

# 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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