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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Pink Weekend

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Rachelle Cruz

June 2012

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Christopher Abani, Chairperson

Professor Juan Felipe Herrera

Professor Goldberry Long

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The Thesis of Rachelle Cruz is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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For my mother and father, Julienne and the Alban Family: for your steadfast support.

For Thomas: always.

For Mamay

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“Monsters hardly ever started out as monsters. Something always transformed them.”
-Lynda Barry, *One Hundred Demons*

*First accessed on January 8, 2003 from JSTOR.
Bronxville, New York*

Foreword

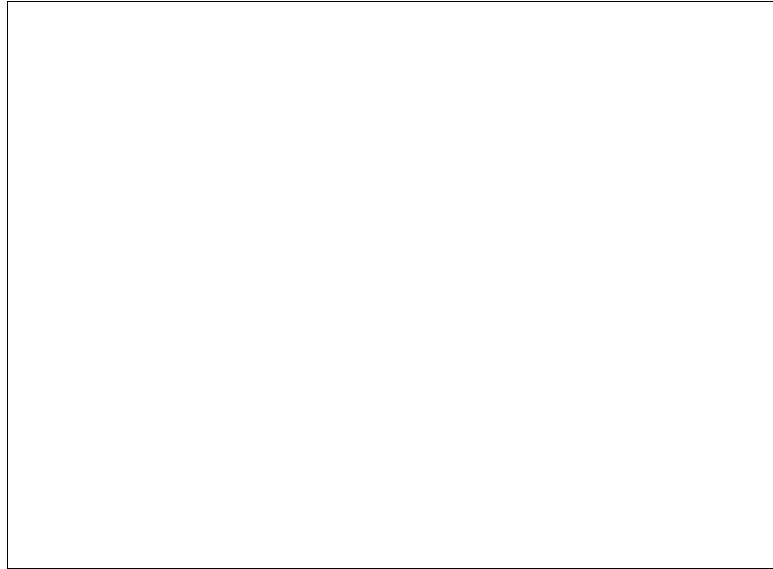


Figure 1
*Portrait profile, the Aswang. Photograph courtesy of the Department of Anthropology,
St. Louis, 1902.*

the Aswang,

I acquired a live subject from a remote village in the province of Bikol,
in the Luzon region of the Philippines, after fifteen years of fieldwork research in
contained for a week
at the University of the Philippines, Dilliman,

have drawn comparisons to the European ordering of mythological creatures many, elusive forms that the creature takes will further ease reader's understanding of the muddled and often confusing accounts shape-shifting abilities; from rabid weredog, to self-segmenting devourer of fetuses. not comfortable in a singular form. five manifestations

- 1.) The Vindictive Witch
- 2.) The Manananggal
- 3.) The Vampira
- 4.) The Weredog
- 5.) The Carrion-Eating Ghoul

Aswang's particular thirst blood of adolescent boys, feeds the life source of the creature. bears the most resemblance to or *bruja*, who assists women unwanted pregnancies.

, I refer back to Lilith (first wife of Adam), found in the Babylonian Talmud and other early Mesopotamian texts, birthed a tree of temptation

What We Did With The Aswang

Hayward, California

At night, my mother tucked me into sun-bleached sheets, smudging my forehead with ginger and steam. She weaved stories into my hair, braiding a song of cracked window sills and witches who lifted a finger to slip inside to feed. Out of the fish-licked sky of home, a flash of tongue. The aswang let the tetherball swing on the pole without any players. No breadcrumbs, beanstalks or tree houses where children curled inside the damp hearts of Redwoods, whispering, *I'm home, I'm home*. Mother saying, *no, not me, where did you hear that?* I reached for the fall of her black hair, a split end I wanted to peel into two.

Imelda Marcos Waves From Ashore

The overtake of kelp. The tangle of salt and water in the mouth. I can't yell or even whisper, every gulp of water stings the cuts —every blunt name I've called her—as she sinks deeper, her bouffant still in tact, she's still standing on the shore in a white and green polkadot one-piece, and of course, shoes: hemp-corded espadrilles on primed, perfect feet.

An excerpt from:

1.) The Vindictive Witch

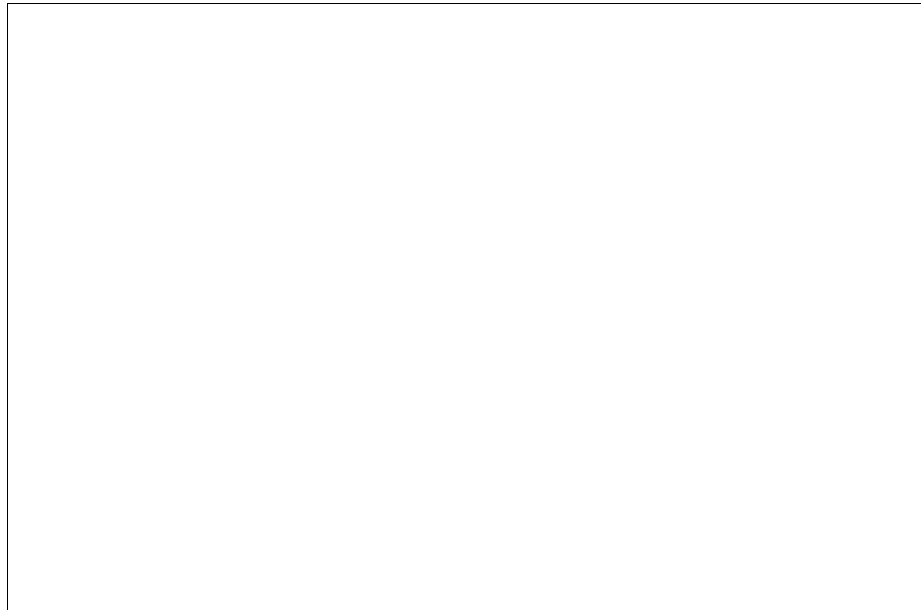


Figure 2

Side Profile, the Aswang. *Photograph courtesy of the Department of Anthropology 1902.*

witch disguises herself as a youthful, striking woman
vindictive
portrays the role of a dutiful housewife
: shopping at the marketplace, cleaning house
and peeling root vegetables. known to insert objects, such
as seashells, unhusked rice, bone, pebbles and various seeds into the orifices of her
unsuspecting victims. the witch takes a deep
breath and dives and blood of her victim.

The Aswang Considers Her Inheritance

My mother
rolls a pearl
into her tongue's
soft cage,
cups
my infant
mouth into hers.

Against the pink
beginnings
of teeth,
the tender
doorways
of shadow,

planting this:
the first burst
of feathers,
the lizard's
forgiveness
the body's
stubborn wick,
its severed tail.

How I Learned to Speak

Bicol, The Philippines

The words are dropping,
plums prickly and wet on the book.
My father says, good, good, good,
before floating into another
language with my mother.

Little S had a box. I'm four,
two wings flutter on my lap. They dance
with their milkfish hands.

On the airplane ride:
Inside her box was a slithering snake.
My mother says, stop reading,
you'll ruin your eyes.

His name was Sam,
before clicking the light off.

Outside, thick wires squirm on Uncle's
house, lizards lift their heads from walls.

O-long-ga-po Ci-ty, says
a Coca-Cola sign across the street.
Tin roofs rattle. I step
on a crack but it's a lizard.

My parents loosen their tongues
here, wild and free. Before Uncle
sweeps us inside, I yank
on my mother's belt loop.

Everything is broken here,
I say,
a leathered tail in my hands.

Imelda Marcos Tries on a Pair of Minnie Mouse Ears

and breaks the headband in half. *They make these things so damn small. Whose head is that tiny? Pffft, cheap!* and hands the plastic discs and stiff red ribbon to her daughter who yelps at the injustice of it all. The cracked ears of her favorite Disney icon. She tosses the ribbon on the sidewalk near a horse-drawn carriage on Main Street, U.S.A. Imelda pinches her nose at the sight of a pile of fresh dung. She then pops a piece of kettlecorn into her mouth, measuring each bite. *Wait, let's stop here.* Her daughter points to the castle, sparkling. Crossing the moat, she runs to the entrance then swings open a wooden door. A kiosk selling crowns. Later, at the last parade of the night, on the princess float, Imelda and her daughter clutch scepters in hand. *Like this.* Mother cups her daughter's finger into a royal wave. Pink gemstones decorate their crowns. *Who are they?* Imelda overhears a child yell to her mother in the crowd, pointing at them. *Which fairy story are they from?*

(sst): Rumor

a beautiful woman

single

conceived perhaps

a changeling

pretty maiden into a large bird

a pretty maiden tianak

then flies around on huge bat wings

is more wicked around other women

a big dog or pig

listen for sounds of death at dusk

parents keep your children

in line among us a vampire

shapeshifter

not a witch but near the house

eating unborn

separates in half

pretends to rear children by day

leaves for her operations at night

afraid of bawang

parents

keep your children in line

How I Found My Mother

Lake Elizabeth Park, San Leandro, CA

I'm standing on the peeling picnic table
with other children who shape binoculars with their hands,
as the procession starts. My palms search

for balance on my mother's shoulders. Here are the women
unfurling the painting of Jesus with his too-tight
crown of blood. Here is the priest spraying

holy water into the air, and here are the ones who miss it,
We watch as the men latch the rowboat onto the pier,
then hoist

the brocaded statue of the Virgin on their shoulders.
Wrapped in gold and indigo
her crowned face glinting in the ritual of September.

My mother heads to the tinselled platform where they place
the statue. I'm careful not to lose her as I choose among
the rosaries laid out for us: coral, amber,

sterling silver. Our Lady is alive from our pilgrimage
to a concrete lake in San Leandro.

I clutch the rosary tightly in my hands: a small Christ

is left impressed on my thumb. I've lost my mother
in the crowd, another woman praying for the flash of lucky lotto
numbers, for her brother dying of lung cancer,

for her children's secrets buried in diary pages

I've lost her in our own river of prayer. *In the name of the father...*

We kiss our thumbnails as prelude, pinch the first bead
from the first Joyful Mystery – *conceived by the power
of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary*—

wait for good news to fall, confetti from the sky.

Cross-Examination: The Anthropologist Asks the First Question

State your name:

Immortal daughter.

Pyramid of plumage.

Orange bud.

Proboscis.

Night loiterer.

Vampira.

State your name:

Phantom tongue.

Wild garlic.

Abaca smoke.

Ponderous eye.

Night hag.

State your name:

Dream delirium.

Tease.

Cavorter.

Tar heart.

Sky-built wings.

Womb intruder.

The Aswang Dreams of a Salted Stone

Dinner quiet as usual,
and tonight,
my mother fills the stew
with ginger and a large stone.
She says,
they contain the flavor of the earth,
the salt of everyone
before us,
sitting inside
our deep iron pot.

(sst): Rumor

Close your windows at night.

The baby isn't safe.

That witch woman.

that witch woman.

Shut your windows.

There is dirt in your mouth.

Her bad tongue, forked and thin as a red serpent,

scaling up the glass,

shedding its red skin.

Dirt.

Spit it out

for blood. Then turn your head from her gaze.

Bad tongue.

Witch woman. Dirt.

Five. Shut the. Blood.

Shut the. Serpent. At night --

My Imelda Marcos

after Margaret Rhee

O, Imelda Marcos, I wear your hair like a woven flag of sharp stars and bees. Something I can't touch. Your hands are laced with sand. Lou Diamond Philips is serving the clams again (he calls it "Cio-Filipino" and you deign him a smile) and of course, you'd stir the sun out of their shells. As a child, I collected seashells. On the shore and at the dinner table, scraping mussels' beards wet with my parents' slurp. Salt of salt of salt. My father blew the dust off from the metal-green shelf in the garage and laid out mesh for the shells to rest. And now, of course you are humming *bailar bamba* when I'm yelling *Ritchie*, but Lou refuses to hum *and* sing, instead readjusting his chef's hat.

An excerpt from:

2.) The Manananggal

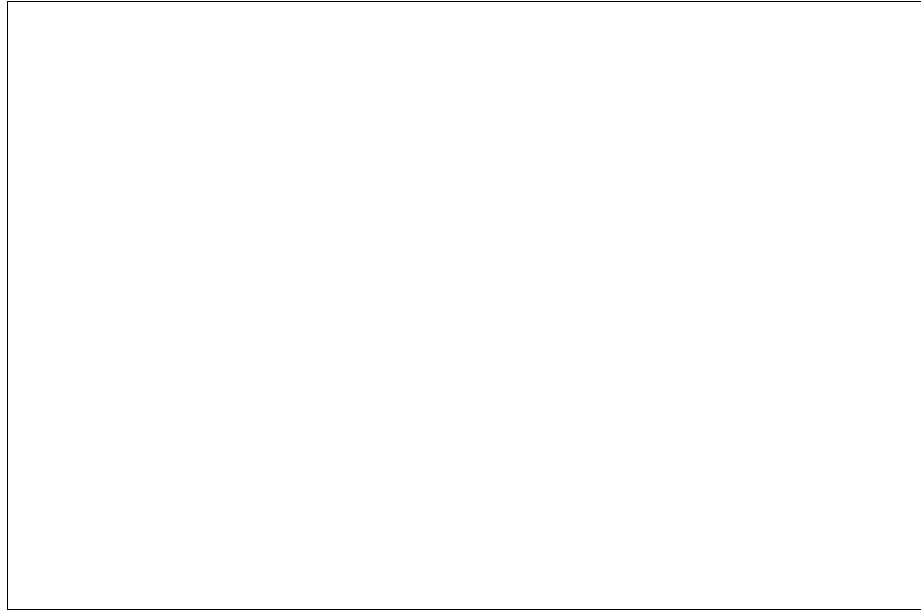


Figure 3

An artist rendering of the Manananggal.

version is oft-told

midnight and pre-dawn hours, the *Manananggal* seeks

shaded, unpopulated areas, such as banana groves,

this creature severs her body in half, separating her torso from legs.

wide leaves of

banana trees.

Further research

the creature's genetic sampling and

anatomical composition

shapeshifting

unsuspecting pregnant women.

keen sense of sound and smell,

structural vulnerabilities in

the prey's home, or for sheer neglect, i.e. an open window.

inserts her long, proboscis into the vagina

Manananggal's needle-like tongue has the ability to wrap around the fetus and to detach

the umbilical cord from the mother.

What We Broke

Hayward, California

It began with an innocent nick
from the crown of thorns.
Then our fingers brimmed
with blue paint and
his invisible left eye
lay broken in my hand.
In my parents' bedroom,
the statue stood between
two mirrors over
the false wooden drawers,
his hands heavy with air.
Every day, after school,
a scratch from
his callused feet, a comb
of fingers over the grooves
of his hair.
My sister and I
couldn't explain
the rainbows of
archeological dust
on our cheeks.
Even after our mother spanked us,
the Slipper or the Belt?
we swiped tiny curls
from the sacred heart, burning.
We wanted to dig for the fire
that made the heart beat,

our hands open to the beauty
of ruin.

Beauty Triptych

"I hate ugliness. You know I'm allergic to ugliness." -- Imelda Marcos, quoted in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, August 1999

Beauty is a gown with wings the color of butter melting inside a frying pan. A perfect, steaming omelet slides onto the plate.	Beauty is a pair of rose kitten heels foxtrotting across the Congress parquet. Meanwhile, a typhoon breaks open the sky. A cotton dress shredded into pieces is good luck for someone else to sweep up and stitch back to life: a new school uniform, a blanket for the wheezing baby.	Beauty is a satin-gloved hand tucked into Ferdie's, her husband, the President. They wave at sun- spoiled faces in the crowd, the confetti of children. Their brittle hands scratch the sides of our stretch limousine. A gift of paint (a scanty morsel of beauty) thrives underneath their fingernails.
---	--	---

How We Tried to Levitate

Hayward, California

In a circle
on the dying front lawn,
we slip our fingers
under my baby sister
and chant
light as a feather,
stiff as a board.

Flakes of ash fall from the hills,
smearing our foreheads.
Like Ash Wednesday.
Father Andrew's thumb
forming hushed blessings.

Blades of yellow
grass decorate my sister's hair.
Her closed, ash-lit eyes
are two bowls of water
collecting rain.
Her body not stiff
enough to float.

When a neighborhood girl
continues to chant,
I know somewhere
in the hills,
a house is burning.
It's the end of summer

and I can smell plums
crushed into wet dirt,
their stones gnaw
into the backyard.

Streetlamps above us flicker,
shine their heat on us
like we're responsible for it all.

Cross-Examination: The Anthropologist Asks the Second Question

Where does your mother live?

Between the night's studded eyelids.

Where does your mother live?

Her eyes are flecked
with salt from the cooking stone.

Where does your mother live?

Her conjure stone lives
in the wrinkle
of a woman's groan,
razed across her face.

Where does your mother live?

On the forehead of heaven,
she greets no-children,
brushes seaweed from their eyes.

Where does your mother live?

Above the greeting table.
She can't resist cloaking
Santo Niño with a scarlet gown.
His crown of rubied light.

Where does your mother live?

In my father's lit hallucination,
she is riptide. On other days, spindrift,

Where does your mother live?

In another country,
She sits on the shell of my ear.
Stop being so good.

What Auntie Taught Me

Hayward, California

After a #2 with supersized fries, my friends and I spit
at the trains from the peak of the chainlink
overpass, watching them flash underneath us.
Nothing else moves, except for the trails of sweat
between our new breasts, the sun aching
in our corner of the sky. It's still July, and
we're shaking our heads at the boys from last
year, the men we're looking forward to come fall.
*Do you think their things go through
a growth spurt, too?* Amber asks.
I'm keeping quiet, reserved like a woman,
though a giggle marks the air, a girlhood note
escaping from my untuned body.
At home, Auntie's cooking a dinner
I'll skip, Cousin's tying up the phone line,
the baby must be asleep.

Walking home down Edwin,
an ambulance screeches, a vulture, an inkblot
in the sky. *Wouldn't it be funny if...* but I'm halfway
home, and in the kitchen, red lights charge
the windows, my aunt reveals
a knife in her tight fist aimed at her chest,
mouthing a prayer *Dear God, dear god...*
as if her mouth were too slow, and for a moment,
she's no longer a woman.
I think I see the crown of a baby in her mouth,
its innocent down, the rupture of wings
in her shoulders before they twist her away.
I'm standing back, unclaiming her. Gathering
spilled knives, I'm told to be silent
like a woman, a good, good woman.

After Botticelli: Imelda Marcos Posing as Venus

Boracay's precisely white
shore will have to do,
but I will be better
than Venus:
taut stomach,
swept-up dark-sugared hair,
Chanel-powdered face,
tits that peek through the cracks
of spread palms
and inspire.

Nipples disguised with rose
petals, of course.
There's still something
to be said about modesty.
My chariot: a nautilus shell
plated with Yamashita's gold
(rightfully ours),
mother-of-pearl accents
the spiral outward
toward God's locked kiss.

My daughters will toss
handfuls of sampaguita
when the camera's
red light signals.
I bite down
on my tongue for the flood
of salt. This is when
the flash of light
preserves my beauty.
This is when
I step out pure
from the ocean.

Lately, I've been feeling like the Filipina Youth of the Year

back at the San Bruno Hilton Silver Ballroom,
sticking my head in the steaming buffet trays
when no one is looking.

The picture in the paper is my hand breaking into a wave.

The Most Accomplished Filipina of the Year

is on my left in a conch-pink gown,

and the Filipina Sweetheart on my right

is in a rose A-line,

and all I can think of is Steel Magnolias,

my colors are blush and bashful, Julia Roberts

reaching out from the screen with her pouty teeth.

Red glitter flutters from my \$14.99 strapless

from Fashion Plaza, the one next to the Blockbuster

on Mission Blvd. Glitter sticks to my eyelash, my mother's lip,

the photographer's lapel, the plate of lumpia.

When I was the Filipina Youth of the Year,

I didn't know what else to do but fill up

on stewed pork's blood and rice

and watch the front of my dress.

What else was there to do but memorize

“Phenomenal Woman” by Maya Angelou

and spell check my resume?

How to Fight Back
Hayward, California

*I'm gonna scratch up his car, pour
sugar in his gas tank and watch
the whole thing blow.*

A girl inside a car of women, almost
women, speed down Mission Blvd to downtown Hayward.

Jalapeno poppers on their laps,
dinner. Miles away, their cousin cools her bruises
with weed choke, leaning on cold brick.

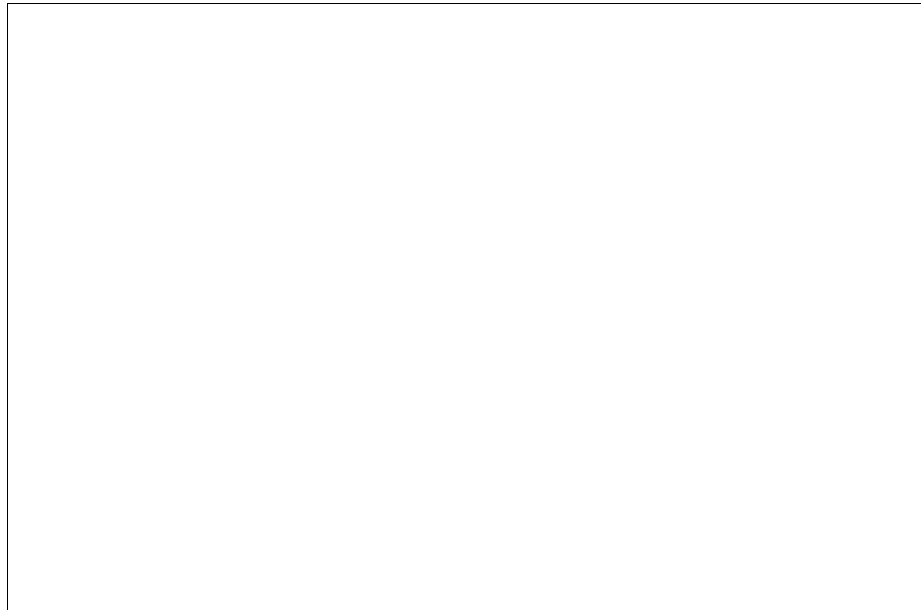
Motherfucker, the driver says, swerving past Whitman,
is gonna get it. Pipe and all.

The girl says nothing, sticks her hand out
of the window to cool a pepper.

Springtime red and dying on her face,
lilac fingers on her arms. She considers
spring a season for lovers, his smile, of course. She is convincing
with her hands. She hopes they are convinced. *Motherfucker*,
the girl repeats, burning her fingertips and lips on hot grease.
With more force and heat, she thinks, *this must be love.*

An excerpt from:

3.) The Vampira



Once again,

cannot resist the blood – the ultimate life

force-- of young men.

What My Father Read

Hayward, California

Without reason, he collected
books and didn't read them.
But his daughter did. She read
about falling angels, the lashings
on a girl's back, crime driven
by passion, a yellow shirt
stained with black tea, the men
who lived like brothers
on Cannery Row. Alice tumbling
down a rabbit hole,
King Solomon choosing between
feuding mothers and deciding
to split the child in half,
the incantation of Genesis,
Joseph and his journey of dreams.

Her father washed his hands
exactly five times before dinner,
plucking pinchfuls of rice from
the family plate with his fingers.
After dinner, he scrubbed his mouth
with a lemon, did exactly three
loads of dirty laundry, ignoring
the daughter's stained underwear
from a first year on her cycle,
the grass-stained jeans which meant
she was still a girl. The father

scrubbed Palmolive on his fingertips
and in the darkening dusk, hung
the wet clothes on a cherry tree,
the ants crawling on the shiny
bark, latching on.

Paper Doll

My cousin cuts along the doll's towering beehive,
shaping her hairstyle taller, taller
until the scissors stop
at paper's edge.
She sharpens the fingers, the crushed pointy toes,
the thin waist
with precision.

My cousin squints
as she steadies the paper between her knuckles
and I cup both hands and wait
for the fall of confetti corners,
the paper ephemera, doll fat I receive
like cracked pieces of communion wafer.

I announce,
This is my body
and swallow
a small shard of paper
before my cousin nips the last heel
and spills the heap of dolls onto our laps.

What I Learned from Kiki Smith

Riverside, California

A pad opened like a dandelion
on the sidewalk.
Where is the part,
in the educational video
about menstruation, when
the girl smells the napkin,
fresh like a head-wet pillow?
My best friend hid and bought
pads from the liquor store,
threw them in the dumpster
to save her father from the trouble.
In the bathroom, my mother
crumpled her underwear
and threw it in the ocean
for me to swim after.

Cross-Examination: The Anthropologist Asks the Third Question

State your age:

Moon's lust.

Severed sky.

Cartographer itch.

Look at me.

Cannibal teeth.

State your age:

City of tribes.

River of decay.

Prayer spit.

Glittering boats,

cages.

State your age:

City of painted trees.

Chant, chant over bread.

Tomb to share.

What Cousin Taught Me About The Body

San Jose, California

She said something about boys. I shake my head no and think of crushes I could've had. Something about her barrio. I think a mud shack with an aluminum roof. Something about rules, reglas. No, something about periods. No, I shake my head, no. Twelve? I shake my head again. I count eleven fingers. Eleven, a stuck out year. Something about breasts. She pinches the injury of my left bud and laughs. Something about permission, something about not allowing anyone to touch me there.

What a Bad Man Looks Like

Hayward, California

The man requests Für Elise
from my sister
who is a baby,
who is jumpy,
the notes newly minted
in her fingers
My mother slices
the spines of tiger shrimp,
their black-blooded veins
dangle on her fingers,
on her ring,
in a bowl of water.
My father dusts his hands
with a basketball.
The man closes his eyes.
My sister's hands stretch
over the keys.

The Anthropologist Fantasizes about the Aswang

I want to curtain
her voice and body,
reveal her
cage of sin.
Screech-owl,
harpy of want,
she calls me in dreams
sweaty and disturbed.
Population of ghosts.
I always run after her.

Half-clad Lilith.
Her genealogies of lust
house my pleasure
in measuring
deformity.
Monsters unfold
on my sterile table.
Thief of seed.

In her thatched
dwelling,
above the trees,
she lifts a finger
from a woven plate
frayed by the sound
of stolen cries.

For every good woman,
gasp and teach
your children.
For every good man,
heed this warning.
I want to trap
her body of ruin.
Emboss her name
in every encyclopedia
of maladies,
symptoms
destructive to mankind.

Tame her,
name her mine.

Litany for Silence

My mother in her flesh nightgown and I swallowed silence.

The bedroom door left ajar and I swallowed silence.

A book of refusal and I swallowed silence.

My sister's corded laughter and I swallowed silence.

Run home, run away, I swallowed silence.

The blacked out stars and I swallowed silence.

A book of strangers and I swallowed silence.

A man pressed down and I swallowed silence.

The elevator awaits and I swallowed silence.

Here, the lampshade of forgetting and I swallowed silence.

A book of good little girls and I swallowed silence.

My zipper ground down and I swallowed silence.

The gossip tree of women and I swallowed silence.

My darkening laughter and I swallowed silence.

Even at the forgiveness parade, I swallowed silence.

Wearing my mother's nightgown, I swallowed silence.

Infomercial Break: *Inferno Terno*, Aswang-Repellent Spanish-Style Women's Fashionwear by TYRA

Are you sick and tired of finding stray legs hiding between the leaves of your banana trees when you come home from work? Are you just plain through with discovering that the gravestones of your recently deceased loved ones are cracked or, even worse, that their bodies are removed when you visit them on All Saints' Day? What would your poor mother say? When you wake up in the morning, are you just completely over the wild animals, the rabid dogs or pigs squealing underneath your bed, waking you before sunrise? Have you been looking for the perfect, Spanish-colonial throwback dress that will fit your curves perfectly?

Well, I've got a *fierce* solution.

For the low, low price of ten payments of \$19.95, you can purchase the *Inferno Terno*, Aswang-Repellent Spanish-Style Women's Fashionwear by TYRA.

Don't be fooled by the *Inferno Terno's* carefully crystal-beaded bodice, the hand-laced butterfly box sleeves, or the luxurious couture-quality sateen. Did you know that the Spanish word *terno* means *to match*? This Spanish-inspired two-piece ensemble is guaranteed to obliterate an aswang creature of any manifestation into *ash* and win over your old *flame* (Dan, the captain of Vikings Football) at your twenty-fifth high school reunion.

How it works: Utilizing cutting edge technology, microscopic temperature and motion scanners are embedded into both butterfly-boxed sleeves on the *Inferno Terno*, which detects bitterly cold aswang creatures. Once detected, the scanners shift into laser mode, informing their wearer with a mist of jasmine perfume, to eliminate the aswang creature in the proximity.

Best of all, the *Inferno Terno* is all about women's empowerment, which is one of my goals in life. Any woman can wear the *Inferno Terno* because it's one size fits all and it will transform your bulges into well-defined hips, waist, and butt. *Inferno Terno* comes in an incredible variety of colors: turquoise, magenta, ruby red, buttercream yellow, black and ivory, which means it'll look good with any complexion. Work it, girls!

The Aswang Imagines Her Self-Portrait as Blood

If there is a river more ecstatic than this
simmering between fingers,
black-red as night parting through the reeds,
then let me gnaw my mother's finger
into the bell of her silence.

If there is a river more powerful than this,
pray that it flows through the magic of return.
Silt loosened by the heart's surge
and carried into the chambers of my wilderness.

If there is a river more present than this,
teach me how to unfurl dawn with my hands,
to stroke honey-mouthed generations
with this wild, wild water.

Remit Aches in 25 Words

A deafening mythology
dark-haired bunso
laid between the folds
between crackling wings
between words
of lies or silence,
whatever you prefer.
silence conveys oxygen
but my heart opened.

*

*Please rush this message This message This money For your new cane Make your walk
steady and sure For your chemo Tell me For*

*her catechism dress and veil Make sure it's white and crystal beaded and sparkles For
our house behind the fields swollen with cane Don't tell*

anyone I'm sending this to you

*

In the tunnel between Montgomery and Powell Street, my mother says, *you know, we are underwater*. My sister chews fake peppermint gum. My mother yawns a cartoon yawn. A pile of newspapers dance on the floor, I stop them with my heel.

*

*For the linen curtains I chose for the living room Tell me what does it look like For your
geometry books and lunch of sweet yam*

and rice Study hard and good Don't tell anyone I've only got so many words

*

In 2009, about US\$17.348 billion in remittances was sent to the Philippines by overseas Filipinos, higher than in previous years. This is what Wikipedia says. I also learn that New Zealander Pinoys are called “KiwiPinos.” Crossing the bridge, my father tells the joke about Daly City again.

*

When you get this What time will it be there Enclosed is extra for the surcharge What happened

*to the cousin who This is for the ceiling Monsoon season again Wash the tarp clean of
tears When you receive this*

*

The bronze bust of James Flood. My mother signs us into his building. Where she works. *He came looking for gold*, my mother says, *like me*. I try to stick my finger up his nose but there are no holes for air.

Do you know why it's so foggy in Daly City? Because all of the Filipinos are opening their rice cookers for dinner. Do you know why all of the Filipinos are so foggy? Because dinner is Daly City is their rice cooker. Do you know all the Filipinos are dinner? Because their opening is cooker and City and Daly. Do all Filipinos fog their city in the rice?

Ding.

The first door once the elevator opens. Black letters pressed into frosted glass: Odena Foreign Exchange. Tax. Remittance. Notary Republic. *This is why they call me the Jill of all trades*, my mother says. Tuloy Po Kayo. *Welcome*.

*

*This is for Black Madonna Lady of Good Voyage Sang karaoke and served drinks For
Ina who crossed the river In Tokyo My tears strung around her neck Did*

*she give in to those men Today I found How long the pilgrimage A twenty-dollar bill on
the ground Please find it enclosed*

*

My little-girl voice answering the phone.

-Odena Foreign Exchange, how can I help you?

-Anita?

-No.

-Can I speak with your mother?

I help my mother count the stacks of twenty-dollar bills wrapped in white remittance forms. Enough room for a small message from sender to receiver. Always this: *please rush.*

*

*Holy This is all I've saved For fields of rice we've rented For banana groves curled into
the arms of machetes The moon pounds with the restless line of*

*spare change & bus fare & folded bills Hidden in the tusk of an elephant Tiny and
ceramic Greeting the bedroom Good luck & Holy This is all I've saved*

*

*

On Market The men circle kingdoms with their eyes Waiting for the next free chessboard

*

A poster of a white sand beach fades into the background: Boracay. The coffeemaker drips done. Both flags gleam on Manong's camouflage hat. His fingernails brimmed with dirt, telling a story of cataracts and grass.

*

*Across the street At the Burger King Fingers pass loose change across the counter A
simple sandwich No Pickles Holy the only request Today*

*

*

*Today I saw a rooster who ran blindly into the sidewalk of the city
Who still marks dawn
with a watery & bold cry His bill charged bright as blood*

Disappearing into an alleyway His banner torn behind

*

On the train ride home, a woman dressed like a tulip sits in front of my mother. It is quiet, this goodbye to the city. My mother stares at the dark hair in front of her. When the sidewalk descends again, the sun scatters through broken window building. She holds up a single white hair to the light. The tulip turns around. *You had a piece of lint on your shoulder*, my mother says, tucking the hair into her coat pocket.

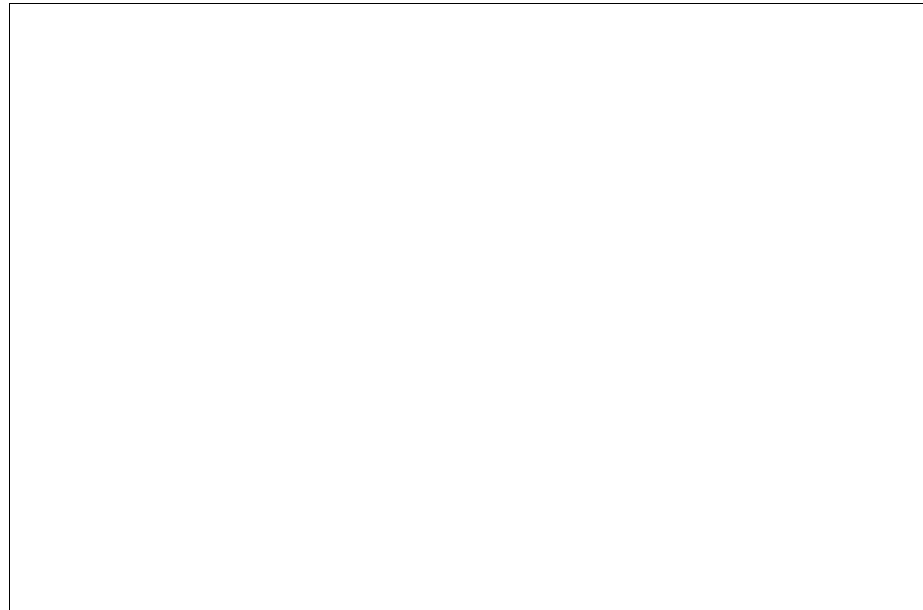
*

*Do you know the winter of workdays Seething to a close The brittle purse crumbling
inside the hand of day A letter in the mail for you*

*

An excerpt from:

4.) The Weredog



cause illnesses to those who look her in the eye.

image of her pupils mimics a lizard

startled in bright sunshine.

Below the Store Room of Imelda's Reported 1,300 Shoes

is a cave swollen with thousands more.

To enter, you need a passcode
of jumbled birthdates, a Hefty bag
and a willingness to abandon
your feet's humility. Here
is a framed letter from Ferragamo,
blessing Imelda's toenails.

Here is a photograph of her
and Gaddafi shaking hands
in front of a stately hotel near Nice,
of course, a chance encounter.

Deep inside, in the cool dark,
the holy shelves of shoes:
kitten heels, espadrilles, wooden
platforms, spit-shined leather
and a few Nikes sit silent. Once

when the sky buckled
with the people's shouts,
this was where Imelda removed her shoes.

Right here, where she crawled on her knees
and fumbled over her jet-beaded rosary.

I didn't do anything wrong,
hoping it was close enough to prayer.

(sst): Rumor

Bless this burning.

Don't breathe in the smoke.

Even the roots.

Don't catch the ashes. Trail our hands. Evidence.
Burn.

Our eyes water at this expulsion.

Our hands raw from weaving rope.

An act of justice.

This holy day into night.

Thick torches anointed with oil and blood. Bless this burning.

How We Talked About Beauty

Hayward, California

My mother said,
don't go to bed with wet hair,
you'll catch sick.
I unravel my hair from the shower
onto the crickets beneath my pillow.

In the dream of Cancer,
I hold my breasts
to the light,
two fresh sting rays
in the slide of the aquarium.

A girl's hair
is waning,
a storm, a cliff,
draining strands of blackness.

On the TV,
two bald women twang and sing.
Everyone whistles.
The girl's mother yells,
"I hate dreams of beauty
and shards."

The girl is on East 14th,
searching for
a deeper drain
and a hair catcher
for the dreams and dreams
of wigs.

The girl is a small daughter
hulahooping a wig
around her waist,
waiting for the sun to
rise with the test results.

I hold my breasts
to the night,
metal strainers

sifting out the hair
from the sick.

In the dream my grandmother, drunk

she leaned the scuffed door of her body
against my shoulder
and I held her up for as long as I could
until she pointed to the fur flashing past the window
a wolf with a name and a nose for girls and photo albums
and there was a wolf for every year of her life
and it was the same wolf
scratching a fevered paw at the crack in the doorway
and my grandmother slammed us shut
before holding up a splintered finger
to the dusk and a swig

How We Talked About Cancer

Hayward, California

My niece traces a line across
her heart.

I don't catch the name of the scar
on her mother's breast.

She says _____, her finger
cracking open.

I can't hear it,
say it again.

How We Kept Secrets

Hayward, California

It's still night when my cousin turns her body
curled like an ear, and I say, *it must be*
the January air, or the baby.

She says, *listen, don't tell anyone.*

I don't know what else to say or do but ring
my pinky around hers and kiss my hand –
a girlhood vow she's outgrown long ago.

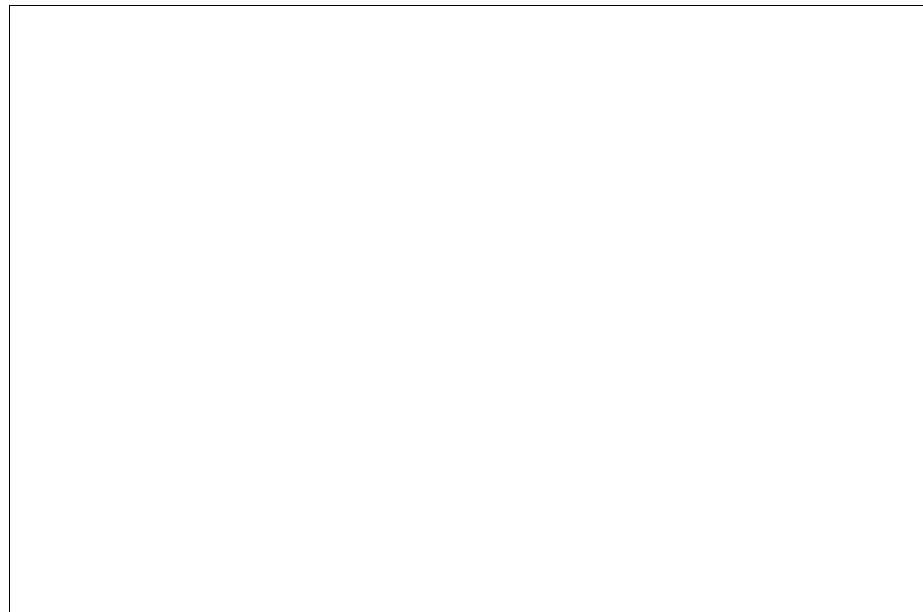
The first time, I didn't love the guy.

She visited a witch doctor
who made her chew guava leaves and breathe
deeply while pain burst between her legs.

I dream of her first baby, a beta fish—
tail and blurry fin, swimming in a mason jar.
My cousin unscrews the lid with
the flat of her hand and dips her fingers,
splashing in the brine. The baby
snaps at her with slow-moving lips, pounds
at her fingertips with the force of her small, red body.
In the morning, I wake up, gasping, my hands
cupping a small fin.

An excerpt from:

5.) The Carrion-eating Ghoul



grotesque appetite

Catholic priests in the Luzon provinces who have killed

the Manila Bulletin, Salt

and Holy Water were sprinkled

creature's hunting hours, which

reportedly killed her during the precise moment of attack.

Imelda Marcos untangles her iPod headphone cords at SFO Airport

and scrolls for Artists 'M' Miles Davis *Kind of Blue* because she loves to sing the words *so what* when the trumpet quakes. *So what, so what, so what. Okay then, so what?* The kind of blue from an Aquafina water bottle sitting on the check-in counter, half-drunk and still. The drops quiver below the cap when the planes descend on the runway. The navy blue vest, crisply ironed, of the United Airlines Attendant at customs who pressed her for an autograph. This old *kabibayan* who left Manila before Aquino's assassination, before Imelda reached her goal of the thousandth shoe, an Italian mule with a thick buckle. The cataract blue rounding out the attendant's black eyes, and the ink from her leaking pen, staining Imelda's hand.

(sst): Rumor

...remember she was there
in the bedroom
on the edge of the barrio in the market
hiding behind sweet meats
holding her skin, luggage
no not skin a baby
and no not like luggage
but a baby holding her
baby not her baby
but skin there
she has wings no arms
she is a bat no
a bird lizard with dart blue eyes
Look! there in the window
brushing her dentures
an old woman entrancing young men
no a young woman in the aged skin
is she there?
all the way to America
like her baby not her baby holding her skin

Imelda Leans Over to Kiss Ferdie in his Glass Coffin

but gets distracted by her sagging reflection. Her eyelids, neck and breasts dangle over the formaldehyde-injected body that was once her husband. Even this morning, wisps of her hair slipped from her typically sprightly bouffant, caught in the webs of her hands. When did her high cheekbones shift underneath her face like agitated tectonic plates? When did loose skin soften this former Miss Manila's silhouette? Her husband's glassine skin gleams beneath the track lighting of his tomb. His hair blacker, more alive in death. Vases of Goldband lilies perch in each corner. Her husband's bodyguards uncross their arms. Imelda shivers and clutches the collar of her silk blouse before leaving. Ferdinand's lips wintering.

How We Imagined Serving Oysters to MFK Fisher

La Jolla, California

“all the Filipino servants, pretty little men-dolls as mercurial as monkeys, and as lewd.”
-MFK Fisher, 1924, *The First Oyster*

We slide past the wooden crate crowding the service entrance.

We crowbar the question of lids open: slippers and slippers of oysters waiting for a tongue to kiss.

We freeze our hands scrubbing their algae coats, pristine from the thickness of our bristles.

We mimic the Pacific's sharp bite and overtake, salt shaking free from our hands.

We shuck and snap with our pointed knives, pry, unlock, twist the collection of God's gnarled doors.

We cut the muscle under the shell, inhale the liquor we can't drink.

We serve gloved young women waltzing, oyster in hand, the other charged at the small of her back.

We remember our first oysters grown on the ghosts of coconut husks, slithered in by submerged ropes

We remember the quickburn of rum to chase these heartbeats of ocean, cruelly brining our bodies.

We collect empty shells for the linen-covered trash, no room to grow and collect or repeat this careful task.

Imelda's Abandoned Pair #546

The price tag still hangs
over the left heel. A gift,
she claims. An unremarkable
brown. Like yam farmers'
cracked hands. Like her mother's
blunt face. Like the color of her
face before powdering Chanel.
Afterward, the mirror blew
a bubble with its silver cheeks.

Breadcrumbs, Home

Praise your black coffee breath. Praise the rare quiver of your voice, a mourning dove. The spray of honeysuckle; praise your laughter. Praise the salt hills at the Alameda County Line. Praise the sulfuric roads you drive on after work. Praise the quiet paths like breadcrumbs, home. Praise the hands conscious of their patience, their stilted breath over my cheeks. Praise your sleeplessness when I snuck out of windows. Praise the nose pinched by you, your mother, hers. Praise your story, distilled into strands inside plastic heart-shaped lockets. Praise the smell of moonrise and abaca of your hair. Praise the hand on my forehead, your mother, hers, and before her.

What I Learned from Lucille Clifton

Washington Heights, New York

i stole your book of light
from a roommate's shelf
and climbed onto the fire
escape

the book slipped from
my fingers spilling ashes
on the sidewalk

the city crying
let it, let it