

## Postnatural Supernatural: Transcript by Helena Hunter

### Skotography

Balete is a term used in a number of Philippine languages for fig trees, known as 'strangling figs'.

Balete trees grow on other trees, entrapping them and finally killing the host tree

In some areas of the Philippines people believe that balete trees are dwelling places for supernatural beings

In Manila, the 'white lady' is said to haunt Balete Drive, a street lined with balete trees and houses from the Spanish colonial period

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modern fears stain the premises  
trees no longer there

commercial reporters  
say their prayers inside out

city officials boost tourism  
grow the road

ancestral mansions fell rural areas  
pave the streets

it grew in the middle of the road  
has since been cut down  
cemented and asphalted over

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Rural peoples of the Philippines believe in the existence of supernatural beings called enkgantos.

Their dwelling places are large rocks holes in the ground or trees like the balete.

Whoever sees engkantos reports of their beauty, their fair complexion, golden hair and blue eyes.

They are reported to exemplify the best of the Spaniards of the past and of the Americans of the present.

Encounters with engkantos are said to induce a crisis so deep it borders on madness.

Based on *The Engkanto Belief: An Essay in Interpretation* Francisco Demetrio, 1969.

## **Dendromancy**

The betel nut is a seed of the Areca catechu, a tree from the palm family.

The chewing of betel nut is a tradition that is firmly embedded across South East Asia.

The betel nut is wrapped in the leaf of a piper betle pepper plant with lime powder, spices and tobacco and is placed in the mouth for chewing.

The interaction of the ingredients produces a red-coloured saliva which is spat out and looks like dried blood on the ground.

Betel is believed to have a powerful link  
with contacting or conversing with spirits.

Offerings of betel are made to thank  
good spirits or to exorcise evil ones.

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within this nut  
is a portrait of a face  
with a look of disdain  
like a blood stain

a white collar  
clasps the throat  
holds up the head

the eyes are covered by a mask  
the mouth is upside down  
plumes of smoke rise  
from the ears

the nut speaks of what it is pulled from  
histories, genealogies

forgetting names and authors  
it describes the inscape of a tree  
the phantoms that shade around it

it says it is an I  
an eye that is touch  
a sensation of light  
that pushes through the pupil  
to describe itself

that what is seen  
is only the shape of  
what the eye affords us  
yet the mouth  
chews red depths

with eyes covered  
the nut creates a passage  
of tree roots  
trade routes  
connections across water  
tongues beneath

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1. a swallowed rustle
2. connection not consumption
3. the red keeps coming
4. whiteness burns the tongue
5. a wound in the mouth
6. words leak unworded

## **Colourmancy**

When I first encountered the bleeding-heart dove,  
I thought the bird had been shot.

Its feathered chest was saturated with the blood  
from a fresh bullet wound.

As I looked closely, I noticed the wound was  
in fact a red colouration of the plumage.

I read about the birds and learned there are five  
different bleeding-heart doves in the Philippines.

The birds are named in relation to their locations across the  
archipelago: Sulu, Mindoro, Mindanao, Negros and Luzon.

The birds live and sustain themselves in low-land forests  
feeding on seeds, berries and grubs on the forest floor.

The loss of this habitat has resulted in the decline  
of bleeding-heart doves across the Islands.

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*I am red*

a feathered chest  
signalling the  
shape of a wound

*I am red*

saturated  
plumage across  
the forest floor

*I am red*

a strained syrinx  
replete with song  
you cannot know

*I am red*

a swallowed warning  
inscribed on landscape  
persistent to

*the last drop*

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DESCRIPTION OF A SPECIES  
PLATE XXI.

INTERIOR OF A FOREST  
Figure 31. Foreign Commerce

NATURAL DYES OF THE PHILIPPINES  
Fig 2. Imperial Source

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I am trying to find  
the ghost in you  
in me

I'm trying to write  
the ghost of you  
of me

of our encounter

switched from a seed  
grown under the tongue

a shoot trying  
to twig you out

your bladed boughs  
slice the air between us

you breathe me  
as I breathe you

pining  
palming  
figuring

leave letting

sprigs all topside  
limbs buried below

a woodiness  
wordiness  
barks a hollow chase