

Etymology of paalam

after K Ming Chang

- I. *Pa*: a prefix used to let, make, ask or have someone do something
 - A. Filipino is a language of affixes. tenses born out of
 1. roots and branches. present repeating into future –
 2. the tension between what is un / real
 3. history: still truth beneath the lies painted over it
 - B. to season a question, cull a demand into request
 1. a mouth growing smaller while the tongue thickens
 2. sugar-coat teeth until enamel melts away. my syrup smile
 3. preceding the words caught behind my teeth
 - C. swallow down the stinging
 1. the stories don't translate, don't encode into permanence
 2. hunger for what precedes me. go home
 3. to await departure / return. time's oldest ritual
 4. is a flash flood. is night's rapid onset
 - D. please
 1. I swallow or am swallowed by
 2. nothing and everything. I beg
 3. to appease the gods. give me
 4. a life I can stomach living
- II. *Pa*: father
 - A. speaker of seven languages, he who gives me
 1. my name and a legacy of tongues
 2. a long-awaited prophecy
 3. rebirth / agape / unasked / an answer
 - B. our father who art in heaven, hallowed be
 1. the steeple of rejection is
 2. the thorn in my side which means desire
 3. for the love of all that is holy. my body is
 4. a loaf made of stone
- III. *Alam*: to know
 - A. the world is alien, and you, uprooted
 1. navigating a strange new world of many rules. remember
 2. church hall acoustics and your loud voice, shaking. what it meant
 3. to be seen inside a spotlight / to be known by a god / to love
 4. without understanding
 - B. queerness begins in a mirror. the first time
 1. you google 'am I gay'

2. you don't pray that shit away. you laugh it off
 3. because none if it is real. you don't even know
 4. how to feel inside your body. let alone
- C. god
1. burning bush / voice / myth / spirit / child / mother / man / hunger / blood / water
 2. again. I am nothing if not repetition –
 3. I know nothing of
- D. myself
1. I, a stained-glass façade
 2. the queerness I buried is a seed that grows until I am choking
 3. on my own fucking need. I am the lucky one
 4. broken free. the trauma in
 5. the love at my feet

IV. *Paalam*: to let [someone] know

- A. resist the revelation of leaving
1. school friends find out before my confession, crying in the hallway at recess
 2. I imagine nothing is real, and another life
 3. takes shape: here, nothing changes
 4. nothing stays the same
- B. to speak is to make real
1. god said, "let there be light" and there was
 2. the mythology of the closet – coming out is forever
 3. I am always un / real, my body un / becoming
 4. over and over again

V. *Paalam*: goodbye

- A. a word said over and over
1. doesn't lose its meaning. it grows heavier
 2. backed by the losses like a landfill
 3. or lighter, when the fear is thrown off at last into the sea
 4. and a name given to itself
- B. I let go of the self –
1. a retreat I land in, re / created. silence is the gift I gave myself
 2. when the world was ending. but it began again
 3. a new layer of skin over the break, leaving only
 4. a scar
- C. an ending