

**Eileen Tabios**

**I Forgot Ars Poetica**

I forgot my poetry is going to change the world. I forgot my words are healing. I forgot my words are apples infused with cheerful cinnamon. I forgot my words are holy. I forgot my words are going to lift you—all of you!—towards *Joy*.

I forgot the logic of fragments.

I forgot the medicinal nature of tango.

I forgot all the poets referencing “Guam” when they write a discourse on what’s *passed over*.\*

I forgot “Guantanamo” might rear its bloodied head in a poem, but Guantanamo is not just word.

I forgot the radiance of darkness.

I forgot the timidity of your sixth toe.

I forgot the poem whose nudity is radical for addressing money instead of flesh.

I forgot the shallow poem—like “food wine,” for over-relying on social context to overcome its flaws.

I forgot the poem that caused me to realize how exhausted I’d become from self-deprecating sages.

I forgot the membrane of your lips.

I forgot a favorite irony: how reader-response becomes most enjoyable precisely because what’s read does not make sense.

I forgot the poem written because its author, “at the end of life, must stagger back toward love.”\*\*

I forgot the rare poetry collection magnified by its lack of compromise: the relentlessness of a gaze atop a sweat-soddened shirt, broken knees, and trembling fingers.

I forgot his unbegrudging fall to move on his knees toward the altar. I forgot the altar's fat white candles whose flames were scented by the blood of fallen priests, virgins, poets, crones, sons, daughters, bastards, politicians, rebels, mothers ...

I forgot that rare poem all too aware that no one else can be the sentry watching over your life—only you can judge when you have absconded from your distinct possibilities.

I forgot the dictator who was my father: Ferdinand Edralin Marcos.

I forgot the poems which contain the paradox of garnets—stones for, say, jewelry but ever evoking blood: jewels that should stay pretty but end up transcending décor.

I forgot a poem with multiple references that became whole through a scaffolding of jazz.

I forgot a wind chime dancing with, not against, wind. I forgot a wind chime delighting with its hobo tune.

I forgot a poem's judicious insertions of the word "you." As the poem shifts across topics and dimensions, the attentive pronoun alchemizes the reader into the author!

I forgot the present is thin, and the past thick...

I forgot a poem with a certain flickering light—not bright, *fragile*, but one senses its dependability for never dying into dark.

I forgot how a poet's use of double slashes—"/ /"—evoked cutting, how troubled girls cut their flesh, paradoxically to *feel*.

I forgot a strand of hair hearkening a welt.

I forgot a particular line, "he found himself," that exemplified a marvelous line-break by continuing on immediately to the next line's word, "adrift."

I forgot the hush that can surface. So many words! Yes, and such *quiet*!

I forgot we agreed to live in Technicolor.

I forgot the poems which delivered revelations so keenly they become knives into guts.

I forgot how love clouds as much as it clarifies vision.

I forgot your haste in tearing off jeweled combs.

I forgot how critique alone is as meager a fuel for poetry as it is for romance.

I forgot how stellar line-breaks transform a reading into a rhythm so deeply felt even bones rock and roll!

I forgot how reading the phrase, “the scent of your nervous desire,” makes your nose twitch.

I forgot the chilled monks illuminating manuscripts with silver and gold and rarely seeing finished results—we cannot know if they felt compensated from anticipating a new generation would sacrifice to continue their works. I forgot their fingers insufficiently warmed by skinned mittens. I forgot their eyes abused by the feebleness of their lamps. I forgot the stone walls that defined the limits of their experience as if words always fulfilled what are expected of them.

I forgot the poems whose first lines yanked you into the poems’ depths.

I forgot the country of hammocks and waling-waling orchids whose perfume obviated the world’s magnificent indifference.

I forgot a poem made powerful by a poet who allowed darkness its time, then labeled the experience (that placed snow on her hair), *Blessing*.

I forgot the advantage of an ignored chandelier.

I forgot the poems writ casually to be minor poems but failed to be minor.

I forgot space is difficult to depict without the negative grid.

I forgot lucidity does not always translate to freshness in language.

I forgot the complexity of evolution from : to : : , or how few have persisted to explore : : :

I forgot how rarely an author realizes when a punctuation mark’s significance is exaggerated.

I forgot how so much depends on a punctuation mark.

I forgot the poet who’d insert a typo at the last minute of proofing manuscripts—he longed to create a space for readers to inhabit, in the tradition of indigenous weavers creating imperfections as doorways for spirits to enter.

I forgot how I went through a phase at poetry readings of ripping pages from my books—sometimes I’d autograph them before handing them out with a “They’re

worthy of Ebay!", sometimes I crumpled them into balls I'd toss towards the audience as if they were money or my underwear.

I forgot the poem whose words entranced by galloping across the page until you felt the wind against your face and, suddenly, you were composing the opera that would come to be known as "Sonora!"

I forgot that I prayed, only to have prayer bring forth stigmata in areas of my body usually hidden from public gaze.

I forgot how poems can set you ablaze until you look at the world with glowing alien eyes—lidless to see better, gold irises to erase the sun's glare, and unblinking.

I forgot I happily volunteered my tears. I forgot the sweetness of damp cheeks.

I forgot the poem whose first word is "but." I forgot the poem whose first word is "consequently." And another poem whose first word is "nevertheless." I forgot the poems that began with the least lyrical words to raise the threshold for the definition of "treasure."

I forgot the wet walls of a beer bottle, against which I had laid my brow.

I forgot that a poem can unfold unchecked in a manner where suffering becomes rationale for salvation.

I forgot you can be drawn into turmoil, into trauma, through empathy—that the distance between a page and a reader's eyes can be as intimate as our commingling breaths.

I forgot how the matter-of-factness in many poems does not contradict their nature as protest poems.

I forgot the poem whose page was a glass pane etched with words—that paper would be too soft a field for your hand leaving my waist.

I forgot that an orphan's rant for attachment speaks to desire for desire's own sake. I forgot that not knowing what one wants does not obviate the *wanting*.

I forgot to see the thing as the thing itself. I forgot I looked through a window and saw only glass.

I forgot the plastic flowers, their radioactive yellows and reds inappropriate for marking grief. (But how else to see them by roadsides when they are passed by so swiftly by traffic?)

I forgot that meditation, if conducted deeply, must harvest pain.

I forgot I admired encaustic for protecting forever the fragility of paper.

I forgot love stutters over a lifetime.

Footnotes

\* Paraphrasing Craig Santos Perez

\*\* Eric Gamalinda

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Eileen R. Tabios' 2014 poetry collections are *147 MILLION ORPHANS*, *44 RESURRECTIONS* and most recently *SUN STIGMATA (Sculpture Poems)*. More information about her is available at <http://eileenrtabios.com>