SANDUGO: BLOOD COMPACT

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We certify that we have read this dissertation and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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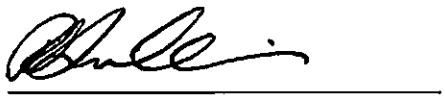

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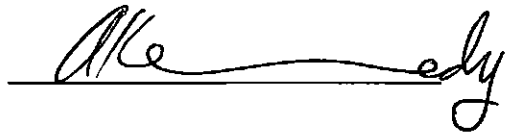

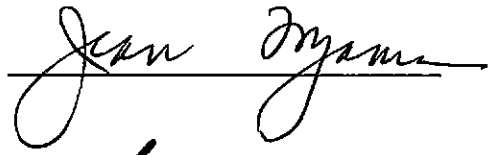

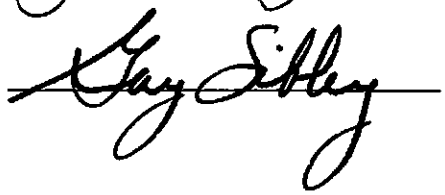

"Her body is not so white as
anemone petals nor so smooth—nor
so remote a thing."

William Carlos Williams

Abstract

This is a novel in the form of narrative poetry. The narrative tells the story of Miguel Rubio, *mestizo* (mixed race) son of a sugar plantation owner in the Philippines in the 1800s who yearns to go to Europe to study painting. However, once Miguel reaches Europe, he feels a sense of conflict within himself about his identity and a persistent feeling of "unbelonging." After finding success in Madrid he moves to Paris, where he falls in love with and marries a sheltered, asthmatic French girl, Inès, even though her mother objects to his mixed-race heritage. They have a son, Angel, but when he dies Miguel blames his wife for not taking care of the child. He becomes angry and depressed and attends a séance, and Inès feels isolated and ignored. After attending a lecture by Dr. Charcot, which features a woman patient as an exhibit, she decides to have her portrait painted so that her husband will once again acknowledge her. But when her nude portrait is exhibited at the Salon, it becomes a scandal and Miguel is humiliated. She goes away to a sanatorium where, feeling more lost, she has an affair with a doctor. Miguel is enraged and, suspecting that his wife has had an affair with the portrait painter, considers killing him, but instead decides to take Inès away from the corruption of Paris and return to the Philippines. When she defies him he kills her and is tried for her murder.

The story is loosely based on the life of Juan Luna, the celebrated nineteenth-century Filipino painter who murdered his wife and mother-in-law at the height of his career in Paris. Juan Luna came of prominence at a point in Philippine history where Filipinos first began to think of themselves as a nation, not just Spanish subjects, and he confounded the institutionalized racism of the Spanish in the Philippines to achieve

artistic recognition both at home and in Europe as one of the most talented painters of his generation. Although he was tried for the killings, he was acquitted and set free.

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Prologue: On Trial

"They are now peaceful and it is believed that they will remain this way. However, it is feared that any incident can cause them to return to their misdeeds, and their ferocity, killing and cutting the heads of Europeans and natives that they catch, and which they triumphantly carry around. It is said that the ease with which the men can marry and please their brides, depends on the numbers of heads they have cut, especially if the victims are Europeans." Gervasio Gironella, 1847

The overheated courtroom is never still:
there is always a background of shuffling,
chair-scraping, coughing, the rustle
of the women's skirts like a constant whispering.
Monsieur Olivetti calls Miguel a savage,
a fiend, a cold-blooded murderer while sweat
pearls at his hairline and he brandishes the pistol.
Madame Victorine's grief rivets the onlookers.
When she testifies her voice is an instrument
of bitterness. I am an old woman,
she says. I have outlived my husband.
Now I have outlived my daughter.
But once I was a mother.
Inès was born late into my marriage.
My husband was old by then,
and no longer pretended to love me.
She was my love, not my son,
who was his father's creature.
I was sickly during my pregnancy.
From the first Inès was weak too.
She came early, raw, like a skinned rabbit.
She could hardly make enough sound to cry.
The doctors said she wouldn't live

to her second birthday, but I knew
differently as only a mother can.
Just as I knew this man with his unclean
blood would destroy her.
I sat beside her night after night
and willed her to breathe—
willed her little chest to move in and out—
listened for each gasp that fell
like a pebble into the silence
that threatened to drown her.
They will say that she was mad,
that she brought this upon herself.
That lawyer will point at her portrait,
and ask the jury with a little wink—
Look fellows, what would you do
if your wife shamed you like this?
What will my daughter's life be worth to you,
Madame Victorine sneers, you court of men?
Miguel's lawyer earnestly strokes his pointed
little beard and stands up to address the court.
You have before you, he says, a Malay,
a man who God made differently from us.
Therefore you must ask—should he be judged
as we would judge a fellow Frenchman?

PART ONE:

The Philippines

Juego de gallos

> *"The rooster is the favorite of the native. It is his inseparable companion at work and what entertains him while he enjoys his vices. Summarily, it is his principal pastime and hobby. . . Spellbound, he contemplates it or trains it to fight his other roosters, or those of his friends. . . . The native's fondness for the rooster and the cockfight has resulted in the proper organization of these events, such that they are controlled and provide income for the Treasury. Therefore, this activity sometimes generates an income of more than 40,000 pesos a year." Gervasio Gironella, 1847*

In fact he doesn't go home yet
though it's after dark, he stops
at the *nipa*-thatched cockpit
by the river at the edge of the workers' quarters
and finds a match about to begin.
The crowd of men signals last-minute bets
to the *kristo*, who never writes anything down
but can always magically reunite every man
with his bet after the match.
The men wait anxiously,
spitting red betel juice and fingering
the *anting-anting* amulets they wear
around their necks. The boy
elbows his way in and takes a seat
on the bench nearest to the sandy ring,
the one reserved for *hacenderos*, owners, and judges.
He is a skinny, brown-skinned boy of fourteen
who has just begun to grow out of childhood;
his most prominent features are his knees and
elbows and his broad flat feet, the result,
his mother scolds, of running around
with no shoes like any *sacada*'s son.
The brownness of his skin—

the result of not wearing a hat—
is also a source of great irritation to his mother;
in this too he also resembles the labourers' children.
To look at him you would never know
that his father is Gerard Rubio,
owner of the biggest sugar plantation on the island
and the most modern mill
and a brand new house with a living room
that could house the families of four workers.
His father's importance and thus his own
have always been a matter of fact to the boy
and all who know him, as unassailable a fact
as the beginning of the rainy season in May.
The cockpit is dim and hot and smells of sweat.
The owners of the roosters stand huddled
amongst their supporters at opposite ends
of the pit, they hold the birds at arm's length
while spurs are attached to their feet.
Weeks of wages, the honour of whole villages
ride on the backs of two birds, one red,
the underdog, and one white, the favourite.
To Miguel they look equal, sleek and muscular
and vicious and often it is only the luck
to be discerned in intangibles like the pattern of scales
on their legs or whether they have been handled
by a menstruating woman that delivers the winner.
Go! the referee shouts and the roosters are flung
into the ring. They are still for a moment,
measuring each other, and then the red one spreads
his wings and rushes at the white.

The yelling of the crowd drowns out
the roosters' angry cries as they peck and slash,
locked in a fast-moving ball of feathers and blood.
It is over in minutes, the white rooster limp and bloodied.
Upset! the referee cries,
and even the men who have lost their bets
cheer because the underdog has won.
The owner of the dead rooster shrugs.
It is fate, after all, and there will be dinner.

Suerte

> *"they look graceful since the tapis [overskirt] fits them tightly and shows the shape of their bodies. . . As all women walk dragging their feet along, they make a noise similar to rain when there are many of them in the street. . . . The embroidered slippers, the embroidered chemise, the* saya *[long skirt],* tapis *of silk, the* jusi *shirt, the handkerchief made with embroidered piña, the earrings, the golden rosary and the many rings on her finger are the apparel which with more or less luxury form the complete ensemble of a native or* mestiza." *Gervasio Gironella, 1847*

Doña Eugenia is smoking a cigar
and playing solitaire in the living room
when Miguel comes in, wet and disheveled,
but she beckons him over to sit at the table with her.
Eugenia Rubio is a gambling woman.
She had married the Protestant Frenchman—
a sugar trader lately of Haiti, the only one
of his kind to be found in all of the Philippine Islands—
nineteen years ago on the deck of a British ship
anchored in Iloilo harbour because no church
on land would do it. It was a scandal
and an abomination; the friars had hinted darkly
in the newspapers and shouted from the pulpits
about the evils of consorting with heretics,
and a rumour spread throughout the city
that upon completing her vows, Eugenia
would be struck down dead in a flash of brimstone.
On the morning of the wedding thousands of *indios*
lined the shore in expectation of her annihilation.
Doña Eugenia was not blasted into eternal fire,
merely across Guimaras Strait to Negros
where there was land ready to be cleared for sugarcane.
A fool's bet, growing cane

is like trying to appease a mercurial god:
from May to October the rains pound
the fields into a red mud so thick
even *carabao* are seized and held fast,
and from the end of the rainy season to the onslaught
of the next, workers cut and mill and plant.
Babaylans might leave offerings of chickens' blood
and priests might bless the fields,
but still droughts or locusts might come
and every successful year is paid for by a failed one.
Miguel is a bit afraid of his mother.
Wherever you are in the house
you can always hear her coming because
she jingles when she walks, so bedecked
is she with gold rosaries and gold crosses,
gold medallions and gold scapulars.
All the rooms of the house are separated
by sliding wooden panels instead of solid walls,
so that sometimes she seems to inhabit
it like mist or the Holy Spirit.
When he was very little she told him
never to lie to her because she would know
it and he believed her, so he does not lie
when she asks where he has been.
Doña Eugenia gazes at her youngest son
and Miguel gazes at the tabletop,
which is fashioned out of a single *narra* wood
plank polished to such a luster
that it resembles a tapestry woven
out of gold and red and black threads.

Miguel the youngest is the son she worries about.
When he was two, his blundering father
startled him out of a sound sleep;
everyone knew that you should never awaken
a person quickly, especially a child,
because its soul would be frightened
out of its body and might never return.
A friar was summoned to sprinkle holy water,
and a *babaylan,* who spat on the baby's forehead
and made a cut on his palm across his lifeline
to ward off bad luck, but still.
But still.

Encanto

> *"The Spanish they speak is charming and has been given the name 'kitchen Spanish' due to the tone and the absolute languidness with which they speak it. . . . They do not use the gender forms of Spanish words or the plural of adjectives and pronouns, as these are also absent in Tagalog." Gervasio Gironella, 1847*

Some mornings before it became too hot,
Don Gerard rode out to the fields on horseback
with a gun in his belt and Miguel's arms around his waist.
Under the watchful eyes of the *kapos*,
the men and women crouching in the cane
would call out greetings from under their *salakots*
and the cloth hoods covering their entire faces
that left openings only for their eyes.
Although he had taken on the name
of his wife's family, his father insisted
that his son learn French as well as the Spanish
they spoke to each other and the Ilongo
they used with servants. Although he had not
seen France in over 30 years and his children
might never see it, Don Gerard insisted
on their Frenchness, so that Miguel sometimes felt
as though he had a double life,
as if there was another Miguel that walked
the streets of Paris instead of the tracks of Negros,
and he wondered if they would recognize each other
if someday they were to meet.

Portrait of an Execution

> *"As in Spain, capital punishment is implemented in the Philippines through strangulation by garotte. The prisoner, as well as the hangman and his assistant, can be seen at the gallows depicted in the drawing. With their clothes and their very dark skin, the hangmen present a truly horrific aspect. Their red robes and hats make them look like demons. They use the same clothes when they attend public floggings, where the prisoner is mounted half-naked on a horse, accompanied by a large number of bailiffs and by* palistas *armed with lances.* Palistas *are natives who take turns in serving as* palos y servicios." *Gervasio Gironella, 1847*

When he was little Miguel's mother
had taken him to see the friar's execution
early in the morning, just past dawn
in the *plaza mayor* of Silay. It was a soft day to die.
The birds were barely awake yet,
the sun still filmy, a crowd of *indios* was gathered
and a crowd of *guardia civil* held them back
at bayonet point. Yet there was no need;
they stood quietly. Miguel and his mother watched
from the second floor of a house overlooking
the square and the wooden scaffold in its center.
The *capiz* windows had been drawn back
and chairs arranged in a row so that the ladies
of the house could sit and watch
with the children on their laps and the men
standing behind them looking over their heads,
all as orderly as if they were at a musical evening.
A red cloth hung over the railing
And Miguel preferred to lean over it
instead of sitting in his mother's lap.
A cart with two men in it pulled by a *carabao*
trundled into the far end of the square flanked

by more soldiers—Fray Hermoso
and the executioner wearing a broad-brimmed
straw hat. Fray Hermoso's hands were tied
in front of him and Miguel could see that he was crying,
tears rolling unchecked down his face
and onto his brown collar while his lips
moved silently. Miguel turned to his mother,
who was sitting still and stiff-backed in her chair,
unsmiling, her hands resting on her lap
with an ivory rosary looped over them.
Mama, what is he saying? he asked
and was greeted with shushing
and reproving fingers by the other women.
He is praying to our Holy Mother,
she answered, neither softly nor loudly.
The cart clattered to a stop
in the middle of the cobblestoned plaza
and the friar was helped down by the executioner,
who had been sent down especially from Manila.
The captain of the guard, feathers on his hat bobbing
like a posturing rooster, took up a commanding pose.
He cleared his throat, and Miguel would remember
the silence that fell over the already-silent crowd:
as if every man, woman, and child was holding their breath.
The captain unrolled the paper he had been carrying
with an ostentatious snap and pronounced:
On this day, the 17^{m} of April in the year of our Lord 186-,
his Excellency the Governor-General has decreed
that this man, Brother Hermoso,
shall be garroted until dead in punishment

for seditious incitement and revolutionary
activities against the lawful government of this country.
He let the paper roll up again with a snap
and turned his head to look at the friar.
Have you any last words to say
before your sentence is carried out, Fraile?
Yes, my son, the tear-stained friar said.
His voice seemed to boom through the plaza.
He turned to the executioner and said, My son,
may God forgive you for the work you are about to do.
The executioner knelt and crossed himself.
He turned to face the crowd which,
as if in one movement, dropped
to their knees on the cobblestones.
My children, pray for me so that God
will receive my soul, and remember
His holy words: blessed are the meek
for they shall inherit the earth.
Amen, the crowd intoned.
The executioner took the friar's arm
and led him to the scaffold,
a kind of stool with an upright post at its back.
The friar sat with his back against the post
and the executioner fitted an iron collar around his neck.
He covered the friar's face with a black cloth,
and standing behind him took hold of the handle
that would tighten the collar. The captain nodded and,
squaring his shoulders, the executioner began
to turn the lever of the garrote. In his lap
the friar's hands curled into claws

and his body arched against the post.
After a few moments the executioner stopped
and lifted the cloth from the friar's face,
which was livid, eyes bulging, mouth hanging open.
The executioner wiped his brow with his forearm.
Though it had grown no hotter
and his work had been brief,
Miguel could see that he was dripping with sweat.
Hanging his head over the balcony,
Miguel vomited until there was nothing
left in his stomach to heave up.

Study in White

White room, white light,
rows of boys in white suits—
how Miguel hates this.
The priest droning at the head
of the class is the only thing not white,
but black of dress and red of face
with the effort of trying to beat Latin
into the hard coconut heads of these *indio* boys
determined to ape their betters.
Marooned amongst his schoolmates
he drowses. Sweat trickles down
the back of his neck and a fly,
black and somnolent and slow-moving
bumbles against him with a buzzing that sounds
as loud as carriage wheels on cobblestones.
Miguel shudders minutely.
The fly lifts and returns again
like an overstaying relative.
Miguel eyes the book laid open on his desk
and the Jesuit at the blackboard.
He has spent all of class embellishing
the letters of his name in the margins
and dreaming of how proud his father will be
when he wins a gold medal for the painting
he is planning to enter into the annual
competition of the *Academia de Dibujo y Pintura.*
Miguel longs for his father to release him
from his duty as his only heir, the future
of an *hacendero* that has been chosen for him

by fate as one after another his older brothers
died of cholera and malaria and influenza, their lives
vanishing like smoke rising from burning fields.
When he wrote to his father begging
for money to hire a painting instructor,
or to be released from his studies in Manila
so he can study painting in Europe,
his father threatened to disown him
and now his mother pays for his lessons in secret.
Miguel longs for his glorious future to arrive,
longs for the other side of the world where
he'll be free to paint and he'll become so famous
even these *peninsulares* will admire his talent.

PART TWO:

Europe

Chula

> *"The native* buyo *vendor is comparable to the chestnut vendor of Madria. Seated at a corner or near the door of another store, she makes her* buyo *which is composed of a little piece of* bonga *[a type of hard fruit marbled red and white in colour, wrapped in a piece of* buyo *leaf in which a little lime has been spread. Rare are the natives,* mestizos *and Chinese of both sexes who do not chew* buyo. *This produces red saliva and gives the mouth and teeth the same colour . . ." Gervasio Gironella, 1847*

January in Madrid, long past Christmas,
steel-skied, when the winter hurts your soul.
The stones of the kitchen exhale a filmy cold
and Miguel listens to the *chula* speak of home.
Filomena is broad-shouldered like a man,
she is older than he but not grown old yet,
her face is still round. It was her hands
he noticed first, large, reddened,
her left palm marred by a thick, raised scar.
Dressed like any good *madrileña* in black,
Filomena leans forward and points at him
with a cigarette stub held between thumb and forefinger.
Fish, she says, and slashes the air with the heel
of her hand. Why would I stay in that god-forsaken
village gutting fish my whole life?
A *mantón de Manila* nearly covers her
and part of it flows down her arm onto the floor.
As Miguel paints her he wishes
she was limned by the afternoon light of home:
white and all-seeing, not the light
of Europe, which is muted as if the sun
is filtered through a mantilla.
At home, the light glares, beats the skin

like a mallet striking a bronze gong,
brings tears to the eyes. Light to make
even God weep. In that all-seeing light
at the age of fifteen, Miguel lost his virginity
against the whitewashed wall of the mill.
The woman's skin breathed molasses
as he laid his cheek between her breasts.
In tired, faded Madrid people stare openly
at him on the street and some even ask him
if he is an *indio*. *Insular*, he answers,
Filipino, born in the Philippines.
Limpio de sangre, pure of blood.
At the Real Academia de Bellas Artes paler
students win prizes for inferior paintings.
His scholarship barely pays for his paints.
Madrid is a backwater—winning one prize
would pave his way to Paris where real art is made.
Filomena's eyes are as black and weary
as any god's. It never gets warm
in this fucking place, she says.
Tell me stories of warm places.

Gustave Caillebotte: *Le Pont de l'Europe*

On the Pont de l'Europe an onlooker leans
on the metal railing, looking down
at the railway tracks of Gare Saint-Lazare
through a cage of crossed iron girders.
He is a respectable man in a black
bowler and a long grey smock.
A woman is coming toward him
wrapped tightly in a black ruffled dress,
wearing a black hat with roses circling the brim.
She holds a purple parasol and is peering
through the netting that covers her face
at another respectable man in an even taller hat
who has passed her and has tilted his head to nod at her.
In the background white steam rises
from a locomotive passing underneath the bridge.

Mise-en-Scène

When Miguel sees the armless Venus de Milo,
enigmatic Mona Lisa, Ingres' sinuous *Odalisque*
in the Louvre for the first time—it is like arriving
at a place he hadn't known he missed until he got there.
As a small boy he loved to look at a picture book
of his father's, drawings of the great masters,
and he had learned to draw by copying them.
At eight he saw that their beautiful lines needed colour
and so he had filled them in painstakingly,
and his father had whipped him unmercifully
for destroying the book. Though he did not
understand—he had made them perfect
and he was being punished. But in the Louvre,
here they are, the real paintings, speaking to him,
welcoming him, vindicating him—he wants
to smell and taste and ingest them
with every sense, take them inside so that
they are a part of him, and he is them.
His hands shake with the effort not to touch
the *Raft of the Medusa* a guard shouts at him
because he is standing so close that he can smell
the varnish on the picture frame.
At the Musée Grévin there are no paintings,
only wax figures—dioramas about a baker
who had been arrested for murdering his wife
and their four children. Miguel walks through rooms
of life-sized figures: here is the baker bludgeoning
his screaming wife with a wooden block in the bakery,
both of them dusted with flour; here he is

at home sneaking from room to room strangling
his new baby and his young daughters;
here he is struggling with his wife's broad,
weighty corpse as he tries to incinerate it
in the bakery's giant ovens; here he stands trial,
an undernourished, slope-shouldered little man
before an audience that wonders at the strength
of such a puny little madman.
Outside the museum he sees that it has grown late.
The swallows are calling from the rooftops,
the air has turned blue and soft and
the late afternoon light has thickened,
gilding the doors of the houses he passes
in amber and honey. Down on the *quais*
the booksellers are closing their stalls; under the bridges
the slow-moving Seine is Prussian blue.

Juan Luna: Vanity

The woman gazes languidly,
her head coquettishly tilted
down and to the left.
Her curly hair is held up
with chopsticks that look barely strong
enough to carry its weight;
her silk robe is open to her breasts.
Her eyes are half closed
and she smiles, knowingly.

Les Lèches-Vitrines

Miguel knows the other art students are curious about him,
the lone foreigner enrolled in the Atelier Suisse.
This fellow from Madrid who comes early
so he can position his easel at the front of the class
and is the last to leave at night, this fellow
with a medal presented to him by the queen of Spain
who has already been invited to submit a painting
to the Salon, who is making a name
for himself painting portraits of the *beau monde.*
He never goes out drinking and carousing
with them, never comes in pale and hangdog
in the morning—until finally young Patrice says:
Come and have some fun with us for a change,
and the students decide that tonight they will go to Hell,
or at least L'Enfer on Place Clichy,
entering the bar through a door that is a gaping mouth
into a room frescoed with women who are naked and damned.
Served by mute waitresses dressed as skeletons,
Miguel resists the urge to cross himself.
You have not truly experienced Paris,
Patrice says grandly, if you have not experienced
the nightlife. First, my mysterious friend, meet
La Fée Verte—watch! A small glass of emerald
liquid is set in front of him, and water, a cube
of sugar, a slotted spoon. Patrice balances
the spoon over the glass and places a sugar cube
on it, then pours water over the sugar,
dissolving it into the drink which precipitates
into a milky white. Now drink it down quick,

he orders, and Miguel takes up the glass doubtfully
but dutifully drinks it down in one go.
It is like eating fire—he chokes and gasps
to everyone's delight. Now he belongs.

Camille Pissarro: *La Place du Théâtre français*, Rain

In the painting Paris dissolves
and coalesces and dissolves again.
The façades of the stone buildings
are softened and people hide
their faces under black umbrellas.
The sound of the traffic of horses and
carriages and wagons on the boulevard
is muffled by the noise of the rain,
which falls with a sound like wooden
slippers striking a wooden floor.

Rainlight

He came upon them dancing.
He was late because it had started to rain
and he had taken shelter under an awning
to wait it out. The rain had started out
as a light mist, droplets so fine
that they condensed on his jacket
without his noticing until it began
to rain harder and he realized he was already
wet through, and soon his sketchpad would
be as well and his hair was dripping down
his collar because, of course, he had no hat.
When he had arrived in Paris to study art,
the very atmosphere had unnerved him.
The light in France was different, soft and watery,
it seemed to be filtered through a veil
so that the world was always slightly out-of-focus,
not altogether tangible. He too had felt
not altogether tangible in this wavering landscape.
He had expected to feel a sense of belonging
when he arrived, but instead he felt invisible.
There was no one here who knew him,
when all his life his name and his family
had been a thing to be considered,
they had a form and a weight like holding
a stone in your hand. The French his father
had taught him was out of date, his pronunciation
full of hard, foreign syllables, not like the slithering
rush of language that Parisians spoke,
and they looked so pale and strange, their skin

a greenish-white that was nothing like his own.
Sometimes he felt that he was only held in this place
by the weight of his clothes. In cafes,
on the sidewalks, at the theatre,
they stared at him and asked him
what he was, and listed the possibilities:
Italian, Algerian, Chinese, Japanese, Indian?
No one believed he was French,
so he told them he was a Spaniard
and that they could pretend to believe.
The rain had slowed and he left
his dry harbour and arrived
at 127 Boulevard Sant-Germain quite out of breath.
It was a large, white, solid house,
looking rather as he imagined
the people who lived there would look.
The skinny maid who opened the door
looked him over disapprovingly before
letting him into the front hall and taking
his wet coat. The hallway was dark
and he had sensed the maid was impatient,
but Miguel took the time to look into the gilt mirror
hanging on the wall and straighten his hair to annoy her.
The maid had watched him part his hair
and smooth it into place. Something was not right
about him, she had thought, but she could not say what.
She had been told to expect an artist and here
was a hatless young man with a sketchpad—
of course an artist but his clothes were not artistic—
he looked like a banker in his black suit.

He was not very tall but solidly built, and his face,
she thought there might be something foreign
about his face—perhaps he was a Jew?
Miguel had gathered up his things when he was satisfied
and she showed him to the sitting room
where he came upon them dancing,
Patrice and his sister practicing a turn around an armchair,
and Miguel saw the girl drop her slipper
then step back into it, a dainty little trick
designed to show off her pretty dancing
and her prettier ankles to any who might care to look.
Inès leaned against her brother to catch her breath.
She was a beauty, Miguel saw—
she was sallow and there were dark circles
under her eyes, but it didn't matter.
She returned his gaze, unblinking,
and he recognized her. In his former life
he had seen women like her;
but they were wearing *piña* blouses
that did not cover so much as dapple their skin,
their hair was scented with ylang-ylang
and pinned with tortoise-shell combs,
and they had driven in open victorias
by the bay in the hour before sunset and as the wind
drifted off the water they had concealed
their faces behind undulating lace fans,
lowering their lashes over their brilliant black eyes
in a sign language he did not know.

Kundiman

> *"The natives are not fond of dancing if that is what moving at a certain speed is called. They sing and dance the* cundiman *and the* cumintang. *Although some use castanets in certain dance steps and show a certain amount of liveliness, these are undoubtedly modern additions. This is because their dances are some kind of pantomime in which they sing. With their actions, the dancers express the words being enunciated, but which such a lilt (accent) and such languidness that they look as if they are dying or are possessed by great sentiments." Gervasio Gironella, 1847*

They fall in love without a sound.
Inès sits on a silver-and-white brocade sofa
wearing a dark-blue dress. She is perfectly still
as he works—if stillness is an art, Inès is an Old Master.
She has been asthmatic since childhood and has spent
long stretches of time doing nothing but trying to breathe.
Inès had not gone to school on the advice
of the family doctor, who doubted that so many jostling
children and so many books were good for a girl's health.
Her childhood had passed minute by minute,
a wasteland of silence and boredom
while she waited for something to happen.
Now, at nineteen, something is happening at last.
She pretends to read the book she holds on her lap.
She hears herself breathing evenly,
the inhale and exhale smooth today,
and the sound of Miguel's crayons
rubbing against paper. He has come
to her for a reason, she is sure,
he will break her out of this well-upholstered prison.
Miguel goes back to 127 Boulevard Sant-Germain
four more times, claiming to need

a better likeness of Inès's profile,
or to see the way the light falls on her skirt
in the late afternoon, or suggesting
that Inès wears the red dress instead of the blue.
Every time Madame Victorine hovers like a wasp,
and so he and Inès fall in love by looking at each other.
In every drawing she becomes more beautiful,
and Inès watches her transformation at his hands.
She looks at Miguel with glittering eyes.
Can he see her true self, or even deeper,
to a self even she has not imagined?

Juan Luna: *Sorprendidos*

Against the brilliant depths of black water
and black sky, two lovers escape in a gondola,
no light but the white flash of the woman's
lantern in the foreground as she flees
toward the man waiting in the boat;
no colour but the red stain of her lover's cloak.
Looming behind her is the stone façade
of a house, the front door a great gaping mouth
that spat them out or may swallow them still.

The Secret Marriage

It is the beginning of February
and Carnival has washed over Venice,
an ecstatic flood of forty days and forty nights
from Three Kings' to Ash Wednesday.
The city is stormy and flooded;
waves break over the sea wall and flood
Piazza San Marco up to the knees.
Fast-moving sheets of rain are pushed
by a bitter wind sweeping off the lagoon,
and flocks of sodden pigeons wheel and
grumble as they look for a dry place to roost.
But Nature cannot stop this onslaught
of pleasure and deceit. Gondolas bearing
figures dressed in gold capes and silver masks ply
the canals like ghostly visitations
and along every street there is wine and music,
harlequin acrobats and mute women clenching
black masks in their teeth to show
they are in search of a lover.
At night thousands of lamps light every bridge and piazza,
and the city seems to float on a burning black sea.
In their rooms Miguel and Inès make love
with the windows open to the wet air and
the slapping of water in the canals,
and each night is like an island made lush with desire.
One night Inès is asleep and Miguel watches her,
it is hard for him to get used to sleeping
in the same bed as another person,
he is restless and hot and thinks of clean

white sheets and blank canvases as he listens
to her breathing. She lies on her stomach,
naked except for a humid sheet wrapped
around her hips. Her skin is so pale and smooth
that it cries out to be filled with colour,
the hollow of her spine and the wings
of her shoulder blades are like the surfacing
outline of a drawing—and so he paints her.
Gently, more gently than the way he took her virginity
on the first night of their honeymoon—
after all the first time is never done well—
he skims over her skin with oil crayons,
barely touching her; no lover in the world
has ever been this tender.
Vertebrae by vertebrae she is remade,
she is a tidal wave, a wall of turquoise and lapis
and aquamarine that will sweep him away.

Juan Luna: Five O'clock Paris

The woman sits with perfect posture
in an armchair drinking tea;
one hand holds the tea cup paused in midair,
the other holds the saucer. The brilliance
of the golden Oriental screen behind her sets
off how her black skirt pools around the chair.
The pearls sliding down her forearm glimmer
dully like her shoulders, and she looks away,
chin and eyebrows raised, as if posing
is beneath her, something she has acquiesced to
so long as it requires no conversation.

At Dinner

Dinner does not go well.
The dining room is as still as a mausoleum,
and as quiet. Black velvet drapes
shut out the noise from the street
as well as the air, so Miguel sweats under his collar
and arms and prays he will last the night
without saying something unforgivable
to his new mother-in-law. The little maid
serves him with a little glare, and the only sound
is the scraping of silver on china, chewing,
swallowing. It is like being buried alive—
it feels like he will be sealed in here for all eternity.
In fact the rage is Egyptian décor—
from the walls pharaohs' death-masks
gaze implacably, gleaming dull gold
in the gaslight. Two sphinxes adorn
each end of the marble mantel over the fireplace,
and the walls are papered with hieroglyphics.
They raise the hair on his neck,
all these dead, sightless things.
He is seated at one end of the long, formal
dinner table, facing Madame Victorine like a fencer.
Inès and Patrice are on either side of the table,
and conversation requires one to raise one's voice,
as if calling to a passerby. It reminds him of the long,
hot, endless meals of his childhood.
When his father was away, Doña Eugenia
would bring him into the kitchen with the servants
and they would sit on mats on the floor

around a low table and eat with their hands,
rolling the rice into small balls.
The servants ate earlier than the family did,
just past sundown, the lanterns just lit
and mosquitoes dashing against them,
and they were content. But when his father was home,
they sat stiffly in heavy chairs of black wood
and rattan, inlaid with pieces of ivory like shards of light
around the long table, using fork and spoon and knife,
and it was a long and silent meal stretching deep
into the night so that sometimes he fell asleep where he sat.
He was never allowed to leave the table before the adults:
when he tried once, at the age of six, he was given
no food the next day. His father was a man
who saw things in black and white.
Madame Victorine finally speaks after
the soup is being cleared and the meat served:
M'sieur, tell me something about your family.
What kind of people are they?
She is scrutinizing his skin, his features,
trying to calculate the percentage
of his whiteness—his worthiness.
Oh *Maman,* Inès exclaims,
leave poor Miguel alone, and suddenly
he can pretend that this accursed meal
is only for the two of them,
as it was in Venice, when they emerged
at midnight to eat oysters overlooking
the dark canal, the sea-salt tang merging
with the smell of the sea-soaked air

so that they felt as if they were underwater.
Inès drops her fork and knife suddenly,
letting them splatter red wine sauce
on the starched white tablecloth.
You know I hate kidneys, *Maman,*
she says petulantly—they are so tough.
Your know you must eat them to keep your blood
strong, Madame Victorine soothes—Patrice,
help your sister, and the obedient brother rises
and comes around the table to her side and carves
the piece of meat into minuscule pieces
and then feeds them to his sister
with all the tenderness of a mother.
I think I'm expecting, Inès says dreamily.

Berthe Morisot: The Cradle

In the painting a young woman sits,
her chin cradled in her hand, gazing into
a cradle bedecked with lace and pink ribbons.
Her other hand rests on the cradle's edge
and underneath the netting a baby sleeps.
The mother, dressed to go out in a black
and grey striped chiffon dress with white
lace at her cuffs and at the *v* of her neckline,
looks down with an expression of distant curiosity.
White lace curtains are drawn against the sun
behind her. A black velvet band circles her throat.
Can this baby really be mine? she wonders.

Ensueños de amor

> *"Generally they cannot be called beauteous. although some could be called beautiful particularly if they are very young, because when they become mothers. or when they reach a certain age, native women deteriorate fast. Undoubtedly, the tendency of the women to wrinkle is caused by the strong heat of the climate. At home, they usually remove their* tapis *and are left with the loose* saya, *a dress that is charming because when you lift the skirt to one side you can see the white embroidered chemise. When without the shawl and with only the undershirt, you can see a part of their waist as well as the shoulders and the neck which in general are nicely shaped." Gervasio Gironella, 1847*

His most famous painting is of me.
I am asleep in bed, my bare arms
folded over dawn-coloured blankets,
but I am not dreaming of him
or love or anything else.
I have had asthma since childhood.
My mother made sure the windows were closed
against suspicious drafts, I never ran or jumped,
doors were never slammed, voices were never raised
to me so that my heartbeat would never rise,
my breathing never quicken.
Still, the attacks came,
the sudden constriction in my chest,
as if the Devil had reached inside
and was tightening his hand slowly around my lungs.
Each time was a little death.
From the time I was a child I knew
I would die—the doctors told me so—
like this, gasping for air,
my entire body locked in protest.
Each day that I was well

was the day I had not died.
I look so peaceful in the painting,
not at all as though I am resting after a bad attack.
My husband likes to call himself a painter
of women, but I think he is only half right.
He is a painter of women waiting,
waiting for husbands or suitors or customers,
women waiting for their lives to pass
from moment into being.

Juan Luna: *Luling castigado por su Mama*

The *sala* is swathed in yellow afternoon light
lying as close and heavy as the satin drapes.
In the foreground, Inès in black lace,
her back turned, and only you can see
she holds a cane with which to strike
her son. At the left, in the corner,
Angel crouches between the fireplace
and a china cabinet, his arm thrown over
his face; there is no escape.

Envidia

Inès grows sullen, bored—he no longer
takes her to cafes or the theatre—and when
he is home he only draws portraits
of the baby, never her. Mostly he is shut in his studio
painting these canvases that no one will buy—
laundresses and foundry workers and ragged
little street urchins, his new obsession—
neglecting the patronesses whose cards
pile up in a silver dish by the front door.
She has exchanged one prison for another
and she tastes bitterness when she has to ask
for money and sees triumph in her mother's eyes.
She begins to feel as if her outline is flickering,
as if Miguel only sees through her now.
It is only the boy he wants near him—
Angel has stolen his father's love
from her, sometimes she hates him,
this small, squawking thing, little monkey;
how could it have resided nine months
in her belly when she feels only indifference.
One afternoon she finds him in his room
drawing on the rose-trellis wallpaper
with one of his father's charcoals.
Slapping him shocks them both into tears.
When she holds him he feels like a little furnace
in her arms and she feels like ice.
When Angel falls sick— measles,
says the doctor Madame Victorine has paid for—
Miguel prays over him, half convinced

someone has given him the evil eye.
Heathen, Inès thinks, and afterwards
hates him or herself more she hardly knows,
and barely grown herself she watches her son die.
When she whispers to Miguel, we still have each other,
he backhands her and accuses her of never
loving their child. It is all your fault, he weeps.
Tasting blood she wonders if he's right.
The child goes quietly, limp and wet,
holding his father's hand.

Castigo

> *"Transporting cadavers on public roads must also be avoided, especially in the afternoon or early morning when these are very busy or crowded. Upon hearing music, one is sure that it is the burial of an infant. The poor people bring the infant to the head of the procession, placed on a tray like a cake or a sweet. At the corners of the procession body, there are four sharply dressed young men, wearing the clothes of saints with much aplomb." Gervasio Gironella, 1847*

In the lavender dusk of September
Miguel's life splits in two:
Before Angel, after Angel.
The earth gives off the smell of rain
as the little white coffin is lowered.
Birds that should be settling for the night
rise from the trees in a black, beating cloud
and their high-pitched call is the sound of his grief.
The cemetery is crowded with expectant
stone cherubim and sightless angels,
and he knows that his son is not here—
he is not in the earth nor in the trees nor
in the wind—he is only gone
and the immensity of it moves through him
like a summer storm that once chased
him through the stubble of a red-dirt cane field:
as he counted the heartbeats between
lightning strike and thunder call,
he knew the storm would overtake him.

Edgar Degas: Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando

At the Cirque Fernando with Angel
he watched the girl climb nimbly
up the rope ladder and onto a trapeze.
He is fascinated by the swift movements
of her long, wiry limbs, the kind of grace
she achieves swinging high above him.
Like quicksilver she drips off the swing,
hanging nonchalantly by one leg
and his stomach flutters.
She hooks the other leg over the bar
and begins to swing in lazy arcs
that grow wider and wider, faster and faster.
She swings with the insouciance
of a child, though she is upside down
and the sawdust floor is a fatal drop.
With one mighty swing she heaves herself
into the air, and he nearly cries out,
until, somewhere in mid-flight,
she manages to find another silver bar,
and before he can exhale is again flying,
somersaulting to safety.

Séance

Miguel is sure that his son will come
if he calls him—he must be frightened,
so far from home, alone in the darkness—
he clutches the pudgy hand of a banker's wife
on one side and the grieving banker on the other.
Come to us, spirits, the medium intones
and the table trembles; he knows
she is a fraud but he doesn't care.
He remembers the *babaylan* his mother would consult,
a woman so ancient she looked like some gnarled
petrified tree, toothless, and he was fascinated
by the geometric tattoos that covered her forearms
and her shins, nestled in the folds of her skin
and gone blue and faint with age.
Doña Eugenia always brought a brick of sugar,
sometimes rum, and Miguel had to wait outside
with the goats while she sat with the old woman,
who shuddered in a trance and relayed
the messages and warnings of the dead.
One heavy airless day in August,
Doña Eugenia knelt in the red dirt and took
his little-boy face in her hands, gripping him hard,
so hard that he feared his cheekbones would splinter,
and he struggled like a fighting cock in hand
to get his head free. Suddenly his mother released
her grip, her fingers now cradling him loosely
and murmured, you will be a great man, Miguel.
People in far away lands will know your name.
But you must be careful of their deceitful ways, my son.

When he went away to school Doña Eugenia
made him wear an amulet the *babaylan* made for him,
a little leather pouch containing garlic and a small
scrap of paper covered with tiny symbols.
What is it? he asked, and his mother told him,
It is our old language, the one we spoke before
the Spanish came—it will remind your soul where it lives.
Now Miguel almost reaches for the charm around his throat,
but it is not there—upon arriving in Paris
he had thrown it into the river. This is my home
now, he had said and he wanted to believe it,
even when he lived in a tiny room above an alley
stinking of horse manure and echoing
with the shouts of the stable boys.
The woman next to him shrieks
and everyone opens their eyes—
a cloudy apparition floats above them and the medium,
a sharp-faced old woman, calls, Welcome, spirit!
She gasps and begins to scribble
across a tablet of paper, and then her hands go limp.
It is a child, she says.
Miguel feels his throat begin to close.
M'sieur, the medium says, and turns to him—
her eyes are rolled back into her head
so that only the whites are visible,
and Miguel feels panic pulsing in his veins.
The boy says he cannot find the way home.

Juan Luna: ***En el palco***

In the midst of flowers and opera
programs, a rippling, floating rain falling
from the gilt balconies to the stage below,
she sits, still eye of the storm,
her wrist flashing as she wields
her black lace fan.

Nature Morte

The walls of the Salpêtrière drip sadness,
Inès thinks as she enters the gate and crosses
the wet, empty courtyard to the Sainte-Laure building.
How many centuries of the sick and the insane
have been received by this hospital?
It is a Tuesday morning, and she will stop
to see the lecture before she sees her doctor.
She sits at the back of the amphitheatre
by a window and waits while it fills
with medical students, scientists, a few like her
of the simply curious. All the world looks dead, she thinks,
as she stares at the pewter sky that promises more snow.
The trees on the boulevards are black and leafless,
their branches are encased in ice and clack together
and they look like a fairytale until the dead branches
break under the added weight and fall into the mud.
She has come to see the madwomen
because she wonders if she has become one.
Every day she wakes and thinks,
This is not what I wanted.
Nerves, her doctor has pronounced,
nerves are the cause of her lifelong affliction.
He prescribes coca, which makes her heart
race, which makes her reckless and restless,
which Miguel doesn't know about.
When the hall is full Dr. Charcot arrives
and stands on a stage behind a lectern.
He is a small man with a white beard.
A student leads a woman dressed

in a cheap black gown on stage.
She looks at the floor, never the audience,
even when the student introduces her as Augustine.
Dr. Charcot demonstrates her symptoms:
hysterical paralysis makes her right arm rigid
so that it extends stiffly even though the student
grasps her bicep and her forearm and tries to bend
it at the elbow until she makes a soft, harsh cry.
Her right foot is turned in grotesquely
so that her gait is a foreshortened hobble.
Dr. Charcot has her sit on a stool and hypnotizes
her with a dangling pocket watch to demonstrate
the power of suggestion. He commands
her to walk normally, to bend her arm
and uncurl her foot, to laugh, to cry,
to crow like a chicken, to hop, to blow kisses.
There is nothing she will not do.
Afterwards Inès goes to the Ecole des Beaux Artes
and waits with the models who strip
so that the students can examine them.
She grabs hold of a young man
with yellow curls like a cherub and says,
You must paint me so that everyone will see me.

Juan Luna: *Odalisca*

The woman sprawls across a Turkey rug
on her back amidst red and white carnations,
naked and golden except for the length
of red and gold silk that drapes over her hip
and spills out underneath her.
Turned toward the viewer, her face
is shadowed by her raised arm
and her hand holds a dagger
poised as if she is waiting for an order.

Vernissage

White silence fills his head
as he comes upon the painting in the Salon.
The room is full of dull Classical nudes,
fleshy bathers and immodest wood nymphs,
and at first his gaze passes over it because
it is small and high up and dark, but then his gaze
is drawn back to it, the image imprinting
on his brain before his eyes can recognize it—
that woman looking at him, into him, *daring* him,
that blinding, burning flesh reclining
so wantonly, barely covered by a scarlet cloth
is Inès. You would not look at me,
she says. She cannot look at him.
Around him press other artists, other wives,
critics, dealers, social climbers invited
to the *vernissage* before the Salon
officially opens tomorrow. All around him
the bored, hot crowd is electrified,
scenting scandal like a piece of offal in their midst.
At home Miguel knocks her to the floor
with his ivory-handled walking stick,
leaving L-shaped bruises on her arms and back.
How can you dishonour me like this, he
rages, inviting other men to look at you?

L'Hystére

At the sanatorium a man looked
at me. Looked at me the way my husband
used to. Long ago, before Angel.
How cold I have been.
I have been doing penance for so long.
The man is a doctor here,
a specialist in ladies with delicate nerves.
He asked me questions.
How do I feel after I have taken the mineral baths?
Does floating in the water make me feel
relaxed or excited? How often do you make love
with your husband? Do you think of him
when you take the waters?
Sometimes we talk at the end of the day,
when I am supposed to be changing for dinner.
Lying on deck chairs at the far edge of the lawn
the grass smells damp, the earth releases heat.
Heavy, honey-colored sunlight and long shadows
lie across the lawn, which rolls gently downhill
to a wood. Dark like a fairytale, the trees are black
against the sky, which tilts above us,
pale and cloud-foamed, giving me vertigo.
I can feel the earth turn at such moments,
I am dropping into the great space of the universe
and his voice seems far away,
a comforting murmur.
Other times we are in his consulting room,
after lunch when the whole hotel is hushed,
when *Maman* takes her nap. I lie on a divan

and he sits in a chair near me, almost knee to knee,
taking notes. I am burning but still he takes notes.
Until one afternoon when I tell him my fantasy—
a silly stupid schoolgirl fantasy,
and I a married woman.
I dream, I say, of a mysterious man
who will carry me off, away from my mother,
away from my husband—anywhere, just away.
And what does he do to you,
the doctor asks, still writing.
He will kiss me, I say,
closing my eyes. Kiss me until I can't stand.
And then he will carry me to bed
and he will put his hands everywhere.
Like where? The pen pauses.
Here, I say, and as if in a dream
I cover my breasts with my own hands.
He touches me I say, and then his hands,
they go down, down to *there,*
and *there* to that nameless place my hands go,
to cover that exquisite throb.
My head falls back on the cushions
and I can feel my back arching.
I feel so hot, I say, and it is like dying--
My doctor stands up so quickly
that his chair teeters and scrapes across the floor.
He is already unbuttoning his pants,
and his hands are scrabbling through my skirts,
and I die, I die again the little death.

Juan Luna: Seashore

It was one of the last good days—
newly pregnant and wearing red,
Inès shone against the grey Normandy sky
and the dun beaches. Arm in arm,
they explored the pools left
by the receding tide, murky puddles
of black seaweed and tiny, inedible crabs.
As if they understood, fishermen, other tourists,
little boys selling postcards left them alone.
The green scent of seagrass growing wild
on the bluffs mingled with the smell of decay,
and on the wind Miguel listened
for the sound of jingling medals.

El Paseo

Miguel sits alone with one drink too many
in a café with zinc-topped tables,
empty except for two men in top hats in the corner
watching a woman alone seated at the banquette,
and she too is staring, like a madwoman from the asylum.
Next to her sits a straw hat with a blue-eyed peacock feather.
He cannot remember why he married his wife.
He had thought he knew everything about Inès,
she seemed easy to love, like a dog or a baby.
He leaves and starts to walk aimlessly—
he likes to walk alone, under cover of darkness
when such moments come upon him
and he does not know his life.
This night is warm and humid,
the streets dark and empty.
He passes through a neighborhood of small
businesses, stationary stores and pharmacies,
all closed behind metal gates. The streetlights buzz
faintly and stretch fingers of light into the darkness.
Miguel moves from light to shadow
to light again, lulled by the sound of his own footfalls.
He doesn't see the woman until he is almost
upon her. She stands under a streetlight
at an intersection with her back to the street,
looking at him openly, as if she had been waiting
for him and him alone. She is dressed
in a high-collared, green-and-white striped dress,
and a hat with a dyed-red ostrich feather.
A jet-beaded shawl draped loosely over her arms

even though it is far too warm for such a garment.
An ivory brooch is fastened at her throat
engraved with the image of a woman and a swan.
Miguel stops and looks frankly at her.
The lamp makes her skin seem greenish,
her painted mouth black. He extends his arm
and she takes it, and says, My name is Leda,
in a strange, throaty accent that wallows
in the vowels. Her room is windowless,
the walls papered in a blue flowered pattern
that was once pretty, but now only drab.
The bed is pushed against the far wall in the corner
and the only other piece of furniture is a round
wooden table with a lamp on it. Hands in pockets,
Miguel stands with his back against the door.
A mirror across the room reflects him back to himself.
Leda pulls back the white lace counterpane
on the bed and begins to undress,
her back toward him. She is skinny
and he can see the knobs of her vertebrae
and her skin is the colour of milk
from which all the cream has been skimmed,
and she is inked from neck to ankle
with a lattice-work of names—
the names of all her lovers—she is
a map of love, and so dense a life is written
into her skin that her flesh is only a suggestion.
Once Miguel had watched a sailor being tattooed.
He was drunk, barely conscious
as an old Japanese man bent over him, scoring

his back with ivory needles and a small mallet.
Blood and indigo mixed as a dragon
began to snake across his skin.
Miguel attended this painful birth for hours.
When he was finished, the old man
rose up and spat on the ground.
Miguel too will become a name on her skin.
She is not how he imagined sin would look.

Gustave Caillebotte: Young Man at his Window

In the painting a man in a black coat
stands at the sitting room window
and watches a woman hurry to her lover.
The sky is cloudless and the woman,
dressed in black and wearing a veil,
keeps to the shadowed side of the street.
The glass doors open from ceiling to window,
and the only thing between him and a leap
into the still July air four stories above the street
is a wrought iron grille. It is one of the things
that attracted him to this apartment,
they remind him of home, of the way
he could walk down any street in town
and look up and see girls sliding back
the wooden doors of their balconies
to peek through balustrades at the people below.

Temblór

Even now, months after the Salon, humorists
in the newspapers comment on the painting,
cartoons still appear of Inès draped seductively
across an artist's palette pretending
to stab herself with a paint brush.
Madame Victorine, even Patrice have gone
to beg the artist to sell them Inès's painting,
but he won't—buyers are offering him
ungodly sums, he assures them—his career is made.
Miguel wonders if the painter and Inès were lovers
and rage surges within him like a wave that will not recede.
One morning when Inès slips out to beg the artist
for the painting herself Miguel follows her.
He enters the man's apartment building and crosses
the lobby, his footsteps echoing off the black and white
checker board marble floor. What he must do
is without question. He is about to start climbing
the circular staircase when suddenly a boy
with curly yellow hair wearing a dandyish red velvet
smoking jacket is coming down toward him, smiling,
holding out his hand. *M'sieur,* he cries, how good to meet you!
I am afraid you have just missed your lovely wife
who has been pleading with me so prettily, but
I will not sell! He grabs Miguel's hand in both
of his own and pumps it effusively and is gone
as suddenly as a summer rainstorm.
Miguel's other hand is still buried deep
in his coat pocket, curled around the handle of the pistol.
He doesn't tell Inès that he has seen the artist.

That night he decides that they must leave
this city, they must go away from its temptations
and later he has the dream he has had since childhood.
The sky is reddish and dirty and no wind lifts the heat.
From all over the town there comes the sound
of dogs howling. He crouches in an acacia tree;
the crowd below him fans itself listlessly.
When the Corpus Christi procession starts,
the smell of dying flowers already hangs in the air
as a team of men pull the first *carroza* into view,
a silver bier covered heaped in flowers and candles
carrying a statue of the Christ holding up his hand
in benediction, His black velvet robe rotting around the collar.
And then the ground begins to move
like a ship's deck rolling, so that the priest in front
stumbles and the worshippers pulling the *carroza*
stagger and struggle to keep their knees from buckling.
The *carroza* tips, throwing Christ to the ground,
and the bank of flowers slides off in a purple waterfall.
The ground roars and splits and spews
frothing green sea water, and all the while
the great bronze bell of the cathedral is clanging,
and then the bell tower begins to buckle
and there is only silence.

The Funeral

"It is the general opinion that the natives see the end of their lives with an enormous amount of serenity. . . The natives do not have a ferocious character, nor do they have great passions, but as with all human beings with little comprehension skills, their sudden fits of rage are horrible. Consequently, they commit atrocious crimes and justify it later by saying that the other fellow made them crazy." Gervasio Gironella, 1847

The day of her death is grey,
unusually cool for September,
the streets filled with a drifting mist.
Red, Inès decides, it must be the red
velvet dress because Miguel has destroyed
most of her clothes, burning or ripping
them up at the height of his rage.
Even now she finds bits of colored cloth
in the fireplace in their bedroom—
a fragment of lace from a collar, a scrap of pink
satin that used to be an evening gown.
How the red velvet escaped, she doesn't know,
but at least it will be warm even if
the neckline is indecent for this time of day.
The months of fear and misery
have become monotonous, her desire
to hear another voice—for he has dismissed
the maid and banished her mother—
has turned into a physical pain
that travels along the tight line of the parting
of her hair, starting at the soft place where
her spine meets her skull and ending at her temples.
The pain cradles her, it gives her days purpose.
It is how Inès knows that she is alive;

she is afraid that if it stopped
she would know she was dead.
The dress is hard to put on
without the maid to help with the buttons,
and her struggle to get into it
leaves her sweating slightly.
She looks at her self in the mirror
in the corner of their bedroom and sees
an ugly woman, gone old and haggard with
waiting, and smiles grimly to see herself
in her true form: the scarlet woman.
People on the street will look at her dress
and think she's a whore, but she doesn't care.
She will go to one of the new emporiums
where it will be warm and bright and full
of light, and she will buy some eye pencils
with the meager coins Miguel has left her with.
The boulevards are windy and Inès has to hold
down her skirts as she jumps over puddles.
She stops at an intersection to watch a funeral
procession file slowly by. For a moment
she wonders if it is her own funeral, if she isn't
already a ghost and really it's her body lying inside
the black lacquered coffin glittering with rain drops.
The arcades are wet so Bon Marché is crowded;
the air is moist and warm from the exhalations
of so many people and it is hard for her to breathe.
The crowd makes a noise like the shrill, excited cry
of a flock of birds settling in a tree at sundown.
Inès lets the eddies of the crowd push her,

though she notices that some women are staring
and walking around her in a wide circle
as if she carries something infectious.
But at least the girl at the cosmetics counter
is kind. She is young and flaxen-haired
with the ruddy broad face of a girl from the country
and hands that are broad-fingered and sturdy.
When the girl hands Inès her small package
the fleeting contact of another person's skin
makes her want to take hold of her and beg
this girl to save her. On the street
the wind has grown stronger, bringing
upon it the smells of mud and horses,
the noise of streetcar bells and freedom,
and suddenly she thinks—I could go anywhere,
away from my husband, away from my mother,
away from my brother. The thought blazes
up in her and dies just as quickly.
Inès lets the moment pass and turns home.

Mary Cassatt: Woman Bathing

Eyes closed and frowning slightly,
she twists up her hair, her sleeves falling,
baring her arms up to the elbow,
the skin of her forearms naked,
the bones unbearably fragile.
With her dress and corset pushed down
to her waist and her hair gathered
in an untidy knot on top of her head,
she bathes her face and chest from a bowl
of warm water. A *Japonesque* ewer
rests by her feet, and so purposeful is she
that she might kick it over and not even notice.

Masque

He is not home yet. Inès cuts the string
and slices through the wrapping paper enfolding
her new make-up with the heavy iron sewing
scissors Miguel used to shred her clothes.
She spreads out her pencils on her dressing table
and thinks, Now I am the painter.
Even though her pallor is almost lavender,
she paints a layer of white enamel paste
over her cheeks and nose and forehead,
paints down her throat, her décolletage,
turning herself into the whitest of canvases.
She must be careful not to move a muscle in her face,
otherwise the enamel will crack into a web
of fine lines like the glaze on a celadon vase.
When it is dry she rubs carmine into her lips.
At first her lips are slightly pink,
as if she has bitten them, or kissed someone.
She builds up on the colour with a tiny brush,
and now they are stained,
as if she has been eating raspberries.
Not enough. She paints until they are crimson,
and then more so that they are almost black.
She drags kohl around her eyes with a heavy hand
and dots rouge on her cheekbones with careful fingertips,
making blooms of scarlet on her cheeks.
Something must be done about her hair.
She releases it from its pins one by one,
letting each section fall down her back
and lops off hanks of it with the scissors.

She looks into her mirror.
Under this mask no one will touch her.
Miguel comes home to find not
his wife but a revenant with scissors
in a red velvet dress standing in the foyer.
Do you not like it, she asks—
remember, you once painted me thus.
Something breaks inside him, like
the rending of the earth in his dream
We are leaving this sinful place, he says—
I have decided we are going home.
The specter cries, I will not!
You can't make me! *Maman*
was right about you—you are a beast!
A half-breed, a monkey!
She can feel her face start to shatter.
For a moment Miguel can't breathe, he is drowning.
He takes a step and Inès hurls the scissors at him—
they glance off his shoulder without drawing
blood and fall clattering to the floor.
She retreats into the bedroom
and slams the door screaming, I hate you!
You and your monkey hands pretending
to be an artist! Spending my money
and blaming me for your lack of talent!
How we laughed at you, *Maman* and Patrice and I!
Miguel howls and hurls himself
against the door but it doesn't give.
Inès scuttles back but laughs at him.
Her face is flaking off and drifting

to the carpet like an early snowfall.
It feels so good, this—she has never
raised her voice to anyone in her life.
At last she has someone's attention.
The door shudders again and she laughs more.
Open this door! Miguel bellows.
She hears his footsteps recede
and there is silence. She waits.
Miguel? she whispers, and louder, Miguel?
Only silence. She creeps to the door and listens.
Open the door, he says quietly and Inès imagines
him pressed against the other side
of the door like she is—they are almost embracing.
Open the door Inès, Miguel says again.
I have a gun. I'll blow the lock off.
She crouches down against the door.
No, she says, I won't, go away!
Her chest hurts, her breath is coming fast.
I'm going to count to three, he says.
The sound engulfs her.
Three bullets are blasted through the wood
near the door knob, one grazing her temple
so that a thin stream of blood begins
to run into her eye, stinging,
another into her skull, above her ear,
the force of it spinning her
around so that she falls to the floor
face-up, eyes open,
arms outstretched.

Les Indiens Braves

In prison it is the absence of colour
that torments him most—
not the ceaseless noise of other human beings
quarreling or laughing or shrieking—
not the cold that seeps out of the stone walls
or the hours he spends watching a beam
of winter sunlight that falls from a barred window
inching across the floor of his cell,
not the iron cot or indeterminate food—
though the Spanish ambassador does bring him
baskets of blood oranges and curious Parisiennes
bring sticky offerings of *marron glacée*—
it is the dreary palette of his cell
that makes him feel quite mad.
His lawyer has him brought a sketchbook and pencils
and he draws the faces of other prisoners and imagines
painting the walls in sun yellow and salmon pink.
He imagines grinding up pigments even though
one can buy the new oil paints: Indian yellow made
from cow piss, Tyrian purple from mollusk ink,
lapis lazuli from stone that mirrors the overarching
Afghan sky, crimson Mexican cochineal,
pure lead white that won't oxidize to black.
The newspapers call him *l'indien sauvage* now.
Only last year at Buffalo Bill's Wild West Circus
he and Inès had seen the American Indians
stand on the backs of their scrubby, galloping
ponies as casually as any *flaneur* might stand
on a street corner, their shrieks filling the air as

once again General Custer was massacred
while, mad for the savages,
the Parisian crowd screamed,
Les Indiens braves!

Restitution

It is a raw, steel-skied day
when he walks free from Mazas Prison.
All the world is a palette of gray.
Inès's death had been ruled a regrettable accident.
There is nothing left for him in France,
neither wife nor child, only a career of notoriety.
Once his talent had lit his way in the world.
It had been the one thing he trusted,
the truth of him. Now it is something
to be put aside, part of the debt he has to pay,
like the 12 francs he paid in restitution
to Inès's family—that piece of his life in forfeit for hers.
Before he leaves Paris he goes to see the Tour Eiffel,
marching up through its iron innards into the sky.
The city lies before him, a palette of slush
and mud and he clutches his wool coat around him
against the breath-snatching chill of the breeze
that sends the tower to swaying ever so slightly—
he has never gotten used to the cold.
At the Exhibition Universelle the year before,
he and Inès had passed underneath the Tower,
borne by the crowd to the Village Nègre.
See a savage headhunter! a scabby boy
in a cap had bawled as he collected fees,
and posed dramatically in front of a sheet
of lurid red canvas. A real live cannibal
from the Philippine islands! the boy shouted,
and ripped the curtain down as the crowd
gasped at the one occupant revealed,

a short brown-skinned barefoot man
dressed in a loincloth with black tattoos
etched on his chest and arms.
The man's gaze had found his
and seemed to know him.

Epilogue: *Pacto de sangre*

At dusk thousands of shrieking fruit bats
stream across the crimson sky like an evil omen.
Doña Eugenia pays no attention to them:
this is a sight she has seen countless times.
She likes to come down to the beach
and watch the fishing boats come in,
watch as the waiting women wade out
to the *bangkas* with their striped skirts tucked up
to their knees and carry baskets of fish
back to shore in baskets on their heads.
The sky deepens into night,
and she watches the gradations of blue
overtake the glory of crimson and purple and
gold that has come before.
As sky and sea meet and fall away
into darkness she wonders about the ships
sailing beyond the horizon, far away
from the lights of shore. In her girlhood
these waters had been thick with Moro
pirates, and old-timers told of raids
when pirates attacked villages and carried off
men and women and children into slavery.
Who knows what ships now sail
under the protection of night?
There are rumors of revolution in the north,
and Miguel has gone—Doña Eugenia knows
she will never see her son again.
In the only painting she has of him,
a self-portrait given to her before he left,

Miguel is posed in a dark blue soldier's uniform
leaning on a saber, its tip buried in the floor.
He is no longer the slim young boy he was—
a slight paunch swells over his belt,
his thick mustache curls flamboyantly.
He came home to take his father's place for a time
but he was full of black and restless pain and
except for her parting gift he never painted again.
She has composed a letter to the mother
she has never met, her sister in sorrow.
I humbly ask your forgiveness, she wrote.
My son spilled your daughter's blood.
We have a word—*sandugo*.
When Rajah Sikatuna and the conquistador
Legazpi opened their veins some 300 years ago
and mixed their blood with wine and drank it
from a cup in the *pacto de sangre* to pledge
their brotherhood, they became *sandugo,* one blood
and then many betrayals followed.
My son betrayed his pledge to your daughter
and together we have drunk from a cup of bitterness.
We too have made our blood compact.

Afterword

Although this is a work of fiction, it was inspired by the life of a painter, Juan Luna, one of the Philippines' most celebrated artists. Born in 1857 in Illocos Norte, a northern Philippine province, Juan Luna was the third child of a revenue inspector. He came of age at a point in Philippine history where Filipinos first began to think of themselves as a nation, not just Spanish subjects. He confounded the institutionalized racism of the Spanish in the Philippines, which favored *peninsulares* (those born in Spain) and *insulares* (Spaniards born in the Philippines) over *indios* (natives) to achieve artistic recognition both in his home country and Spain as one of the most talented painters of his generation.

After studying for a diploma as a pilot in the navy, Luna enrolled in art school in Manila and then left for Madrid in 1877. In 1881, his painting *Muerte de Cleopatra* won a silver medal in the Madrid Art Exposition. In 1884, Luna submitted *Spolarium,* a dark, imposing painting of dead gladiators being dragged off to rest on a pile of corpses in a room underneath a Roman arena, to the National Exposition of Fine Arts and won the gold medal. *Spolarium* was interpreted as an allegory of the suffering of the Philippines under Spanish rule. Later that year he moved to Paris and established a studio.

By 1885, Luna had fallen in love with Maria del Paz Pardo de Tavera, an asthmatic 20-year-old girl from a prominent and wealthy family of Philippine-born Spaniards living in Paris. Juliana Pardo de Tavera y Gorricho, Paz's mother, was proud of the family's Spanish blood and looked down on Luna as a social inferior. They married in 1885, but by 1892 the marriage was in trouble, beset by money troubles because of Luna's uneven income. Despite Paz's illness the Lunas had two children, a

son (Andrés, nicknamed Luling) and then a daughter, but when the daughter died, Paz went away to a spa where she is suspected of having had an affair. Luna became increasingly violent after that, buying a gun with the intent of shooting Paz's lover, attacking her with a pair of scissors, and forcing her to sign a written confession of adultery at gunpoint. Luna abruptly decided to move his wife and son to Spain where they would be out of reach of his meddling in-laws, but on the morning of the trip, Paz, her mother, and her son locked themselves in a second-floor bathroom in their home. When her two brothers and a policeman attempted to get into the house, Luna shot his wife and mother-in-law and claimed that he had accidentally shot them when he tried to blow the lock off the door. His murder trial was a public sensation but he was acquitted on February 7, 1893 and ordered to pay court costs and restitution of 1 franc to Paz's brothers.

After his trial, Luna returned to the Philippines after a 17-year absence. Although he continued to paint his career never regained its luster. By 1898, the Philippines was at war for its independence from Spain, and then from America in 1899 the Philippine-American War. Luna's brother, Antonio, served as a general in the revolutionary forces and Juan was appointed a diplomatic agent of the nascent Philippine Republic. When Juan Luna died on December 7th, 1899, he was mourned as a national patriot.

All of the paintings by Juan Luna that are described in this work are real, as are the paintings by French and American Impressionist painters Caillebotte, Pissarro, Morisot, Degas, and Cassatt. Luna was working in Paris at a time when it was truly the capital of the art world, and the Impressionists were changing the way critics and viewers thought art should be made and what subjects or which persons it should represent.

Rather than commemorate grand personages or great historical events, Impressionists painted the most mundane details of everyday life like a woman looking at a baby in a cradle and recorded all the attractions the Paris had to offer, such as circuses, theatres, and cafes. Luna is considered a realist painter, yet in later years his paintings moved from monumental subjects like *Spolarium* and *Pacto de sangre* to informal portraits of his family and scenes of his own home, notably *Luling castigado por su Mama.* I decided to write about Juan Luna's paintings as well as those of contemporary artists in order to explore the idea of *ut pictura poesis* (Latin for "as is painting, so is poetry"): the convention that a painting is like a poem without words or a poem is a kind of word painting. By writing poems about paintings, and by including works by painters other than Juan Luna, I tried to translate images into words in order to create a sense of the milieu of nineteenth-century Paris, but also to create a kind historical commentary on European life that mirrored Gervasio Gironella's notes and observations on the Philippines.

Notes on the Poems

Page 9:

Babaylan - Filipino shaman or healer, most often a woman in pre-Hispanic times.

Page 10:

Salakot – a cone-shaped hat woven out of straw used in the Philippines.

Page 16:

Peninsulares - a term used in Spanish colonies, including the Philippines, to differentiate Spaniards born in Spain, who had higher status, from Spaniards born in the colonies, who were called *criollos,* or, in the Philippines, either *insulares* or Filipinos, meaning from the Philippines. During the Revolution the term Filipino came to reflect a sense of national identity and referred to *indios,* the indigenous Malay people of the islands.

Page 18:

Chula – a low-class woman (Spanish).

Page 19:

Limpieza de sangre – literally "cleanliness of blood" in Spanish. The term originally referred to the absence of Jewish or Moorish blood, but in South American and the Philippines the Spanish became obsessed with classifying their colonial subjects based on the mixture of their blood, and a complicated system evolved upon which a person's legal status was based. The word *mestizo,* meaning mixed, denoted a person of Spanish and indigenous descent in South America, while in the Philippines it referred to a person who was of mixed Filipino and Chinese descent. (Chinese traders and settlers in the Philippines converted to Christianity, married Filipino women, and took on Spanish names to avoid persecution by Spanish authorities.)

Page 21:

Odalisque (French) or *Odalisca* (Spanish) – an odalisque was a female slave or concubine in an Ottoman Turkish harem. The word originates from the Turkish *odalık*, meaning "chambermaid." In Europe during the 19th century, odalisques became common fantasy figures in Romantic art as a symbol of Muslim sensuality and were featured in many erotic paintings by artists such as Eugene Delacroix and Jean August Dominique Ingres.

Page 24:

Les leches-vitrine – French term for someone who is window-shopping; literally "window-licker."

Page 30:

Kundiman - traditional Filipino love song, often melancholy. In colonial times the *kundiman* came to serve as a vehicle for hidden patriotic sentiments in which love for a woman symbolized love of country and a desire for freedom.

Page 51:

Dr. Jean Martin Charcot, a nineteenth-century French physician, is regarded as the founder of neurology. He isolated hysteria as a mental disorder, treating it with hypnosis and electricity, and his work explored how it manifested itself though physical symptoms in his patients. He became famous for weekly "hysteria shows" while he was the director of the Salpêtrière Hospital—a holding place for poor, aged, epileptic, and insane women— which were open to the public and featured demonstrations by the women patients confined there under his care. His pupils included Sigmund Freud, who attended his lectures in 1885 and 1886.

Page 53:

Vernissage – literally "varnishing" in French; a *vernissage* is a preview or opening at the start of an art exhibition. At the annual Salon, a six- to eight-week event in Paris that attracted thousands of people. the *vernissage* was traditionally held on May 1st, the day before the official opening. While artists applied the final coat of varnish to their paintings, patrons, critics, art dealers, journalists, and high society were allowed to preview the show.

Page 69

Les Indiens Braves references Los Indios Bravos, the Filipino association founded by Dr. José Rizal, a doctor, novelist, and the leading proponent of reform in the Spanish-ruled Philippines, after he saw the Wild West Show with Juan Luna at the Paris Exposition of 1889. *Indios* was the term the Spanish used to refer to the indigenous Malay people of the Philippines, and Rizal thought to turn the name into a source of pride. (Rizal was executed by Spanish authorities in Manila in 1896.) *Los Indios Bravos* is also the name of a famous photo of Rizal, Juan Luna, and Valentin Ventura posing with swords as they practice fencing. At corner of the photo (top left), the figure of Luna's wife, Paz Pardo de Tavera, is crouched, barely visible, with her chin resting on her hand.

Page 72:

The Exposition Universelle of 1889 was a World's Fair held in Paris from May 6 to October 31, 1889. It was held during the year of the 100th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. The main symbol of the Fair was the Eiffel Tower, which was completed in 1889 and served as the entrance arch to the Fair. A "Negro Village" (Village Nègre)

displaying some 400 indigenous people was one of the main attractions. Another attraction was Buffalo Bill's "Wild West Show," which recruited American sharpshooter Annie Oakley and performed for packed audiences throughout the Exposition.

Page 74-75:

The *pacto de sangre* or *sandugo* was a blood compact performed between the Spanish explorer Miguel López de Legazpi and Datu Sikatuna of the island of Bohol on March 16, 1565 to establish friendly relations between Spaniards and Filipinos. *Sandugo* is a Cebuano (Cebu is an island in the central Philippines) term meaning "one blood" (*san* means one, and *dugo* means blood) and was a traditional way to formalize friendships and alliances. Legazpi and Sikatuna were believed to have cut their arms with a dagger and sprinkled their blood into a cup of wine from which they both drank in honour of their friendship and brotherhood. The blood compact took place 44 years after Magellan, who took part in several of these ceremonies, was killed attacking a village on Mactan Island, just off the coast of Cebu and 50 miles north of Bohol. Legazpi subsequently conquered the island of Cebu, founded the capital city of Manila, and became the first governor of the Philippines. Juan Luna depicted the blood compact in his painting entitled *El Pacto de Sangre* in 1883; the painting won the first prize in Paris in 1885 and now hangs in Malacañang Palace.

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