Introduction

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The sixth issue of the revived *Tomás*, the official journal of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies (UST CCWLS) contains the creative and critical output of an interesting combination of literary masters and emerging wordsmiths, a merry mix of top-billed writers and scholars, and authors who are still building and broadening their reputations in Philippine literature and criticism.

Among the literary luminaries who grace *Tomás 6* with their new works are recently-conferred National Artist for Literature Cirilo F. Bautista, poet, short story writer, novelist, essayist and literary critic; UP University Professor Emeritus Gémino H. Abad, highly distinguished poet and foremost literary scholar and anthologist of Philippine poetry and fiction *from* English; UP Professor Emeritus Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo, fictionist, literary scholar, the grand doyenne of Philippine creative nonfiction, and director of the UST CCWLS; Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) Professor Emeritus Soledad S. Reyes, foremost scholar and critic of Philippine popular culture and literature; poet-fictionist Christine Godinez-Ortega, head of the National Committee on the Literary Arts (NCLA) of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), and co-founder of the long-running Iligan National Writers' Workshop; bilingual poet Allan Popa, director of the Ateneo Institute of Literary Arts and Practices (AILAP); and fictionist and creative nonfiction writer Joselito D. Delos Reyes, perhaps the most popular of them all with 16,000 organic followers in Facebook.

Not to be dismissed are the other authors of this issue, who also have their own loyal, if not cult, following: poets Joel M. Toledo, Mesándel Virtusio Arguelles, Allan Justo Pastrana, and Vijae Orquia Alquisola; essayists Rofel G. Brion and Raymond De Borja (who are also poets, and in the case of Brion, a translator too); fictionists Nonon Villaluz Carandang, and Amado Anthony G. Mendoza III; and critics U Z. Eliserio and Rina Garcia Chua (who are also short story writers).

The four narratives featured in the fiction section are written in a diversity of styles, ranging from social realism to marvelous realism (of the Filipino variety), from city fiction to fairy tale. The first two are cautionary tales. Godinez-Ortega's "A Raftman in the River of Time," an excerpt from a novel-in-progress, reads like an allegorical fable that warns the readers against the dangers of avarice, and is replete with magical details that include a talking seahorse, an underwater kingdom, and a treasure trove of golden objects and precious stones. Framed within the year-long preparations involved in the celebration of the feast day of San Clemente, the patron saint of Angono, Rizal, Carandang's "Ang Higante at ang Birhen" fearlessly explores the exploitative side of the patronage system, as a hapless maiden, typically beautiful and innocent, falls victim to the machinations of the wealthy *hermano mayor*, the main benefactor of the annual religious festivities.

Unlike Amadis Ma. Guerrero's dark and depressing naturalistic city fiction, Delos Reyes' "Hbd" (which is also set in the urban jungle of Metro Manila), takes a lighthearted approach in narrating "the end of the affair" between the female protagonist and her boyfriend who are both millennials. Written in contemporary Filipino, the story can be read symptomatically as emblematic of postmodern Pinoy urban relationships: the almost instantaneous attraction, the swiftness of the courting period, the tumultuous togetherness afterwards, and the equally quick breakup, with just the three letters (Hbd) signifying that everything has ended. Or perhaps not, knowing how the configuration of such emotional entanglements is mercurial, highly dependent on what critic Barbara Hernnstein Smith refers to as "contingencies of value."

Reminiscent of Milorad Pavić's über innovative book *Dictionary of the Khazars*, Mendoza's "Movovug: Isang Diksyunaryo," another excerpt from a novel-in-progress, chronicles the destruction of the seaside town of

Ugac-Anafunan Sur by tidal waves caused by a super typhoon, brimstones from a volcanic eruption, and shifting sands due to illegal mining. What is most interesting, though, is the townspeople's loss of memory and its concomitant loss of language, and the existence of an idiosyncratic dictionary whose authorship, place and date of publication are unknown, without a foreword or even a page that explains its technical aspects—in short, a lexicon where the words are arranged very differently: "Kaiba sa nakasanayan nating diksyunaryo, medyo pekyulyar ang pagkakaayos ng mga lahok sa diksyunaryo: may nakalaan na tatlo hanggang sampung pahina para sa bawat salita. At imbis na mga pormal na depinisyon, bigkas, at leksikograpong pagbabaybay, mga ginuhit na larawan ang tumatayong depinisyon para sa mga lahok." I am certainly looking forward to reading the rest of the narrative once this novel is finally published.

In the essay section, Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo, who has done extensive studies of women's memoirs, offers a memoir of her own, titled "Once Upon a Time, Under the Pine Trees in the Old Campus." It consists of three short narratives. "Ghost of Christmas Past" is about a young man who seemed to the narrator "the fair young god of all my dreams" when she was seventeen. "Usahay" is about Danilo, a poet classmate who "existed in the periphery of this campus life." And "Norma" is about a dear friend and fellow writer, whose grit and no-nonsense approach to life the narrator greatly admired, and whose untimely demise was a deep shock.

The other two essays in this section describe the creative process involved in the translation practice of Brion ("Translation as Revision: On Translating My Own Poems"), and the ekphrastic poems of De Borja ("Pieces"). Both essays illuminate the readers on what the two writers are trying to achieve in their translation and poetic experiments, respectively. Brion makes a definitive statement, "In empowering myself as a poet as I translate my own works from the original Filipino, I let my translations liberate my own works and allow them to aspire for totally new meanings in another language—a language not necessarily just American or British English. Filipino-English? Maybe. It may, however, even be a language that still awaits a name." De Borja offers a more tentative appraisal, "I want to begin, sincerely, by admitting that the prospect of talking about my own book makes me feel uneasy. We say things about work we had written and find that in further thought, what we say it *is*, it is not; or we

find what we speak of, and are frustrated to find little of anything else. So I will not talk about *they day daze*, it is what it is (which I am certain, and also hope, as with any poetic text, differs for each of us that reads it). What I want to do instead is to remember encounters, chance meetings, associations—which somewhat led to the making of *they day daze*. All of which it is not."

The eight suites of poems featured in the poetry section bear the unique linguistic stamps of their authors, their inimitable idiolects and distinctive turns of phrase. For instance, the first three pieces of Bautista's suite of five poems lyrically express the persona's yearning for disclosure and transcendence ("Was this the revelation I had waited for—/ truth and law inclined to the order of things?") ["At the Top of Mount Santo Tomas"]; his conversations with God regarding the frailty of his corporeal self ("Can you blame me,/ You so far away/ in heaven?... Visit me. Take care of my body./ Or you'll have to give me wings.") ["Body Talk"]; and whether it is necessary for Him to punish human beings with a deluge to get His point across, ("I wish someone would tell me/ why it rained so much yesterday,/ … God, give them a drink of water./ It's dark enough where they have been.") ["Too Much Rain"]. In the last two pieces, Bautista becomes more narrative as he shares his quotidian experience of living within the vicinity of the Philippine Orthopedic Hospital ("I live near a hospital and every day at intervals/I hear the shriek of ambulances as they/ speed through the neighborhood./"), and speculates on the circumstances surrounding his birth during wartime ("No ship/ sighted on the bay, the palm trees/ like coastal guards.) ["The Day You Were Born"]

On the other hand, the first three pieces of Abad's suite of five poems articulate his insights on such subjects as the unreality of time ("our supreme fiction") versus the realness of the poem ["Now"], the inevitability of death ("it is our common lot/...beyond protest,/ and no remedy.//") ["No Wants to Die"], and the inadequacy of language ("Words and words!/ how they lie shameless and bare/ like starfishes dead on bleaching coral,/") to capture the stellar constellations of human thoughts ["Stick-writing with Mud"]. In the last two pieces, Abad immortalizes a hare-lipped housemaid of his childhood ["Manang Bita"] who was both an enchanting storyteller and a staunch defender of her wards ("she was our Valkyrie,/ squat and feared, unkempt of hair,/"), as well as a married man's recurring dream of

a "pale, shy girl smiling at a window,/" and the eventual fall after the spell was broken ["A Longing Like Death"].

Pastrana deals with how human beings experience and/or perceive motion and inertia in his suite of five poems which stretches language to its limits, as he simultaneously reveals and conceals, expresses and suppresses his insights on kinesis and stasis. These poems may leave the reader quite queasy and uneasy with semantic motion sickness, but the linguistic dexterity and syntactical daring deployed in their composition is impressive. Although carefully disguised and not immediately apparent on first reading, Toledo's suite of five poems actually tackles Biblical themes and existential questions of a spiritual and religious nature, focusing on such figures as St. Peter the Apostle, Pontius Pilate, and Noah, among others, and on such issues as the human desire for harmony and deliverance ["Continent-making"], as well as the sad reality of disconnectedness and the loss of awe ["Schematics"].

Arguelles' enigmatic cycle of poems "Mula sa *Chi*" posits certain statements on the human condition which are at best provisional, partial, even parabolic: "Kung gusto mong malaman kung ano ang kahulugan ng mga/ kumplikasyon, ang agwat ng malapit pero malayo, ang aalis/ o darating na kakulangan.//" ["Ano"]; "Madaling sabihin at madaling magpanggap na/ alam kung anuman ang ikot ng mundo.//" ["Vera"]; "Hindi ko alam, hindi ko alam kung pa'no ang sitwasyon sa dulo ng/ isang engkuwentro.//" ["Cho"]; "Hindi mo maibabalik ang pagkakataong pakawalan ang/ pagkakataong hawak mo.//" ["Vera"]; and "Hanggang sa dulo, sinusulat ko lang kung saan ko/ ilalagay ang kamay ko at wala nang iba.//" ["Olé"]

On the other hand, Popa's three poems deal with aging and aging well "Dito ka sa lupa tatanda./ Paglipas ng panahon,/ ikaw na ang matanda./ Ikaw na ang magpapatanda.//" ["Pagtanda"]; the power of song to break free from the conventions set by society ("Naikulong ng kumbensyon/ ang iyong buhay sa hubog/ ng isang salaysay ng pag-ibig./ Ngunit hindi ang iyong awit.//") ["Liham kay Arabella"]; and the impossibility of hoarding gold ("Hindi maikukulong ang ginto./ Ilang ulit mo mang ikandado ang pinto,/ ilang ulit mo mang susian,/ ilang ulit mang putulin ang tali ng hagdan.") ["Liham kay Amburukay"].

Arquisola's suite of five poems for children titled "Sa Tuwing Ikaw

ay Tahimik at Iba pang Tinig ng mga Batang Tinutukso" gives voice to the sentiments of youngsters who have been bullied into silence due to their otherness: a Moslem girl ("Hijab), a gay boy ("Ang Aking Pangalan"), the deprived kid ("Mahal Kong Santa Klaws"), the oppressed child ("Ang Ibon sa Twitter"), and the silent one ("Sa Tuwing Ikaw ay Tahimik").

Not to be outdone, the criticism section also features powerful pieces that address important national issues. In "The Rebellion of Mariang Sinukuan, or Why We Need to Discuss Place Mutualism" Chua emphasizes the importance of harmonizing the north places ("the spaces which are beloved, admired, and nice to look at") and the south places ("the ones which are shunned, ugly, and environmentally degraded"), if we are to save not only our environment but the entire planet from total destruction. Chua analyzes the ecological poems of Hermino S. Beltran, Jr., Abercio V. Rotor, and Myrna Peña-Reyes which thematically deal with the personae's personal relationship with a particular place, a subject matter that truly matters in the light of the natural and manmade disasters that have been plaguing the Philippines with increasing frequency since the start of the New Millennium.

Eliserio's "Ang mga Bayan ni Rosario Cruz-Lucero" critiques the critic's construction of the concepts of "nation" and "the other" in her book *Ang Bayan sa Labas ng Maynila*, as well as her still unpublished doctoral dissertation titled "Negros Occidental 1970-1986: The Fall of the Sugar Industry and the Rise of People's Theater." With characteristic humor, Eliserio observes, "Sa dulo ng kanyang lekturang 'Writing to the Music of Pestle-on-Mortar,' nagpahayag ng disablist na sentimyento si Lucero. Sabi niya, 'Not to love our own people and our own music is akin to being deaf in a land of musicians,' na pailalim na panunupil sa mga bingi (pinapalagay at pinapalabas na masamang bagay ang hindi makarinig). Baka ang 'our' ni Lucero dito'y tumutukoy lamang sa 'tayong nakakarinig' at isinasantabi ang mga bingi? Hindi ito eksaheradong pagbabasa kundi pagpapatuloy lang ng itinuro ni Lucero, na siya ngang naglalahad ng mga estruktura ng pang-aapi sa imahen ng 'promdi' at 'mabuting babae.'"

Reyes examines the use, misuse, and abuse of the Filipino language in popular culture, from the Philippine Revolution of 1896 to the present, in her critical essay titled "Pusong Walang Pag-ibig: Ang Pagtatatwa sa Wika." According to Reyes, our native tongue's loss of prestige is partly due to its

being denigrated by important Filipino personalities as belonging only to the provenance of the so-called "bakya" crowd, a term coined by National Artist for Film Lamberto Javellana, after two of his movies flopped in the box office. She also cited Miss Universe 1969 Gloria Diaz's condescending attitude towards our nation language, when she declared in an interview that "I use Tagalog to speak to the maids."

The diversity of works, both in terms of thematic concerns and stylistic approaches, featured in *Tomás 6* harbors well for Philippine literature in this Millennium, with its interesting synergy between writers belonging to different generations, as well as between creative writers and literary critics.