

Nietzschean Aesthetic Themes in the Selected Poetry of Ophelia Dimalanta and Tita Lacambra-Ayala

Ivan Tan

Abstract: Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetic thought when compared to the more traditional views of Kant appears to be working on a wholly different plane. If in Kant, for example, one assumes a disinterested standpoint, Nietzsche assumes a point of view that is more direct: that life and the individual become the very objects of art through active participation. This view severs Nietzsche from the older theorists and presents a new way of understanding art, not for its own sake, but in relation to man. The task undertaken in this paper is to outline a few key Nietzschean aesthetic themes that are portrayed in some poems written by Philippine poets Ophelia Dimalanta and Tita Lacambra-Ayala. These are intoxication, elevation, tragic fate, affirmation and creation. The discussion of the poems written by Dimalanta and Lacambra-Ayala must then circle around these themes and their relation to Nietzsche's conception of art. These themes, furthermore, will be divided into two groups: intoxication and elevation will be discussed under Nietzsche's general description of the elements of art in relation to some poems by Dimalanta; while tragic fate, affirmation and creation will be discussed under Nietzsche's figure of the tragic artist in relation to some poems of Lacambra-Ayala. The poems selected will be presented in full after the conclusion.

Keywords: Dimalanta, Lacambra-Ayala, Nietzsche

Preliminaries: Nietzsche's change in perspective

It is to be noted at the onset that Nietzsche's aesthetics underwent some changes from the 1870's to the late 1880's. The aesthetic view of Nietzsche in his earlier writings was characterized by his text *The Birth of Tragedy* published during the year 1872. While a marked change could be observed in a passage in book two of *The Gay Science* (1882) producing a different trajectory in relation to art in his works. This change may also be seen as formative in the different ideal type of person Nietzsche wanted to actualize which also changed from his earlier writings to his later

writings. These differences and shifts in perspective characterized Nietzsche's works in so far as he did not formulate an explicit system of philosophy. Though no definite system is seen, (as for example, the works of Kant where there are classifications and sub-headings, etc.) this does not mean that Nietzsche's thought is disjointed in the sense of overturning itself in complete contradiction for there are always connecting threads in the development of his thought which may link his earlier views to his later ones that still renders them intelligible.

A few things on the changing perspective of Nietzsche should be pointed out to prevent confusion in the analysis of poems later on. In Nietzsche's aesthetic thought, Apollo and Dionysus are used as symbols to portray the form in which art appears to man; these symbols are still held by Nietzsche throughout his writings, most especially the Dionysian with a few alterations in use¹. However, Nietzsche's view shifts from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *The Gay Science* in so far as the significance of art is concerned. Walter Kaufmann observes that in Nietzsche's earlier view, art, in so far as it allows man an image or projection of himself as a work of art, finds his dignity in this for the reason that "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified"². While one observes in *The Gay Science* that Nietzsche writes "As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us."³ The marked difference between "justified" and "bearable" must be noted in so far as the former suggests an eternal reason and seal while the latter brings out a more open-ended view which does not take away any difficulty and suffering that must be lived. Other than this, it must be said briefly that an implication of this change in view reflects also the different figure which Nietzsche presents in his later writings: the Overman replaces the tragic artist⁴, the latter being the ideal of the earlier works of Nietzsche. The interpretation held in this paper leans more towards Nietzsche's departure from the world being justified by art and is more inclined to his later views on art as that which makes life bearable. Still, some views, which can be assimilated from *The Birth of Tragedy*, are kept.

Elements of Art

Intoxication

Nietzsche echoes in his *Nachlass* what he wrote in *The Birth of Tragedy* that intoxication is characteristic of the Dionysian as opposed to the Apollonian dream-state. Intoxication is understood in Dimalanta's poem *We Are Electric*⁵ with the portrayal of the electric quality of every star and stone; the overflowing electricity everywhere and within the person. Dimalanta writes:

...this force that moves the
sun and ticking hearts,
crisscrossing through
every energized roadway
...towards this flowing
current, ripe for recharging,

seeking consonances with
these kinetic elements,
running out of the spirit
into an overabounding field
of force that sends us
mighty private signals
where there mutably we leave
surcharged, peaking...⁶

The image of force and abundance which Dimalanta portrays in the poem reflects Nietzsche's conception of the intoxication in the Dionysian state as it breaks the bliss of the Apollonian principle of individuation; in the realm of Dionysian intoxication every conventional barrier is broken down, the veil of Maya has been torn apart revealing a mysterious primordial unity in force⁷. Without this aspect of nature even the Apollonian vanishes, for form and measure cannot be imposed without a conflicting resistance in tension with it. This state of intoxication of the Dionysian realm is also immediate in experience. It does not need

any special intuition by reason or logic: one is already immersed within it and is enclosed by it. To this theme, Dimalanta writes in the poem *Usually, Disaster Begins Rather Quietly*:

and with not much bang and fanfare,
hissing insidiously from all corners
of one's sensing, starting the day's
havoc: a first splurge of water,
this whirlpooling into a deepsea swell.
it is not then this nothing, nor the none,
nor no one, but this fullness, this
crazy shouting heave, orgying outwise,
with the world and every one and all
around O so wanting, quietly quietly
he is there, need and all...⁸

The Dionysian conflict “orgying outwise” cannot be avoided—it is life itself. Furthermore, the intoxication of this state is full and bursting; even if one may find oneself in a state of reserve and restraint, the conflicting and organic aspect of life is in constant tension with this and seeks to dissolve it. The irrational and instinctive have always been there in all its noise and “shouting”, in the height of passion but also in its silence when one is least conscious of it. Intoxication might also be understood in the form of a derangement of sensuous impressions overwhelming the subject externally then seeking to extend itself internally. Dimalanta illustrates this in her poem *One Final Burning*:

it is the wind's demolishing hand
come to soon fell this imperious
frame into its final death-swoon,
its seared selves dispersed
piece by piece; faint flappings
in the air, hurt birdwings
bleeding in post-mortem spasms,

... firewalls isolate it,
so it sizzles on in private,
contained in all its seethings,

its intimate designs
within itself intensified
into poetry's richly ringing
intertexted lines limned
in cycles of firelit pain
and joy, sovereign and sole
within its fragilely flammable
formidable walls, my personal
incandescent world that had
then burnt on and on, not out
nor down, but forever quietly on.
and because forever,
some ghosts of it are fielded
all over the site of its ruins.

... this flesh by flesh gobbling
up is initially one painless
smouldering, flames gutting
everything standing in their sweep
within the ring
of their annealing.
and then, the smell!
like something acrid, acid,
carbonaceous, quite nothing else.
and slowly, this strange oozing

smell swells, redounds into
spitting, splitting noises,
pain cracking up
in many pieces
in different places
all at once!

... its life cinders on
until this ultimate imploding,
one deafening blast to the climax rite
as loved ones writhe, ashen
in their own consumed shells,
or perhaps, relieved at last
over this burning's end.⁹

In the series of stanzas quoted above, one becomes aware of certain sensations of pain that a person experiences which are not limited

to the plane of sensory experience, but beyond it in a person's inner economy. The Dionysian foundation of art for Nietzsche buries itself deep in the person, extends and blankets the person's internal pathways of the mental. The person's world has been burned on and on for eternity. This ends in an implosion—the climax of the Dionysian that extends within the person may lead to death leaving behind only “consumed shells”. One observes in this poem that the graphic portrayal of conflicting forces overpowers any sort of form. The “burning” which occurs is appropriate to the intoxication of the Dionysian as it consumes a person “in cycles of firelit pain and joy”¹⁰.

Dream

In Nietzsche's aesthetic theory, measure and reason is understood through the figure of Apollo, which is in constant conflict with the figure of Dionysus. The Apollonian may be understood in the context of the poems cited to be the very intelligibility of words used to portray the conflicting characteristic of experience and nature. For Nietzsche, poetry itself, in its use of rhythm and meters, of conjuring a vision through association of words is already a manifestation of the Apollonian characteristic of order¹¹. Hence the Apollonian aspect is understood in the way the poem presents itself to the reader.

Elevation

But art does not stop in the recognition of the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects nature. For Nietzsche, the significance of art lies in its ability to make life bearable. In section 107, book two of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche explains that art serves as a stimulus for life in the midst of the terrifying realization that error is a condition for man's subsistence. In this vein, Nietzsche writes that avoiding the consequences

of such absurd realizations makes “art as the good will to appearance”¹². Art becomes a bridge to man seeing himself from a distance; from a distance which retains his “freedom above things” that he is likely to lose without these instances which art offers—instances wherein man is able to see through what he does in matters he takes more seriously, such as morality for example, enabling himself to rise above them. This means that the Apollonian and Dionysian as recognized by their own characteristics do not mean much if as a whole art does not stimulate man. The *Nachlass* offers some insights as to how art is a stimulus to life. The intoxication mentioned above is a feeling of increased power and vitality¹³. For Nietzsche, the increased feeling of power characterized by intoxication also entails a greater mastery of the will over drives and impulses. Furthermore, this power does not create “pessimistic art”. But rather, the effect of works of art arouses the very condition for its creation—intoxication itself¹⁴. This means that intoxication constantly elevates man to greater and greater extents to the point wherein one is able to love the things of the world and one's senses¹⁵. This is of course not to be confused with a blind striving for pleasure nor a will to disorganization. Nietzsche, in so far as art is concerned, emphasizes the mastery, which comes with an increased vitality: a logical and geometrical simplification is a sign of an increase in strength, a symptom of what Nietzsche calls “the grand style”. Ophelia Dimalanta's poem *Lines to a Life Poet* illustrates this clearly:

Here if you must burn at all
For the country's lapse of green,
You must search in the rustic confines
Of your mind, where each lease of summer
Is not only sudden whorls of colors
But rain, crystalline and pure,
A spate of promise
Tensing your frame.

And here, if birds materialize at all,
They do so offhand, in frozen cliques
...Wrapping about them the city's
Chilling anonymity...
...Portents
Of lyric dearth and dying.

You pause to wonder, minting yea-lines
Meanwhile catching fire every minute,
While the rest of the world is shrouded gray...¹⁶

Dimalanta's first stanza in particular presents the Nietzschean position in art. That if one must burn and become intoxicated, one is not consumed entirely. Though there is the aspect of burning, there in the very state of elevation too must emerge the promise sought through the derangement of the Dionysian—that one cannot passively let the irrational and chaotic consume oneself and remain “sudden whorls of colors”. The last stanza focuses on the affirming aspect of elevation which accepts one's burning as essential in contrast to a pale world. If the first part of this paper dealt with intoxication and elevation as elements formative for the foundation and significance of art for Nietzsche, the latter part will deal with man's attitude towards nature and his possible participation within it in relation to art. The latter part will also elucidate some points mentioned above.

The Tragic Artist

Tragic Fate

In the light of what has been said earlier on the inescapable Dionysian characteristic of the world and the realization of error as a condition for man's life, Nietzsche makes his point in the *Nachlass* against Aristotle who explains that the tragic suggests a “downward movement”: that tragic art has the potential to harm health,

leading to a disorganization and disintegration of life. This sort of nihilism is easily observed by Nietzsche who suggests on the contrary, that tragedy can be tested, and in testing it will reveal its tonic characteristic as a stimuli rather than a depressant¹⁷. Art, then, is a stimulant, intoxication with, and a will to life¹⁸. Tita Lacambra-Ayala presents the tragic core of life in the poem *Creations, Precisely*:

Even when the world is turning round
like the map and the science of it, even when
the tip is but a few degrees and east
to west it turns upon an orbit: there is
the space around its presence, the unsure
genesis of its past, and feared collisions
are in the future sure events. The laughter
and living on the gay surfaces come
from the still and sorrowful core
lost from all movement and the touch of ether
...there in the core, the pure sorrow from
which
even the laughter grew, from which all grow...¹⁹

The world which surrounds the persona has a core of pure sorrow as a precondition from which all grew. This portrays the necessity of the tragic where man may be located. Amidst reason and the order and classification imposed on the world there is a “space around its presence” and the conflicting “collisions” of the future. Hence life is always open-ended for there are no eternally justified reasons on which man may sleep on comfortably. Man's fate is tragic in so far as he is faced with this predicament which calls for affirmation if he is to triumph and not despair—he is called to be attentive. This sorrowful core, furthermore, is likewise characterized by the way the world appears to be “questionable and terrifying” in man's relation to it²⁰. It is to be noted in Lacambra-Ayala's poem that a contrast is placed between rationality and science on the one hand, and the irrational core lost in all motion.

This is man's condition amidst the many things: he is situated directly within the immediate flux of becoming, suffering within it to the point that he has no time to be able to formulate an absolute standpoint and justification in relation to it. Provisional measures are called for—nature encloses man indifferently when religion, truth, science and other means of solace are unable to speak. Nietzsche claims in a fragment relating to *The Birth of Tragedy* that can be found in his *Nachlass* that the only world is this world that is “false, cruel, contradictory, seductive, without meaning”²¹.

Affirmation and Creation

The world as it appears to man as such is in need of affirmation if man is not to perish in despair. Nietzsche explains that the tragic artist affirms the questionability and terror of existence through his far-sightedness in the overall economy of things. According to Nietzsche, the tragic artist makes a heroic “Yes” as they are “hard enough to experience suffering as a pleasure”²². This affirmation is a testament of the artist's vitality and strength as a consequence of a “habitual intoxication” which makes them “fuller, simpler and stronger” thus yielding a greater fruitfulness due to their potency.²³ In the same breath, creation must be consequent to affirmation. The plunging of an artist forward in creativity becomes the means to bear existence. The poem *Gilding* by Lacambra-Ayala describes this:

...Each day a day of birth
unravelling from old dreams
lusting for hunger, for thirst
and other wild lions.

This is the time for skinning
the dirty neck of doubt.
For burning unused ropes
rotting from the tree.²⁴

The persona speaks of being reborn and lusting for hunger, thirst and wild lions. This shows the fullness of the artist bursting out in expression. Moreover, the persona speaks of “burning unused ropes rotting from the tree” suggesting a will to externalize whatever lies dormant inside the person. It is a will to express and create with all inner resource that one has grown and nurtured in oneself so as not to waste their vitality (this may be taken as a metaphor for death, or in a more literal sense, decay). The tragic artist, then, in affirming nature and existence, participates in its creation. This creation, however, is not blind and careless, it does not seek to express in a way that has no form. Nietzsche emphasizes what he calls “the grand style”²⁵ being mastery over the chaotic influx of impressions and impulses within the self to render them form. Moreover, it is a remodeling of life in the manner of simplifying what is complex by one's self mastery. Creation is not making something out of nothing, but a reshaping of what is—furthermore, a revaluation that extends not only to art, but to all other aspects of life. This can be seen in Lacambra-Ayala's poem *The Impeccable Sin is to Despise Feeling* as she writes:

such as the narrow bitterness so narrow
that it cannot be pathed to trace the expanded
causes...
And then let it be said...
that the impeccable
salvation is love's old willingness to win
a path through the narrow tapered trunk
from the wind's gay song and follow it through
until the tiny, plenteous roots are found
and there unknotted, understood, loosened,
and mingled with not sadly in the deep soil
but gladly as wind and rain and sun
and rock and silt and loam in the deep soil.²⁶

The first few lines suggest that the impeccable sin in despising feeling can be understood in the

example of a narrowness that cannot be mapped out and is closed off. The succeeding lines portray the contrary: that the salvation is a “willingness to win a path” which can be connected to Nietzsche’s artistic creativity. The reshaping and participation in nature which Nietzsche calls for is clearly seen in this poem as the former is portrayed in the formation of a way through, while the latter is the joyful participation with the elements of nature representing the Dionysian. So it has been said that the tragic artist creates on the ground which sprang from his life affirmation. While this creation and creativity blesses existence as it becomes bearable—for the tragic artist elevates life and others in so far as he himself and what is externalized by him streams from a potent intoxication. One last poem of Lacambra-Ayala illustrates in sum the artist’s fullness in creation and affirmation; the tragic artist’s capacity and strength is clearly understood, she writes in *The Trick is to Find*:

The Trick is to find
the path
to unbearable beauty
and unbearable joy
or unbearable
hurt

and bear all of it
like an egyptian
mummy wrapped
in all these
unbearable things

Then show up at a
party
smoking a cigarette
held by a friend
with a fondness for
olives, peanuts and
whisky

Then life will be
a scream
And almost bearable²⁷

The trick is that one must search for a tonic, an initial stepping stone from which one emerges in fullness. For Nietzsche the obvious answer is art. The sum of the efforts of the tragic artist is the creation and remodeling of a life though not in accordance to how things are in themselves enables existence to exhibit its lightness in joy. The lightness characterized that is consequent to the increase in power and vitality of the artist is seen in the third stanza where the persona casually portrays a scene of a party as though the weight and terrors of existence are out of sight. But these are never out of sight. Nietzsche writes in the concluding portions of *Twilight of the Idols*:

The psychology of the orgiastic as an overflowing feeling of life and strength, where even pain still has the effect of a stimulus, gave me the key to the concept of tragic feeling...Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the tragic poet. Not in order to be liberated from terror and pity, not in order to purge oneself of a dangerous affect by its vehement discharge—Aristotle understood it that way—but in order to be oneself the eternal joy of becoming...²⁸

The significance of art and the tragic artist is not to negate the suffering, terror and contradictions of existence, but rather to be able to enhance a person to be able to affirm existence through them in the way it presents itself and creatively participate in the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of life. This is a form of fearless overcoming and triumph that is

necessary if one is not to perish from an existential passivity. Furthermore, this is a path of revaluation which is always connected with Nietzsche's struggle against nihilism and what he observed to be the devaluation of the highest values thus far, such as God, slave morality, and truth.

Conclusion

It is understood through the course of the paper that Nietzsche's aesthetic theory is not an abstract and disinterested theory but rather one that is engaged and immersed in life itself. It is clear that art for Nietzsche cannot be limited to objects of molding that is viewed and appreciated for their own sake. For Nietzsche art must be understood as a self-creating in the sense of giving form to oneself in the midst of dominating chaos. These qualities, chaos and irrationality, are understood through the Dionysian impulse that is in constant conflict with the Apollonian impulse. Man as part of nature must then confront these aspects as he is immersed and enveloped in it: this is the challenge to man that invites him to become an artist through affirmation and creativity thus transfiguring his disposition towards life and existence. The tragic artist must be one that joyfully lives with all the terrifying aspects of becoming in a state of intoxication and elevation of life. These aspects and themes which revolve in Nietzsche's aesthetics are to a certain extent clearly portrayed in certain poems of Ophelia Dimalanta and Tita Lacambra-Ayala.

¹ The symbol of Apollo though, later on, is not used as much as Dionysus as primacy is given to Dionysus.

Kaufmann notes that if the earlier distinction is Apollo and Dionysus, the later would probably be the Christian and Dionysus.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 52.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 163.

⁴ The figure of the tragic artist though was not erased or marked out by Nietzsche.

⁵ Ophelia A. Dimalanta, *Flowing On* (Manila: Santo Tomas University Press, 1988), 23-24..

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 36-37.

⁸ O. Alcantara Dimalanta, *Montage* (Manila: UST Publications, 1974), 57.

⁹ Ophelia Alcantara Dimalanta, *Lady Polyester: Poems Past & Present* (Manila: Santo Tomas University Press, 1993), 222-225.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 420.

¹² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 163.

¹³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 420.

¹⁴ Ibid. 434.

¹⁵ Ibid. 433.

¹⁶ Dimalanta, *Montage*, 70.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 449.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Tita Lacambra-Ayala, *Tala Mundi: The Collected Poems of Tita Agcaoili Lacambra-Ayala*, edited by Ricardo de Ungria (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2011), 33.

²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 450.

²¹ Ibid. 451.

²² Ibid. 450.

²³ Ibid. 421.

²⁴ Lacambra-Ayala, *Tala Mundi*, 43.

²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 444.

²⁶ Lacambra-Ayala, *Tala Mundi*, 29.

²⁷ Ibid. 281.

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 562.

Selected Poems of Ophelia A. Dimalanta

We Are Electric

(Lake Tahoe, October '87)

we are electric...
and so is every star,
and every stone; this is it
within and everywhere,
this force that moves the
sun and ticking hearts,
crisscrossing through
every energized roadway
for migrant birds and
monarch butterflies in
heat and chartless drifters
like us...god, it is this
that dries up all open wounds,
bound as soon we are
towards this flowing
current, ripe for recharging,
seeking consonances with
these kinetic elements,
running out of the spirit
into an overabounding field
of force that sends us
mighty private signals
where there mutably we leave
surcharged, peaking, for the
time being recouped, revved
and patched up (coming full circle
from this pointless drive around
the lake's sensorrounding cast
till back of the beyond),
every single quaver and crack.

Usually, Disaster Begins Rather Quietly

and with not much bang and fanfare.
hissing insidiously from all corners
of one's sensing, starting the day's
havoc: a first splurge of water,
this whirlpooling into a deepsea swell.

it is not then this nothing, nor the none,
nor no one, but this fullness, this
crazy shouting heave, orgying outwise,
with the world and every one and all
around O so wanting. quietly quietly
he is there, need and all.
he will not stray this way.
and the stars say, so...
every oncoming day they say
will tune different. a voice.
a stranger, a call, or even a familiar.
love in a different dress.
disasters take all colors.
worst is this which begins subtly,
covering, hovering; an offhand pin-bruise
hacked into a mortal sore,
one does not know when-why.
till one is near loss, and just why why
one does not even halfway know.

Lines to a Life Poet

Here if you must burn at all
For the country's lapse of green,
You must search in the rustic confines
Of your mind, where each lease of summer
Is not only sudden whorls of colors
But rain, crystalline and pure,
A spate of promise
Tensing your frame.

And here, if birds materialize at all,
They do so offhand, in frozen cliques,
Any time of day, sphinxlike upon some eaves,
Wrapping about them the city's
Chilling anonymity, never ever ready
With their usual pastorals, their tiny voices
Uncarrying, stilled inside their throats,
Brown specks of silence. Portents
Of lyric dearth and dying.
Dots upon murk and heaving smoke
And always, here mornings are astute.

And instantaneous suns whir an early
Rasping tune, as impresses of sleep persist,
And briskly, evening stumps in even before noon,
Businesslike, as if it had some nasty task
To see efficiently through and right on.
The air around you has a cunning way
Of sucking in every living din
While louder and above all
Clutters the sovereign peal of death.

You pause to wonder, minting yea-lines,
Meanwhile catching fire every minute,
While the rest of the world is shrouded gray:
Which of you is the gruesome misfit,
Which is the sinister lie, the great monstrosity,
Poet-pariah, the lone uprooted tree.

One Final Burning

i.

it is the wind's demolishing hand
come to soon fell this imperious
frame into its final death-swoon,
its seared selves dispersed
piece by piece; faint flappings
in the air, hurt birdwings
bleeding in post-mortem spasms,
strange noises in the dark
flung far off into the nightmare
of one's waking moments. and it is
these later residual resonances
that could stalk one's nights
since the exact contour and voice
of its going must only be imagined,
must be suffered by the scavenging,
senses, salvaging possible hanging-on
shards of her here and there,
even as the had been instantly
wrenched, erased as it were,
as if it never had been,
in this post-prandial passing.
one can only then recast, re-image
over and over, more pained each time,

mount on the soul's scorched lapidaries,
her lamellar incinerating,
the slant of her first crumbling,
the rumble and shade of her deepest
moan, and this one nightfall fitful
stirrings in the flaying wind.

ii.

i know this one
could not possibly go
the way of all other
dying old houses.
firewalls isolate it,
so it sizzles on in private,
contained in all its seethings,
its intimate designs
within itself intensified

into poetry's richly ringing
intertexted lines limned
in cycles of firelit pain
and joy, sovereign and sole
within its fragilely flammable
formidable walls, my personal
incandescent world that had
then burnt on and on, not out
nor down, but forever quietly on.
and because forever,
some ghosts of it are fielded
all over the site of its ruins.
imagine fluffs of light,
ghoulish emanations of its
immortal remainders, picking up
their paths slowly, dawdling
over previous treasures, worldly
and invisible, and now, so soon
assuming their eerie sheen,
an afterglow of cinders burning
flameless in the tomb of night.

iii.

no, it does not begin

with any crackling sound
like scarred scripts burning.
this flesh by flesh gobbling
up is initially one painless
smouldering, flames gutting
everything standing in their sweep
within the ring
of their annealing.
and then, the smell!
like something acrid, acid,
carbonaceous, quite nothing else.
and slowly, this strange oozing
smell swells, redounds into
spitting, splitting noises,
pain cracking up
in many pieces
in different places
all at once! still

its life cinders on
until this ultimate imploding,
one deafening blast to the climax rite
as loved ones writhe, ashen
in their own consumed shells,
or perhaps, relieved at last
over this burning's end.
the skull tautens, breaks,
bursts forth into nothing, nil,
its ghosts given up...pure annihilation!
the cold remains of its spirit
ash-kohl in its final irrevocable
bleak dissembling, now, here in
this one kind of final burning.

Selected Poems of Tita Lacambra-Ayala

The Impeccable Sin is to Despise Feeling

such as the narrow bitterness so narrow
that it cannot be pathed to trace the expanded
causes. The roots be plenteous and tinily
outspread to grow, put finally into the taper
of trunk bearing the shriveling nuts,
the yellow anemic fronds waving brittle

and sad, attempting the wind's protuberant
gay song. And then let it be said (nor thought
alone so terribly, closely in the heart's
subsoil roadways) that the impeccable
salvation is love's old willingness to win
a path through the narrow tapered trunk
from the wind's gay song and follow it through
until the tiny, plenteous roots are found
and there unknotted, understood, loosened,
and mingled with not sadly in the deep soil
but gladly as wind and rain and sun
and rock and silt and loam in the deep soil.

Creations, Precisely

Even when the world is turning round
like the map and the science of it, even when
the tip is but a few degrees and east
to west it turns upon an orbit: there is
the space around its presence, the unsure
genesis of its past, and feared collisions
are in the future sure events. The laughter
and living on the gay surfaces come
from the still and sorrowful core
lost from all movement and the touch of ether
Outside gaieties have strained their elements
through depths of sand to her core, and there,
there in the core, the pure sorrow from which
even the laughter grew, from which all grow.
Even the sweetness has a bitter truth in it.
Ah this perfect globe, the world's shaky thing

Gilding

The extravagant vision
colors dawns, goldening shadows
into sight stteadfasting me.

The bright condition:
the short quick verse of laughter
the heavy sea walking on tiptoe
the wind playing along blindfolded
or outburst of a tree yawning

Each day a day of birth

unavelled from old dreams
lusting for hunger, for thirst
and other wild lions.

This is the time for skinning
the dirty neck of doubt.
For burning unused ropes
rotting from the tree.

The Trick is to Find

the path
to unbearable beauty
and unbearable joy
or unbearable
hurt

and bear all of it
like an egyptian
mummy wrapped
in all these
unbearable things
Then show up at a
party
smoking a cigarette
held by a friend
with a fondness for
olives, peanuts and
whisky
Then life will be
a scream
And almost bearable

Bibliography

- Dimalanta, Ophelia A. *Flowing On*. Manila: Santo Tomas University Press, 1988.
- Dimalanta, Ophelia A. *Lady Polyester: Poems Past & Present*. Manila: Santo Tomas University Press, 1993.
- Dimalanta, Ophelia A. *Montage*. Manila: UST Publications, 1974.
- Lacambra-Ayala, Tita A. *Tala Mundi: The Collected Poems of Tita Agcaoili Lacambra-Ayala*. ed. Ricardo de Ungria. Manila: UST Publishing House, 2011.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1992.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Portable Nietzsche*. trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.