

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Francis Johann: Two Poems

Francis Johann · Wednesday, March 18th, 2020

Manila

Drugs are rampant,
 like shirtless men walking your dirty streets.
Your bumpy, filthy pavements
 mirror your pier and your cove.

Still, your muddied bay remains home
To many couples holding hands
While walking along the breakwater.

Manila,
You're bleaker
Than the moon's darkest side and Dylan's desolated row.

Manila,
You and your people breathe
Nicotine smoke and *Sarao Jeepney*'s belching mufflers.

All your rising
 malls,
 skyscrapers,
 and condos
can never hide
 your slums
 and shanties
dressing the edges of Pasig River.

But Manila,
your beauty lies in your obscurity:
 the vigorous nightlife,
 sparkling with neon lights, and
 the music of honking horns
 and bands in bars.

Manila, keep your hope alive in the dying night.

Someday, Manila, someday
 the kid you once cradled
 will return and dance the same dance
 with better timing
 and rebellious elegance
 until the moon retires its nighttime frivolities.

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Daily Commute

Traffic was worse, back in my younger days.
 But the commute was always interesting
 because as they say, “It’s more fun in the Philippines!”

I hop into a vividly colored jeepney filled
 with random commuters – fathers, mothers, sons,
 daughters, high school students, teachers,
 bank tellers, construction workers,
 college students, the unemployed

On any given day, I’ll see one or the other
 A mother screaming to clear the road as she rushes her son
 who had a knife on his belly to the nearest hospital
 A college girl who had her necklace snatched by a random thief
 A creepy dude trying to feel a woman’s side boob with his elbow

Out on the streets, pedestrians snack on street foods –
 Dirty ice cream, deep fried quail eggs, fish balls, coagulated blood,
 hotdogs, squid balls, chicken feet paired with mineral water,
 coke in a clear plastic bag, pineapple juice from a can.

And at the end of the school day, shirtless men light their cigarettes,
 drink ice cold beer at corner convenience stores,
 piss on walls that say “ONLY DOGS PEE HERE.”

At the end of the day, people relax at pool halls or makeshift karaoke bars singing
 Sinatra’s *My Way*,
 U2’s *With or Without You*,
 Savage Garden’s *Truly, Madly, Deeply*,
 Aqua’s *Barbie Girl*

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