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**Luis Cabalquinto,**
**Moon Over Magarao**


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## *BOOK REVIEWS*

Luis Cabalquinto, **Moon over Magarao.** Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2004. 81 pages.

Gemino Abad entitled the third installment of his history and anthology of Philippine poetry in English *A Habit of Shores.* That could very well serve as the alternate title of Luis Cabalquinto's fifth book of poems *Moon over Magarao*, a collection of new works and selections from his previous books. A native of Camarines Sur but a long-time denizen of New York, Cabalquinto returns to native shores in poems which remember and reflect on the hometown.

Cabalquinto's imagery grounds his poems in recognizably Filipino, if not specific, locales. In "Sarong Banggi," for example,

> Magarao blooms with
>         thousands of cat eyes
> From its houses of wood, bamboo,
>         hollow of cement blocks
> And corrugated iron or palm.

And the persona becomes

> . . . a child again, drawing lines
>         on the asphalt pavement with water

From a pail, or with chalk brought
home from elementary school,
to play the water game with neighbors
or, for variation, kick-a-can. (12)

Then there are the *lechon*, the *fandango sa ilaw*, the "distant thunder of trucks going North," sparrow and crickets sounds, suppers of "mountain rice / And wood-roasted river crab," the "wedding rice strewn as starlight" at a Bongao wedding, the divers of Buhi flashing "coconut-white teeth," the shores of Paracale beach, the fish shacks and outriggers of Los Baños, evening serenades, and the exchange of stories around a fire at 1 a.m., a bottle of gin being passed around.

Even the poems that dwell on what may be called more universal themes are informed by hometown imagery. Thus, in "To Dust" the persona muses on the prospect of death ("I'll turn into a golden leaf, falling spirally / back to the earth, to become—finally—its loam") but points out that "bearing witness, not far, [is] Mr. Isarog's peak" (81). In "The View from Mt. Mayon," the insignificance of human endeavor vis-à-vis the elements is brought home by Cabalquinto's turning the famous volcano into "a fulcrum / for the universe" (18).

The memory of the homeland, however, is not a myopic one, as it recalls both the lovely and sordid. The "avocado and hibiscus" lie side by side, intimations that something's rotten in the state of the Philippine Islands. In "Waiting for the Peñafrancia Train," for example, the company talks of "the fast-rising price / Of rice," "the growing scarcity of gasoline," and "the recent street killing of an abusive cop" (20). In the end, the persona coolly observes, "the Peñafrancia train is still late, as usual" (20)—a summation epigrammatic in its acuteness.

The idylls are not wholly idyllic. In "They Move with the Casualness of Eels," a sense of futility creeps in what would have been an Amorsolo-esque scene: "Artemio plays his guitar and Leandro sings: / He has the voice of a trapped animal" (15). That Cabalquinto recalls the pastoral tradition by using personal names only heightens the irony in the poem. The persona in "Night Gin," another poem suffused with local color, reflects on the "world's sharp counterpoints": how, while his present company speaks of poor harvest and poorer pros-

pects, his "other kin / in New York will be yelling for Nureyev / to answer his 24th curtain call at the Met" (26).

A series of poems recalls the tumultuous years of martial law. "Edge of the Woods" clinically recounts how "they got Armando" and "left his body for the ants and, / Still in uniforms, leaped into the roaring / River to get rid of the blood" (34). "For Emmanuel" clearly alludes to Emmanuel Lacaba's "The Guerilla Is Also a Poet," in which the poet holds not a pen but a gun.

Not all the poems are about the hometown. Cabalquinto also forays into other experiences. "Poem 8/9/90" captures the moment of erotic rapture, and "Absence" laments its loss. "Safari" presents the tension between the exotic and the banal. The opening poem "When They Come" describes the creative process behind the writing of poetry, much like Emmanuel Torres's "Them," while "Still-Life" ruminates on the autotelic nature of art. A number of poems capture the experience of equilibrium amid tumult, a separate peace, which in some of his poems is called "alignment" and is conveyed in the imagery of photography (e.g., "The Photo" and "Close-Ups"). Still others like "Schedule for Sunday" and "The Picnic" capture common contradictions that any reader, whether native of Magarao or not, will recognize. Reading these pieces, one encounters a personality wizened and wise but not self-consciously sage-like.

Throughout the book Cabalquinto demonstrates his knack for understatement, and he is more effective thereby. "The Rat," an early poem, makes a point of theological import ironically by using the image of a dead rat. The use of the haiku form in "Island Reports" intensifies the horrors described (33):

For the price of gin<br>
And rice, her mother sold her<br>
At twelve, a virgin.

"A Love Poem with Almost No Adjective" is precisely that—and as such it multiplies the lover's anguish. Economy and simplicity of diction are ideals to which many poets aspire. This collection confirms

Cabalquinto's masterly attainment of those ideals—and that in a borrowed tongue.

*Moon over Magarao* represents a lifetime's work of poetry, and a fine summation it is, deserving a high place in the library of Filipino poetry in English and the emergent discourse of Filipino-American literature.

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Yen Le Espiritu, **Homebound: Filipino-American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries.** Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003. 271 pages.

The Filipinos' long history with the United States and the desire to know more about Filipinos who left for the U.S. is perhaps the reason behind the abundance of literature on Filipino-Americans. Much of the literature has focused on history, identity, and decolonization. While this book also provides a background on the history of emigration to the U.S., it differs from previous literature in its exploration of the ways by which Filipino-Americans in San Diego, California, have made a home for themselves "amid constant dislocation, migration, and endless assault" (21). Drawing from in-depth interviews of both first- and second-generation Filipino-Americans in San Diego, as well as statistical data, Espiritu's book tells of how these Filipino-Americans manage to transcend boundaries and create homes across countries and cultures. The book then, while situating homemaking within the context of history and the social, political, and economic order of the U.S., also looks at Filipino-Americans as active agents and shapers of identity and the home.

Espiritu utilizes transnationalism in her discussion of homemaking; that is, despite the idea of permanence behind each settlement in the U.S., constructions of home and identity are intrinsically linked to the