea only (less water than mirror, repeating  
The outcropping of rocks with neither doubt  
Nor prohibition), letting your sun foist its road  
Of shimmer, columnar and effervescent.  
The island, this low tide, reveals its roots

And indomitable use: something to be scaled  
By fisher folks, a trio of whom have spread  
A mat under a tree for a chance of gossip  
And hot drink that will last until the crepuscular  
Sky has set in. "We are not creatures of leisure,"  
Some proclaim so they scour the shore  
For shells and dumb fish while the children,

Still vague on the theory of hardship, gambol  
Among outrigger-less boats resembling gold.  
Their glee is inexpensive. What about them,  
The revelers with baskets on their heads?  
*"Intayon idiay isla ket agrag-o tayo ita nga aldaw,"\**  
They seem to have said. A pair of white sails  
Ghosts near the coast, seen but unremarked.

\*"Let us go to the island and celebrate the sun."

## II. *Afterglow*, Romeo Tabuena

The texture the masonite renders to the scene  
Already extracts a kind of contemplation –  
A flatness disheartening in real life but is  
The governing feature of this slum where  
Slim houses, cheek by jowl, are stretched  
Vertically to their material limit, beyond which,  
They become a mere concatenation of lines,

The joke of wind. And yet by some miracle  
Of gravity and sufficient carpentry, they hold  
Together, sheltering a family whose mother  
And child are crushed geometric figures against  
The door's frame. Foregrounded by a warren  
Of wires, the father carries a plank of wood  
The length of coffin against his chest

Like a pledge, is finished with his task,  
A dark oval for his face. If he turns around,  
He would remember what groove to slot  
The piece into and yet he will not do that,  
He will not be humiliated again, unless  
Out of the cobalt gaps between shacks  
Something like grace arrives, alleviates.

### III. *Nothing*, Rod. Paras-Perez

The sky over our heads is a rusty roof,  
Stained by verdigris, smudges of chalk.  
The red arc lit up by lampposts slender  
As matchsticks is an invitation of escape  
And yet we choose to confess our sins  
To the river whose reputation reeks  
Worse than ours. Should we take

The obligatory three steps toward it  
And gaze at the people we have  
Become? – no, not just drunkards but  
Workers, citizens, nation-builders.  
But for now, we simply wait for our  
Hangover to resolve by itself, ignore  
The door beckoning with its green light.

Let us sing about electricity, the moon  
Always absent in these parts, the skiff  
Laden with coconuts, the loose change  
In our pockets, the women who, later,  
Will slap a cold rag on our foreheads,  
The long sleep that will not condemn,  
The nothing that was, is and ever will be.

## VESSEL

In commemoration of the 25th year of the sinking of MV Doña Paz,  
said to be carrying over 4,000 people when she met her demise  
in Tablas Strait on December 20, 1987.

When she sailed from her safety to her destiny,  
God poured onto Mary His flesh-ordained divinity.  
Four thousand burned and drowned in the sea

Two millennia after, the worst in maritime history.  
MV Doña Paz teemed with people bound for the city  
When she sailed from her safety to her destiny.

Matriarchal, their names signify peace and mercy.  
They were vessels, both, the other fated to catastrophe.  
The four thousand burned and drowned in the sea,

Did they beseech her name amid the terrible melee  
As the fire lapped up the ship, ruthless and hungry,  
Hours after she sailed from her safety to her destiny?

Mary gave birth to the world's Savior, her duty  
Done. Rewarded with ascension, how did she see  
The four thousand burning and drowning in the sea?

Had MV Doña Paz borne her name's simplicity  
Would Mary cast the protective net of her pity?  
When she sailed from her safety to her destiny,  
Four thousand burned and drowned in the sea.

## CROWN SONNET FOR MARIA

Named after she who was anointed by God  
And bore His child as a virgin, my mother  
Was half of a twin, dark-skinned, whose broad  
Nose spanned a small face with a mole near  
Her left eye, and whose hair, thinning now,  
Would curl at the ends, a permanent perm.  
A child during the Japanese Occupation, she saw  
The terrible lack of those days, infirmed  
Soldiers on the streets of Sampaloc, rationing  
And food coupons, but what she would  
Most remember was her traversing  
A beam, the inevitable bad fall, cold  
Lard combed into her hair. She dared  
The fates which made her predisastered.

The fates which made her predisastered  
Allowed her distractions in her teen-age years  
As she chased and cheered stars in their  
Convertible cars and movie studios, fear-  
ing her mother's wrath only upon coming home,  
Pretending to have attended school,  
Her twin sister complicit in the ruse. From  
The life portrayed in the films, did she pool  
Gleaming images together and predict  
Some kind of future, perhaps with a cool  
Debonair who would love her forever, risk  
His life when called for? Her body was whole,  
Untouched, expectant. That bastard, poverty  
Seemed to be rooted in her destiny.

Seemed to be rooted in her destiny  
Was to glimpse the world as a migrant  
So after finishing high school, with a tiny  
Command of English, she, like a yanked plant,  
Was strapped to a plane, flown to Hawaii.  
There, she joined fellow Ilocanos looking  
For that hopeful chance to blossom away  
From the homeland, amid the teeming  
Pineapple plantations. From there,  
Mother moved on to a boarding school  
(The dirtiest place on Earth, she said) where  
She was a cleaner. The seawind was full  
Of promise and potential, especially at night,  
Tinkling melodies, far-flung yet bright.

Tinkling melodies, far-flung yet bright,  
On her guitar, mother would settle on her  
Favorite, "I Will" by the Beatles, right  
After her stint. Was she crooning for father  
Who, by this time, was sending her posts  
Written in a big, terrifying script, avowing  
His tenderness? Against censure, she chose  
Love, flew back to the country and, marrying  
My father, turned her back from her task:  
Save the family from scarcity. Foolish girl,  
They collectively said, for losing her chance  
At a green card. Prematurely whirled  
Into the demands of raising a family,  
She knew one thing: deliver a litter of three.

She knew one thing: deliver a litter of three,  
And so there we were, in a suburban home,  
Looking like we belonged to each other, free  
Floating souls. Were these indicative of doom:  
Father's year-long absences, money spent  
Rapid as luck, uninvited in-laws crowding in?  
But nothing was more telling of the rent  
Sub-layer of things than these: arrowing  
Accusations that flew into the face  
That was flesh. Father's diabolical temper  
Collapsed the house's interior space,  
Leaving a horrid gap in the center.  
Sweeping us to where she grew up,  
Mother returned to the one place in her map.

Mother returned to the one place in her map  
And never looked back, as well as I—my sisters  
Spent years with him, closing the gap.  
In the succeeding years, she nourished a number  
Of dogs and cats, collected proofs of purchase  
(Wrappers of detergent, noodles, shampoo)  
For raffles, played cards till morning, chased  
Her luck in Lebanon and Jordan, shed copious  
Amount of tears at the sight of Pope John Paul II  
In TV, mourned the death of her mother,  
Became a grandmother to two grandsons  
And moved to a tenement, a cluster  
Of claustrophobic spaces. Sent to that address,  
The boxed ash of father, now totally hers.

The boxed ash of father, now totally hers –  
What is my mother's thought over this  
Appalling reunion? Did the blank years  
Retract to the rupture between her hands, miss-  
ing everything? Mama, nothing to be done now.  
Choices – dull, slippery atoms – determine  
Patterns beyond our holding, somehow  
Make a life. The rest goes unexamined.  
Your forgetfulness ushers in the clarity  
You swear by during the hard hours. Words  
Tamper with old hurts, recriminations but see  
How they also reveal a pardonable world  
Where you can be queen, light's motherload,  
Named after she who was anointed by God.

## AMERICA

Mother and I were to see America, no  
Not the continent – neither its representative  
Country, the most powerful nation on Earth,  
Where she stayed for seven years and would  
Never return again – but the band from

The '60s, whose hit "A Horse with No Name"  
Is less a song than a poem as it gallops  
Toward ambiguity. It was Valentine's Day,  
People were bearing cakes, balloons, roses  
Wrapped in cellophane with little hearts.

I asked her to meet me at McDonald's  
Near the train station – now defunct. Before  
My patience sailed off in its brief string  
And short supply of helium as I waited,  
Mother arrived, hastened toward me with

Her chipped manicure and faded hair dye.  
She had managed to dab tint on her lids,  
A gash of red on her lips. Later: as we were  
Munching mournfully on spaghetti and burger,  
An explosion – a godawful thud – set off

Below the station, sent its shockwaves  
To the floor, scurried up our legs and,  
Upon reaching our stomachs, detonated there  
For a second time. All animal terror now,  
Mother and I took to our feet and, with

The nameless others – they who never  
Bargained anything like this in their life –  
Fled into a mall, thinking of nothing else  
But running, saving ourselves, all of us  
Buzzing a single mind like a swarm.

No sooner did we entertain the idea  
Of safety when a fresh wave of the panic-  
Stricken descended onto the mall; this time,  
The cashiers, the sales ladies joined us,  
Abandoning the merchandise they were

Paid to keep an eye on. And so mother  
And I – source and offspring, template  
And copy – ran some more, encircling  
The globe, sprinting to the moon and back,  
Navigating the spiraling floors of a parking lot –

The circles of hell where angels hole up  
To escape God's terrific wrath – until  
We were spat out, dazzled and confused,  
On a thoroughfare. By now, ambulances were  
Blazing and shrieking, doing something

Counter-intuitive, rushing *toward* the site  
Of the blast. A pickup whizzed by us,  
Carrying the injured, map of blood  
On their backs. Spent from all the running,  
Mother and I ambled on the streets of

The financial district, as if luck had left us  
For good this time; as if we were looking  
For father, asking passersby of his where-  
Abouts; as if our lives had been reconfigured  
Without our consent in a place where

No face was friendly and the snow, sensing us  
As fresh off the boat, pummeled our shoulders  
With their laughably small fists. Mother  
Biting into the burger she had the mind  
To save despite – or because of – our hurry,

We resolved to see America – the beautiful,  
Blessed America – in our shell-shocked  
Composure, refugees of the near miss  
Trying to remember their names while  
Keeping mum on the news of the outside.

## MARIANG MAKILING AS OTHER WOMEN IN MYTH

The myth holds true: I have long fled into  
The interior of the mountain where  
An inexhaustible lamp throws a shuttle

Of light into the dark weave, hemming it.  
No longer bound by appearance, I let snakes  
Braid into the vines of my hair. Fireflies,

Impoverished fairies, visit me to die. I stitch  
Their rent wings to a wedding dress with  
The dragonfly's needle, the spider's silk.

The man who promised me marriage –  
And absconded – is long dead. I stoppered  
my weeping by feeding on his shadow or else,

My grief would have split the mountain,  
Cratering the island, shattering the mirror  
Of the bay. That was my last generosity:

No more ginger of gold for the newlyweds,  
No more storm-snapped trees springing  
Under my touch. As for him, his soul

Is of no use to me – fugitive and impotent.  
His scalp is the souvenir I keep by my sleep.  
Should I hostage a young man to serve

My fancy? Picking up his musk, I sense him  
Drift by my dwelling, summon me with strings.  
I catch a strand of his music, spool it around

A finger. Should I press against a shaft  
Of moonlight to garner visibility after  
A century? No one would have the mind

To see me. In my boredom, I wear the dress  
I dare not complete. It glistens like tears when  
I dance. They said I was a great beauty once.

## FAIRYTALE DIPTYCH

From *Household Stories by the Brothers Grimm* (Dover Publications, 1963)

### *I. Hansel and Gretel*

From the start, we were intent on killing  
Each other, raw skin in your fingernails,  
Clump of hair in my fist. Vile children,  
We wrestled day and night, missing meals.  
Father would simply watch – amused –  
In that familiar demeanor of a man used

To failure. We only ceased sharpening  
Our tongues and knives when she arrived,  
Stepmother, not from the woods in the deep  
Valley but somewhere far remote, America.  
She regarded us with distrust through  
Small eyes punched into a face electric with

Permed silver curls. She enchanted father  
With money, milk and honey, green card.  
Before we, for the first time in tandem,  
Could save him, she had already lured us  
Into the forest, spirited him away.  
She cooked him in a winter stew, licked

His bones clean. The birds having eaten  
The bread crumbs and still no white  
Duck to ferry us across the massive lake,  
We call father's ghost to no avail.  
The witch's house has long burned,  
Its untold riches, its panes of sweetness.

## II. *The Brother and Sister*

After banishing us to the forest – having  
Failed to summon father back to life –  
Stepmother tinctures the streams with  
A curse that will transform the drinker  
Into an animal, either predator or prey.  
Savaged by thirst, I drink, retract into

The shape of a fawn, shooting spindly legs,  
Shivering into pelt. Instead of touching  
My neck with a knife, you collar it with gold  
And turn me into a pet. I bound across  
The land in this new body, flirting with  
The hunters. The king traces my steps

To our seclusion where, gripped by your  
Beauty, he offers you marriage. Flinching  
Not one bit, you agree. He brings us to his  
Kingdom where we're free. Having heard  
Rumors of our fortune, stepmother charges  
Like a dark wind and kills you, replacing you

With her one-eyed daughter. That impostor  
Queen, I chew on her good eye like a berry.  
The king unleashes his military might  
Involving wolves, howling fire. The curse  
Lifted, I unfold into human and you  
Return, smelling faintly of the afterlife.

## DEATHS IN THE FAMILY

### I. Gloria

After trudging on the main road from her house in Sapang Palay  
We reached it, the just stamped cemetery where we would lay  
My aunt's remains constrained by a casket the color of pewter.  
It was all parched landscape, sharpening the wind to shimmer.

In the distance, squares of still untouched vegetation, the silo  
Of the cement factory, spare habitations. Her face was an O  
Beneath the glass, made up to the pasty constitution  
Of the dead, the final humiliation. Her funeral procession

Was composed of relatives I used to live with in one house,  
Hers occupying the roomier first floor where, in dead hours,  
She would lumber about, banging pots and such, her shriek  
Shaking its foundations. By day, she was companionable, meek.

Now, she looked like she had the last laugh. Even my cousin-  
In-law (who I had seen swing an ice pick at the startled skin  
Of a tricycle driver) wept bitterly, grief etching against  
His heart asterisks of ice. As for her husband, my uncle,

I heard what he confessed but I won't write it. The children  
Having circled around my aunt, the undertaker attached a chain  
To the coffin and lowered it into the pit. Before it was paved  
Over with soil, a concrete slab sealed the mouth of the grave.

## II. Aurelio

The most handsome among my cousins, he was popular  
With the ladies, but he loved only one, her name forming part  
Of a tattoo in the shape of a heart emblazoned on his arm.  
*Angie* – where is she now? After that heartbreak, no harm

Would ever visit him again save the one in his sleep which,  
Clutching his real heart, gave it an indefatigable squeeze.  
His siblings scampered to give him a decent funeral,  
Held his wake in a room nearly demolished, provisional.

His lover, who had worked as a nurse in Saudi Arabia,  
Never left his side, arranging the flowers, the candelabra.  
Sometimes, she would mutter a word or two to herself,  
Giving her hair a quick tug. Inconsolably, she wept.

She felt entitled to brag about her gifts to him. She was,  
It turned out, his last hope. Was it love between them? I axe  
The question. I'm ignorant on the nature of intimacy  
Between two people with their mess of histories.

I stared imploringly at my cousin's face – flame-struck –  
Hoping for a reproach for my impertinence. No luck.  
Beauty took a shine on him even in death; his tall  
Fingers poised as though about to fire a double pistol.

### III. Myra

Her name was Myra and she was eighteen when armed men  
Sprayed bullets at their storefront home shattering condiments,  
Canned goods, plastic containers. Targetless but specific, some flew  
Toward her body asleep on a double-decker. Her family knew

A second assault might ensue, scampered out of their beds,  
The night smearing its inky blue. The sheets blotted with red;  
She didn't make it through. She was a cousin close to my age,  
The one with a mole on her chin and who had pledged

Never to wear skirt and frilly dresses. When we were younger,  
We used to play in the dusty lot at the back of their house, an inner  
Square where a tree blossomed its sour fruit and where  
My grandmother pickled fish in an earthen jar sealed with a cover.

It is said that a row in the cock pit, debt unpaid, or property  
Casting a shadow on the neighbor's lot, eclipsing its value may be  
The motive. Her file has rotted in the police headquarter for years  
While her killers are still at it, I suppose, easy with murder.

May it blow a clean hole between their eyes, the testimony  
Of justice. High walls wrap the house in the province like a sentry.  
If you step in the living room, you will see her in a portrait smiling.  
My cousin's name was Myra and she was dead at eighteen.

## THE FOG

Dropped like a god –  
Or at least his wild  
Indifference –

Precipitate loss  
Of avowals,  
Shooting from

The center  
Pitched high up  
In the mountains

Where clouds  
Are the higher entities,  
The real manifestation

Of disembodied grief,  
The fog advances,  
Cold-hearted,

All motive  
And murder,  
Chocking vegetation,

Poisoning  
The undergrowth,  
Stripping the landscape

Of color –  
At this instant, time  
Is contracting

To the never-ending  
Now, its edges  
Degrading –

The fog reaches  
Human habitation,  
Cascading

And dipping  
On mountain-  
Side towns,

Intruding into houses,  
Seeping through  
Furniture,

Fouling the grain  
Of the wood,  
Metastasizing metal

Into tumors  
Of rust –  
Now, it grasps

The face  
Of the infant,  
Re-arranging it

Like jigsaw –  
Now it tethers  
The brain

Of an old man  
By its slight stem,  
Making him say,

*I'm sixteen*  
*Years old,*  
*The Japanese*

*Are coming,*  
And yet the fog  
Will not relent,

Will not ascend  
Like a blue bandage  
And unzip

Above the trees,  
But will go on  
As the thicker version

Of air – its corpuscles  
Of blur –  
Silencing the city,

Constricting  
The hearts  
Of its citizens,

Drenching books  
And newspapers  
To illegibility,

Paralyzing  
The hand on  
A page of a diary –

And when people  
Begin to think  
The damage

Will be permanent,  
That it's time  
To call the soldiers

And summon  
The help of foreign  
Governments,

The fog sublimates –  
An awareness akin  
To conscience –

Exhausting  
Its blind fury  
Among the stones,

Here where  
The land meets  
The fog's

Former body –  
Its primal recalcitrance –  
The sea –

## GOD PARTICLE

### I.

In the news, physicists claim they have spotted  
The God Particle, the missing equation in creation.  
They wouldn't call it as such (Higgs Boson's  
The official) but to their chagrin the name stuck  
So what we have now, in monitors and graphs  
Is God Himself, infinitely smaller than a sperm,  
Flashing His brief tracery when photons, dastardly  
Nervous entities, collide with each other. This  
Particle, if I'm getting the science right, explains  
Why we're even having this conversation in  
The first place, why the table holds the pitcher  
And the apple (sometimes both), why galaxies  
Fly like loose kites in space – sort of. It hooks  
Sub-atomic anchors to matter, making it *there*  
Or else everything will just shoot its energy  
To a field where nothing happens, even God  
Presumably. It gives us the color of our eyes,  
Our eyes, their convoluted circuitry and optics.  
It gives us us. We are saturated in it. We are it.  
God, who has long vanished from the Heavens,  
Now resides in the deepest interior of the visible  
(Coaxed to intelligibility with the right instruments,  
Of course), swaddled in minute shooting stars.

## II.

Is this particle the same God who visited me  
When I was a child, feverish and flirting with death,  
Who stitched Himself into the shape of a Great Being:  
Wise, wizened, His white almighty beard, like a clock-  
Maker's brush, sweeping away my six-year-old sins?  
He was about to scoop me up to the shining clouds,  
Light shooting from the holes of His sleeves,  
When I awoke. Or perhaps it's the two angels,  
Male and female, who visited me in my dream,  
Beautiful specimens of humanity save for their  
Energetic wings. Why did they have to be European,  
Specifically Scandinavian, given their blondness?  
Why did God not appear in a form I could easily  
Believe in? perhaps Mr. Juco with his sleepy eyes  
And distended tummy, wearing *sando* and suspenders,  
Operating a workshop of movie billboards painted  
By hand; or possibly Mrs. del Mundo running  
A pharmacy, peering through thick glasses to read  
The fine print of a tablet. Long dead, they are now  
A mystery to me, compelling and irresistible as angels.  
Or are their shapes unrepeatable now that they have  
Spilled their constituent elements back to the source?  
In the supernatural apparitions, not one of them spoke.

### III.

Certainly, there are the historical figures – the Buddha,  
Jesus Christ, a motley crew of saints whose vertebra,  
Elbow or knucklebone was too precious to bury,  
Had to be encased in a reliquary – whose pneuma  
Was fully manifested they could treat the laws  
Of the physical world with impunity: multiplying  
Loaves and fish, rowing across air, imbuing awareness  
To trees so they may bend their boughs and protect  
The sacred head from scorching sunlight. It is said  
That they themselves gave off light emanating from  
Their outlines, fanning out into a halo. How can physics  
Explain the aurora borealis of soul? What undulant  
Celestial electrons was it constituted of? For these  
Surrogate beings of the spirit, flesh was the necessary  
Impediment, the enemy to be slept with so they may  
Walk among us – the downtrodden, the fallow –  
And vocalize the news from the other side. It's not  
As if they did not suffer from it: the brief lives,  
The dazzling epilepsy, the palms leaking of stigmata.  
I'm more interested, however, on how they perceived  
And attempted to cure the common afflictions:  
The whooping cough, the numb limb, the stye  
In the eye. When they died, did they let out a sigh?

#### IV.

I did witness it first-hand, divine spark fleshing Pope  
John Paul II in a bullet-proof glass borne by a pickup.  
He was parsing the air with his hand, pink and hairless,  
As a gesture of blessing to the masses, to us and we,  
Filled with Holy Spirit (what else?), were waving back,  
As enthusiastically as we could to catch his purifying gaze.  
I would be equally hypnotized a decade later, by a painting  
By Giovanni Batista Moroni called *The Portrait of a Man*  
Where a tailor, wearing a blouse ruffled at the collar  
And sleeves and pleated pantaloons, holds a pair  
Of scissors while fingering a black cloth and yet  
Will not shear it, will not transform it but instead  
Draw and fasten the viewer's attention with his gaze,  
Hook-and-eye. Is this stasis not indicative of holiness  
Since only life is full of changefulness, vicissitudes?  
But if this particle is omnipresent, in fact the essence  
Of presence, would it even matter? Now everything  
Is divine by default: the mother stroking the head  
Of her hydrocephalic child like silk, a skittering deer,  
A cup that you draw to your mouth, sanctifying it  
With your kiss. If everything is a particle, a particulate  
Of God, what then is not God? A day after I saw  
The pope in his mobile, my skin was stippled with pox.

## V.

It could be just a matter of semantics, of course.  
If anything, the particle makes the concept of God  
Redundant as it debunks the intelligence required  
To set things into order. Matter generates its own  
Impulse, locomotion. Mass is the real benevolence.  
But what was I doing at two o'clock in the morning,  
Walking toward the Chapel of Transfiguration,  
Urging my body through the darkness, wanting  
To pray? (Matins was a good two hours away.)  
I shook the glass doors that would not open.  
(Or should have I slid them?) Only the taber-  
Nacle was lit. Who did I think I should be meeting  
Under the chapel's steep pyramid? In that night  
Livid with stars, I was certain God was a separate  
Entity, somersaulting with the highland winds,  
Bearing upon me the full force of His compassion  
And worry. But terror made me more aware  
Of my body now trudging carefully back to  
My room, negotiating through the tripping rocks.  
The bell's tongue was still in its receptacle.  
My mouth was full of His names. In that split second  
When fear fled and I leveled my gaze, something  
Took over and altered the mountain, jubilant as flesh.