

Rayji de Guia

# English Policy

I.

What happened to your mother tongue  
 when the Americans brought theirs?  
*Ewan ko*—ten pesos to the teacher—  
 but early on, you learned an order of things:  
*Tayaan* was five pesos, *Ayoko*, they argued,  
 was ten, cough up, *Isusumbong kita*  
*sa nanay ko* was twenty-five.  
 In Filipino class, *medyo mahirap*  
*magsalita ng* straight Tagalog  
 pero there was no Filipino  
 policy, so you still bought  
*adobo* with your *baon*,  
 which ran out sometimes  
 so you fitted in new syllables  
 until the next day and the next—  
 soon you didn't have to ask your mother  
 anymore to buy you the English  
 books from the National Book Store.

II.

English was the *madrasta*  
 that separated you from your mother,  
 taught you to read and write,  
 negotiated with you instead  
 of making you to pay whenever you write to her.  
 Remember, Tagalog is not your tongue anymore, flexible  
 in your mouth, vowels soft, twang like an American.  
 So italics leaned  
 upon your tongue,  
 slowed down  
*baybay*,  
 like bye-bye  
 as you leave  
 your language  
 behind.