

## Eileen R. Tabios



### Featured Poet

## JULY

You walk out into ash  
to discover the world's on fire

But we already knew that—

## CIGAR PUFFS

—for Tom, Kevin, Ann, Patrick, and Julie

1.

Dust burns

as we all will

Kindling crumbles

for fire to warm us

as we open books

only to discover

someone else

is wounded

I see salt on your

wet cheeks

and anticipate

the taste of my tears

Now I know why

one longs for dementia:

“No matter where you go

there you are”

The rib-eye pleases

by sacrificing itself

in the fiery skillet

Even butter must burn

for our pleasure:

he whispers, “caramel”

We now know

wine, too, must lapse

to sediment  
to maximize our enjoyment  
Pleasure exacts its price—  
someone hollowed  
the wine bottle  
to create the punt

2.

Dementia cancels memory  
until nostalgia rises  
for a non-existent past—

In the old country  
tobacco leaves were rolled  
against virgins' thighs  
to create cigars—

We never experienced  
or witnessed  
this image of long-haired  
girls that keeps  
surfacing  
in new poems about  
something else—

Dip the tip  
of the cigar into  
a snifter of Armagnac  
before sucking in  
smoke filtered  
through the seduction  
of nostalgia—

Another puff of smoke  
as nostalgia transforms  
itself into hiraeth—

Desire is consistent—  
longing increases  
as the cigar diminishes  
towards death

## The Cruelty of the Novel

So I gave 2019 to the novel and it's October and I've done enough to get an idea of novel publishing and it's another against-the-odds type of activity and I wonder how much of my time and effort I'm able to give to the possibility of big corporate publishing and a (nice) literary agent passed on my novel because it's "not a fit" which of course doesn't have anything to do with writing quality and she still was encouraging but her encouragement was "Persevere because this process is a marathon not a sprint" and I heard and appreciate that advice but the Poetry as ever is calling and hey at least the process turned me to fiction this year and now I have a short story collection accepted for publication and, you know, I can also chalk up the year to research for an essay about "How a First-Time Novelist Attempts to be Published" for which many places probably would be interested in featuring and the planet continues to be choked, my birth land is being traded for money in secret offshore accounts by its president, and negative isms will keep a liar in my resident country's highest office, and I'm talking mere words towards the question, "What if, instead of running a marathon, one would rather dance?" with the attendant question, "But have you done enough to stop persevering?" and more questions, none of which are given clarity by the fact that an acquaintance has decided to end his life which is consistent with his life-long attempts to control everyone and everything around him which, boy, is some staggering crawling finish of falling across the finish line where no one waits to applaud except for a paraplegic stuck there because someone stole her wheelchair to sell for money to feed her children waiting under a bridge who haven't eaten for days so that the family is even eyeing the paltry meat of the skinny family dog who persists with his loving stare at his humans who, surely, the dog feels, would never betray love

## The Incident Of/In Class

*Freshening up  
old bread, I explain  
wrapping my son's  
two-day-old croissant  
in a damp paper towel  
for the microwave*

*He says, That's not  
going to make  
soft cardboard edible*

*But I should try  
I reply*

Perhaps he might  
have said more  
But I quirked  
an eyebrow at him  
and observed  
*You've never been  
hungry?*

He didn't say more

Years later, I  
am still pondering  
the pervasiveness  
of class

though the marriage  
survived  
the odiousness  
of stale bread  
I could not swallow

## **Vacation Haiku**

Fancy yoga clothes  
Posturing painful to see  
Moon laughs as it hides

## **Poet's Autobiography**

I review, or (as I prefer for its accuracy) "engage" a lot of poetry books. I belatedly realize that one reason I do so is to counter how I am surrounded by indifference to poetry.

Sometimes, no, make that often, when I attend a poetry event, I look around at the people there and wonder what it would be like to be like X or Y or Z who is surrounded by other poets, or at least pro-active poetry lovers, in their daily lives.

Then I return to what others call my "home" and inevitably return to the books. And, inevitably, release another poetry review.

I've figured out a way to deal with the loneliness. (And when I look about the laden shelves in my library, I often smile.) But, at times, the loneliness breaks my heart.

This is not intended to be an angst-ridden poem. It's by someone who's just been at something for a long time. Such a long time that heartbreak becomes ... matter-of-fact.

A state of matter-of-factness—such a useful state for a poem. Poetry, after all, is also cruel.

Unfortunately, the repetition of heartbreak does not make one immune to it. But one can linger a while in the face of its bludgeonings, a long while ...

This morning, driving home, I mentally wrote a review of a poetry book. How easy it's become to tango with poetry. At its beginnings, tango (with "tambo") referred to musical gatherings of slaves.

In the beginning, they tried to ban tango. During the end days, they tried to ban poetry.

We are always living in the beginning and the ending.

I pull into the courtyard. I open the car, take out my luggage, and approach the front door. I open the door and enter the house. A book welcomes me. Because I open it, heartbreak. When I open it, *Poetry*.

**Eileen R. Tabios** has released about 60 collections of poetry, fiction, essays, and experimental biographies from publishers in 10 countries and cyberspace. Her books include a form-based “Selected Poems” series which focus on the prose poem, the catalog or list poem, visual poetry, and tercets: *The In(ter)vention of the Hay(na)ku: Selected Tercets 1996-2019*, *THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL: Selected Visual Poetry (2001-2019)*, *INVENT(ST)ORY: Selected Catalog Poems & New 1996-2015*, and *THE THORN ROSARY: Selected Prose Poems & New 1998-2010*. She issues “Selecteds” based on poetry form in order to show how she expanded a form’s landscape.

In 2020 she also releases a new short story collection, *PAGPAG: The Dictator’s Aftermath in the Diaspora* (Paloma Press). She’s also released the first book-length haybun collection, *147 MILLION ORPHANS (MMXI-MML)*; a collection of 7-chapter novels, *SILK EGG*; an experimental autobiography *AGAINST MISANTHROPY*; as well as two bilingual and one trilingual editions. Her award-winning body of work includes invention of the hay(na)ku poetic form whose 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated at the San Francisco and Saint Helena Public Libraries in 2018, as well as a first poetry book, *BEYOND LIFE SENTENCES* (1998), which received the Philippines’ National Book Award for Poetry.

Translated into ten languages, she also has edited, co-edited or conceptualized 15 anthologies of poetry, fiction and essays, as well as exhibited visual art in the United States, Asia and Serbia. Her writing and editing works have received recognition through awards, grants and residencies. More information is available at <http://eileenrtabios.com>