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Sepulturero/Gravedigger. Ang Kanilang mga Pangalan/Their Names

Michael M. Coroza

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Michael M Coroza (Philippines)

Sepulturero

Ayon sa isang pilosopo, wala kang
kaibhan sa iyong hinuhukay: kapuwa
ninyo hindi kilala ang inyong nilululon
o ang inyong isinusuka. Marahil totoo

ang kaniyang bintang at sadyang
hindi ka masasaktan katulad ng lupa
na hindi nagdurugo sa pag-aararo
ng magsasaka o pagpapasabog ng minero

o pagbubungkal ng ambisyong magtayo
ng edipisyo. Ano pa nga ba naman
ang dapat mong malaman? Sa dulo
ng iyong piko at pala, patas lahat

ang iyong nakikita: lupang nagpuputik
sa buhos ng lungkot, maalikabok,
nakapamumuwing kung natuyot
sa paglimot. Batid mo ang nakatakda:

walang hindi aangkinin ang lupa;
magiging isang libingan ang mundo
at susuko ang lahat sa iyong pagpapala;
huwag lamang itutulot na mangyari

ang kutob ng matatanda na tulad
sa simula, malulusaw ang banal
na awa at ang lupa ay magiging
isang dambuhalang patak ng luha.

Gravedigger

A philosopher once said, you are not
any different from that which you dig: both
of you know not whom you swallow
or throw up. Perhaps it is true,

what the philosopher claims, and truly
you feel no pain like the land
that does not bleed when tilled
by farmers or when blasted by miners

or when plowed by ambitions to put up
edifices. What else, indeed,
do you need to know? At the end
of pick and shovel, everything is equal,

as you see them: soil caking
from torrent of sadness, dust-ridden,
blinding us as it dries up
from forgetfulness. You know what is fated:

nothing escapes the earth;
the world will become a graveyard
and all will succumb to your shovel, your blessing.
Pray, though, that it does not happen—

the old portent that as it was
in the beginning, sacred compassion
will dissolve, while the land turns
into a gigantic teardrop.

--Translated by by Mikael de Lara Co

Their Names

When we were but children,
we etched their names unto our minds,
those who made the paths
we now tread. Again
and again, we sang of their
bravery, enough so that
welts appeared on our sanity—
marks left by the purpose of their suffering.
We tried to outdo each other, remembering
who built what, when or where and how
one was gunned down still zealous and
determined, like how today so many,
young or old, approach their games.

We made sure that they'd be part
of our lives as we grew older. We framed
their frowns or their smiles on paper
money or sometimes etched their heads
on coins. We had them stand
on choice spots in buildings
or public parks so that they may be
models of love and great
forbearance, as they held still while they were
mocked by the excrement of birds, lizard, roach,
spit of the hurried passerby, vomit
or piss of the drunkard stumbling home, thick
dust or smoke of unremembering.

We were told to be like them,
to exceed their exploits so that
on the maps of history our names
can also be inked. But how is it
that, as we reach certain crossroads
and some extravagance must be

given up, some faith broken, friend
betrayed or told on, how is it our fingers
become crooked as our resolve
weighs like a sigh stuck in our chests?
We become like statues on the paths
that they have made. Like children,
we solemnly utter, cry
their names to drive away
the demons that attempt to mislead
the selfish desires that we cradle.

--Translated by Mikael de Lara Co