

## Poetry as Historiography: The Routine Poems of Franklin Cimatú

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Baguio City, nestled in the Cordillera Mountain range in Northern Philippines has, throughout history, been the site of numerous encounters between native and foreigner. Originally an Igorot settlement, it was “re-invented” during the American Colonial period to serve as host to their primary rest and recreation facility. Today, the city is home to a heterogenous population and remains a fertile meeting ground for various peoples and cultures. This paper explores the idea of “Baguio,” an “invented space,” as likewise possibly the site of invention and re-inventions.

This paper employs postmodern theory in an analysis of the poetry of multi-awarded, tri-lingual, contemporary Filipino writer based in Baguio City, Franklin Cimatú. It focuses particularly on this writer’s “Routine Poem Series.”

Launching off from the Lyotardian perspective of the postmodern as “incredulity to metanarratives,” the paper then examines the various manifestations that reveal the liminal nature of the writer’s poetic practice and the anti-metanarrative impulse which pervades this body of work. The paper investigates the various interrogations of **T**ru<sup>th</sup>, **I**den<sup>t</sup>ity and **H**is<sup>t</sup>ory, the metanarratives that make absolutistic claims. The study likewise explores the notion of hybridity in an attempt to interweave subjectivity, context, and poetic practice.

## Poetry as Historiography: The Routine Poems of Franklin Cimat

The study of language has revealed that language is not merely a tool by which to state things or declare facts. It is a complex system which individuals employ for various purposes, an idea that an examination of literature as discourse would corroborate. This paper reveals how poetry can function in performative, rather than constative mode. As the former, it continues the postmodern project of interrogation to be able to open up new vistas of possibility and enable departures from the boundaries of existing configurations.

A reading of Frank Cimat's poetry leaves one with a strong sense of uncertainty. There is a peculiar sense of elusiveness in the poems such that these seem to refuse to give in to interpretation using traditional reading strategies which signals the need to summon an alternative approach to enable the reader to venture into interpretation using a variety of possible modes of entry into 'difficult' or 'resistant' texts. It was thus that I thought of approaching this body of work from the perspective of postmodern theory.

Franklin a.k.a. King a.k.a. Frank Cimat is a Baguio boy, journalist, Physics major, Fine Arts student and winner of awards in various writing contests. In 1987, he took third place in the poetry contest held by the *Galian sa Arte at Tula* (GAT [Crucible for the Arts and Letters]) and went on to become a two-time winner for poetry in the prestigious Philippine national writing contest, the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature with a third place finish in poetry in English for "Living in the Movies: Poems" and the first prize for Tula (poetry- Filipino Category) for "Desaparecido/ Desaparadiso: Mga Tula ni Juan Caliban" ["Desaparecido/Desaparadiso: The Poems of Juan Caliban] in 1991. The following year (1992) he came in second in the *Makata ng Taon* [Writer of the Year] poetry writing contest of the *Surian Ng Wikang Pambansa* [Institute for the National Language]. In 1995, he garnered second place in the short-lived Procyon Awards in Manila, Philippines. In 2003, he was adjudged the top prizewinner for poetry in the *Philippines Free Press* Literary Awards. Franklin Cimat also writes short stories and has won a *Philippines Free Press* award for the essay in 1994.

The study of Cimat's poetry from the perspective of postmodern theory jumps off from Jean-Francois Lyotard's definition of the postmodern. "Postmodern," Lyotard writes "would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo)" (Lyotard 2001, p.62). The modern would refer to that which is current, the 'now.' The addition of the prefix enmeshes the proposition in a conundrum of being 'after now, now.' Lyotard situates the postmodern within modernity.

It is undoubtedly part of the modern. All that has been received, if only yesterday (...) must be suspected . . . . In amazing acceleration, the generations precipitate themselves. . . . A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodern thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this is constant (Lyotard 2001, p.60).

The definition seizes time and transforms it into space. This is the postmodern moment. It is a space of uncertainty, interrogation, negotiation and awareness that "everything is text." Barthes (1968, p.64) elaborates: "We know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture."

Lyotard's position is one which questions "meta-narratives of history" or the "overarching narratives and stories" which provide the "foundations of modern thought" that enable claims to 'truth' and 'objectivity' (Mcrobbie 1994, p.64). For Lyotard, all these meta-narratives on which 'rules' are founded are fictional constructs. 'Facts' exist only within a

provisionally accepted framework and notions of ‘truth and objectivity’ are not fixed, steady or permanent. There are no absolutes; things are neither stable nor static.

For Lyotard, the Enlightenment promised science as pure knowledge and as narrative-free practice, but that picture of pure knowledge was itself part of a very powerful story which helped legitimize capitalist exploitation. Therefore, beware of meta-narratives. Knowledge is not pure or in the minds but moves in a game. (McRobbie 1994, pp. 64-65)

The postmodern admits the idea of relativity of perspective and with the absence of common ground from which to interpret ‘reality,’ universalistic claims are no longer possible. There is no single story, narrative, or **H**istory. It is, after all, not the narrative per se that Lyotard was incredulous of, but the *meta* narrative—the variety that claims primacy over all other narratives. In the same manner, the product of historiography (the writing of history) is a poetic construct. History is no longer seen in terms of past and present but a text formed at the intersection of particular contexts and subjectivities. History is not fixed or permanent, but a ‘provisional truth’ that begins with every narration. It is no longer stable in its commonly accepted definition and through the strategy of counter-memory, the ‘truth’ of **H**istory can be challenged.

The postmodern awareness is that both history and literature are discourses, and thus not to be talked in terms of truth, as much as ‘whose truth’. History then, in Foucault’s terms, may become ‘counter-memory’: the process of reading history against its grain, of taking an acknowledged active role in the interpretation of history rather than a passive viewing role. Counter-memory intervenes in history rather than chronicles it. This intervention is precisely the role of the postmodern literature which Linda Hutcheon called ‘historiographic metafiction.’ The historiographic metafictionist refuses the possibility of looking to and writing about the past “as it really was.” Rather, s/he takes on the active role and ‘does’ the past, participates, questions and interrogates (Marshall 1992, p.150).

Through counter-memory, the process of signification or the “process whereby meaning is produced and at the same time as subjects fabricated and positioned in societal relations” (Marshall 1996, p.96), rather than the act of validation of past history (of “what really happened”) and of past representations is highlighted. The relevant question shifts from the close-ended question “What” to the open-ended “How” and “Why.”

This paper examines representative poems in Franklin Cimatú’s “Routine Series.” The writer originally envisioned 13 poems for this series, which draws from research on *bodabil*, the Filipino version of the vaudeville, and his “rediscovery” of an early Filipino writer, Carlos Bulosan. Six of these “Routine Poems” are included in the anthology which has been appended. Others are currently underway

Whereas the word “routine” is one which calls in ideas of habit, and monotony, compliance and repetition, Franklin Cimatú’s “Routine Poems” may perhaps be seen as the writer’s most active engagement with **H**istory. “Routine,” too, brings in the ideas of “rule,” “conventional exercise,” the notion of “constructedness” and the mechanisms of control which metanarrative employs to be able to authenticate **T**ru<sup>th</sup> within a particular perspective. I indicate the terms here with initial boldface capital letters to refer to the metanarratives which make absolutistic claims. The poems included in this collection draw inspiration from scripted stage acts, more particularly the vaudevillian routines of figures from Philippine *Bodabil*, Pugo and Tugo. In some poems, this “scriptedness” is extended to contemplations on the plight of migrant workers. Perhaps, the main idea which underlies these poems is that familiar adage: the whole world, is a stage where we are all players, and it is by pure circumstance that we are assigned the “roles” we must play.

“The Sweet Pea Routine” (2002c) is a component poem of the “Routine Series.” This particular poem reveals the wide variety of sources and structures from which postmodernism appropriates in its parodic re-presentation. Here, “parody” is used in the postmodern sense which contains the terms intertextuality, appropriation, ironic quotation, pastiche and is reflective of the critical nature of postmodern practice (Hutcheon 2003).

[T]his parodic reprise of the past of art is not nostalgic; it is always critical. It is also not a-historical or de-historicizing; it does not wrest past art from its original historical context and reassemble it into some presentist spectacle. Instead, through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and how ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference (Hutcheon 2003, p. 89).

The poem illustrates how postmodern procedural poems can take on shapes that do not derive from traditional poetic structures. “The Sweet Pea Routine” is reminiscent of a music video montage or television channel surfing with a remote control:

#### The Sweet Pea Routine

“And they shall make themselves utterly bald for thee, and gird them with sack-cloth, and they shall weep for thee in bitterness of heart and bitter wailing.”

-Ezekiel 27:31

<b>P</b> (juggling the ball):	O The Time Is Not For Taking Prisoners
<b>T</b> (jiggling the ball):	Kill all above the age of ten
<b>P</b> (jingling the bell):	O Lord, our Father, our young patriots
<b>T</b> (jiggling the bell):	Idol of our heart, go forth in battle
<b>P</b> (giggling the bull):	Be thou near them—in spirit—
<b>T</b> (gagging the bull):	We also go forth from the sweet peace
<b>P</b> (hagging the bill):	Sweet peas
<b>T</b> (bagging the bill):	Of our loved ones to smite the foe
<b>P</b> (bangling the boll):	Filipinos come quick
<b>T</b> (bandling the boll):	Heaven watch the Philippines
<b>P</b> (handling the ball):	Keep us safe from harm
<b>T</b> (tolling the bell):	Damn, damn the Filipino
<b>P</b> (rolling the bill):	Pockmarked, khakiac ladron
<b>T</b> (bolling the claude):	Underneath the starry flag
<b>P</b> (browing the robert):	Civilize him with a krag
<b>T</b> (irving the john):	And we’ve got a Filipino
<b>P</b> (redding the otis):	Dear mom
<b>T</b> (cummings the e.e.):	This shooting human beings
<b>P</b> (stribling the t.s.):	Beats rabbit hunting all to pieces
<b>T</b> (harding the warren):	Sweet pieces
<b>P</b> (shearing the george):	We killed a few to teach a lesson
<b>T</b> (whiting the george):	And you bet they learned it
<b>P</b> (cushing the harvey):	Westward, Philippines through Hawaii
<b>T</b> (hawking the stephen):	Eastward. Hawaii through Philippines

**P** (pauling the linus): Which do you prefer? plague before leprosy  
**T** (channing the ed): Or leprosy before plague  
**P** (kipling the rudyard): The end of the flight's a tombstone white  
**T** (pershing the john): With the name of the late deceased  
**P** (lessing the doris): And the epitaph drear: A Fool lies here  
**T** (tao-shing the kwan): Who tried to hustle the East  
**P** (marking the twain): They say I've got brown brothers here  
**T** (marking the agustin): But I still draw the line  
**P** (rooting the elihu): He may be a brother of Big Bill Taft  
**T** (makiling the maria): But he's no brother of mine  
**P** (keesing the felix): This country of thee  
**T** (stalling the carl): Sweet land of liberty  
**P** (macli-ing the dulag): And keep us forever  
**T** (bashing the head): And keep us forever  
**P** (heading the bash): Come out colonel, the ball has begun.

THEY SAID IT, NOT US. Lines 1-2 from Gen. Jake "Howling Wilderness" Smith. Lines 3-6 from Mark Twain's "War prayer". Line 8 is the first line of Lenny Bruce's "How to Talk Dirty and Influence People. Lines 10-11 and 37-38 from Irving Berlin's "Heaven Watch the Philippines." Lines 12-15 is the U.S. Army's version of Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic". Line 16 is from Carson McCuller's "Reflection in the Golden Eye". Lines 17-19 from a letter of one of the soldiers. Lines 20-21 from Pvt. William Christner. Lines 22-25 from a condensed version of Thomas Brackett Reed's writings. Lines 26-29 from Kipling's "Naulakha." Lines 30-33 from a song. The last line from Major Wilder Metcalf of the Kansas detachment awakening his sleeping commander, Col. Frederick Funston, after the Grayson affair that started the U.S.-Phil. War.

On its surface, the text appears to be very highly cohesive, this being primarily because of the repetition of structural elements, especially on the left hand side of the text as printed. Cohesion is primarily achieved by manipulation of elements on the lateral / syntagmic plane through replacement of letters to form new constructions, which may not be explicitly intelligible (juggling-jiggling-jingling- giggling- gagging-haggling, etc.), but nevertheless convenient in allowing for an intermediate stage in the mutation into the next possible intelligible construction. As one component of the surface structure of the word is replaced, it recalls the previous construction and at the same time, accentuates its difference from the latter. As letters are displaced and replaced one at a time, the shifts are gradual; there are no gaps.

As the poem progresses, the game becomes more elaborate as words are manipulated to transform family names into verbal forms (browning the robert, redding the otis, irving the john, etc.). Further into the poem, this 'play'<sup>1</sup> on words transforms into a 'game' of punning (Sweet peace, sweet peas, sweet pieces) where meaning is likewise re-created through the double act of recall and displacement.

The text's structure in terms of cohesion seems very tight, yet the poem itself does appear to be very coherent. In the same manner that it is possible to create a sentence which may be

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1 Use of term here incorporates the idea of "volatility" with "game", "contest." Lyotard (1985) employs the term "joust".

grammatically sound but essentially senseless, “meaning” in the traditional sense of the word, up to this point, eludes the reader.

To create the poem, the writer has wrested lines and phrases from their original contexts and joined these in “cut-and paste” fashion to create the poem, which is essentially a script of a dialogue for the characters, Pugo (P) and Tugo (T). In addition, the left column portion, which contains ‘stage directions’(as represented by the items enclosed in parentheses) for the ‘dialogue’ recall Saussurean linguistics (‘Cat is cat because it is not cap or bat.’). This poem is particularly interesting. Difference in articulation of words on the left side has its cognate decontextualized statement on the right. The poem charts the slippage of meaning in language.

The poem draws attention to the impossibility of a neutral perception of ‘reality’ and ‘truth’ in the impartial, ‘objective’ sense. “Meaning” is not found in the word itself, but is provisional and determined by the “rules” at play within the system in which it is articulated (in the case of this particular poem, the parenthetical “stage directions” which determine the manner in which the speaker makes the statement). On one hand, it echoes with the idea of the arbitrariness of signs within language. On the other, it conveys the idea that facts do not exist in the objective sense. As the oft-quoted line goes, ‘everything is text,’ and absolute truth, reality and certainty are thus put to question. The foregrounding of ambiguity ensures that the text remains open. There can no longer be claims to universality since truth and reality are relative. Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), adds:

The question of historiography, the writing of histories within present-day constructions and concerns, reposes the infinite space of analysis... In writing, the past is represented, linguistically and put together, fabulated, and becomes a narrative, a story, a literary genre (cited in Chambers, 1990, 109-110).

Fact and fiction are apposed so that illusion and reality become impossible to differentiate. The “Hawes-Hare Cutting Routine” (Cimatu 1996a) a pun on “The Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act,” a bill which ensured the presence of US military presence in the Philippines long after the declaration of Philippine Independence, describes the scripted nature of a magic act that is designed to sell an illusion, a routine too, which has been ‘played out’ at certain points in actual history.

#### THE HAWES-HARE-CUTTING ROUTINE

“Make Thee bald; and poll thee for thy delicate children; enlarge the baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity for thee”—Micah 1:16

O The Time They Are A Men’s Soul Tryin’

Bare souls, dead souls, but mostly the well-heeled ones

Who got themselves into the World War II collaboration trials

And Pugo and Tugo laid low for a while and grew their hair back

Lest they be suspected of le coolalabooration

Like those French maidens who cavorted with Nazi soldiers

And were rounded-up, Burma-shaved and paraded

On the avenues and cursed and pelted.

Pugo and Tugo before they grew back their hair were the main act

In the voodooville about to make a comeback. Their hair back,

They found themselves unknown. They sought a living

As stagehands now, sometimes being called back to testify,  
“Yes, you, on the third row, seat number twenty-seven, come up  
And show the audience if there’s a trick or we’ll saw you in half”  
Or “We’ll shoot you” or “Frighten you till your hair stands up.”

Once a famous Indian magician on an Asian visit  
Came and asked Pugo before the show to sit  
On the third row, seat number twenty-seven so he can call on him  
And testify that Tugo, also supposedly taken randomly,  
Was actually sawed in half. That being the agreement,  
“Yes, you, on the third row, seat number twenty-seven, come up  
And tell us if this was actually sawed in half.”  
And Pugo, being Pugo and not you,  
Told the truth and proceeded to show  
How it was all done with mirrors.

And all the more, others were copying their acts  
With names like Pogi & Togi, Pago & Tago, Pugak & Tugak.  
All shaved heads and nothing else.

In the U.S. Hall of Justice, Truth and the American Way  
Representatives Hare & Hawes & Cutting got their acts together  
For the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act  
Which was ratified as the RP-US Military Bases Agreement  
Which was ratified as the comebacking act of Pugo & Tugo  
Which was called the “How’s Hair Cutting Act”  
Which they might have misspelt but not misinterpreted  
Which goes like this:

Tugo on the first night sat on the bare stage  
And asked everyone in the audience to cut his hair  
With scissors, knives, hands or teeth  
And one by one they went up there until he was completely bald  
And then it was Pugo’s turn in the second night  
Then you on the third row seat number twenty-seven and so on.

The poem ends with the following stanza:

Filipinos go bald thinking it’s in their genes  
Filipinos get bald thinking it’s the fashion  
Not knowing they are a part of the longest, continuous post-

Modern symbolic rebellious deliberately spontaneous  
Vaudevillian act still going on. Never know  
Your time to go.

Similarly, “The Numero Routine” (Cimatu 1996b), expounds on an imaginary ‘vaudevillian sketch’ which is a system whose ‘secret’ is ‘encoded in numbers. The poem illustrates the all too human propensity to piece together narratives from the rubble of the past, to make these fragments ‘work’ anew, to confer ‘sense’ on what would otherwise be chaos. “The Numero Routine” begins with a quote from an article on the *Bodabil*:

“The lack of script meant this part of the Bodabil was left to oral tradition, and to this day, nobody has compiled these comedy sketches developed by the country’s best comedians ever. One example is the sketch called...”

--J.P. Fenix

#### THE NUMERO ROUTINE

O The Times When They Were Yang and Yin  
The moro-moro’s moribund and the buddhaville’s in.  
T’was pistaym and people’d rather go high than sober  
Not that it matters but you must remember  
The time when Pugo & Tugo hit on the idea  
Of the Numero Routine. Hilariously morose  
Not that it matters but you must remember  
How it goes.

A lady would write a number on a paper  
And show it to the audience except for Tugo  
Who was meditating on the left corner of the theater  
Because he was clairvoyant, you see, Great Swami Rabindranath.  
X-ray Visionary with a (hee haw) crystal ball for a head  
But turbaned now and held by a rope so he won’t levitate.  
So he knows. But he doesn’t really and Pugo  
Has to tell him somehow or else their scam be discovered.  
So he hits Tugo on the head, the number of times corresponding  
To the digit itself. Sometimes he would shout to him the number  
Of words equal to the digit again. Example: 4  
Or so it goes.

Until the lady  
Writes the digit “0”. The audience  
Burst out laughing when they realize Pugo  
Can not hit Tugo and can not tell him so.  
So Pugo mimicked the moon, the stars wheeling.



The cycle of life and death, Wagnerian ring sung down low.  
And of course, Tugo wouldn't know  
And invariably gave the wrong number.  
And they had the same routine and no one came to resist  
Not that it matters but you must remember  
That a war has started and the, 'is it safe now?' Japanese  
Wanted Pugo & Tugo to corroborate, sorry, collaborate  
With them. Not that it matters but you must remember  
Art doesn't owe anything to politics  
And collaboration was not a dreaded word for an artiste  
And bodabil is low-brow, unidealistic and populist  
So they did not want to collaborate just because  
But you cannot say to the Japanese, "Noh!"  
Because that means kabuki where they get disemboweled anyway  
So the Numero Routine had to stay  
And Pugo and Tugo would bash each other on the heads  
But instead of hitting numbers, they hit on letters instead—  
One for "A" to twenty-six for "Z" not counting punctuations.  
And the letters spell telegraphic messages  
For the guerillas in the audience to transcribe.  
So messages like MEETING IN ZAPOTE required 179 bashes  
Not that it matters, but you must remember  
That Pugo and Tugo used real baseball bats instead of cardboard  
To demonstrate to the audience the "horror of war."

It was unfortunate that the duo weren't awarded  
The highest medal of civilians, comedians and the brain-dead.  
As no one in the audience  
Were aware of the message.

But the war has not really ended  
As in some small hours  
I still feel a dull throbbing on my head  
Which I try to calculate to the letter  
And pen in hand, try to decipher.

(1989)

In the end, the poem takes on the mien of an act of rationalization to 'explain' a present condition. It is the human mind that creates the connections between and among the essentially separate frames/stories/narratives. In all narratives, the speaker/subject is completely entangled in narrative production where fidelity is not to Truth but to possibility

and plausibility of the story fashioned from the flotsam brought in by unpredictable tides in what Iain Chambers (1990) refers to as a “poetics of the possible.”

As with “The Hawes-Hare-Cutting Routine,” the mechanisms that lie beneath the surface are revealed and truth is ‘de-naturalized.’ Nothing is congenital; everything is constructed/written/inscribed. Fact does not occur in its regularly accepted ‘objective’ sense, but like the ‘found object’, is a fragment transformed at the hands of an artisan in conformity with the his present desires, “foregrounding above all the textuality of its representations” (Hutcheon 2000, p. 88).

Within the postmodern space is a perceptible shift from either-or constructions to both/and propositions. “The End-Of-The-Road Routine” (Cimatu 2002b) brings in the idea of the inseparable twin binaries through the figure of Siamese conjoined twins Chang and Eng, and their alternative incarnation, Pugo and Tugo who must coexist to ensure each other’s survival in a space of inextricable opposites. The poem can be seen as a postmodern interrogation of the notion of static, unitary Self animated by Truth.

The final section of the poem reads:

Dream dies first. The last three hours  
Eng spent alone; Chang, his other half, slackened  
Like the murdered body strapped to its murderer  
Under the Boxer Codex to make vivid the remorse.  
The last moments spent in guilt and terror  
Yet wanting his half-brother to be nearer.  
Face to face in hope of resuscitation.  
The unshared agony of Pugo took decades.  
But all the same: The ant will bring home  
But will not partake of the grasshopper. Like an unborn twin  
Lodged forever in his brother; Tugo withered within  
The cicatrix left on the head, smaller  
Than birthmark and dormant throughout the solo act  
Called “The Normalcy Routine” including a TV sitcom  
That endeared us every Thursday night at seven.  
Then the mole grew, re-creating  
The partnership.

The situation recalls a word in Ilocano, a Philippine language— “*cadua*,” which roughly translates as “the double” (dua=two or “the/my other (one),” in the spirit of companionship. In the case of Pugo and Tugo, the idea of composite self gains an added nuance. The “other” never truly disappears. It only lies dormant, perhaps undetected, waiting to ‘recreate the partnership.’

How does one make sense of things that come to him from the past? Narrative is a ‘mechanism,’ an ‘envelope,’ ‘genre, a ‘medium’—a “process, relying on an untotalizable range of effects ... [N]arrative is fundamental to most, if not all societies and cultures throughout history.” Each narrative is a unique construct (Wolfreys 2004, p.163). ‘Historiography’ is a word which invokes, above all, the act of storytelling. History is but another compendium of the countless stories that human beings like to tell each other about each other and about themselves.

There is an amusing story that tells how Frank Cimatú came to be known as ‘King.’ ‘Angking’ was his mother’s pet name for him, he avers, which would make the transformation into ‘King’ rather convenient and highly plausible. Further prodding, however, encourages the revelation that this is not entirely accurate. At some point, or so the story goes, the family had a dog. The dog died; a space had to be filled; affections required reshuffling. Being the youngest, he was the logical replacement for the pet, whom they had fondly called ‘King.’

Franklin Cimatú, born in Baguio City in the Philippines in 1965, is an intersection of many stories. Like the offspring of many others born in this city to migrant parents, Cimatú’s genealogy begins elsewhere. And like many others too, the attachment to the city goes much deeper than the fact that this is his place of birth. Baguio’s history is a narrative of invention, intervention, displacement and reconfiguration, attributes, which have likewise figured prominently in the personal history of Franklin Cimatú.

Like others who grew up in the Baguio of the 60s and 70s, he remembers a place which is now long gone. The entire city was a virtual playground where no boundaries were set for games of hide-and-seek, and the game ended only when it got too dark. The entire city was his backyard and the gang would wander into Burnham Park clad in their pajamas. He remembers the Shaolin movies in the old Luna Theater at the city’s Malcolm Square, now taken over by a warren of used clothing stores. He recalls the grove of pine on the hill that he played in as a child, where now only one pine tree remains. He remembers the house of his youth, shaken to the ground during the 1990 earthquake which devastated the city and many areas in the Northern Philippines. Poems reflect the transitory nature of past experiences.

Today, the facades of this past reality may have waned but their essences persist with puissance in the poet’s “homeland” where he is firmly rooted. For Franklin Cimatú, this homeland goes by the name: “Baguio”. It is a floating world that has been forged in the furnace of his personal consciousness—a world largely his own, which adheres to the protocol of invention and revision. These processes are paramount. “‘Baguio’ is not the actual Baguio for me anymore,” he says, “it has become a mythic place. It may not be worth it but what can I do? I was born in Baguio [so] I might as well make a myth out of Baguio. I like the poetry of place. [One has] to have roots somewhere.”(Cimatú 2002a)

Baguio, the geographical area may wane; it does not matter because the “Baguio” of the poet’s creation endures and continues to expand. It is a world that has built its foundation on a suitcase incessantly filling with memories that are continuously folded and refolded. In this poetics of the pack rat (interestingly also called the mountain rat), Cimatú travels through a most unusual jungle where the only constant is inconstancy, and where endurance requires incessant revision, reinvention, and endless appropriation.

Cimatú expounds on his poetic process: “...when you tell me a story, then it becomes mine after a while. I will have wrested it from you.” On the series that he refers to as the “Routine Poems,” he adds: “The seed of the routine poems started in 1988 when I read an article in the *Sunday Inquirer Magazine* about Pugo and Tugo routines (purportedly for the Bodabil musical which was set for staging at about the same time) and that not one of these routines can be recalled by the sources. ... So it became my *Eureka!* moment. Why not invent the routines of Tugo and Pugo and make them [mine] somehow? (Cimatú 2003)

Routine is generally understood as a repetition of that which has already been done but in this case, memory becomes re-articulation, a re-membering in cybernetic mode. This is nostalgia of the postmodern variety where the conjured world is “not simply the final stage of a poignant narrative...it is also the site of the ruins of previous orders in which diverse histories, languages, memories and traces continually entwine and recombine in the construction of new horizons” (Chambers 1990, p. 112).

Cimatu continues: “It’s like Borges conjuring his own world. It’s not my world, but it’s my way of saying that time and space are relative—that anytime is my time as long as I lay my word on it, that anyone becomes me because I conjured them in my poem”(Cimatu 2002a).

The statement seems to imply the desire for a stable center in which to anchor consciousness, yet at the end is the return to the enigma of being ‘rooted in rootlessness’ and the idea that ultimately, the only stories that anyone can truly tell are those that are his own.

Perhaps, this desire for coherence is prompted by an impulse to be reactionary. Then again, perhaps it is not. The former would imply the existence of a self desperately trying to preserve its center; the latter implies a hybridity that resists the centripetal pull of a defined focal point. The former is spurred on by a consciousness that seeks comfort in the maintenance of “the order of things”; the latter is one that revels in the prospect of excitement in chaos. Fritjof Capra (1977) quotes physicist Werner Heisenberg as an epigraph to the book *The Tao of Physics*:

It is probably true quite generally that in the history of human thinking the most fruitful developments frequently take place at those points where two different lines of thought meet. These lines may have their roots in quite different parts of human culture, in different times or different cultural environments or different religious traditions: hence if they actually meet, that is, if they are at least so much related to each other that a real interaction can take place, then one may hope that new and interesting things may follow.

Like the city of his birth, Cimatu’s poetry is a place of blending and intermingling. Poetry is propelled by an impulse that compels the individual to negotiate between worlds and faced with uncertainty, plunges him headlong into a new phase in the occupation of mapping out the uncharted terrain that lies ahead. In true postmodern fashion, the enterprise is not one that seeks to affirm the Self with Identity or to validate History. Poetry as liminal practice is one that creates the ruptures that permit forays into boundless realms of possibility. It is one, which seeks out to probe into the highly charged interstices, which at once connect and divide.

For Franklin Cimatu, poetry is that exploration. It is not a quest for stasis in definition in the certainties of “What is?” but an adventure into the infinite possibilities unleashed in the fecund and volatile nexus that is a Möbius band of “What if?”

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## Appendix: The Routine Poems

The writer originally envisioned 13 poems for this series, which draws from research on *bodabil* and his “rediscovery of Carlos Bulosan.” Six of these “Routine Poems” are included here. Cimatu says that “Asparagus,” published in *Philippines Free Press* is actually part of this series.

Poems included in this collection are the critical texts which appear in the form which represents the author’s final intentions. An exception has been made in the case of “Asparagus” which was published in the *Philippines Free Press* in 1996. Both the published copy and the original text as component part of the “Routine Series” are included in the following collection.

A.

ASPARAGUS \*

In memory of Phillip Vera Cruz

The time before dreams, real jobs and the Resurrection  
 Was the only time the asparagus in California could be harvested.  
 The ground plowed weeks before the spears at their most tender  
 It was always before dawn when you stick your knife under roots  
 And proceed to yank the green shoots out. A half mile of asparagus  
 Cradled in your left hand, dumped in sleds, packed in crates,  
 Loaded for the East Coast, peeled to their whiteness and dissolved  
 In soup for dinner. We also dream of their women at night  
 Overwhelming them with wreathes of dance tickets meant to last forever  
 As you slow-waltzed your inner rage groping for inner thighs,

Hard-hearted hands tracing the tender lines of officious longing.  
Maybe she, too, knew that passion, the stubborn hold of grape tendrils  
But love is a land of opportunity we will never be granted  
Citizenship. Desire is another state where jobs are hopeless.  
A half-mile of asparagus to work on. A half century of love's reversal.  
You let her rest her head on your left shoulder like a harvest of green spears  
Imagining a love dissolving at ten cents a minute on a \$2 daily wage  
Before the unnecessary illusion of a vanished ocean as the band was dismantled.  
You go back to a bunkhouse with walls translucent like skin lampshade,  
A sniper's bullet piercing easily like Cupid's arrow across a labor leader's  
Valentine heart. You mail to P.I. you studio portrait of suits and pomade  
Dedicating vacuous assurances of doing fine, settling down and coming home  
And not why in the small hours the asparagus were at their most tender  
And the shoots like taxi dancers waiting for love deciding to hold back  
The dawning of the Dream and the rebirth of everything we longed for.

---

\* "On Friday, April 7, 1939 Good Friday a general strike was declared. This was an unprecedented strike—not a single Filipino asparagus cutter reported for work. Within 36 hours, the million dollar asparagus industry capitulated. There was a caucus among the farmers. They gave up. And the Asparagus farmers won the strike"

Sebastian Inosanto, *The History of Trinity Presbyterian Church*, 1974

Published: *Philippines Free Press* (Feb. 24, 1996)

(In an interview in 1992, the author notes that this poem was originally conceptualized as a "routine poem," and that revisions were made for the 1996 publication. The following is the same poem as a component poem of the "Routine Series.")

A-1.

The Asparagus Routine

In memory of Phillip Vera Cruz

"For every head shall be bald, and every beard dipped: upon the hands shall be cutting  
and upon the loins sack cloth." Jeremiah 47:5

O The Time Between Dreams When The Stars Stopped Stirring

In Spring's small hours when only then their asparagus could be harvested

The ground plowed weeks before and their spears were at their most tender.

It was always before dawn when you stick your knife under the roots

And proceed to yank the green shoots out. A half mile of asparagus

Cradled in your left hand, dumped in sleds, packed in crates,

Loaded for the East Coast, peeled to their whiteness and dissolved

In soup for dinner. We also dream of their women at night

Overwhelming them with wreaths of dance tickets meant to last forever  
 As you slowdanced your inner rage groping for inner thighs,  
 Hard-hearted hands tracing the tender lines of officious longing.  
 Maybe she, too, knew that passion, the stubborn hold of grape tendrils  
 But love is a land of opportunity we will never be granted  
 Citizenship. Desire is another state where jobs are hopeless.  
 A half-mile of asparagus to work on. A half-century of love's reversal.  
 You let her rest her head on your left shoulder like a harvest of green spears  
 Imagining a love dissolving at ten cents a minute on \$2 daily wage  
 Before the necessary illusion of a vanished ocean as the band was dismantled.  
 You go back to a bunkhouse with walls translucent like skin lampshade,  
 A sniper's bullet piercing easily like Cupid's arrow across a labor leader's  
 Valentine heart. You mail to P.I. your studio portrait of suits and pomade  
 Dedicating vacuous assurances of doing fine and coming home  
 And not why in the small hours the asparagus were at their most tender  
 And the shoots like taxi dancers awaiting love deciding to hold back  
 The dawning of the Dream that even the stars stopped stirring.

“On Friday, April 7, 1939 Good Friday a general strike was declared. This was an unprecedented strike—not a single Filipino asparagus cutter reported for work. Within 36 hours, the million dollar asparagus industry capitulated. There was a caucus among the farmers. They gave up. And the Asparagus farmers won the strike”

Sebastian Inosanto, *The History of Trinity Presbyterian Church*, 1974

(Copy from the author, Unpublished TMs)

B.

“The lack of script meant this part of the Bodabil was left to oral tradition, and to this day, nobody has compiled these comedy sketches developed by the country's best comedians ever. One example is the sketch called...”

--J.P. Fenix

#### THE NUMERO ROUTINE

O The Times When They Were *Yang* and *Yin*  
 The moro-moro's moribund and the buddherville's in.  
 T'was *pistaym* and people'd rather go high than sober  
 Not that it matters but you must remember  
 The time when Pugo & Tugo hit on the idea  
 Of the Numero Routine. Hilariously morose  
 Not that it matters but you must remember  
 How it goes.

A lady would write a number on a paper  
 And show it to the audience except for Tugo

Who was meditating on the left corner of the theater  
Because he was clairvoyant, you see, *Great Swami Rabindranath*.  
*X-ray Visionary* with a (*hee haw*) crystal ball for a head  
But turbaned now and held by a rope so he won't levitate.  
So he knows. But he doesn't really and Pugo  
Has to tell him somehow or else their scam be discovered.  
So he hits Tugo on the head, the number of times corresponding  
To the digit itself. Sometimes he would shout to him the number  
Of words equal to the digit again. Example: 4  
Or so it goes.

Until the lady

Writes the digit "0". The audience  
Burst out laughing when they realize Pugo  
Can not hit Tugo and can not tell him so.  
So Pugo mimicked the moon, the stars wheeling.  
The cycle of life and death, Wagnerian ring sung down low.  
And of course, Tugo wouldn't know  
And invariably gave the wrong number.  
And they had the same routine and no one came to resist  
Not that it matters but you must remember  
That a war has started and the, 'is it safe now?' Japanese  
Wanted Pugo & Tugo to corroborate, sorry, collaborate  
With them. Not that it matters but you must remember  
Art doesn't owe anything to politics  
And collaboration was not a dreaded word for an artiste  
And bodabil is low-brow, unidealistic and populist  
So they did not want to collaborate just because  
But you cannot say to the Japanese, "*Noh!*"  
Because that means *kabuki* where they get disemboweled anyway  
So the Numero Routine had to stay  
And Pugo and Tugo would bash each other on the heads  
But instead of hitting numbers, they hit on letters instead—  
One for "A" to twenty-six for "Z" not counting punctuations.  
And the letters spell telegraphic messages  
For the guerillas in the audience to transcribe.  
So messages like MEETING IN ZAPOTE required 179 bashes  
Not that it matters, but you must remember  
That Pugo and Tugo used real baseball bats instead of cardboard  
To demonstrate to the audience the "horror of war."



It was unfortunate that the duo weren't awarded  
The highest medal of civilians, comedians and the brain-dead.  
As no one in the audience  
Was aware of the message.

But the war has not really ended  
As in some small hours  
I still feel a dull throbbing on my head  
Which I try to calculate to the letter  
And pen in hand, try to decipher.  
(1989)

C.

#### THE HAWES-HARE-CUTTING ROUTINE

“Make Thee bald; and poll thee for thy delicate children; enlarge the baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity for thee”—Micah 1:16

O The Time They Are A Men's Soul Tryin'  
Bare souls, dead souls, but mostly the well-heeled ones  
Who got themselves into the World War II collaboration trials  
And Pugo and Tugo laid low for a while and grew their hair back  
Lest they be suspected of le coolalabooration  
Like those French maidens who cavorted with Nazi soldiers  
And were rounded-up, Burma-shaved and paraded  
On the avenues and cursed and pelted.

Pugo and Tugo before they grew back their hair were the main act  
In the voodooville about to make a comeback. Their hair back,  
They found themselves unknown. They sought a living  
As stagehands now, sometimes being called back to testify,  
“Yes, you, on the third row, seat number twenty-seven, come up

And show the audience if there's a trick or we'll saw you in half"  
Or “We'll shoot you” or “Frighten you till your hair stands up.”

Once a famous Indian magician on an Asian visit  
Came and asked Pugo before the show to sit  
On the third row, seat number twenty-seven so he can call on him  
And testify that Tugo, also supposedly taken randomly,  
Was actually sawed in half. That being the agreement,  
“Yes, you, on the third row, seat number twenty-seven, come up  
And tell us if this was actually sawed in half.”

And Pugo, being Pugo and not you,  
Told the truth and proceeded to show  
How it was all done with mirrors.

And all the more, others were copying their acts  
With names like Pogi & Togi, Pago & Tago, Pugak & Tugak.  
All shaved heads and nothing else.

In the U.S. Hall of Justice, Truth and the American Way  
Representatives Hare & Hawes & Cutting got their acts together  
For the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act  
Which was ratified as the RP-US Military Bases Agreement

Which was ratified as the comebacking act of Pugo & Tugo  
Which was called the "How's Hair Cutting Act"  
Which they might have misspelt but not misinterpreted  
Which goes like this:

Tugo on the first night sat on the bare stage  
And asked everyone in the audience to cut his hair  
With scissors, knives, hands or teeth  
And one by one they went up there until he was completely bald

And then it was Pugo's turn in the second night  
Then you on the third row seat number twenty-seven and so on.

Filipinos go bald thinking it's in their genes  
Filipinos get bald thinking it's the fashion  
Not knowing they are a part of the longest, continuous post-  
Modern symbolic rebellious deliberately spontaneous  
Vaudevillian act still going on. Never know  
Your time to go.

D.

#### THE END-OF-THE ROAD-ROUTINE

"The audience warmed up to two bald heads hitting each other endlessly. Some even attribute Pugo's developing cancer to those early days of gimmickry." Emmie Altamirano, THE ESSENTIAL PUGO

O The Times They Were A-Chang/Eng  
Dreams And Responsibilities, Duty and Eng/Changment;  
Circus freaks bound with one heart  
And one navel only: Twins,

Siamese, identical, fraternal  
Or papier-mache, depending on the clamor  
Of the audience in their local vaudevilles: identicals  
Leading wars and wardances in African deserts  
Being fearless incarnations of gods and hyenas;  
The Americans who find horror where we find  
Our lucky charms, tried to pull Chang away from Eng,  
Pricked their united states arranged their marriages.  
But Pugo & Tugo only have their heads shaved  
To translate mutual relationships to umbilical.

Duty drinks excessively to benumb Passion,  
Who gets the hang-over. Eng/Tugo gambles  
And Moral Obligation gets its pockets picked;  
But always their cooperation gets front billing:  
Pratfalls instinctive, cue cards all in the mind.  
Touchiness and sibling rivalry becoming an obsession,  
Becoming a parody: Chang and Eng arrested  
For assaulting each other. Pugo and Tugo  
Biting each other's ears, bashing each other's heads  
With kerosene cans and Russian novels, with determination  
And uncatcha-cha-chable rhythm like warriors in that Ifugao epic  
Throwing and catching only one spear among them  
When they thought the other was not looking,  
Hitting the message that the war  
Is in the heart of your brother.  
That the African Desert (*hee haw*) is on the head  
Of your brother. Endlessly, Stopping only  
To accumulate calluses on the skull  
For pain to become banal and routinary.  
Or so it seemed.

Dream dies first. The last three hours  
Eng spent alone; Chang, his other half, slackened  
Like the murdered body strapped to its murderer  
Under the Boxer Codex to make vivid the remorse.  
The last moments spent in guilt and terror  
Yet wanting his half-brother to be nearer.  
Face to face in hope of resuscitation.  
The unshared agony of Pugo took decades.  
But all the same: The ant will bring home  
But will not partake of the grasshopper. Like an unborn twin

Lodged forever in his brother; Tugo withered within  
The cicatrix left on the head, smaller  
Than birthmark and dormant throughout the solo act  
Called '*The Normalcy Routine*' including a TV sitcom  
That endeared us every Thursday night at seven.  
Then the mole grew, re-creating  
The partnership.

E.

#### THE HOLTVILLE ROUTINE

"One day, a Filipino came to Holtville, with his American wife and their child. It was a blazing noon and the child was hungry. The strangers went to a little restaurant and sat down at a table. While they were refused service, they stayed on, hoping for some consideration. But it was no use. Bewildered, they walked outside. Suddenly, the child began to cry with hunger. The Filipino went back to the restaurant and asked if he could buy a bottle of milk for his child.

"It's only for my baby," he said humbly.

The proprietor came out from behind the counter. "For your baby?" he shouted.

"Yes sir," said the Filipino.

The proprietor pushed him violently outside. "If you say that again in my place, I'll bash your head!" he shouted aloud so he would attract attention."

Carlos Bulosan, AMERICA IS IN THE HEART

(on which this routine was based)

O The Time They Were To Everything  
And a time to every purpose under heaven  
And a time to plant and a time to reap they were there  
From the fish canneries to grape valleys, from orange orchards  
To pineapple plantations we are called till it's time to go  
And Pugo and Tugo goes to see these farms in California  
And just in time to rest they goes to speak to Filipinos against hunger  
And hate and miscegenation laws and a time to unite  
And unbeknownst to all five detectives goes inside the hall  
And just when the two were in their act, light goes out  
And the five detectives goes bashing heads and shooting  
And Pugo and Tugo leave and the five goes out with them  
And just when they're about to escape, Pow! Light goes out in them  
And they goes into this car and later, Pugo wakes up  
And he goes moaning, "Owww" and Tugo like a Bessie Smith blues  
And that goes Owww-onlee fo' my beheeybee"

And one of the detectives goes bashing Pugo and Tugo's heads  
 And he goes, "For a friend in Holtville"  
 And the car goes through the woods and stopped  
 And one goes to Pugo, "Can you understand the language?"  
 And Pugo goes dumb, pantomiming that he can't  
 And another goes punching him and another dragged Tugo and another  
 And another goes unconscioning them further  
 And another goes tying the another to a tree and undresses him  
 And another goes, "He's a well-hung son-of-a-bitch"  
 And another goes back to the car and gets tar and feather  
 And goes tarring and feathering them  
 And meanwhile Pugo goes conscious  
 And while the detectives goes blindly drunk  
 And Pugo goes to the bushes and carries Tugo on his back  
 And so they goes out to the road unnoticed  
 And after a while Tugo goes semiconscious  
 And Tugo's ghost goes on with the routine  
 And they goes to a crossroads  
 And Pugo goes, "Where'd we go"  
 And he goes, "And a time to mourn and a time to dance"  
 And he goes, "And a time to gather stones for H-O-L-L-Y-W-O-O-D"  
 And he goes, "And a time for peace and a time for signing for war"  
 And he goes, "It's 1941. For the poor, it's the only hope's here."  
 And he goes, "Will I go?"  
 And Tugo's ghost goes, "Go"  
 (Unpublished, copy from author, March 2002)

F.

#### THE SWEET PEA ROUTINE

"And they shall make themselves utterly bald for thee, and gird them with sack-cloth, and they, and they shall weep for thee in bitterness of heart and bitter wailing."

-Ezekiel 27:31

P ( <i>juggling the ball</i> ):	O The Time Is Not For Taking Prisoners
T ( <i>jiggling the ball</i> ):	Kill all above the age of ten
P ( <i>jingling the bell</i> ):	O Lord, our Father, our young patriots
T ( <i>jiggling the bell</i> ):	Idol of our heart, go forth in battle
P ( <i>giggling the bull</i> ):	Be thou near them—in spirit—
T ( <i>gagging the bull</i> ):	We also go forth from the sweet peace
P ( <i>hagging the bill</i> ):	Sweet peas
T ( <i>bagging the bill</i> ):	Of our loved ones to smite the foe
P ( <i>bangling the boll</i> ):	Filipinos come quick
T ( <i>bandling the boll</i> ):	Heaven watch the Philippines

P ( <i>handling the ball</i> ):	Keep us safe from harm
T ( <i>tolling the bell</i> ):	Damn, damn the Filipino
P ( <i>rolling the bill</i> ):	Pockmarked, khakiac ladron
T ( <i>bolling the claude</i> ):	Underneath the starry flag
P ( <i>browing the robert</i> ):	Civilize him with a krag
T ( <i>irving the john</i> ):	And we've got a Filipino
P ( <i>redding the otis</i> ):	Dear mom
T ( <i>cummings the e.e.</i> ):	This shooting human beings
P ( <i>stribling the t.s.</i> ):	Beats rabbit hunting all to pieces
T ( <i>harding the warren</i> ):	Sweet pieces
P ( <i>shearing the george</i> ):	We killed a few to teach a lesson
T ( <i>whiting the george</i> ):	And you bet they learned it
P ( <i>cushing the harvey</i> ):	Westward, Philippines through Hawaii
T ( <i>hawking the stephen</i> ):	Eastward. Hawaii through Philippines
P ( <i>pauling the linus</i> ):	Which you prefer? plague before leprosy
T ( <i>channing the ed</i> ):	Or leprosy before plague
P ( <i>kipling the rudyard</i> ):	The end of the flight's a tombstone white
T ( <i>pershing the john</i> ):	With the name of the late deceased
P ( <i>lessing the doris</i> ):	And the epitaph drear: A Fool lies here
T ( <i>tao-shing the kwan</i> ):	Who tried to hustle the East
P ( <i>marking the twain</i> ):	They say I've got brown brothers here
T ( <i>marking the agustin</i> ):	But I still draw the line
P ( <i>rooting the elihu</i> ):	He may be a brother of Big Bill Taft
T ( <i>makiling the maria</i> ):	But he's no brother of mine
P ( <i>keesing the felix</i> ):	This country of thee
T ( <i>stalling the carl</i> ):	Sweet land of liberty
P ( <i>macli-ing the dulag</i> ):	And keep us forever
T ( <i>bashing the head</i> ):	And keep us forever
P ( <i>heading the bash</i> ):	Come out colonel, the ball has begun.

THEY SAID IT, NOT US. Lines 1-2 from Gen. Jake "Howling Wilderness" Smith. Lines 3-6 from Mark Twain's "War prayer". Line 8 is the first line of Lenny Bruce's "How to Talk Dirty and Influence People. Lines 10-11 and 37-38 from Irving Berlin's "Heaven Watch the Philippines." Lines 12-15 is the U.S. Army's version of Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic". Line 16 is from Carson McCuller's "Reflection in the Golden Eye". Lines 17-19 from a letter of one of the soldiers. Lines 20-21 from Pvt. William Christner. Lines 22-25 from a condensed version of Thomas Brackett Reed's writings. Lines 26-29 from Kipling's "Naulakha." Lines 30-33 from an anonymous song. The last line from Major Wilder Metcalf of the Kansas detachment awakening his sleeping commander, Col. Frederick Funston, after the Grayson affair that started the U.S.-Phil. War.

(Unpublished, copy from author, 2002)