

An Ode to the Death and Life of Benjamin

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The death of Benjamin occurred curtly past midnight of November the eleventh. Twelve years, a short amount for those of his kind, have lasted longer than the love of the young marriages told about in the stories of my grandmother. The inevitable Graying: she used to say, once a thing like this happens to you, unfolds in moderation, but does not fail in succession.

First, the wood of the *tocador* will lose its sensuous concentricity. The *kamagong* will soon appear more like a *yakal*—made dull, lacklustre, cheapened. Once dense, it will turn hollow; a knock on its side will reverberate a distant echo in a key approximate to B minor. The smooth, unfinished walls of cement, my grandma iterates, already gray, will gradually turn into a shade of domestic eggshell. The floors, despite any effort with a *walis tambo*, or any dusting with an old shirt by way of jerking the foot back and forth in a wiping motion, will gather more dust than was ever possible for an enclosed space. *You will sneeze at once, you will sneeze again, and you will sneeze infinitely.* The space, she adds, will in fact cease to be enclosed. Windows of Capiz shells, once emanating a tenderly eerie light with their tiny frames of mollusk, will at once fall off its hinges—shattering on the ground below as if never connected in the first place.

It all happened just as she had described upon Benjamin's death. In the beginning, it wasn't so terrible. The cavernous drawers were altogether manageable; and although the walls had an air of malaise, it was really the taste of nausea that was the bother. The floors, at first merely gathering dust, were in time swarmed with long strands of hairs. In trying to walk too quickly, a bundle of strands would trip me over—though the pain of falling was nothing compared to the agony of ticklish tresses between the gaps of my toes.

In an attempt to combat the cold, I plastered large posters on the wall. Darlings and idols, amassed over the years, have finally come to some sort of use. Except nearly every evening, a strong gust of wind would blow a hole straight through them (as if a ghost). Thereby at once, I came upon the idea of manufacturing a Frankensteinian plug to fill the break in gluing together: an anthology of poetry by Oliverio Girondo, *Blood on the Tracks*, a Björksnäs bed frame, a pair of avocado-print socks, and a number of articles collected on a trip to Europe from some time ago.

I would be lying if I said that I didn't try to revert Benjamin's death. I heard once that you could fashion a real, working heart by putting together an unopened can of liver spread, processed cheese, some fried galunggong, all soldered together with bits of bronze. Careless as I was, I forgot the part about it needing to be consecrated. Consequently, and though it was in vain, I remembered that I had lost the phone number of my pastor anyway (*it was useless, of course, to ask a stranger to bless your makeshift heart*).

Then, I remembered the uncle of my grandfather, who was said to be a *babaylan*. I imagined him, as my father had once described, whispering mysticisms to the foreign occupiers in the jungles of Luzon, rendering him invisible to their eyes and ready to strike. (*If a tree falls soundlessly in the forest, maybe it was never there*). Or how, in demonstrating the grit of the spirits residing in his body, he would split the heads of beer bottles with his bare teeth, ingesting the shards of glass with a gulp. (*I am, therefore I bite*). And so, with these in mind, I called for his magick; in silent appeal for nearly a day and a half, I prayed to the ancestors of my ancestors.



It was, however, to no avail. So I made up my mind that, perhaps over time, due to an insincere intention, or due to a pure lack of faith, the magick of the ones who had given me my name, in fact, perchance, had an unprecedented date of expiration which my father had—swept in the emotions of his recounts to me—forgotten to disclose.

Still, I was in feverish hope to revive my only and beloved Benjamin. After a number of other futile shortcuts and tactics, I had finally decided to consult an expert on the matter. The meeting involved a lengthy discussion of options: animation was a no on his part, while modifications were a resounding no on my end (and naturally, any kind of freezing or skin-mounting was out of the question).



In the end, we finally agreed on an affordable and yet luxurious stuffing known as Memory Foam™. As I do anticipate, the temporary depression upon any kind of petting will inevitably deform the look of Benjamin. A crater upon his countenance is certainly not ideal in conveying his resurrection. The incremental return to its original state, however, following the slightest bit of pressure, shall have the effect of Benjamin responding as if in vital motion (an advantageous feature).

Admittedly, upon hearing that it would be difficult to hide the scars of the incision, I could not hide my dismay. I did not, by even the slightest means, want to be reminded of his cadaverous state. I knew that my wishes, dire as they were, were idealistic to the point of quixotic.

As such, the expert offered me a kind of compromise. If I truly wanted this illusion to be grounded in reality, I must then commit the ultimate sacrifice of renouncing the privilege of having both of my eyes. Through the surrendering of one eye, one measly eye, for the benefit of Benjamin, I would then be rewarded in two ways.

The first: that in seeing through only one eye, the left eye, my perspective would be entirely skewed in the sense that I will no longer be able to, so much as I might try, notice the scars of the incision. No matter from which angle I attempted as a point of vantage, I shall not see it; it will not be there.

The second: that in donating my other eye, the right eye, to take its place on Benjamin, I shall have the rare and gratuitous honour of seeing the world as it appears from his position. Dubious, I know. I was also curious to see how this would unfold.

Nonetheless, I had consented to the operation before the expert could relay to me as to how exactly it would transpire. What can I say, when the serpent gives you fruit, what else are you to do but to extract that fruit dry? (*As you are reading this, I can only imagine that you are anticipating the the results of my decision. I shall make no further delay in telling you.*)

This double vision, a kind of simulated mirror of the world, as an effect of having each eye in two separate locations, has been miraculous and has entirely transformed the procession of my life. I have become the cinematographer of my own perception; a kind of ad hoc Creator. At any given point, I can choose to close my right eye and view an event from the West; or close my left eye and view it from the East; or see through them both in concurrent dislocation

(which, I have to say, produces a refraction of lights, colours and shadows, a show most pleasing to the senses). The mode of having such a malleable vision is quintessentially surreal—the possibilities of which are incalculable. Its application in any sort of activity involving the visual is manifold; its resources, inexhaustible until I perish.

My preoccupation in testing the limits of this newfound ability has, as an understatement, served well to pass the time. Things do not quite appear the way they used to. They are the same, and yet marginally novel by the minutest sense. (Only last Thursday did I have the queerest experience of seeing my most prized succulent, an Echeveria, grow a surplus limb of a papaya leaf about the size of a thumbnail.)

The Graying, as it were, still remains; though the double vision has transformed its procession from dismal to ephemeral. If I should shut one of my eyes, I could fully neglect half the room.

Best of all, not only have I encased Benjamin into an ultimate and solidifying permanence, (*and lately, I have also been considering my very own transition*) but I have also acquired this cutting-edge vision. A set of lenses so effervescent, imprecise, and absolute; one of incomparable caliber, even to the latest model of a mirrorless Canon.

A "tocador" is a Spanish-style wooden dresser.

"Kamagong" is a type of Filipino wood more prestigious than the "yakal".

"Walis tambo" is a broom native to the Philippines made of soft reed.

Galunggong are tropical fish in the Indo-Pacific region.

The "babaylan" are pre-colonial shamans in the Philippines known to practice black magic.