

AGAINST MISANTHROPY
A LIFE IN POETRY (2015-1995)

EILEEN R. TABIOS

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Buffalo, New York

Against Misanthropy, A Life in Poetry (2015-1995) by Eileen R. Tabios

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THE AUTO / BIOGRAPHY

“Being a poet is not writing a poem, but finding a new way to live.”
—Paul Lafleur

“The best person is the best poet.”
—Maxwell Clark

A Selection of Blurbs

(Circa 2000-2015)

Eileen R. Tabios' blurbs for other writers are presented in first draft form (which may not be their published versions).

NESTS AND STRANGERS / ON ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN POETS
(featuring Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Nellie Wong, Myung Mi Kim
and Bhanu Kapil) Edited by Timothy Yu with an Afterword by Mg
Roberts

The depth and breadth of poetry presented by merely four Asian American women poets attest to Kelsey Street Press' own expansive vision—a rigor wise enough to be enervated by compassion. What I first thought would be a coincidental combination of very different poets and poetries unexpectedly reveals a logical trajectory from 20th century Asian American activism to radically innovative poetry. These poets don't just defy erasure or silencing of their individual or chosen-as-collective identities—they create and recreate selves unimaginable to those who would have subsumed their voices. The terms “Asian American” or “Asian American poetry” can be unsatisfactory for reducing difference. But after reading this collection, I actually opened myself up to the possibility of accepting the label: “Asian American woman poet.”

MESSAGE FROM THE MEMOIRIST: POEMS by Paul Pines

If the origin of consciousness is a wound, would it not be logical that someone looking back might observe (like Robert Redford in one poem) that life has been mostly sadness with moments of joy? What to do with such a conclusion? Perhaps it depends if and when one acknowledges this possibility's reality. For then there would be time to lighten such darkness by forging the “ability to contain the tears in things.” Such a path would be understood by the “Memoirist” as defined by Paul Pines: someone who “understands that Memory is not a bin where pieces are stored and retrieved but a field in which the Soul's narrative continues to unfold.” Poems—such as the ones in this book—are effects from the unfolding of a Soul's narrative. They are a welcome read for they emanate from Pines' deeply-considered “time / For quiet Contemplation” that will result in “All books will Be written.”

A's *Visuality* by Anne Gorrick

Some poems are written slant. They surfaced because their poets didn't have an idea they imposed on the poem to develop. They surfaced because the poets respected the raw material—words—enough to get out of the way to let the words speak for themselves. When the approach works, language becomes poetry by, in part, transcending the limits of the poets' conscious imaginations. Such has resulted from Anne Gorrick's *A's Visuality* which presents a section of poems translated from prior positionings as visual art and a second section of poems taking off from the found language of a website's description of paint colors. The first section, *Folios*, is rife with surfaced wisdom: "a map / as small as / astronauts" where guidance (map) is not the astronaut's limits (knowledge) but the astronauts' task (and desire) to explore or expand the limits of what's known. In the second section *Chromatic Sweep*, never has color become so palpable (at times even edible or radioactive): "when black and white mix, there is a lower sound" or "red play back our own choking." Gorrick trusted the words ("No editorial / preoccupied with") and their reciprocation are lush poems that thoughtfully invite.

MEANS by Lars Palm

Lars Palm rolls with song titles and makes dissonance harmonize: "i / will not be food / for your cats" he stresses, before suggesting that cat food instead be "that old school nazi / who took your / house keys / & forged them / into a statue / depicting surreal sex." These are brief poems with huge expanses—what a discerning mind sees and sings after he "reel[s in] lines" to "see what's on / the hook." All to the heavy beat of one subversive enough to proclaim: "i live in / towns or cities / not countries."

SYMPHONY NO. 9 by Rick Carfagna

Speech is not just a means of communication. Speech may also be an attempt to engage with an other or, in Ric Carfagna's *Symphony No. 9*, many Others. Speech however, often falters in the face of its desires. And perhaps for certain matters there simply are no words. That Carfagna nevertheless brings forth a poem—a long poem—signifies how Poetry is more than speech. This moving poem aspires to address the entirety of the universe even if it often lapses to dream-speech: "by eyes / in a windowless prison / at an ocean's edge / or it is a vase / of withered orchids / turning to ash." Wisely,

the poem also knows to question its ambition: “why / the forgotten heart / aspires in silence / to fill the chasms of emptiness / which lie at the core / of its reticent being.” Since the quest produces so many luminous lines—so many thresholds into emotional interactions—the poem not only rationalizes its existence but makes itself a welcome addition to postmodern and deconstructed romantic poetry.

ON THE ALTERATION OF SILENCE: RECENT CHILEAN POETRY
(La alteración del silencio: Poesía chilena reciente) edited by Galo Ghigliotto and William Allegrezza

Once, the historian Arnold Toynbee apparently named Chile as a “country of the future,” which Adan Mendez calls “inexplicable” in one of his poems. The explanation, though, might be the moving bounty of poetry continuing to come out of Chile since she birthed “the first Spanish poetic expression known in the Americas,...La Araucana by Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga,” as well as Latin America’s first two Nobel Prize winners Gabriela Mistral (1945) and Pablo Neruda (1970). For Chile’s contemporary poets are writing energetic poems with fresh forms, musics and perspectives which deserve wider exposure on the global stage. Chile’s poets are pushing forward the known limits of poetry with compelling poems—if these poems’ invitations to be inhabited are eagerly accepted, they also will share something about the hunger, astonishment, radiance, grief and desire that stews together to form Chile: “The blazing light of the sun / ...Pouring heat on my body / Letting it live burning it gradually // Come see this burning.”

PLURAL by Christopher Stackhouse

These poems break down because they seek to extend poetic expanse. And they want to expand the poem because they want to mirror a very “multiple” world, much of which the poet did not create but wants to acknowledge. They acknowledge by eliciting a new “trace” of activities which exist outside of authorial determination. The activities referenced encompass paintings, literature, conversations—but they’re all just part of what’s being acknowledged through exploration: humanity. That’s how a short poem entitled “Short” can come to move seamlessly from being short 75 cents to gazing at computer porn, from standing in a Korean deli to seeing the image of a white ass imprinted on one’s inner eyelids. In other poems relying more on fragments, the fragments cease being parts to become parts-of. Despite fragments,

breaks, and ruptures, the achievement of these poems is that their totality mirrors humanity as inherently unified. We are all parts of.

THE DANGEROUS ISLANDS by Seamas Cain

Words tell the story, yes. But the words, one senses in Seamas Cain's *The Dangerous Islands*, were not just authored but also precipitated by immediately preceding words or phrases. This is to say, the energy flowing through this novel is so powerful it sometimes dances away from a narrative thread(s). The result is an author going beyond the limits of self, and a story that is not just "pleasure [but] is a violent pleasure."

LOVE IN A TIME OF PARANOIA by Howie Good

As with positing—that is, poem-ing—that "a crumpled napkin / was all Degas needed / to do a sky," Howie Good only needed to be attentive to his world to create the many, varied universes possible through poems. That is, from the smallest of details he creates the deepest implications, and does so with a pleasing finesse.

a womb-shaped wormhole by j/j hastain

This is one beginning for a world attempting to make itself in advance of its articulation. But it can be articulated by scents, which is to say, traces ... like musk, patchouli, mustard, "split truffles," or even attar of long-dead altars and imagined memories. In this beginning lie the orgasms of fractals, revealing how fractions require flesh as condition precedent to existence—for who we may not at first recognize is nonetheless not that different from you and me.

THE SACRED RIVER OF CONSCIOUSNESS by Tom Hibbard

Empire so often come to this: "potholes imitating frozen potholes." The poems in Tom Hibbard's *The Sacred River of Consciousness* reflect on various crimes by humanity by simply reporting them. That Hibbard's language is poetic rather than journalistic does not mask the realities being referenced—how "At times life does unfold / as though civilization were garbage." The suffering disenfranchised, the suffering environment, the corrupted governments, the dysfunctional relationships—how did compassion evaporate? That question is but one of many begot by these poems. For the poems also ask "at what time does the candle

make crimes unredeemable.” The answer could be: upon the lighting of the candle or consciousness of those events, hence the import of Hibbard’s poems. If these poems facilitate the consciousness where the *New York Times* et al has failed, the river may yet turn sacred again. For the sake of the world, open yourself up to these poems.

HOMO SENTIMENTALIS: A GUIDE IN VERSE TO MODERN
EMOTIONAL INTIMACY by Nicholas Manning

In *Homo Sentimentalis*’ epigraph, Milan Kundera notes, “As soon as we want to feel (decide to feel...), feeling is no longer feeling but an imitation of feeling, a show of feeling.” How might that be reconciled with the actual poems wherein may be found such effectively moving text as “the moment your hair / ’s height falls * down covering / my lit body in threads / of unthinking / light”? Perhaps that it is as difficult to be artificial as it is to be sincere? Perhaps that intention (e.g. a privileging as Kundera describes the raising of “feelings to a category of value”) may not manifest itself when the raw material, words let alone poems, is so subjective (or, to paraphrase one poem, are doppelgangers to their referenced realities)? The genius of Nicholas Manning’s *Homo Sentimentalis* is that one is moved to deliberate on these questions and care about such answer(s) as they surface or not. It is pure poetry—ungraspable but nonetheless meaningful, just like those asterisked stars interspersed throughout the poems for glimmers of, though they may not actually be, *light*.

Disclosure by Dana Teen Lomax

Dana Teen Lomax shows her ass and makes you want to kiss it.

THE INCOMPOSSIBLES by Carrie Hunter

Every poem in *THE INCOMPOSSIBLES* is “an utterly unique void.” What seems consistent is a rhythm of certainty, even as the poems posit uncertainties; these are musics impossible to categorize. Read a line like “The indecipherable spoken aloud”* and you can’t help but read again, then again. As you continue reading, you realize you’re searching for something you might discover but will defy memory-zation if only because the context of a reading changes each time. I guess that’s the (or, one,) point of these poems—it encourages the search itself and the discovered beauties in the process make the uncertainties welcome. That’s what fabulous

poems can achieve: the suspension of belief into language for its own sake. Thus, do “obscurities hold hands...”

Gaha (babes) Noas (of the abyss) Zorge (become friendly) by Jesse Glass
Rollicking jesterous spawn of ... who knows? Here, the Q might as well be A and the A might as well be Q for Jesse Glass’ “Gaha (babes)...” upends language...and if the receptive reader loses linguistic preconceptions such as cause-and-effect, what then results is music’s seduction into senselessness because the punchline can be: “IN THE LAND OF MY FORMER ENEMIES / a shaft resets time.” Such wondrous things occur when a skull gives up its identity to a crystal ball.

QUATERNITY by Scott Glassman and Sheila E. Murphy
The dictionary bows to Glassman and Murphy’s seductive diction: “No curve to infinity can mimic bells.”

good behavior by Lars Palm
These are wonderful parenthetical novellas. Within “a snap of ... fingers,” these inquisitions—ranging over Pinocchio to addressing cats to white colonialism in Zimbabwe—provide a welcome “kick in the head”.

POSTCARDS TO BOX 464 by Amanda Laughtland
Created from postcards sent to long-time family friends over a span of 50 years, Amanda Laughtland’s *Postcards to Box 464* offers manifestations of affection which so enchant that we are pulled into their intimate space. We feel as if we were “the Coopers”, recipients of the original postcards—reading these poems makes one feel liked as much as obviously loved! Distilled into a chap with fittingly spare but evocative drawings by Jen May, the poems read like a travel diary as well, and as such a journal is a page-turner. The “found text” even transcend their original context through inadvertent humor: “Through some / misunderstanding, the hotel / didn’t hold my room. At present // calling around for a bed tonight. / Way it looks, I’ll end up in Berkeley.” Laughtland’s craftsmanship and emotional commitment makes this project luminous—in her “labor of love,” her generous love achieves what poetry can: a seemingly effortless making of attraction.

DISPLACEMENTS by Michelle Cruz Skinner

Evocatively written. Deftly offers how life can unfold as a series of uncertain transitions. But redemption can surface when one realizes through these stories how much we share with each other—an effect made possible through full-blown characterizations that allow for nuanced portraits, thus reader empathy.

THE SPACE BETWEEN by Aimee Suzara

The poems in Aimee Suzara's *THE SPACE BETWEEN* should make their author proud. They together offer a voice that's captivating and with something worthwhile to say. "If home were a song" is a nice way to complete the circle of the path unfolded by each individual poem.

GUARDIANES DEL SECRETO / GUARDIANS OF THE SECRET by Lila Zemborain, trans. by Rosa Alcalá

Lila Zemborain's power subverts paper: her words turn pages into films of blurred or incomplete images. The references are specific (geezus: even "Danielle Steele"!), but what is happening remains stubbornly a question, defying the definitive answer except for what a reader is moved to speculate. The technique of reader involvement is not unique, but what's special about these poems is how they seduce you into wanting to connect with them, in part by opening up to allow the entry of some sort of fever. For it's within such a heightened space where focus begins and the relationship between reader and words can unfold. If lucidity is not possible without the inner gaze (e.g. "an ancestral space"), what Zemborain reminds is that intimacy is a prerequisite, in the way—to paraphrase her—a partly blind person can glean what is being seen by way of *touch*. There indeed are secrets within this book—but their discovery requires more than reading. The reader must allow the secrets to "enter[...] another way" than "through the eyes." If you are lucky, you will read these poems and discover something about how you were made, as well as possibilities of what you may become. These poems' secrets are within you.

CHIMES by Adam Field

At times so painful and lovely and fragile that *Chimes* made my mind's eyes weep. My body's eyes, however, refused to cry as they

did not want to stop reading—*Chimes* paradoxically is a page-turner even as the words compel you to linger on each page. *Chimes* is one of the most moving autobiographies I've read—actually, language's beauty makes it irrelevant whether this is fiction or non-fiction; its authenticity is *felt* to be true. It is language dreaming of song and so it sings until the most tone-deaf reader can, through dream and a most gentle delirium, inhabit its world. For the reader, too, *Chimes* thus is “not an *is* but [a] being.” Adam Fieled accomplishes what *The Catcher in the Rye* did for him and that he wished to replicate: that by “words demonstrat[ing]...potential for continuity,” he “give[s] people back themselves.” Quite logically, the book's ending is a beginning: the being as forever a continuance. That is, “continuance...an excitement and a way of still existing.”)

silk string arias by Mary Kasimor

Mary Kasimor's latest collection is aptly titled. Narrative ellisions are not so much slippery as silken smooth. Textual distillations manifest into strings of text, but strings bearing the steel scaffolding of witty alchemy. Arias are for readers to complete with their engagements. Hence, “apples rose from the roses with / its special skins / gleam tooth gleam.” These poems are purrrrrr-fectly pitched.

AFTER TAXES by Thomas Fink

What's left after taxes usually causes heartburn: so much effort for so little return! But in Thomas Fink's *After Taxes*, “pogo loam” becomes a symbol for a result that “exceeds forecast.” An “impossible swell/persists”—especially admirable in the longer poems—and it is music ever-ascending and all the more rewarding for the craft made visible by extraordinary diction. Fink's poems discover sounds that had been veiled by contexts and meanings. Thus, “a vase/ smash rage” and not the other way around as would be assumed by a lackadaisical culture. For as Fink notes, “There [was] something new/ and learned/ before you read/ the page” and he determined to excavate. The rewards are ours if we recognize what this collection craftily and craft-fully achieves: bypassing the binary of operatic ornamentation or matter-of-fact tones to encompass both, thus effecting a 21st century Song.

Full Deck (jokers playing) by Oscar Penaranda

Oscar Peñaranda chose Poetry to tell stories, most notably of the Filipino American experience. So why didn't he choose fiction? Because the stories resonate beyond what can be expressed by words. What breathes between the lines of his poems is an ached-ridden love borne of the mating of loss and desire—a haunting that transcends such references as “There was this/ ragged iron bar/ that by accident crushed my/ toe/ when I with leathered gloves/ worked with steel/ in Alaska...” Fortunately, Poetry also chose Oscar Peñaranda, as evident in a poem like “A Song” where he sings, “So long as the world/ touches me/ my heart strings will never stop/ playing the music.”

Bright Felon by Kazim Ali (Judge's Citation—Asian American Literary Award in Poetry)

It's difficult to write autobiography as poetry *and* rely on sentences as part of poetic form. One risks not having done enough to evaporate language from prose to poetry. Some poets rely on lyricism for this path—and, certainly, Kazim Ali's *Bright Felon* is lyrical. But the challenge—and occasional beauty—of poetry is how it can be more than words, such that its architecture by itself can facilitate poetry's blossoming. Herein lies the genius of *Bright Felon*: how Ali creates a coming-of-age story using traveled cities as infrastructure; the result is a luminously larger sum than all the genre-parts utilized: autobiography and travelogue, as well as meditations on literature, politics, art, cultures and religion. *Bright Felon* makes a stranger-reader care about the life of this poet, even as the memory of what was read becomes not just the narratives upon which the work so relied but instead the haunting tones that surfaced as the reader was moved to linger between words. In those spaces that words can only evoke, poetic resonance remains pure with music and light. *Bright Felon* presents a brilliantly unforgettable “accretion of sentences and waking up.”

GRAVITIES OF CENTER by Barbara Jane Reyes (from Preface)

To experience Barbara's poems is to learn about the specifics of a Pilipina's experience. And it is also to experience the 'universality' of desire and loss—that is, despite the consistency of losses, the stubbornness of never-ending desire [...] by engaging us all in the poetry of Desire, you need to be as present as Barbara is in her poems. So enter these poems, and stay a while.”

THE PRESENT DAY by Ernesto Priego (*from Afterword*)

Diasporics—those forced into as well as those who volunteer for exile—share a certain vocabulary. Like, when one hears fragments like *One has to leave to find one's self* or *One might choose—or accept—exile to know one's self*, response is tinged with familiarity. Poignancy transcends cliché.

I don't know, but it seems to me that the voice of these poems is of someone who's a song away from being an ecstatic.

and the
angel spoke

the word
of god

to me
this morning

John Bloomberg-Rissman

Interviews Eileen R. Tabios

(*ARDUITY*, October 2014)

Introduction

Generally speaking, the focus of *Arduity* has been on the poem itself, on the difficulties involved with coming to grips with examples of a certain kind of writing that is often identified as "obscure and elitist". It doesn't strike me that focusing on the micro, as it were, on allusions and non-standard syntax, etc etc totally exhausts the meaning of poetic arduity or difficulty. Personally, I find something arduous in simply trying to think thru what it is one is doing when one is making or reading a poem. This might be seen as a more meta or macro difficulty. Macro-meta thinking does not of course replace close reading, just as close reading does not replace an investigation into poetry as a cultural practice, and of poems as cultural objects. When I decided to interview Eileen R. Tabios, I thought to do so because, besides being a poet I greatly admire, she is a woman of color originally from the Philippines, which has a long colonial history, and that, positioned thus, she might be able to talk about "allusions and non-standard syntax, etc etc" from a different perspective than that of, say, a Prynne or a Hill or even a Celan. Being a "post"-colonial woman of color really does, I think, change things. As Žižek has it in his notion of the parallax view, "Parallax can be defined as the apparent displacement of an object, caused by a change in observational position. [There is a] 'parallax gap' separating two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible, linked by an 'impossible short circuit' of levels that can never meet." In other words, the "one", above, in "I find something arduous in simply trying to think thru what it is one is doing when one is making or reading a poem", is irreducibly multiple.

John Blomberg-Rissman (JBR):

I want to start by quoting a bit from Enrique Dussel's *Ethics of Liberation* and then elaborating on it. "We are confronted by the overwhelming but contradictory reality of a 'world system'... which has globalized its reach to the most distant corners of the planet at the same time that it has paradoxically excluded a majority of humanity." Dussel goes on to identify the world system with the hegemony of Western Europe, the United States, and a few other

"latecomer" countries, e.g., post-1989 Russia and Japan. It seems to me that this hegemony has been more or less firmly in place since the 18th century which also saw the birth of aesthetics as a new and specific disciplined way of relating to "art objects" (including poetry), which took as its other *ekel*, disgust (the fact that *ekel* is German is not just gratuitous information), which as Winfried Menninghaus' research has shown, is best exemplified by the figure of the old woman, by people of color, especially Africans, by the actual human body, etc (e.g. a runny nose). At the same time that aesthetics was being formulated, the same generation of Germans was beginning to redefine philosophy as that which began with the Greeks, and to exclude everything Asian, African, etc as not-philosophy, because only white Europeans were capable of actual rational thought. This kind of thinking clearly came to dominate western thought, and, dare I say, helped justify colonization and exploitation, and Dussel's exclusion of the majority of humans from a seat at the table. OK. Sorry for being so long-winded, but I wanted to set this up. Tho I don't want to ask you to speak for anyone but yourself, you are a woman of color hailing from the Philippines, a former colony, who has nevertheless chosen to write in a conqueror's language, no, has done more than to choose to write in English, but who has actually taken it as your beloved. What kind(s) of difficulties (if any) has this presented? I would like this question to be heard on both a macro and micro level, but let's start with the macro, a la Spivak: "can the subaltern speak? and, if and apparently so, what difficulties, to use an Arduity-word, you might have / continue to encounter, and how you see your work fitting / not fitting / etc into an aesthetic regime that is at its very heart racist, misogynist, etc etc?"

Eileen R. Tabios (ERT):

John, thank you for your Introduction—I should clarify that I consider myself more of a "trans-colonial" versus "post-colonial" simply because I'd like my work not to be constrained by inherited history (that may be a futile desire, but I identify the need to go beyond what others have imposed on me and my background). As regards your first question, I initially took your question at face value and wrote an answer. When my answer was at 2,999 words, I realized that my answer was not reflective of how I truly feel because it didn't question the premise which you mostly intended for setting up the conversation. I guess I am not totally comfortable with all of the framing (so to speak) of your question—the frame being the first part of the question up to when you said you "wanted to set this up." A longer look at history may be relevant—I think

humans, especially after switching from the hunter-gatherer to agricultural-based lifestyles, have displayed a tendency to improve themselves at the expense of others' positions. Thus, the matters you note are just examples of a longer-lived pattern which is more directly the problem. I think the problems you rightly note come from this tendency, and as enhanced by the introduction of such matters as surplus and ownership into human lifestyle, and that the immensity of the problems we have today is not (just) because of the other-ing tendency you observe but because we have a larger population than we've had before and their consumption is not supported by the planet's resources.

Also, I have no particular problem with how the three Greeks have come to be identified as some philosophical core in the West since the same world has accepted India's form of numbering.

So perhaps I should start by just saying that first, and seeing what you think as I sense the frame of your question is important to you...

JBR:

First of all, I hope you did not trash your original response because it's probably interesting in itself and I'm sure bits are salvageable. In any case, OK, your response is fair enough, and, really, I would expect no less.

So, you ask: what in my framing is important to me. There are two ways of answering that which occur to me at the moment. The first is: what is important in that frame to me, regardless that we are having a conversation and/or interview. In other words, what bothers me (as an artist, we'll keep it at that) about living under the intellectual hegemony of the west? The other way to answer this is: what is important to me about the way I frame the question in terms of this interview? In other words, what was / am I hoping to elicit?

I'm going to answer the second here, because that seems more relevant to us, not just to me. Tho I could answer the first if you'd like me to. OK. This is what occurs to me. Paul Celan continued to write in German because even tho it was the enemy's language it was also his language. But the fact that it was not just his anymore, but the language of those who had killed his family etc etc, had certain effects on his use of the language (led to the rise of certain "difficulties" in his work) (this is not, of course, an attempt to reduce his work to some sort of monocausal thing). You have chosen (for

the most part) to write in not just the enemy's language, but to (more or less) embrace an aesthetic that was designed to exclude you, as a woman and as a person of color. What difficulties has that presented you with? How have you managed and/or subverted them?

Of course, I understand that that's just a paraphrase of my original question, shorn of the footnotes and references. But maybe that helps narrow down what I am really getting at. I'll veer now a bit into a "what is important in that frame to me" zone. Yes, every culture has done that same kind of "othering". I don't like that aspect of them either. And I know that western culture is much more than just an exclusion machine, I know that's the same for every culture. But what troubles me right now about western culture is its globalization. It's like a monocrop. And monocropping is never a good idea. Using the monocropping metaphor, it seems that one thing poets might be about today is, well, if Monsanto is a black magic way of inculcating disease resistance into a monocrop, maybe poetry might be a white magic way of doing the same thing. What's really interesting to me about your response is how different it is from what you told me yesterday, that I had asked exactly the right question. Apparently ... not. Or something.

ERT:

The easy part first, John. Yesterday I read "the right question" because I'd focused on the second half of the question which mostly addressed poetry. Today, my attention snagged against the framing, too. But that the question is the right one is still true, as befits how much I wrote in response and how much the rest of my answer now recycles much of what I wrote yesterday. So, I'll continue below and with some clarity of your "frame." But before I do so, I want to present an answer that was created with your frame in mind; it was written on my behalf by another Filipino poet, Angelo Suarez, whose books include *POEM OF DIMINISHING POETICITY* and the forthcoming *Philippine English: A Novel*. I asked Angelo to speak to your first question as if he was me because I thought it would be interesting if not relevant to see a version of a reply from someone who does not see me as a subaltern and whose knowledge of me revolves mostly around my published writings (including on social media). As you know, the person never exactly matches one's public persona but my public persona mostly revolves around poetry which is the matter we're discussing. So, to your first question, here is Angelo's response on my behalf:

Obviously I can speak: that you are interviewing me is an indication of my work's & also my visibility w/in this aesthetic regime. Nevertheless my visibility comes marked w/ both complicity & oppression, i.e., my visibility is an indication of an ability to play along-or perhaps not so much an ability to play along but an ability to survive being played by-the oppressive conditions that you speak of. This love affair for English, for instance, finds me producing texts not only in what you see in books, but texts that come in the form of a publishing practice-by w/c I mean to say I have also come to run a publishing house. It is one thing to exercise resistance by writing poetry; it is another thing to exercise resistance by taking control of the forces of production that allow my poetry to be printed & disseminated. Publishing & affiliating myself w/ communities of independent publishers present themselves as forms of composition outside of books that help determine how books are made, presented, distributed-conditions that in turn generate, in a simultaneously Foucauldian & Benjaminian sense, the author-as-producer function. But look—I can only carry out this so-called resistance insofar as I can afford it. It's one thing to be Filipino; it's another thing to be poor. Beneath all this talk about visibility is whether I can afford to make myself visible. I don't pretend to be dirt-poor. Let me just say that I was lucky enough to not have been born into a subjectivity that is genuinely subaltern & therefore cannot speak. I can speak, my poetry is recognized as poetry in the poetry & publishing communities I move in, but Ist of all because I have time to produce it rather than rummage thru garbage bins looking for food to survive on.

And while there's nothing in there for me to dispute, I affirm that its incompleteness (not Angelo's fault) affirms my discomfort with your original question. So let me add to Angelo's words by continuing to say:

As you know, history obviously didn't begin with the Western articulation of it, though it can be true that its economic power affects/widens the distribution of its point of views (it wasn't that long ago, for example—and maybe it's still the case!—that U.S.-American textbooks portrayed the Philippine-American War as a Filipino "insurrection" or "rebellion" against an implied legitimate U.S. rule when it was actually a defensive battle against U.S. invasion).

But I try to go long on history, reaching certainly further than your frame. My understanding of such a history contextualizes how I view events. So, if we go back to, say, the human switch from hunter-gathering to agricultural-based lifestyles, we will see how certain lifestyles bring out or reward or encourage certain values over others. To live by agriculture (which means re-engineering plants and animals for human consumption) you fundamentally change the human-nature relationship from one of reciprocity (you care for the land and it cares for you) to one of use and exploitation. War, slavery, etc.—these things are ancient. Indeed, if we go back even longer to the hunter-gatherer stage, we'll still see elements, I believe, of man's self-oriented nature (and maybe that's just part of creatures who have to be concerned with survival).

So while I am as appalled as you over abuse and injustice, I'm not ultimately surprised. I am responding this way because you mention "globalization" which I also feel is an overall profile and arc of historical events. And a trajectory. When you combine overpopulation and/or human levels of consumption with growing scarcity—and even if not scarcity but the imbalanced distribution—of resources, there's a logic I see in the resulting inequitable distribution of resources, and the resulting biases in terms of such areas as aesthetics. A logic because I identified (grumpily but so what?) long ago this tendency in the human race to act only or mostly on its behalf.

Now, certain decolonization scholars (I think of Leny Strobel and Lily Mendoza) offset my dour view of human nature by reminding me of various indigenous practices whereby humans were very careful about not taking more from the land/natural resources than they can put back. Even when, with the effects of elements out of human control—specifically climate—people thought it wise to generate surpluses, many of those early folks still didn't abuse the environment—tried not to take more than they needed to take ("need" would include appropriate surpluses). I'm not an anthropologist or expert historian, and am forced to elide the controversy as to how much of a paradise existed in pre-modern times. But we've obviously gone a long way from respecting, and loving, our ties to nature. It's not such a stretch to move from there to colonizing other people; much of the Western (though this tendency is not just Western) cultural elements you decry rely on having other peoples as well as the environment subservient to one's use or advantage. Thus, it would seem logical that aesthetics, too, becomes a tool for larger forces more directly concerned with