PROVOST’S POETRY WINNER: KAYUMUNGGI

My skin is brown
    Out of mercy and protection from Kabunian

My skin is the copper
    my people melted into plates
    with inscriptions in unknown languages

My skin is the mark of diasporas,
    centuries harvesting rice and mangoes
    under the hot sun of an endless summer,
    the memory of the jungle
    long journeys between scattered islands

A record of history in the flesh
It speaks of death threats and guerrilla warfare disguised as dances
    gong music and rooster blood spilt to name sultans we call datu
    and healers we call hilot

Strong brown fingers in joyful and solemn prayer;
    twisting necklaces of fragrant white blossoms,
    thick with the heavenly scent of sampaguita
Strong brown hands catching fish awaiting the fryer
    and lime juice mixed with soy sauce
Skillful hands mixing concoctions of spices, sour fruits, and meat
    into large bubbling pots
Dancing, eating, sleeping, breathing, praying, and dying
    on the tops of volcanoes
Hands proudly hauling rainwater to boil tea and clean the home
Hands breathing life into ancient stories by moonlight,
    stories of angry mothers turning their daughters into pineapples,
    of why there are stars in the sky and how the mountain gods gave us rice
The weathered fingers of grandmothers tracing palms to tell fortunes
    scrutinizing the bumps in our skulls, the drops of residue left in tea cups
    for stories

We are the past and the future
Amber, wild, and beautiful
    not to be exoticized,
    commercialized,
    assimilated,
    with your cultural appropriation
a weak imitation of a brave culture that resists slavery and genocide
a culture, a people, that would not die

I name myself
My name is Ilokana, Tagalog, Kalinga
    Maranao, Tiboli, Yakan, Pangasinan,
Waray-Waray, Aeta, Hanoo....
Bicol, Bontoc, Igorot
Bisayan, Mangyan, Bagobo

I name myself
My name is Malaya
    FREEDOM