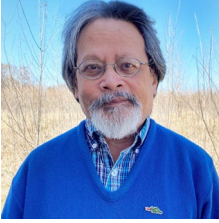


Vince Gotera– Five Poems



Feature Poet

In Memoriam John Prine, Dead of COVID-19

Most days, we expect to hear from a famous author of songs loved by millions for decades even more of his lovely music. He was only seventy-three, John Prine, loving and loved husband and father.

My daughter Amelia and I have a duo called Groovy News, and we perform a noteworthy song by Mr. Prine, “Angel from Montgomery,” about an old woman living with her old

husband, their lives a desert of lost dreams. The song asks, “How the hell can a person go to work in the morning / and come home in the evening and have nothing to say?” The man

told us simple, unvarnished truths. COVID-19 may have taken John Prine but in song he lives on.

next to of course god i donald j trump

“next to of course god i donald j trump

rule america great again let’s make
trillions my cash my kids my tweets harrumph
my bigly tax returns my huge wall fake
news a stable genius that’s me handsome
star with the beautifulest naked wife
i have great respect for women grab ’em
by the southern border secure for life
my people will want me president more
than two terms goddamn impeachment no one
could remove me take all the kids from their

families mexican rapists and whores
covfefe covid-19 i beat biden”

he spoke . . . then drank a glass of caviar

Babaylan

Aswang
Activity? Not in this

Barangay. I am
Babaylan. I am

Clara the priest. Not
Catholic but priest nonetheless.

Devotees sometimes call me priestess, but it
Doesn't matter what they call me. I am not

Elected, but all look to me to lead.
Ever since we arrived, people have come to me

For relief from aches and pains,
From fevers and seizures. I

Gave them ease of mind, offered
Grace for their bodies by

Harnessing the medicinal knowledge I
Had learned working with plants

In San Francisco all those ages ago.
I continued to learn more from the nearby healer

Josefa — hilot, midwife, herbalist — for years, until
Just three Christmases ago, upon her death.

Keeping our faith alive, I have
Kindled a flame in two young women,

Leah and
Lolit, who will continue this work after I die.

Malcolm helps me now. Every week, every day,
Many people come to visit me,

Not just for their bodies to be healed,
Not just for their minds to be made whole —

Of course, I do that — but because it is
Obviously my destiny and my duty to

Pray with them for the ancient Diwatas'
Providence, to encourage the people's

Quest for justice, for peace, to
Quench their desire for dignity. I teach the people to

Resist the corruption of selfish men, of evil
Rulers. As the community's

Shaman, I venture into the
Spiritual realm, bring back wisdom and insight

To use in chants and rituals,
To foretell the future and

Unravel the way modern life twists our
Unity, our tribal and communal

Vision, to foster our people's
Vigor and energy. As babaylan I have always

Willed the preservation of tradition and
Wholeness, in its most sacred form, in all its

eXtraordinary power. I
eXhort the divine Bathala to

Yield all that is good. We pray
Yes to the gods Aman Sinaya of the Ocean, Amihan of the

Zephyr. I claim all of this with indomitable

Zeal. While I, Clara, am still and always

Aswang, I am also no longer
Aswang. I am Babaylan.

Note: this poem is from a novel-in-poems in-progress about two aswang — Philippine mythical monsters — who fall in love and try to live as humans in plain sight. They are Clara (a flying vampire) and Santiago (a shapeshifting weredog). They get married and have a son, Malcolm in the US. After Santiago's death in WWII, Malcolm and Clara move back to the Philippines, where she becomes a babaylan, a traditional shaman, healer, and priestess.

Discovery

*—a golden shovel on
Gwendolyn Brooks's
"We Real Cool"*

Friends, what can we discover if we
think only about what's real?
Or worse yet, what's cool?

No, no. let's stretch our minds. We
can look beyond right and left.
Forget all we learned at school.

Geometry, civics, chemistry we
detested in high school. There lurk
old bugaboos and heartbreaks. Late

friends, relatives, and enemies we
had forgotten have died. Let's strike
out into perilous wilderness, straight

into rapacious light of the sun we
take for granted every day. Let's sing
of flames and waterfalls, saints and sin.

Seek the exotic, delicate axolotl we
have glimpsed only on the internet. Thin
tall sequoias. Rare Tanqueray Malacca Gin.

Whatever elegance and bright glory we
can chase. Rockabilly and acid jazz
in the voluptuous summer daze of June.

Fiery spaceships. Icarus wax wings. We
need to jump without looking. If we die
we die. Let's live, live, live . . . and soon.

Foxtrot Tango Alpha — Vietnam, 1969

Smitty threw his steel pot onto his bunk
in the low hooch he shared on the firebase
with three other grunts, all their OD junk
spread out everywhere. McNeal—"Black Irish,"

they called him—started up a game of Tonk,
five bucks and ten, with Corporal Solis
and the FNG they nicknamed "Tree Trunk"
'cause he looked like a big-ass Hercules

but was only five foot six. "Come play cards!"
Solis yelled. Smitty waved him off, lay down.
Just so goddamned motherfucking bored: cards,
booze, guard, smoke, clean weapon, shoot off his "gun."

Humping the boonies, he yearned just to be back here.
But now on his bunk, Smitty ached to be out there.

Vince Gotera teaches at the University of Northern Iowa, where he served as Editor of the *North American Review* (2000-2016). He is also former Editor of *Star*Line*, the print journal of the international Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association (2017-2020). His poetry collections include *Dragonfly*, *Ghost Wars*, *Fighting Kite*, *The Coolest Month*, and the upcoming *Pacific Crossing*. Recent poems appeared in *Altered Reality Magazine*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Dreams & Nightmares*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Philippines Graphic* (Philippines), *Rosebud*, *The Wild Word* (Germany) and the anthologies *Multiverse* (UK), *Dear America*, and *Hay(na)ku 15*. He blogs at [The Man with the Blue Guitar](#).