

INTRODUCTION

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The digital age is a historic period in the 21st century which dramatically changed the way we do things. It is characterized by the massive evolution of modern technology which further revolutionized information and communication processes as well as the use of various forms of media. Who would have thought, for instance, that 45 rpm records, long-playing albums, cassette tapes, and video cassettes would be replaced by the digital optical disc or compact disc and the video compact disc, two of the early forms of digital recording? While the CD and the VCD enjoyed tremendous popularity in the 90s and the early 2000s, their ultimate downside is that recorded music and film can easily be copied because they are formatted and recorded digitally. This led to the proliferation of pirated CDs and VCDs which were sold at a cheaper price, which impelled everyone who is a part of the culture industry such as singers, composers, actors, writers, film directors, etc. to take to the streets to stop piracy. The fight against piracy was long and hard and continues up to this day.

With the advent of new technology such as iTunes, iPod, iPad, SmartPhones, and external hard drives, the digital optical disc has become a thing of the past and appeals only to a small segment of the market—collectors who prefer owning physical copies of films and music to downloading them, but their number continues to dwindle.

Just like music, movies, and television programs, literature is not spared from the digital revolution. While there are still a great number of people who go for the physical copy of a book, we have to accept the fact that more and more people have made that transition from buying a book from a traditional bookstore to buying an electronic copy. This new social order has

indeed changed the landscape of the culture industry. Of course there are naysayers, who proclaim that all of these technological advancements have also contributed immensely to the current paranoia about technology biting its own tail. Since everything can be downloaded easily (and illegally), this has become a problem for professional filmmakers, musicians, writers, etc. This is their livelihood that's literally being stolen from them.

Digitalization has also taken academe by storm. Today, universities everywhere have begun digitalizing academic journals, giving scholars and students access to articles they require for their research. Gone are those days when students needed to go to a university library located in another city or town to borrow a copy of an academic journal, or sit in the library for hours taking notes. All they have to do now is to turn on their gadgets.

The University of Santo Tomas has started the digitalization of all its journals. Among those journals now available online is *Tomás*, the literary journal of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies. In fact, at this very moment you might be reading this Introduction to the new issue of *Tomás* in digital format. In short, the knowledge industry has embraced digitalization: knowledge transfer is now possible with just one click.

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This issue of *Tomás* is the first issue of Volume III. It gathers some of the finest work from both canonical and emerging writers as well as literary scholars. We are also pleased to announce something new: a book review section as a regular feature of the journal, by Ma. Ailil B. Alvarez.

We open this issue with the critics. Joyce L. Arriola's essay "Borrowed Plots, Local Stories: Medieval Temporalities and 1950s Film Adaptations of Korido-based Komiks Stories" is an examination of three extant komiks with extant film adaptations from the 1950s. The study traces the origins of these stories which have greatly contributed to the medievalist attitude in komiks-to-film adaptations in the 1950s.

In "Pananalig at Pagpaparamdam sa mga Dula ni Floy Quintos," Vladimeir B. Gonzales, himself an accomplished playwright, examines Quintos' works through the critical theories of both Roland Tolentino and Jacques Derrida. To quote Gonzales, "Halughugin ang mga insidente ng pagpaparamdam, imbestigahan kung kanino ipinagkakatiwala sa loob at

labas ng teksto ng dula ang katapatan at kakayahang makipag-usap sa mga multo... tingnan ang insidente ng mga pagpaparamdam bilang serye ng mga pagsasanay papunta sa isang pagtatapos, sa pagwawakas ng kasaysayang wala sa kaniyang mga tamang panahon.” Gonzales shows that, despite its hardening into an “art form,” with strict formal requirements, theater is arguably one of the most popular art forms, and still has the potential to advocate for alternative belief systems which may ultimately be liberating.

Any undertaking that sets out to identify local or “localized” traditions and conventions is important, especially in a country that sometimes seems too willing to accede to foreign, notably Western cultural and artistic criteria. So to say that Louie Jon A. Sánchez does important work in “Pagtatatag ng Tradisyon: Ang Soap Opera sa Radyo, Sirka 1922-1963” is an understatement. His essay historicizes and insists on the importance of the radio soap opera’s impact on Philippine cultural history. And like most “localized” traditions, one finds in this essay not just the development of a cultural form, but also a history of resistance and negotiation, that bled from and bleeds into other genres and forms.

Moving now to poetry, we find Nerisa del Carmen Guevara, whose suite of poems unravels the poetics of love, loss, loneliness, grief, and remembrance, and how words can perfectly render namelessness and how labels can create a void and make insignificant even the most powerful of feelings and experiences.

“Currency and Other Poems” by Francis C. Macansantos acutely observes and explores the boundaries of wealth, the effects of old age, the integrality as well as the futility of love, and the possible signification of one of nature’s simplest keepsakes.

“Five Poems” by Adrian Crisostomo Ho vividly captures the personal and the political, particularly those about suicide caused by sheer humiliation, shattered love triggered by a simple mistake, an ephemeral kind of ownership, the powerful and profound effect of various sounds, and the vacuous spheres and spaces created by loss.

Rodrigo V. De la Peña, Jr.’s suite of poems tackles the various ramifications of cruelty, oppression, and hypocrisy as well as the poetics of silence and death with Rizal’s fictional characters as vessels for these wonderfully dark verses.

By creating poetry based on the tropes of “lunas at lason”—remedy and poison, health and sickness, life and death—Paul Alcosoba Castillo was able to straddle modernity and tradition. His poems may be considered traditional, following the ritual practices of the *babaylanes* who first employed the chanting of poetry for healing purposes. The poems can also be considered modern, because in this age of the quick fix, we have a pill for nearly everything. With the current state of political affairs, both here and abroad, people seem to be turning back to poetry. This is obvious in the continuing popularity of spoken word performances, including “battle rap,” as well as the political chants and songs one hears during protest rallies. Castillo’s poetry therefore is a testament to the importance of having what T. S. Eliot calls a “historical sense.”

Science and poetry make strange bedfellows in Joseph T. Salazar’s poetry. In “Totipotency,” he references a biological process, the cell’s capacity to describe the inherent contradictions of navigating individuality and conformity, nation and nationalism, subjectivity and objectivity. In “Terra Nulius,” he likens the body to “unclaimed land,” and asks questions that have to do with the metaphysical: “Kung gayon,/ ano itong ibinabalik/ sa lupa?/ Ano itong karawan?/ Ano itong pinaglalagakan/ ng dugo, laman, buto/ at hininga?/ Ano itong nagpapayakap/ at nagsusumamo—itung danas/ at damdam?”

Radney Ranario’s poetry suite is a meditation on aging and existence, but he uses such a light touch, and employs such quiet, almost unobtrusive imagery, that one hardly feels the weight and seriousness of his themes. In “Katapusan ng Pebrero, 2018,” for instance, he is able to condense complex emotions that deal with the randomness and temporality of human existence with these lines: “Bastang hinahangin ang mga dahon/ At nagkukumpol sa daraanan,/ Pirasong buhay na nalagas sa sanga/ At iniligaw ng ihip sa bakuran-ng-may-bakuran./...Mangyaring nagpanabay ang araw-puso at abo:/ Gunitang-hangin kapwa, mga dahon ng pulso.”

There is a long poetic tradition about the search for the poetic muse. Kid Orit’s take on the theme is to be found in the suite, “Paghahanap sa Paraluman.” The persona finds what he is looking for in different places, in different forms: nature, the beloved, the fleeting moment, even in delay. Orit deftly handles romantic longing and the existential angst that often accompanies it, for instance in these lines from “Tulog”: “At kahit na hindi ko

pa tapos,/ kung anumang ginagawa ko habang hinihintay ka, lagi't lagi akong sumusuko/—rumurupok ang balat ko—sa malalamig mong haplos.”

Eugene Y. Evasco’s poetry suite “Ilahas at Iba Pang Tulang Pambata,” may have been written for children, but its appeal is not limited to any age group. This is because his poetry emphasizes the importance of the imagination, and how it shapes one’s perception of the world. Wild flowers, the ocean and its waves, mysterious *balete* trees, sleepy creeks, and the now-extinct rhinoceroses are not mere flora and fauna in his verses. They are transformed into something else by the playful mind, which is best found in the child.

The fictionists in English are represented by Quintin Jose V. Pastrana, who contributes two short shorts. “Eventide” very subtly captures the nuances of an irreparable relationship. And what adds poignance is the awareness that the relationship has been broken by forces not within the protagonists’ control. Another couple are at the heart of the second story, “Mercury Rising.” This one is a brutally accurate portrait of infidelity and betrayal. The songs of the famous rock band Queen are both framing device, and a kind of echo or counterpoint of the male protagonist’s own feelings as he goes through his discovery and embraces it.

Tristan Joshua A. Acda’s short story, “The Walk Home” treads on the subtleties and silences that mark a kind of love, which is both unspoken and perhaps even unrecognized. It likewise reveals how a profoundly moving moment may leave more questions than answers.

Jose P. Mojica’s “Summer at the Barrio” is a story within a story. A fantastic tale is passed on from one generation to another. The point is: can it actually happen again in real life, today? The charm of this tale is its sly playfulness.

One may argue that the story “Ang 46 na Pinakaayaw na Buhay na Dinanas ni Shiela Ismael” is a mere assemblage of flash fiction, or even sketches. After all, U Z. Eliserio plays with time in each narrative, condensing large chunks of it into mere statements, and providing minimal drama. But the piece is reminiscent of Liwayway Arceo’s “Uhaw ang Tigang na Lupa” because of its use of enumeration, and pushes the envelope a bit farther. If Arceo experimented with plot (“by the numbers”), Eliserio questions the formal notion of a “fully-drawn character.” As the title suggests, the story toys with the idea of eternal recurrence. It is, however, bereft of any religious

influence. Instead, the vagaries of history lord it over the 46 disparate histories of the woman called Shiela Ismael. At the end, the reader is left with a paradox: Shiela Ismael is a “fully-drawn character”—with 46 narratives, no less—but remains unknowable.

Paul Cyrian M. Baltazar’s short story, “Malagim Ever ang Gabi” is part horror, part comedy, and part coming-out story. It features a transgender protagonist who seeks the approval of her father, a father whose horrible qualities extend beyond his fierce temper and basically unloving nature. The coming out in this piece is unexpected, but as with most coming-out stories, everything ends with light being shed on what was previously hidden.

In John Jack G. Wigley’s “Tanikalang Bahaghari,” the protagonist, Wilfredo Sta. Cruz, is made to stand in for the reader by speaking of the virtues of literature (“By reading literary works, we are allowed to feel the hopes and dreams, and aspirations of other people...”), while also standing in for the writer. The story ends with his curiosity over the relationship of two male students. The ending has many possibilities, and as with all good fiction, it demonstrates that a work of imagination about the imagination breeds further imaginings. One may even be tempted to describe it as Wigley’s inadvertent metafictional turn, because this story, despite its problematizing of the nature of narrative, is firmly rooted in the realist tradition. And the author successfully demonstrates that, despite the current popularity of speculative and non-realist fiction, realism still offers a distinct and appealing glimpse into our humanity.

Only two pieces of creative nonfiction made it to this issue. Edmark T. Tan’s “The Thief” vividly recounts how a young boy develops the bad habit of stealing from his parents, and why. It also dramatically shows how this terrible habit becomes a kind of prison from which there is no escape.

In “Remembering Lolo,” Jasper Emmanuel A. Paras talks about how he witnessed and came to understand death as a young boy through the loss of his grandfather to whom he was very close. And he discloses how, at that young age, he found a way of consoling himself and coping with the grief.

The single play in this issue of *Tomás* is Maynard Manansalá’s “Tao Po.” It was first staged in 2017; and since then, it has already been staged many times, both here and abroad. The play also garnered the 2nd Prize in the 2018 Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature. One might attribute the play’s success to its political content and agenda—it is, after all,

a series of dramatic monologues of different characters involved in extra-judicial killings—but if one bothers to carefully listen, or read the play, it is Manansala’s ability to capture the humanity of his characters that shines through.

We close this issue of *Tomás* with Alfred Y. Yuson’s speech as Guest of Honor at the 68th Palanca Awards, held on October 5, 2018. “The Need for Harmony” emphasizes the need for writers to be kind to one another and to support, instead of disparage, each other, a troubling tendency in some of the younger generation of writers. Because he is issuing this call at a time when writers have a particularly significant role to play in society—when the truth and the telling of it is under siege—we feel it is an important document, and hope that the writing community will heed the words of one of its most distinguished members.