

# PUNTA SPARTIVENTO

& OTHER MOBILIZATIONS FOR OUR TIME

E. SAN JUAN, Jr.



**PUNTA SPARTIVENTO**  
*& Other Mobilizations for Our  
Time*

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## PUNTA SPARTIVENTO

Innocence has flickered out, my Beloved,  
The disrobed glory of the lake mountains clouds  
is the gift offered by nature  
From the distant shore burn the flowers  
symbolizing the promised blessings....  
But what wings of the past sneak in  
shrouding the beauty and sanctity of  
our meeting?  
splitting the unity of desire, dividing our tryst?

Remembering the violated victims "plunged in the  
grave of suffering and despair...."  
Souvenirs of the future--  
what tidings are trumpeted by the turbulent winds?

They killed Juvy Magsino, Benjaline Hernandez,  
Eden Marcellana, Rafael Bangit, Alyce Claver...

On the shores of Punta Spartivento, the waves  
encounter each other and separate--  
right or left, here and there--as if without any  
decision,  
pushed to the right  
or pulled to the left  
divided by fate or fortune?  
driven by hatred, attracted by hope?

What sails have traveled to the other shore--moving

to and fro,  
up and down, hither and thither?

Famished claws of vultures are striking down--  
Scarcely does the wanderer sense the crimes that  
have occurred  
and are now occurring--  
755 murdered, 181 abducted and abused--

Was it all a waste, Salud Algabre?  
"Even if a life is extinguished?" how many  
more leaps?

Those tortured by this unjust order link us together,  
they connect and are joined by what has  
disappeared, drowned by barbarism....

Dusk falls on Punta Spartivento....  
dividing and splitting the flow of experience....

In my solitude, all the combatants who have  
perished are inscribed in the psyche, transcending  
the claws and fangs  
of this pier that divides and fragments—

My beloved, in your lips treads the dawn of the  
promised beatitude,  
grafted into the cut of grief and rapture,  
of what is needed and not needed,  
of what is valueless and what is valued,

while we embrace, our jaws clenched,  
attacking the shore's whirlwind.....

Blessed are the thousands of victims of the  
oligarchy and compradors in the fissure of the past

now sunk and tomorrow

heaving up, surging

Blessed are the comrades who separated and

divided, selected and cut up

The world will know who deserted

and who volunteered,

those who fought and those who fled--

Everyone will meet here

at the Punta Spartivento

of the revolution.

HALT, TRAVELER, SYNCHRONIZE  
YOUR CALENDAR  
IN THIS “LAND OF GRIEF”

Every morning  
the militant Alan Jazmines counts how many weeks,  
months, years that he has been imprisoned and  
when the crooked ways can be straightened

Ash-heap now is the fire last night in the Sierra  
Madre camp but there are still sparks and smoke  
swirling up and down...

In the nest of embers,  
the guard perceives, pregnant flame dazzles,  
slumbers, soon a conflagration  
that will destroy the rotten jails in the ripeness of  
time

Every noontime  
the detained Maricon Montajes counts how many  
days, weeks, months were stolen  
from her by the State, and when fate will be  
overthrown

On the edge of the estero near her cell a vagrant  
plant sprouts and puts forth buds, soon the red  
flower will spread its petals

under the shadow of the guns and canons of the  
State ignorant of time's flow....

Unbound, some prisoners escaped, while the armed  
sentries gambled, all drunk

Every twilight  
the activist Tirso Alcantara counts how many slaps,  
blows, beatings, kicks  
and pummeling he received as rewards from the  
military — when  
the vengeance of justice will come

From the mountain-fissure crawls the brook ignored  
by time's passage....

In the wilderness the stream flows all night,  
carrying the blood and tears of the conflict

The river dissolves the impatience of longing —  
Vigil tonight has spilled over....

The people's warriors crossing the seas can no  
longer be counted.

We have been counted.

Fulfillment has come to pass.

Now is the settling of accounts, the reckoning.

## THE POET'S PREDICAMENT IN A TIME OF TERROR

Bereft This is extravagance, vanity indeed!

As State crime continues wickedness  
Terrorism of the neocolonial behemoth  
Military and police violence

The abduction continues the killings  
How many victims of Oplan Counterinsurgency  
dragnets-- innumerable....  
Recently, 57 victims of the massacre in  
Maguindanao

Their faces and bodies riddled with bullets  
Even the private parts of female cadavers  
unspared

Is there no shame Is there no more dignity among  
us all subjugated?

Nauseating Hideous Sickening

After Auschwitz Buchenwald Intramuros  
The barbarity of fascist Germans and Japanese  
Those who perished in Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Theodor Adorno's counsel, master of art and  
philosophy,  
Art and poetry are useless—  
Those who still try to versify are insane!  
But has everything been assimilated by the politics  
of state opportunism and violence?  
by rape and corruption?

Comrade, is it okay to stray from the party line?  
Is it okay to let out a sigh--  
Opposition to perversion's rule?

Sensing the smile in the shuttering eye  
Kissed and inhaled  
Sweet glory sizzling

*Sandali lamang*

Penetrating every fiber total extreme  
Bristling at the ferocity of the clawing and biting

*Sandali lamang*

Full intensifying extreme total

Reaching the final explosion of carnal desire  
Sorrow of goodbye in knowing

Foreboding happens only once

The soul entwined in the arms and legs  
In the throat, what sting and bitterness

Perverse sex from paradise  
Though undying is forsaken

*Sandali lamang*

*Ay naku*, smoldering kisses  
Kiss of fire no desperation no mercy everywhere  
Unrelenting ceaseless

*Sandali lamang*

The soul entwined in the arms and legs  
In the throat, what sting and bitterness

Ferocious sex from paradise  
Though undying is forsaken

*Sandali lamang*

*Ay naku*, kisses burning

Kiss of fire no desperation no mercy everywhere

endless endless

## TOMORROW, FLOWERS UNBOUND

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,  
yea, we wept when we remembered Zion...*

*--Psalm 137*

From Comrade Alegria, the *canción* of the socialist  
struggle in Venezuela is a salutation,  
wondrous news that you bear as a refugee—

Though thwarted and held back, the torrent of the  
Revolucion Bolivariano spills into the land the  
foreigners had enslaved rising steadily...

*May the just overcome*

While here in Babylon we trudge down the river,  
waiting weeping over remembrances of our native  
land—  
when will it be saved?

How could we sing God's song in the quarantine of  
exile?  
How could we offer laughter to despair when seized  
by strangers?

*We pray the just will overcome*

Sitting on the banks of this whorish river, sobbing  
whimpering swept by the tide

clutching the memories of home left behind...  
returning

In dreams drifting floats the occupied land a nation  
broken apart  
restless is the body's soul split by separation

*Let's strive to make the just overcome*

From the riverside lying weeping when you're  
remembered

O vanquished land!

Those who abducted and raped us, asking—  
*ay naku—*

Forcing us to sing

but how, comrade Alegria, I could not imagine

How to sing the redeemer's *canción* in this rotting

black hole of conquerors?

*Yes, the just will surely surely overcome*



no one else,  
but who on earth is that one breathless beside you?

*What beast is crawling through the fissures?  
Not raindrops or scraping of lizards' claws on the  
boundary-stone  
Not the brook's rustling nor the cogon-grass'  
singing as they are combed  
by the bountiful fingers of the wind....*

We broke away from the barricade's frontline,  
believing that no one will trace search pursue  
hound us  
Here in this spot no cry for succor except the shriek  
of cicadas  
No sobbing or groaning or weeping

No water in the crack of the wall or sludge seeping  
from the open pit  
When I looked up I gllimsped the end of the trail....  
Near the boundary-stone waits the shadow with  
stained filthy hood—

*What animal leaped across the fissure?*

*The crows all scampered debouching to the edge of  
the meadow  
No water there at the barbed wire so quiet  
No moan or noise behind trees fallen cursed*

*petrified....*

No hand that will stretch forth a piece of bread

Who is that treacherous spy stealthily hovering over  
us?

His face masked, disguised, carrying a muddy  
shawl—

Can't tell whether man, woman, gay, lesbian,  
transgender, aborigine, alien—

*Rain rushing forth river's fury turbulent waves  
pounding on the shore—*

Who is that beside you stumbling, accompanying  
us?

What comrade of ours fled, scurried away, escaped  
so that we shall encounter each other here,  
foul-smelling and dirty

but still clasping each other, shoulder  
to shoulder—

It was dawn then (I still remember) when we knelt  
and kissed the scorched soil

thankful that we reached—

ay, alas, like a miracle, owing to the mercy  
of the armed Virgin—

the destination

we swore to be faithful to,

right at the start.

REVERIES: “IN THE MIDDLE OF THE  
JOURNEY...”

A hundred miles away the snow perched on the  
Dolomiti peaks

from where I stand here  
at the Piazza Dante Alighieri  
but the skin of your neck is warm to my touch

What destination may perhaps be divined  
in the entrails of the doves flying around  
the challenging hand of the poet?

Sorceress of winter, Giovanna, you sutured together  
concept and metaphor

but to which circle of inferno will I be hurled  
by the earth-borne angel?

Fire in the brain (wings of metamorphosis) between  
the descent and the upsurge,

no sage guiding me in this wandering  
except Antonio Gramsci

(nestled in the icy purgatory of his prison cell)

my only mentor in the labyrinth of  
the garden of communism  
but in the distance between the snow naked in the  
open air  
and the fiery dungeon—  
liberate us, Giovanna, my beloved—  
in that fissure

I grasped you, embraced you,  
bound you in my arms while the masses take up  
arms,

exploding in a conflagration in the mountains of  
Sierra Madre

raging throughout the islands

(raging fire of paradise in your breast and hair)

ballooning in waves,  
falling—

until the ravenous capital of conscience

and the bloody profit of virtue

are gutted by your kisses

## REMEMBER, ALWAYS

We parted last December on the corner of  
Blumentritt and Avenida Rizal—  
Comrade Felix Razon, do you still  
remember?

Dig up the skeletons in the lime and lichen of  
memory  
to unearth the truth opposing this wicked regime.

You exposed the decadence and duplicity of the  
government and military  
including the prostitution of laurelled artists and  
intellectuals  
not surprisingly, you were arrested and jailed,  
beaten,  
starved in the dungeon, testicles electrocuted,  
unrelenting punishment.

Merciful God, who can play blind to this outrage  
that happens every day to political prisoners?

Who are the witnesses that will testify?—  
because (they say) you're a communist.

Twilight had fallen  
when we parted, you were leaving for the asylum of

Utrecht, Holland...

Meanwhile in Isabela and Davao, north and south of  
the archipelago,  
the people's revolution continues, "un-spectacular  
adventure" of ordinary citizens,  
side by side with kinsfolk from the New People's  
Army...

Years have already come between us...

You're still a tease, infuriating all with sly paradox  
oxymorons antinomies—  
myriad distractions.

But with your passage, I have sensed in your  
writing  
a trace of vexation loathing rancor dejection  
resentment—is this true?  
because (you say) forgotten is the sacrifice that  
you've made for the nation...

You've left already, Comrade Felix Razon, flâneur  
in urban forests, among the deserted  
roads and sad cathedrals and musty palaces of  
Europe,  
while in Nepal, Venezuela, India, Yemen, Bolivia  
and other countries  
the communists, little by little, lay siege—  
grim and determined—

to the modern conquistadors' outposts, this much is  
known,  
so, even if no one remembers your service to the  
movement, no need, let it be--  
your courage and loyalty will be celebrated,  
however volatile and rarefied...

Comrade Felix Razon, wherever you may be, hear  
my testimony:

Smog and traffic of convoluted streets in  
Blumentritt and Dimasalang  
were the witnesses to our last engagement,  
these words drawn from debris and waste shall be  
tombstones to your grave—  
in whatever field of struggle you've fallen,  
may the metaphors that I etch here be ironclad and  
diamond-hard—  
the violence and fury of mourning  
stoking the roar of bereavement....



unmindful of the azure undertow

Magritte's migraine at long last migrates beyond  
borders

“What time....?”

Who will then map the cadavers of fallen sparrows?

What ghostly marauder drifts with white parasol,  
demarcating  
under coral boughs,  
bifurcating the continuum of transmigrations?

Unleashing what tiger desire  
leaping across mermaids lost among beehives

and striped stars where the solar cyborg's willpower  
spreads out its pallid tentacles....

Now is the time to demarcate

the aura and penumbra of this lunar migrant

risking all chances, dreaming of deliverance

from unrelenting terror--greeting the azure presence  
of what appears  
absent dragon and tiger,

with migrants prowling behind.....

## THE EXECUTION OF REBELYN PITAO

The Internet bore the news, of late, that the New  
People's Army [NPA] will not avenge  
the government's murder of Rebelyn Pitao.  
But is this what the masses demand?  
The masses demand justice and accountability: who  
will pay for this crime?  
The NPA's answer has already preceded us...

Has a rule been decreed by the party on misery  
bitterness pain control of the masses' fury?  
Has a rule been decreed on how to get furious or  
laugh?  
Has a rule been decreed when it's correct to hate  
and when it's correct to love?  
Has a rule been decreed when it's correct to be  
doubtful and to be trusting?  
Has a rule been decreed on how to be obnoxious or  
obsequious? Has it been decreed how it's correct to  
be smart and to be stupid?  
Has a rule been decreed on all that has yet to be  
experienced?  
If fury is smoldering, can the waters of  
disappointment douse it?  
How long should patience last?

During the Filipino-American War in 1899-1913,

which killed 1.4 million Filipinos, the US Senate asked Gen. Robert Hughes, commander of the US Army in the Visayas, why civilians—women, children—were also punished, Gen. Hughes replied: *“The women and children are part of the family, and where you wish to inflict a punishment you can punish the man probably worse in that way than in any other.”*

Ay, *naku*, you wouldn’t guess—Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo & Benigno Aquino III’s military executioners learned Gen. Hughes’ lesson well, as well as their paramilitary goons... Senator Rawlins asked Gen. Hughes if what they did was *“within the ordinary rules of civilized warfare.”*

The answer: *“These people are not civilized.”*

There you go, friends! Despite almost a century of intervening time from our bloody occupation by the American “civilizers” — we might as well include the long Spanish colonization and the short but painful experience with Japanese cultural missionaries,

it’s quite true  
that we’re not “civilized” yet....  
so to speak, wouldn’t  
you?

FRIDAY AFTERNOON IN OCTOBER,  
WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT

In the autumn afternoon a wound festers  
in the crack of the asphalt roads in thIs city  
                    once a pasture and hunting ground  
  for the native Mohicans.

What fraud and deceptions do the window-curtains  
  hide?

Doves and pigeons do not know the color of hope.

My cigarette stubb I interred beside the Bridge of  
Frogs  
    while the traffic procession headed for the Foxboro  
  Casino  
  now owned by the Pequots.

But why does the Abu Sayyaf sneak into the mind?

In the Fall's twilight hour I sneak into memory 's  
    fissure, a voyeur gravitating to dusky trails  
                    filled with apprehension  
  and terror

on the eve of our journey  
  to America.

## ABOUT THE POET

E. SAN JUAN, Jr., emeritus professor of Ethnic Studies, English and Comparative Literature, is currently professorial lecturer at Polytechnic University of the Philippines. He was a fellow of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute, Harvard University; and the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin. Previously he served as Fulbright professor of American Studies, Leuven University, Belgium; and visiting professor of literature at Trento University, Italy; and at National Tsing Hua University and Tamkang University, Taiwan.

Among his books are *In the Wake of Terror* (Lexington), *US Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines* (Palgrave), *Working Through the Contradictions* (Bucknell) and *Between Empire and Insurgency* (University of the Philippines Press); *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora* (University of Santo Tomas Publishing House), and *Filipinas Everywhere* (De La Salle University Press). His recent anthologies of poems in Filipino are *Sapagkat Iniibig Kita*, *Kundiman sa Gitna ng Karimlan*, and *Ambil* from which some of the poems included here were selected for translation. Due this year is *Carlos Bulosan: Filipino Revolutionary Writer in the United States / A Critical Appraisal* (Peter Lang).

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