
"Locution (Rosa's Story)"

Eric Tinsay Valles

Biography

Eric Tinsay Valles is a Filipino Ph.D. candidate in English Studies at the National University of Singapore. He is exploring the use of St. Augustine of Hippo's interpretive theory of reading (distinguishing between literal and figurative interpretations) in the study of *cupiditas* (disordered love of self that prevents communion with others and the Other) in the works of Chaucer, Jonson, Pope and Flannery O'Connor. Prior to postgraduate research, he worked in Taipei as a business reporter and columnist for the English-language daily *Taiwan News*.

Rosa's still fair as the flower
 But, roused from a waking dream, lacks its glow.
 In place of thorns she wears blisters.
 She whispers on a foreign shore

Some truth to a boy with skin paler than her own:
 Buds untended lack a shield
 From dust, misery, being alone;
 She gawks at Hsin Sheng park aboard bus 66.

The boy is lulled by Snow White's tale;
 What vanity to think it her own.
 Her eyes could use some extra sleep,
 Dreams of spirits by the moonlight blown.

Hi ho! Hi ho! How does it go?
 A pall hangs over lips which once bore a smile.
 Pug noses like Rosa's stir like sparrows

Before a quake; past St. Christopher's they file.

The altar wall's chipped, blue and gray
Like the noon sky after a spell of rain.
Hundreds of Rosas clasp hands in array,
In spirit fly to towns left behind.

On Chungshan Bei Lu Rosa toils,
Her pay's as fat as an Ayala manager
For scrubbing other people's toilets,
Paroled on Sundays a willing prisoner

Irises sparkle like a misty, moonlit lake,
Awed by a wooden Lord crucified;
A mother's calloused hands his feet would take,
Wash with nard and dry with hair unbundled.

Can a migrant worker forget her baby?
Nonoy's eyes are sealed tight inside her head.
Her fingers run through his unkempt hair
On the Chinese boy she tucks in bed.

A snapshot of him in her wallet
Flashes a chipped tooth frozen in time,
Seven when goodbye she kissed him;
One year later his pa packed for a richer clime.

What I'll give up for you, Nonoy, my dear.
The teenager's face is cracked like granite,
The right eyelid releases a murky tear,
Lips kissed by pills drool with frothy ire.

Why oppress innocents with affliction
And forsake those who cry in your name?

Nanay sets the table with fancy food,
But Nonoy says without mother it's a shame.

Have mercy on Nonoy; do not be false!
The world's blurry behind her veil of tears
And hollow as her cry bounces off the walls,
Sweeps past pews, and tolls like a bell in her ears.