

Puñeta: Political Pilipinx Poetry



Volume 2

Barbara Jane Reyes, Editor

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Edited by Barbara Jane Reyes

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Puñeta: Pilipinx Political Poetry, Volume 2

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Arlene Biala

hey, america ~

did you not get enough attention
did you think you were alone
didn't you know we had your back
until you said, *fuck it, i'm tired*
turn off the lights, lock the door

didn't you know we've been loving you
every damn day you've been gone
even though you promised you'd be home
always muttering your lame ass excuses

did you know we still write love letters to you
burn them in offerings on the new moon
usually we have to rip them up and start again
too mad at you, how many times you break us

we're talking to you, damn it.
where the hell do you think you're going?

Arlene Biala

*won't you help to sing,
these songs of freedom?
cause all i ever have
redemption songs . . . ~ bob marley*

this is the taste of memory.

when my daughter asks
where we will move to
if trump wins,
i cringe.
strike the prayer bowl, burn the sage

i hold her tightly and tell her quietly
we are staying right here.

this is the broken record: those people, these people
make america great, feed us hate, click bait
and for god's sake, build that wall.
this is the needle stuck in the cesspool groove.

and i understand fully what my friend once said:
that her grandma used to hum
to keep from killing someone.

and here we are humming to save lives.
but we are hungry for the real music, and we want it now.
let the humming pierce the eardrums of those who look away.
strike the chord, burn the sage

one by one we summon our lolas
because we can't sleep at night
we are hungry for the real music,
not the noise, and they
are the keepers of song.
each note they sing brings us back

mmm. you're late. sigue. go eat now.
Is how my lola greeted us.
not, "hello dear, how are you! thank you for coming!"

no. *mmm. you're late again. wash your hands.*

sit in silence for a moment. stop humming. lift each note to your mouth,
pick out the lies like fish bones that try to lodge in your throat.

talk story, raise one up. make room for each other. make room.

Rose Theresa Booker

Bakunawa

A mouth the size of a lake, a crimson tongue set among pearl white daggers. Whiskers, gills, wires – sharp as fish hooks – jut out from metallic blue scales. Two sets of wings protrude from this serpentine form. One large, ash-gray; the other small, found further down. He flies out from the ocean's depths and into hallways by bays, coastlines, rivers.

Ang bulan namon sang una, sang una
Guin ka-on sang bakunawa
Malo-oy ka man, i-uli, i-uli

He opens door after door after door, looking for moons in the shape of daughters. He has swallowed thousands in the past. He will swallow more in the future. He is swallowing them now, leaving in the sky a black gash of shame.

Ang bulan namon sang una, sang una
Guin ka-on sang bakunawa
Malo-oy ka man, i-uli, i-uli

Mothers play soothing sounds with their bodies, in hopes that he will fall into a deep sleep. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes they don't even try. Mothers bang on pots and pans, to scare him into spitting out the moon. They drive him out. They drive him in. They drive themselves.

Ang bulan namon sang una, sang una
Guin ka-on sang bakunawa
Malo-oy ka man, i-uli, i-uli

Amalia B. Bueno

At Cebu Pool Hall

When Mrs. Sato says our shorts too boy-crazy tight, we
cruise Hotel Street anyway and sway in front the manongs, the real

men muscled brown arms in undershirts keeping cool.
The gold-toothed one winks and I pretend not to see as we

turn and stare at starched white shirts. We sway left
at a Navy man whose liquor breath whispers to school

girl me and I blush at his *hey beautiful* drawl. We
pull into the pool hall. They drink, then lurk

for the gambling happening day and night, late.
Mommy asks *you want in now, or what?* We

hold the front down, the pool balls strike
red white blue they all hit straight.

Mommy leaves Bill Haley and the Comets so we
rock round the clock and let me go, lover. We sing

our hearts, we cash our dreams, we sell our island sin.
We wanna salute statehood and dance off this rock. We

do the honi honi, talk good English, make aloha sexy body thin.
Whistling between pointy yellow teeth, the ensign slips me some gin.

He say he take me away see the wide, wide world. We
laugh at "how wide do you like it, sailor." I'm jazz-

ing his ukulele strumming his A major cool as a pina colada in June.
We talk, we walk, we drink, da-drink-a-drink-a-drink until it's time we

swoon at Aloha Tower moon, ride a high tide life, and I tell him I'm dy-
ing, stuck on this rock, flippin' on men, gonna shrivel up soon, real soon.

Amalia B. Bueno

#61354218, C. Mendoza

Crystal's pre-teen belly button
looks up from her cropped top.
Her hands, shoved careless in jeans
match her shoulder slouch cool.
Her half-closed eyes belong to
an unblinking chameleon taking
all things in, giving nothing back.

Crystal, crystal, her name took her away.
Crystal sparkle, crystal clear.
Crystal's trapped in a hot glass pipe.

Runaway girl on Hotel near Four Jacks
selling her assets for the sleepless high.
Nana's etched Hawaiian heritage bracelets, gone.
Tata's jade ring, gone. Billyboy's Ipod gone.
Legal now, she's Chinatown homeless
sleeping in doorways between rehab
and relapse, but the rock keeps calling her
to jail then bail, back in and out again.

Crystal, crystal, her name took her away.
Crystal sparkle, crystal clear.
Crystal's got a lei around her neck.

#61354218. C. Mendoza, suicidal
in prison and taking pre-natal meds.
#61354218, she kisses her newborn goodbye.
#61354218, she breaks down, again tries to die.

But now she's Maria Clara Mendoza and clean—what
nobody could believe happened in prison.

Maria Clara, quiet and compliant.
Crystal no more, Crystal not here.
Just Maria Clara, MC for short.
Yeah, churchgoing saint.
For how long she gonna stay?
I guess until she goes back.

Rachelle Cruz

Embroidery

I was looking at the Wikipedia page on Embroidery and found a link to Ray Bradbury's short story, "Embroidery." What happens: three women embroidering flowers, trees, houses, streets spilling on their laps. They remember hands, not faces. Hands that spank children, shuck peas, lock and unlock front gates, measure cloth, turn taps, etc., etc. When I read "Embroidery" by Ray Bradbury, I felt a metal ding in my mouth, like too much coffee or not enough. Like too much to do and not enough. A woman once told me that you can read age by the veins on a woman's hands. Drippy like melting candles means old, old, old. You're old. Smooth and taut - you're still a child, you cute thing. OK, but back to these three women. Here's the scene: the embroidered sun is shining brightly, the embroidered trees stand there; there's an embroidered man on the embroidered road. One of the women tears out his face. What are you doing?! the other women cry. I don't know, she says, I don't know, looking at her hands. The first woman keeps checking the time; a countdown to five. When it's finally five o'clock, the world ends, and that metallic taste comes back and now it has a mosquito sound. The world is ending, and there is fire and all of that, but the women can't look up from their laps. One of these women has a rose for a heart, and it's the last thing to burn. These women don't have faces, just hands that peel oranges, make lunches, build and tear down the world.

Rachelle Cruz

Instead of the moon, coupons

When the phone rang at 3 AM, we pulled out our wallets, rubbing the guilt from our eyes.

Guilt is stupid so we pinched it between our fingers and flicked it out of the window. Adrienne Rich said something about guilt, the uselessness of it. So we think of that, but we still pack boxes. Hold office fundraisers.

When we heard your voice, we clicked around and around, the heat from screens whirring between our hands.

\$3.89 Saved! The printed-out coupons for the things we kinda want/need. The things you needed/wanted. The fingernail circled our total on carbon paper.

How distance made you you. The younger we of us don't understand why they can't have Hershey's, too.

Rachel Ronquillo Gray

Recess

If I tell you he grabbed me
 over my dress, between
 my legs

If I say he grabbed me
 so hard I couldn't sit
 still on the bus ride home

If I say he grabbed me
 so hard I was sore for a day

If I say he grabbed me
 during recess playing tag,
 that he ran up behind me, wrapped
 his skinny small boy arms around
 me & grabbed me & grabbed me &
 grabbed me & I screamed & shrieked &
 struggled & elbowed him until he let
 go.

If I say I kept it a secret then & I keep it a secret now.
 I have never said it out loud. I don't know how.

Again.

He digs, scoops with his hand like he is
 digging a moat for a castle or like a dog

for bone he's trying to get inside me & we're
 in the middle of the playground, afternoon recess.

Does anybody see this. I want them to see it.
 I don't want them to see it. What is happening.

My face heats & I scream. Does it sound like I'm
 joyful or like I'm having fun. On the bus home

I can't sit still like I have copper pennies between
 my legs. I don't know yet that I can bleed from there,

but that's what it will feel like. I can't sit. I can't sit.

Does this make him a monster, the boy who cried

into his desk because he felt stupid, because no one told him
he was talented & gifted. He was so skinny. Years later,

he did Michael Jackson impressions, he did the moonwalk
at a school assembly & I was proud. We were friends. He wore

a fedora & a white suit. Does he remember that he did this to me.
How did he know to do something like that to a girl.

Did he do it to anyone else. Did someone do it to him.
I'll never forget the dust & gravel & sunlight off metal

& sun & sun & sun

Rachel Ronquillo Gray

The Muse Torches Corporate America

It was only Tuesday.

Ten minutes after she fell

asleep, she startled herself
awake, hurried to put on slacks

and heels and a name badge. Two hours
of drifting later, her eyes startled awake

once more, anticipating fluorescent glow,
dull buzz. She dreams of votive candles. Black bags

full of them. Their tinny sounds. Wax melting
to the touch. She sets candles everywhere,

encircles everything. Closes in skyscrapers,
billboards, colors meant to stir hunger, greed.

Ten-foot high symmetrical faces made to invoke
beauty. She lights each candle one by one.

Makes sure yesterday's newspaper is close at hand.
Yesterday's headlines are kindling. She is awake now.

Everything is enclosed in fire. Everything is sun.

Jaime Jacinto

World's Fair, St. Louis, 1904

I.

Inang, stares at the camera
Tells a newspaper man
About the winter she rode a steamboat
Across an ocean to California,
Where she tossed overboard
A pair of black-heeled shoes-
Gifts from the missionary man's daughter
With feet so wide, so used to walking
Barefoot across the cordillera,
What use were those laces and buckles?
That harness of leather tongues?
What was promised that she would leave
Her village of terraced mountains,
Land of green and rain?

II.

By day I lived beneath
The Saint Louis sky
And at night, a plaster ceiling
Of painted stars.
I lit the straw.
I stirred the meat
Boiling inside a charred iron pot.
I'd squat and fan
The yellow sparks
The grey smoke curling
From the dog fires.
And they'd watch me and wince
At my calloused knees,
My toes caked in dust,
My empty gaze.
When they called us names
We spoke back to them in
Our *Waray, Tagalog*,
Our *Bontoc, Bagobo*,
Our *Ifugao*.

III.

We displayed them like dolls
Measured their bodies
Photographed their faces
Recorded every detail of
Their coarse hair, the shape
Of their ears, their splayed feet,
The girth of their sex
Even the temperature of their blood
And day after day
For one buffalo nickel
Folks dressed in their finest
Lace and linens paid to stare
And they would return

IV.

My dear devil children
Creatures of our Christian illusion,
Reason for our domination
And why we dream of your copper skin,
The flies hovering at your hips,
Your bare backs
Smooth hairless bellies
The dark oily hollow of your thighs.

V.

Who posed for that final photo?
Who was the real barbarian?
Was it that missionary man's daughter,
Her heart full of prayer,
Her hands whiter than the dead coals
Of an open firepit?
Or was it you, lost and wandering
The fairgrounds, an amulet hanging
From a cord around your neck,
This gift of your history,
This reminder of home.

Michelle Peñaloza

The Morning After the Election I Called My Mother

In the space between
where I've come from
and who I've decided to be

I swim in questions—
why do fierce hearts of the same weight and size work in such opposition?
why are my people within my people, that is to say, my family, a people of such fear?
how does a person hold pride and shame with the same hand?

It's over, my mother answers.
I scream, *it has only begun.*

If we could speak of my mother's life
as an ocean, we might call it
The Edge of the World
or a gyre of fear, Christ's throned heart holding its center.

To wish violence upon your own
Heart is something I know well
and something of which I am ashamed.

Don't you know your hate will not make a harbor
Don't you see your face, your voice, your life
are what they would burn clean from this country
is what I mean when I say, Ma, I'm not coming home
Ma, we should just stop talking

They say, *the high ground is a lonely hill to die upon.*
I feel like I'm dying on an erupting volcano,
surrounded by rising waters
filled with two-person canoes
brimming over unsteady with scared families,
grappling for a way to stay dry—
their spines made soft from years
of living on the ocean
with only the burning land in sight.

Michelle Peñaloza

FORMER POSSESSIONS OF THE SPANISH EMPIRE OR WHY MY LAST NAME IS PEÑALOZA

People name us
with the separation of their teeth,
the long z of our naming.

It used to be
we were named for our proximity:
kato tabing dagat, the parentage of the sea;
the forest's lineage, kato ginubatan.

Or we were named for our parents—
anak ni Lina, bunso ni Boyet.

The song of our names
led to the discovery of garlic
growing from our palms,
the scapes forming a second green hand.

But it was in the name of good King Philip
that songs changed to names
and the naming of names became law.

A governor general made a name for himself
with the Catalogo de Apellidos—
a dissemination of empire, a naming of parts
to trace and tax everyone:
whole provinces renamed with efficient alphabetical phenomena:
Padilla, Pacheco, Palma, Paz, Perez, Portillo, Puente, Peñaloza.

Still, there were names we kept to ourselves,
a shorthand between us:

windows lined with votives
jars of holy water

the papaya's
lush coral and beaded seeds,
shining fish roe

Can legacy exist in short hand?

Papal papa
papel papaya
paalam permission
please

What are the root words
for what we simply know?

How do children born of empire
once removed,

possess the history
of their naming?

Barbara Jane Reyes

Wisdom's Rebuke

Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square; on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech

– Proverbs 1: 20-21

I am not the polite little colored girl you are looking for. You did not fashion me in your image. It is not my ambition that you glance my way, to acknowledge my foreign face, to learn my barbaric tongue, to cherish my diminutive body. You are not my gravity.

I am not your ethnic spectacle. I am not your cultural poverty. You don't get to frame me.

I do not ask for your permission to speak. I do not ask you to hear me. I write whether or not you invite my words. I will not be housebroken, ador(n)ed for my tameness. I am not afraid of you.

You don't get to catalogue me. You don't get to warehouse me. You don't get to rescue me. You don't get to touch me. You don't get to explain me. You are not the standard by which I judge my own worth. You don't get to draw my boundaries.

Fuck your tender fences and applause.

I do not ask for your acceptance. I am not your child. I am not your pet. I am not your object lesson. I don't need your absolution.

Tony Robles

Water Protector

My old man had
This thing
About water

He'd put his
Nose near my
Armpit and inhale

Man, you need
To get your hygiene
Together, he'd say

Get some soap
And get your
Ass in the shower

And I'd get in the
Shower and 30 seconds
Or later there'd be a
Bang on the door

Don't stay in there
All goddamn day,
My father would yell

All day? I'd ask
He explained it

1. wet yourself down
2. turn the water off
3. soap down
4. rinse (but not too long)
5. Get your ass out of the shower
6. Don't take all goddamn day

It was his way, I suppose
Of protecting the water

And in the years since
I have heard the sound
Of leaking pipes

Escaped tears

Looking for
Ground
Looking to
Water the earth
That covers our
Bones

And the seeds
Hidden inside
Us

And these days
My father calls me
On the cell phone
And says:
Hey man, you heard
About those brothers
And sisters in North
Dakota?

The man's trying to
Run a pipeline
Through native land

It's a cold motherfucking
Shot, from water canons
And rubber bullets

But you got
To protect the
Water, son
He says

His words
Falling like
Feathers
From a
Bird

Tony Robles

Building the Wall

The wall
Has been
Built

Don't you
Remember
It?

It was grade
School

That wall was
So big
So tall

We wanted to
See over it,
Jump over it

That wall fortified
With piss and vinegar
And mortar that dried
And hardened over
Our bones

Have you scaled
Those walls not
Visible to the eye

The wall in front
Of that guy at the
Cash register?

Or the
Judge

Or the wall in
Front of that
Social worker
Who has the

Look and smell
Of a priest

Or the wall in
Front of the nurse,
Teacher, school
Photographer
Or street sweeper?

There's no need
To build a wall

It's Already
There.

Aimee Suzara

Because Water is Life

Originally written 10/29/16, in solidarity with the Sioux People and Water Protectors at Standing Rock working to stop the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, inspired by Craig Santos Perez's poem "Water is Life."

Once upon a time my ancestors lived beside the water
Fishing, capturing crabs from the sea, the fine sand mingled with sweat on their skin
And when I return to water the parts of mine recognize their source

Once upon a time my ancestors lived beside the water
Fishing, capturing crabs from the sea, the fine sand mingled with sweat on their skin
And when I return to water the parts of mine recognize their source

Because water is life
Because water is life I honor the *dagat* and all of its fishes
And when I look at the ocean I am dreaming my origins
Because the Philippines is an archipelago
And every land is an island, bigger or smaller
Because no land is really dominant or superior or main
Because water is the *ilog* that rushes
And even when we dam rivers they rise up in a storm

Because water was our first home inside the womb
And water was the first sound we heard when we floated
And water was natural when we learned how to breathe
So as babies we remember how to swim
Because water is the condensation of rain and rain
Is the consequence of water, and we forget then that we end
Where we begin

Because in that forgetting we become like machines and try
To extract another liquid, oil, which helps us fuel other machines
To be bigger, faster and stronger
But we can't drink oil though we act like we can
But oil kills the water, so our dependence on oil is a killing of water

Because the Sioux and the Water Protectors are guarding the water
In order to stop Oil from being transported by machines
And destroying the river and sacred places
Because the Dakota Access Pipeline is disturbing the dead
And disturbing the living for 7 Generations

Because the police have become like machines
Bearing militarized vehicles and pepper spray
And Water Protectors bear blankets and feathers and prayers
Because the police wear riot gear
And say the protestors are rioting
Because grandmothers and children and horses stand
As they have for centuries to guard the land
Because this very much reminds us of earlier treaties broken
Because this very much reminds us of how the United States was founded
Upon the burial grounds and sacred sites of Native and Indigenous people everywhere
Upon the dead with no respect for the living
Threatening the living with no respect for the dead

Because this is what the United States stands for
Harbingers of death, not protectors of life
Because water is life and life is our birthright

Because this very much reminds me of the colonizing of my people
Because water was used by this government as water torture
Because water was used by this government as an image of civilizing the savage
Because water is the metaphor for washing the culture from our brains
Because water was the gift of our islands and then you took us
Because you saw the water not as life but as passageway for machines,
And guns and ships, and Pacific military bases
Because you did that too in Guam and Hawaii
Because you showed no remorse for those you killed when we fought for independence
Because you used water not for life but for transporting bodies
To provide labor for your machines to serve your dominance
Because water became a graveyard of bodies, a passage of bones

Because you have turned water into a tool of death
But water is life and you need it to live
Must we remind you, over again?
That water is life, and water is life
Because water is life.

Aimee Suzara

water cure: a telegram to 1901 from the future

Get the good old syringe boys and fill it to the brim

lifesource our liason to the sea lessoned on Philippine insurgents stop

attempt to get confession force the feel of drowning stop

cause waterlung/pneumoniacauses pleuritis cause adrenaline overload cause irregular heart beat cause release of catecholamines cause heart attack stop

proven despite CIA sanitation of a formal method yes one can be scared to death stop

We've caught another ----- and we'll operate on him

if not from broken limbs or bruises if not oxygen loss if not vital organ failure stop

and under this distress one will admit to anything stop

post interrogation should one survive now fear the gentle sprinkle on a rainy day a pool a shower anything aquatic stop

administration and united nations deem it form of torture stop

Shouting the battle cry of freedom

stop

stop

stop

wonder who the terrorist is

*Text in italics from an U.S. Army marching song written during the Philippine-American War

About the Poets

Arlene Biala is an award winning poet who has been participating in poetry performances and workshops in the Bay Area for over 20 years. She is currently Poet Laureate of Santa Clara County for 2016-17. Her poetry has been described as "grounded in ritual object and ritual practice, mantras that resonate within the body, and plant the body firmly in the world." She is the author of several collections of poetry: *bone* (Helmut Press, 1993), *continental drift* (West End Press, 1999), and *her beckoning hands* (Word Poetry Press, 2014), which won the 2015 American Book Award.

Rose Theresa Booker is a mixed race Pinay writer who holds a MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University and a BA in English from the UC Berkeley. Booker's poetry mixes knowledge with mythology and everything in between while exploring her family history. Plus, dragons—lots of dragons.

Born in Manila and raised in Honolulu, **Amalia B. Bueno** is occasionally lured by lava and snow on Hawai'i Island. Her poetry and fiction have been published in various literary journals, anthologies and magazines. Her chapbook, *Home Remedies* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2015. She is currently pursuing a PhD in English at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where she teaches composition and creative writing. Her research interests include Asian American literature, Pinay poetry, and place-based writing.

Rachelle Cruz is from Hayward, California. She is the author of *God's Will for Monsters*, which won the 2016 Hillary Gravendyk Regional Poetry Prize (Inlandia, 2017), *Self-Portrait as Rumor and Blood* and co-editor with Melissa Sipin of *Kuwento: Lost Things, an anthology of Philippine Myths* (Carayan Press, 2015). She hosts The Blood-Jet Writing Hour. She is a recent recipient of the Manuel G. Flores Scholarship from PAWA. An Emerging Voices Fellow, a Kundiman Fellow and a VONA writer, she lives, writes and teaches in Southern California.

Rachel Ronquillo Gray, born and raised in rural Nevada, is a poet and organizer. She is a Kundiman fellow, VONA/Voices alum, and Pink Door fellow. Her work has appeared in *Digging Through the Fat*, *Winter Tangerine Review*, *Radar Poetry*, *As/Us*, *Lantern Review*, and other places. She is currently based in Bloomington, Indiana.

Jaime Jacinto is the author of *Heaven is Just Another Country* (Kearny Street Workshop Press).

Michelle Peñaloza is a child of immigrants. She is the author of two chapbooks: *landscape/heartbreak* (Two Sylvias Press) and *Last Night I Dreamt of Volcanoes* (Organic Weapon Arts). Her work has been featured in *Waxwing*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Vinyl*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere.

Barbara Jane Reyes is the author of *To Love as Aswang* (PAWA Inc., 2015), *Diwata* (BOA Editions, Ltd., 2010), *Poeta en San Francisco* (Tinfish Press, 2005), and *Gravities of Center*

(Arkipelago, 2003), and three chapbooks. Her fifth full-length collection, *Invocation to Daughters*, is forthcoming from City Lights Publishing. She is an adjunct professor in the Yuchengco Philippine Studies Program at University of San Francisco. She lives in Oakland, CA.

Tony Robles is the author of *Cool Don't Live Here No More--A Letter to San Francisco*, published by Ithuriel's Spear. Forthcoming book of poems and short stories *Fingerprints of a Hunger Strike* to be released in 2017. He works as a housing rights advocate in SF and is resisting Trump's idea of diversity which is the hormel variety pack.

Filipino-American poet, playwright, performer **Aimee Suzara** released her debut poetry book, *Souvenir* in 2014. A YBCAway awardee, her work has been presented nationally; selected for the Utah Arts Festival, One Minute Play Festival, United States of Asian America; and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts among other grantors. <http://www.aimeesuzara.net>

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Michelle Peñaloza: "The Morning After the Election, I Called My Mother," first appeared in *Resist Much*. "FORMER POSSESSIONS OF THE SPANISH EMPIRE / OR WHY MY LAST NAME IS PEÑALOZA," first appeared in *Vinyl*.

Barbara Jane Reyes: "Wisdom's Rebuke," first appeared in *Delirious Hem*.

Aimee Suzara: "Because Water is Life," was previously published at *Split This Rock*. "water cure: a telegram to 1901 from the future," was previously published in *Souvenir* (WordTech Editions, 2014).

