Rice
Thérèse Ferreria-Douglas

On my way to school
there is an old man
down the street who does
tai chi
on his deck
every morning
even
in the rain.

The sun will always let you
be yourself
he said one day,
It is the rain that
transforms
you...

He stopped me
on one of those
Indian Summer
days when
sun and
rain
fight for possession of
your soul...

That is not
rain
on your cheeks,
he noticed,
but you are strong
  like bamboo
  bending
in the fiercest wind
without
breaking...

When you are sad,
eat a bowl of rice with
  your fingers
and many ancient hands
will uplift you...

You will ride the steamy wisps
that waft about your face,
and wonder
why
there is war in the world
why
children are hungry
when there is rice...

Inhale deeply
silence
  earth
rising from your scarred
brown bowl,
fragrant fingers
cleansing, reaching—
  wrapping
  around
you
because you
cried when they said
  your eyes were always squinting and
checked Other when
they asked if
you were Asian

Eat of the plate before you.
  Tasteless.
  Odorless.
  White.

Only you can savor it,
Only you can flavor it
  with patis
  with boggoong
  with blood.

Sweet manna from the motherland—
  quintessence
of a sun that shines for all...

Eat slowly,
deliberately,
  peacefully,
and
always
  share your rice.