

TOMÁS

THE JOURNAL OF THE
UST CENTER FOR CREATIVE WRITING
AND LITERARY STUDIES

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University of Santo Tomas
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and Literary Studies

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The Journal of the
UST Center for Creative Writing
and Literary Studies

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Editorial Board

Contents

Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo
INTRODUCTION

~ vii

POETRY

Carlomar Arcangel Daoana
**ALMANAC OF BLACK
AND OTHER POEMS**

~ 3

R. Zamora Linmark
FIVE POEMS

~ 11

Rita Gadi
CHOSEN AND OTHER POEMS

~ 17

Dinah Roma
STELLAR AND OTHER POEMS

~ 23

Michael M. Coroza
ÁGAM-ÁGAM SA PAG-ÁSAM

~ 30

Paul Alcoseba Castillo
NEO AT IBA PANG TULA

~ 36

CREATIVE NONFICTION

- AJ Elicaño*
SCREAMING TOWARDS PEACE ~ 49
- Cecilia Manguerra Brainard*
**THE CLASS REUNION:
REMEMBERING THE SALMON RUN** ~ 63
- Angelo R. Lacuesta*
A SNAPSHOT ~ 70

FICTION

- Kat Del Rosario*
FRUITS OF NEGLECT ~ 79
- Larissa Mae Suarez*
SUNDAYS AT THE CARDOZAS' ~ 85
- Augusto Antonio Aguila*
**EXCERPT FROM *THE MONSTERS*
(A NOVEL IN PROGRESS)** ~ 102
- John Jack G. Wigley*
HANTONG ~ 114
- Luna Sicat Cleto*
**TATLONG PROPOSISYON
NG PUTING HANGIN** ~ 122

D R A M A

Jose Victor Z. Torres
TRIANGLES

~ 159

Lito Casaje
CHIAROSCURO

~ 189

S C R E E N P L A Y

Jose Mojica
TAKE ME TO AMERIKA

~ 239

C R I T I C I S M

Virgilio S. Almario
**ANG PAGBABALIK NG PANITIKAN
SA PUSO NG SAMBAYANAN**

~ 255

Chuckberry J. Pascual
**NOBELISTIKONG KOMPULSIYON:
PAGBASA SA MOOG (1991)**

~ 259

Ramon Guillermo
**THE PULSE OF THE TEXT:
USING DIGITAL TOOLS
FOR CLOSER READING**

~ 277

THE CONTRIBUTORS

~ 312

THE EDITORS

~ 317

Introduction

Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo

This academic year, the UST Faculty of Arts & Letters accepted its first batch of Creative Writing majors—45 Freshmen. This is a source of elation for us in the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies. The proposal had to wait almost 6 years for approval, the delay partly caused by the implementation of the K-12 Program, which effectively destabilized the educational system, not just on the secondary level, but on the tertiary level.

Everyone agreed that the program was overdue. The Center was established in 1999. The MA Creative Writing Program opened shortly after. Today, the Center has an Assistant Director, 13 Resident Fellows, and 2 Associates. Among them, they cover all the genres.¹

And now, the program is finally in place. One turns to the other side of the partnership: the students. And the question occurs: what attracted them to the new program?

“They think it will help them write more interesting posts in social media, thereby earning more followers,” a cynical friend volunteers. The suggestion earns the expected laughter.

¹ The list of the Center’s staff complement, and their specializations, follows: Fiction (Chuckberry Pascual, Joselito Delos Reyes and Augusto Antonio Aguila), Poetry (Michael Coroza, Nerisa Guevara, Ralph Galán, Delos Reyes, Ned Parfan and Paul Castillo), Creative Nonfiction, including Literary Journalism (Joselito Zulueta, John Jack Wigley, Dawn Marfil, Nestor Cuartero, Guevara, Galán and Aguila), Playwriting (Chuckberry Pascual), Scriptwriting for Film and Television (Jose Mojica), Literary Research and Literary Criticism (Joyce Arriola, Lulu Reyes, Ailil Alvarez and Galán), Literary Translation (Coroza, Delos Reyes, Pascual and Galán), Writing for Children and Young Adults (Coroza and Marfil).

But I, for one, hope for a more serious—or perhaps a more idealistic—motive. Are there not a few among them who, perhaps, have been reading literature for some time? And, has their reading not awakened in them curiosity, sensitivity, a sense of adventure? Has it not led to a certain openness... a certain largeness... of mind? And have these qualities, in turn, not propelled them to ask questions, to seek explanations or solutions, to the mysteries that puzzle or fascinate or disturb them? And is this, perhaps, what makes them wish to become writers? For is this not what literature—in its explorations and elaborations—tries to do?

The answers to those questions will not be immediately available to us, of course. But, in the meantime, the possibilities can be as expansive as our imaginations will allow. And how our imaginations soar as we embark on this new journey, in the company of our new students!

But even as we indulge our expectations, we note that the idea that creative writing cannot be taught, persists in some quarters. The premise behind the argument is either that writers are born, not made; or that the only way a writer can be made is by reading, and for this activity, a classroom is not needed.

There is undoubtedly some truth to this position. Creative Writing as a formal academic discipline is relatively new. This means that many generations of writers have managed to become writers without the help of an academic degree. And I think there are indeed some writers who may not thrive in academe's structured environment. But today's world has made expertise—or professionalism—an imperative. And expertise or professionalism is generally acquired through tutelage. When the old practices declined—the practice of apprenticeship to an older writer, for instance, and the practice of patronage bestowed by a person of wealth—writers had to acquire their credentials through other means. Today, this takes the form, of either informal instruction (such as workshops offered by individual writers or institutions like the Ayala Museum), or degree programs offered by universities.

In fact, in our own country, for a few gifted young artists (selected through a rigorous system), formal training begins with the Philippine High School for the Arts in Makiling. In the visual arts and the performing arts, no one seems to question the importance of enrolling in a conservatory of music, a theatre department, or a college of fine arts. One wonders

why there should be any doubt regarding the value of formal education in Creative Writing, particularly since Creative Writing deals with ideas and emotions as expressed through language, and is, therefore, the most intellectual of the arts.

Additionally, there is a need to remind ourselves that a university education does far more than just refine technical skills—whether these be computer skills, management skills, nursing skills, or creative writing skills. Far more important are the attitudes and values it inculcates: commitment to the disciplined search for truth, the habit of critical thought and rational discourse, a keen sense of fair play. Today, all of these are endangered by the sudden rise of strongman politics and the carelessness of the pervasive social media.

For artists, not the least artists who work with words, perhaps even more than for other artists, these attitudes and values are an absolute necessity. These will not only help them as artists, but enable them to be of more help to their fellow men. It is they who will go forth “to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.”

But what about the apprehension of those who, while recognizing the advantage of the supervision of young writers by experienced practitioners, are wary of the effects of the highly structured environment of the university upon a young writer? This is what I call the “cookie cutter argument.” It is based on the suspicion that writers produced by academe will be a “homogenized” lot. But can one really speak of a “UP school of writing” or a “DLSU school of writing,” or a “UST school of writing,” for that matter? The University of the Philippines, for instance, has a large number of poets in its Creative Writing faculty: Gémino H. Abad, J. Neil Garcia, Isabela Banzon, Paolo Manalo, Wendell Capili, Isabelita Reyes, Conchitina Cruz... These poets have very different writing styles, not to mention different politics and preferred themes. Is it likely that students exposed to this variety of perspectives will all write in one particular way when they graduate? And I suspect the same situation obtains in the rest of the so-called “Big Four Universities,” though they may not have as many writers working as full-time faculty members.

It seems that many young writers themselves recognize the importance of a formal education. Proof of this might be found in the robust enrollment enjoyed by Creative Writing courses offered by the

major universities, and in the large number of applicants for the Creative Writing workshops held by their creative writing centers.

Several of the contributors to the present issue of *Tomás* are the products of either these courses, or these workshops, or both. Some are now teaching Creative Writing courses, and/or are affiliated with the university creative writing centers. I believe that most, if not all, of them, would grant the beneficial effects of their formal training on their efforts to define and refine their craft. Even international writer Cecilia Manguera Brainard (in an essay which is included here) speaks of how, while she was already writing a column for a newspaper in LA, she continued taking writing classes at UCLA to further hone her craft.

It is with pride and pleasure that I now introduce them and their contributions.

All but one of the poets are established figures in our literary scene, and the only one who is relatively new to it (Paul Castillo) has already won a Palanca gold.

Carlomar Arcangel Daoana's "Almanac of Black and Other Poems" explores darkness and light, night and day, absence and presence. Commenting on the suite of poems, fellow poet and critic Ralph Semino Galán (who is also this issue's Managing Editor) writes: "The Latin phrase *video sed no credo* ("I see it but I don't believe it") from the title poem perhaps best embodies the tension between faith and doubt, deceit and revelation, sight and sense, that is echoed by the other pieces."

International fictionist and poet R. Zamora Linmark contributes "Five Poems" taken from his first young adult novel, *The Importance of Being Wilde at Heart* (forthcoming). One of the poems, "Daydreams" might be addressed by one of the novel's characters to another. "After a Great Pain" seems to be a rueful response to Emily Dickinson's famous poem on grief. In "Heart" the persona is instructing or cautioning himself or herself. There is a youthful feel about this poems, tender, tentative, yet powerful.

Rita Gadi's "Chosen and Other Poems" are in marked contrast to Linmark's. These are somber, melancholic pieces, about loss and leave-taking, about ageing, about the absence of hope and lack of courage... And yet the collection ends on an upbeat note with "Couplehood," which is about the surprise of "a consummate light/ leaning into the afternoon/ of your life..."

A different kind of sadness surrounds Dinah Roma's "Stellar and Other Poems," ("... the lands shaking us to the core/ steadying us to the loss of everything,/ to track in daily the only rejoice of life,/ where there was once beauty/ intractable now but through song..."), for all that it is shot through with images of light. Starlight in the title poem of the collection, which is dedicated to the dead poet, Bimboy Peñaranda. Moonlight in "We Shall Write Love Poems Again" dedicated to another poet, the Singaporean Gwee Lee Sui. The artificial lights dressing the trees outside a café in "City Illumination." Here, too, the last poem provides a stunning surprise, and a terrifying one, when the reader realizes what "Fire Dance" is actually about.

Even when he deals with the familiar urban aggravation of traffic (as in "Paghihintay," the consummate LIRA poet Michael M. Coroza, in his suite of poems, "Ágam-Ágam sa Pag-Asám," does so in language evocative of old Tagalog poetry, complete with diacritical marks. Two of the poems in the collection utilize the form of the villanelle—"Ágam-Ágam" and Ligamgam"). And the over-all tone of this suite of poems is one of regret, repression, resignation, ending fittingly with "Inip" and its succinct but lyrical suggestion of death.

Paul Alcosoba Castillo's suite of poems ranges over a number of different themes: desire ("Billboard,") and its denial ("Asetiko"), agrarian unrest ("Guhit"), street prophets ("Ang Sinasabi"). The last poem, "Neo" (for which the poet received the "Makata ng Taon" Award from the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino), is a dirge for Horacio Castillo III, the fraternity neophyte who died at the hands of his "brothers" during the all-too-familiar hazing. Though much younger than Corroza, Castillo, exhibits the clean lines and lyricism which have become the trademark of the LIRA poets, and could well promise the emergence of a major voice in the near future.

Creative Nonfiction is represented by three generations of writers in English.

Filipino-American Cecilia Manguera Brainard, who is better known in Manila for her novels and her short stories, contributes a memoir to this issue. "Class Reunion" uses the salmon run as an unusual metaphor for the lives of Filipinas in America. The difference, though, is that "the salmon will return to the gravelly beds from where they were born, and there they

will spawn, then die. Many of my friends and I, on the other hand, will not return to our original gravelly beds. We will have to improvise as we face this next hurdle in our lives.”

Angelo R. Lacuesta’s memoir is a quiet, touching little piece about his late father, its tender note rather unexpected, given the author’s trademark humor. (Readers will recall, for instance, the tour de force nonfiction collection *A Waiting Room Companion*.) Here, memory turns into ruminations on memory, and how it is altered by technology or the lack of it. “My father would have been 70 years old if he had survived that heart attack in 1997,” Lacuesta reflects, “not a very old age, and not a very long period of time to be gone. But come to think of it, 20 years is an entire generation. I am certain that if he had somehow caught a glimpse of the future using some sort of magic camera, everything to him would be nothing short of science fiction, defying even what he had richly imagined, thanks to his love of *Star Wars* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*.” The memoir ends with a bemused tone, as the author contemplates his 8-year-old son, his energy, his razor-sharp brain, his bliss in the company of his parents, and how he might, or might not, remember his dad.

AJ Elicaño’s is a new voice in our literary scene. And if his contribution to this issue is any indication of things to come, there is cause for celebration. The fraught relationships of fathers and sons is one of the themes of “Screaming Toward Peace,” a long, rambling meditation on music, “fanhood,” childhood, fathers and sons, depression, suicide, people caring about each other and the redemptive power of music. The piece is framed by the self-inflicted death of two rock stars, who were friends and co-lead singers of the famous Linkin Park—Chris Cornell and Chester Bennington—and lived the kind of troubled life that one has come to associate with rock bands. “When a band resonates with you, it starts being an interest and starts being a language,” writes Elicaño, “a way to articulate, if only to yourself, the experiences for which there are no other words. Music becomes the vocabulary of memory...”

The fictionists have contributed three stories in English and two in Filipino.

In Kat del Rosario’s “Fruits of Neglect,” a young woman seems to be talking to someone about her garden, in particular its *kalabasa* patch. And as she does, her own life story slowly emerges, as does the identity of the

person to whom she is talking. Del Rosario's fiction is as simple, quiet, and understated as her nonfiction. (See, for instance, "Beginning with Words" in *Tomás*, II, 2.) And, like the latter, it is deeply poignant.

"Sundays at the Cardozas" by Larissa Mae Suarez focuses on the suburban home of an upper middle-class family. Everything seems to be as it should be, the pleasant routine of what Kerima Polotan famously referred to as "the sounds of Sunday." Yes, everything is fine. Until it isn't. And the unravelling is not any less devastating for being so underplayed. Suarez's is an exciting new voice in our fiction, as well as in our creative nonfiction. (See "Uneven Development" in *Tomás*, II, 7.)

Augusto Antonio Aguila's "The Monsters" (from a novel in progress) is quite the opposite of the two quiet stories described above. While it also takes place in a city, it plunges the reader into the city's darker side. The action takes place entirely in a "huge vacant lot with wild grass, weeds, and dry bushes, lit only by a lamp post... beside a filthy river which has become a dumping site." The characters are four boys, barely in their teens, who come from middle-class families and all go to school. But this story is about their main preoccupation in life: sex. In short, they're pretty normal. Which is what makes the story's denouement feel like a punch in the gut.

Readers familiar with John Jack Wigley's four essay collections will be surprised, to begin with, by the narrator's voice, which is quite distinct from the one they may be familiar with; and then by the sobriety and subdued misery of this story. No high tragedy here. Just the tiresome monotony of a dead-end job and the slow acceptance that nothing she had ever dreamt of would come to be. Wigley's story augurs well for his forthcoming debut collection of short fiction, and the novel he is working on.

This compact, minimalist story is followed by Luna Sicat Cleto's expansive narrative, "Tatlong Proposisyon ng Puting Hangin," which is at once love story, mystery and myth. While it chronicles the experiences of protagonist Bayang, a music teacher in the Philippine High School for the Arts, it weaves into that story the legend of Mariang Makiling, musical instruments varnished in blood, illicit affairs, abortions, and the massacre of journalists in Maguindanao. Is this fairy tale? Marvelous realism? Historiographic metafiction? Or all of the above? Perhaps it is part national allegory, still unfurling, still unfinished. The protagonist's name—

Bayang—seems a signifier of the country, but sans a defining modifier (magiliw? malaya? progresibo?).

Drama is represented by a one-act play in English, a full-length play in Filipino, and a screenplay for a short film.

Jose Victor Z. Torres' "Triangles," is a highly-focused one-act play with only three characters: Beng, a 35-year-old advertising executive, Allan, her ex-boyfriend, and Marky, her teen-aged son, who might or might not be dead. In the opening scene, Beng is talking with her shrink, whom the audience does not see. The play's blocking is an externalization of the shifting relationships among the three characters, and Beng's attempts to come to terms with what torments her. This work is one of the few contemporary plays in English today. It's what some drama critics might describe as a bit "talky," but it actually lends itself to reading in print. In the last two years, the UST Publishing House has been publishing play collections.² Is a collection of Torres' plays a possibility?

The *dramatis personae* of Lito Casaje's "Chiaroscuro," a Palanca prize-winning full-length play, are as follows: two "Mabini artists," a former artist-turned-"full-time dealer," a slightly older artist who has been nominated to the post of National Artist; the young wife of one of the Mabini artists, and the nude model of the National Artist nominee. The dialogue consists of conversations among the artists, who have been friends for a long time, regarding the tricky negotiations between artistic integrity and the need to survive. What may strike audiences as a lack in dramatic action might perhaps be precisely the point of this play, namely, that their earlier decisions, and the trajectories their lives took, have resulted in an impotence that can only manifest itself in endless, circular angst-ridden conversations.

Jose Mojica's short film screenplay "Take Me to Amerika" is a campy take on the Pinoy everlasting, determined chase after the American Dream. Characters are deliberately stereotypical: Jessa, the eager young woman who dreams the dream; her sullen, rebellious younger brother; her nerdy sister; the "parlorista" friend. Most of Jessa's family are bullied into collaborating with Jessa in her elaborate strategy to entrap the unwitting American. They behave awkwardly and mispronounce English words.

2 (Rody Vera's *Tatlong Dula*, Nicolas Pichay's *Maxie*, Liza Magtoto's *Bienvenida de Soltera*, and Em Mendez's *Anagnoris: Apat na Dula*)

What distinguishes this screenplay from similar satires on this topic is that it is taking place in a world where relationships rooted in online dating websites have become the norm. This makes the sought-after “porener” more accessible, but the dream no less false.

The Criticism section opens with a short essay by National Artist Virgilio S. Almario, “Ang Pagbabalik ng Panitikan sa Puso ng Sambayanan.” Delivered during the opening ceremony of “Performatura: Performance Literature Festival 2017” at the Tanghalang Nicanor Abelardo (CCP Main Theater), it is an important piece, for all its brevity. Almario used the occasion to comment on the event’s title. The neologism “performatura” combines the English word “performance” and the Spanish term “literatura.” Almario objected to an article which appeared in a daily newspaper, which claimed that literature’s being an intellectual enterprise, accounts for its lack of appeal where the general public is concerned. He also disagreed with the festival’s efforts to make literature more interesting to the *taumbayan* by “raising” it, from its oral form, to its written form. He pointed out that literature’s unpopularity is due, not primarily to its being intellectual, but to the steep price of books, which is simply beyond the means of the masses. He then examined the etymology of some Filipino words that could serve as the equivalent or approximation of the word “performance,” and suggested the root word “ganap,” and its derivative “kagampan,” as perhaps the closest terms to “performance.” This word, and the concept behind it, Almario said, are important for all who would undertake performance poetry and performance studies. He added that, although the objective of “Performatura 2017” was laudable, the task remained of bringing back literature to the heart of the people, before true *kaganapan* (fulfillment) could take place.

Chuckberry Pascual’s essay “*Nobelistikong Kompulsiyon: Pagbasa sa Moog*” is a psychoanalytic reading of B.S. Medina, Jr.’s Palanca prize-winning novel. The title translates loosely into “fortress” or “fortification.” Using Freudian concepts culled from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Pascual cross references two other Medina novels *Salingdugo* and *Huling Himagsik*, which he reads as having similar thematic concerns: a collaborator father and the consequent destruction of the idealized parental picture, and the intrusion of the nation into the private sphere of the family. Noting the use of the technique of stream of consciousness, and the obsessive recurrence

of certain themes, and even plots, the critic concludes that these novels can be read, not so much as realist novels, but as examples of trauma fiction.

Not too many readers may be familiar with Franco Moretti's "computational criticism." Describing his effect on the field of literary criticism, last year in the *New York Times*, Jennifer Schuessler wrote: "... Few have issued as radical a cry as Franco Moretti, the professor famous for urging his colleagues to stop reading books." Moretti works in a lab, and has claimed that "to grasp the laws of literature," what is required is "distant reading," i.e., "computer-assisted crunching of thousands of texts at a time." [<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/30/arts/franco-moretti-standford-literary-lab-big-data.html>]

In his "The Pulse of the Text: Using Digital Tools for Closer Reading," Ramon Guillermo argues that this strategy requires the availability of "massive digital corpora" not available to many of the world's scholars, and offers instead tools (computer-generated graphs, scatter plots, scan windows, etc.), "examples of techniques which, in combination with traditional 'close reading,' can arguably lead to close(r) readings of texts." Those readers who will find this essay far too technical to be palatable, will nonetheless grant that as a cutting edge piece of literary criticism, it is important, and that its very unfamiliarity makes it exciting. So we close with the most avant garde contribution to this issue.

This, then, is our offering for the last issue of *Tomás*, Volume II. Our featured writers are a combination of established writers (including one National Artist), and emerging writers, the youngest still in his twenties. This mix is integral to our mandate, which is not just to showcase the work of our most distinguished writers, but to discover and nurture new practitioners. Among our contributors are two international writers. This, too, is in keeping with our objectives, one of which is to establish an international, as well as a national presence. We would have preferred a more even balance of writers in English and writers in Filipino, but in this we were limited to the submissions received.

As we go to press, Augusto Antonio Aguila and Chuckberry J. Pascual have issued a call for submissions to *Tomás* Volume III, Issue No. 1.



POETRY

Almanac of Black and Other Poems

Carlomar Arcangel Daoana

ALMANAC OF BLACK

Pulsing, oceanic, like the womb's
Originating dark, but vaster,
More complex and compelling
Than death, it's creeping towards me,
With its sheets and treatises,
Its slew of paraphernalia
And accoutrements, flicking
With the mamba's forked tongue,
Slow-thighed like a panther in
Its pivot-and-pounce maneuver.

Around my ankles now, pooling
And hissing, it offers me a multitude
Of gifts: carbon, coal, graphite,
Blood-veined dahlias, the side
Of the moon unbesieged by sun
And meteorite, the motive
Of generals, the hair of the be-
Headed, the inheritance
Of poets, the gravity of words,
The gaps holding together

The paper-thin strips of history,
History from the perspective
Of God, God Himself, abyss-filled,
Displaced by absence. Should
I kneel down and accept them,
What light would crack across
The sky and save me? *Video sed*
Non credo. I stand mute and
Transfixed, freed of poetry,
The night gouging my eyes of onyx.

AFTER LISTENING TO GUSTAV HOLST'S *THE PLANETS*

As Performed by Manila Symphony Orchestra

What do I know of music, this orchestral piece
In seven parts, each plucking a planet's singular note
Or feel, as imagined through the centuries: Mars
In its fiery, fleet-footed temper, war-ready;
Neptune's scherzo which is a kind searching
Underwater with a beam of light; and Jupiter,
The centerpiece, rolling giddily across the space.

There are, of course, the other planets, which
Somehow fail to register and the planet Earth,
Conspicuously absent, because the point of listening
Is to train the mind's eye towards the skull's
Planetarium as the music knives open the darkness
Of the body—space-deep—until all the bent cells
Of the platelets are stars. But that can't be right.

If at all, the music simply washes over like a shower
Of meteors, heard superficially, wave upon wave
Of notes from flutes, strings, glockenspiel, relentless
And uncompromising, insisting its nervous energy,
Expanses of placidity until the air itself—strung,
Beaten, reverberating—becomes the complexity.
Here is a level of safety we can expect: locked

Into the solitude of their respective orbits,
All the planets merely turn in soundless space,
Seven points sparkling around the sun, free
Of collisions from asteroids and planetary dust.
The music has made it so. I step out of the venue
To Manila's night sky. Minor, forgotten gods
Are making their sad leaps across the heaven.

WEDDING OF THE CENTURY

From the outside, floodlights blast
Through the cathedral's grilles,
Approximating daylight. Nothing

Should unhinge when the scenes
Of television's "wedding
Of the century" will be stitched:

Not the façade decked out
In white orchids flown from
Thailand, not the pool of people

Kibitzing by the stone gate who,
Intruding into the frame,
Will be excised promptly

And replaced with a shot
Of an open cobblestone street,
Trees, the horse-drawn carriage

Where the bride, shielding
Herself with a parasol, pretends
No one watches her. Now,

She is affixed at the start
Of the aisle, waiting to walk
The walk of the severely

Punished now justly rewarded:
A hand-embroidered gown,
A good ending, the marriage

Of the only man she ever loved.
(Waiting for his turn, the actor-
Husband cools his heels

In his airconditioned tent.)
Everyone rides this conceit,
Calling her Katerina

And by now she is really into it,
Her character, that she begins
To weep through her veil

Even before the take.
Does she wish it to be real
And think that for life

To be beautiful it has to be
Staged? The trompe l'oeil
Ceiling soars and is grandiose.

From a corner, St. Agnes looks
At her askance while holding
A town in the crook of her arms.

When the gapper finally
Makes his determinate click,
The cameras—handheld,

Set on tracks, mounted
On doilies—begin registering
Her wedding walk among

The extras who are clapping—
Happy for her—unwittingly
Refining the scene's sublime

Deceit. Top view, she glides
In a svelte wave of fabric
Amid crystal-strewn branches.

It seems forever, that walk.
Good! howls the director,
And the cathedral deflates
Back to its lesser version; lights
Are turned off, cables snarl
On the marble floor.

The actress, she can laugh
Again. A week later,
Viewers will work themselves up

To an equal joy as the bride's
As they see her in their
Own image—released

From evil, eternally loved—
Malignant tears burning
Through their only life.

FIGURATION

Someone draws water from a well, so this is evidently
A village, rural. Beside her, a cow mournfully chewing
On grass, her hide an accidental map to God's kingdom.
One can detect a glint of metal by her magnificent throat.

A child rushes to them with a wooden sword.
It is presumptuous to think of the earlier figure
As her mother, but that's beside the point. Perhaps,
It may be the cow that he's interested in, triangulating

The scene to one of disguise or premonition.
He may be the devil. He may poison the well once
He grows up. A slope rises behind them, blue-green
Like a bottle in a cupboard. Quick brushstrokes

Suggest either houses or creeping fire. The sky
Is a flat, indeterminate blue, asterisked with stars.
Because of the expectation that there should be no sea,
A band of cerulean glimmers. Small boats smolder.

No object casts a shadow, even the jug beside the woman.
Perhaps, an allegory antedates the awareness of negative space.
If so, the fire will be pointless, bearing no heat. The figures
Don't carry the burden of ever being once alive.

The sheen betrays the oil of the medium. You can slash
The canvas and you will be charged with vandalism,
Not murder. You are responsible only to things that
Tame you. Someone has yet to paint everything I said.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EMPTYING

Wear a crisp white shirt, a simple watch.
If there are letters, burn them. Put the key
Under the mat. Outside the house,

Think of the neighborhood for the last time.
At its edge, someone will meet you,
Impressing upon you a new name.

There will be a train. Here's the ticket
You will show to the inspector.
Mutter your thanks. When the train hurtles

Through an ever-tightening space,
Your ears shall scream from the noise.
The first blast of light shall rip you apart.

When you alight and anyone tells you
They've not seen you before, say
You have lived here all your life.

Five Poems

R. Zamora Linmark

**All from *The Importance of Being Wilde at Heart*,
forthcoming from Delacorte/Random House, June, 2019 release.
My first young adult novel.**

DAYDREAMS

The curve of your lips
The sigh that completes a kiss
Ah, the endless Ahs!

SCAR

If only the memory of his kiss
and embrace did not burn
like a first-degree and left
me with a scar with meanings
as the time he held my hand
and whispered softly
my name in my ears
while the moon glowed
and eavesdropped.

AFTER A GREAT PAIN...

I don't want the chill
I don't want the stupor
you can keep the letting go
so come and take it
there is no room for it
in this room tonight
this is not a poem
this is nothing
preparing for more
nothing.

HEART

Learn from the clouds.
Promising nothing—
Even rain.

ON SILENCE

There's the silence that drops from nowhere
And the silence that stabs like a shiny switchblade.

There's the silence that comes right at takeoff
And the kind that echoes long after a crash landing.

There's the silence that craves for attention
And the kind that aches to be left alone.

Silence like the red velvet curtain of an old theater
Full of history: Thick and musty.

Silence confident as a period, breathless as a comma,
Endless as ellipses...

There's a silence lovers leave behind,
Like a suitcase on a platform after the last train.

There's a silence lovers arrive with,
Like a body crammed in a busload of strangers.

There's a silence waiting to breathe
And a silence crying to be broken.

There's a silence rare and breathtaking
As the time I caught her in her room,

Dancing with no music to guide her
Just a song playing loudly in her head

Leading her to another place,
Another her.

Away from here and away from her:
The woman with a thousand and one silences,

Who left behind a life in another country
So she did not have to answer to any man

Or walk five steps ahead of him
Or sleep with dreams bolted down.

This woman who made me see silence in words
And taught me how to shatter it

Whenever something was worth hearing.
My list of silence ... my endless list: My mother.

Chosen and Other Poems

Rita Gadi

I. CHOSEN

It begins to labor:
someone else's secret yearning sequestered
 beneath the cravings of good fortune or fame,
so known and yet un-known,
in whose clasp desire has grown beyond
 proportion
by some strange arrangement made
to lie here among the leaves, amidst the
 silence
gathered within the quivering heart
of an ancient story from a far-away speech
out of its quietude into its past today reveals
an enchantment expressed in words as alien
as the slopes of mountains that now
surround, captive,
yet captivating the overwhelming sound
of its first breath.

Transported now into this incoherent scene
by trees undisturbed as the years
over centuries stirred in their time
of melancholic mornings when the rain
 retreated
to the forests's black enclaves to sleep
there, safely untouched by the intrusion
 of this

momentary presence that stirs, uneasily,
in the glory of daylight's full bloom.
I am undertaken to mount the light
after night required the revelation that I am
alone and come into myself upon a landscape
occupied and opened by distances
in the permanence of age, elusive, solitary,
separate, while I write
the meaning into the hour's soul.

2. LEAVE-TAKING

Distance fades the last hours the longest;
lives on departure's insistent look
of fleeting dreams and things we understood
to be unmoved before they vanished into
the sudden emptiness of growing old
unable to tell the terms that ageing required
removed from promises imposed
upon the spaces of the present from the past.

Towards the uncharted address
proceeding in the sight of endless years
given to one's proper station on earth's
solitary route
of human futures, anxious as it seems, yet
gently drawn through imminent destiny
we forage the realms of relations
retrieving the most blessed wishes
along the way
happiness has bordered safely in the comforts
of its fate, perhaps, once, or several
forsaken selves
faded by the wind's fortune or the star's
enchanted glow upon the nights
that longed for waking more intensely
than the unrequited day.

It may be coming to a close,
painlessly, as when it summoned
the beginning's earnest move.

3. **SCRIPTED**

We simply get bound
by resolutions and agreements
going into the points discussed about
our lives in crises or worse
so that we design a state of rules
created out of fears, false hopes
and fantasies
and mess up the simply visible way
each one of us began with
with that hesitant first step
not very long ago
yet otherwise our sights were set
on scenes beyond the range
of this engagement.

Let us un-bound
much of the violence we have caused
around our words, which ought to speak
no louder
than the sound of truth.

4. APPLICATIONS

Laugh
before the rain defines the way
the day will shape the dark and light
events that have come down on our
was-there-ever-an entirely-definitive-
what's-it-all-about play
where everyone is for the record
done in hoping. I could listen
one more time after turning a page
written in black and white
how dare you cross the excitement of this
“clear and present danger”
the world has already seen
“live” on television.

There could be lesser risks
promoting a need for samples
of lesser claims to fame
when already the entertainment
part of life is
like a basically physically slow
 unfolding which may surpass
survival or the stories nature intended
to be taken less seriously
than the laughter we never had
the courage to have.

5. COUPLEHOOD

“where I go
there you are.”

It will come
before you know it
it will be
a consummate light
leaning into the afternoon
of your life
it will speak
softly like a little bird
you must pause
listen patiently
as the evening settles
it will sing
again
and you will know
the song.

Stellar and Other Poems

Dinah Roma

STELLAR

for Bimboy Peñaranda

During a break at a late night poetry reading
you asked me to look up at the skies. Inside the hall
younger poets were huddled still over what could
have been a better line for an image conjured
by a girl yet too young to even think of poetry.
How could she have thought of galaxies that way?
asked one with impatience. *Why not?* You said gently
as you led me to a spot on an empty driveway nearby,
where at the end of it a street lamp was the only source
of light from a world elsewhere, a lonely halo
hanging around it. *Do you see them?* you began
pointing into the night sky. An outline of a figure.
Another one, traced by your finger. At the farther end,
another shape you named as you smiled. *On a really dark night,*
you can see more than a thousand stars. At that angle,
they were perhaps more agreeable to the eyes.
More than a thousand stars and yet I kept missing the sight.
They were to my urban mind merely the beyond,
sphere and an outstretched arm not giving up
on another poet seeing those mythical clusters again—
the water bearer, the crane, the king, the hunter, dwellers
in time and space, remnants of stories that engulf
in each shift of bright and dark, gifts to poets all,
bestowed by the lesson from sorcerer or sage
coming upon a celestial map here on earth

revealing the secret of what it is to stand still,
sharpen one's vision against the dark,
while our metaphors constellate
into the wide circumference
of the universe.

WE SHALL WRITE LOVE POEMS AGAIN

for Gwee Lee Sui

When you pointed out the tree
And the moonlight as you recall her hand
Soft in yours like the first time
You held her close to you, I wanted to urge you
To do many things before your voice
Trailed into the burden of images
Choking you to tears.

 You see,
I had my own battle
With love poems. Some time ago.
Betrayed by them. Worn out by them.
I used to think we poets owe
The world beauty. Wizard of words,
I trouble them for the possible.

Until I learned love poems
Do not bleed for broken hearts.

We mine the world for its coldness
To shield our naivety even as the tree
flourishes on its own. Pebbles settle
into the walkway under the rain.
The moon's glint tires in the change of day.

What we forget are the roots
That do not care for secrets.
They gnarl into loam, in deep moist,
shunning surfaces.

Speak of love again
after bearing its truth and you can
breathe more deeply now,
desire for that one again.

And your eyes that once could no longer bear
the empty night skies will discern
the faint outline of star-crossed lovers,
and wish for the wisdom of those
adrift in their own realm of the heavens.

CITY ILLUMINATION

November dusk. Attempts at writing
the last paragraphs of a letter before the day fades,
the light fades, before the city loses its details,
and corners blend into the thoroughfare.

Night falls. Before my mind weakens in focus
as the glass walls of this café chill
in the shift in weather, and the trees outside,
oh, yes, the sentinels of seasons,
their branches now covered in a thousand
pins of lights. The illumination startles.

The slow change of color. Its radiance
redeeming the city's darkness, redeeming
the only street we had walked up once,
when nothing could no longer be redeemed,
and we are overcome by the plainness
of the moment when we remember
the street in its starkness

Before dusk. And how for a second
we are bewitched
by a faint radiance nearby.

EARTH SONG

Here I mend my quarrel with the earth
for the decades it eased my passage
through its landscapes, for what could count
as its gifts, the mountaintops beyond
my reach, shorn now of their forests,
the quiet waters in the grooves, drawn
to ruins. For what I did not see
as my life, as my own trudge into the dark
of trees, for what I was only able
to see as my own, separate and free,
for the fiction that now drives me
to seek once again what made me reach
this point, thinking neither of hell nor angels,
the lands shaking us to the core
steadying us to the loss of everything,
to track in daily the only rejoice of life,
where there was once beauty
intractable now but through song
like the wind invisible except
for the graceful quiver among the leaves
hostage to the seasons

FIRE DANCE

We gathered around her to look
at what was left of what could have been
her breast. Her skin's silky texture
roughened. The mold of fertile years
flattened. By the bank of dried leaves
at the foot of the tree where smoke rose
like ghostly lure, she went. She didn't know
what fire can do. At the instant it caught her,
we didn't know where the crackling came.
The dress she had worn in play was hemmed
in hues. The leaves, the flesh, the burning
was the same. All I remembered was the little
body and its face grimacing in pain. A small
hand frantic to stop the flame. As if it could
lift the heart out of its cage. A moment
so familiar as when she danced
whirling in joy. So blessed,
my niece, winged with fire.

Ágam-ágam sa Pag-asám

Michael M. Coroza

1. PAGHIHINTAY

Tulad ng mga naninilaw at nalalagas
na dahon sa kahabaan ng Quezon Avenue
ang mga mukhang nag-aabang ng másásakyán
pauwi. Kapuwa táyo hindi nagmamadali:
dalawang kaluluwang gunita ang dinaratnan
sa gabi, lumbay ang katalik hanggang hatinggabi.

Walang aksidente ngunit hindi umaabante
ang mga behikulong nasusulasok sa sariling
usok. Nilalagok natin ang mga himutok
na pinalalapot ng nagsasalimbayang
busina, silbato, at “putang-ina.”

Maraming mamámatáy kung may maghahagis
ng granada sa may Delta, tiyak na may iiyak
at sásambúlat ang dalamhati na marahil
makahihigit sa namumutawi ngayon
sa iyong mga labi. Tama ka, nakamimitig
ang manalig sa pangakong pagbabalik.

Nilunod na ng karbon sa ulap
ang araw, sásakyán ng lahat kahit
trak ng basura huwag lamang
mabahura at mangálay ang bait.
Aakayin sana kita patawid sa West
subalit pinasikip ng mga behikulong
aburido ang tawiran.

Maglakad na lamang táyo hanggang sa inyo!

Nagkunot ka lamang ng noo.

Walang ano-ano, naging berde
ang ilaw-trapiko. Umatungal
sa pag-abante ang mga sasakyán,
parang mga hayop na pinakawalan.

May bumaba sa dyip na tumigil
sa mismong tapat natin. Agad táyong
sumampa, ikaw lamang ang kasiya.
Kayrami kong bitbit para sumabit.

Tulad ng mga dahon sa kahabaan
ng Quezon Avenue, nanilaw
at nalagas ang aking mukha sa kapal
ng karbon at kumubkob na dilim
sa walang masakyang damdamin.

Kay A, Tag-araw '92

2. ÁGAM-ÁGAM

Pag ang labi ay natuyót at tumíkom,
Maging mata ay bantulót na magtapat.
May kataga't katubusang nalulúom.

May ligalig na malubha kaysa gútom
At sa gatla nitong mukha násasalát
Pag ang labi ay natuyót at tumíkom.

Sa dibdib ma't sa balikat ay malágom
Ang minanang mga sumpa at pabigát,
May kataga't katubusang nalulúom.

Isang sugat na hindi na maghihilom
Ang bagabag na sa budhi'y ngumangatngat
Pag ang labi ay natuyót at tumíkom.

Pagkat sulák ng balisa ang nalikom,
Malalapnos ang sinumang mag-uungkat;
May kataga't katubusang nalulúom.

At sisimoy na animo'y alimuom
Ang pighati pag may sumbat na kumidlat.
Pag ang labi ay natuyót at tumíkom,
May kataga't katubusang nalulúom.

3. *LIGAMGAM*

Sa labi ko ay diklap kang dumarampi,
Pagtitimpi'y dagli-dagling dumurupok
Pag dibdib ko'y isang yungib ng pighati.

Nalukob man ng hinawà't gaping-gapî
At ang mithi ay humimlay na alabok,
Sa labi ko ay diklap kang dumarampi.

Walang hindi nálulugmók na lunggati,
Maging lubid ng gunita'y nagágapók
Pag dibdib ko'y isang yungib ng pighati.

Pag sa súlok ng karimla'y tumutupi
Maging budhing dinalisay sa pagpukpok,
Sa labi ko ay diklap kang dumarampi.

Dalúmat mang maalamát at naglungti,
Napipigtal, nalalaglag, nagagabok
Pag dibdib ko'y isang yungib ng pighati.

Maging bibig ay mistulang isang limpî,
Natatakot mamutawi ang himutok;
Sa labi ko ay diklap kang dumarampi
Pag dibdib ko'y isang yungib ng pighati.

4. HARÁNA SA KARAGATÁN

*Ang dagat ay matahimik
Sa wari'y may damdamin sa pag-ibig;
Sadyang kasaliw sa hapis
Ng puso kong humihibik...*

musika ni Juan Silos Jr. at letra ni Macario Ramos

Sa awit na ngayo'y iyong maririnig,
Wala mang taginting n'yaring aking tinig,
Di ibig sabihi'y wala ang pag-ibig
Na handog sa iyong hindi madaraig

Ng lawak ng dagat na nakapagitan
Sa atin kung kayâ di kita mahagkan;
At tulad sa alon ng dagat na iyan,
Pintig ko'y patúloy na mananambitan

Sa pampang ng iyong mapanglaw na dibdib
Hanggang isimoy mo't ganap na sumanib
Nang walang pangamba't banta ng panganib
Ang lihim at hiling ng mayamang tangrib.

5. *INIP*

Ang pagdating na tiniyak
Kapag iyong hinihintay,
Kabuntot kang umiiyak
Sa karo ng isang patay.

Sa pag-usad na matagal
May kung anong nalilingid,
Nang ataul ay matanghal,
Ikaw na ang nakasilid.

Neo at Iba Pang Tula

Paul Alcoceba Castillo

BILLBOARD

May gabing gaya nito na ayaw ko pang dumating
sa uuwian tuwing dumaraan dito,
ang pagod parang nawawala
kapag nakikita na kita.

Ang mukhang kinikilatis kahit kilalang-
kilala naman. Paanong nananatili ang liwanag
ng mga ilaw? Paanong nililisan ng malalalim na linya
ang kutis? Hanggang saan babatakin
ang batas ng kabataan? Lahat ng ipinangakong

magiging akin.

Sa paggalaw ng trapiko, walang tinag
ang titig dahil bukas maaaring
palitan ang modelong ipapaskil.

Uusad ang lahat ngunit mauuwi lamang ako
na walang maiuuwi.

ASETIKO

At hindi nagtagal, nakita ko
ang sarili, sumasalubong sa akin.

Nagawa kong hawiin ang dagat
ng mga nakaharang sa bangketa
nang dumaan ako. Ngayon, hindi na

maaaring umiwas sa paparating.
Sinusubok umiwas na makatagpo
ang kaniyang paninging hindi nais
gayong nakikita ko na

ang nasa harap mula sa nakaraan.
Inihahakbang ang talampakang

nagkukubli sa mga kalyo
habang nahuhubad na
ang maluwag na salawal, nakakapit
na libag sa balat, at buhok
na nabuhol—ang paalala

ng dating katawang pinabayaan sa nasang
makawala sa lahat ng pagnanasa.

Ang pagtanggi sa ginhawang
inakalang natatangi.

GUHIT

Ang hindi inasahan, walang gustong maunang
magpukol ng batong tangan ng kanilang mga kamao.
Umusad sila sa pagmartsa ngunit nanatiling
nakatindig ang hindi natitinag na barikada.
Hanggang may naghagis ng lupang
matagal nang idinadaing.
At walang nakailag sa sumambulat na paratang.

Pagdating sa hanggahang itinakda,
kumitid ang pasensiyang pumapagitna
sa magkabilang panig.
Pilit na iginigitgit ang mga katawan
sa pagitan ng mga pananggalang
na tinatablan pala
ng hindi nakikitang panama.

Patuloy ang batuhan ngunit sila
at sila lamang ang nagsasakitan.

ANG SINASABI

Sa gitna ng lansangan, pumuwesto siya at ikinalat
ang balitang makabubuti sa lahat ng nagdaraan.

Walang nakalalampas nang hindi inaalok na
mabubusog ng mga sasabihin niya.

Kaunti pa't isusubo na niya
sa bibig ng susunod na tatangi, tatabig

sa kamay na iniaabot niya. Abot-
tanaw ang di nakikitang laman-tiyan,

kaya lumapit ako bago siya lumipat ng lugar.
Pinulot ko lahat ng pirasong nahulog sa aspalto.

Inilagay sa bibig. Sinusubo kahit ang nalawayan,
ang iniluwa. Nagawa kong kainin

ang galing sa basura, masisikmura ko ito.
Susunggaban ko ang sunod na lalabas sa kaniyang bibig.

Natagpuang walang buhay sa bangketa ng Tondo, Maynila si Horacio Castillo III, dalawampu't dalawang taong gulang at nasa unang taon ng kursong abogasya sa Unibersidad ng Santo Tomas. Masama ang loob ng kaniyang inang hindi kailanman pinagbuhatan ng kamay ang anak na nasisiguro niyang napaslang ng umanong hazing ng Aegis Juris matapos makitang puno ng pasa ang labi ng anak na wala raw talagang balak sumali sa fraternity.

1

Tiyak na hindi mo nabilang ang bigwas
na dumapo habang ang katawa'y hubad

sa bawat pananggang makapagtatanggol
sa sariling walang naibatong kuyom

na palad pabalik sa nakapalibot
na berdugong salit-salitang umubos

sa oras na takda hanggang sa sandaling
iyong naalalang hindi ka hihindi.

Kamao'y tinanggap nang walang reklamo
pagkat binabawal umangal ang bago

kaya pinigil mo ang mga salitang
batid mong pahamak sa nagsisimula.

2

Kahit sampalin ka'y hindi nagawa ng iyong inang
hinintay kang makauwi. Sa halip, ang pangangamba

ang kumatok at nagdala ng iyong gamit sa bahay
na parang kakilala na ngunit ngayon lang dumalaw

gayong ika'y kailangang sunduin sa punerarya
nang magdamagang nawala't matagpuan sa bangketa.

Walang nakapagsalaysay kung paanong napadali
ang iyong buhay sa kamay ng tumangging ipauwi

ang iyong bangkay. Kung alam ng amang mapapalapit
kang tuluyan sa panganib, di ka niya ihahatid.

3

Batid mo ang init ng bawat pumatak
mula sa kandilang gumuhit sa balat

bago pa tumalab ang bisa ng kredong
dadalhin mo hanggang sa kabilang dako

gayong mas mabilis tumulo ang sakit
kaysa sa salitang pilit na sinambit:

*Walang in hustisyang dapat na ipataw
nang hindi patawan pabalik ng bitay.*

Binigkas mong lahat upang makasapi
at haraping ika'y hindi natatangi.

Nais mo lang maging bahagi't karamay
sa simula't wakas nitong kapatiran.

Sayang, hindi mo nakitang dumagsa ang nagsitirik
ng liwanag sa gusali ng pinasok mong panganib

mula nang unang basagin sa telebisyon ang ulat
ng napaagang pagpanaw ng matagal nang pangarap

na pag-aralan ang batas. Ni ang kapusin ng tulog
habang nag-aapuhap ka ng tugong paikot-ikot

sa tanong ng guro'y waring hindi mo pa nadarama.
Labis sa unang semestre ang singil na matrikula

nang ikaw ang pinagbayad kahit walang naging sukli.
Ikaw ang utang na tanging hinintay lang na masawi.

Tandang-tanda ng bumbero paano niyang sinagip
mula sa bubong ng takot at naibaba ang paslit.

Ikaw, na minsang naligtas ay walang katakas-takas
sa patubuang naghintay na kunin ang iyong palad.

5

Damhin mo ang bawat lagapak ng hampas
(pagkat kapatiran ang simula't wakas).

Ang paddle ang iyong magiging pagbagsak
(pagkat kapatiran ang simula't wakas).

Tuloy ang paghataw hanggang walang hudyat
(pagkat kapatiran ang simula't wakas).

Ititigil lamang ng nakatataas
(pagkat kapatiran ang simula't wakas).

Huli nang malamang kapatid mo'y huwad
(pagkat kapatiran ang simula't wakas).

Mapapaslang ka lang ng tinawag mong brod
(pagkat kapatiran ang simula't wakas).

6

Wala ka pang isang taon, iyo nang sinisigurong
bubuo ka ng ugnayang magpapanalo sa kaso

pag ganap nang abogado; kung kanino ba lalapit
o kung sino mang padrino ang tutulong kung sumabit.

Walang abogado't hukom ang magtatangkang umaming
hubad din nilang dinanas ang palo't bangis ng hazing.

Sila, na dapat nagtulak sa iyong makapaglingkod
sa bayan, ang naglilihim sa pangarap mong nilagot.

May silbi ba ang pagdulog sa naglalaro ng batas
kung paanong katawan mo'y sa kalye ibinalagbag?

7

Umabot ang kaso na biglang dininig
ng pangulong gabi't araw ginagahis

ang lungsod na patay ang nasa kalsada:
bulagtang katawang walang kikilala.

Habang sa senado, muling isinalang
ang bawat kasangkot kahit napaparam

ang ama't ina mo sa paulit-ulit
nang salaysay, kunwa'y isang paglilitis.

Wala mang napiit sa mga kasapi
pagkat kapatira'y hindi mababali.

Kung may babaligtad ay matitiwalag.
Ito, hanggang wakas, ang sagradong batas.

8

Maging ika'y nagulantang na nanatiling malaya
ang pumaslang sa umano'y dalawang nanlabang bata.

Kaya ika'y nanindigan at dali-daling tumutol
sa laganap na pagpaslang at kawalan ng paghatol.

Ngunit higit na mabilis ang hukumang nambabaryl
kaysa mga mambabatas na nanggisa sa salarin.

Sadya ngang matutulad ka kina Kian't Carl Angelo,
mga bagito sa mundong nagkalat na ang berdugo.

9

Magtaka ka kung paanong sa bangketa ka napadpad
—at pagkamalang biktima nang magpatrulya ang dahas.

Ito ang napagpulungan ng nagkaisang miyembro
—pagkat ikaw ang baguhang wala sa kanilang plano.

Huwag kang mag-aalalang mayroon pang isusunod
—hindi ikaw ang naunang napaslang ng pambubugbog.

10

Nang huli tayong mag-usap, lingid sa akin ang balak
na tutungo ka sa landas na marami nang tumahak.

Larawan mo ang bumungad nang matunghayan ang ulat
na humakbang ka sa hila ng lunang walang liwanag.

Sa panulukan ng Tondo, nakita kang nakalagak
nang tinungo mo ang landas na marami nang tumahak.

At kunwa'y hindi kilala ng tumulong at bumuhat
sa paghakbang mo sa hila ng lunang walang liwanag.

Ang pagkamatay mo'y hindi tatawaging pagkalagas
sa pagtungo mo sa landas na marami nang tumahak.

Paglapit sa hukay, waring nagkamali ka sa sukat
ng bawat hakbang sa hila ng lunang walang liwanag.

11

Pasya mo'y mabilis nilang kinaladkad
upang patunayang hindi ka naduwag.

Kaya napatid na ang inyong pangalan
pagsalang sa bingit ng muling pagsilang:

Sa huling hampas ka tuluyang nadapa
gayong walang aral nang ika'y magtanda

dahil nabatid mong walang naituro
ang inang nagtimping magpataw ng palo.



CREATIVE NONFICTION

Screaming Towards Peace

AJ Elicaño

Chester Bennington stands at center stage, a study in opposites: slacks and sneakers, full tattoo sleeves peeking out from under an impeccably fitted black suit, dark amber shades that look only a hair too casual for a funeral. No one can see his eyes, and one wonders if this was intentional.

The bald white Arizona-born singer and his bandmates are seated on stools, suggesting a quiet, somber performance, but he grips the mic stand tightly, almost desperately, like he wants to either hit something with it or swing it around like a dance partner. The outdoor stage is large and dark and mostly empty, the backdrop speckled with points of light that would look like a star field were it not for the huge Mercedes-Benz logo to the side. The crowd is cheering, raising arms and making what's known in the heavy metal community as the sign of the horns: middle and ring fingers held down by the thumb, index and little fingers extended like devil horns. The atmosphere feels like a rock concert, but as soon as Chester starts speaking, everyone goes quiet. Everyone is listening.

"We were going to come out and play 'Heavy' first," says Chester, "but in light of our dear friend Chris Cornell passing away, we decided to play our song 'One More Light' in honor of him, to start this off. We love you Chris."

The occasion is the taping of *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* on May 18, 2017. The band is American nü-metal/rap rock group Linkin Park, currently promoting their new album *One More Light*. And Chester,

the man with the tattoos, is Linkin's co-lead-singer of 18 years, one of their most prominent voices and faces (alongside rapper and other co-lead Mike Shinoda) throughout their 21 years. But in this moment, he presents himself not as the rock star, not as the artful screaming tenor behind Linkin's distinctive sound, but as a mourner. The suicide of Chris Cornell, frontman of the band Soundgarden and Chester's close personal friend, is less than a day old. Chester may have just have found out hours before performing.

And so Chester sings. He sings "One More Light," one of the quietest and most mournful songs on a quiet, mournful album of the same title. *One More Light* has been heralded as a distinct departure from Linkin's previous musical stylings, most of which have been angry, up-tempo, and loud. And a week later, on May 26, 2017, Chester performs another quiet song—Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah," accompanied by Linkin's guitarist Brad Delson, at Cornell's funeral. One of rock's most iconic screamers is in pain, and he isn't mourning through noise, it seems, but through silence, stripped-down guitar melodies, and vocals as slow and measured as they are impeccably sung.

"Who cares if one more light goes out? / In a sky of a million stars," Chester sings, note-perfect, his voice not yet wavering. "It flickers, flickers."

When a singer dies, a fan's first instinct is to immediately start playing their songs, which is either quite beautiful or quite sad. On the one hand, it's the perfect act of remembrance—one can literally hear the voice of the deceased even after their passing. This is the gift that musicians can give the world; every replay is memory, tribute, and resurrection all in one go, and all of it in their own voice. Very few people get any say in how they're remembered, but musicians do.

On the other hand, one can't help but think of how very small such an act is. Many of us never meet our idols, never get to know them as people, never get to see beyond the public persona, the brand, the airbrushed photos and orchestrated mp3's. When we mourn an artist by replaying their songs, a cynic might say, we reduce them to products, which is tragic in its own way if that's the only way we knew them. It's an interesting intellectual exercise: how do we mourn someone we never really knew? And, for that matter, why do we even bother?

But when Chester killed himself, a few months after he sang for

Chris Cornell's suicide, I found myself not thinking about any of this. I just wanted to listen to him sing.

* * *

When a singer dies, a question must be asked: with what song will we remember you? It's at once as trivial as hitting *Shuffle* and as heavy as the world, especially for fans of more established artists with more material from which to choose. "What part of you represents all of you?" we ask. In other words: "What song are we going to play now that you're gone?"

When I went on my memorial sound trip on the morning of Chester's passing, I found myself alternating between two Linkin Park songs. There was "Leave Out All the Rest," a slow keyboard-and-guitar-driven ballad from *Minutes to Midnight*, one of the band's most famous albums. In it, Chester's voice is somber, melancholic, and reflective, as he asks to be remembered fondly after he dies. "When my time comes," Chester sings, "forget the wrong that I've done / help me leave behind some reasons to be missed."

The other song was "Battle Symphony," part of *One More Light*, the last album Chester recorded before he died. Its sound is at once more like "classic" Linkin Park than that of "Leave Out All the Rest," and less so: their signature crashing percussion and guitars are back, but without the dense layering and texture of the band's usual complex orchestration. The song sounds more like a rock band, but also more like *any* rock band. Nevertheless, when the chorus ends—the words "And my eyes are wide awake" rising in volume until the instrumentals cut out, leaving silence where before there might have been noise—you get the sense that this isn't just any anthem about not giving up, but one about facing one's demons and looking them straight in the eye. The tone and themes (to say nothing of that drumline-like beat) are more optimistic than one might expect from Linkin Park, but the undercurrent of pain and desperation and rage is still there, driving the hope forward, giving it grounding and gravitas.

But neither of these, precisely, encapsulated what Chester meant to me, not really. Neither of these could quite explain why, out of all the celebrity deaths I've experienced, this was the one that hit home. And neither of these, on the morning of Chester's passing, were enough to stop me from searching for songs to replay.

This is the signature Linkin Park sound: aggressive guitar riffs, crashing cymbals and percussion, intricately layered keyboard and instrumental work, and Chester Bennington's smooth tenor yelling out a chorus while Mike Shinoda's sniper-precise rap rounds out the verses. They're known primarily as a nü metal/rap rock hybrid, but their influences range from heavy metal to alt-rock and even electronic pop, and this shows in their habit of trying out new sounds and styles with every album (particularly pronounced with 2010's *A Thousand Suns* and everything that came after it, after the mid-2000's "golden era").

A casual listener would say that Linkin Park sounds like anger: rising frustration in the verses, bursts of controlled fury in the rap breakdowns, screaming release in the choruses. But to me, they've always sounded more like pain, in all its forms and oscillations: dull migraine aches, sharp violent spasms, a raw punch to the gut, an open wound. And throughout their long career, they've continually found new forms and musical expressions for pain: the dense overlapping noises of *Hybrid Theory* and *Meteora*, the somber keyboards and marching percussions and quiet storms of *Minutes to Midnight*, the hungry electronic prayers of *A Thousand Suns*, even the hard-edged bitterness of *Living Things* and the messy clashing instrumentals of *The Hunting Party*—and, yes, the soft desperation of *One More Light*.

When it was released in early 2017, *One More Light* was a hit with mainstream critics, who heralded it as a successful experiment for a band known for changing their sound with every album (and a return to form after *The Hunting Party*, which many felt had been unremarkable at best). Much of Linkin's core fanbase, however, decried *One More Light* as being too much like mainstream pop, as being too electronic and not rap-rock enough. *The Hunting Party* had been unremarkable, yes, but at least it was *Linkin*. At least it didn't sound like they'd sold out.

But after Chester died, Linkin's fanbase seemed to look upon *One More Light* with new eyes. It was almost too perfect—downright eerie—that the band released its quietest, most somber album just before its frontman took his own life. *One More Light* was perfect eulogy music, but more than that, it felt almost prescient, like an anointing of the sick performed on well-worn guitar strings layered over experimental electronic beats. In the wake of Chester's passing, many fans called each other out for their

earlier reception of *One More Light*, accusing each other of unnecessary cruelty when the album first dropped (because really, what else besides unnecessary cruelty would you expect from YouTube comments?) and of changing their tunes only out of guilt. The rules of engagement for those who've spoken ill of someone who's passed away, it seems, are just as true for rock star suicides as they are for anyone else.

* * *

I first became aware of Linkin Park in grade school, back when I still watched TV and didn't yet know to pretend like I had any taste in music. I was a sheltered middle-class Filipino kid without any peers who lived close enough to make excuses to not hang out with me, so I would spend a lot of my time watching music videos on Studio 23, during commercial breaks in the middle of superhero cartoons. The most commonly played video was Linkin Park's "Points of Authority," which I loved not for any musical merit—it was a good if unremarkable rage-against-the-man song from a band that had done far better—but because the video featured alien soldiers laying siege to a futuristic military base ruled by disembodied heads and defended by glowing blue tentacles. It was brash, weird, and give-no-fucks kitsch, which meant it was tailor-made for a lonely grade-school boy's definition of cool. And because Mom and I still lived with Dad and his family, he would tape the cartoons on VHS for me sometimes, and while I didn't always remember which episodes were which, I always remembered which tapes had the Linkin Park videos on them.

It was also around this time that Dad began to be—for lack of a better term—difficult. He'd always had a temper problem, but my second and third grade were when he began taking it out on me. At first, it was just a certain harshness when it came to low grades, a particular intolerance for instructions being disobeyed and homework being delayed in favor of leisure. But over time, it escalated into near-weekly yelling from Dad over minor indiscretions (which invariably included scolding me for crying over being scolded), all while he never showed up for family dinners and honors ceremonies. The first time I didn't get first honors and told him I'd done my best, he said, "Yeah, but your best wasn't good enough." After that, I was no longer sure I wanted him around for honors ceremonies after all.

I could never relax around Dad; when he was around, I'd clench my fists to keep my hands from shaking, and every breath was a deliberate effort to not look scared. Every spare moment was spent mentally cataloguing everything he'd told me to do and making sure I'd done it correctly, making sure I hadn't given him any reason to be mad. My father had at this point become something to be survived, a walking, talking, stalking lesson in how to live with pain: clench your fists, keep your head down, say nothing, wait it out.

I wish I could say that Linkin Park was how I coped with my father's worsening attitude. It would certainly make sense, what with all their lyrics about frustration and anger towards authority figures. When I hear "Points of Authority" now, I listen to the chorus—"You like to think you're never wrong / You like to act like you're someone / You want someone to hurt like you"—and I think of the time my father screamed at me for trying to comfort a cashier at whom he was already yelling. I think of how his head whipped around and seized me with a glare as he said, "Do not countermand me in public." Today I think of how Mom told me later that my Lolo yelled at Dad too when he was a boy, and I wonder whether Dad's sins were anything like mine.

But the truth is, when I was in grade school, I never once heard that chorus and thought of Dad. I didn't listen to "Points of Authority" because I wanted to sing it at Dad, because at that age, I genuinely didn't know how to be angry at my parents. (I didn't know how to let myself be angry at my parents.) Yelling from a father, even unjustified, was just something you lived with; fighting back was anathema. If I imagined any connection between myself and the speaker in "Points of Authority," it may have been this: the speaker has enough hurt to scream, and decides that he's going to take that scream and turn it into something people will want to hear.

* * *

Here is what we know about Chester Bennington's death:

He was found dead by hanging on the morning of July 20, 2017 in his home in Los Angeles County. He was alone.

He was a recovering alcoholic—he'd struggled with addiction throughout much of Linkin Park's golden era, claimed to have kicked

the habit by 2006, but relapsed sporadically in the year leading up to his death—and there was an open bottle of alcohol in the room where he died.

Bennington's father was a police detective who worked on child-sex cases, but was described by an adult Bennington as “not emotionally stable.” When Bennington was sexually abused by an older male friend in his childhood, he didn't tell his father until much later.

Despite this, Bennington decided not to pursue a case against his abuser after learning that he had been a victim too, earlier in his life. Strangely, conspiracy theories after Bennington died would try to link both him and Chris Cornell to a supposed investigation into Hollywood pedophiles, but nothing seems to have come of that.

He died barely two months after Cornell's suicide, and only a week before Linkin Park was set to go on tour for *One More Light*.

After Cornell's memorial, with *One More Light* having received widespread accolades from mainstream music critics and significant radio play for its lead single “Heavy,” Bennington tweeted that he'd just written six new songs, and had told friends he was feeling creative.

There is a video of Bennington performing in June 2017 at Hellfest, a French hard rock and heavy metal festival, where he appears in full shirtless tattooed glory, and performs “Heavy” to the tune of an audience nearly booing him off the stage. They warm up to him by the second chorus, but one wonders how he managed to get that far.

Bennington was easily the most jokey and outgoing member of Linkin Park. Watch any behind-the-scenes video of the band touring or producing music, and you'll see that half of it consists of Chester messing around and making faces at the camera.

After Bennington died, his second wife Talinda became outspoken on her social media accounts about suicide awareness. She posted videos and photos taken days, hours before Bennington's death, showing him smiling, laughing—seemingly the literal picture of happiness—to show that “depression doesn't have a face.” In response, Bennington's ex-wife, Samantha, later posted an angry Facebook rant about Talinda, in which Samantha accused Talinda of withholding Chester's belongings from their son Dra, and of capitalizing on Chester's death with a funeral that she claimed was not what he (or she) would have wanted.

After Bennington died, the five remaining members of the band—co-lead-singer and rapper-in-chief Mike, guitarist Brad, drummer Rob Bourdon, keyboardist Dave Farrell, and bassist Joe Hahn—released a new logo, in which the hexagon that framed their stylized “LP” was now missing one of its sides. As of November 2017, there is no word on whether the new logo will be permanent, or what the band will do now that its lead vocalist has passed.

After Bennington died, the band released the official video for “One More Light.” It’s notable in that it never shows him looking anything but happy, at peace, the picture of lighthearted dignity. Concert spotlights, lens flares, and the dozens of lights from people’s raised cellphones become a painfully beautiful visual motif, twinkling steadily as Chester’s voice sings, “Who cares if one more light goes out in a sky of a million stars? It flickers, flickers. Who cares when someone’s time runs out? If a moment is all we are, or quicker, quicker, who cares if one more light goes out? Well, I do.” The last images in this video are of Chester ending a performance: in one, he’s bending down and reaching out to his audience, and in another, he’s facing the crowd, his back to the camera, as he spreads his arms wide and bows.

* * *

Here is what we don’t know about Chester Bennington’s death: what role any of this actually played in Chester’s own decision to hang himself.

The old cliché: when someone you love commits suicide, you go through their journals, their social media, every interaction you’ve ever had with them, searching for the signs you think you should’ve seen earlier. “If only they’d told us,” we tell ourselves, “if only they’d said something about what they were going through, maybe we could’ve helped them.”

Being a Linkin Park fan in the wake of Chester’s passing isn’t like that, though, because the signs are everywhere. Every single album features Chester singing of hurt, of loss, of anger at fathers and the world and life itself, in the grand tradition of the metal and rap that form the core of Linkin Park’s influences. And in his interactions with fans, Chester never hid his personal demons—addiction, depression, being sexually abused as a child—but many seemed to assume that screaming his vocal cords out onstage, tattooed torso as bare for the world to see as his heart, was

exorcism enough for him. The signs of pain were there in abundance; we just didn't think anything would actually *happen*.

The insidious thing about mental illness is that, like any illness, it operates not by killing you directly, but by subverting your own natural processes and turning them towards self-destruction. Depression wins by making suicide make sense. This is why all the advice to "choose to be happy" misses the point completely: it's the faculty of choice itself that is sick. And with a singer like Chester, it's even harder to speculate. We're lost not in the absence of answers, but in an overabundance of them. "Maybe this song is the one that explains his suicide," we theorize, "or maybe this one, or maybe this other one." And so it goes.

I find myself going back to "Heavy," the widely played single from *One More Light* that nevertheless got heaped with scorn by many "purist" Linkin Park fans. I confess I counted myself among those who, upon first hearing the song with its delicate, seemingly simplistic instrumentation, thought, "This doesn't sound like them at all," although I like to think it may have been because I first heard it when I was drunk. Subsequent replays, however, revealed the Linkin edge under the pop veneer. The first chorus begins with the line "Holding on," something which in an earlier Linkin work might have been punctuated by slamming drums, but which here is marked by the instruments cutting out, a sudden loss of all sound apart from the vocals, so all you get is one voice—Chester's—asking, "Why is everything so heavy?" This line repeats during subsequent choruses, and only here do they bring the drums in; the noise now comes only after the silence, as the question repeats louder and louder, with ever more urgency, ever more desperation. The signature Linkin rage inheres this song, too, but now it's willing to be quiet, to build before it bursts, to ache.

This is, to date, one of the only Linkin Park songs whose most memorable line is a question rather than an exclamation: "Why is everything so heavy?" The question, fittingly, remains unanswered.

("Do you want to die because you hurt," I ask no one in particular, while listening to the chorus again, "or do you hurt because you want to die?")

Here is what we actually know about Chester Bennington's death: that it happened, when and how it happened, what happened afterwards,

how the people around him moved on, how they didn't. But as for beyond that—the why of it—we barely know anything at all.

* * *

When a band resonates enough with you, it stops being an interest and starts being a language, a way to articulate, if only to yourself, the experiences for which there are no other words. Music becomes the vocabulary of memory; you begin to associate events with songs not because they were actually playing at the time, but because these songs are what these memories sound like, because there's no other way to recall them except through their music and lyrics.

For instance: it is 2003 and I am trailing behind my father in the basement parking lot of Power Plant Mall, two years after Mom and I moved out of his parents' house, and Dad is still yelling. Our unused movie tickets are crumpled in my hand, the only things blocking my nails from digging into my palm. My head is down; all I can see is pavement. Dad is angry at me for comforting the cashier at whom he'd been screaming, and whenever I try to picture what he is saying, all I hear is classic-era Linkin Park metal. Dad's voice in my mind sounds like violent guitar and slamming drums and rough electronics, and I am 13 years old and my piano-key footsteps feel tiny, soundless, in comparison.

Dad says something—I'm sure it's not "I'm like this because I love you," but that's what I hear—and for the first time in my life, I yell back at him. The guitar cuts out; the drums fall silent. The instruments vanish and only the vocals remain: one lone voice asking, "Then why did you fuck your mistress?"

I later find out that this is the moment he was afraid he'd lost me forever, that he'd not only lost his marriage but the son that came out of it. Mom—somehow still friends with Dad even after the annulment—tells both of us, separately, that whether Dad loses me or not is entirely up to me. It brings me a strange kind of comfort to know that I can hurt him too.

And yet: it is 2017, and Dad and I are having burgers in Glorietta fourteen years later. We never stopped having our weekly dinners, even after that night in the Power Plant carpark, but since then we've rarely talked of anything more serious than comic books and politics. Still, our

non-serious dinners have seen us through a lot—thirteen pairs of birthdays between us, two graduations (both mine), Dad changing jobs, me entering grad school, Dad's heart attack, my first year of teaching.

On this night in particular, though, Dad does something he's never done before: he starts telling me about a problem at work, something he's only shared with me and the half-sister I've only met once. This is not something we do—Dad and I don't do feelings—but I nod, giving away nothing. (I've gotten very good at being terrified without showing him.) I consider my options: say something sympathetic, say something generic and noncommittal, say nothing and wait it out. But before I know what I'm doing, I'm giving him advice and helping him work through the problem, and we're actually talking about something real, in a way I didn't think fathers and sons could. It feels important, in a way for which I don't have the words.

But whenever I try to recall the details of this conversation, the first of its kind in my 26 years of existence, I draw a blank. In my mind, Dad's mouth opens, and all I hear is guitar—not angry strumming this time, but a quiet, deliberate plucking, the notes coming slow and lonely and clear, like something out of *One More Light*. He doesn't sound like the Dad I grew to fear as a boy and learned to manage as a teenager, but what he does sound like is *normal*, is *like any father*, is *human*. (Is the band different, now, or is it the listener who's changed, or are these two different ways of asking the same question?) And when it's my turn to speak, it sounds to me like the piano entering the song, not drowned out by the louder instruments, but for the first time an equal part of the mix. It's not an apology, and it doesn't erase the years of hurt and harsh metal noises and rage, but it feels like a new sound altogether—more tentative, more experimental, perhaps a little less metal—and I find that I'm okay with that. Call it, perhaps, a demo track.

I return to these moments now, and I think about my father, and about his father—when it was that Lolo stopped yelling at Dad, whether Dad ever yelled back, what the two of them talk about now. I think about Chester's sons listening to Linkin Park in their two separate houses with their two different mothers, and I wonder whether they fought with their dad too, if they ever heard echoes of those fights in his songs, how it must feel for them to hear their dad's music now that he's gone. And I wonder

if screaming towards peace is just how some fathers and sons learn to love each other—if all any of us are doing, really, is fighting to be heard.

* * *

The child in me says: the lesson in Chester Bennington is *we all lose our idols sometime*. Just as our fathers aren't gods, our heroes aren't immortal, and sooner or later, whether through death or disappointment or a fall from grace to humanity, the icons to whom we look will invariably topple. Growing up, perhaps, means this: we who remain must grow to live with—and, perhaps, fill—the void they leave behind.

But the adult in me says: no, the lesson in Chester Bennington is *seek help when you can*. There is no shame in needing help, and if Chester Bennington is yet another in a long line of celebrities who've lost their lives to mental illness, maybe this is one tragic step closer to the world realizing the enormity of the fact that so many people need help. There's comfort, I think, in the idea that some good can come out of tragedy, even if it is otherwise too late.

But the artist in me says: no, the lesson in Chester Bennington is *the best art comes from a place of truth*. I go back to the Linkin songs I remember, now, and think, in hindsight, of course Chester was battling his own demons. For all that Linkin Park are craftsmen, the material with which they worked had to be raw and desperate and true and unrelenting, or it wouldn't have been so powerful. There's a kind of comfort in that, too; there is solace in the idea that pain can not only be endured, but can be molded, can be shaped, can be performed onstage for fans who will hold their hands up in the sign of the horns for you if you do it well enough, and who'll come to your concerts anyway even if you don't.

But the human in me says: no, the lesson in Chester Bennington is *there is no lesson*. The human in me says *I refuse to reduce Chester to "the artist whose every song was just an unheard cry for help"*. Nor will I eulogize him by saying *his death gave us all this beauty*. Chester may have turned his pain into his art, but art and pain are not the sum total of a life. He was a performer, yes, but also an activist, an advocate, a friend, a father. And any attempt to "solve" him, to find the one crack that explains his brokenness, to turn him into a moral lesson, to look for one song and claim that it might encapsulate everything he was, is to reduce him to a stereotype, the way

the deceased are shrunken into portraits and eulogies, the way a band is flattened into a single sound and nothing more.

So get help, if you need to, I write on Facebook, because that's part of how you mourn someone in the digital age, I suppose. *Yes, talk to somebody. Yes, Chester's story reminds us that everyone deals with their own demons, that we should never be ashamed to get help with ours, that we should be kind to each other, that everyone feels alone sometimes but no one actually is.*

But if there is anything to be gleaned from Linkin Park's discography, something to tell ourselves in order to make Chester's death more palatable, perhaps it is that it is entirely possible to live with pain, to endure for years and get better and get worse and make art out of your damage, to make one song and then make another and then make multitudes and then keep singing. The sheer length and breadth of the band's musical history is testament to this; Chester sang and shouted and screamed his way through 18 years of Linkin Park before succumbing to his demons, and the many forms their songs took are testament to how much can be made out of pain if you're willing and able to face it. Or perhaps what we take from this is not that pain can be overcome, or that pain can sometimes win, but simply this: that we can listen to each other, that maybe all we can do is keep listening, that pain has rhythm and melody and voice, that pain can be *heard*.

* * *

The reason I keep going back to the *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* performance of "One More Light" actually has very little to do with the song itself, or with the fact that it sits right between Chris Cornell's suicide and Chester's own. Even if I were still looking for my one great Linkin Park song to memorialize the man, this would not be it, if only because I think the band has better songs, all things considered. No, what keeps me coming back to this performance is what happens at the end.

During the whole song, Chester stays seated at center stage, near-motionless apart from his mouth and head. During the camera's many close-ups of his face, you can see his expression twist into something pained during many of the lines; despite the shades obscuring Chester's eyes, you can tell he's holding back tears. He and his bandmates wrote the song to comfort the grieving, and now they find themselves mourners, too. And the audience, for their part, seems to be respecting Chester and giving

him his moment; there are no raised cellphones, no cameras, no screams or sing-alongs. It's just Chester, the band, the mic, and a silent crowd, all being there for each other for four and a half minutes.

The chorus before the bridge ends with the line, "Who cares when someone's time runs out? Well, I do." Then we get to the bridge, a wordless instrumental riff—all mournful keyboard and guitar strums—while the lights twinkle on the dark backdrop, the band's own personal firmament. Throughout all this, Chester's face is visibly contorting; he's leaned back, working his mouth silently without saying anything. Then at the very end of the bridge, Chester belts out, "I do," screaming the notes with pitch-perfect precision and holding them flawlessly; this is the voice that's carried most of Linkin Park's vocals for years, and even choked by sorrow, it's a thing of awe.

Then the final chorus begins. Chester makes it through the first half without skipping a beat. But then he sings "Who cares when someone's—" and his voice breaks. The next three words—"time runs out"—go unsaid. In their place, Chester visibly swallows, holding something back, but the silence is brief, and he regains his voice in time for the next line.

"Who cares when someone's— / If a moment is all we are / We're quicker, quicker."

The beauty of that moment is this: the camera is at this point not actually focused on Chester, but on Brad the guitarist, seated to Chester's right. Throughout the entire performance, Brad has been playing with his head down, focused purely on the music and the song. But right after Chester goes quiet, Brad looks up and glances his way for a split-second—plucking his strings all the while—before looking back down at his guitar.

This, perhaps, is what Chester Bennington means to me—not a slogan, not a song, but an image: the image of a man in pain asking "Who cares when someone's time runs out?" but unable to form the words, and the image of his friend checking on him wordlessly, just as the man himself sings, in reply, in grief, in triumph, in his own voice, accompanied by guitar and piano and a crowd waving their arms and a sky of a million electronic stars, "Well, I do."

The Class Reunion: Remembering the Salmon Run

Cecilia Manguerra Brainard

Aside from the two who lived in Toronto, the women who showed up for our class reunion in Toronto travelled from the Philippines, US, UK, and even Switzerland — twenty-four women, college classmates, friends from Maryknoll days. I hadn't seen many of them in decades and had lost the threads of their life stories. In many ways, they were strangers to me, but there were a few commonalities that we shared. Most of us were transplants from the Philippines. Many had left Manila in the years following our 1968 graduation.

Toronto was glorious that October; the leaves were changing and there was enough chill to make it a novelty for most of us. We enjoyed walking to Chinatown and finding a good dim sum place (Dragon City was a favorite). We poked around the shops and bought kitschy little things for gifts. Some of us took a hop-on-hop-off tour to get an overview of the City. We bought gourmet cheeses at St. Lawrence Market, then crossed the street for bottles of wine from LCBO. We had some wonderful wine-and-cheese parties, some of which stretched on until four in the morning.

And we talked — revealed little secrets: our bunions, thinning hair, cataracts, weight gain, arthritis, high blood pressure, wobbly ankles and knees. A few revealed their battles with cancer. Hesitantly we wondered about what we would do when we got older and frailer. This was new territory for us who now live in a culture different from the Filipino culture that we grew up in. We hoped we would remain as strong and independent

for a long time. We hoped not to burden our children.

The post-graduation stories that emerged fascinated me.

Some of the stories were somewhat humdrum, like the classmate who went to the East Coast in search of her independence and who ended up marrying a professor. They've led lives as academics for decades now. Another classmate spoke of how she and her husband left Manila during Martial Law. They went to Guam where her husband's parents lived. They were warmly welcomed in Guam. She and her husband found work easily. Even with five children (she had the help of a nanny), she worked in the private and government sectors. They fit into Guam's diverse population and were active members of the community. The only downside she could come up with was being isolated from her friends in the Philippines.

Another friend talked of moving to the East Coast with her husband where she decided to go back to school to get training in the health field. At Maryknoll, she had been famous for being a "Lanai Girl," one of a group of girls who hung out in the lanai or patio area to watch the cars and world coming and going — not academically inclined in other words. The Lanai Girls were the first to know of any gossip in school. We had a good laugh when she confessed to studying hard to keep up with her young classmates. She was surprised and proud to pull "As" in her classes. She went on to describe her work with the elderly and sick in nursing homes, how physically difficult that work was — she had to lift patients on to beds; she had tend to their sores — but the work was deeply rewarding, she swore.

Another classmate whom I'll call Luisa, shared a more extensive report of her life. The daughter of Chinese immigrants to the Philippines, she had been a Manila resident without the rights of Filipino citizens until President Ferdinand Marcos issued a presidential decree in 1974 that allowed the conversion of Chinese residents and immigrants with appropriate documentation to become citizens. Luisa had been a Filipino citizen for five years before she and her husband and children migrated to the US. She had no relatives in California where they settled, and while they knew some people, those friends were busy with their own families and lives, leaving Luisa and her husband without a support system. As time went on however, she felt at home in America because of the kindness of

neighbors. Once she had been locked out of her house and her neighbor was very helpful. Working at her first job in California also helped make her feel part of the “melting pot” as she called it.

But life as a working mother was hectic. She had to think through her priorities; she had to be organized and focused. In the beginning, she said, life in the US was a matter of survival, of achieving stability, of making sure her children got the best education possible. What kept her going was the thought that there was a “light at the end of the tunnel.”

As one who had experienced discrimination by Filipinos in the Philippines, she revealed similar experiences in the US. Once, Luisa was in line in the Post Office, when a young woman claimed she took her place in line. Calmly, Luisa reminded her of the US Constitution, which silenced the woman.

In another incident, a Black student mimicked her accent. She ignored him but called him for a private meeting where she talked to him about discrimination. That ended the student’s pranks. But she confessed that her greatest pain came from another Filipino who often made derogatory comments about the Chinese in the Philippines and who manipulated office politics to get promoted at Luisa’s expense. “I did feel hurt, but it was mainly because he did not accept me as a Filipino,” Luisa said.

Despite these negative experiences, Luisa recalled meeting a woman in church who welcomed her as if they were long-time friends. This woman, who worked with the deaf and hard-of-hearing at the public school system, impressed Luisa with her humility and work ethic. In fact Luisa was then inspired to transfer teaching from a private school to a public school. Before this encounter, Luisa had only heard of how bad the public schools in Los Angeles are, but she realized this was not true, that this was discrimination at its worse.

When I asked if she considers herself a Filipino American? Luisa said, “Yes, I’m an American, regardless of whether others want to see me as a Filipino American or a Chinese American, or an American of Chinese descent. This is where I have spent most of my life. This is the home of my children, of my partner. America is the melting-pot, not just a salad bowl. I’ve been integrated, assimilated; I believe in its value of democracy, equality even though not quite, due process even if it doesn’t happen all the time. America is not a perfect world, but it’s very livable.”

~

It came as some kind of surprise to me that my story was no different from those of my classmates. I had always thought I was unique and special, that there was only one ME in the entire universe. But after listening to how my friends had to adjust to their new lives away from the Philippines; how they missed their families and friends; how, in America, they had to go back to school or get training to find a profession; how they juggled family and work; how they achieved the “American Dream” of ownership (the house, the cars, etcetera); how relationships with their husbands sometimes failed; how they raised their children; and how they were now looking at the next chapter of their lives (their last years) and praying they could do so independently and gracefully — well, that is also my story.

~

My own story is this:

After graduating from Maryknoll, I migrated to California in 1969 as a UCLA Film student. Soon after, I married the former Peace Corps Volunteer whom I had met in the Philippines. He was in law school, and I worked at an executive secretary at McCormick-Schilling in San Francisco. Even though we didn’t have a lot, we never felt hopeless. We were certain that our small apartment across the Levi Strauss Factory in the Mission District was temporary. In fact we found San Francisco invigorating and interesting with its Flower Children, Hippies, and anti-Vietnam War protests.

After my husband earned his law degree and passed the bar, we moved to Santa Monica in Southern California. My husband worked in downtown LA and I returned to graduate school to complete my studies in film. While working on my movie projects I realized that film is a highly collaborative and expensive medium. It confounded me that I would have an idea in my head in the beginning but the end product would be so different.

During this time I had to respond to my growing family’s demands, and finally I decided to abandon the idea of becoming the “great film maker.” I chose to take care of my family. When the children were older, I worked part time in fund raising.

One Christmas, my husband gifted me with an IBM electric typewriter (this was pre-computer times). He used to see me at night, writing in my journal. His gift inspired me to make arrangements to have a column in *Philippine American News*. I also took writing classes at UCLA Extension's Writers Program. These classes opened another door for me. I discovered that the writing field offered me the opportunity to express myself artistically. Writing suited my temperament perfectly.

I took more writing classes and learned the craft and business of writing. Bit by bit I started to get my short stories published. At some point I gained the courage to call myself a "writer" because my teacher said, "a writer writes."

How simple yet profound that statement is.

I have been writing ever since, and that activity has grown to include editing and publishing. I've enjoyed some successes, but I've also had my share of rejections. I've had to work hard to get my works published, to make a name in the literary field. Sometimes, the situation is discouraging, but I plow ahead. This is my work. This is what I do. If it's important to me (and to my community), I'll find a way.

And while this professional struggle has been going on, I also dealt with family matters, just like my friends who raised their children, ushered them to their independence, and now hope that their golden years will be filled with God's tender mercies.

~

In Toronto, we were supposed to go to a salmon run but the weather was bad and this didn't pan out. But the salmon run plan was enough to nudge a memory to the surface of my mind.

One summer back in the '80s my family and I had visited Alaska. My husband and I and our three boys drove our Volvo north to Bellingham, Washington, where we left the car in a long-term parking lot. We took the Alaska Marine Highway, the ferry system ran by the State of Alaska. Because of its popularity, it hadn't been easy to get cabin reservations. It was worth the effort because it was a great way to see Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway, Sitka and other places. We'd get off the boat spend one or two nights in a place and do our sightseeing. My husband wanted to see

Northern Lights, glaciers and historic sites. My agenda was different. I had read about Filipino Old Timers working in Alaskan salmon fisheries and I wanted to see them or at least find evidence that they had been there. I wanted to learn more about Filipinos in America.

I didn't come across Old Timers but did see young Filipinos working in supermarkets and restaurants. And we had a taxi driver regale us with his story of being married to a Filipina and how her entire family from the Philippines now lived with them. What happened? he said in a droll way.

In Juneau we stumbled upon Manila Square, a small little park with the statue of our own National Hero, Jose Rizal, the sight of which made me proud. It make me feel, that, yes, Filipinos did have a history in Alaska and in America.

One night the boat's captain woke all of us with an announcement that the Northern Lights were in the sky, and we trudged out and gasped at the undulating waves of colorful lights that filled the sky. During the trip we saw glaciers and had our fill of Gold Rush information and sites. The photograph of the long line of men struggling up Chilkoot Pass remains vivid in my head.

Once we picnicked in a park with a small creek, and that ribbon of water teemed with salmon, salmon so thick, it looked like you could walk on them. A boy, around nine-years-old, put his hand in the water and pull out a fish, "Look, Ma," he yelled, holding up a large squirming salmon.

Every river and creek shimmered silver, pink, and red with salmon that swam fiercely upstream. Some struggled up steep rivers, then slid down, and they'd go right back and fight to go upstream. There was no stopping them. I learned that the salmon wanted to return to the gravel beds where they had been born, and there they would spawn, after which they would die. As it was some of the fish were already battered, with parts of their skin in tatters from their arduous journey, four thousand miles long in some cases.

It was the first and only salmon run I had ever seen and I would never forget the sight of those fish. It was their spirit most of all that stayed with me.

In Toroto, after hearing my friends' stories, I thought: *we are like the salmon doing the run*. If you pull yourself away and look at all of us from afar, we are salmon journeying upstream, shimmering silver, pink, and red, looking enough alike, swimming upstream, bravely, ferociously. The only difference between us and the salmon is that the salmon will return to the gravelly beds from where they were born, and there they will spawn, then die.

Many of my friends and I, on the other hand, will not return to our original gravelly beds. We will have to improvise as we face this next hurdle in our lives.

A Snapshot

Angelo R. Lacuesta

“In the game of life and evolution,” writes George Dyson in his 1997 book *Darwin Among the Machines*, “there are three players at the table: human beings, nature, and machine. I am firmly on the side of nature, but nature, I suspect, is on the side of the machines.”

Exactly ten years later, in 2007, I lost my first battle against a machine. I had just come from my first trip to the United States, where I had been a fellow at the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa.

For a middle-class Filipino, I was a relative latecomer to America. Most of my friends had been there to visit family and finally see Times Square and Disneyland. I can't lie—to me it had been a dream, too, fed by Hollywood and TV and glossy magazines, and of course by my upbringing in a country that America had occupied for a long time.

Before the trip I had saved enough money to purchase a second-hand DSLR camera. I borrowed a couple of lenses from my brother, who was a photography enthusiast. I knew enough about how to take pictures because many decades earlier I had assisted my father, who had been a hobbyist when he was still alive. I tagged along with him to on-the-spot photography contests and far-flung locations, tasked with changing lenses and loading film.

Digital photography, I found out soon enough, was so much easier than celluloid—I didn't have to think about how many photos I was taking or how much expensive film was left in the camera. I could take as many

photos as I wanted and only needed to transfer them to my laptop at the end of every day. Three months later, by the end of my residency, I had amassed hundreds of photos, of everything from the brick pavement that lined the streets of Iowa City, to the turning leaves of Central Park, to casual portraits of my co-fellows, who I had been so sad to leave after months of living together and working with them.

Immediately upon arrival in Manila, I was swept by a wave of work—a backlog of immense proportions that took all my attention and energy. As a result, I had to constantly put off my lofty plans: of organizing the photos in my laptop and using them to complete an electronic diary of the trip, made richer by links to articles on the monuments and curiosities I had seen and even short video recordings of readings.

You probably have an idea about what happened next. My hard drive crashed a few weeks after my return home, in a freak accident involving a table at a restaurant and a careless gesture. As my laptop fell hard on the floor, hundreds of images flashed before my eyes, as though I were dying: landscapes and cityscapes, the people I had met and promised to keep in touch with. Trips to repair shops and consultations with experts, each one dodgier than the last, only repeatedly confirmed my worst fears.

My documents were gone—unpublished material and work stuff. Recovering that loss, I decided, came down to the simple, though tedious, act of reconstructing them from handwritten notes or old drafts. I also quickly accepted that I could, in a worst-case scenario, probably rewrite them from scratch.

But how do you recover a photograph—especially if it is one of your own feet standing on the wooden beams of the Brooklyn Bridge? How do you recreate the moment you sat at a restaurant and got served the biggest burger of your life? And for each of those instantly lost photographs I could remember, there were sure to be hundreds I couldn't.

In the aftermath of the accident I wandered around like a man who had suffered a brain injury; I felt like I had lost not just my memories, but memory itself: what exactly did I eat at that restaurant? What exactly prompted me to lift my heavy camera out of my bag and pause in the middle of the day, in the middle of the street?

This may all seem so overly dramatic now, or even simplistic, but perhaps that contains some of the point. I realized how much I had trusted

my camera to capture everything, and by extension, my computer.

Years and years ago, when my father was still alive—that's how I measure many things, whether they happened before or after my father's death—he taught me how difficult it was to realize a single image from what had been photographed, by winding the film back into its canister, and with my hands unseen within the folds of a special hood that allowed no light in, carefully taking it out of the camera, extracting it from the canister and threading it into a special spool that I then placed in a container that allowed me to immerse the film in the chemicals that would start the development process. That was step one. After shaking the container and hoping the chemicals worked properly, I would take out the film, cut it into strips, and line the strips up in rows on a piece of photographic paper, which, when fully developed, made a black and white contact print that was the size of a standard letter, which contained the thumbnails of, at most, 36 photographs that I never completely knew what would look like until they showed up, gaining slow detail, on the white photographic paper.

The color process is, I was told, much more complicated, and my father was never able to learn it, or afford the equipment one needed for it. He also never saw a digital camera in his life, but not because he couldn't afford it. It had not been invented yet.

Fast forward to today, ten years after 2007. My father would have been 70 years old if he had survived that heart attack in 1997—not a very old age, and not a very long period of time to be gone. But come to think of it, 20 years is an entire generation. I am certain that if he had somehow caught a glimpse of the future using some sort of magic camera, everything to him would be nothing short of science fiction, defying even what he had richly imagined, thanks to his love of Star Wars and 2001: A Space Odyssey.

I would have wanted to show him the photographs I had saved on my laptop: the cornfields of Iowa, the interstate highways, the view of the Statue of Liberty from the Staten Island Ferry. Unlike many Filipinos, he had never had a desire to visit the United States, despite his photographer's curiosity and love of the unknown. Of course, he would have saved his final awe for the fact that I would have all these photos saved on a single device. Although he had computers in his time, and had worked on a laptop himself, there was never room for such bandwidth and fidelity.

Today, ten years after 2007, I have two cameras on my phone and the cloud takes care of ensuring the photographs are never lost, in any aspect: each is timestamped and geotagged, and the operating system even stores a split-second of video before and after the image. I have taken too many photographs now—thousands upon thousands—that I hardly have time or inclination to even look at all of them anymore. What is important is that I took them.

When aggregated with all the other snapshots taken by everyone at that particular moment, the photographic record helps create an almost complete image of everything and everyone that exists in that space and time. Combined with other captured information—in my case, biometric and biographical data, the words I’ve written, read, and said, and, soon enough, those I am predicted to write, read, and say—a complete version of myself in full human resolution may be created: no longer corruptible and always available to anyone who wishes to remember me.

My father never even took a selfie. In fact, the word had not been invented yet when he disappeared from the world. As a result, there are only two photos of him available in all of the internet, both so very small and so very grainy that you would not be able to identify him from them if by some magic or accident of time you bumped into him. In other words, we would not be able to recreate him out of any useful memory.

In many ways, we do have magic cameras now. But, really, there is no need for any magic. All we need is straightforward time: nature made man, and man makes machines, and machines will one day will make nature. At this point, we must learn to accept that the progression is natural, and to change things—if we ever wish to—we must do the unnatural.

I have a friend who seems to have gone off the face of the earth. They used to be really good friends of mine, and he used to be part of our really close gang. We were classmates all throughout grade school and high school, and though we took different courses in college, we continued to hang out. Back in the day—I’m finally of that age where I can talk about being “back in the day”—hanging out meant spending entire weekends and after-school afternoons playing videogames, Dungeons & Dragons, and trawling bookstores. I don’t know if you could call that a gang, though: we were about as threatening as pimples on a Friday night—not that we did much on Friday nights.

We had a name for our gang, of course, and we had our official designations. Like all other gangs, there was the jock and there was the bookish one. There was the academic achiever. There was the wealthy one, and I was the poor one. He was the weird genius who was the writer, comic book creator, class cutter, morbid thinker, and Dungeon Master, all put together.

Apart from formal class photos, there exists no single photograph of us. There was hardly ever a camera within reach, and I don't remember there having been much sense in having one taken because we saw no point in preserving our memories that way. We saw each other every day, anyway. Until the usual things happened, as they do in gangs and among friends, and he just stopped showing up and we stopped expecting him.

This is how my friend, like my father, completely disappeared. Except that he remains—coming from the nonexistence of reports of his death on my alumni Facebook and Viber groups—completely alive.

The image I have of him in my mind remains that of a soft-faced schoolboy, a bit on the handsome side, but a lot unkempt, some hurt in his eyes remaining from stories he told us a long time ago about the death of his own father, many years before mine. That description won't work on google, of course, so I've had to subsist on his name—unfortunately quite generic—and all variations thereof, including his family's province of origin and his possible line of work (based on all those career aptitude tests we all took, back in the day). I've also sought him out using the Facebook page of an older sibling of his, where there is a profusion of selfies, hashtagged beach poses, and group shots at tables in geotagged restaurants—in short, the sort of things we everyday people take and look at every day.

But there is no trace of my lost friend. No matter how long and hard I backread and how many google pages I turn. Time froze on that thumbnail memory I have of him, and today I doubt whether I could recognize him if I saw him in the flesh in a mall or in an airport. I think I remember where he lives, or used to. Getting there was once a matter of muscle memory; a jeep ride and a bus ride, a short walk past a village gate. But what a stretch and a chore and a step that would be—to actually go see someone because you haven't seen them in some time.

Besides, to be completely absent today could only be a willful and deliberate act, requiring considerably more effort than choosing not to be

completely present. For example, I have a number of very close friends (especially the wealthier ones) who are not actively on any form of social media for reasons of security, or modesty, or plain lack of interest. But I very often still see their faces, captured by mutual friends at the ribbon-cuttings, the clan reunions, and the vernissages. There is also a kind of reassurance, similarly mutual, that springs across the screen: “I’m just right here, old friend,” they seem to be saying. “You haven’t missed anything, and we haven’t been missing anything, either.”

But for someone to avoid phone cameras at company outings and required-attendance meetings, and to elude the most mundane listings—voting records, alumni rosters, random discussions on Dungeons & Dragons and videogame forums—well, that requires some sort of weird superpower, or a special hatred for mankind. Has something gone horribly wrong? Are they still interested in this world?

My generation alpha kid, born in 2010, is not on any social media platform, but I am often shocked to find out how some acquaintances know him enough to greet him by name when they first meet him. The fault is all mine. I’m talkative on Facebook and I’m a bit of an oversharer and I like going with the flow.

We have just snuck out in the middle of a very busy month to a small gem of a resort by the sea, where we spend long days swinging in hammocks and drinking iced tea, receiving Indian head massages, eating kinilaw, bananas, and Kit-Kat bars of various flavors.

In the middle of it all, he says to me: “You know why holidays are the best? Because you get to miss stuff.”

By ‘miss stuff’ he means he does not miss being in the city and seeing his classmates and attending school and his Kumon math and taekwondo classes and his music lessons.

There are other things to occupy him here. He asks me why the grass is wet under his feet in the morning. He jumps at the sight of birds alighting on our breakfast table and tensely cocks his ear to the *tu-ko* sound coming from the garden behind our cottage. I tell him it’s a gecko and wonders how a thing that can’t be seen can make such a large and scary sound. He squeals with delight in the pool and his eyes light up at the thought of seeing whale sharks for the first time tomorrow morning.

He is perfectly content being alone in our small circle of family—as long as there’s a fast wifi connection for his iPad, of course.

He happily and instantly obliges when I tell him to pose for what I’m sure is his millionth photo. “Post it on Instagram!” he shouts—though he doesn’t even have an Instagram account yet. Oh yes, I thank him for reminding me, and I dutifully and mindlessly post it, for remembrance, for posterity, for all the million reasons I don’t know, and don’t bother to know, but mostly because I don’t want us to disappear.



FICTION

Fruits of Neglect

Kat Del Rosario

Planting the Seed

I didn't think immediately of you once the first tentative leaves crept up from a pile of broken up cement and stones in your Oma's garden. It wasn't even a garden, but the side of a swimming pool cracked open for repair, now filled with rainwater, home to a small community of alien-looking water bugs with powerful legs and tadpoles of different sizes. I often told your father that his parents' garden was a biology lesson waiting to be taught.

"It used to be a nice garden," your father said to me many times as we stood there, sometimes clearing up dried leaves, or playing with our cats Straw—a hyperactive orange tabby— and Frosty—a gentle white kitten with grey markings. Your father would point to stumps of palm trees, sweep his arms mutely across the surfaces of old garden chairs, and all at once you would see the garden in its glory days—akin to that of a poolside resort that would have been no stranger to pamphlets or ads you might find online.

But neglect had driven weeds and ferns to unfurl around the edges of pots; moss followed the imprints of feet and paws, and traced hazy outlines across the tiles. Strange little flowers and herbs with no names and strong flavors propped open their lazy little heads within abandoned flowerpots. Vines crawled along with their giant leaves, cellulose muscles bulging as they tightened their grip on the walls as if marking their territory. To the delight of the cats, the beginnings of cattails and grass grew where empty

spaces announced themselves. The kalabasa grew where we threw the seeds after a lunch of kalabasa soup, as if nature had decided: here, are the fruits of your neglect. Not the string of nameless wildflowers that broke apart like tiny dandelions, not the dragonflies and their metallic coats of blue and red. Not the flowers that died as your Opa brought pots, hoping for them instead to grow. Not the herbs that your Oma pruned meticulously, but had perished anyway, their heads dropping in limp, yellow clumps. None of those, but the seeds we threw away and discarded so that the cats could have a healthy snack; the seeds we kicked into the poolside rubble that grew and flourished, and bore sweet fleshy fruit.

How you would have giggled at your mother's dramatic musings. And I could have pointed out to you—or dragged, if he had walked by—Straw the cat. I would have held him up, wiggled his arms, and explained how he, too, was a fruit of neglect. How so, you might have asked, and I would have answered that his mother left him far too long. What counts as a fruit of neglect? Do accidents, and wild uninhibited decisions? Does a night in an Ermita hotel, with a man your great grandparents did not approve of, twenty seven years ago? But what does it matter, I like to think you would declare with a child's confidence, if there is the promise of delicious fruit?

First Bloom

It was when the first blossoms grew that thoughts of you began flitting through my head. I knew nothing of growing kalabasa; my only experience with them was of consumption: the creamy soups, the soft cubes of yellow flesh in savory vegetable stews, the fresh crunch of young blossoms in warm ensaladas.

You would have learned from school about how fruits are formed. Now, normally, that would be the task of bees: honeybees and bumblebees, carpenter bees and squash bees. That was what I knew of fruits; they were helped along by bees. But very rarely did bees visit your Oma's garden, so we watched the first kalabasa blossoms fall off their stems. As with most things in your mother's generation, dearest, learning about things was easily done by going online. You would have seen the irony of this, and I lament that same irony as well. You would have said, "But, mother, weren't you raised in the hills, surrounded by fruit trees and birdsong, and vegetables sprouting right and left?" To which I could have answered by

pointing at your lola, if she were in close vicinity, and saying “Blame your lola; she wanted me to learn about books and arithmetic, she wanted me to forget about the land,” for your lola thought the land was beneath books.

By the time the blossoms came again, I knew I had to look for the male and female flowers. Who knew? Who would think that there was such a thing? A male and a female of the same plant, separately, eight stems away from each other: the males, all eight of them in a row, diminutive and shy, all the same size, all in line, anxious and impatient. A few days later, the female arrived, unfurling the huge petals above her round base—fiery locks above her own bosom, plump and green! In the morning, the she-flower’s petals open at their widest, revealing a sticky claw-like formation within, to lure ants to their doom. The males opened too, their heads turned hopefully towards her. I would have told you to listen closely, and listen well, and to keep quiet in case your father was nearby, feeding the cats or clipping his toenails; I would have told you that men are silly, simple creatures whose desires are driven by sex. I imagine that you would have giggled, and I would have pointed to the male flowers craning at their stalks, over the leaves, just to get a glimpse of the female, eager to pollinate her. I would have explained to you the night your father and I met, how he had smiled a certain way to get me to stay longer, just a bit longer, and how I had draped one of my legs over the other, suddenly and out of nowhere a quiet seductress. I would have told you proudly that it worked on your stupid father; and he would have overheard us and pestered us with inquiries. But we would have giggled to ourselves, keeping our laughter to the overgrowth.

Hand-Pollination

I thought of you as I plucked a male, stem and all, and stripped him of his vestments, leaving only the powdery rod contained within; and as I slid him into the she-flower and prodded at her claw until every bit of her was coated in his powdery pollen. I looked to the side, suddenly self-conscious, chortling to myself, expecting a watching child, thinking how it would have been the best way for me to tell you, “This is how most life begins,” that this is all there is to reproduction: the simple insertion of a male into a female, until his seed and her seed combine to bear fruit. This was how simple it is. How I would casually discuss with you, over

a dining table, and shown you in simple, physical terms—with flowers, or with a vegetable that I might one day feed you. How, if you had asked me “how are babies made, mother?” this would have been my answer. I would not have at first thought of sex, which was what your lolo and lola thought about when I asked them the same question. I would have cut off a stem for you, and showed you how to peel away the petals, and to carefully spread the pollen.

“In a few days,” I would have told you, “this female will close up its petals, and go to sleep. You see this bulb she has? By next week it will grow to this big.” I would have held up my hand, formed a circle with my thumb and pointer finger, and your eyes would have widened.

It would have been an easy transition, to tell you about sex. How I first read about it in a book. How painfully I was made aware of it when I was far too young to be made aware of it, during a fifth grade confession; how it was more about power, and sometimes desire, than reproducing. I would have told you, the simple kalabasa knows no desire or power, and perhaps you would have asked, “Doesn’t it?”

It would not have! Otherwise, all eight males would have at first hollered and hollered until the she-flower awoke, and then torn themselves bodily from their stems to get at her until she lay shivering and wilted in the dirt. Perhaps some of them would have torn her open before she was ready; perhaps one of them might have harbored his desires quietly, composing love poems and planting songs in their roots. The she-flower may have closed herself off to all but one of them, or let herself fall off her stem if she desired no one, or she may have defiantly opened her claws to any blossom, ant, or bee—all reveling in her scent and sticky beauty—and found power in their helpless, hopeless desires.

I wonder if you would have asked me, “Could they do that?” It would have been one of your first almost-fables, “The Simple Kalabasa And How Babies Are Made.” I could easily imagine your father chiming in “The Sexual Kalabasa!” But in all truthfulness, the story is not so far from the reality of the sex we learn by ourselves, brought violently upon some of us, bearing accidental fruits that rot and fall off their stems left and right. Some turn into more clueless fruit; all were part of a cycle of hopeless, pitiful, and stupid flowers, all of us. Except, maybe, you. Your father and I made sure we would make no mistakes, and as we tended to the kalabasa we made

sure every part of it was accounted for: every leaf and every small blossom that sprouted we counted before pollination.

Harvest

Here's why people grow kalabasa: it's a tough little crop. It can bear the brunt of the most extreme heat, even rain, and once you cut it away from the plant, it can stay on your shelf for weeks and weeks, until you plan to eat it. I could have told you that, and how even the smaller blossoms can be eaten, or how simply redirecting the cats to the base of the plant makes for hassle-free fertilizing. But I never could have told you for sure why people decide to have children. Your own lolo and lola, as well as their own parents and grandparents, decided to have children as a kind of retirement plan. Your Oma and Opa decided to have your father simply because they became jealous of a newborn niece and thought she was so cute, so they wanted their own. Many people don't even plan it; children come in batches every day. So as your father and I planned our futures together, we spoke of having our own daughter, how we would have her when we were done with the world, done with seeking out and discovering its secrets.

But the world would never be done with us.

If I could tell you one secret, and it is because you know my mind as I imagine you to, there by the kalabasa patch, checking to see if they are ripe for harvest. Sometimes I think myself burdened with the sheer number of them, wanting to lop them all off at once just to be done with it, and be unbothered with all the troublesome tending...

Once, I made your father pollinate a forlorn looking she-flower, and we did not expect it to grow so quickly into a promising young kalabasa, only to find it one morning sloughed off from its stalk, dead and brown, eaten away by caterpillars. How I had murdered them with stones, pricking myself on their spines in my anger, but no mind—I did not stop until every last caterpillar had been smashed to a pulp. I buried that dead kalabasa like a child, speechless, as your father watched, amused.

It takes a little over a month for a kalabasa to grow into its full size; the type that had grown in the neglected garden grew only to the size of two fists, almost as if they were a single-serving kind. I would have pointed out to you the kalabasa in its many stages: at first, a deep, dark green, shiny

as if waxed to perfection in their youth. They are nearing ripeness if they slowly turn yellow, or if the shiny appearance begins to dull. Remove the kalabasa with a sharp knife, four inches away from the top of its head. Be careful of its tiny, spindly hairs.

Slowly, the kalabasa patch died where it began. It had spread from the edge of the garden, and ventured into the grassier parts of the yard and into the derelict pool. Your father's love faded with similar slowness, parts of it browning and withering away, dropping to the ground, crumbling into earth under the burning sun. I would have told you that not even all the care in the world can save everything you hold so dear. I never knew what happened to the last of the fruits that grew from neglect, that I had cared for in their transition before their painful endings; I left before I had the chance for harvest.

But I think of you still. If I can't imagine your face now, or the feel of your hands, I can imagine your mind, and your heart. I can imagine that you may be capable of feeling how I feel, that you will know I will think of you always, and that at least in these lines—and for at least a few months, amongst a small kalabasa patch that grew from a neglected garden—we had known each other.

Sundays at the Cardozas'

Larissa Mae Suarez

Her son tells her of his engagement over a phone call. His words are drowned out intermittently by the sound of horns and engines, as though he's standing by a road, or maybe inside a car with the windows down, but who would roll the windows down in this city, with the thick smoke visible in the streets and the hot hard heat of the sun stinging the skin? Since Joaquin moved out of the house she often catches herself doing that. Pausing in the middle of some task to think of him, imagining where he is at that very moment. "Congratulations, that's incredible news, I'm very happy for you," she says, but her mind, absurdly, is still stuck on the question of his location. She's about to ask him when he says, "Are you with Dad? Don't tell him my news, I want to tell him myself." He ends the call. The instant silence is jarring. It's a moment before she puts the cell phone down.

Elise is in the living room of the house her husband started building long before they got married, in one of those walled, gated subdivisions with wide tree-lined roads and gently sloping hills that her younger child, Diana, once described disdainfully as "suburban rich." Elise is undisturbed by such remarks. She loves how smart her children are, how they never run out of things to say and topics to talk about; they were valedictorians and dean's listers and committee heads all throughout high school and college. On the wall above the ivory-colored sofa is a cabinet with a glass cover that she commissioned when Joaquin and Diana were in preschool. At first it held only perfect attendance stars and drawings

with happy face stamps; now it's crammed with framed certificates and trophies and medals hanging from wooden knobs, the only cluttered note in her elegant living room.

How happy she was, in those postcard-perfect years when Joaquin and Diana were born, two years apart: a lovely house, a good husband, and a son and a daughter, in that order, with a pet dog that was supposed to sleep in the kitchen but who always ended up in one of her children's rooms. She was ecstatic when both her children took after their father, tall and fair, whereas, even in heels, her head only reached Tonio's shoulders. The dog died years ago, and now there's no need for a pet, since Joaquin has left and Diana only comes home on weekends.

The aroma of roasting meat and buttery pastry wafts like an invitation from the kitchen. Tonio is cooking in there. Their maid, Barb, always remembers to close the door, so that the smells of food won't get into the furniture, but she goes home on Sundays. Usually they eat leftovers on Sunday, but as her husband nears retirement he has taken up cooking with enthusiasm, searching out specialty gourmet shops that sell things like provolone cheese and truffle oil, and tonight he's making beef wellington. It was one of his early triumphs as a self-anointed chef; that golden, crisp slab of pastry-encased meat, which dripped juices when he sliced it, flakes of crust sticking to the edge of the knife. Diana once asked him to make it for an overnight study session with her law classmates, and he puffed his cheek with pride. He has never failed to recreate the dish. It sustains him though the failure of dishes such as crabmeat frittata ("This *tortang alimasag* is too dry, sir, too salty," said Barb innocently, unaware of the chef) and honey glazed pork ribs ("The sauce is just a bit runny for a barbecue," Barb observed, eyeing Tonio diplomatically).

Tonio's phone rings, and Elise walks to the kitchen. Like the living room, it is a wide expanse of white walls and wooden accents. She finds Tonio, who is never able to answer his phone while cooking, rolling out dough on the counter. "Wacky has something important to tell you," she says, placing his cell on speakerphone.

The sounds of traffic have subsided into a quiet indoor hum in the background, and Joaquin's voice is clear. "Dad, I'm getting married!"

Tonio moves closer to the cell phone, a wad of dough forgotten in his hands. "And you can't come here and tell us that in person?"

Hers was technically the better response, Elise reflects, hitting all the right congratulatory beats, but her husband's voice booms with the genuine joy missing from hers. Joaquin responds to it. Elise wanders back to the living room as the conversation continues behind her. The sound of a female voice pipes up from the phone, and she closes the door firmly behind her, while Tonio says, "Call me Dad, you've earned it, my good girl. So you finally got him to propose."

Elise first met Nora Bustos two years ago, entirely by accident. Joaquin had just broken up with his girlfriend of five years, and she was almost as distraught as her son. He had started going out again, with a girl he didn't introduce to the family, and though Elise was hurt she let it pass, thinking maybe it was a rebound thing that wouldn't last. A few weeks into his new relationship, Joaquin left the house for a date, but Elise saw his wallet on top of the piano. Sure enough, Joaquin returned within the hour. He left the car idling outside the gate while he entered the house, and Elise went outside, saw a girl's silhouette through the window of the front seat. She came closer and the window rolled down. "Hi! I'm Nora," the girl said, extending a hand, which Elise shook with some embarrassment. She wasn't accustomed to shaking hands with young women through car windows. Nora was pretty enough, with wide dark eyes and wavy hair, kept just short of beauty by her snub nose. "I'm Wacky's mother," Elise offered, and Nora nodded. "I'm a friend of a friend of his," she said, smiling, and Joaquin returned with his wallet. He kissed his mother on the cheek and got into the car, driving off, while Elise stood on the curb, the words "Won't you come in for a glass of water" unspoken on her lips.

Later she learned that Nora was the same age as Joaquin, a scholarship girl in one of the country's best universities, the same one from which she, her husband, and both their children had graduated. But Nora was still studying. She had been in college for, "oh, around eight years now, give or take a few semesters," she had told Elise and Tonio, without embarrassment, during her first dinner at the Cardoza house. Elise wondered if it was polite to ask what she had been doing during the semesters she wasn't studying, but Joaquin volunteered the information himself. "She worked in call centers to support herself and her siblings," he said. Nora pitched her voice in the robotic, lilting cadence of phone operators: "THANK-less, DEAD-end, SOUL-des-TROY-ing." Tonio laughed, and even Elise smiled.

The kitchen door opens, and Tonio comes out. "I told them to come over for dinner," he says, then sees the look on her face. "You're not happy?"

"I'm happy," she assures him, and comes to him for an embrace. He gets flour on her blouse. Over his shoulder she sees an angel figurine on top of the glossy black piano, and resolves to remove it before Joaquin and his fiancée arrive. It is a gift from his ex-girlfriend, Sophia, given to her for Mother's Day.

That night the newly engaged couple shows up holding hands. Nora is in worn jeans, a faded shirt. Over dinner they tell their parents the story of the proposal; how Joaquin hadn't planned it and didn't even have a ring ready, but they had been at a bar where she performed a couple of songs with her old band, and she had looked so beautiful and he loved her so much that he couldn't resist, and now Nora says, "Joaquin and I really were going to come over tonight, to tell you in person, but then my mother called this morning, so I had to tell her. And he decided he had to tell you right then and there, too."

"You have to introduce us to your parents soon," Elise says. There is a brief, awkward pause, the two of them sharing a look. Joaquin says casually, "Oh, her father isn't going to come to the wedding."

"He's, well, he's living with someone else," Nora says. "I don't really talk to him. Or about him." She stops, but no one speaks; her eyes are narrowed, as if thinking of how much to add. Finally she says, "But my half-brother will probably come. Him, I like. You can meet him soon if you want. My mother lives in Catanduanes, though; she probably won't come until the wedding itself."

Elise feels a thick humiliation, but she is also annoyed. This is the first time she's heard any of this. She gives her son a stiff look, then smiles at Nora. "Have some gravy."

Diana arrives when they have moved to the living room, cups of brewed coffee steaming in front of them. Like Tonio, she sounds truly excited by the news. "Now it can be told," Diana says, laughing. "Do you know, I actually like you a lot better than Sophia? Not that she wasn't nice. But I like you better."

"Oh, thanks," says Joaquin, making a face at her. He will turn thirty this year, yet sometimes he still seems so young, a little boy being teased by his baby sister.

“Convenient,” says Nora. And Diana tells her, “No, really! I’m not going to lie to you. She was really beautiful. But I think you’re smarter.”

That’s Diana, frank to a fault, and now it’s Nora who says, “Oh, thanks,” laughing, without affront. She is a pleasant young woman, really, and Elise does like her. But Sophia Salazar was Joaquin’s girlfriend for so long, Sophia who was almost as tall as her son, with white skin and *chinita* eyes and that slender build that looked good in any outfit, and she always kissed Elise and Tonio deferentially on the cheek when she saw them. Just a few weekends ago, she had run into Sophia’s mother in the mall, and they chatted about their children. The Salazar matriarch was an imposing woman who always left Elise with the feeling of being underdressed, or out of place. Mrs. Salazar was as tall as her daughter, eyes always dramatically lined and hair forever blow-dried and hair-sprayed to an unshakeable bouffant, but her face had softened when she said, “Sophia’s been promoted. She’s a supervisor now in that firm’s HR department. But she hasn’t had a serious boyfriend since Wacky.”

It is Nora who sits here now, however, and before the couple leaves, Elise goes to the bedroom to fetch her mother’s engagement ring, which she has always intended to give to Joaquin. The ring she wears is also an heirloom, but from the Cardoza line — her husband, like her, is the eldest child in his clan. She places her grandmother’s ring on her palm, a small but reassuring weight in her hand. Rose gold. Three small diamonds embedded in the narrow band. It is nothing extravagant, but she treasures it. Back in the living room, she calls her son over and gives him the ring. Joaquin promises to give it to his fiancée later.

That night Elise can’t sleep. Somewhat guiltily she turns on the TV. This is one of her secrets: she loves home shopping channels. On nights when she lies awake, she waits for the sound of Tonio’s rumbling snores, then sits up to watch the parade of ludicrous products. Salesmen pitching Magic Hard-Boiled Egg Crushers that can mash a hard-boiled egg without including pieces of shell (Perfect for egg salad and other egg-based meals!), Wonder Mops that can clean a liter of spilled liquid without needing to be squeezed into a bucket (Top-secret ultra-absorbent micro fibers!), and Fat-free Food Sheets on which you can place fried food to absorb oil (Guilt-free snacking!) — sometimes, as furtive as a child, she sneaks downstairs to call the hotline, to place an order for something that catches her fancy.

Tonio has no interest in housekeeping and never asks where any of the household items come from, but their maid has sharp eyes, and instantly spots the newfangled items of dubious origins.

“It’s not my fault, ma’am,” Barb said darkly, after the latest failure, a Portable Super Smoothie Maker that spun bananas and milk into a lumpy mess before it sputtered and died. “That thing was broken from the start.” And, reproachfully: “We already have a blender, ma’am.” Elise then vows never to be hoodwinked again, but always buys something within a few weeks. Tonight she orders a Compact Closet Organizer with multiple zippers, hooks, and compartments (comes in five different shades!). She’ll give it to the newlyweds when they set up house together.

Over the next few weeks she sees them regularly. They usually come on Sundays, and stay the whole day, talking about their plans for the wedding. “I love it here, it’s always so — so clean and calm,” Nora says, while helping Tonio chop some vegetables. Joaquin says, “That’s because of Mama,” but before Elise can feel pleased he adds, “Just kidding. It’s because of Barb.” Instead of chiding him, Tonio laughs.

Joaquin and Nora set the date for June next year, the summer after Nora finally graduates. That gives them close to a year to prepare, and money is no object; the Cardoza family will shoulder the lion’s share of the costs. Joaquin is part of the management team of the Cardoza clan’s architecture firm, and over the past years has helped, as he tells Elise proudly, “to modernize the company, expand its online and mobile network platform, and reach a whole new base of clients.” He is a business graduate, unlike his architect father, but he took enough classes in college, and saw enough of the firm while growing up, to know how it’s done. A few years ago he began leasing an apartment in Makati, near the firm’s office, while Elise and Tonio remained in the Pasig house. The two cities are separated by a river that rises during storms, and by several traffic-congested highways — these are Joaquin’s constant excuses for not coming to visit. Elise doesn’t barge in on him in Makati. The lines of privacy and propriety between them have long been drawn and respected. But now that he is engaged, Nora openly lives with him in his apartment. Elise disapproves. She once expressed her concern to her husband, and Tonio was unconcerned. He said lightly, “It’s a different generation. And they’re engaged, after all.”

Elise did no such thing during her own engagement. She met Antonio Cardoza at twenty-three, when she had just begun teaching; he was thirty at the time, and his nephew was one of her students. She was stunned when he showed up one day at the classroom door, the flowers in his hand an unmistakable signal. Her students, all boys, watched with deep interest. She knew she was no great beauty, not like this bookish bachelor whose glasses and diffident air could not conceal his classic *mestizo* features, or the artful folds in his designer polos. But he kept coming, kept giving her presents, and though she would have loved a love letter (maybe a poem or two, she thought, her literary airs stirred), she adores his gifts, and keeps those that don't wither, those she can't eat. (His default: roses and chocolates). It was a rapid courtship. Within the year she was engaged, and on her wedding night lost her virginity to her husband. She had been proud of it at the time, but these days, watching Diana go out at night, watching Sophia and then Nora leaving in Joaquin's car, she wonders if she has missed out on something vital, like a woman who has never been pregnant, or who has never been married. Once she takes a risk, blurts out these ideas at confession. The priest tells her to remember how lucky she is, and saddles her with three Hail Marys.

When he proposed, Tonio told her, "I love how steady you are, how trustworthy. You are my rock." She fought to hide the wide grin threatening to take over her whole face, kept her head demurely down as she said, "I love you, too." But these are the broad strokes. The finer details are myriad, tangled, less easy to parse.

Of course, Elise tells her siblings (who still come to her for advice on all things, even their own marital affairs), marriage takes work, and any marriage has its ups and downs. She finds comfort in these platitudes. But the veil over her own marriage is one she never lifts. No one in her family knows, for example, that at first Tonio wanted her to quit teaching. She initially agreed, but the next day, standing in front of the classroom with some thirty faces looking expectantly up at her, she felt a staggering wave of tenderness, like they were all her children. She was relatively new — perhaps because of that, she had done her best to get close to her boys, to learn their names and their lives and find the approach that would work on each one. She had a batch of troubled boys whose faces, in particular, seemed to be turned towards her in mute appeal: Darryl (parents separated, each living with other partners); Marco (mother dead

and father busy with work, living with any aunt that would take him); Carlo (wealthy, busy parents who let him run wild and dabble in drugs); Michael (parents dead in an accident, living with grandparents who were excessively strict with him), and Daniel (got his girlfriend pregnant, and his parents paid for the abortion). These tidbits were supposed to be very hush-hush. Obviously, then, all the teachers knew. They called these students “those boys,” with special inflection, or “that kind of boy,” in the faculty room. Their parents were called worse things.

Elise maintained an air of benevolent superiority towards her boys, and tried not to scold and fuss as the older teachers did. This paid off in occasional small, earnest confessions. That day, Daniel asked her innocently if she knew any teachers in the all-girls’ school, a ten-minute drive away, where his girlfriend studied; his parents had cut off all contact with her and he wanted Elise to give her a letter. How touched she had been, at the kindness in the gesture, at the potential (which she had thought ruined) which might yet ripen into the manliness of hard lessons. Gently, she declined his request, explaining that she was in no position to do anything like that. But when Tonio arrived at school to fetch her, she told him, “I don’t want to quit.”

And so she taught for the next thirty years. Now she has asked for, and received, a considerably decreased workload. She teaches only a couple of senior high school classes, four days a week. She applied for the part-time load two years ago, which she remembers very clearly, because it was the occasion of her parents’ fiftieth wedding anniversary, and the year that Joaquin and Sophia broke up.

One weekend, she accompanies Joaquin and Nora to an art gallery in Antipolo, to put a down payment for the wedding reception. The gallery’s back lawn has three levels, like wide terrace steps, and on each level there are vine-laced gazebos and canopy tents, with thick blankets spread out on the grass and pillows scattered artfully around. All these are white; the only items of color are the paintings, sculptures, and installation pieces dotted throughout the garden. Nora is moving her hands with animation, talking about the placement of the cake, the tables, and the band. The ring glints on her left hand. The gallery owner is nodding, drawing an invisible line on the ground, to indicate where the extension cords will run. “What do you think?” Joaquin asks Elise.

"It looks beautiful," she answers. And it does. Still, this is not the kind of place she would choose for a wedding; it is striking almost to the level of flamboyance, well-designed but casual, a site for book launches or exhibit openings, perhaps, but not a wedding reception.

For her parents' golden anniversary she rented out the ballroom of one of the most expensive hotels in Metro Manila. It had plush red carpets, veined with gold lattice; floor-to-ceiling windows framed with elegant brocade curtains; tables and upholstered chairs with carved backs (*kamagong*, the hotelier assured her, the iron wood); and a stage with glass-and-wood panels discreetly positioned to conceal the sound system. Now, she looks at the pillows and the grass and casts about for an objection she can frame in acceptable terms.

"What if it rains?" she asks.

"Oh, it probably won't," says Nora. "But when it rains, the gallery owners move all the artwork and everything else to an inner room with a balcony. We can set up there, too."

Elise insists on seeing this Plan B, so they walk inside the gallery. There is a large, rectangular room on one side, bare except for paintings, and one wall is comprised of sliding doors that open out to a medium-size balcony. "Can this fit a hundred guests?" she wonders aloud, studying the room with a practiced eye.

"Oh, we won't have a hundred guests," said Joaquin. "We want it a little more intimate than that."

"Maybe fifty," muses Nora. "We don't have to invite the distant relatives. Just immediate family and close friends."

Elise is taken aback, and turns to a painting to hide her frown. How could she have forgotten that Joaquin is not one for big weddings? For her parents' anniversary she had wanted, and indeed could have found, at least three hundred guests. Sophia was on her side, but they were outnumbered by Tonio, Joaquin, and Diana, who convinced her to cut the guest list down to a hundred and fifty.

She does not like remembering the role she played in her son's breakup. In that year, as her parents' anniversary loomed, Elise had been consumed with the culmination of her life's work, a collaboration with a university professor in a textbook that was about to be published by the Department of Education. Of course, she had to deal with all the attendant

problems — revisions, securing permission for copyrighted material, adding last-minute content, commenting on the layout and cover design, coordinating with public officials, and so on and so forth. Truth be told, it was her name on the top, and the book was at least eighty percent her own work, with the professor acting more as a consultant than a partner. The bulk of the problems were hers to solve. And Diana was of no use then, in her first year of law school, shell-shocked by the heaviness of the workload. Elise remembers staying up late, proofreading a chapter, while Tonio was also up, going over the plans for some building; and they both looked up, startled, when they heard the sound of someone crying upstairs. It was Diana, surrounded by stacks of books and Xeroxed cases; she tearfully confessed that she had been humiliated during a recitation in her constitutional law class, and would probably fail the midterms as well. Tonio tactfully backed off, while Elise went to the bed, put her arms around her daughter, and told her, “Tell us how we can help, dear. We’ll do what we can to make it easier for you.” That was also the year Diana decided to move to a boarding house closer to the law school, with a classmate for a roommate, so she could “really focus.”

Elise had expected that the duty of anniversary-planning would land in her lap. She was the oldest of four — her brother was in Dubai, and he promised to help pay, “but only if you need it;” her sister was in Cotabato with her husband, and she promised to fly in for the event, “but we’ll only stay overnight;” and her youngest sibling still lived with their parents, promising to help if he could, but he was “really busy with job-hunting and freelancing.” So she asked Joaquin and Sophia for help. Joaquin was noncommittal at first, but Sophia agreed with enthusiasm, and said brightly, “It’ll be good practice for our own wedding.” So Elise chose a date, booked a venue, and made up a guest list; everything else she left to the two of them.

On their way home from the gallery, Elise sits in the backseat of her son’s car and falls asleep. She awakens when the car comes to a stop at a gas station. She opens her eyes to see Joaquin and Nora leaving the car, and sits up to watch as they walk to the convenience store. In her drowsy state she feels none of the anxiety that has plagued her over the engagement, and she feels calm, even fond, at the sight of Joaquin with his arm around Nora’s shoulders. It reminds her of the way she felt when her son at fourteen came home with his first “girlfriend” (name lost to her

now), and she saw that he was on the verge of a new stage in his life, the beginning of adulthood, the vestiges of childish shyness warring with the fresh certainty of maturity. The next stage, she thinks ruefully, is when the certainties crumble, maturity loses its luster, and adults second-guess the choices they have made.

Joaquin and Nora emerge through the glass doors of the store. Elise, placidly watching them, is startled when Nora suddenly throws Joaquin's arm from her shoulders. They are backlit, their faces shadowed, but Nora seems angry. They turn to face each other, gesticulating, and Joaquin ends the argument by walking back towards the car, while Nora stands there, her lips forming the shape of his name. He gets into the driver's seat, and though he slams the door closed Elise immediately pretends to be asleep. The car is silent, suffocating. Minutes pass before the car door opens and Nora gets in.

"You don't want to talk about it?"

"Not now. We'll wake up my mother."

"We wouldn't wake her up if we talked outside."

"There's nothing to talk about."

"Are you sure?"

Joaquin exhales through his mouth. His voice is brittle. "Not. Now."

Nora doesn't answer, and the engine starts up. Elise keeps her eyes tightly closed in the backseat. She wants to comfort her son, to ask him what's going on, but this is not the time or place. She struggles to suppress the small thrill of hope that surges through her at their argument. With Sophia she saw only the aftermath of arguments, like the detritus left in the wake of a typhoon — Sophia giving her the barest peck on the cheek before rushing outside the house, face averted. Joaquin moping around, moody and irritable. Barb triumphantly showing off an almost brand-new polo shirt, a gift to Joaquin from Sophia. "Wacky says he doesn't like the style, and I can have it! My nephew is going to love this."

Still, when Joaquin and Nora drop her off at the Pasig subdivision house, she stands for a while in the open door of the gate, watching the blurred shadows of the couple's heads inside the car. The tableau is intimate, compelling, everyone else an outsider to whatever happiness or unhappiness the two of them share.

Inside, Barb follows her upstairs, where Tonio has fallen asleep. It takes her a moment to recognize the crumpled heap of fabric on the bed beside him as the Compact Closet Organizer. She picks it up and shakes it out, trying to force it into some semblance of the jaunty cloth shelves, separated by dividers and zippers, which hung smartly from the cabinet rod in the TV spiel. “Ma’am, the package came for you, and I didn’t know what it was, so he opened it to see,” says the maid.

“It’s all right,” Elise answers, and Barb leaves. Elise has been looking forward to telling Tonio about the fight, to speculate with him about what it might have been about. It’s only nine o’clock, but he has to get up early tomorrow for some meeting at the office, so she doesn’t wake him. She gives up on the closet organizer and folds it to some semblance of flatness, then puts it away and lies down next to her husband.

What brought this on? She has loved him from the moment he showed up at the door of her classroom, and has spent the past decades striving to learn him, his interests, his desires; yet sometimes he still does some trivial thing that catches her off guard. He has taken very good care of her and their children, and learned to praise her work and her intellect (he insisted on getting an autographed copy of her textbook for his Makati office), but she knows that he has not been learning her. He has never taken an interest in her purchases before.

She does not mind this. A different generation, she thinks. Sophia and Joaquin had broken up over what seemed to her then the shallowest of arguments — she never even heard it from Joaquin directly, but from Diana, who said her brother had given her permission to tell their parents. Apparently, they argued over the caterer. Sophia, a longtime vegetarian, had wanted a caterer that served “heavenly green options, their veggie lumpia is the absolute best,” but Joaquin was pushing for some other caterer that grilled steaks on the spot, medium-rare to well-done, just as the guest wanted it. “And then,” Diana said, “It got worse. First they were fighting about the caterer, then they were fighting about prospective children, and if they would be raised vegetarian or not. Unbelievable. Stupid, if you ask me.”

“Be kinder to your brother,” Elise said automatically, and Diana said, “Oh, they’re not stupid, but the fight was stupid, don’t you think? Do it both ways! Have vegetarian weekdays and meat weekends, or something.

Or,” she snorted, laughing, “raise one kid as a vegetarian, and another as a meat eater.”

Elise agreed with Diana then, but now, revisiting the argument, she reflects on the opacity of relationships — how difficult it is, even impossible, to see what holds two people together, or what can separate them. Perhaps it hadn’t been ridiculous, after all. Food is not a small matter. “The family that eats together, stays together,” she murmurs to herself. An old joke from childhood that hasn’t resurfaced in years. Tonio stirs beside her on the bed, and she touches his hand.

Some weeks later, Joaquin texts to say he’s coming home for dinner. It’s a Saturday night, but Diana is at the house, and she goes out to open the gate for her brother. She has been coming home more often lately, and seems less tightly wound, less prone to complaints. “Maybe she’s getting used to law school,” Elise tells Tonio, as the two of them stand in the kitchen. Sunday is supposed to be the maid’s day off, but Barb asked to switch it to Saturday, just this one time, because it is her nephew’s birthday and they’re having a family gathering. So Elise is in the kitchen with Tonio, helping him cook mussels in the shell with blue cheese sauce, a dish that Nora said she liked because it reminded her of her home in the province, by the sea. “But we had *suka*, not this,” she said, wrinkling her nose at the ripe, sharp odor of the sauce. “It’s an acquired taste,” Joaquin told her, kissing her on the nose. A different generation. And by the end of dinner, Nora pronounced herself a convert, scraping the last smears of blue cheese off the plate and licking it off her finger.

The front door opens, and they hear Diana’s voice, then Joaquin’s. Their words are indistinguishable, but Diana’s screech pierces through the kitchen door. “What?”

Elise already knows. On Tonio’s face there is only the mildest curiosity, but Elise wipes her hands on the nearest rag, and hurries to the next room, to join her children.

“Mama,” he says. He is alone. “The wedding’s off. I’m not going to marry Nora.”

That thrill leaps into Elise’s breast again, but by now she is used to tamping it forcefully down. “What happened?” she asks.

“Da-ad!” Diana yells. To her brother she says helpfully, “So you only have to tell it once.”

When Elise hears the name “Sophia” she imagines that everything is about to turn out as she has always wanted. But then the word “pregnant” lands in the room, and the sheer gravity of it causes Diana’s jaw to drop, while Tonio sits heavily on the piano bench. Inside Elise’s chest, the thrill disappears, replaced by hollow numbness.

“That’s what you were arguing about, in the car,” she says, with sudden instinct. “You told Nora you had met with Sophia.”

He raises his eyebrows. “I thought you were asleep,” he says.

“When was this?” Diana asks with interest.

“Maybe a month or so ago? When we put the down payment on the gallery,” says Elise, a rebuke.

Joaquin says sharply, “That was my money. I paid for that.”

“The money’s not the issue,” Elise tells him.

Diana looks at her mother. “So why bring it up?” Then to her brother, “And as for you. Where’s Nora?”

“She moved out.”

They are talking in circles. They are picking at crumbs, delicately circumventing the important thing. For the first time in years, Elise asks her son a direct, intrusive question. “When did you find out about the pregnancy?”

“Just yesterday,” Joaquin admits. “Sophia’s pretty upset about it. Don’t tell her mother, because she doesn’t know yet, all right? I broke up with Nora this morning.”

“You should have broken up with her as soon as you and Sophia had your little fling. A month or so ago, right, Mama?” Diana is deliberately provoking her brother.

“Why don’t you stay out of this?” he snaps at her.

“She’s right.” Tonio shakes his head. He looks like an old, tired man.

Joaquin doesn’t answer.

“Well, nothing can be worse than that,” says Diana, and Elise wants to slap her. Now is not the time, she thinks, but her daughter keeps going relentlessly. “I dropped out of law school.” Her manner shifts, becoming less cavalier, and she bites her lip. “I’m so sorry. I know you spent a lot of money on this, and I know you loved imagining me as an attorney, but it’s just not for me.”

Elise has to pause for a moment, to catch her breath, feeling winded. “When did you drop out?” she asks.

“At the beginning of the semester. I’ve been looking for a job. I was going to tell you when I found one.”

Tonio is rubbing his temples, like he has a headache. “You’re sure this is what you want?”

“Yes,” says Diana calmly.

It is a strange dinner. All four of them pick morosely at their meals, peeling bits of flesh from the shell. Joaquin leaves as soon as possible and Diana goes to her room, leaving Elise and Tonio at opposite ends of the table.

The next morning, Elise walks softly to the kitchen to brew coffee. It is a quiet hour, early Sunday morning, when her husband and Diana like to sleep in and Elise can pad through the house in her soft slippers, enjoying the solitude. The kitchen window overlooks the driveway at an angle, and she hears the tricycle before she sees it, its rude rumble catching her attention as it pulls to a stop outside their gate.

Elise goes outside to find Nora counting out change. The tricycle drives away in a burst of noise and smoke.

“Come inside,” she says, but Nora shakes her head.

“I just came to return the ring.” Unexpectedly, she moves forward, embraces Elise. “I’m very sorry for how everything turned out.” They are around the same height. Her eyes are red-rimmed. The morning sun slants over them, and Elise is conscious of the weight of the arms around her.

After a moment, Nora steps away, hands over the engagement ring. Rose gold. Elise folds her hand around the ring and remembers all the stories enclosed in it. As a little girl she sat in dim rooms with her grandmother, listening to narratives of war and Japanese soldiers, and was mystified when tears came to her *lola’s* eyes, at the memory of her beau returning when she had thought him dead. “I thought all I had left was this ring, right here,” she said, letting Elise sit on her lap and fiddle with her hands. Elise liked to gently pull at the loose, soft skin, giggling at its pliability, twisting the ring around her grandmother’s finger. Then the ring passed to Elise’s mother. She kept it safe for years, until the hardest period, when they moved to a bungalow behind the Cubao marketplaces and Elise

was repeatedly told to be careful with her uniform so she could pass it on to her younger sister. Her mother broke, offered to sell the ring, but her father said, “No, no, we’ll find another way.”

Then the ring came to Elise, because she was the oldest, and now it has been Nora’s. It will pass to Sophia. Then she grasps that she doesn’t actually know if Joaquin intends to marry Sophia.

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” she tells Nora. Neither of them mentions Joaquin’s name. Only when Nora is walking down the street, away from the gate, does Elise recall that she arrived on a tricycle and now must walk several blocks to the main road outside the entrance to the subdivision. However, she has no way to escort Nora. There are two cars in the driveway, but she has never learned how to drive.

She watches Nora turn the corner. She is adrift. Sundays feel like a window into the coming decade, when she and Tonio will both be retired. They can go on trips, go to Paris or Venice, or go on cruises, things they have always planned and never managed to do, promising themselves it will happen someday, when they have time. Only, she was not his first choice. She has always known this. He was fresh from a nine-year relationship when he met Elise. He proposed to the girl, but she went abroad. As far as she knows the two of them never contacted each other again. But she did not yet know all this when Tonio showed up at the door of her classroom, waiting patiently for her to dismiss the class, winking at his nephew in the room, and as they went to dinner, up the escalator of a midrise building his firm had designed, she imagined that the rest of her life would be series of upward movements, through doorways and rooms, each better than the last, because she and Tonio would build a life together, and it would be the life she deserved — she, a woman who sits with her back straight; who can speak English with perfect diction; who can work every day while still managing her own household; who has, for over fifty years, been the most dutiful of daughters, wives, and mothers — and even though her life has led to this house, a beautiful house, designed with some other woman in mind, she has always believed that she got her reward: a husband and children she need never be ashamed of, or worried about, because they are not that kind of family.

Elise goes upstairs. Tonio and Diana are still asleep. Carefully, she returns the ring to its proper place in her dresser. Then she hears a

chiming sound; her discreet ringtone, her phone vibrating on the table by the bed.

It is Mrs. Salazar. A number she never deleted because she had been hoping, hoping. She wonders how the news played out in the Salazar household. Tears, recriminations? Sorrow or rage? Anger at Sophia, or at Joaquin, or both? Is terminating the pregnancy an option, or is a grandchild welcome, if unexpected? Elise does not duck phone calls. She has not needed to. But now she puts the phone in silent mode, so as not to wake Tonio, and lets it ring.

Elise goes to the cabinet and takes out a folded mass of cloth, hooks, and zippers. She walks back downstairs. When Barb comes, she'll give her the Compact Closet Organizer. She'll tell her she can have it, or she can throw it away.

The Monsters

A Novel in Progress

Augusto Antonio Aguila

1

It is the best place to make out or smoke pot, a huge vacant lot with wild grass, weeds, and dry bushes lit only by a street lamp post. It lies just beside the filthy river which has become a dumping site for garbage, old tires, dead cats and rats, used sanitary napkins and condoms, rusty tin cans, large empty sacks, bed pans which look like beautiful porcelain cups from afar (especially if you see them from a window,) feces of different colors, shapes and sizes, and other things unrecognizable and in various states of decay. Anything unwanted and undesirable floats in the filthy river.

Adults warn children not to play in the vacant lot which everyone calls *malignuhan* because of rumors that a hideous white lady with sharp claws haunts the place. Some say a *tikbalang* guards it which is why nobody wants to purchase the lot thinking that it brings *malas* to whoever will buy it, while others say a mermaid claims a young boy or a young girl's life every year. But despite the stench and scary stories, children are often seen in the lot catching spiders and fireflies, and when they can't find any of these, they settle for cockroaches, putting them in jars to keep as pets or as specimens for torture, or playing *habulan* or *tex*. But the children immediately scamper away when it's about to get dark or when they see the bigger kids and drunk men who go there for a variety of reasons.

One November evening, just after Halloween, four young boys who were barely in their teens went to the vacant lot. Celso, the tallest, the stockiest of the four, the group's leader, told his gangmates that they would meet after dinner because he would be teaching them something that all boys should know, but only if there were no other people in the lot. His friends were quite excited about the idea since he also told them that what they were going to do would change their lives forever. Francis thought that Celso would teach them how to smoke; Ringo thought the same thing. Danny thought that they would be drinking their first beer or gin. He had *inuman* on his mind. Danny always saw his father and his friends huddle around a small table just outside of their house on a Friday or Saturday night drinking numerous bottles of beer until they were dead drunk.

They agreed to meet at seven thirty, but the gang wasn't complete until eight o'clock. Ringo still had to wash the dishes and he didn't want his mother to suspect that he was up to no good with his friends. They all told their parents that they would be working on a group project. When Francis' parents asked him what project he and friends would be working on, he told his mother that they had to make sea creatures out of small stones or pebbles. They believed him because it wasn't the usual generic answer boys give. They were lucky that there were no one else in the vacant lot. Celso brought a big red flashlight and a satchel that seemed to contain a lot of things because it was bulging, while Danny brought a kerosene lamp.

"Let's go there near the river," Celso urged the other boys.

"Why near the river? They say that there's a..." Danny said.

"What? A *tikbalang*... a white lady. You believe in them? You're such a sissy! There are no such creatures!" Celso mocked his friend.

"Yeah, let's just follow Celso. He knows what he's doing," Ringo said trying to hide his fear. He didn't want Celso to think that he was a scaredy cat. Francis remained quiet but he was breathing heavily, thinking about what Celso hinted that they would be doing that evening.

"I'm not scared! Who said I'm scared? I'm thinking of bad people silly... Like criminals... Who might be... You know?" Danny defended himself but he knew that he didn't sound convincing.

'Oh c'mon! I've always known you easily get scared shit. Don't deny it. Remember, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*? You could hardly sleep after we

saw that on DVD. Trying to hide your fear, little man? Hehe... I know. I always know,” Francis said.

“Stop it, you blabbermouths! What the hell are we gonna do here Celso? What’s your fucking bright idea?” Ringo couldn’t contain his impatience. He was actually excited about what Celso was going to teach them.

“Hey, watch your mouth! You’ll know in a short while!” Celso said. He stared Ringo down to show him who was boss.

Ringo and the rest kept their mouths shut. They didn’t want to cross Celso. He was their leader and he called the shots.

“Now guys, I’ll show you something...” Celso said. All of them sat on the grass.

“The river stinks! But I love it! Haha!” Francis said.

“Yeah, it smells like your butt!” Celso teased Francis.

“It’s probably your dick! That’s how your dick smells!” Francis retaliated.

“We’ll get to my dick later, shithead!” Celso said.

Celso brought out of his satchel of magazines that displayed naked women with big boobs on the cover, old issues of *Hustler*, *Playboy*, and others that had foreign titles, probably French, which the boys could not pronounce correctly.

“Wow, where did you get them?” Ringo looked at the covers of the smut magazines one by one until his hands became sweaty. He had never actually seen one. His parents were fundamentalist freaks. They talked about God everyday. Their sentences always ended with Amen. They called everyone brother and sister, particularly those who attended the same church as them. But Ringo was an eleven-year-old-boy whose hormones were raging, though they were kept in check by his parents with talk of fire and brimstone. They knew that their son was an adolescent and for them that was dangerous. They didn’t want him to be like other boys his age who thought about sex all the time. They placed the computer in the living room so that they would see what Ringo was googling or surfing. There was no way that he could surf porn sites. But he masturbated on a regular basis, usually before taking a bath. His parents never knew this of course. They thought he was an innocent

and obedient boy. They didn't know that he was horny all the time. They had regular bible readings in the house. The television also had its special place in the living room. For Ringo's parents, watching television was a family thingy. They believed that their son's viewing habits should be closely monitored. Ringo had no choice but to watch religious programs, cartoons—the-not-so violent ones—and game shows. There were times when his parents watched television until midnight, especially during Friday and Saturday night.

One night, Ringo had found it hard to sleep; he twisted and turned but sleep never came. He heard the sound coming from their TV; the volume was turned down. He checked the time on the wall clock; it was a few minutes past midnight. For some reason, he suddenly had the strong urge to take a peek at what his parents were probably doing while watching television. He stood up and slowly opened the door of his room just enough to see what was going on. He covered his mouth when he saw his parents lip locking on the sofa. Ringo closed the door. He crawled to his bed and there he laughed silently, but he also felt a bit nauseous.

The only magazines in the house were those that dealt with their religion and pamphlets on how to be a good Christian boy. It was Ringo's first time to see a magazine that had women in their birthday suits who either caressed their boobs or had their legs spread-eagled for every boy to have a glimpse of the promise of hot sexual paradise. The yellowish light coming from the flashlight and the kerosene lamp made the naked women on the pages of the magazines look even more real and inviting. The shadow made the women's lips redder, their pussies pinker, and their eyes looked as if they were on fire. Ringo already had a hard on.

"I saw them hidden in the *bodega*. I'm sure my dad put them there for me to see. He wants me to be like him ... A real macho man. I'm gonna fuck girls when I reach seventeen. I heard my dad telling my uncle that he couldn't wait for the time that he could take me to a place where I would be 'initiated'. I can't wait for that. I wanna taste a real pussy!" Celso said proudly.

Celso came from a family whose parents allowed him to do whatever he wanted to do. He was spoiled rotten, especially by his father, since he was the youngest and the only boy in a brood of four. His parents, both government employees at the *municipípyo*, thought that he would bring the

family good luck because of the popular belief that having three girls and a boy in the family was a sign of *buena suerte*. Their relatives told them so.

His father was rumored to have a mistress, a much younger woman who liked daddy types, but no one was able to prove it. When Celso heard these rumors, he would tell his friends that it was a big lie. Celso idolized his father. He bought Celso the best bike when he was ten years old. He bought him boxing gloves and taught him how to box like a champion. He even bragged about Celso becoming the next Manny Pacquiao someday because he was a fast learner. He bought Celso signature shirts and branded rubber shoes that he always wanted. His sisters envied him and told their parents that he was lazy, that he didn't do anything in the house. They just laughed and told his sisters that he was a boy.

His sisters just stared at their parents in total disbelief. One time his eldest sister, Carla, had the audacity to ask at the dinner table, "Why does being a boy come with a lot of privileges? Why do you spoil Celso?" Their father banged the table and told Carla that she had no right to question him. Those were his rules, and if they weren't happy with them, they could leave the house anytime. The girls looked at their mother who seemed like she didn't hear anything. She was forking the liver in the menudo and just continued eating. Celso just kept quiet; he never thought his father would defend him that way and he really felt good about it. Celso looked at his sister who was in tears. He gave her a grin that seemed to say "I am the boss here and you can't do anything about it." His sisters never said anything about him being a spoiled brat anymore, but he knew from the way they looked at him, particularly Carla, that they hated him for being their dad's favorite. Celso didn't care. In their house, he was the king.

"This is nothing! Just old magazines! There are better sites on the Net." Francis said, but he also flipped the pages of the magazines.

"Just shut up! Look at those boobs? Do all white girls ... Well ... You know ... Have no hair down there?" Ringo said.

"They shave it, dummy!" Celso joined in the reading.

"Shave? Why would they shave it? Mrs. Serminio said that pubic hair serves as protection ..." Francis said.

Francis wanted to think that he was the brightest among his friends. He was an average student, but he worked harder in school than his friends. He knew he wasn't going to be as popular as Celso. Celso had a commanding

presence; the other boys listened to him. Besides none of the others had it, which was the reason why he wanted to be the bright one in class. He would listen attentively to teachers' lectures, submit assignments and projects even earlier than the deadline. Celso would sometimes call him *sipsip*, but Francis didn't care. Because he was such a hardworking student, he would always be in the class' top ten, number nine or ten usually, never in the top five. He was happy with his standing in class, because his friends were not even in the top thirty. Francis never knew his father. His mother, a saleslady in a department store, had him when she was only eighteen. She barely talked about Francis' father. When he asked about him on occasion, she would just shrug her shoulders and say, "He left us. What else do you want to know? If you want to know if he was handsome, he was, but that was it." After that, Francis tried his best not to ask his mother about his father. It was pointless anyway. When his classmates asked about his father, he told them the truth. He never elaborated when they wanted more information. He would tell them, "That's it. That's the story of my life." They would leave him alone after that.

"Who cares about what she said? It's better when it's shaved ... Pussy looks better that way," Celso said with authority.

"What's that? Yuck, is that your saliva Ringo on that blonde's pussy?" Danny was surprised to see a sticky colorless liquid on the page that had a Miss America type of girl, blonde and blue eyed, who had large pink bunny ears on her head. Everyone laughed and called Ringo *tulo laway*.

Danny was the shortest in the group. He looked more like he was eight instead of eleven. His mother left the country two years ago to work in London as a domestic helper. His father did nothing much; he just loved drinking with his *ka-tropa*, mostly jobless men like him whose wives were either housewives who depended on their parents for support, or women who sold fish, meat or vegetables in the market, or former G.R.O.s in Videoke bars. Danny thought that his father was lucky because he had a wife who supported him. He wasn't a bad man. He took care of Danny, bought the things that he needed, took him to the mall every now and then to eat in burger joints and watched him play arcade games, and he treated Danny like they were of the same age. Danny remembered how his mother joked about his father being a drunk despite being born on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The people in their vicinity

respected his father. They listened to what he had to say. Danny didn't know why. Neighbors knocked on their door with such regularity asking whether Ka Tony was around. People in Danny's neighborhood always had problems which his father could solve. Danny had no idea how his father was able to do this. He had tattoos on his chest and arms, mostly of strange looking creatures: one was a half-woman, half-bird creature on his left arm, and a head of a one-eyed monster on his right. On his chest was a fire-breathing dragon that attracted stares when his father was shirtless because he resembled prison inmates like those you seen in old action movies.

When his mother would come home for a vacation, she would shower her husband and son with gifts. For his father, T-shirts with the faces of Bob Marley, Led Zeppelin, Ozzy Osborne, The Doors, The Beatles, David Bowie printed in front; an assortment of alcoholic drinks; audio CDs of his favorite rock bands, and rubber shoes and jeans; and for Danny, battery-operated cars, a remote-controlled airplane, t-shirts with cartoon characters printed on them and rubber shoes too. There were of course a lot of imported canned goods and a variety of candy bars. Danny would see his father kiss and hug his mother even when he was around. He felt embarrassed when his parents did this. Danny would look away or pretend to be doing something, like fixing the small angel figurines on the shelf. At night in those two or three weeks that mother was on vacation, Danny would hear his parents moaning in their room. There was a time when Danny suddenly woke up from his sleep because his mom screamed so loud. He went out of his room, knocked on his parents' door, and asked "*Nay*, are you and dad all right? Did you just scream?" His parents didn't answer immediately. Danny heard them laughing softly until his father replied, "We're okay, Dan. Your mother just got pierced by something really sharp!" They continued laughing inside their room. Danny went back to his room, worried that his mom had been hurt by thumb tacks or a big nail.

"Are these all, Celso? This is it? Old smut magazines? We kind of expected more from you," Francis said. He sounded as if he were challenging Celso.

"That is not all, guys! I brought something that will blow your minds!" Celso arrogantly replied.

Danny and Ringo looked at each other. They were already happy looking at the countless naked bombshells who did not only pose for the mag without a stitch on, but also sucked the men's long and hard penises and posed in various sexual positions with them.

From his satchel, Celso brought out something that looked like a bigger flashlight that had a long slit in the middle. He proudly held the thing like it was some kind of trophy. The other boys looked at it with wonder and amazement.

"Do you know what this is?" Celso waved the thing right in front of their faces. His friends hadn't seen anything like it, but the sight of the strange thing excited them.

"This, guys, is called a fleshlight! I'm sure you haven't seen one!" Celso felt he was the coolest of the four by simply holding the treasure in his hand.

"What is it for?" Ringo asked.

"it's supposed to make our dicks happy, Dummy!" Francis shouted.

Ringo and Danny looked at each other again and they knew immediately what the flesh light was for.

"Francis is right. I'll give you a demo." Celso pulled down his basketball shorts and underwear. Ringo, Danny, and Francis stared at him in amazement. Their leader and friend was already naked from the waist down. Celso rubbed his cock until it was hard. They looked at Celso because compared to what they had, his was bigger. Celso lay on the ground and kept on rubbing his dick.

"Hey, one of you, put that magazine right up so I can see some pussy..." Celso instructed his friends. Danny reached out for one magazine and opened it on a page with a long-haired brunette spread-eagled in bed.

With his left hand busy stroking himself, Celso inserted his hard cock inside the fleshlight using his right hand. He started to move it up and down. He began to moan while his friends stared at him and the wondered that the fleshlight could offer them.

"Guys, this feels like the real thing! Shit! Shit! Ohh...Ohh...I'm coming...I'm...I'm...Oh...Shiiiiiiiiit!" Celso came inside the flesh light.

"Boy, that feels good! Now your turn guys! Who wants to be next?" Celso offered the flesh light to his friends. Francis took it from him

immediately. He removed his shorts and underwear and began to pleasure himself. Danny was next. Ringo was last. They didn't care if all their jizz were mixed inside the flesh light.

After being serviced by the flesh light, the four boys laughed. They talked about how great the experience was. Each one of them felt that their bond was sealed by the strange intimacy, a secret that only the four of them shared. They wouldn't tell the other boys in school. They felt they were already men, and better educated than the other kids. They felt they knew something that the others didn't. While their schoolmates talked about stickers and robots and sneaking from their parents to go to the mall, which to Celso and his friends, were silly kid stuff, what they experienced was definitely life-changing as Celso had promised. The three boys knew that they had chosen the best leader. They also knew that he would introduce them to other cool stuff which excited them even more, especially Ringo, who felt he had found true salvation with the fleshlight.

"Now what do you think guys? Isn't that the coolest?" Celso asked his friends. He sounded as if he wanted approval.

"Where did you get that thing?" Danny asked.

"I also found it in our *bodega*," Celso answered

"That might be dirty. We might end up infected with like... Like having tetanus!" Francis cried.

"Did you even wash it?" Danny asked Celso.

"Wow! You smart asses have a lot of questions! You should have asked before inserting your dicks into the thing!" Celso said.

"I don't care! We will all die of tetanus! Let's do this again!" Ringo cut in but the other boys ignored him.

"Look, it was inside a box and sealed. It was never used. Maybe my dad bought it but never had the chance to use it. When I saw it, I took it immediately and wrapped it with old newspapers just scattered on the floor. You have to admit, it was good, wasn't it?" Celso explained.

"Let's do this again!" Ringo repeated what he said.

"Hey, little man here is a sex maniac, hahaha!" Francis made fun of Ringo.

“Look who’s talking. You were the first one to grab the thing from Celso, you fucking sex freak!” Ringo defended himself. Danny joined in the laughter.

“Don’t worry, we will do this again. You can borrow the fleshlight if you want. But you have to be careful; your parents might find out. You’re in for a lot of trouble, unlike me, I am a big guy. My dad would be okay with it.” Celso said.

“My dad too would be okay with it. If he sees me using it, he might even congratulate me,” Danny said.

“You two have a problem, especially you Ringo. What if your parents find out? They’ll surely freak out. They might invite their friends to give you a pray over to banish the devil inside you, hahaha!” Celso laughed.

“I’ll find a way. I’ll find a place to hide it. They won’t suspect. I’ve never disobeyed them. I’ll borrow it one of these days,” Ringo said it like he was an adult.

“Little man sounds like big man now. Now that you know what your dick can do, there’s no turning back!” Francis said.

“I hope a girl sucks my dick soon!” Ringo said.

“I would be the first one to be given a blowjob because I’m the biggest. You know what I mean? You all have kids’ dicks! No girl would want that! They’ll think they’re sucking Stork candy!” Celso bragged.

“Asshole!” Francis said.

“Just telling the truth man! You three are still children and you look like children. That would be child abuse, hahaha!” Celso spoke in a very condescending tone.

“But we’re all the same age, you idiot! You’re just like us... You’re...” Danny tried to make a point.

“Yeah, but I look like a young man! I’m taller than you, got no tummy, and I have a big dick! That makes all the difference, children!” Celso continued to brag.

“That’s true, but you’re still using a fleshlight. If you’re so hot why don’t you bring girls here so we could fuck’em!” Francis challenged Celso.

“We can’t do them here, dickhead. You can only fuck girls when we treat them special. You can’t bring them to a vacant lot!” Celso said.

“C’mon stop it guys! We enjoyed it right. So chill...” Ringo said.

The four boys just looked at each other and they all laughed. Francis picked up Celso's red flashlight, turned it on, and walked a few steps towards the river.

"Hey, what'cha doin? Looking for ghosts?" Celso jeered at his friend.

"No, I'm just checking it out. Looooook into the daaaaark and dirty waaaaaater..." Francis joked.

"Why don't we just smell the fresh air? Hahaha... if it weren't for the mags and that flesh light I wouldn't be here!" Danny said.

"Do you see anything?" Ringo asked.

"Not much... Cans and the usual trash... There's a... What's that?" Danny was trying to make out what he was seeing in the water with his flashlight.

The other boys stood up and walked towards Francis.

"Do you see that?" Francis asked his friends.

"You mean that huge floating trash bag?" Danny asked.

"What could be inside it?" Francis mused.

"Oh, that's just probably some old... You know... Equipment or furniture... Don't be such sissies..." Celso said.

"Let's check it out." Francis said.

"Let's not... What if it's some dead animal?" Danny said.

"Like a horse silly!" Celso said.

"If you're scared, you might as well go home," Francis said.

"Me? Scared? You must be joking. C'mon let's drag it here," Celso replied.

"I'm not going into the water," Danny said.

"Me neither," Ringo said,

"Well, since it was you who suggested it, why don't you get it?" Francis challenged Celso.

"Oh, I get it now. You three are just a bunch of sissies! Since I'm the only real man here, I'll get it." Celso dipped his feet into the water. The black trash bag was about five feet away. The water was up to his thighs. He pulled the trash bag which he thought was quite heavy.

"Hey, help me here, will you?" Celso told his friends.

The three boys helped Celso bring the trash bag to where they were seated earlier.

“C’mon, let’s open it!” Celso said excitedly.

“Wait, wait! What if it’s a... It’s a...” Ringo stammered.

“A what dummy?” Celso was already pissed off.

“We should leave it... Here.” Danny said.

“After all the trouble, no way!” Francis said.

“Yeah, too late for that now.” Celso said wiping his legs with his hanky.

“Who’s gonna, you know?” Ringo asked.

“I’ll do it! You’re all just chicken.” Celso was already in a bad mood.

Celso checked out the rope and saw that it was knotted tightly.

“Give me a hand here...” Celso said. Francis knelt beside Celso. He didn’t want to be called chicken.

“God, there’s another trash bag inside!” Francis breathed heavily.

“What could be inside must really be kept hidden,” Ringo said.

Celso and Francis loosened the rope tied around the second trash bag. The four boys looked at each other. They knew that they shouldn’t have done this in the first place, but it was too late. Celso stood up and reached for the end of the trash bag and pulled it up so that what was inside would come out.

The four boys gasped. They froze in terror. Ringo felt nauseous. He walked a few feet away from his friends and started vomiting.

Inside the black trash bag was the upper body of a woman whose face was mutilated; her breasts cut open. They were staring at a body which resembled a *manananggal*, a dead one. The three boys ran away, leaving Ringo who was still vomiting, and screaming at his friends to wait for him.

Hantong

John Jack G. Wigley

Mas nauna pang nagising si Resie kaysa sa *alarm clock*. Hindi na siya nabigla. Gabi-gabi niya itong *sini-set* sa alas singko y medya para hindi siya mahuli sa trabaho. Pero araw-araw din siyang nagigising bago pa man tumunog ang orasan. Gusto pa sana niyang mamaluktot sa kaniyang maliit na katre, pero dahil naalimpungatan niyang silipin ang *alarm clock* na nakapatong sa maliit na mesa sa tabi ng kaniyang kama, hindi na siya nakatulog uli. Bumangon siya at pinatay ang *alarm*. Bahagyang kinusot ang mga mata at ipinahid ang nasungkit na muta sa damit-pantulog. Kinuha ang takure, nilagyan ng tubig mula sa gripo, at ipinatong sa kalan. Tumingin siya sa oras sa dingding. 5:17 ng umaga. Maaga pa. Alas otso pa ang pasok niya sa *toll gate*. Napansin niya na nakatumba ang mga lalagyan ng patis, toyo, at suka sa plato. Nagkalat ang mga laman nito. Malamang may daga na namang kumalikot dito, isip niya. Kinuha niya ang lumang basahan sa lababo para punasan ang mga ito. Minasdan ang kalendaryo ng mga santo malapit sa paminggalan. Buwan ng Abril na pala, himutok niya. Dumaan ang buong Marso na hindi man lang niya namalayan. Ipinatong ang baba sa kanang kamay at nag-isip. Bumalik ang kaniyang ulirat nang marinig ang sagitsit ng kumukulong tubig sa takure. Marahan niyang ibinuhos ang tubig sa isang tasang bulaklakin at nilagyan ng kape at asukal. Lalagyan din sana niya ng *creamers* pero naalalang nakalimutan pala niyang bumili ng *sachet* sa tindahan ni Aling Fely sa kanto. Okey na ito, aniya. Hindi ko naman kailangang may *creamers* ang kape. Basta may asukal, tama na. Hinigop niya

ang bagong timplang kape at saka nag-isip uli. Maya-maya, ginalugad niya ang kusina. Pinansin ang mga kulang sa bahay: tinapay, sabon, supot para sa basura, basahan, at *creamer*. Kailangan na niyang mag-*grocery* uli. Inilista ang mga kulang sa isang gusot na papel at isinilid sa *bag*. Mamaya ako bibili pagkatapos ng trabaho, pasya niya.

Pasado alas saits y medya nang makalabas siya ng bahay para mag-abang ng dyip papasok sa trabaho. Nakasalubong si Aling Mameng na nagwawalis sa bukana ng aksesorya kung saan siya umuupa ng isang maliit na kuwarto. Alam niyang naging trabaho na ni Aling Mameng ang maunang gumising at linisin ang harap ng kanilang lugar. Madilim pa, kumikilos na ito. Para kay Resie, naging malalim na debosyon na ng matanda ang panatilihin maayos ang paligid. Parang panata ng mga deboto ng Nasareno sa Quiapo.

“Pasok ka na?” bungad sa kaniya ni Aling Mameng.

“Oho,” marahan niyang tugon.

“Alam mo, iha, malakas ang kutob kong yayaman ka at makakaalis sa sinumpang lugar na ito,” dagdag ng matanda.

“Salamat ho, pero...”

“Kasi, masipag ka, at pumapasok araw-araw. Walang mintis. Pag ganiyan ang tao, gumaganda ang buhay.”

Biglang nakaramdam ng hiya si Resie. “Naku, hindi naman ho, Aling Mameng. Takot lang akong masisante sa trabaho kaya maaga akong pumapasok,” dagling hirit niya.

“Suwerte ang mga magulang mo na may anak silang gaya mo.”

“Ulila na ho ako.” Bumaba ang tono ng boses ni Resie.

“Ganunman, masuwerte pa rin sila, iha.” Malungkot na tumingin si Aling Mameng sa kausap at marahang hinawakan ang braso nito.

“Tuloy na ho ako,” sambit ni Resie at bahagyang tumalikod para kawayan ang paparating na dyip.

Sa loob ng sasakyan, naglaro sa isip ni Resie ang sinabi ng matanda. Yayaman daw siya. At makakaalis sa lugar na iyon. Sana nga. Suwerte daw ang mga magulang niya. Paano nangyari iyon? Hanggang ngayon nagsisisi siya na hindi nakatapos ng pag-aaral. Hanggang ngayon, nakasadlak pa rin siya sa matinding kahirapan. Suwerte ba siyang anak dahil sila ang naging magulang niya? Ang ama niya na walang inatupag kundi ang mag-almusal

ng alak, magsugal, at magbigay ng sama ng loob sa kaniyang ina? Isang araw, nakita na lang nilang mag-ina na nakabulagta ang ama sa may durungawan. Bural ang mga mata at umaagos ang bula sa bibig. Hindi na ito umabot nang isinugod nila sa ospital. *Cirrhosis* daw. Natusta ang atay sa kaiinom. Hindi makapaniwala ang kaniyang ina. Kahit manginginom daw ito, siya pa rin ang ama niya. Huwag daw siyang mag-isip ng masama sa ama. Hindi makapaniwala si Resie. Mahal pa rin ng kaniyang ina ang kaniyang ama sa kabila ng lahat. Di nagtagal, sumunod na rin ang kaniyang ina. Sabi ng ilan, namatay daw sa kalungkutan. Nasabi niya sa kaniyang sarili na hindi siya maghahanap ng asawang katulad ng kaniyang ama. At hindi rin siya papayag na maging katulad ng kaniyang ina. Suwerte ba silang magulang? Suwerte ba siyang anak? Naisip ni Resie na sana may dalawang tanong na kailangan munang sagutin ang tao bago siya ipanganak. Kung gusto ba niyang mabuhay sa mundo, at kung sino ang magiging magulang niya. Bumuntung-hininga si Resie habang naglayag ang kaniyang isip.

Naramdaman niyang sumikip ang loob ng dyip sa dami ng mga pasaherong sumakay. Lahat ng mga ito ay may hantungan. May pupuntahan. Trabaho. Eskwela. Palengke. Simbahan. Bahagyang naantala ang kaniyang pagmumuni-muni dahil sa pag-abot ng mga bayad sa pasahe galing sa mga pasahero sa likod at sa mga sukli ng drayber.

Nasulyapan niya ang dalawang magsing-irog sa kabilang upuan. Nagkikilitian ang dalawa. Binubulungan ng lalaki sa tenga habang pigil na humahagikgik naman ang babae. Pahiyang tinakpan ng babae ang kaniyang bibig nang makita niyang nakatingin si Resie sa kanila. Nabigla din si Resie kaya ibinaba niya ang tingin at itinuon sa kaniyang mga kamay. Matagal nang hindi nadadantayan ng ibang kamay ang mga iyun. Matagal na nga. Sabi ni Jojo noon, masarap daw hawakan ang mga kamay niya kasi malambot daw ang mga ito. Kamay ng mayaman. Parang hindi dumanas ng hirap. Mangangatuwiran naman si Resie at sasabihin niya na pera galing sa *toll gate* lang naman ang madalas niyang hawakan. Isang araw, lalagyan ko iyan ng mamahaling singsing, pangako ni Jojo. ‘Yung may brilyante sa gitna. Pero pangako ito na napako. Iba ang binigyan niya ng singsing. Balita ni Resie, hindi daw mamahalin ito. At walang bato. Biglaan daw kasi. Nakabuntis daw kaya kailangang pakasalan agad. Istrikto ang mga magulang noong babae kaya napilitan si Jojo. Nung huli silang mag-usap, sinisi pa siya ni Jojo. Ang tagal daw niya kasing mag-desisyon. Matagal na siyang inaalok ng kasal pero ayaw niyang sumagot. Kaya nakabuntis ng

iba si Jojo. Naghanap ng mas madaling daan. Pero mas mahirap ito. Kasi siya ang mahal ni Jojo. Pero, siya nga ba? Ang mga lalaki talaga. Kung hindi matapang sa alak, duwag sa babae. Gaya ng ama niya. Gaya ni Jojo. Pero ipinangako niya na hindi siya magiging gaya ng kaniyang ina. Gaya ng maraming babae.

Pagkatapos ni Jojo, wala nang dumating. Wala nang humawak sa kaniyang mga kamay na pang-mayaman. Wala nang nangako na maglalagay ng singsing sa kaniyang daliri. Maski iyong walang brilyante. Maski nga yung mura na lang at tatatanso, wala pa rin.

“Kamatsile na, Kamatsile na, yung mga hindi pa nagbayad diyan, bayad na po,” hiyaw ng drayber.

Naalimpungatan na naman si Resie sa kaniyang kinauupuan. Nagpalinga-linga siya sa bintana ng dyip para masiguro na ito na nga ang kaniyang babaan. Mabilis niyang inabot ang bayad at hindi na naantay ang sukli dahil nakahambalang ang kaniyang kamay sa daraanan ng ibang bumababa.

Matulin siyang naglakad patawid sa malawak na *highway*. Tiningnan niya ang relo. 7:15. Maaga pa rin. Alas otso ang kaniyang pasok pero wala nang sampung minuto ang lalakaran niya bago makarating sa *toll gate*. Nagpasya siyang bagalan ang paglalakad.

Pumasok siya sa maliit na opisina sa kabilang *highway* para mag-time in. Hinanap ang *time card* na nakasulat ang pangalan niya sa *rack* malapit sa *bundy clock*. Nagpunta siya sa salamin para makita ang sarili habang ikinakabit ang *nameplate* sa blusa. Bahagyang naulinigan niya ang pag-uusap ng dalawang kasamahan sa kabilang lamesita.

“Saan kayo ni Rene ngayong Holy Week?” tanong noong isa.

“Galing na kami sa Subic nung isang taon. Sabi nila, maganda daw sa Botolan ngayon. Baka doon kami magpunta,” sagot ng kausap na mas malakas ang boses.

“Oo nga daw. Mas maganda na raw ang mga *resorts* doon ngayon kaysa noong bago pumutok ang Pinatubo.”

“Hoy, Resie! Ikaw, saan ang bakasyon mo?” sigaw ni Letty, ang malakas ang boses.

“May pasok ako,” katwiran ni Resie habang madiing pinipirmahan ang *timecard*.

“Gaga! Dalawang araw tayong walang pasok. Pinapipili tayo kung *Holy Thursday* at *Good Friday* ang bakasyon natin o *Black Saturday* at *Easter Sunday*. Hindi mo ba nabasa ang memo?” giit ni Mitch.

“Nabasa ko,” mahinang tugon ni Resie.

“Ako, papasok ng Huwebes at Biyernes kasi gusto ko bongga ang *beauty* ko sa *weekend*. Siyempre, kasama ko si Rene,” pagmamalaki ni Letty.

“Ako naman, mas gusto kong gumala ng Huwebes at Biyernes kasi walang tao. Sabado at Linggo ako papasok. Ano’ng mga araw ang pinili mo?”

“Wala naman akong pupuntahan eh. Nagpaalam na ako kay boss na papasukan ko na lang lahat,” paliwanag ni Resie habang marahang dinampian ng pulbo ang kaniyang pisngi.

“Hindi ka magbabakasyon, Resie? Mas gusto mong mausukan ng mga sasakyan dito sa semana santa?” tukso ni Letty.

“Oo.”

“Hayaan mo na, Let. Kung ‘yan ang gustong penitensiya ng lola mo, hahadlang ka ba sa pangarap niya?” pabirong sabi ni Mitch.

Pagkatapos maitali ang buhok, mabilis na dinampot ni Resie ang *timecard* at isinuksok ito sa loob ng *bundy clock* para makapag-*punch in*. 7:39 AM. Ibinalik niya uli ito sa rack at lumakad na papunta sa kaniyang cubicle. Naiwang nag-uusap pa sina Letty at Mitch. Umiiling-iling ang kanilang mga ulo.

Ngayong buwan ng Abril, isa siya sa mga nakatokang magbigay ng *toll ticket* para sa mga sasakyang lumalabas ng Maynila. Matapos marilyebo at makuha ng panggabing *ticketer* ang kaniyang kaha, umupo na si Resie sa mataas at umiikot na *stool*. Binuksan niya ang maliit na bentilador sa ibabaw ng cubicle. Nilabas niya ang kaha na mayroong *cash* na tig-iisandaan, tig-sisingkuwenta, at tig-bebente. Mayroon ding mangilan-ngilang barya sa bandang ibaba ng kaha. Sa ibabaw ng babasaging bintana, may nakapaskil na “Serve with a Smile.” Sa gawing likuran naman niya umiilaw ang *electronic ad* na “Drive Carefully” para sa mga motoristang palabas ng *toll gate*. Sa tabi naman niya ang mga resibong kailangang punitin at ibigay sa mga magbabayad ng *toll fee*. Nasa harap niya ang mga presyo ng *toll fee* ng mga kotse sa bawat *exit* sa North Expressway: Meycauayan – P10.50... Malolos – P11.75... Pulilan – P13.50... San Simon – P15.00... San

Fernando - P18.25... Angeles – P20.00... Dau – P21.50... Mas mataas ng limang piso ang bawat destinasyon kung van ang sasakyan. At kung pampublikong bus at delivery truck naman ang gamit, mas mataas ng sampung piso. Hindi na niya kailangang pag-aralan pa ang mga ito. Hindi na siya malilito dahil memoryado niya ang lahat ng nasa listahan. Matagal na niyang saulado. Matagal na siya sa trabahong ito. Mahigit walong taon na. Buhay pa ang mga magulang niya, andito na siya. Ito na rin ang trabaho niya nang makilala niya si Jojo.

Alam niya ang layo ng bawat *exit* galing Maynila. Kalkulado niya ang daan at ang oras ng biyahe. Pag may naliligaw at walang matanungan, bibigyan niya ng tamang direksyon base sa napag-aralan nila noong *trainee* pa lang siya. Pero ang totoo, hindi pa siya nakakapunta alinman sa mga *exits* na yun. Hindi pa siya nakakalabas ng Maynila. Bakit nga ba? Wala kasing panahon. Walang pagkakataon. Walang taong pupuntahan sa mga lugar na iyon. Wala ring nagyaya sa kaniya. Huminga si Resie ng malalim. Umpisa na ng kaniyang maghapong trabaho. Pagkatapos, mariin niyang isinara ang kaha at binuksan ang bintana para tanungin ang papalapit na sasakyan, ang una niyang motorista.

“Saan po?”

“San Simon.”

“Kinse po.”

“Eto o.”

“Salamat po. Maligayang paglalakbay.”

Ganoon ang naging buhay ni Resie. Ang magtanong kung saan pupunta at magsabi ng “happy trip” sa lahat ng umaalis. Walong taon na niyang ginagawa ito. Walong taon na niyang inaalam ang destinasyon ng lahat na naging bahagi ng kaniyang trabaho. Hindi man niya kilala ang mga ito, pakiwari niya ay may naiambag siya sa kanilang paglalakbay. Sana ay makapunta sila sa kanilang hantungan nang ligtas. Pero, sumagi din sa isip niya na wala ni isa man sa mga ito ang nagtanong kung saan ang kaniyang hantong. Hindi siya kilala. Walang gustong makilala siya. Walang gustong mag-ayang sumama sa kaniya. Walang interesado kung saan ang kaniyang destinasyon. Maging siya ay hindi rin niya alam. Mukhang mabubulok na lang ako sa cubicle na ito, hinaing niya. Binilang ni Resie ang perang ibinayad at maingat na pinasok sa kaha.

“R-Resie... San F-Fernando...”

Pamilyar sa kaniya ang marahang tinig na iyon. Inangat niya ang ulo para makita ang susunod na motorista.

“J-Jojo...”

“*Family* drayber na ako. Mga amo ko. Pupunta sa kanilang resort sa Hermosa. *Exit* kami sa San Fernando. Musta ka na?”

“M-mabuti...”

“Magkano daw, Jojo?” Kinalabit si Jojo ng babae mula sa likuran ng sasakyan.

“Ah, P18.25 po, ma’am,” mabilis na sagot ni Jojo.

“P23.25. Kasi van ang sasakyan niyo,” salungat na sagot ni Resie.

“Ay, opo nga pala, ma’am.”

Binuksan ng babae ang kaniyang malaking pitaka para humanap ng eksaktong barya. Marubdob na pinagmasdan ni Jojo si Resie. Paminsan-minsa’y sinasagot ni Resie ang kaniyang tingin. Kinuha ng babae ang isa pang pitaka sa kaniyang bag. Umaalab ang kanilang mga mata. Balisa at nagtatanong. Pero walang gustong kumibo. Walang gustong bumasag ng katahimikan. Inilabas ng babae ang isandaang piso.

“Ibigay mo na itong buo. Wala akong barya,” pasigaw na bigkas ng babae.

Nanginginig na tinanggap ni Resie ang bayad. Pakiramdam niya’y nasusunog siya sa mga titig ni Jojo. Parang mga silahis ito ng araw na pumupunit sa kaniyang balat. Hindi niya mawari kung may gusto nga ba siyang sabihin kay Jojo. Marami nga ba siyang mga tanong? O nasagot na ba lahat ang mga ito?

Inabot ni Resie kay Jojo ang resibo at sukli. Nagdampi ang kanilang mga palad. Pinagmasdang muli ni Jojo ang kamay na naging malaking bahagi ng kaniyang nakaraan. Nahulog pa ang ilang barya sa semento. Akmang bubuksan ni Jojo ang van para kunin ang mga ito pero pinigilan siya ng among babae.

“Pabayaan mo na,” sabad ng babae. “Huwag mo nang pulutin. Nagmamadali tayo at ayaw kong abutin ng tanghali sa daan.”

Humarurot na ang sasakyan sa kahabaan ng *expressway*. Naiwang nakatungo ang ulo ni Resie. Hindi niya magawang habulin ng tingin ang papalayong van. Pakiramdam niya, bitbit lahat ng sasakyang iyon ang mga naging pangarap niya, ang buong buhay niya.

Pasado alas otso na ng gabi nang makauwi si Resie. Hapo niyang dala-dala ang mga pinamiling grocery para sa bahay: tinapay, sabon, supot para sa basura, basahan, at *creamers*. Isa-isa niya itong inilabas sa supot at inilagay sa tamang lalagyan. Tinanggal niya ang blusa at palda at isinuot ang damit-pantulog na nakasabit sa likod ng pintuan ng kuwarto. Tiningnan niya ang *alarm clock* na nakapatong sa isang mesa sa tabi ng kaniyang maliit na katre. Isinet niya uli ang alarm: alas singko y medya. Ngunit alam pa rin niya na bukas, mas mauuna pa rin siyang gumising bago tumunog ito.

Tatlong Proposisyon ng Puting Hangin

Luna Sicat Cleto

Unang Proposisyon: Dumarating ang puting hangin kapag napansin ang pagkasilaw

Pag nagkataong nakatabi mo siya sa bus at buhol-buhol na ang trapik, hintayin mo lang ang hudyat na may maalala siya kapag nadaan ang sasakyan sa anumang de-salaming gusali o ng salaming malaki. Puwede ring palara, o kahit ‘yung tint ng mga sasakyan. O ‘yung tama ng araw sa traffic light, o shades. Basta dapat, nakakabulag. ‘Yung may ningning. Iyon na ang portal ng pagkukuwento niya kung paano siya linigawan ng Diwata. Nagsimula ang lahat sa manggas ng kaniyang khaki jacket. Isang gabi, sinabit niya ang jacket malapit sa kaniyang kama. Kinaumagahan, napansin na lang niyang nakasuksok ang mga manggas ng jacket sa bulsa—linamig ba ang jacket? Sumunod na napansin niya ay ang pagsutsot ng kung sino sa tuwing nag-iisa siya sa Music Room. *Psst. Psst.* Nasa dulo ang Music Room sa kumpol ng mga kuwartong inilaan para sa pagtuturo. Para makarating ka doon, iikot ka pa ng isang laberinto. *Psst. Psst.* Paano naman mangyayari na sa tuwing lilingunin niya o hahanapin ang sumusutsot, wala naman siyang makita. Walang maririnig na karipas, ni walang kasunod na halakhak. Sutsot lang, pero hindi siya sanay na sinusutsutan.

Duluhan ang puwesto ng Music Room. Tumbok, dead end. Ito ang kuwartong pinakamalawak sa kumpol ng mga cottage, ang may pinakaelevated na silong. Malayo sa kalsadang tatatlong sasakyan lang ang umaakyat-baba. Pinaglalagakan ng maraming samples ng instrumento

ang silid, na may bukod na locker. Ito na ang bersiyon ng eskaparate na may mga mamahaling gamit na hindi pinahahawak sa mga mag-aaral. Sari-sari ang pinanggalingan ng mga instrumentong etniko: at masarap isiping ipinamigay sila. Pero mas malamang, nabili at nakubra sa mga tahanang ni ayaw silang pakalawan dahil pamana ng mga ninuno. Pero atin-atin na lang ‘yun. Hawak ni Ms. Cacawasan ang susi ng katubusan ng mga instrumento, nakasukbit iyon sa kaniyang baywang na mas malapad pa ang isang plantsa.

Masinop namang nakatago sa bukod na cabinet ang mga instrumentong tulad ng biyolin, bandurria, guitarra, flute at clarinet. Ito ay bukod pa sa mga personal nang gamit ng mga estudyante mismo. May unawaan na kapag kailangang hiram ng estudyante ang gamit, isosoli niya iyon pagkagamit. Naka-logbook ‘yan, may resibo. Naka-catalogue iyon at may specific number. Iniinspekyon muna bago i-clear pag nasoli. Iniimbentaryo ito taun-taon, at tuwing budget time, may wishlist ang Music Department ng mga bagong batch, kung kakailanganin. Bawat instrumento ay mamahalin, hindi kailanman nagtipid ang eskuwelahang ito sa mga ganyang bagay. Tulad ng mga maleta, may kaniya-kaniyang tatak ng pinagdaanang airport at bayan ang mga ito. Sa isang bukod pang stockroom nakatambak ang mga tuluyan nang nasirang instrumento.

Actually, sa tingin ni Bayang, mausaleo naman talaga ang Music Room. Nabubuhay lang ang mga bangkay na instrumento kapag tinugtog. Pero sa palagay rin niya, nasisipsip ng espasyo ang negative vibes ng mga instrumentong nahostage—wala kasi iyon sa tunay na nagmamay-ari. Marami sa mga instrumento’y donasyon ng mga sikat na musikero, nasolicit halimbawa ni Madame sa kaniyang endless cultural tours. May nanggaling ng Ukraine, Laos, Vietnam, Liberia. May nabili mula sa mga sanglaan ng India, Portugal, Germany at Nepal. Ang mga local at indigenous instruments ay may kaniya-kaniyang seller, na kadalasa’y mga tao rin na kakilala ni Madame.

Naiisip ni Bayang na ang mga bangkay na iyo’y mula rin sa mga dating buhay: mga puno sa gubat, mga balat at buhok ng hayop, mga tadyang o palad ng halaman, mga kaliskis ng animal. Wala ring pinagkaiba sa mga pinatigas na animal specimens ni Sir Mael. May mga instrumentong pasaway at walang paggalang sa ritmo ng katahimikan at ingay. Tulad ng kudyaping iyon. Gaya ng isang palpak na mangingibig, hindi siya

maasahan sa maraming bagay, lalo na ang pinaka-dahilan kung bakit mo siya pinatutugtog.

Lisa pa lang ang nakahawak noon. Isang nangahas na humawak noon, at isa siyang kilalang musikero. Ginamit sa isang biglaang konsiyerto na hindi na naulit. Patungo ng music festival sa Bath London ang musikero at ang pagbisita niya sa bundok ay bahagi ng x-deal para sa paglikom ng kaniyang pamasaha. Binigyan nga siya ng travel grant, pero airfare lang at bahala na siya sa living expenses. Nainsulto ang musikero pero hindi na nagpahalata. Walang bisa sa Ministro ng Kultura (inappoint ng military official na naging presidente dahil sa isang coup) ang dami ng kaniyang mga medalya, ang hits niya, ang popularidad. Sinabi niya talaga ito sa kaniyang spiel. Friendly naman ang audience. Bagets man sila, nakikilala nila ang musikero dahil isinasama ni Bayang sa kanilang mga leksiyon ang importansiya ng popular music. At hindi man niya aaminin sa pagmumukha ng musikero, kumpleto siya ng mga CDs nito. Mula sa mga kantang parang rinecord lang sa banyo. Noong kilala pa ang musikero sa pagbibigay boses sa mga hinaing ng mga magsasaka at manggagawa, at ginagamit ang mga awit sa mga rally. Hanggang sa mga album nitong may tema ng pagsagip sa kalikasan. May bagong release na album ang musikero, binili ni Bayang pero hindi niya nagustuhan. Dahil ba sa parang katunog na lang iyon ng persona ng mga hugot hits? Wala namang nagbago sa arrangement ng mga kanta. Naupdate nga lang ng sitar, hegalong, marimba, at geomungo kaya nagtunog World Music. Marahil, naghahanap lang siya ng bago, iyong hindi pa niya naririnig. Umaasa siya na makukuha muli ng musikero ang kaniyang huwisyo.

Sa kalagitnaan ng konsiyerto ng musikero, biglang naputol ang kuwerdas. May nahugot na kable sa soundboard at tumili ang feedback. Nagtakip ng tenga ang mga tao, marami ang napangiw. Nasa kalagitnaan rin ng pag-awit si Bayang. Bago napigtas ang kuwerdas, dinig na dinig niya ang hininga ng kaniyang katabi, ang kaluskos ng mga paa, kahit ang isang naisipan yatang magbuklat ng polvoron. Matapos ang pagkapigtas, ang daldalan, bulung-bulungan, walkie talkie. Nangiti ang musikero, ngiti lang. Mabilis ang damage control, nakahanap kaagad ng canned recording ng kaparehas na instrumento. Pero hindi swak. Matapos ang konting patawa na linamon naman ng mga nakikinig, ang kudyapi'y sinalo ng isang elektronikong hegalong mula sa isang nanonood na alumni. Natapos ang

konsiyerto na tila walang nangyari. Pero iyon ang naging paksa ng musikero at ni Bayang sa likod ng stage.

“That was close,” sabi nito.

“Natapos mo naman nang maayos. Binabaan mo na lang ‘yung melody ng konti di ba, at magaling pumick-up ‘yung back-up mo.”

“At ikaw ‘yun.”

“At ‘yung batang musician na alumni.”

“Nga e. Pero alam mo, may napansin ako sa kudyaping iyon. Saan ito galing?”

“Ang sabi, pinamana ito ng isang datung Maranaw sa kaniyang angkan.”

“Am not surprised. Kasama ba ‘yan sa nahakot sa Mindanao?”

“I couldn’t say. Basta isang set ‘yan e, kasama ang mga kulintang, agung, atbp. Nagagamit namin ang mga kulintang at agung pero ‘yang kudyapi, hindi.”

“Bakit?”

“Takot kaming masira.”

“Oh, so gumamit pala ako ng lab equipment na bawal gamitin.”

“Hey, acknowledgement ‘yan ng status mo.”

Nagkibit ng balikat ang musikero. “Di ba we must have a connection with the instruments we play?”

“Oo naman.” Nagsindi ng yosi ang musikero, inalok si Bayang.

Nangiti ang babae. “Sorry, pero pinipilit kong tumigil.”

“Talaga?” Pause. “Bakit?”

Hindi iyon sinagot ni Bayang. Tumango ang kausap. Hinugot nito ang sigarilyo sa kaniyang bibig at matapos, binalik ang kaha sa beltbag. Medyo nagulat si Bayang sa kilos pero kakatwang pinalampas na lang niya. “Huy, wag mong linalang-lang ‘yang boses mo. You have a wonderful voice. It has a quality na matagal ko nang hinahanap—‘yan ang boses ni Lolita Carbon bago nagkaroon ng lamat.”

“Ikaw ha. Sumbong kita.”

“Bakit, may nasabi ba ako?”

“Icon si Lolita Carbon just as you are.”

“Bakit close ba kayo?”

“Hindi. Pero it’s subtly ageist. And sexist.”

Natawa ang musikero. Luminingon ito sa likod. Baka na-off sa kaniya? Ang pagtago ba ng sigarilyo’y pakikiisa? Ang paghambing ba kay Lolita Carbon ay papuri? Ito na ba ang pinahihiwatig na honor code? Igalang ang katawan mo lalo na kung ginagamit mo ito sa pagtugtog?

Ito ang pangaral ng istriktang piano teacher niya tungkol sa kaniyang mga kamay. Hindi siya dapat pasmahin, ni hindi siya pupuwedeng maglaba, o magluto. Hindi siya puwedeng maging domestic goddess, haha. Kahit ang paborito niya sanang volleyball ay sinuko na rin niya. Para na siyang silkworm na pinatataba lang para dumura ng laway at matapos mabuo ang cocoon, wala nang silbi. Anak, ‘yan ang binigay sa ‘yo, naalala niyang nasabi ng kaniyang ama. Ang tatay na rin niya mismo ang nagsabing sundin ang bilin ng kaniyang maestra. Pero para saan ang magandang kamay, kung hindi mo naman mahawakan sa iyong palad ang gusto mong mahawakan, at hindi lang iyon ang teklado ng piano? (Ano kamo Bayang? Nasa ulo mo pa ba ang utak mo o nasa labahin, kasama sa mga dapat kuskusin para luminis?) Nangaligkig si Bayang sa naisip. Gano’n ba siya talaga kahalaga? Kaya ba niyang talikuran kung sakali? Dapat. Kaya? Naman.

Maraming anekdota ang musikero, at hindi na alam ni Bayang kung may mga bahagi ba ng anekdota na nakaligtaan niyang pakinggan. Isang dalagita na ang nagsasayaw sa tanghalan ngayon, sinusundan ng mga kasamahan nito. Naka-Ifugao costume, mga tapis na binili sa ilalim ng tulay ng Quiapo at beige nylon na mga blusa, para kunwari, balat. Bukod sa mga kuwintas na gawa sa puka shells at bao ng niyog na pinagmukhang ngipin ng baboyramo, may maliliit na palayok na nakapuwesto sa mga ulo nila. “Hindi mo ba naitatanong kung minsan kung gaano ka-authentic ang mga nakikita nating mga sayaw?”

“I think it’s naive to assume they are authentic at all. Wala tayo sa Bundok Kiangnan,” ang sabi ng musikero.

“O’nga. Kasi kung naro’n tayo ngayon, may baboyramo nang iniihaw at sumasayaw na tayo ng ganito,” at ginaya ni Bayang ang dance step na gumagaya sa kilos ng ibon. Sinakyan ni musikero ang biro, at bago pa sila hinila ng mga kabataang babae na sumayaw, nasa tanghalan na mismo sila. Tila nahawa ang mga tao sa kanilang pinakitang enerhiya. Lahat ay sumali. Si Sir Giacomo, ang mga faculty, kahit sina Mang Lino at Ms. Praxi.

Maliban kay Finn na tuloy lang ang laklak ng lambanog at nakatingin sa kaniya. Nagseselos? Ngingitian siya ni Bayang. Ibinaling ni Finn ang pansin sa isa pa nilang co-faculty, ang long-legged na si Glenda. Parang wala na ring nakita si Bayang. Inenjoy na lang niya ang sayaw. Nang matapos ito, inabot pa ng musikero ang kaniyang kamay para maaalalayan siya sa pagbaba sa stage. Wala siyang maalala na ikinilos na ganu'n ni Finn.

"As I was saying, may naramdaman ako sa kudyaping iyon. Lam mo 'yun? 'Yung pag basa ang paa mo at nagbukas ka ng lumang ref. Hindi mo ikamamatay 'yung ground. Pero sapat para maalala mong na-ground ka."

Bakit siya kinakausap ng ganito ng musikero? Bakit nagchichikahan sila tungkol sa mga elektrisidad, mga vibes ng mga kahoy, bagting at teklado? Naasiwa siya sa pinatutunguhan ng pinag-uusapan. Gusto na niyang bumalik sa cottage. Hindi na baleng hindi na siya makapagpaalam kay Finn. Pero sumalok pa siya ng isa pang tasa sa punch bowl.

"One time, kinuwentuhan ako ng anecdote ng lute player sa China. How he foolishly allowed another musician to use his lute, and it was said that after that, he couldn't play a single note on that lute."

"Wow. Para kang nanakawan."

"Exactly. But it was also said that the one who got the lute's soul also died a miserable death. Kasi the lute kept on calling him to play, and play he did, non-stop, until he stopped breathing."

Nangkangitian sila ng musikero.

"Kuwento lang 'yan, e."

"Possibly. Pero ako naniniwala."

"Paano kung sabihin ko sa 'yo na ang kudyaping 'yan, lalo na ang frets nito, ay mamula-mula. Mahuhulaan mo kung bakit?"

"Varnish?"

Umiling si Bayang.

"Blood."

Tumango si Bayang.

"May storya sa kung pa'no nabili 'yang kudyaping 'yan. Bukod sa galing 'yan sa magulong bayan, matagal nang pinaglalawayan ito ng kulektor na nakabili. Until a tragic event happened to the datu's family."

"What was the tragic event?"

“We don’t know, pero naubos raw ang angkan.”

“It could be an intertribal war.”

“Puwede.”

“Or some family member was bitten by greed.”

“Mas puwede.”

“May prinsesang nakidnap ng manliligaw na matanda at naghiganti ang spurned lover.”

“Puwede.”

Nagkatawanan sila ng musikero.

“Kuwento lang rin, puwedeng totoo, puwedeng hindi. Nasagap ko lang sa storyahan ng mga utility na naglilinis dito kapag wala nang klase at bakasyon.”

“Bakit, nakikipagkuwentuhan ka ba sa kanila?”

“No. I just listen in to their conversations.”

“Ah, so eavesdropper ka pala. Then maybe you’re not a musician.”

“So what am I?”

“A gossip columnist?”

“He!”

Nasa background si Finn, umiinom pa rin ng lambanog at pasulyap-sulyap lang sa kanila. Kausap na niya ngayon si Loreto. Si Glenda nawala. At alam ni Bayang na naiinip na naman ito. Paulit-ulit lang kasi ang ikinukuwento ni Loreto—katulad ng mga ibong sumisiyap sa umaga na pare-parehas ang intonasyon at timbre ng lalamunan.

“Actually, magka-height lang daw kami ni Rizal...” nahuli ni Bayang ang buntot ng sinasabi ni Loreto nang dumaan ang dalawang lalaki sa kaniyang harapan para kumuha pa ng mas maraming kangkong kropek. “Kaya nga sabi ng wife ko, baka kaya lapitin ako ng mga babae.” Kamuntik nang mailuwa ni Bayang ang nginguya niyang lumpiang gulay nang marinig ito.

“Sa totoo lang hindi naman siya pangit,” sabi ng musikero. Ano ba ang tinutukoy nitong “pangit”—ang kudyapi, ang venue, ang kinakain, o siya mismo? Tiningnan niya nang mabuti ang musikerong kausap at ini-imagine niya ang pagkahimatay ng mga kaibigan niyang mga babae sakali

mang malaman nilang kaharap niya ito ngayon. May mga mata siyang ekspresibo na maaring bumagay sa isang artistang lalaki na sawi sa pag-ibig. May dating din ang mukha at katawan na tila mahiyaing probinsiya, pero kinukubli sa kunwaring tiwala. Nababasa niya iyon, at hindi rin niya alam kung paano niya iyon nalalaman. Nasa suot ba nitong Sagada weave jacket at itim na kamiseta't pantalon? Sa gupit nitong malapit sa anit at brass na pulseras sa kaliwang kamay? Sinusundan pala ng musikero ang kaniyang mga mata at nangiti ito.

Nakahanap si Bayang ng safe topic. "Nababasa ko noon ang nanay mo. I loved her stories. Is she still writing?"

"Hindi na, but she'll be happy to know that she's being read." Naubos na ng musikero ang punch. "Want some more?"

"No thanks. May gagawin pa ako bukas."

"We're leaving tonight. Are you staying here or—"

"Am based here."

"Too bad. Kala ko, makakapagkuwentuhan pa tayo pauwi."

Ngumiti si Bayang. Ang kudyaping pinag-uusapan nila kanina ay ibinalik na rin sa kabinet ng Music Room. Lumalapit na sa kanila si Sir Giacomo.

"We'll be leaving in thirty minutes?" sabi nito sa musikero.

"Sure." Tinapik na lang siya ng musikero sa balikat at umalis na. Kumaway si Finn na mauuna na siya, at sabay na silang naglaho ni Loreto sa direksiyon ng kanilang dormitoryo.

Madalas nilang ilarawan ang musika bilang organisadong tunog na linapatan lang ng organisadong katahimikan at ingay. Nais isipin ni Bayang na kung recording ang kaniyang buhay noon, hindi iyon malinis. Dinig na dinig ang lapat ng karayom sa plaka, ang hininga ng mang-aawit, ang hugong ng paghimig ng piyanistang labis na nalulugod sa pagteklado, ang nagtutubig na laway ng isang trumpeta o saxophone. Kung piyesang rock, andaming fuzz at distorsiyon. Ultimo ang patak ng pawis nasasagap.

Pero bakit kaya, sa kabila ng "ingay" na iyon, kay tahimik ng kulay at paraan ng kaniyang pananamit noon? Laging mapusyaw ang kulay ng kaniyang mga polong sinusuo noon. Nang naglalandian pa lang sila ni Finn, bihira siyang magpalda o magbestida, at kung hindi siguro sa mahabang kulot niyang buhok at pagsuot ng make-up paminsan-minsan, hindi siya

mapapansin bilang babae. Nag-ayos lang si Bayang nang naging hayag na sila. Kakatwang napabili siya ng mga floral na bestida, palda, ultimo payong at doll shoes. Kahit ang kinasusuklanan niyang pagpapabango ay ginawa niya. Na-conscious siya sa kilikiling ginusto niyang paputiin at ahitan ng balahibo, at sinumpa niya ang pagtubo noon ng buhok. Nakatikim ng wax ang kaniyang binti. Dinalas-dalasan niya ang pedicure. Ang kilay niyang malago ay pina-ahit niya para magkakorte. Iniwasan na niya ang mga accessories ng isang gypsy. Ngayon, mga maliliit na hikaw at isang kawad na lang ng manipis na fake gold. Itsura lang ni Claudine Barreto. Gusto niya kasing pakibagayan sa simula ang mga kapwa niya rin mga babae na humuhusga ng kaniyang pagkababae. Para bang akala niya, isa siyang kulisap na kusang mawawala sa dinapuang puno. ‘Yan ang pagkakamali niya. Hindi kailanman naging filter ang pagiging “totoo sa sarili” sa eskuwelahang iyon. Music teacher ang identity niya dito, tulad ng colleague niyang si Loreto. Pero ang trato sa kaniya’y kulasisi.

Hawak ni Loreto ang classical at Western canon at siya, ang ethnic at indigenous. Gusto sana niyang tanungin noon si Sir Giacomo kung bakit parang arbitrary ang pagkaka-assign. Parehas lang naman silang music major, may M.A. pa nga siya. Pero olats siya sa foreign degree ni Loreto. Wala pang programa noon para sa contemporary. Gustong-gusto pa naman niya sanang makipagpalitan ng anecdotes tungkol sa mga piyesang una nilang natutuhang tugtugin—tulad ng “Eye of the Tiger” sa electric guitar o “Still Loving You” ng Scorpions. ‘Yun bang magkaalaman na kung ga’no kabaduy bago pa natuto ng mga “aral” at “magandang” piyesa. Gustong-gusto niya sanang paghaluin ang mga forms, lagyan ng sayaw, script, gano’n. Alam niyang *kung* papayagan lang siya ni Sir Giacomo, kayang-kaya nilang makabuo ng kahit isang musical na sila lang ang nakaisip.

Well, na-typecast na siyang salot na kulot at temptress supreme. Kung minsan, pag napapaaga ang paglalakad niya patungo sa Music Room, tumutugtog siya ng piano. Freestyle lang. “Gymnopedie No. 1” muna ni Satie at saka niya lalabusawin. O Brubeck, kahit nga Philip Glass. Ini-imagine niyang may layaw siyang parang sinasapian kapag kaharap ang piyano. Wala namang nakapapansin. Hindi siya sumasabay sa baba ng mga tao tuwing umaga. Ugali niyang mauna sa eskuwelahan ng at least one and a half hours para psychically handa na siya. Wala namang problema dahil mas maaga pa ang mga utility na naroon, winawalis nila at inaayos ang

mga classroom bago dumating ang mga klase. Kabatian na niya ang mga manong doon, kangitian ang mga babaeng naglalabas ng mga mantel para paarawan at nagpapagpag ng welcome mats sa pasilyo. Noong umagang iyon, naabutan siya ni Loreto na tumutugtog na mag-isa. Pumalakpak ito. Muntik na naman siyang matawa sa itsura nito. May makakapagsabi kaya sa kaniya balang araw na mukha siyang tukmol?

“Misteryo ka sa akin Bayang e. Hindi ka mabarkada, wala kang bisyo, at hilig mo lang na mangulekta ng mga CDs at libro.”

“Hindi ka ba nangungulekta ng CDs at libro?”

“Not as much as you consume. Para kang anay kung maka-concentrate e.”

“Grabe ka naman!”

“Pero you can play like a concert pianist.”

“You flatter me too much.”

“Narinig na ba ni Finn na tumugtog ka ng ganiyan?”

Napatingin siya kay Loreto. “He never asked me to play for him.”

“Really? But you do a lot of play?”

Tiningnan niya nang mabuti si Loreto, mula ulo hanggang paa. Height: 5”, baka nga 4’11” lang dahil sa sapatos na madaya. Weight: 110 lbs. Chocnut muscles, signs of flab sa mid-area. May slight anghit. Astigmatism, slight strombosis, left eye. Bembol Roco bald pate.

“Yan ang mahirap sa nangyari e. Nagkunwari na lang siyang hindi niya nakuha ang “joke”. Kumalat na ang ugnayan nila at hindi mo na maaring sabihing “baka naisip mo lang”. Ina-assume na ng mga colleagues nila na puwede na silang mag-probe. Parang naging pag-aari ng lahat ang kuwento nila.

Tinuloy ni Bayang ang pagtugtog.

Napa-ehem na lang si Loreto at binuksan ang mga bintana.

“Kaya pag nagtuturo na ako ng piano ngayon, lagi kong pinaalala na ang instrumentong hinahawakan nila’y katumbas ng kanilang katawan. What is within is without.” Tumigil sa pagtugtog si Bayang sandali.

“Ngayon ako naman ang ginugulat mo Loreto.”

“Bakit?”

“Well, Buddhist ka rin pala.”

“No, I’m Catholic.”

At tinuloy na ni Bayang ang pagtugtog, hanggang sa dumating ang klase. Nagkaniya-kaniya na ng upo ang mga bagets, inayos ang kaniya-kaniyang instrumento, at kaniya-kaniyang kabit ng music sheets. Wala na siyang baby pagdating sa pag-aayos na ito.

Mahirap namang ibukod ang musical noise (o ingay na nagmumula sa proseso ng paglikha ng musika, gaya ng pagngisngis ng daliri sa tumbong ng gitara) sa regular na ingay, ang hindi musikal at mas musikal, dahil tama si Loreto, “what is within is without.” Ang katawan ay hindi ibinubukod sa instrumento. Kaya ba kinakalyo ang baba ng mga violinista? O natututuhan ng sikmura ng nagtrutumpeta na pigilan ang bahing o ligwak ng plema? May pagkasanay ba ang mga ugat sa pangangalay? Bukod sa ingay na insidental, i.e., mga iyak ng batang pasaway na pinauupo sa isang sulok para pagbigyan ang pretensiyon ng “tamang palaki” ng magulang, ang ingay sa orchestra’y kasabay rin ng musikang linilikha: kaya ang hanging inihip at humuhulas mula sa embouchere ng clarinet ay gaya rin ng hilik ng isang lasing, ang pagtuktok ng valves ng tuba ay paglagutok ng mga buto sa kamay ng sekretaryang napagod sa encoding. Daraan ang buong maghapon sa ganito lang, sabi ni Bayang sa sarili. Salimbayan ng musika at ingay. Ng pagganap at paghubad ng sarili. Kasi, pagkatapos ng rehearsal, kailangang magligpit. Itatago nila ang mga instrumento sa mga ataul, aalisin ang sipit sa mga music sheets, isosoli o itatago ang mga papel sa kabaong ng filing cabinet, dadamputin ang kaniya-kaniyang knapsack at lalabas para abangan ang shuttle, sa isa pang kabaong na dinedelay ang pagniniig sa lupa pero nangangamoy aksidente. Nangaligkig uli si Bayang. Ayaw niya ang ugali niyang ito. ‘Yung hindi niya malaman kung may third eye siya o ano. Pero kapag aalalahanin lang niya ‘yung asbestos ng brake pads kapag lumiliko’t lumilihis, parang nasusuka na siya. Teka, kanina pa ito. Whaark. Buti natakbo niya ang cubicle. Whaark. Hinga. Suka. Hinga, suka. Kalove-affair na niya ang inidoro. Sa paglabas, nasulyapan niyang muli ang kudyapi na nasa display cabinet.

“Ma’am Bayang, pa’no to, napunit ko po ang page 5?”

Nagtatanong ang bata nang walang kamalay-malay sa pakikipagbuno ng kaniyang bahay bata. Lumingon si Bayang sa magkabilang balikat. Tila wala. Mabilis niyang sinipat ang blusa, pinagpag ng konti ang palda.

“Pakuha ka na lang ng duplicate.”

Lumabas ang kabataan sa music room, nagpunta sa office. Pamaya-maya, pumasok na si Ms. Cacawasan, dala ang master keys ng filing cabinet. Pumasok silang dalawa sa CR. Kakahugas lang ni Bayang ng napagsukahan sa lababo. Sumulyap sa kaniya si Ms. Cacawasan pero hinila lang nito ang first drawer ng filing cabinet, may hinugot na bungkos mula sa isang folder doon, at ibinigay niya sa kabataan. Makakalimutan na sana ni Bayang ang insidente pero pamaya-maya'y biglang umalingasaw ang silid. Parang may nahukay na imburnal, naghahalo ang amoy ng repolyong bulok, kanal, putik, naaagnas. Parang mas lalo siyang nasusuka.

“Nasira na naman ba ang toilets?” sabi ni Ms. Cacawasan. Pasok na naman siya sa CR, sabay halos sila ni Bayang. Kamuntik nang tamaan ng projectile ng tapsilog at laway ang mga daliri ni Ms. Cacawasan. Sampu, labinlimang segundo ang kaniyang pagdahak. May nag-abot ng tisyu sa kaniya at hindi na niya liningon ang mukha ng kamay. Tumulikod si Ms. Cacawasan at kinausap muli ang walkie talkie. “Ang kubeta? Malinis naman. Kanina. Walang namang iba.” Pagkalabas ni Bayang, nag-spray lang ng air freshener ang sekretarya na parang may nagprito lang ng dalagang bukid sa kusina. Nakangiti ito at parang naaliw pa ito sa munting eksenang naisip. Pagbalik ni Bayang sa classroom, binati siya ng sangsang at burak na amoy. Nagtakip siya ng panyo sa ilong at bibig. “Hay naku, may problema na siguro ‘yung septic tank,” sabi ni Ms. Cacawasan sa kaniyang kausap sa walkie-talkie. “May advisory ba kayo? Pakitanong naman si Sir Lino o.”

Humahangos muli si Bayang sa banyo. Whark. Pero wala nang lumalabas. Masakit na sa sikmura.

“Ms. Bayang? Are you all right? Kailangan mo ba’ng pumunta ng klinik?”

Umiling lang si Bayang. Nagkatinginan na sila ni Ms. Cacawasan. Ito ang unang umiwas ng tingin.

“Ms. Bayang, baka gusto niyo munang mag-break? Puwede ko po namang ibilin ang klase kay Mr. Loreto.”

Kung may ugali man si Ms. Cacawasan na kinagigiliwan ni Bayang, ito ay ang pag-unawa nito sa relasyon ng katahimikan at ingay. Marunong itong magtakip.

“Hindi, ganyan lang ako kung minsan. I’ll manage, may iniinom rin kasi akong gamot.”

Nakangiti si Ms. Cacawasan sa kaniya. Parang may kaharap siyang asong hindi makagulapay.

At ‘yun, nagkadahilan ang klase na lumabas ng music room at mag-rehearse sa labas. Nang makalabas, parang humupa ang masamang pakiramdam ni Bayang. Hindi, sabi ng kaniyang isip na in denial. Hindi siya buntis. Imagination lang. (Un)immaculate conception. Pamaya-maya, nawala na rin ang pangangasim ng kaniyang sikmura. Hindi na siya nasusuka. Inaantok naman siya.

“Class, tara,” sabi ni Bayang sa klase. Nagtinginan ang mga bata.

“Uwi na tayo?”

“Hindi, lilipat tayo ng venue.”

Isang kulektibong buntung-hininga ang narinig niya, pero hindi niya na lang pinansin. “Dalhin niyo instruments niyo, basta ‘yung portable lang. Tsaka notebooks at pens. Composition muna tayo.”

Nagkatinginan ang bandurria at gitara, taklobo at panpipi. “Ma’am pa’no rehearsal sa piano?”

“Well, pagtitiyagaan natin ‘yung nasa Auditorium. Paisa-isa.”

Isa na namang kulektibong buntung-hininga. “Kaya nga composition na lang muna.”

Naglakad sila patungo sa main assembly hall ng eskuwelahan. Ang main assembly hall ay mukhang biotope, isang man-made greenhouse. Sa loob, may mga tumutubong mga malalaking bromeliads at sari-saring mga bulaklak. May mga natural looking ponds na may mga koi. Habang naglalakad, naririnig niyang nagbubulung-bulungan. Ano na naman kaya ang gagawin nila doon? “Ma’am, paano po ‘yung mga mabibigat ang instruments?”

“Did I say na kailangan niyong dalhin?” Halata ang inis sa tono ng kaniyang boses.

Nagkibit-balikat ang kabataang nagtanong. “Basta si Levy, bitbit niya violin niya kahit saan.”

“That’s all right. You can even bring your cello if you want to and if you can manage.”

“Si Ma’am talaga...”

May tumawag ng kanilang pansin. Si Loreto, humahangos sa paghabol. “Sama na ako sa inyo.” Kasunod ni Loreto ang klase nito, na

katulad ng klase niya ay nagkaniya-kaniyang bitbit ng mga instrumento.

“Ano ba ‘to, para tayong mga na-demolish.”

“Sinabi mo.”

“Hindi rin nila matiis ang amoy.”

“Ano kaya ‘yun? Ang baho ano?”

“Ma’m, may halitosis na matindi ‘yung bunganga ng kubeta.”

“Hindi baka si Ethan lang ‘yun, naiwan niya sa toothpick ‘yung tinga.”

“Shhh! Tama na ‘yan. Hindi ‘yan maganda.” Kay Loreto. “Tingin mo, saan kaya nanggaling?”

“Hula ko dahil ‘yun sa pina-renovate na schoolroom malapit sa atin. Nagpalagay rin si Sir Giacomo ng fountain doon, di ba?”

“Ano namang kinalaman noon doon?”

“Ikaw talaga Bayang hanggang ngayon unbeliever ka na mahiwaga ang lugar na ito.”

Unbeliever. Nasabi ko na ba na ang lugar na iyon ay may kultong relihiyon? At nasa pinaka-Vatican na sila dahil nasa loob na sila ng globular assembly hall. Gawa sa matibay na polycarbonate plastic ang bubong, transparent at kamangha-manghang hindi pa naninilaw sa tagas sa mga elemento ng araw at hangin at ulan. Kala mo’y forcefield na tumitiklop kapag sinasalakay, pagka’t nabubuka’t nasasara ang ilang contours para sa natural light. Modelo raw ng arkitektura nito ang Acquario sa Genoa Italy at ang Mehang Gardens sa Singapore. Siyempre may impluwensiya ng Opera House sa Sydney. Globular na parang kahugis ng nakatuwad na kalabasa. Linagyan ng Filipino character sa mga halamang itinatampok—dito mo maaamoy ang nagtatagisang ylang ylang at sampaguita, pati rafflesia at gumamela’t pitimini. Maraming mga bromeliad at orkidyas. May mga nakasabit na installation pieces ng isda, itlog, sarimanok. Sa pagkakadiseno ng mga arko’t mga sulok na isang imitasyon ng gubat na gawa sa industriyal na materyal. May mga slopes na puwede kang magslide, mga contours na nakapagpapaalala ng mga ramps ng mga laruang tren o marbles. Pag Arts month, rumarampa ang mga bata dito, pati ang kanilang mga linikha. Sa isang sulok ng biotope may makikita kang tinatawag nilang Bibig.

Found sculpture ito. Ukab lang naman talaga ‘yun na may nakaharang na ugat-ugat ng baliteng sinadyang hindi putulin noong linagyan ng globular structure. Kapag gagawa ang sinuman ng desisyong mahalaga—ang pagsali sa isang kumpetisyon, halimbawa, o ang pamimili kung uuwi na lang o tiisin ang pagkawalay sa pamilya — ang Bibig ang magpapahiwatig. Kailangan mong mag-alay para maging “totoo” ang sagot. Bumubuka ang Bibig kapag ibig nitong ipahiwatig na Oo, at nananatiling tikom kapag Hindi ang sagot. Tatal ang Oo at Hindi ay napaka-metapisikal nang mga salita. Kung papaano nila itinakda na bumubuka ang Bibig ay hindi alam ni Bayang, dahil parehas itong nakabuka (lagusan) at parehas itong nakatikom (kasi hindi mo nga matanaw ang nasa loob na parang blackhole sa dilim.) Wala siyang kilala na nangahas tuklasin kung saan ba lumulusot ang papasok sa Bibig, kung ito ba’y makalalabas sa kabilang dulo. Wala siyang kilala pero posibleng wala ring nagkukuwento. Malay ba niya? Hindi lang naman ang mga estudyante ang nakakaalam ng secret spot na ito kundi pati ang mga maintenance at admin. Pero marami na ang nagsasabi na ang sinumang pumasok doon ay isusumpa ng Diwata. Kung kanino nanggaling ang kuwento at kung kailan ay walang nakakaalam. Puwede mo raw itanong kung crush ka ng crush mo, kung linoloko ka lang ng ka-relasyon, at kung papasa ka ba sa Visual Arts 100 o makukuha ka sa auditions. May walking tour dito ang mga freshman kapag nakalarga na ang kanilang mga magulang pabalik. Kasama sa bonding ng mga freshies at senior years ang paninigurong ang Bibig ay mananatiling lihim na batid lang ng isang tunay na tagaroon. Ang mitolohiya nito ay hindi ipinakakalat labas sa mga estudyante. Kung ano ang naikuwento sa tapat ng Bibig, mananatili lang iyong nasa Bibig.

Noong bata pa si Bayang, takang-taka siya sa ginagawang ritwal ng kaniyang mga kaklase. 1979 iyon. Hayun sila, magdadala ng mga prutas, minatamis na saba at kamote, bigas, nganga, sigarilyo. Atang ang tawag nila. Ilokanong salita. Kay Sir Lino ba nanggaling? Pag may handa sa eskuwelahan, may isa sa mga maintenance na mag-aalay ng pagkain doon. Ni minsan, hindi siya sumali rito. Kung hindi maiwasan, magkukunwari siyang nagdarasal kapag nakapikit na ang lahat.

Pinilig-pilig na naman ni Loreto ang kaniyang relos pagkadaan nila sa Bibig. “Nagwish ka na ba dito?”

Parang walang narinig si Bayang na tuloy-tuloy lang sa lakad.

“Gaya ng relo ko, lagi itong advanced.”

“Ha?”

“Naririnig nito ang hihilingin mo kahit hindi mo sasabihin.”

Tumawa nang tumawa si Bayang. Sa tagal ng kaniyang halakhak, sumakit ang kaniyang tiyan.

“Lagi ko itong shinessake nang ganito para tumatapat ‘yung gears sa aking pulso.” Natawa uli si Bayang sa sagot ni Loreto pero nagkunwari na lang siyang nahimasmasan sa nakita niya sa labas ng pyroplastic wall ng biotope. “Saranggola ba ‘yun?”

“Yes. mga saranggola nga.”

“Wow! Tingnan mo ‘yun, o. Ang gaganda. Nakakatuwa.”

Mga pinalilipad iyon na mga likha ng klase ni Finn. Saglit na napatanga ang mga kabataang nasa loob ng kalabasang malaki. At parang kinati ang kanilang mga talampakan nang humugos sila palabas ng biotope na akala mo’y may lumapag na spaceship. “Wow!” Napuno ang langit ng mga malalaking ibon, dragon, paruparo, isda, pawikan. Nagtatalon ang mga kabataan at kinikilig sa pagtingin sa pakikipaglandian ng mga buto’t balat na lumilipad sa langit.

“Alam mo Bayang kung nakapasyal ka ng Japan maalaala mo ‘yang mga saranggolang iyan. May significance ‘yan sa kanila.”

“At anong significance?”

“Well, meron silang tinatawag na Boy’s Day doon.”

“At para saan ‘yun?”

“Magpapalipad ng mga saranggola ang mga ama para ipagdasal ang paggabay ng mga ispiritung ancestral sa mga bagong silang na anak na lalaki.”

“E pano kung malaki na ‘yung bata?”

“Kasa-kasama sila sa ritwal. Sila ang gumagawa ng saranggola mismo.”

“I’ve never been to Japan.”

“Well, you should try. Habang bata ka pa. At habang wala ka pang pamilya.”

Katahimikan. “Ano ba’ng nangyayari sa ‘yo kani—“

“Hindi ko pa iniisip ang mga ‘yan Loreto.”

“Who knows? Baka ayain ka na ni Finn.”

“May masasagap ka sigurong balita tungkol sa amin anytime soon,” wala sa loob na naibulalas ni Bayang.

Ano? Bakit niya ‘yun sinabi? Close na ba sila?

“Good news?”

“Well, depende kung pa’no mo titingnan.”

“Hmmm. Napaisip ako diyan a.”

Ngumiti lang si Bayang.

Ilang metro na rin ang kanilang nalalakad palayo sa direksiyon ng Bibig nang biglang tumigil sa gitna si Loreto. “Narinig mo ‘yun?”

“Ano?”

“Psst. Psst.”

“Hay naku, Loreto. Pa-check mo na nga’ng tenga mo.”

Tumigil uli si Loreto na parang tinatantya kung nasa tamang tono ang naririnig.

“Hayan o.”

“Baka kung ano na ‘yan. Tayo-tayo lang naman ang naririto, at ‘yung karamihan sa mga estudyante natin, tumakas muna sa atin para manood muna ng palipad ng saranggola.”

Napakamot ng di makitang balakubak si Loreto. Ipinilig niya ang relo niya. Pinakinggan ang tick-tock.

Wala nang klase sa composition na naganap. Tila nagkaunawaan na sina Bayang at Finn na ito na muna ang bahala sa mga Music Students, na inaliw rin niya sa paged-demonstrate ng paggawa ng mga guryon. Gustong gusto ni Bayang na pagmasdan si Finn sa mga sandaling ganito siya: parang isang nakatatandang kuya o tiyuhin o ama. Ituturo ang paggupit at pagdikit ng balat, ang papel ng mga guryon. Ituturo kung paano binibigkis ang mga patpat, maging ang pag-test kung balanse ito. Iwo-workshop ang disenyo ng mga magaan ang lipad, ipaliliwanag kung bakit may mga disenyong bumabagsak. Kapag pinaalagwa nito ang mga guryon, umaalagwa rin sa kaniyang anit ang buhok niyang kulot-kulot at mukha siyang masayang kerubim. Napahahalakhak niya ang pinakaseryosong bata, napatatahimik ang pinaka-makulit at napasusunod ang mga pasaway. Parang barkada lang sila kung mag-usap, pa-apir-apir pa kapag nakakaunawaan. Lumipas ang oras na parang kay bilis. Masaya ang mga bata nang dumating ang sasakyan. Magkatabi sina Finn at Bayang, nangngingitian, pero hindi nag-uusap.

Sa cafeteria, naging usap-usapan ang amoy na umalingasaw sa Music Room. Lumalabas na hindi lang pala ang mga klase ng music faculty ang apektado. Napatigil rin ang lecture sa drawing, ang barre exercises, ang paggamit ng potter's wheel. Iisa ang reklamo nila. Hindi nila matagalan ang amoy. Na-weirduhan si Bayang. Pare-parehas ang deskripsiyon. Umaalingasaw, nakakasuka, parang bulok na repolyo, itlog. Ano 'yun? Parang nabubulok raw na bangkay? Hindi, parang mga sanitary napkin na nabulok, sabi ng isa. 'Lam mo 'yun, 'yung nakakainis na amoy ng dugo na malansa na parang may katas ng sampaloc, pero magnified daw 'yung amoy na parang hinaluan ng burak, tae, imburnal. May nagsabing parang halimuyak ng Smokey Mountain. Payatas. Ang nakapagtataka, aniya, hindi lang sa kanilang mga taga-Music nangyari iyon, pero hanggang Ballet Studio. Pati sa Arts Room. Tinanong ni Bayang kung anong petsa noon. Nov. 29, 1990. Kinagabihan, sinulat niya ang petsa. Itinala niya rin ang kaniyang pagsusuka. Tinandaang kailangan niyang bumaba bukas para magpatingin.

Hindi na siya magpapasama kay Finn. Tiyak na hindi naman ito interesado.

Ikalawang Proposisyon: O, Nahanap Mo Na Ba?

Magdala ka ng pocketbook o notes. Kung may walkman bilhin mo 'yung talagang kapit sa tainga mo. Minsan kasi, kahit napansin niyang may iba ka pang gustong gawin o may iniisip ka, binabasa niya iyon na panahon na para mag-perform. *Psst. Psst.* Sasabihin niya sa tainga mo. May tumatawag raw ng kaniyang pangalan: *Psst. Loreto. Psst. Loreto.* Nasa bus siya, o nasa bahay. May sumusutsot at tumatawag ng kaniyang palayaw. *Ssst. Itoy. Itooooy.* Ilang beses na niyang pinag-iisipan kung isusumbong niya si Loreto kay Finn. Sinubukan niya, pero natawa lang ito. Baka raw may crush sa kaniya. Parang siya pa ang may mali, dapat daw kasi, flattered siya. Pero ang sabi niya, hindi na ito simpleng pangungulit e. Minsan nagulat na lang siya nang lumabas siya ng cottage niya. Sa lanai na nasa porch, nakaupo si Loreto. Nakabisaklat ang mga hita. Nakatingin sa kaniya na parang nag-usap sila na magkita sa lobby. At ang tanging sinabi nito nang itinanong niya kung bakit? "May pinasasabi lang siya sa iyo."

"Sinong siya?"

“Yung kinukuwento ko sa ‘yo.”

Tumawa lang nang tumawa si Finn. E di gawin mo raw sa kaniya kung ano ang ginawa sa ‘yo. “Ano bubukaka ako sa porch niya at sasabihin kong Pass The Message? Para akong nabastos e.”

Bumuntung-hininga si Finn. Sumenyas na tumahimik muna siya, nasa paligid kasi ang mga “pulis”. Tinatantya niya kung dapat ba niyang sabihin ito kay Sir Giacomo. Pero magmula nang payuhan sila ni Finn na “magpigil sa gigil” nagdalawang isip siya. Ang roommate niyang si Nurse Hellena ay busy sa pakikipagtsismisan sa cottage nina Mael at Sir Lino. Out of the question na lapitan niya ang mga kapwa niya babaeng mga guro. Si Cressi? Puwede sana kaso... hindi niya mabasa kung ano si Cressi.

Minsan, magiliw. Lalo na kapag nagkasalubong sila sa library at nagkataong parehas sila ng hihiraming libro. One time nakita niya ito sa mall at may kausap doon na estudyante. Malungkot na malungkot ang mukha ni Cressi nang bigla siyang tinalikuran ng estudyante. Sinikap niyang kalimutan ang nasilip niyang iyon. Sinikap niyang burahin ang mukha ng babaeng estudyante na bukod sa may maamong mukha ay napansin niyang lumuluha rin.

Kaya kinimkim na lang niya. Hanggang sa siya na naman ang katabi niya sa bus.

At saka niya ikukuwento ang tila nagkataon lang na pagkakalaglag ng mga bulaklak na malapit sa kaniyang porch. Rosal, daisies, madre kakaw, santan, rosas. Ulan ng talulot. Kapag ikinukuwento ito ni Loreto, kumukumpas pa ang kaniyang kamay na akala mo nagcoconduct. Na pag inisip daw niya, sino ba namang baliw na magsusupot ng talulot at magpapaulan sa tapat pa ng kaniyang welcome mat sa cottage? Ilang beses na raw niyang sinubukang hulihin sa paggising nang mas maaga-aga. Hindi niya ito naaabutan, kahit noong binilin pa niya sa mga kapwa niya faculty doon sa male dormitory. Kaya nga raw naalala niya ang himala sa grotto ng Lourdes, nang maging sugo ang dalawang bata.

“Ano ‘yon?” sabi ni Bayang, at nagsisi siya kung bakit pa siya sumingit dahil naging hudyat pa iyon kay Loreto na ituloy ang kuwento. Pero hindi talaga niya alam ang sinasabi nitong himala.

“Hindi mo alam ‘yon? Hindi mo ba napapanood ‘yun sa tv noong growing up years mo?”

“Sorry, laging sira ang tv namin hanggang sa tinapon na lang.”

“Hindi ba ang dami tuloy mga batang babae na pinangalan kay Bernadette?”

“Sorry, WALA AKONG CLASSMATE NA BERNADETTE.”

Natahimik ito. “Ay, pasensya ka na, nakalimutan kong naka-walkman ako kaya ako napasigaw.” “Sila nina Lucia at—nakalimutan ko na ‘yung pangalan ng isa pa. Basta, tatlo silang mga mahihirap na bata sa France na nakarinig at nakakita ng apparition.” At kinuwento na ni Loreto ang mga batang iyon at muli, hindi naman siya talaga nakikinig, papulot-pulot lang ng mga piraso, detalye, sa kuwento. Hindi ba’t naka-amoy sila ng talulot ng bulaklak? Rosas daw iyon. May sariling halimuyak ang rosas. Oo, ani ng utak ni Bayang. Kaamoy nito ang mga punerarya. Ani Loreto, matatapos ang siklo ng pag-ulan ng mga talulot at mapapalitan ng pahiwatig ng mga insekto. Minsan, may nakita siyang pormasyon ng mga hantik. Korteng puso.

“Sa Lourdes?”

“Hindi. Dito. Ano ka ba? Hindi ka naman nakikinig, e. Paano ka naging musician? Anyway, sa bahay ng mga anay, may nakita akong isang mukha ng babae.”

“Malay mo naman kung marunong nang magdrawing ang mga anay.”

“One time, nakakita ako ng mga paro-paro. Palipad-lipad lang, paandap-andap lang sa aking likod at harapan.”

“Uy, nangyayari rin ‘yan sa akin.”

“Hindi iisa, ha? Tig-tatlo, tig-lima.”

“Baka dapat ka nang magpalit ng deodorant.”

Tumigil si Loreto sa paglalakad, waring nasaktan. “Itutuloy ko pa ba ang kuwento ko o ano?”

Ang clincher ng anekdota ni Loreto’y maiisipan niyang mamasyal ng SM. Gusto na raw niyang palitan ang kaniyang relo. May five years na rin kasi at nararamdaman niyang bumibigay na ang battery at bumabagal ang reflex ng mga kamay. Lagi tuloy siyang nalelate sa date nila ng kaniyang girlfriend, ‘yung babaeng nakatuluyan niya, si Marge na masarap magluto, na pinakamasarap magluto ng...

“Pinakbet, oo, nakuwento mo na,” sabi ni Bayang. “Ipa-adjust mo kaya para hindi mo na pinipilig?”

“Ha? anong sinabi mo?”

“Kako, ipa-adjust mo na ang relo mo.”

“Bayang, hindi iyan ang sinabi mo.”

“Bakit anong sinabi ko?”

“Magpasundo ka na kasi.”

“Ha? Hoy Loreto, tama na ‘yan ha, hindi ka na nakakatuwa.”

“At hindi na rin cute ang pangsusupalpal mo. Napaka-gentleman ko na nga sa ‘yo e.”

“Bakit ka ba nakikipaglandian sa akin e may asawa ka na?”

“Sinong nagsabi na linalandi kita? Kinukuwento ko lang sa ‘yo ‘yung kuwento ko. Masama ba ‘yun?”

“E bakit mo ba kinukuwento?”

“Kasi kaibigan kita. Bakit, nagkakamali ba ako?”

Huminga ng malalim si Bayang. Sayang. Sana ngayon siya nasusuka.

“O sige na. Ituloy mo na ang kuwento.”

May isang saleslady na lumapit sa kaniya. Napakaganda raw. Hindi mo aakalaing may saleslady na ganoon kaganda o kakinis. Pero hindi raw mestisa. Kayumanggi. Buo ang ngipin. Makislap ang buhok. Balingkinitan. May mga matang humihigop.

“Parang mga mata mo.”

“Ha?” Inusog ni Bayang ang sarili na mas malapit pa sa bintana. Lumingon sa likod nila. Tulog ang mga estudyante, napagod sa biyahe, sa rehearsal. Napagod sa traffic. Umuulan at nakatikom ang mga bintana. Malakas ang aircon.

Inaassist daw siya ng babae nang bigla itong mawala. Akala niya may kinausap lang. Pero ilang minuto na siyang naghihintay sa may estante ng mga relos na malapit sa eyewear. Katunayan nagsawa na siya ng kasusukat sa mga Rayban pero hindi na nagbalik ang salesgirl. Nang aalis na sana siya, may malamig na hanging dumaan. “O, nahanap mo na ba?”

“Ulitin mo nga ‘yon, Bayang.”

“Ang alin?”

“O, nahanap mo na ba?”

“Bakit?”

“Wala. May patutunayan lang ako.”

“O, nahanap mo na ba?”

Tumahimik si Loreto. “Gusto mong lagyan ko ng special effects?”

“Matamis ang tinig niya Bayang. Hindi kagaya ng ordinaryong tao. Ikaw nga, maganda na ang boses mo. Pero hindi ito kasing-tamis ng tinig niya.”

Isang matamis na tinig. As it turns out, hindi lang naman siya ang privileged na makinig sa mga kuwento ni Loreto. Magmula nang mapikon siya kay Bayang, hindi na siya kinibo nito. Kung sabagay, mabuti na ring alam niyang may hangganan ang kaniyang pasensya. Sa iba na lang siya mangungulit. Tatal, ang dami naman diyan na sabik o gustong makarinig ng ganyang uri ng kuwento. At hindi nga nagtagal, tila nagkapakpak ang balita dahil binulungan ang tenga ng lupa. Naikuwento na nga ni Loreto sa halos lahat. Sa liit ba naman ng populasyon ng mga tao doon. Pupusta si Bayang na pati ‘yung mga langgam at bubuyog doon alam na ang kuwento ni Loreto sa diwata.

Dito, musika ang tsismis.

Mismong si Sir Giacomo ay sumakay sa kuwentong ito. Nagpatawag ng isang reporter ng magazine at nagpasulat ng feature article tungkol sa kababalaghan. May photographer na kumuha kay Loreto, pero nang lumabas ang final article ay wala ang kaniyang mukha at pinili ng magazine na gamitin ang scenic shot mismo ng Music Room at ang corridor sa SM Mall, kung saan allegedly nakita ni Loreto ang mahiwagang babae. Isang taon matapos ma-publish ang artikulo, sumabog ang bulkang Pinatubo. Naramdaman ang yanig sa bundok. Maraming mga bahay ang lumubog sa lahar, maraming mga buhay ang apektado. Sinasabing dala ng pagkayanig, may mga kamalayang hindi na nakabalik ang utak sa dating ritmo. Isa sa mga tinakasan ng bait ay isang babaeng natagpuan nina Sir Giacomo sa kalsada ng Pampanga. Nagkataong nasa daan sila patungong Apalit para bigyang sigla ang mga biktima ng lahar. Tiyempong may nasalubong silang taong grasang babae na may garland ng sariwang-sariwang putong ng bulaklak. Nagbiro si Sir Giacomo sa mga bata. “O yan, method acting ba ‘yan?” Walang natawa. “Sir, parang mamahaling orkidyas ‘yung suot niya, o.” Ang sabi ni Sir Giacomo, baka ninakaw raw sa isang hardin. Pero ang sabi ng babaeng sinto-sinto, siya ang diwata ng bundok, at tutubusin niya ang mga naligaw. Naaawa raw si Sir Giacomo sa nasaksihan. Maganda raw

‘yung babae, sa ilalim ng limahid at amoy. May bitbit daw siyang supot ng mga talulot at nang paalis na ang coaster ng mga scholar, pinaulanan pa raw sila ng talulot ng babaeng sinto-sinto. Ang diwata ng kilometro 45.

Ikatlong proposisyon: Hindi mo na sila muling matatagpuan, kahit ipinangalan mo sa Alon at Agos

Tinawag sila noon ni Antonio Pigafetta bilang mga *viejas*. Inakala ko naman na sila’y mga babaeng nasa kasibulan. Hindi pala. Mga ale sila. Nakaranas nang maging ina o nabalo, nakaranas nang makipagtalik, itinuring na mahalaga sa komunidad, dahil sila ang tulay ng mga may buhay at wala. Sa kanila dumadaloy ang mga hinahabilin, at sa kanila rin naniningil ang mga naghabilin. Sapagkat tulay, tanggap na matapakan, tanggap na masaniban, tanggap na may hangganan ang mga mundo at naipagbubuklod ang mga iyon. May telang kambay silang tinutuntungan sa mga ritwal, at sukat rin ang mga ginagawa: magdasal, sumasamba sa araw o sa buwan, may tiyak na pag-aalay. Sa mga mata ni Pigafetta, ang ritwal ng mga *viejas* ay binubuo ng hindi maunawaang pagdarasal at hindi matanggap na paglublob sa dugo ng baboyramo ng mga hugis trumpetang gawa sa pinatuyong talahib. May pagbasbas ng dulo ng trumpetang iyon sa mga noo ng mga kapwa nila. Noong masaksihan ito ni Pigafetta, napansin niyang lahat ay binasbasan maliban sa kaniya. Isang pailalim na pagmamarka ng mga hindi ka-uri, hindi kasama. Siya ay dayo, isang banyaga.

Hinubad ng mga *viejas* ang mga saplot nila. Mabilis lang siguro ang proseso, sa tingin ni Bayang. Kapisang panakip lamang iyon, hindi tulad ng suson-susong mga tapis at takip na isusuot ng mga karaniwang babae na tulad nila matapos maitarak ang krus sa bayan at kamalayan. Siguro, sa kanila, balewala ang paghuhubad. Pero iba ang mga mata ng banyaga.

Kinain nila ang alay na nakahain sa bao at dahon. Maaring inihaw na lamang dagat, mga bungang kahoy, katas ng niyog, karne. Sa ganitong paraan lang nila kakainin ang mga alay. Nauuna na silang kumain bago ang iba. Walang sinabi si Pigafetta kung ang mga ito’y nagbigay ng pabalat-bungang alok.

Wala siguro. Matapos ang ilang dekada, isusulat muli ng isang banyaga ang kroniko tungkol sa kanila. Iba na ang kaniyang gagamiting pangalan para sa kanila. Babaylan na. Linarawan ni Loarca ang kilos ng kanilang

performance—sumasayaw, gumigiling, at may igting ang pagkilos, sapat para bumula ang kanilang mga bibig. Sapi? Nangiti si Bayang sa nabasa. Dalawang dekada na ang nakalipas pero inuusig pa rin siya ng nakaraan.

Minsan, habang nanonood siyang *Ang Pag-uusig* (salin ng *The Crucible*) ni Arthur Miller, naaalala niya ang sarili at ang panahong naroon pa siya sa sapot ng kaniyang pagnanasa. Ang sahig ng tanghalang iyon ay tinabas na magmukhang rampang may kaunting tarik sa dulo, at padausdos sa sayad. Isang espasyong nakatatakot sigurong matapakan, pagkat magkamali lang ng ikot ang aktor, gugulong ito at baka mabalian pa. Tungkol sa sapi ang dula. Tungkol sa kapangyarihan ng nakararami. Tungkol sa kuntsabahan ng labis na pagkabukod at paranoia. Isang sapi na kinondisyon, isang kasinungalingang pinalabas na katotohanan. Para lang mapagtakpan ang isang relasyong nabuo sa libog. Para lang magkaroon ng kaunting kalayaan ang ilang mga kabataang babae sa relihiyon. Pinagmamasdan niya noon ang aktres na gumanap sa papel ni Abigail Williams, ang tauhang nagpaikid sa eskandalo at nagpaikot ng ikid ng katuwiran ng buong komunidad. Ganiyan din ba siya kung makatingin sa sinisinta? Parang nanghihigop? Parang nagmamakaawa? Gani'yan din ba ang pagtingin nila sa kaniyang pagsasayaw? Talaga namang isinayaw niya ang trabaho niya doon, binuhos ang sarili sa abot ng makakaya. Pero mabuti pa ang mga tauhan ni Miller o kahit na sinong tauhan. Pag nag-black-out, umuuwi sa mausaleo ng pahina, maghihintay ng magbabasa. Aangat lang at magkakabuhay pag naunawaan.

Umuuwi silang lahat noon nang sabay-sabay sa iisang bus. Pero ang pakiramdam ni Bayang, naiwan siya sa Salem. Binitay doon.

Isang umaga, natagpuan na lang ni Bayang na mag-isa na siyang nag-aalmusal sa cafeteria. Tulad ng dati, nakakumpol sa isang mesa ang lahat ng babaeng faculty at sa isang mesa ang mga lalaki. Hindi na nag-aalmusal si Finn. Makikita na lang niya ito sa hapunan, at para bang nagkausap sila na hindi na magpansinan. Naisulat na niya ang resignation letter. Matagal na, bago pa nagparamdam ang matitinding morning sickness. Dadalhin na lang sana niya sa opisina ni Sir Giacomo pagkakain. Alam niyang mangangahulugang mawawalan siya ng sahod at baka hindi makapagtrabaho kaagad.

Pero ma'no ba? Gano'n talaga. Buntis siya. Sa lahat ng mga opsiyon, pinakamainam para sa lahat ang magbitiw. Ayaw niyang para siyang buteteng palutang-lutang pa sa sapa tapos huhulihin para i-dissect. Kung

hindi sana “mga kabataan ang iyong estudyante”—naalala pa niya ang pagbuka ng bibig ni Ms. Nabiyaan—“we can keep you.” Wow. Lalong lumala. Sana hindi na lang ipinadaloy ang mga pampalubag-loob. Sana nang mag-usap sila, babae-sa-babae, naisip din niyang hindi lang kasarian ang magkatulad sa kanila kundi ang pagkatanikala ng matris at itlog sa kinabukasan ng pagiging babae. Kung paanong siya dapat ang role model. Leche. Kahit nga ang mga bulaklak na champaca nalalaglag sa mga puno. Hindi naman nababawasan ang kanilang bango. Sa katunayan, bago sila mabulok, doon sila pinakamahalimuyak.

Ang katahimikan ni Finn ang sagot sa kaniyang tanong. Hindi pa ito handa. Hindi na niya kailangang dumaan pa sa Bibig. Alam niyang ilang tulog na lang at lilitaw na ang umbok. Tulad ng sintonadong nota, aangat ito at aangat. Bubukol at hindi uukol.

Isang kaibigan ang nagmalasakit sa kaniya. Kapwa babae rin, nagdaan sa katulad na proseso. Hindi niya alam noon na may pagsasaluhan pala sila na iisang problema, magkaiba nga lang ng time frame. Nang tinawagan niya si Becca at ayaing lumabas, akala niya nagbibiro lang ito nang sinabi niyang nararanasan na niya ‘yung eksaktong nararanasan niya. May pumipintig na sa loob ng kaniyang katawan at hindi niya alam kung anong gagawin.

“Parang invasion na parang extension... parang solution na parang resolution.”

“Extermination?”

“Redemption?”

“Ano ‘yan lyrics?”

“Exactly.” At tumawa si Becca at natawa na rin siya.

“Para akong minumulto kapag nakakakita ng nagdadalantao.”

“Dearie, 3 out of 5 people are women. Kakabaliw ‘yan.”

“I know.”

“Kapatid, matanong kita. Sino ba ang namimili ng mga awit na napakikinggan natin, habang nasa grocery tayo, nasa mall, o nasa elevator?”

“Ewan. Malay. ‘Yung mall?”

“Di ba puwede mo namang isipin na may pumindot lang ng playlist sa loob ng establishment na ‘yun ta’s ikaw na naloloka wala palang karapatang maloka kasi ‘yung pumindot kebs niya kung may existential crisis ka o ano.”

“E pa’no kung nasa palengke ka, kalsada, eskinita?”

“Same answer. Wala silang paki kasi hindi ikaw kami.”

“Hay naku, kung puwede ko lang malaman, gusto ko siyang barilin. Parang nananadya na mamili ng playlist na tila alam na mapapaiyak ka, sa pampublikong lugar, kung kailan wala kang mahanap na panyo o tissue man lang sa bag.” Natawa si Bayang sa sarili.

“Parang hindi mo pa kilala ang sarili mo. You’ve always been on the edge. Parang may malapit nang mapunit sa iyo sa loob, everytime.”

Nangiti si Bayang. “God, hindi talaga ako puwedeng magmaganda sa ‘yo. Lagi mo akong nakikita. Everytime. Shit.” Kakalkalin ni Bayang ang kaniyang bag.

“May nakalimutan ka?”

Hindi siya sinagot ni Bayang. Isa-isa nitong linabas ang contents ng bag at pinapatong iyon sa mesa ng burger place. “Ano ba ‘yan?”

“Ano, tell me, may nakalimutan ka ba o —”

“Wala. It’s here.” Itinaas niya ang bagay na naalala niya: panyo.

“Ano bang dinadala mo na nasa loob nito na mahalaga?”

“Susi. Ticket sa tren. Pera. Bagong Pasaporte. Yun lang. ‘Yung iba, basura na.”

Tiningnan ni Becca ang kaibigan, pinagmasdan kung paanong awtomatikong hinaplos ni Bayang ang puson.

“Think about it. Pag nag-decide ka, call me.”

“I think this is it.”

“What?”

“Naka-decide na ako.”

Headline News, sabi ng kaniyang mga mata. Hindi na ako ‘yung dati, magmula noong mabuntis ako. Binati rin siya ng mata ng kaibigan: It’s Over. Get on with your life.

Naniniwala siya sa kabatch niyang ito, si Rebecca. Actually good girl siya, nagkaboyfriend lang at nagkamali sa choice. Nahulog sa romance na may punk siyang lover na nakamotorbike, the whole Sister Christian

song. Malaking bulas si Rebecca, halos six footer. Literal na parang walang hanggan ang haba ng kaniyang mga binti at biyas, at may k na magsuot ng mga killer miniskirts at leather jackets. Madalas tuksuhin dahil sa tangkad, at kung minsa'y napagkakamalang transgender. Naging magkaibigan rin sila ni Bayang dahil rin sa musika, nang magkakasama pa sila sa isang banda na *The Virgin Donuts*.

Na-bully sila ng iba at 'yun ang bond nila, inakala ng iba na magjowa sila, pero para kina Bayang at Becca, hayaan mo silang gumawa ng kuwentong trip nila, basta sila, magkaibigang tunay. Tumibay sila dahil sa koalisyon nila, na kapag bata ka pa'y napakahalagang pagkahutok. Kung pinagtatawanan noon si Becca dahil sa height niya at kakaibang paraan ng pag-iisip, si Bayang naman ay naisantabi dahil sa hindi pa siya marunong lumaban. Ngayon, deadma na sila sa mga taong iyon na nang-api-api sa mga kantina't klasrum.

"Noong nangyari ito sa 'yo, did you tell anyone?"

"No one knew. Kami lang ni Barge ang nakakaalam."

Gamit ang computer, nag-log-in si Becca sa search engine at voila, may mga lumabas na resulta. "O di ba, so hindi ka na gagamit ng walis, karayom na panggantsilyo o hanger. May solusyon." Sabi, safe at proven effective. Tumaas ang kilay ni Bayang.

"Notice the irony?"

"I know."

"Wag ka nang magsign of the cross ha? It doesn't help and they don't help. In fact, they're a part of the problem." Malakas manggising si Becca, daig pa ang brewed coffee. "Wala akong naging option noon kundi magtiwala. Hindi naman bali-bali ang Ingles at mukhang kaya nagbebenta ng misoprostol at mifepristone dahil sa marami ang nagse-search. Klinik ko ang link at sinundan ang instructions ng meet-up at payment. Naghanda ng sarili at ng perang ipambabayad." Binanggit ni Becca ang halaga kay Bayang.

"Wow, ang laki pala."

"15K lang, actually. Pero the rest, 'yung 45K is for contingency."

"Contingency?"

"Kung itatakbo ka sa ospital just in case hindi mo makaya ang pamatay talagang cramps." "Cramps lang?"

“Well, among other things, excluding the psychic torture after. Tandaan na hindi ito katulad ng ordinaryong dysmenorrhea.”

“Ok.”

Dagdag pa ni Becca, may honor code na kapag nagkapalitan na ng pera, i-email ang instructions. Hindi na prinoblema ni Bayang ang payment. Pinakinabangan niya ang kaunti niyang talent bilang singer, at nakaipon naman ng sapat matapos ang isa’t kalahating linggo. Wala siyang inabala.

Mabilis ang meet-up at pick-up. Sa mataong lugar, isang terminal sa Cubao. ‘Kala mo nasa Bernal film sila ni Becca na nakaputing shades at striped shirt. Nag-fasting si Bayang ng dalawang oras dahil iyon ang instruction, bago niya ininom ang misoprostol na noong una, wala namang effect. Medyo nahihilo lang siya. At akala niya kaya niya, kaya nag-MRT siya. Ayun, doon siya inabutan ng lecheng pagsusuka sa tren. Nailabas ni Becca ang supot ng 7-11. Projectiles here, rocket mission there. Mga matang nananampal, mga nagpaparinig. Hang-over. Wasted. Chemo. Buntis. Kahiya. Inaalalayan siya ni Becca, ang braso nito ang kaniyang naging tungkod. Nakalabas sila ng bagon na halos matumba na si Bayang sa sahig. Binulungan siya ni Becca: “Isipin mo Bayang nangyari rin ‘yan sa akin, pero mas malala. Ang laki-laki ko tapos I was retching like crazy. At wala akong props na supot.” Natawa si Becca sa vision, at natawa rin si Bayang pero hindi niya kaya. Sumakay sila ng taxi. Kina Becca na muna siya umuuwi. Matapos niyang inumin ang dosage ng mifepristone, itinulog na lang niya. Nagising siya. Ginising niya si Becca. Hindi ito nagmaktol. “Actually, ‘yan rin ang inakala ko—na kaya kong itulog ang contractions...”

“Siyempre hindi no? Ow....Shit Shit Shit Tang-ina mong Finn ka. Tang-ina mo!!!”

Tuloy-tuloy ang pagdurugo, clumps magnifying habang tumatagal. Ano’ng sinabi ng Hinulugang Taktak? “Becca ganito ba talaga ‘to? Para akong naghahallucinate sa sakit. Like I keep seeing pink jellyfish things crawling.”

“Hello jellyfish, ‘yun na lang ang attitude...”

“Yung jellyfish na ‘yun ang baby ko, Becca.”

At umiyak na siya nang umiyak. Dumadaloy ang dugo mula sa kaniyang matris, pumapatak nang malapot na malapot, pumipiglas sa sakit,

waring may nagvavacuum cleaner sa vaginal walls. Nag-duet ang dugo sa luha niya.

Years later, habang nakahilata siya sa sahig na kawayan ng isang malaking kubo sa Bali, pinaliliwanag ng isang guru doon na nasa isang dangkal mula sa ating pusod ang chakra ng ating katawan. Linulugar at pinupuwesto ang enerhiya mula sa pusod, karugtong dapat ng nasa isip, at ng nasa puso. Hirap naman talaga siyang maintindihan ang Ingles nito, pero malaking tulong ang pagmumuwestra nito ng mga bahagi ng katawan at ang padilat-dilat ng mata't papilig-pilig ng leeg. Kusang umaalinsunod ang chakra na nasa pusod, dibdib at isip. Kasi raw may hindi makitang bigkis ang mga iyon. At ang hindi makitang bigkis na iyon ang tatangkain mong hawakan. Para kang si Buddha na nasa lugar ng mga makasalanan na biglang nakakita ng hibla ng sapot ng gagamba. Nang sinubukan ito mismo ni Bayang, nagulat siya sa kung saan siya dinala ng meditasyon.

Sa bayang iyon na parang Pilipinas rin, mas matamis ang hangin, mas masunurin ang mga tao sa trapiko, at mas may pagpapahalaga sa kultura. Kahit saan mo idako ang iyong tingin makikita mo ang kanilang mga bathala, may mga munting kubol ang mga bahay. Doon nila linalagak ang mga bathala nila't mga bantay. May atang ng lutong kanin, konting prutas, mga bulaklak. Parang sa bundok na iyon na tinakasan niya at linisan niya. May butil ng kanin na idinidikit nila sa noo pagkatapos ang samba. Paraan nila iyon ng pagbibigay pugay sa lahat ng biyaya. Kahit saan, may mga tumutugtog ng kanilang katutubong awit, gamit ang mga instrumentong minana pa nila sa mga nuno. Doon niya mas lalong naibigan ang gamelan at ang nosyon nito ng eternal na tugtugan, musikahan, na walang mga simula at wakas, pero organisado ang katahimikan at ingay. Kahit ang notasyon ng kanilang musika'y hindi umaayon sa notasyon ng Kanluran. May sariling metodo ng numero at komputasyon. May mga librong inukit sa kahoy na sari-sari ang nilalaman na inskripsiyon, mula sa mga epiko nila hanggang sa panggagamot hanggang sa witchcraft. Napadpad siya sa bayan na iyon hindi na bilang isang music teacher. Cultural Studies scholar na ang identity niya.

Nagpasya siyang palawakin ang kaniyang nalalaman. May theater workshop siyang dinaluhan sa Ubud. Nakilala niya si Wayan Piscayan, ang kinikilalang guro sa pagganap. Matapos silang bigyan ng oryentasyon sa pagganap sa pamamagitan ng panonood mismo ng performance ni Wayan,

hinikayat silang subukan ang metodo. Isusuot nila ang isa sa mga maskarang nakahapag. Pinagmasdan ni Bayang ang bawat isa. May mukhang leon, aso, unggoy, tigre, buwaya. Sinuot niya ang isang maskarang pinakanagustuhan niya ang itsura. Ewan kung bakit pinili niya iyon. Marahil, tulad ng isang halos makalimutang pagkakalarawan ng isang musikero, may panginingin ng laman siyang naramdaman. Hindi niya matiyak kung anong hayop iyon. Hindi pinangalanan ang mga maskarang ipinagamit ng performance mentor sa Bali. Matutunton naman daw ng aktor kung ano iyon kapag natapos na ang ehersisyo. Sinuot lang niya ‘yun na parang balabal. Walang espesyal, parang isang bahagi lang ng kabuuang saplot. Nagtalsikan na sa materyal nitong gawa sa balat ng puno ng saging ang laway ng iba pang mga aktor na gumamit nito. Kaamoy ng punda ng unang nalawayan. Katekstura ng tuyong dahon ng saging sa ilalim ng plantsa na medyo mas matigas. Nakakasusulasok ang amoy kapag tinutukan. Pero nagawa niyang kalimutan iyon. Tinandaang ang sarili ay nasa ibang daigdig at wala sa daigdig. Binuksan ang chakra. Pinagtiyap ang isip, chakra, kaluluwa. Isang tonal na ohmmm ang paulit-ulit niyang pinadaloy, katulad din ng kaniyang mga kasamahan. Hanggang sa nasapian na siya. Natagpuan na lang niya ang sariling nasa gitna ng gubat. Luntian ang lahat. Naramdaman niya ang lupa sa kaniyang talampakan, ang kati kaluskos lawiswis ng mga halamang kumakapit sumasagka lumililim. May biglang kumibot, isang anino, at alam niyang hindi lang siya ang nag-iisang hayop. Nababasa niya ang pulang init ng hayop na iyon at iyon ang kaniyang sinusundan. Hayun, nandoon. Nawala ang kamalayang naglalakad lamang siya at kumikilos sa dalawang paa.

Tumatalon daw siya, parang mananagpang, tila naging apat ang mga paang kayliliki.

Hinabol niya ang init, ang pulang aura ng init na mula sa kapwa niya hayop. Naglalagablab ang init, pumipintig nang mabilis na mabilis ang kaniyang puso na parang hinahabol niya ang sarili niyang anino, at bigla, may nakita siyang pamilyar. Patak ng dugo, patak ng namuong dugo. Tagas. Tagos. Malapot, malagkit, parang babolgam kapag hinawakan. Boiing. Ano ‘yon? Tumigil ang patak. Narinig niya ang gong, at ang alingawngaw nito ang tumusok at bumasag sa mundong pinasukan niya—ang hudyat na bitawan na ang mga maskara. Wala na siya sa gubat at nasa sala ng isang bulwagang kawayan. Hinihinal ang “hayop” na kaniyang hinahabol. Nagulat ang lahat sa kaniyang bangis. Natakot ang kapwa nilang workshop

delegate na siya ang hinabol. Isa siyang lalaking masteral student mula sa Vietnam na tila may nerbiyos sa mga salakay, pero nang mahimasman, natanggap nitong gayun na lang ang pagpasok ni Bayang sa mundo ng hayop na ‘yun, ‘yung kaluluwa sa likod ng maskarang iyon. Yumukod siya, at pinagyukuran. Natakot at namangha si Bayang sa kaniyang kakayahang hugutin ang intensidad mula sa kaniyang chakra.

“Bayang? Bayang, ikaw ba ‘yan?”

Inangat niya ang mukha. Katapat niya, may babaeng may pamilyar na ngiti, ang puting puting ngipin na iyon na minsan na niyang pinuri. Si Cressida Valmonte. “Oh My God, it’s been what—ten years?”

“Oo nga. Parang panahon pa ng mga dinosaur. Kumusta?” Napansin niyang nagpaunat na ito ng buhok, bahagyang namuti, ngunit gayon pa rin ang dating. Parang payat na Oprah Winfrey na nag-aaudition sa isang dula ukol sa kaalipinan sa South. Naka-blazer ito, cigarette pants at heels. May hinugot ito sa bag na isang paperback na pink. Ipinagmayabang nito na bitbit niya kahit saan ang volume ng mga tula ni Dickenson na rinegalo niya noon.

“E yung isang binigay ko?”

“Anong isa?”

“Yung Sappho.”

“A ‘yun. Tinangay ng baha. Nalungkot nga ako. Ang dami kong librong nawala, pati mga letters, lahat ng mga kinulekta kong mga abubot.” Kapwa sila nangiti. Mahirap makipag-usap sa ganitong pagkakaupo, kailangan pa nilang lakasan ang boses nila, naalala niya tuloy ang mga kuwentuhan nila noon sa Cafeteria. Saglit silang nagpalitan ng konting impormasyon sa kasalukuyang buhay. Siya, jobless, at siya, nasa call center. Hindi na niya nabanggit na may mga napuntahan na siyang mga ibang lugar. Hindi conducive sa blackhole na iyon ng magkakasalubong ang mukha at kilikili. “Ngapala, si...”

Ibang tao naman talaga ang itatanong niya kay Cressie. Si Finn ang ibig niyang mabalitaan. Pero sa halip ang nasagap niya’y tungkol kay Loreto, na namatay na raw.

“Ha?”

“Oo nga, ang gulat ko talaga. Nabundol raw. Pupunta yata sa burol ng kaanak. Nahagip ‘yung motorcycle niya.”

“Marunong ba siyang mag-motor?”

“Apparently. ‘Lam mo ‘yung mga malalaking motorbikes na parang sinasakyan ng mga Putting mahahaba ang buhok? May gan’on siya.”

A Harley Davidson motorcycle? Wow. Approximately 1 million to P350K pesos. Mayaman si Loreto. “Lumipad ang katawan. ‘Lam mo Bayang, he was impaled in one of those construction posts. Grabe.”

“Talaga? Wow. Ang sakit nu’n.”

“Nang dumating na ‘yung tulong, wala na siya. Na-traffic ‘yung paramedics. Hay. Napakabata pa niya.”

“Kuwarenta mahigit na siguro ‘yun. 20 years ago na magmula nang maging colleague natin siya.”

“Yes. He was certainly one of the memorable ones...”

“Psst.”

“Psst.” Nagtawanan sila, sabay.

“Ang sama natin ‘no?”

“Not really.”

“Dadalawin mo?”

“Ikaw?”

Umiling siya.

“...pero lab ko ‘yun.”

Sasabihin niya sana: “Ako, hindi,” pero ang kabig, “O’nga. Lab siya ng lahat.”

Sabay na yata silang yumuko, o tumingin sa pintuang panaka-naka’y nagluluwal ng tao o iniwan. Parami nang parami ang mga sumasakay. Humara ang mga puson ng mga hapit na bestida’t pantalon, ang mga nakabukang bag na may nakalaylay na mga hand sanitizers, ang mga kamay na may bitbit na mga gym bag o vinyl trolleys. Nang mahawi ang mga ito sa estasyon ng Buendia, wala na si Cressi. Nakababa na, ni hindi niya alam kung kumaway.

Sabi nila, ang pakikinig ng sadya sa musika ay bihirang-bihirang gawin ng ordinaryong tao. Kadalasan, nasasagap ng tao ang musika sa paligid na kaniyang ginagalawan. Isang bahagi lang ang musika sa isang composite

na karanasan—halimbawa, papasok ka ng fastfood kagaya ng 7-11. Ang musika na tinutugtog doon ay musika pa rin, kesehodang estasyon lang ‘yun ng 96.3 FM radio at nag-uusap ang dalawang DJ na bagay sa isang karnabal. Bumili si Bayang ng Yakult at empanada. Naupo muna sa sulok, tumanga, pinakalma ang isip. “Can this be love/I’m feeling right now...” Bata pa si Geneva Cruz nang inawit niya ito, paboritong kantahin ng mga kabataang kasabay niya noon sa bus tuwing bumababa sila patungong Folk Arts. Lihim niyang gusto ang kanta, naaaliw sa espontayong bulwak ng awit ng mga batang iyon, tila may hindi mapigilang sigla, nag-uumapaw ang kagustuhang marinig ang nasasaloob. Bumili pa nga siya ng album ng Smokey Mountain sa Harrison Plaza nang patago. Tawa nang tawa si Finn nang matuklasan nito ang tunay niyang “taste” dahil sinuyod nito ang kuleksiyon niya ng mga cassettes. Hate niya ‘yun, ‘yung kunwari inosenteng tumitingin sa mga nakasalansan o nakapuwestong mga gamit, parang nagbabasa ng diary ng may diary; parang nag-iimbentaryo. “Weno ngayon kung baduy? E sa gusto ko ‘yung kanta, paki mo,” ito dapat ang sinabi niya sa ulol na ‘yun, pero in love siya noon sa lalaking ito at naalala niya ang nanginginig niyang tuhod sa tuwing naririnig niya ang boses nito. Oh God. Parang kay tagal na ng panahong iyon. ‘Yun ‘yung panahong makarinig lang siya ng ganyang kanta namimiss niya ang kambal niyang jellyfish na pinalayas niya sa uterus niya nang walang notice of eviction. Saan na kaya sina Alon at Agos? Lumulutang-lutang ba sila sa ere ngayon, mga protons at atoms? Lumulutang sa iniinom niyang Yakult, kasama sa lacto-bacilli Shirota strain? Lumulutang bilang protozoa sa sikmura ng batang lalaking nasa labas, nakatanghod sa kaniya habang inuubos niya ang kaniyang empanada? Ang cute siguro nila kung natuloy. Kulot tulad ng tatay, kasing-kayumanggi ng nanay, baka marunong ring magpinta, baka marunong ring kumanta.

Naiiyak siya. Well, magmula ng demolition na ‘yun mas tumindi ang kaniyang hormonal mood swings. So that’s it. Naiiyak siya dahil sa imbalance. Kahit ang katawan ng babae may climate change. Napatigil siya sa paglalakad. Parang pamilyar ang gusaling katapat niya. Ikaw ba ‘yan, Harrison? Hay Harrison, ano’ng nangyari sa ‘yo? At sumagot ito: heto, bulok pa rin, hindi na nawala sa frontage ang mga batang kalye na sumisinghot ng rugby, ang tambak ng basurang nakalimutan nang kulektahin, ang buga ng mga jeepney at kotseng nakakaanghit. O’nga, sabi niya. Nasa katapat siya na pondohan ng sigarilyo’t juicy fruit, ang

nanlilimahid na kanal. Nakita kaya ng mga batang ‘yun sina Agos at Alon? Baka. ‘Yung batang babae na nagtitinda ng sampaguita, parang kamukha niya. Lamang lang siya ng ilang ligo at pahid sa uhog sa batang ito noon. Pero ganyan rin siya kapayat, parang sipit ng mga damit na isasampay ang mga binti. Pasando-sando’t marungis na school uniporm ang pambahay. Tinawag ng nanay ang bata. Lalapitan na sana niya ang ale. Itatanong: Nakita niyo po ba sina Agos at Alon? Tiningnan siya ng ale, may linista sa 1/4 pad paper na binulsa sa apron niyang pinakumpulan ng mga batik ng sarsa’t panghi. Tinitigan ni Bayang ang mga kending paninda, ang mga menthol candy, coffee candy, orange candy, na lahat walang kinalaman sa kanilang mga pangalan, mabuti pa ang misoprostol at mifepristone, sakto at swak sa birth certificate. Napatingin siya sa dumadaloy na tubig sa kanal at naalalang inaalaala niya noon kung baka naianod sina Agos at Alon sa mga kanal ng Maynila, parang mga bagong Moses na may mabuting kaluluwang dadampot. Palalakihin sila, papag-aralin, at ‘yun, darating ang grand moment na magkikita sila. Probably a talk show. Probably a concert. Hindi inaasahang magtatagpo ang oras at mundo, posibleng sa palengke, sa mga prutas at gulay, pero malamang sa may mga isda, parang mga salmon lang na umuuwi sa dati nilang mga ilog, that is, kung hindi pa naligaw o nailuto o nailata o pinatay ng oil spill. Hanggang sa tingin niya’y nakarating na siya sa bandang Quiapo at makatawid ng tulay, tumutugtog pa rin ang hinayupak na album ng Smokey Mountain. Kakatwang ipinangalan ang pop group sa literal na bundok ng basura na tinatawag nang Payatas. Kakatwa rin na ang liriko ng awit ay nasa Ingles at parang namuhunan sa kirot sa dibdib. Pa-awa effect. Return to a land called Paraiso. Shit. Sa landas ng langaw at salapi, alam ng lahat na may pera sa basura. Pumara siya ng taxi. Natawa ang drayber nang sinabi niya ang destinasyon. ‘Yung pupuntahan niya ang kaniyang pinanggagalingan.

“Ganu’n po ba?” Bumaba siya’t naglakad, naghanap ng mauupuan, masasandalan. Nakakita, at nagtakip muna ng sarili sa likod ng pader ng mga taong magkakaiba ang patutunguhan.

Epilogo:

November 29 2010 nang pinagpapatay ang mga journalists sa isang ambush sa Maguindanao. A-attend lang sana ang mga peryodista ng isang junket at ico-cover lang sana ang press conference na gagawin ng asawa ng isang clan leader sa Maguindanao. Natapos ang kumperensiya at pauwi na ang mga peryodista nang harangin ang kanilang mga sinasakyang van ng mga armado. Pinagbabaril ang lahat ng nakasakay. Nang matiyak na namatay na ang lahat, binuksan ng mga armado ang mga van at hinakot ang mga bangkay sa isang open pit. Linamuray, dinurog, piniga, yinurak. ID na may putik, sapatos na duguan, kamay at binting putol-putol. Ito ang kumalat na mga litrato ng malagim na insidente. Mga mukhang nakanganga at mga matang hindi na naipikit. Labas ang tiyan, ang bituka. Putok ang bungo, nguso. Sumalubong ang kumpal ng mga lupa sa mga bangkay na yinurak, piniga, dinurog, linamuray. November 29 rin iyon, sampung taon matapos maamoy nina Bayang ang open pit, sa ibang lugar, sa ibang panahon.



DRAMA

Triangles

Jose Victor Z. Torres

CHARACTERS

| | | |
|-------|---|--------------|
| Beng | - | 35 years old |
| Allan | - | 35 years old |
| Marky | - | 14 years old |

(The period of the play is the present.)

(The stage is a bare area where the blockings of the characters follow the different types of triangles.)

SCENE 1 - Three Sides

(The lights open onstage. Beng is sitting on a couch in the middle of the stage. She is dressed casually.)

BENG: (excited) I am ready. I am ready to go out there and face the world again. (pause) Yes. I am. (pause) How can I tell? (pause) I don't know. Everything just felt right. (pause) Feels right.... (pause) Well, at the moment, yes. (pause) What am I supposed to feel? (pause) Well, you're the therapist. What am I supposed to feel if I feel that everything feels right? (pause) Nothing? (pause) Oh. (pause) Well, relationships are another thing. (pause) He calls. He calls from time to time. (pause) Who? Allan.

(The lights open on one part of the stage. Allan enters and stands facing the audience.)

BENG: Allan. Who else? (pause) He never stopped calling. (pause) Yes. He never did. (pause) Well, the time periods got longer. At first it was everyday. As if he ... I never left him. Then it became thrice a week. Then twice a week. Then weekly. (pause) I hope it stops there. I do miss him. (pause) Why did I leave? (laughs) I told you about that months ago, remember? (pause) No? (pause) Really? (pause) Really.

(Pause. The lights go on in another part of the stage. Marky enters and stands facing the audience.)

BENG: I still miss him. (pause) But I have to move on. So I decided to go back to work. I mean Two years is a long time. But I have to start again somewhere. I mean, I really have to start again. Either that or I'd just pick up from where I left off with my life. Or start with a new one. (pause) What do you think?

(A brief pause.)

What do you think of all this? (pause and smiles) Well, you're the therapist. Aren't you glad I'm getting ok after all these months? (pause) Aren't you bothered that you might lose part of the money you usually get when a patient gets well? (pause) I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. (pause) No. I shouldn't have said that. Well, I am paying you to listen to me.

(Beng laughs then pauses.)

What do I think of all this? (pause) I don't know. Have you ever heard of a love triangle? (pause) Of course, you have. (pause) Well, whenever I think of them, I think of a triangle. Three persons. Three sides. There may be dozens of ways to move around these angles and sides but you still end up with

three sides. You still end up with the same people. (pause) You have to decide between one of the two people in that triangle to get out of it. So you will end up with just one side. And that's it.

Or else? (pause) Or else what? (laughs) The triangle is like a point of a knife. I can stab. It can hurt. (pause the nods) Yes. The "d" word. (pause) I.... I never used the "d" word. (pause) Too much, no? (laughs) Well, that's what you get from too much thinking. From too much moping around for the past two years. (pause) Has it been that long? (pause) Has it been two years already?

(Beng sits straight and stares straight ahead. Both Marky and Allan turn to her. The light slowly fades out.)

(Blackout)

SCENE 2 - Right Angle

(The sound of rain falling hard. The lights open onstage. Beng is standing downstage at a right angle to Allan and Marky. The lights on the latter two are dimmed. Allan is dressed casually and smoking. Marky is in shorts and a soccer shirt. A hand towel is draped over his left shoulder. Beng is dressed in business clothes and carrying a leather backpack. She is soaking wet. She is facing the audience.)

BENG: I first saw Marky the first week I decided to go back to work. That first week when I was all excited about getting back on my feet again. When getting my first client began that rush that I missed. (pause) Has it been that long? (pause) Has it really been that long? (pause then laughs) But then... then I realized the hard way that that first week I decided to work again was the first week of the rainy season. (pause) And... so much for that rush inside you when all you can see at the moment

is the rush of floodwaters in the middle of downpour in the middle of traffic in the middle of the city. (pause) Then Marky came....

(The light opens on Marky's side. Beng starts to rummage through her backpack, looking for something to dry herself off.. Marky goes up to her and hands her his towel. Beng takes it without looking at him first as she closes her backpack.)

BENG: Oh, Thank you. You're so kind.

(Beng looks at Marky then stops and stares at him. She is still holding the towel.)

MARKY: I guess you forgot your umbrella. Did you leave it in the car?

(Beng just stands there, looking at him.)

MARKY: You're soaking wet, Mom. Maybe you should dry yourself off. That's what you always tell me whenever I'd get wet in the rain. I might catch a cold. (pause) You might catch a cold. (pause) Use my towel.

(Beng just stares at Marky.)

MARKY: You're supposed to wipe yourself dry with it. Don't worry, Mom. It's clean. They made sure I always carry around a clean towel over there. (laughs) You'd kill me if I gave you a dirty towel. (pause) Mom? Are you ok?

(Beng doesn't answer. A cellphone begins to ring. Beng rummages through her backpack and answers her cellphone without taking her eyes off Marky.)

BENG: Hello?

(The lights open on Allan. He is talking on a cellphone.)

ALLAN: Beng? Beng? Hello?

BENG: Hello? Allan?

ALLAN: Are you ok?

BENG: Allan? I can't hear you! Your signal is glitchy!

ALLAN: ARE YOU OK?

BENG: Yes! (pause) What do you mean "Am I ok?"

ALLAN: I just heard on the radio that it was raining pretty hard in Manila. Are you ok?

BENG: If you mean, "Am I stranded yet", No, I'm not.

ALLAN: That's good.

BENG: I'm ok. (pause) Yes. I'm ok. (pause) Wait. What do you mean, am I ok?

ALLAN: I was just asking....

BENG: If it's about the rain, I'm ok. (pause) No. No, I'm not ok. I'm not stranded but I'm soaked. I had to run to the parking lot in the rain to get into the car because I forgot to bring an umbrella with me to the office because who would've thought it would be the first day of the rainy season when I finally decided to get back to work. Then when I got to the car it turned out I didn't bring an umbrella at all.

MARKY: Now, that sucks.

BENG: (at Allan) NO, I AM NOT OK! (pause) But that is not what you're asking about, I guess. (pause) Isn't it?

(Allan is silent. Beng stares at Marky then talks on the cellphone.)

BENG: (pause) Allan?

ALLAN: What?

BENG: There's a boy here who looks like Marky.

MARKY: What?

ALLAN: What?

MARKY: Mom, I am Marky

BENG: (to Marky) You can't be Marky.
ALLAN: What?
MARKY: I am Marky, Mom.
ALLAN: (pause) Beng? Are you alright? Was your first day on the job, ok?
BENG: Yes, it was. (pause) No, it wasn't. (pause) I mean ... (to Marky) How do I know you're Marky?

(Marky takes out a pair of Harry Potter eyeglasses and puts it on.)

MARKY: Ok?

(Beng stares at Marky then talks on her cellphone.)

BENG: Allan?
MARKY: Don't tell him.
BENG: (to Marky) What?
ALLAN: What?
MARKY: Don't tell him.
BENG: (pause, looks at Marky then talks on the cellphone) Marky's here.
ALLAN: What?
MARKY: I told you don't tell him. He won't believe you.
BENG: (to Allan) Marky's here. Now. Beside me.

(A brief pause)

ALLAN: Beng? (pause) Are you ok?
BENG: What?
MARKY: I told you he won't believe you.
BENG: Marky is here, Allan. I see him. He talks to me. I can talk to him.
ALLAN: And I suppose he is wearing those Harry Potter glasses that you always like on him.

BENG: (pause) Yes.

(Allan sighs.)

BENG: (pause) I don't know yet if I can hug him. I know I can feel him. But can I touch him like before? (pause) Because I am so scared he will disappear if I touch him. (pauses then sighs) I'm ok, Allan. I'm still seeing my therapist on every appointment she gives me. She referred me to a counselor who I can talk to so we can talk I'm alright ... for now. (pause) Marky's here, Allan. And I'm ok. (pause) It is not your fault.

ALLAN: It's not even your fault.

MARKY: Things just happen. There are things you cannot change.

(A brief pause.)

ALLAN: I just called to ask if you're ok. If everything was fine. Cindy told me that you went back to work today.

BENG: Yes, I did.

ALLAN: (pause) So... Did you?

BENG: Did I what? I just told you I did.

ALLAN: Did you enjoy it? It is your first day.

BENG: I can't tell yet. It was my first day. (pause) Who could've known it would rain on my first day on the job.

MARKY: You could've checked the weather app on your phone.

BENG: I didn't bother to check my weather app.

(Pause)

BENG: Is there anything else, Allan?

ALLAN: No. (pause) I'll call back, ok?

BENG: Up to you. (pause) It's up to you. Not like I'm kind of always expecting it.

ALLAN: (pause) I see. (pause) Ok. Well... Good –

(Beng hangs up before Allan can finish talking and returns her phone to her bag. She then sits down and looks for something to wipe her shoes with. Marky is watching her. She looks at the towel draped on her shoulder, is about to grab it, then shakes her head and starts rummaging through her backpack again.)

MARKY: What are you looking for?

BENG: I need to wipe my shoes.

(Beng stops rummaging through her bag and takes the towel that she draped on her shoulder. She looks at it.)

MARKY: Don't you dare use my towel.

BENG: (drapes the towel again on her shoulder) I wasn't going to (looks through her back again and pulls out a wad of wet tissue paper) Shit.

(Beng begins to wipe her shoes while trying to balance herself, standing up. Marky is watching her.)

MARKY: Why do you always do that?

BENG: Do what? I have to clean my shoes. They're muddy.

MARKY: Hanging up before he says goodbye.

(Beng remains silent. She continues to clean her shoes.)

MARKY: It's rude you know.

BENG: I never want to hear goodbyes.

MARKY: I didn't, you know... exactly say goodbye.

BENG: Wait. (pause) Before you talk any further ... who are you?

MARKY: You just told Allan who I was.

BENG: You look like Marky. You dress like Marky. You look like the Marky I wanted to look like Harry Potter. But you talk like an adult so I don't think you're Marky because Marky died when he was twelve two years ago. (pause) Are you Marky? Or did I just want you to be him?

MARKY: I'm Marky, Mom.

(A pause)

BENG: Ok. If you say so. (pause) So, why are you here?

MARKY: I don't know. I never did say goodbye.

BENG: (pause) Yes, you did.

MARKY: I did not.

BENG: I believed you did.

MARKY: You believed in a lot of things. Believing is different from realities.

BENG: You sound like my therapist. (pause then stares at Marky) Maybe you are my therapist. Maybe I'm having this depression attacks again and my medication is messing with my brain again...

(Marky laughs then looks at Beng then around him.)

MARKY: It stopped raining.

BENG: (looks around) Yes.

MARKY: We can go home now.

BENG: We?

MARKY: We. You. Me.

BENG: (pause) You need a ride?

MARKY: (laughs) Of course. How do you expect me to get home? Fly?

BENG: Don't they do that?

MARKY: They?

BENG: They. Like you.

MARKY: Like me? (pause) Oh... (thinks then laughs) Oh. That. (laughs harder) I'm not a ghost, Mom. I'm Marky. (pause) Can we go home now?

(A brief pause.)

BENG: Ok.

MARKY: Is it still the same car?

BENG: Yes, I can't afford to buy a new one, you know. (pause) Let's walk to the parking lot.

(Marky reaches out his hand. Beng looks at it, hesitates, then looks at Marky.)

MARKY: It's just me, Mom.

(Beng tentatively reaches for Marky's hand then holds it. She takes a deep breath.)

BENG: Your hand is warm.

MARKY: (pause) What did you expect?

(The lights fade out.)

(Blackout)

SCENE 3 - Obtuse Triangle

(The lights open onstage. Marky and Beng are seated beside each other in Beng's car. Allan can be seen at the far end upstage at an angle to the two. The blocking is like that of an obtuse angle. He is sitting on a bar stool and smoking a cigarette.)

(The sound of traffic on a highway. There is also a faint sound of thunder and rain. Beng is driving. Marky is fidgeting in his seat. Then he removes his seatbelt and opens the glove compartment. He begins to rummage inside.)

BENG: What are you doing? Put your seatbelt back on!

MARKY: I'm hungry.

BENG: We can go to a drive-thru. We're on our way home anyway. What do you want? Burgers and fries?

MARKY: I'm not that hungry. (rummages through the glove compartment) You always kept a candy bar here for me when I'm hungry.

BENG: (pause) Not anymore. (pause) I forgot to buy a box. (pause) Well, I didn't exactly forget... (pause then annoyed) Will you please stop? You're going to mess up things in there.

(Marky straightens up, holding up a candy bar.)

MARKY: Aha! You see? Thanks, Mom!

BENG: That thing's probably expired by now.

MARKY: (reads the label) Nope, still good.

(Marky unwraps the candy bar and takes a bite. Beng just stares straight ahead, driving.)

BENG: Well?

MARKY: (shrugs while chewing) Tastes ok. Like candy.

(Beng laughs.)

MARKY: You want some?

BENG: No, thank you. I think you have a stomach made out of cast-iron if you can eat something that's half-melted in my glove compartment for two years now. (pause) Besides, I can't have too much candy.

MARKY: Why?

BENG: I'm a borderline diabetic.

MARKY: You weren't before.

BENG: Just a touch. I still have candy and cake but I have to watch the amount I eat.

MARKY: Was it because of me?

(A pause.)

BENG: Put your seatbelt back on.

(Marky puts his seatbelt back on then leans back and continues eating his candy bar. Beng continues to drive. Suddenly, she brakes hard and both of them are jerked forward as their car comes to a stop. Beng presses down on the car horn. The sound of car horns blaring.)

BENG: Shit! (rolls down the window and shouts) WHAT THE FUCK?!!! CAN'T YOU READ A TRAFFIC LIGHT!!

(The sound of a car screeching away. Beng rolls up the window, grips the steering wheel and takes a deep breath. She suddenly breaks down, puts her head on the steering wheel, and begins to cry.)

MARKY: Are you crying, Mom?

BENG: No. (pause) Yes. (pause) No. (straightens up and wipes her face with her hand) I'm ok.

MARKY: Are we still far from home?

BENG: Just a few more minutes. (pause) Are you ok?

MARKY: Yes. My seatbelt was on. (pause) I dropped my candy bar.

BENG: I'll buy you another one.

MARKY: At that store on the corner near the house?

BENG: Well, no. (pause) I moved out of the apartment.

MARKY: A new house?

BENG: Yes.

MARKY: (nods) I see. No wonder this ride is taking quite a bit long than I remembered. (pause) It stopped raining now. (pause) When I left, I thought at first that it was going to be a short trip. Then I would come back when you came home.

BENG: What trip? (pause) You call what happened to you a "trip"?

MARKY: I don't know what to call it.

BENG: A trip to where?

MARKY: (pause) I don't know. But the place where I am ... (pause) I'm sorry I made you cry.

(A short pause. Beng stares at Marky.)

MARKY: (stares back curiously) What?

BENG: If I hug you ... will you disappear? Will you fade away if I put my arms around you?

MARKY: I'm not a ghost, Mom. (pause) I never said goodbye. Please believe that.

(Beng looks at Marky. She removes her seatbelt and turns to him. She then removes Marky's seatbelt and waits. Marky holds out his arms to her. Beng tentatively hugs him. Then, realizing that he will not disappear, she hugs Marky tightly. Marky hugs back.)

BENG: I miss you so much, baby.

(The lights fade out.)

(Blackout)

SCENE 4 - ISOCELES

(The lights open onstage. Allan is standing downstage, facing the audience. Marky is standing upstage right, playing a game on a tablet. Beng is standing upstage left, texting on her cellphone.)

ALLAN: Marky was not my son. He was Beng's. Oh, when I meant he was not my son, I meant it literally. She was a single mother when I met her two years ago. One of those ad conventions in the city. Product promotions that had an after-event cocktails and dancing. I liked her. She liked me. We went out for several weeks.

(The light opens on Beng.)

BENG: And on one of those dates, I told you about Marky.

ALLAN: Yes.

BENG: And you should've seen the look on your face when I told you I was a single mother. It was always that same look guys give

me whenever I tell them about Marky. (pause) They would never call again. I guess they were not ready for that kind of responsibility. They would never have that kind of attention they would get if I was single without a kid. (pause) I wasn't expecting you to call again after that night. Just like all of them.

(The lights open on Marky.)

MARKY: But he did.

ALLAN: But I did.

BENG: Yes. You did.

MARKY: You know, I think he was the first guy I met that Mom dated. I must admit, I liked Allan the first time I met him. (turns to Allan) Hello. I'm Marky. I'm ten.

ALLAN: Hi, Marky. I'm Allan. You look kind of tall to be ten.

BENG: (laughs) That's because he's twelve.

(Marky frowns at Beng then look at Allan as he laughs.)

ALLAN: Well, if he wants to be ten let's keep it at that, shall we?

MARKY: Are you in love with my Mom?

(Allan does not answer. Marky looks at Beng.)

BENG: (shrugs) Maybe.

MARKY: (to Beng) Are you with him?

BENG: Before, yes. (looks at Allan) Now... I don't know.

MARKY: "I don't know" can still be a "Yes."

BENG: (shrugs) Partially.

MARKY: It also could probably mean...

BENG: Ok. No.

(Silence. Beng looks at Allan and shrugs.)

MARKY: You told me before that before someone gets to you, he has to go through me first.

ALLAN: (to Beng) Marky was a smart kid.
BENG: Is a smart kid.
ALLAN: (pause) Beng....
BENG: No. Please. No. (pause) You wouldn't understand.
MARKY: It makes no difference now.
ALLAN: I treated him like a son.
BENG: I know. I saw.
ALLAN: Like a son.
BENG: (smiling sadly) You never had a son before. You were single when we met and decided to live together. With me. With Marky. I had the son. And we never talked about you adopting him when... if we get married. (pause) But still... Thank you.
MARKY: That was kind of awkward. wasn't it? My might-be or might-not-be Dad. (pause) I liked him, you know. It was too bad the relationship didn't last long.
ALLAN: Yes. We never did talk about that. I guess I was too much in love with you that I shut Marky out.
MARKY: No, you didn't.
BENG: (to Allan) No, you didn't. Don't blame yourself.
ALLAN: Then why this?
BENG: "This"?
ALLAN: Why did you leave?
BENG: It was... for the best.
ALLAN: The best for whom? You?
BENG: (pause) I just needed to space to deal with it. (pause) Yes, it was for the best... for me. (pause) But I'd like to state for the record that I didn't go crazy. That none of my screws were coming loose. (pause) No. None.
ALLAN: But you pushed me away.
BENG: That doesn't justify me being crazy
ALLAN: That's not what I meant.
BENG: (pause) Oh. (pause) Ok. (pause) I needed space. You didn't want to give it to me. I wanted room. You just gave me this

square foot of space for me to move around in. I needed the space.

ALLAN: I was trying to help.

BENG: Helping me doesn't mean you trying to make me forget Marky!

ALLAN: I was just telling you to move on.

BENG: Move on? (pause) Losing a son isn't just something you "move on", Allan. (pause) You have never lost a son.

ALLAN: (pause) I lost a friend, Beng.

BENG: You can move on if it's a friend, Allan.

ALLAN: Not Marky.

BENG: (softly) You were telling me to forget him ...

ALLAN: No, I was not!

MARKY: Whoa! Adult fight coming.

BENG: Yes, you were! (pause) You loved me too much.

MARKY: (to Beng) I guess the whole point of it is that he loves you.

BENG: (at Marky) But not to the point of losing you.

ALLAN: (pause) Are you ok, Beng?

BENG: No, I'm not! Not at the moment! Not now! Not yet! (pause) I'm not ready yet, Allan. Not for you. Not for anyone. There is just too much... love.

ALLAN: (nods) I see.

BENG: (pause) I'm sorry.

ALLAN: (pause) I know you are. (pause) I'm sorry, too.

(Beng turns around, and walks away. The lights fade out.)

ALLAN: (pause) Goodbye.

MARKY: I wonder if that word still means something to her.

(The light fades out on Marky.)

ALLAN: (pause) For now.

(The lights fade out on Allan. The lights open on one part of the stage. Beng is standing there, facing the audience.)

(The lights fade out.)

(Blackout)

SCENE 5 - RIGHT ANGLE (RIGHT)

(The lights open onstage. Beng is standing at downstage right. Marky is at downstage left. Allan is at upstage right. Beng is facing the audience.)

BENG: If there were one thing I had always wished for... if I were given that one big wish in my lifetime... I would wish for you to come back. (pause) But now that you're here... can I have one more wish? That you will stay? (pause) Please?

I am not looking for anything special. Just you. (pause) You are really here, are you? (laughs) At first, I thought it was just a figment of my medicated mind. A figment that I can hug and kiss and talk to after giving it candy. But are figments of imagination warm to the touch when it touches you back? (pause) Marky? (pause) Marky. (pause) Marrrrkkkkyyyyy. (laughs) It's been a while since I said that without that little start-up twinge that pinches my heart. "That twinge is called 'Memory', my therapist said. (pause) Maybe you are a memory In 3-D. That's why I see you. Like those holograms that you can see and talk to... but can't touch. (pause) Maybe heaven invented this new type of hologram. One that transports angels and disguises them as your loved ones so you can talk to them, be with them, touch them, hold them, love them... but soon the power runs out and they cannot stay. (pause) Because they are angels. And angels can only stay in heaven. And that was what I thought of you, Marky. An angel. When you... (pause) When you left, you became an angel. And now you're back. And you're going to be called back... soon. (pause) Aren't you? Soon? Nothing will stay the same anyway. Not even you. Now I know that angels can age like humans. (pause) I wonder what you will look like when you are as old as I am? (pause) When I decided to face the world again... you know... that "move on" thing they always talked about. They said I looked

better. I had lost weight. I mean, who wouldn't? But people are saying that I looked better. One or two of them would ask me if I was ok? (pause) And I would answer, "Yes, I'm fine. I'm fine already." (pause) Like I would tell Allan. (pause) I am. I really am fine. (pause) Of course, I can't stop having these... twinges. (pause) That's what I called them... (pause) Twinges. (pause) I'm fine. I really am.

(The lights fade out.)

(Blackout)

SCENE 6 - ISOCELES

(The lights open onstage. Marky is at downstage right while Beng is at downstage left. Allan is at upstage center.)

BENG: (to Marky) Ok. Time for bed.

MARKY: No.

BENG: (pause) What? (pause) Well, that's something new.

MARKY: What?

BENG: This "No" thing.

MARKY: Yes?

BENG: Never heard that from you before. "No"?

MARKY: I'm not sleepy

BENG: You can try.

MARKY: Haven't slept since that day. The long sleep day.

BENG: Really?

MARKY: Yes. I am always awake.

BENG: What do you do then if you don't sleep?

MARKY: Stuff.

BENG: Don't you get bored?

MARKY: No. (pause) Well, I don't know. I'm not doing anything much. But I don't get bored. I don't hungry. I don't get thirsty. But I feel... stuff. I can be happy, angry, sad... bored. (giggles) I can be crazy if I want to. (pause) Was I crazy before?

BENG: Child-crazy sort of thing. You were twelve when you left. You are supposed to be fourteen this year.

MARKY: Oh, good.

BENG: Good? What is "good"?"

MARKY: Now I know how old I am. Fourteen. I'm grown up. A young adult.

BENG: Not exactly.

MARKY: Young, young adult?

BENG: More of a teener.

MARKY: A teener is between a kid and a young adult.

BENG: Well, you certainly didn't grow old.

MARKY: I don't know (pause) Maybe when you die, you stop aging.

(Silence. Beng bows her head, wipes her eyes, and tries to stop herself from crying.)

MARKY: Don't cry. (pause) I'm sorry.

BENG: I wish you wouldn't use that word.

MARKY: I won't use it again. (pause) Promise.

BENG: (pause) Promise?

MARKY: Promise, promise. Double promise. There? Ok?

(Beng wipes her nose and smiles.)

BENG: You were always the kid I knew.

MARKY: I never changed. (pause) I think.

BENG: You sound a bit old. I remember the time when you were starting to talk. You babbled and babbled and babbled. Then when you started learning your first words... (pause) Was it "Mama"? It couldn't be "Dada". You never saw him. (pause)

What I remember is how you described every bit of food that you ate.

MARKY: "Chicken".

BENG: Yes. Everything was "chicken".

MARKY: And you never corrected me.

BENG: It was the only way I could think of to make you eat everything I put before you on the table.

MARKY: Meat was chicken. Vegetables were chicken. Fish was chicken. And chicken was well, chicken."

(They both laugh.)

MARKY: I was nine when I discovered that not everything I ate was "chicken".

BENG: Then all that baby talk lessened and all that babble and first words became a single word.

MARKY: "Why?"

BENG: "Why?" (pause) Curiosity. The word that formed your mind.

MARKY: Why?

BENG: And made us close.

MARKY: "Why?"

BENG: Because it annoyed the hell out of me.

MARKY: (smiles) Why?

(A brief pause)

BENG: And in the end, it was I who ended up asking why you left. (pause) Why?

MARKY: (pause) And no one could answer you. No one answered you. (pause) Not even Allan.

BENG: Because no one could tell me to my face that I was a bad mother?

MARKY: No.

BENG: That I neglected you that's why you left? That I chose first to be with Allan instead of taking care of you that afternoon?

MARKY: It was an accident. (pause) It was an accident.

(Silence)

MARKY: An accident. (pause) And it happened so fast. It was like I was in a room one moment enjoying the grapes that you brought home the other night and the next moment ... I was in another place that I didn't know. (pause) And I never saw you again. (pause) Until the other day. When I came back here. And I'm seeing you again.

BENG: Did you come back for good?

MARKY: (pause) I don't know.

BENG: I wish it was.

(A brief pause)

MARKY: (pause) I don't know, Mom.

(The lights dim on Marky. A light remains on Beng. Allan enters and stands on one side of the stage in a dim light.)

BENG: (to Allan) I saw you. The day Marky left. (pause) You were in the hospital lobby. I didn't know you came. I didn't know who called you. (pause) You were crying. I watched you cry. I wanted to tell you (pause) I wanted to ask you ... (pause) He wasn't your son. (pause) He wasn't your son. Why would you waste tears for him? (pause) Am I being selfish? Am I the only one who should really cry? (pause) You didn't lose anything. (pause) I did.

(The light changes. Silence. Allan looks at Beng. Beng looks at Marky then at Allan.)

SCENE 7 - RIGHT ANGLE (LEFT)

(Allan walks to one part of the stage and sits on a stool. He takes out a small box of raisins and starts eating them by popping them in his mouth. His cellphone emits a musical tone and Allan checks it from time to time. Beng is watching him)

BENG: What are you eating?

(Allan does not respond. He continues to eat.)

BENG: I asked...

ALLAN: I heard you. (pause) You wouldn't like it if I told you. (pause)
Raisins.

BENG: Why would I be bothered by raisins?

ALLAN: Because they're made from grapes.

(A tense pause.)

BENG: (nods) Grapes.

ALLAN: Close enough. (pause) Raisins.

BENG: Never mind.

ALLAN: Okay. (pause) I wanted to offer you some...

BENG: No thanks. (pause) Thanks but no thanks. (pause) Never mind.

(A brief pause. Allan looks at his phone and continues to eat raisins. He puts the phone down and looks at Beng.)

BENG: (pause) I called... I called you.

(Allan's cellphone emits a musical message tone. Allan checks the message and texts back an answer. He puts the phone down and looks at Beng.)

BENG: I called you....

(The cellphone emits a message tone. Allan checks the message and texts back an answer.)

BENG: (annoyed) Are you listening?

ALLAN: (puts down the phone) Yes. (he begins to eat raisins again) I'm listening.

(A brief pause. Beng shakes her head.)

BENG: That indifference that you have. (pause) That infuriating indifference.

(Allan shrugs)

ALLAN: What do you want me to do?

BENG: This conversation will be different this time.

ALLAN: How different?

(Allan's cellphone emits a message tone. Allan checks the message.)

BENG: WILL YOU PLEASE LISTEN?

ALLAN: (pause) Basketball.

BENG: Excuse me?

ALLAN: Basketball. A friend of mine has been texting me the scores

BENG: You find basketball more important than what I am going to say to you?

ALLAN: No. But if we are going to talk about something that has been replayed over and over in our lives right now, I do prefer to watch replays of players' moves which are more interesting.

BENG: (pause) I never expected that kind of sarcasm from you.

ALLAN: (pause) I'm sorry. (pause) It wasn't suppose to come out that way. (pause) I never expected that we would talk anymore.

BENG: Have you given up on us?

ALLAN: I should ask you the same question. Or maybe you should ask yourself that same question.

BENG: (pause) No, I haven't

ALLAN: Neither have I.

BENG: (nods) Ok.

ALLAN: (nods) Ok. (pause) At least we got that out of the way.

BENG: Yes. (pause) I wanted to meet you because...

(Allan's cellphone emits a message tone. This time, Allan turns off his phone and sets it aside.)

BENG: I wanted to meet you to know... if you still want me back?

ALLAN: It was you who left. Not me.

BENG: I know. (pause) I'm sorry. (pause) Do you still want me back?

ALLAN: What made you change your mind?

BENG: (pause) The fact that Marky will... might always be there.

(Allan sighs then rolls his eyes. He reaches for his cellphone.)

BENG: No, wait. Allan, please. Hear me out.

ALLAN: I told myself this morning that we might be having this scene.
(pause) I was right.

(Silence)

BENG: I am not crazy, Allan.

ALLAN: I know you're not. What did the therapist say?

BENG: To hell what she said. (pause) Marky is here. I see him. I talk to him. I'm not crazy, Allan. But I don't know what this all means to you. Or me.

ALLAN: He will always be here, Beng. He will always be with you. As long as you believe he will always there.

BENG: (nods) Yes.

ALLAN: Yes. (pause) But, Beng. He will just be a memory.

(A brief pause. There is a look of hurt on Beng's face.)

ALLAN: Beng, Marky will always be there. But you should leave some space in there for me. Marky is a memory. I am here. (pause) You can still love us both. (pause) I loved him too, you know.

(Silence)

BENG: It never came to mind that this would be a short talk.

ALLAN: I was already thinking it would be one. (pause) Are you ok, Beng?

(Beng pauses then nods.)

BENG: (smiles) I always was.

ALLAN: If you need anything...

BENG: (nods) Just call. (pause) As long as you don't say goodbye.

ALLAN: I will try to remember that.

(Beng nods then turns and exits.)

(The light slowly fades out.)

(Blackout)

SCENE 8 - EQUILATERAL TRIANGLE

(The lights open onstage. Beng is standing at one corner of the triangle. Allan is standing at the far angle. Macky enters. He is eating from a bowl of grapes. He goes to the third angle.)

BENG: What are those?

MARKY: My favorite.

BENG: You're not supposed to eat those. (sighs) What is it with you guys? I just came from a talk with Allan and he was eating raisins.

(Marky giggles.)

MARKY: Raisins are made from grapes

BENG: Yes.

MARKY: I like raisins. I like grapes. I like them both.

BENG: You're not supposed to eat those.

(Marky tosses a grape in the air then catches it in his mouth.)

BENG: Stop that!

MARKY: It's just a grape, Mom.

BENG: It's not just a grape.

(Marky tosses another grape and catches it with his mouth. Beng goes up to him and snatches the bowl from his hands.)

BENG: (angrily) I SAID, "STOP IT!"

MARKY: Mom, relax. I'm not going to...

(Marky stops. Beng stares at him.)

MARKY: (pauses) I'm sorry.

BENG: Say it.

MARKY: Mom...

BENG: Say it. (sighs then speaks softly) You can say it. (pause) It's ok.
(pause) I need you to say it.

MARKY: (pause then sighs) I'm not going to die... again, Mom. (pause)
I'm not going to die... again.

(Marky goes up to Beng and gets the bowl of grapes from her. At first, Beng refuses to give it to him. Then she lets go. Marky goes back to his place.)

MARKY: It can happen only once, Mom.

BENG: I know. But that one time it happened was the most painful moment of my life. (pause) Who would've thought that something so small. Something that was your favorite. Something so sweet would kill you? (pause) I always asked God, "Why?" Why you? Why take the single most precious thing in my life? Why take him when I was not there? (pause) They say it was an accident. And accidents do happen. And kids always choke to death on small things that they like and put in their mouths that close their windpipes. (pause) But why you? Why you? (pause) You know, your grandmother told me the day after the funeral that I probably needed an angel to watch over me. That was why you were taken from me.

MARKY: (laughs) I don't think I am the type that will be an angel, Mom. Remember I'm allergic to feathers.

(They both laugh. Marky takes a grape, tosses it in the air and catches it in his mouth. He offers the bowl to Beng.)

MARKY: Try it.

(Beng hesitates, then takes one and pops it in her mouth. She chews then swallows. Marky offers her another one. Beng takes it.)

MARKY: Now toss it in the air and catch it.

BENG: What?

MARKY: Toss it. Catch it with your mouth. You're still good at that, aren't you?

(Beng hesitates then steps back and tosses it in the air then catches it in her mouth. She chokes and falls into a fit of coughing. She continues to cough until she manages to cough out the grape.)

BENG: Shit. (coughs then take a deep breath) Shit. Shit. (pause) For a moment, I thought I was going to join you.

MARKY: Would you like that?

(A pause. Beng stares at Marky then looks at Allan. Then she looks back at Marky.)

BENG: That wasn't funny.

MARKY: Well, don't you?

(A pause)

BENG: I don't know, Marky. (pause) I don't know.

(Silence. Marky offers her a grape. Beng hesitates then takes it and eats it.)

BENG: I love you very much, Marky.

MARKY: I know, Mom.

(Marky offers the bowl again. Beng takes a grape and eats it. She nods and smiles.)

MARKY: I know what you've been going through, Mom. I know how you miss me. That doctor lady you've been seeing and talking to because of me. (pause) But you I am not everything. (pause) I mean, I wish I was. But your life. Your job. Allan. (pause) These are not me.

(Marky takes a grape, tosses it in the air and catches it with his mouth. He offers another grape to Beng. She takes it, tosses it in the air and catches it in her mouth. This time, she manages to chew it before she swallows.)

MARKY: There's nothing to it.

BENG: (nods) Is this why you came back?

MARKY: Well, yes. (thinks for a moment then shrugs) And partly because I missed you. We never did say goodbye to each other that day. I was asleep when you left for work.

BENG: Yes. (pause) And it wasn't work, Marky.

MARKY: (nods) I know. But I know you were happy to be with him that day. Like you are with him now. (pause) Always. (pause) Now I'm awake from that sleep.

BENG: Yes.

(Marky looks at Allan.)

BENG: You would've liked him a lot. If you stayed longer.

MARKY: Oh, I liked him, Mom. And I saw how he loved you very much. (pause) He always wanted you back.

BENG: But I always pushed him away.

MARKY: Do you want him back?

BENG: (pause) Would it hurt you if I said yes?

MARKY: No. (pause) There is no hurt in the place I've been.

(Marky offers the bowl of grapes again to Beng. She takes one and eats it.)

BENG: Ever since you left, I didn't want to hear goodbyes anymore. From my friends. From him. Goodbyes meant you left. Even if you didn't say it. Even if I didn't say it to you.

MARKY: You won't hear it again. (pause) If you don't want to.

BENG: (pause) If we said goodbye... will I lose you?

MARKY: (shakes his head) No. Remember what Allan said? (he touches his chest) I will always be here. In you. As you are with me. (pause) That is probably the reason I never said goodbye. Because I never left. I will never leave, Mom.

(Marky offers the bowl again to Beng. Beng shakes her head. She turns to Allan then goes to him. The lights dim slightly on Marky. The lights brighten on Allan's space. The two face each other.)

BENG: I pushed you away because you reminded me of the guilt I felt when Marky went away. We went out that afternoon. I wasn't supposed to go out that day. It was a Saturday and Saturdays

were for Marky. But I hadn't seen you for a while and that Saturday would be the only weekend I was free because of my work schedule. I left Marky with the maid. (pause) And it happened. (pause) And this happened. (pause) And I wish things would all go back to the way it was before. (pause) I miss him. I still do. (pause) I can't keep telling you I do see him because you will walk away from all this and one day you won't come back anymore. (pause) And I don't want that to happen. (pause) I want you to know that I know Marky might not stay. I know that now. And you will be left here. With me. (pause) Or I will be left without you. (pause) Sorry. (pause) I'd like to try again. With us.

(Allan nods)

BENG: Just us. (pause) I guess there is enough space still in here for you.

(Allan nods. Beng takes his hand. She looks at Marky and smiles.)

MARKY: (smiles back) Goodbye, Mom.

(Beng and Allan remain standing, still holding hands. The dim light remains on Marky.)

BENG: (to Allan) Just us. (pause) Here.

(The lights fade out.)

CURTAIN

Chiaroscuro: ***isang impresyon sa maamong*** ***matrimonyal ng Sining at Buhay***

Lito Casaje

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ANTON CORDOVA 34 taong gulang, isang tanyag na Mabini artist

SANTI DE LA ROSA 25 taong gulang, isang baguhang artist sa Mabini.
Kabarkada ni ANTON

CALOY TRINIDAD 37 taong gulang, isang beteranong artist- dealer
na ngayo'y full-time dealer na lamang. Kumpadre
ni ANTON

PIO RODRIGUEZ 43 taong gulang, isang tanyag at mahusay na
pintor na nominado bilang National Artist. Dating
maestro ni ANTON

DELIA CORDOVA 19 taong gulang, musmos na asawa't maybahay ni
ANTON

MARA SANCHEZ 22 taong gulang, isang professional nude model ni
PIO RODRIGUEZ

MODELO

MGA BOSES NINA ADOR AT IBANG BARKADA NINA ANTON,
SANTI AT CALOY

UNANG YUGTO

Tag-araw ng Marso 1987. Sa isang maliit ngunit maaliwalas na “studio” sa isang lumang *apartment building* sa Padre Faura, Mabini. Kasalukuyang nag-aalmusal ng kape’t pandesal na may mantikilya si ANTON CORDOVA sa kaniyang studio, habang pinagmamasdan niya ng maigi ang kaniyang pinakahuling obra, ang “MAGSASAKA”. Siya’y nakapantalon at tsinelas lamang. May maririnig na mahinang drama sa radyo galing sa kapitbahay ngunit hindi siya maiistorbo. Mapapangiti siya kapag sumusulyap ang kaniyang paningin sa larawang nabanggit. Maya-maya’y nagmamadaling papasok si SANTI de la ROSA sa loob. Siya’y naka T-shirt, maong at sandalyas. Mabibigla si ANTON sa kaniyang pagdating.

ANTON: O. Ang aga mo—

Kukuninin ni SANTI sa paligid ng kuwarto ang kaniyang kagamitan sa pagpipinta. Ang canvas na nakapatong sa easel, larawan, mga brush, palette, at sari-saring kulay na Grumbacher oil tubes. Bubuklatin rin niya ang isang litratong naka-tupi sa singit ng easel at pagmamasdan ito. Ilang sandaling katahimikan. Maya-maya’y sisimulan niya ang pagpipinta.

ANTON: (mapapansin niya ang tahimik na pagpipinta ni SANTI). Isang linggo mo na’ng tinatra-baho ‘yan—

Hindi kikibo si SANTI. Patuloy pa rin siyang magpipinta.

ANTON: Hindi pa ba tapos?

Sandaling katahimikan.

ANTON: Hoy—

SANTI: Ha? (lilingon siya kay ANTON. Babaling siya muli sa kaniyang pinipinta) Kukunin ‘to ngayong hapon. Mga alas dos daw.

ANTON: Hirap ng may-deadline ‘no—

SANTI: Sinabi mo.

Sandaling katahimikan.

ANTON: Kumain ka na ba?

SANTI: Almusal? Hindi pa.

ANTON: Gusto mo'ng kape?

SANTI: Kahit ano. Basta papainit. (ngingiti siya-pabiro) Huwag lang beer.

ANTON: (ngingiti) Hmm— kape't pandesal lang 'to
Hindi nakapamili si misis. Walang datung.

SANTI: Okay lang.

ANTON: 'Di bale. May mantikilya naman.

SANTI: Gusto mo, 'tong pintura'ng inumin ko.

ANTON: Huwag naman. Sayang Mahal masyado para pang-almusal.
Grumbacher din 'yan.

SANTI: Amuyin ko na lang kaya.

ANTON: Puwede rin. Mabubusog ka pa. Makakakita ka nga lang ng kulay. At saka TB ang aabutin mo.

SANTI: Nakakatawa 'no. Nakaka-afford tayo ng Grumbacher at saka mga imported na brush pero hindi tayo makabili ng pizza.

ANTON: Anong hindi— kabibili ko lang sa inyo ng Shakey's kahapon. Masyado ka namang makakalimutin.

SANTI: Oo nga pala. Isa lang kasi'ng nakain ko.

ANTON: Pasensiya ka. Ang bagal mo kasi. Inunahan ka tuloy ni Caloy. Lima'ng kinain. E family size yon— Nag-tae nga.

SANTI: Dumaan na ba si Caloy?

ANTON: 'Di pa. Bakit, may usapan kayo?

SANTI: 'Di nga ba. Ibebenta niya 'to.

ANTON: Akala ko ba, kukunin na 'yan.

SANTI: 'Yung isa'ng sinasabi mo. 'Yung "RICEFIELD."

ANTON: E 'yan, may may-ari na?

SANTI: Oo.

ANTON: Mukhang kailangang-kailangan mo ng datung ngayon a.

SANTI: Sino ba'ng hindi?

ANTON: I mean, mukhang malaking kailangan mo.

SANTI: Pang-tuition ng utol ko.

ANTON: Tuition?

SANTI: Hindi pa niya bayad ang balance. Hindi siya makakakuha ng finals.

ANTON: Magkano lang ba 'yon. Wala pang limang daan 'yon.

SANTI: May bibilhin pa ko.

ANTON: Hirap sa yo, gastos ka ng gastos. Alam mo naman sa trabahong ito. Biglang meron, biglang wala.

SANTI: Nag-sermon ka na naman. Ang aga-aga. Pag pumangit 'to.

ANTON: (tatawagin ang asawa sa loob) Delia!

Sandaling katahimikan

ANTON: Delia!

Sandaling katahimikan. Pagmamasdan niyang muli ang obra. Mapapansin nito ni SANTI.

SANTI: Hoy, baka matunaw 'yan.

ANTON: Hindi matutunaw to. Dugo't pawis ang pininta ko rito.

SANTI: Mukha ngang duguan ang itsura.

ANTON: May pagka-violent kasi ang tema. Alangan namang mag-protest painting ka na walang violence.

SANTI: Puwede. Subliminal.

ANTON: Subliminal— sa mga nangyayari ngayon sa kapaligiran, komedya ang labas, kung subliminal. Yang ginagawa mo— subliminal violence.

SANTI: (magpapatawa) “MGA NAGHAHAMPASANG ROSAS” (sandaling katahimikan) ‘Yung kape ko, ano ba.

ANTON: (tatawagin muli ang asawa) Delia!

DELIA: (mula sa labas) Ow.

ANTON: Pahinging kape. Kay pareng SANTI. Atsaka pandesal kung mayroon pa.

DELIA: (mula sa labas) Sandali. Pinaliliguan ko ang mga bata.

ANTON: Mamaya na ‘yan.

SANTI: Saan ang katulong mo?

ANTON: Umuwi kaninang madaling araw.

SANTI: Sa probinsiya?

ANTON: Pinauwi sa kanila. Tumelegrama ‘yung kapatid Malubha raw ang tatay.

SANTI: Baka ginapang mo na naman.

ANTON: Tarantado ka talaga. Ayun nga palang dahilan kung ba’t ako yagit ngayon.

SANTI: Pinagbaon mo si Eden— (sandaling katahimikan sisikuhin niya si ANTON) Sigurado ka walang nangyari.

ANTON: Tang-ina— Santi— Ayoko ng ganiyang biro. Baka marinig ka ni Delia.

Sandaling katahimikan

SANTI: Hmmm.

ANTON: Anong oras kayong magkikita ni Caloy?

SANTI: Sabi ko, alas diyes. Anong oras na ba?

ANTON: Ewan. Pasado alas diyes na siguro.

Sandaling katahimikan

ANTON: (tatawagin muli ang asawa) Delia.

SANTI: Huwag mo nang kulitin. May ginagawa pala.

ANTON: Akala ko ba, hindi na yan kukunin.

SANTI: Sinong maysabi?

ANTON: Sabi mo kahapon. Nadukutan kamo ‘yung buyer.

- SANTI: Pinuntahan ako kagabi sa bahay. Nakahiram daw siya sa girlfriend niya.
- ANTON: Buti pa siya.
- SANTI: Buti pa siyang alin? Pasalamat ka nga, kumakain tayo ng tatlong beses isang araw. E ‘yung ibang mga artists diyan, gutom.
- ANTON: Talagang starving artists.
- SANTI: (mapapatigil siya sa pagpipinta) Alam mo, nagtataka ako kung bakit may mga weirdong tulad nitong turistang nag-komisyon sa ‘kin kopyahin ‘tong litrato para gawing painting— Samantalang puwede naman niyang pa blow-up kung gusto niya. Anong ginagawa ng photography— Ba’t ba gusto niya ng painting version— sagutin mo nga— e wala ka-feeling-feeling. Gusto pa niya kamo, eksaktong eksakto sa litrato. Walang iibahin.
- ANTON: Pina-blow-up na sana niya sa Kodak, ano.
- SANTI: Oo nga. Ang weird no. At saka kopyang-kopya ang gusto niya. Hindi mo bibigyan ng interpretasyon. Talagang sakripisyo.
- ANTON: Sakripisyong mortal, kamo.
- SANTI: Hindi mo tuloy mabigyan ng kahit kaunting feeling. Hindi mo maipamahagi ang estilo mo. Kahit katiting man lang. O ma-inspire ka para masabi mo naman na kahit papano, may na-contribute ka sa kinopya mo dahil a little of you is there— a little of your impression on how you see the picture.
- ANTON: A little of your imagination and genius.
- SANTI: Kahit papano, di ba E putangina— kaya boring—
- ANTON: Huwag ka nang mag-ambisyong mag-share pa ng kahit kaunti sa statement o world view mo sa damuhung ginagawa mong yan dahil hindi ka nila bibigyan ng pagkakataon. Isipin mo na lang na dalawang libong pisong matatanggap mo sa sakripisyong ‘yan.
- SANTI: Exploitation of the first order.
- ANTON: Alam mo pala e, ba’t ka nagpapa-exploit?
- SANTI: Kailangan e. Atsaka, mutual exploitation naman.
- ANTON: ‘Di titiisin mo.

SANTI: Kung hindi ko lang kailangan talaga— kaya tingnan mo. Walang ka-feeling-feeling. FLAT.

ANTON: Parang pinagdaanan ng xerox machine. Saan ka naman makakakita ng plakadong-plakadong painting na tulad niyan— Mas maganda pa nga sa xerox e dahil ang xerox, black and white. E ito, colored. Ang kikinang pa.

SANTI: Para akong gumamit ng Kodacolor gold.

ANTON: Oo nga ‘no.

SANTI: Kaya nga sa kuwarta ko na lang ine-equate ‘tong mga oras na ‘to.

ANTON: Bakit, hindi ka mahilig sa rosas? Nature din yan.

SANTI: Mahilig. Pero sa sarili kong rosa. Sarili kong likhang rosas.

ANTON: Hindi bale. Nakakagawa ka naman ng mga serious works. ‘Yung mga obra mo, okay naman. ‘Yung talagang maipagmamalaki mo.

SANTI: (patuloy siyang magpipinta) Oo nga. Ang kaso naman, hindi nabebenta. Hindi pambili ng bigas.

ANTON: Sabagay, Di tulad niyan. (ituturo niya ang pinipinta ni SANTI)

SANTI: ‘Di tulad nito.

ANTON: Nasusuka ka na ba?

SANTI: Hindi pa naman.

ANTON: Pag-bayad sa’yo, mag-blow out ka.

SANTI: Oo ba. ‘Yun lang pala.

ANTON: Huwag sa Mister Donut. Baka Honey Dipped na naman ang iblow-out mo. Tsaka kape.

SANTI: Lechon at beer, puwede na?

ANTON: Okay— anything, basta may beer.

Sandaling katahimikan

ANTON: Hamot may bibili rin sa mga obra mo.

SANTI: Magbibig anghel ka sana.

ANTON: Hindi mo pa lang oras ngayon. Kaniya-kaniyang panahon lang yan.

SANTI: Seasonal din pala.

ANTON: Hindi ka pa lang nakakarating do'n. But once you're there, sunud-sunod na 'yan. Panatiliin mo lang na maganda ang attitude mo.

SANTI: Saan?

ANTON: Sa lahat ng bagay. Sa craft mo. Sa pamilya mo. Sa mga kaibigan mo. Sa sarili mo. Sa buhay. SA KAN'YA.

SANTI: Hindi ako nakakalimot diyan. Lalo ang tumawag sa Diyos.

ANTON: Di mabuti. Just keep that up, okay ka na.
Tingnan mo 'ko.

SANTI: Pero nandito ka pa rin.

ANTON: Well, choice ko to. Mas pinili kong mag-starving artist kaysa sa humalik sa puwit ng mga bureaucrats na 'yan.

SANTI: Kailangan mo ba talagang mag-compromise para mag-tagumpay?

ANTON: In a way, yes. Lalo na sa mga katulad natin. Hindi naman tayo anak mayaman. Rich artists can practically do things on their own and at the same time avoid being exploited. But we can't. Kailangan nating mabuhay. Buti nga kahit papaano, nakakapinta pa tayo ng gusto natin. 'Yung iba dyan, nagde-design na lang ng briefs. Kagaya nung isang classmate ko. Hindi nahahasa ang craft nila. Suwerte pa tayo. (sandaling katahimikan) Mabuti pa nga 'yung mga nagje-jeepney design o pottery design o buckle design atsaka sa mga sinturon—

SANTI: Oo.

ANTON: Kasi, kahit na nagkokomersyal sila, their art forms still reflect certain Filipino values. A sense of identity kung бага, kagaya ng jeepney design—Pinoy na Pinoy yan. Kultura natin ang pinausbong dyan. O 'yung tinatawag nila ngayong New Wave in Filipino Art. Mixed Media ng mga old materials gaya ng gubat, o mga kahoy-kahoy o mga bahay ng langgam—Very original di ba. Yet, sariling atin. (sandaling katahimikan) gaya ng mga obra mo. Hindi pang-masa ang style mo. 'Yang pa abstract-abstract mo. Atsaka ang tema mo.

SANTI: So? Wala na sila ron. Yan ang trip ko e. Besides, I refuse to be dictated by my audience.

ANTON: Do you have an audience?

SANTI: Of course!

ANTON: (pabiro) The public at large!

SANTI: (mapipika) Anton, umagang-umaga kung anu-anong—

ANTON: Well, if you don't wanna give in to your audience's demands, don't blame yourself kung hindi mabenta 'yang mga obra mo.

SANTI: Maling prinsipyo naman 'yan, 'Ton. Kaya nga obrang tawag mo dahil hindi ka nagco-compromise.

ANTON: Hindi compromise 'yon.

SANTI: E ano?

ANTON: Investment.

SANTI: Investment?

ANTON: Investment for your future audience. Your chance to develop an audience first before plunging yourself into more estoteric forms and themes. Para safe ka.

SANTI: Ganon ba ka-unusual ang mga paintings ko?

ANTON: 'Yung mga obra mo, oo. Masyadong elitist.

SANTI: Elitist!

ANTON: Pang burgis. Hindi naman ikaw 'yan. Hindi ka naman burgis. You're not true to your artwork. Saan mo ba pinag-kukukuha 'yan?

SANTI: Hindi ko kinopyang mga 'yan.

ANTON: Hindi ko sinabing kinopya mo. Ang sabi ko lang, your paintings don't speak of yourself.

SANTI: But it may speak of my dreams. My wants, my ambitions, my desires—

ANTON: Your subconscious—

SANTI: RIGHT!

ANTON: Maiintindihan kaya ng masang Pilipino'ng mga nasa subconscious mo?

SANTI: Bakit hindi? Ang mga pangarap ko'y hindi siguro nalalayo sa mga pangarap nila.

ANTON: Paano ka nakasisiguro?

SANTI: Pareho kami ng mga layuni— Parehong—

ANTON: Abstract, maiintindihan ng masa?

SANTI: Depende kung gaano ka-abstract. Bakit, masyado bang—

ANTON: It's 20 years ahead of its time!

SANTI: Wow, pinatataba mo naman ang puso ko—

ANTON: Masyadong high-brow.

SANTI: Ganon ka-advance?

ANTON: Kaya after 20 years ka pa makakatikim ng caviar at imported vintage wines. Tiis ka muna sa Mister Donut at pizza.

SANTI: 'Tang-ina mo. Kala ko pa naman, totoo.

ANTON: Pero seriously, o— (itataas ang kaniyang kanang kamay)

SANTI: Ano?

ANTON: Hindi ba high brow 'yan? 'Yung kanan nga lang ang nakataas. Kung gusto mo 'yung kaliwa, o. (itataas naman ang kaliwa niyang kilay)

SANTI: (akmang itatapon ang kaniyang pinipintang canvas) Ibabalibag ko kaya sa'yo 'to—

ANTON: Subukan mo't mawawalan ka ng pang-tuition sa utol mo.

SANTI: Wala ka ring blow-out.

ANTON: O, sige, sige—

SANTI: (mapapansin niya ang 'MAGSASAKA' ni ANTON) Akala mo naman, obrang-obra na 'yang ginawa mo.

ANTON: Hindi nga ba? Ibang-iba ang quality— Sophisticated, yet earthy.

SANTI: Sophisticated ba ang ipakita mo ang violence ng massacre?

ANTON: Protest painting nga, ano ka— kaya nga social realism e.

SANTI: Sa palagay mo, isasabit nila sa dingding ng bahay nila 'yan?

ANTON: Bakit hindi— If I was able to show the truth— it's the sincerity of experience that counts.

SANTI: But it isn't decorative. So it doesn't enhance beauty. Walang homey appeal. Ask any interior designer kung papayag silang ikabit 'yan sa bahay ng mga kliyente nila.

- ANTON: Bakit, for beautification lang ba ang function ng isang work of art? May sinasabi naman to a. Besides, art is not made to be understood, wika nga ni Picasso. If we appreciated any beauty of nature, like the chirping of a bird, we don't wonder anymore why we appreciate them. We don't need to understand what a bird is saying, 'di ba?
- SANTI: That is because they're birds. But we're humans. And as human beings, we have to understand each other because art is supposed to be universal. Besides, I dislike the chirping of birds.
- ANTON: O. Na-pika ka na— Hirap sa yo—

Sandaling katahimikan

- ANTON: O, sige na nga— You're painting is like the chirping of a bird.

Tatawa si ANTON. Hindi kikibo si SANTI. Maya-maya ay darating si DELIA na may dala-dalang tray ng pantimpla sa kape. May ilang mga pandesal din na may mantikilya.

- ANTON: O. Finally, dumating din!
- DELIA: E pano, nag-igib pa ko sa baba. Walang tumutulo sa banyo.
- ANTON: E di tinawag mo sana ko.
- DELIA: Di ka ba tinawag ni Boyet?
- ANTON: Hindi.
- DELIA: Pinatatawag kita kay Boyet. Sabi, nagpipinta ka raw.
- ANTON: Sinungaling 'yang batang yan— Tawagin mo nga! BOYET!
- DELIA: Huwag na. Kapapaligo lang, papaluin mo na naman (habang nagtitimpla ng kape) O, pare— (iaabot niya ang isang tasa ng kape kay SANTI)
- SANTI: Salamat, mare. Naistorbo ka namin.
- DELIA: Hindi. Okay lang. Ikaw, 'Ton, gusto mo pa?
- ANTON: Sige nga.

DELIA: (magtitimpla siya ng kape para sa asawa) Ang aga mo yata, pare.

SANTI: May usapan kami ni Caloy. Pero hanggang ngayon, wala pa.

DELIA: Hindi ka na nasanay sa taong yon. Laging atrasado. Bakit, maniningil kayo?

SANTI: Siya lang. Tapos, ibebenta niya ‘tong “HARVEST” ko.

DELIA: (kay ANTON) Ikaw nang magtimpla ng asukal. Baka matamisan ka na naman.

ANTON: Hindi ka pa ba sanay sa timpla ko— Paano ka makaka-appreciate ng timpla ng mga kulay dito, kung sa kape—

DELIA: Isa lang ang nakasanayan ko sa timpla mo.

ANTON: Alam ko na ‘yan. Huwag mo nang ituloy. Nakakahiya. Nandito si pare.

DELIA: Si pare lang naman.

ANTON: Ano’ng tanghalian natin?

DELIA: Sinigang na baboy.

ANTON: ‘Yung maanghang?

DELIA: Oo.

ANTON: ‘Yung maanghang na maanghang?

Hahawakan niya’t tatapikin sa puwet si DELIA. Papaalis na sana siya nang—

DELIA: Kulang ‘tong ibinigay mo sa ‘kin.

Kukuha si ANTON ng sigarilyo sa kaniyang bulsa at iaabot niya ito sa kaniyang asawa.

ANTON: O.

DELIA: (kay SANTI) Maiwan muna kita, pare.

SANTI: Sige, mare.

Tuluyang aalis si DELIA.

ANTON: 'Yang asawa kong yan. Kahit ganiyan 'yan, napapakinabangan.

SANTI: Mabait naman talaga si Mare. Ikaw lang e.

ANTON: Kung hindi ko pa tinuruan 'yan, naku— baka akong nahihirapan ngayon.

SANTI: Anong turo?

ANTON: Walang kaalam-alam 'yan, kala mo. Fourteen years old 'yan nung pinakasalan ko. Galing probinsiya.

SANTI: Ilang taon ka no'n?

ANTON: Thirty.

SANTI: Mahilig ka pala sa bagets a.

ANTON: Nagkataon lang.

SANTI: Tapos—

ANTON: Ayun. Tinuruan ko siyang mag-appreciate sa art. Sa painting. Sa mga kulay. Ganon— Ngayon, nakakaintindi na.

SANTI: Matagal na rin kayong kasal, no.

ANTON: Four years na.

SANTI: 'Yung iba nga diyan, asawa nilang dealer nila.

ANTON: Okay 'yon. Pero huwag kang magpapalakad sa mga 'yon. Dahil uunahin nilang ibenta 'yung trabaho ng asawa nila bago sa'yo. Sasabihin nila, "nabenta na 'yan. Ito na lang." (sandaling katahimikan) Sana magtagal kami.

SANTI: Magtagal kayo. Huwag ka lang magkukulang sa kaniya.

ANTON: Hindi ako nagkukulang, Santi, lalo na sa kama.

SANTI: Hindi 'yan ang ibig kong sabihin.

ANTON: E Ano?

SANTI: Bilang ama. Pagkain, sustento. Ganon.

ANTON: 'Magsalita ito, kala mo may pamilya. Subukan mo kayang mag-asawa at tingnan natin kung gaano kadali ang sinabi mo.

SANTI: Kaya nga ayokong mag-asawa e.

ANTON: 'Yan ang sabihin mo. Kaya wala kang motivation na magsumikap e. Pansarili mo lang ang iniisip mo.

SANTI: Ayoko kasing magka-problema.

ANTON: Hindi ganon ka simple ang buhay.

SANTI: Hindi rin ganito ka simpleng mabuhay. Ang maging pintor. Lalo na kung ikaw ang maglalako ng sarili mong trinabaho— Dyahe. Nakakababa, ‘di ba?

ANTON: E bat ka maglalako— Kaya nga nandiyan ang mga katulad ni Caloy e. Kaya naman niyang mag-deal mag-isa. Nakakaintindi naman siya. Artist din ‘yan.

SANTI: E bat minsan, sumasama ka sa kanya?

ANTON: Mga rare cases lang ‘yon. ‘Pag hindi maiwasan.

SANTI: Tulad ng ano?

ANTON: Pag garapal ‘yung buyer. Alam mo naman ‘yang iba diyan. Takutan muna bago magbayad. Marami ring balasubas na mga buyer— In fact, ‘yung ibang mga dealers, kung di mo kilala, lolokohin ka. Kayat hindi ko alam kung anong ginagawa ng gobyerno natin. Puro na lang mga kilalang senior artists ang pina-patronize nila. Paano naman ‘yan mga baguhang may talent kagaya mo? Bat ‘di nila bigyan ng chance na ma-share ang kanilang talino sa painting. Ang mga katulad n’yo ang may kailangan ng government support, hindi ‘yung mga kilala na. Paunlarin nila ang mga deserving artists sa bayan natin. ‘Di ‘yung sila-sila, o tayo-tayo lamang.

SANTI: Parang narinig ko na ‘yan a.

ANTON: Ang alin?

SANTI: (ngingiti) Ang sila-sila- tayo-tayo.

ANTON: Nagpapatawa ka a.

SANTI: Nagpapatawa ka ba?

ANTON: Hindi ba— tama ako.

SANTI: Oo. Ang tagal ko nang napansin ‘yan. Tulad ko. O tulad mo— May mga talent naman tayo. But we deserve a break. Para hindi tayo napipilitang gumawa ng mga gumamela’t water lily. O puro harvest at ricefield o rosas na lang. O gaya nito— (itutukoy niya ang kaniyang pinipinta) ‘Di bale na sana kung katulad natin ‘yung mga may-kayang artists diyan sa San Juan. O sa Greenhills. O sa Makati. Sila— kaya nilang mabuhay na hindi nagko-komersyal. Dahil may pera sila. Kahit hindi sila siguro magtrabaho. Pwede silang mag-serious o mag-pure

art' hanggang sa gusto nila. Mag obra ng mag obra— 'Ba, ang mahal yata ng gamit ngayon. Gutom ka kung hindi mo mabawi ang gastos mo.

ANTON: Kaya kayang-kaya nilang mag-experiment. Nakuwento ko ba sa inyo no'n? Nu'ng sumali ako sa Pinaglabanan Group. Kabarkada ko rin kasi ang mga yon e. First time ko non. Group exhibit namin. Nung opening, lahat sila nakabenta. Ako lang ang hindi. Ang sama ng loob ko. Parang gusto ko nang mag-quit. Wala yata akong talent, sabi ko sa sarili ko. Imagine, lahat sila, ako lang ang hindi.

SANTI: Nu'ng mga succeeding days, may nabenta ka?

ANTON: Wala pa rin.

ANTON: Tapos, sinali nila uli ako. After two years. Kailan ba non? Mga '79 yata. Sabi ko, huwag na kaya, dyahe. Hindi na naman ako makakabenta. Pero sabi nila, 'okay lang. Who knows, by this time, baka makabenta ka. Pana-panahon lang iyan e.' Sumali uli ako. Alam mo, sa opening, out of 9 titles na ginawa ko, dalawa lang ang natira! Ang tuwa ko non! Nag-blow-out ako. Cash pa 'yung tatlo. Inumaga kami. Tuwang-tuwa sila sa akin. Biro nga nila, next time daw, 'di na nila ko isasali— Nakakasira daw ako ng diskarte.

SANTI: E 'yung dalawa?

ANTON: Nabenta rin kinabukasan. Kaya nga wala na ko sa exhibit nung pangatlong araw e.

SANTI: Okay a.

ANTON: (kay CALOY) Kaya pare ko, kaunting tiyaga. Anong malay mo, mapag-tripan nilang mga ginawa mo— You just can't please everyone.

SANTI: Pana-panahon din 'yan kasi e.

ANTON: Alam mo, Santi, napag-isip-isip ko, hindi rin e. Kasi—

SANTI: Ano?

ANTON: 'Pag nakuha mo nang pulso ng masa, maaring pati A and B kasali— Okay ka na.

CALOY: Ano, may formula ba?

ANTON: Wala. Kasi, kung mayroon, mayaman na tayo ngayon. Palagay ko, 'yung truthfulness mong importante. 'Yung sincerity mo sa mga tema at technique na ginagamit mo na babagay rin sa tema mo. 'Yung passion mo. Kahit anong mood pang ipakita mo, basta nasa kaibuturan nito (ituturo niya ang puso) At taimtim. Siguradong kakagatin— kahit anong paniniwala mo.

At biglang susulyap si CALOY TRINIDAD sa pinto.

CALOY: TAMA! Pero baka may makarinig sa inyong taga Makati diyan a— Dakdak kayo ng dakdak.

ANTON: (pabiro ngunit animoy seryoso). Hoy! Umalis ka dito. Taga-Mabini ka ba?

SANTI: Tang-ina mo, Caloy! Dumating ka pa!

CALOY: Sorry, boss. Na-stranded ako sa bahay e.

ANTON: Bakit, nag-away na naman kayo ni Nini, no. Anong ginawa mo?

CALOY: Wala.

ANTON: Anong wala?

CALOY: Inumaga lang ako ng inom kagabi.

ANTON: Kaya pala e.

CALOY: Pano ako hindi uumagahin e, maghapong naki-paglasingan 'yung buyer ko. Gusto yatang ubusin lahat ng beer sa Mabini. Anong magagawa ko. Baka hindi ibigay 'yung balance mo. (kukunin ang pera sa kaniyang wallet at ibibigay ito kay ANTON). O—

Tatangapin ito ni ANTON.

ANTON: Pinatawad mo?

CALOY: Hindi, oy. kahit na pagapangin pa niya ko sa kalasingan, naka-imprenta na sa utak ko ang presyo n'on.

ANTON: E 'di three-five 'to.

CALOY: Bilangin mo.

ANTON: (agad na isisilid sa kartamuneda ang pera) Huwag na.

CALOY: Bilangin mo para sigurado. Mamaya, magastos mo ‘yung iba, tapos ‘di mo alam— Akalain mo pang kulang ‘yang binigay ko.

ANTON: O, sige— (dudukutin muli ang kartamuneda at bibilangin ang pera)

SANTI: ‘Ton, tatlong case ang kontribusyon mo mamaya a.

ANTON: Oo ba.

SANTI: Tsaka tatlong crispy pata.

ANTON: (pagkatapos bilangin ang pera) Bakit tatlong libo lang ‘to?

CALOY: Kinuha ko ‘yung five hundred. Kailangan ko kasi kanina e. Binigay ko sa misis ko. Kulang ‘yung komisyon ko e. Okay lang? Hiram lang naman. Babayaran ko sa susunod na deal.

ANTON: Okay lang— Nand‘yan na e. Kaya pala pinabilang-bilang mo pa. Gumi-gimmick ka pa. Sigurado bang kay kumare napunta ‘yung pera a.

CALOY: Oo. Gusto mo, tanong mo pa sa kaniya. Pero kung ‘di ko nga sa kanya binigay, ano naman ang pakialam mo.

ANTON: Wala nga. Babayaran mo naman e. Kaya lang hindi na kita pahihiramin.

CALOY: Sa kaniya ko inabot— ikaw naman o. ‘Di ka na mabiro.

ANTON: Dapat naman. Anim ang anak mo.

CALOY: (kay SANTI. Tinitingnan niya ang pinipinta nito) O, ano hindi pa ba tapos ‘yan?

SANTI: Finishing touches na lang.

CALOY: Akala ko ba, akong late— E ‘di pa pala tapos.

SANTI: Nilalapatan ko lang ng cream sa dahon.

CALOY: (habang tinitingnan ng maigi ang painting) Kopya-kopya a. Ultimo pahid.

SANTI: ‘Yan ang gusto ng Australyano e, ‘di sundin.

CALOY: Ibigay ang hilig.

SANTI: (habang patuloy siyang nagpipinta) Sigurado bang magbabayad yon?

CALOY: Oo. Kung hindi di, papu-pulis ko siya.

ANTON: Nag-deposit naman yata, 'di ba?
SANTI: Hindi.
ANTON: Ha? Bat 'di mo hiningan?
CALOY: E, checkeng ibibigay e. Sabi ko, i-cash na lang niya pagkuha niya.
SANTI: 'Di kaliwaan.

Sandaling katahimikan.

Maya-mayay mapapansin ni CALOY ang obra ni ANTON na nakasandal sa easel.

CALOY: Kanino 'to?
ANTON: Sa 'kin. Bakit?
CALOY: Political na naman.
SANTI: (habang nagpipinta) Committed artist daw 'e. Social commentary.
CALOY: (bubuntong-hininga) Ay naku, walang bibili niyan.
SANTI: Sabi ko nga, iregalo mo 'yan, kahit sa CR, 'di nila isasabit 'e.
ANTON: Bakit, iregalo ko ba? Ibebenta ko ba?
CALOY: E anong gagawin mo?
ANTON: Wala. Dito lang.
CALOY: Sa'yo lang a.
ANTON: Masama ba? Ginawa ko to dahil gusto kong gawin.
SANTI: Sabagay, ikaw naman ang gumastos diyan. You can do anything with it.
CALOY: Puwedeng isanla. Puwede rin gawing collateral. Mapapakinabangan mo rin 'yan.
ANTON: Kagaya ngayon, pinagtitripan ko.
CALOY: Baka mabuhay 'yan, pare.
SANTI: (magpapahid ng pawis sa kaniyang panyo) O, tapos na.
CALOY: Patingin nga— (lalapitan 'yung painting. Pagmamasdan ito) Photo finish a.

SANTI: Okay ba?

ANTON: Anong title niyan?

SANTI: Wala. Ewan ko.

ANTON: Lagyan mo ng title.

SANTI: Hindi naman sa 'kin to e.

ANTON: (magbibiro) Alam ko na.

SANTI: Ano?

ANTON: "PURGA!"

CALOY: Bakit?

ANTON: Purgang-purga na kasi siya habang ginagawa niya 'yan e.

SANTI: Hindi. Ang magandang title ay 'SUKA!'

CALOY: Sukang Iloko?

SANTI: Sukang-suka na ko sa ganitong pagko-komersyal.

CALOY: Hamo't mamaya, pagbalik mo, magsusuka ka sa blow-out mo.

SANTI: Balik ka agad 'a. kailangan ko ng pera bukas.

CALOY: Oo. Mamaya 5:30 sa Dunkin Donut.

SANTI: Sige. Kahit na alas seis.

CALOY: Okay. (kukunin niya 'yung canvas at maingat na babalutin ng Manila paper at nylon cord na galing sa kaniyang mumurahing portfolio)

SANTI: Ingatan mo.

CALOY: Oo.

ANTON: (mapapansin niya si CALOY) Ever ready ka pala sa mga balutan a.

SANTI: Dapat.

CALOY: Nagi-improved na siyempre. Full-pledged dealer na e.

ANTON: (kay CALOY) Wala ka na bang balak mag-pinta muli?

CALOY: Huwag muna nating pag-usapan 'yan.

ANTON: Bakit, may talent ka naman 'a.

CALOY: Kung may talent ako, hindi na sana ako nagbebenta ng mga gawa n'yo.

ANTON: Kala ko ba, sabi mo, mas malaking kita ng pagbebenta kaysa sa pagpipinta?

CALOY: Sa kin, oo. Dahil ‘di naman nabebentang mga gawa ko. Kung nabibili ba’y, ‘di nag-pinta na lang ako.

SANTI: Sabagay, komisyon lang ang nakukuha mo. Kung ikaw ang gagawa, iyong-iyong.

ANTON: Makakabenta ka rin. Ituloy mo lang ang pagpipinta. Sayang naman kung ‘di mo pina-practise ang kamay mo. Kinuha mo yan e.

SANTI: Fine Arts ka ba?

CALOY: Oo.

SANTI: Saan?

ANTON: (kay SANTI) Three years ahead sa ‘kin ‘yan. Sa UST.

SANTI: Natapos mo?

CALOY: Oo naman.

SANTI: ‘Yon pala e. Ako nga, hanggang third year lang.

ANTON: PWU ka, ‘di ba?

SANTI: Nung first two years. Tapos, lipat akong UST.

ANTON: Ba’t di tayo nagkita?

SANTI: 1984 non, ano ka—

ANTON: Nga pala 74 ako. (kay CALOY) Ikaw?

CALOY: 71. Tagal na.

ANTON: ‘Di naroon ka nung mag-martial law—

CALOY: Oo. (sandaling katahimikan) ‘Di naman ako prolific e.

Sandaling katahimikan

CALOY: Sige. Mauna na ko sa inyo.

ANTON: Kita tayo mamaya.

SANTI: Ikaw. Wala ka namang lakad yata.

ANTON: Pupunta ko kina Pio mamayang alas tres. Papakita ko ‘tong gawa ko.

SANTI: Sinong Pio?

ANTON: Pio Rodriguez. ‘Yung senior artist.

SANTI: Kilala mo 'yon?
ANTON: Naging teacher ko sa Visual Composition. Kararating lang niya galing Europe. (kay CALOY) Naabutan mo ba 'yon?
CALOY: Hindi. Sandali lang yata siya nagturo, 'di ba?
ANTON: Alam ko, mga two sems lang. Tapos, nagpinta na lang ng nagpinta. Guest lecturer siya namin n'on.
SANTI: Wala pa siya sigurong studio n'on.
CALOY: Nagturo rin siyang UP pagkatapos. Pero sandali lang.
ANTON: Ah.
CALOY: O, sige.
ANTON: Sige. Hahabol ako. Baka magtagal ako don e. Alas nueve pa naman. Nandon pa kayo n'on, 'no?
SANTI: Talagang hihintayin ka namin. Magblow-blow-out ka e.
ANTON: 'Nga pala.
CALOY: Sige.

Lalabas si CALOY

ANTON: Sige, CALOY. Ingat.
SANTI: (sisigaw sa labas) THANK YOU.

Ilang sandaling katahimikan

SANTI: Mukhang frustrated talaga si Caloy, 'no—
ANTON: Liliwanag din ang isip niya. Magtiyaga lang siya, makakabenta rin 'yan, makita mo.
SANTI: Pero komersyal din.
ANTON: Hindi. Kahit seryoso. Pati ikaw. Huwag ka lang titigil gumawa ng gusto mong gawin.
SANTI: Ang kaso, magastos.
ANTON: 'Di bale. Investment mo rin 'yan. Kungbaga, portfolio mo. Maglaan ka ng pera para diyan. Okay lang kung mag-komersyal ka. Paminsan-minsan lang naman e. Practice din 'yan.

SANTI: E ang kaso nga, madalas. Ikaw rin, ‘di ba?

Mapapangiti si ANTON na animoy may gustong sabihin. Sandaling katahimikan.

ANTON: Wala tayong magagawa. Kahit na ayaw natin, kailangan.

SANTI: Pagawa sa’yong isang litrato ng limang beses, tingnan natin kung di ka mahasa.

ANTON: (mapapansin niya ang “HARVEST” ni SANTI) O, ‘yung “HARVEST” mo, hindi mo pinadala.

SANTI: Bukas na lang. Aayusin ko pa ‘yung mga palay ‘e.

Papasok si DELIA may dalang kanin.

DELIA: Antonio, kain na!

ANTON: (sisigaw) Oo! (kay SANTI) Tara. Dito ka na kumain.

SANTI: Nakakadyahe na yata, ‘Ton.

ANTON: Hmm— Nahiya ka pa (pabiro) Mayroon ka ba n’on?

SANTI: Sabagay— Wala nga—

ANTON: Sinabi mo. Tara na. Kain na.

Unti-unting didilim ang entablado.

IKALAWANG YUGTO

Makalipas ang tatlong oras. Alas tres kinse ng hapon. Sa studio sa bahay ni G. Pio Rodriguez, isang tanyag at mahusay na pintor. Nagpipinta siya ng kaniyang panibagong obra: isang balinkinitang babaeng nakahubad na nakaupo sa harap nito. Patapos na si PIO at kasalukuyang nasa finishing touches” na. Habang nag-uusap sila ni ANTON ay pinagmamasdan niya ang pagbibigay buhay ni PIO sa modelo sa paligid ng canvas. Maaliwalas ang studiong iyon. Presko at may sikat ng araw na sumisilaw sa kaliwang parte ng kuwarta na pinaglalagyan ng ilang icons, antiques at ibang mga larawan ng sarili niyang likha. Medyo makalat ang lugar na ito.

PIO: Sandali lang a— Matatapos na

ANTON: Okay lang. Pagod na rin siya e. Tapusin mo na.

Ilang sandaling katahimikan. Susuriin din ni ANTON ang paligid ng studio habang umiinom siya ng isang baso ng iced tea. May kasamang cupcake ito.

PIO: (habang gumuguhit) Kamusta ka na?

ANTON: Heto.

PIO: (susulyap siya kay ANTON at mapapansin ang nakabalot na canvas sa ibabaw ng silyang nasa tabi niya) Sa’yo ba ‘yan?

ANTON: Oo. Pakikita ko sana e.

PIO: Latest mo?

ANTON: Oo.

PIO: Tungkol saan?

ANTON: Socio-political.

PIO: ‘Yung uso ngayon?

ANTON: Matagal na.

Sandaling katahimikan.

ANTON: Okay lang ba?

PIO: Ang alin?
ANTON: Ang pakita ko sa'yo.
PIO: Oo ba. I'd be glad to.
ANTON: Objective comment a.
PIO: Kailan ba ko naging personal?
ANTON: Sabagay.

Sandaling katahimikan.

PIO: (habang patuloy pa rin siyang gumuguhit) Ano bang pinag-aabalahan mo ngayon?
ANTON: Wala. May mga commissioned projects ako. Mga pending na trabaho sa mga turista.
PIO: Any exhibit?
ANTON: Wala muna. Walang nag-iimbata e. Walang sponsor.
PIO: Gusto mo, i-sponsor kita?
ANTON: (mabibigla siya) Talaga?
PIO: Why not— tagal ka nang overdue. It's about time na mag-one-man-exhibit ka. Ilang taon ka na bang nagpipinta?
ANTON: Mga 15 years na.
PIO: Kita mo Kailangan na nga.
ANTON: Yagit kasi tayo e.
PIO: Don't worry. Ako'ng bahala.
ANTON: Kailan?
PIO: Anytime you want.
ANTON: Are you serious?
PIO: Do you think I'm not?

Ilang sandaling katahimikan. Liliwanag ang mga mata ni ANTON.

ANTON: (iche-cheers niya 'yung iced tea sa harap ni PIO) This calls for a celebration!

PIO: You deserve it, though.

Pupunta siya sa modelo at iche-cheers niya rin ito. Mapapangiti ang modelo.

Maya-maya'y—

PIO: O, tapos ka na—

MODELO: Ay, salamat.

PIO: Giniginaw ka ba?

MODELO: (kukunin ang bathrobe sa silyang katabi niya) Ang init-init nga e.

PIO: Ganiyan ka na lang.

MODELO: Pio, a—

PIO: Anton, si Mara. Modelo ko. Mara, si Anton— isa sa mga top-rated artists ng Mabini.

MARA: Kumusta?

ANTON: Hi.

PIO: O— (kay ANTON) Baka gusto mong mag-model sa'yo si Mara, sabihin mo lang.

ANTON: Sige. Sa next project ko. Sa solo exhibit ko.

PIO: Tama!

MARA: (kay PIO) Hey, I have to go.

PIO: Okay. Thanks a lot.

MARA: You're welcome.

PIO: Sa uulitin a.

Ngingiti si MARA. Lalabas siya sa studio na naka-bathrobe lamang.

PIO: You know your way to the bathroom.

MARA: I know.

Sandaling katahimikan. Mapapangiti ang dalawang magkaibigang pinto.

PIO: Maganda siya, ‘di ba?

ANTON: Atsaka, hayop ang katawan. Ang sarap ipatong sa canvas.

PIO: Sa canvas lang?

ANTON: Pilyo ka pa rin a.

PIO: So now you know where I draw my inspiration from.

ANTON: Alam ko. Alam kong magaling ka pa rin pumili.

PIO: Ako ba, pipili ng ‘di maganda— Ang pangit ko na nga e. Ano pang mangyayari sa ‘kin?

ANTON: Hindi ka naman pangit. Rugged looking lang.

PIO: Kaya mas sensitive ang taste ko sa mga magaganda.

ANTON: Ganon ba ‘yon.

PIO: Siyempre, ang mga guwapo, walang mga taste ‘yan. Kasi ordinary na sa kanila ang magaganda. Hindi na iba sa kanila. Tingnan mong mga Caucasians, mga Americans— ang type nila, mga ethnic-looking. Mga exotic. Mga pinay na maiitim at kinky ang buhok. Mga mukhang chimay.

ANTON: ‘Ba, maganda ang chimay ko, hoy.

PIO: Kasi, unique sila. Pag bihira sa isang lugar, it becomes outstanding. Kaya gumaganda.

ANTON: Well, if that’s their concept of beauty—

PIO: Patingin ng obra mo.

Kukunin ni ANTON ang kaniyang painting at bubuksan ito ng dahan-dahan na animoy talagang pinag-iingatan ng husto. Ipapakita ito kay PIO.

ANTON: O.

Ilang sandaling katahimikan. Pagmamasdan ni PIO ng maigi ang obra ni ANTON. Ngingiti ito at susulyap kay ANTON.

PIO: Galit na galit.

ANTON: May passion ba?

PIO: Sumisiklab.

ANTON: What do you think?

PIO: Mas gusto ko ‘yung isang dinala mo.

ANTON: Alin, ‘yung ‘Dapithapon’?

PIO: Countryside scene ‘yon, ‘di ba?

ANTON: Oo.

PIO: Mas gusto ko ‘yon. Parang mag-asawa ‘yung tingkad ng kulay ng sunset at sunrise— ‘yung shade mo ng magenta at tangerine.

ANTON: Marmalade ‘yon. Crimson mixed, actually— kaya lang, a little darker than the usual marmalade.

PIO: Oo nga. Marmalade— magandang contrast sa kulay ng bukid na almost rust and apple green.

ANTON: Tuyo kasi ang lupa n’on.

PIO: Gan’on ang gusto ko. D’on ako napa-bilib sa iyo. Tulad nitong estudyante ko.

ANTON: Nagtuturo ka uli?

PIO: Tutorial class lang. Dito sa bahay.

Tutungo siya sa isang sulok at kukunin ang isang nakasabit na painting. Ipakikita niya ito kay ANTON.

PIO: Tingnan mo ‘to. Anong oras sa palagay mo ang sikat ng araw dito?

Ilang sandaling katahimikan. Pagmamasdan ni ANTON nang maigi ang larawan.

ANTON: Maga-alas siyete.

PIO: Tama. Pero ‘di mo napapansin ‘yung ilaw na pumasok sa loob ng bintana, nag-iba—

ANTON: Reflection ‘yan. Kaya dapat, lighter ang shade. May halong cream at dapat, mas pino ang pahid, ‘di ba.

Imumuwestra ni ANTON ang lugar sa larawan na tinutukoy niya. Sasalatin ng maigi ito.

ANTON: (habang sinasalat niya ang tinutukoy sa larawan) O—

PIO: Tama. Pero hindi nagco-compliment sa shadow na na-create don sa buhok niya. Nagmukhang kalbo, o—

ANTON: Pero kung iyan ang natural reaction ng ilaw e—

PIO: ‘Di dapat, hindi niya sana inanggulo ng ganito. Dapat dinaya na lang niya ‘yung puwesto ng babae. Instead na nakadungaw sa direksiyong ‘yan, sana, kunwari, may pinagmamasdan siyang bulaklak o ano man para ‘yung line of gaze niya, sa kanan.

ANTON: O sana, nasa ulo na lang niya ‘yung bulaklak o ano man yon para ma-break ‘yung monochromatic tone ng ilaw at buhok niya.

PIO: Puwede rin.

ANTON: Atsaka kulang sa flesh tone, ‘di ba?

PIO: Well, sa ‘kin tama na.

ANTON: Alam mo, nami-miss ko ‘yung mga ganitong usapan.

PIO: Bakit, marami ka namang kasamang pintor sa inyo a—

ANTON: Oo. Pero halos flat ang mga pananaw nila. Halos puro litrato kasi ang pinagkokopyahan. Kundi kalendaryo, mga postcards. Wala na sa kalooban nila ang ginagawa nila. Nagmumukha na kaming robot doon.

PIO: Pati ikaw?

ANTON: Minsan— (sandaling katahimikan) Madalas—

PIO: Although you can’t blame them. Mga commissioned works ‘yan e.

ANTON: Iba talaga yung galing dito— (ituturo niya ang puso nito).

PIO: Pero honestly, hindi ko gusto ito.

Pagmamasdan niya ‘yung dalang canvas ni ANTON ng ‘MAGSASAKA.’

ANTON: Anong problema?

PIO: Masyadong madilim. At magaspang.

ANTON: E kung iyon ang isinasaad ng tema e. Kaya nga amber at somber tones ang bagay.

PIO: Textural metaphor, you mean—

ANTON: Exactly.

PIO: You're right— although this makes the painting too prosaic for comfort. Hindi ka nag-iiwan ng imahinasyon sa audience mo. Masyadong literal. Dapat, mag-create ka ng contrapuntal stroke through complimentary colors or shades na makakadeviate sa audience ng straight forwardness ng message. That's why it looks flat. It feels flat. Masyadong linear ang structure. Nagmumukhang propaganda tuloy. Mukhang cliché na.

ANTON: (medyo inis na siya) Ano pa?

PIO: 'Yon lang.

ANTON: Parang gusto mong sabihin, ulitin ko na lang kaya.

PIO: Nasa sa 'yo 'yan. Pero 'di ko sinabing ganon. Ang sabi ko lang it could have been better.

ANTON: (uubusin niya ang kaniyang iced tea) May iced tea pa?

PIO: Sandali. (tatawag siya sa labas) Pinang, iced tea pa.

Sandaling katahimikan.

PIO: Ano'ng sa palagay mo?

ANTON: (iibahin niya ang usapan) May latest ka bang ginagawa ngayon?

PIO: Puro pasadya. In fact, marami akong tanggap. Puro overdue na nga.

Sandaling katahimikan.

PIO: Kung wala ka masyadong ginagawa, baka puwede kang mag-ghost artist sa 'kin.

Matitigilan si ANTON sa binanggit ni PIO.

ANTON: Sino na ang mga naging ghost-artist mo?

PIO: Si Fidel. Yung classmate mo. (sandaling katahimikan) Pero nasa States na siya ngayon. Matagal na nga akong naghahanap. May marerekomenda ka ba?

ANTON: Meron kung sa meron. In fact, marami. Kaya lang, 'di ko alam na ginagawa mo na pala 'yan.

PIO: Bakit, may masama ba?

ANTON: Ewan ko. Nagulat lang kasi ako.

PIO: Kailangan e. Sa dami ng tanggap ko. Para na nga akong couturier. (sandaling katahimikan) Kung baga e, mga assistants lang sila. Silang mananahi, akong master-cutter.

ANTON: Ikaw ang nagpo-polish—

PIO: Oo. Tapos, pinipirmahan ko.

ANTON: Gusto mo ng referral?

PIO: Kung mayroon ba e. Anytime. Basta rekomendado mo. Pero, kung puwede ka—

ANTON: Sa ibang araw siguro. Sa mga special projects mo.

PIO: Sinabi mo a.

Darating si PINANG at ibibigay ang isang baso ng iced tea kay ANTON.

ANTON: (kay PINANG) Salamat.

Lalabas ang katulong.

PIO: Kumusta na ang asawa mo?

ANTON: Mabuti.

PIO: Hindi ka na ba nahihirapan sa kaniya?

ANTON: Nahihirapang pa'no?

PIO: Hindi ba siya sagabal sa'yo?

ANTON: Hindi. In fact nga, natuturuan ko siya. Nag-uumpisa na siyang magbenta ng mga paintings ko.

PIO: Talaga? 'Di mabuti.

Sandaling katahimikan

- PIO: Naalala ko ‘yung sabi sa kin ni Manansala na mahihirapan daw akong umasenso dahil sa nag-asawa ako— ‘di ko matanggap-tanggap ‘yung sinabi niyang wala na kong pag-asang sumikat pa— Pero tingnan naman niya ngayon— Kulang na lang e, gawin nila ‘kong national artist.
- ANTON: Sabagay, sa dami ng citations at awards mo, ‘di malayong mangyari ‘yan.
- PIO: Kaya nga lang, iniwan niya ko.

Sandaling katahimikan.

- ANTON: Ilang taon na kayong hiwalay?
- PIO: Mga tatlong taon na. Naalala mo nung ninong ako sa kasal ninyo, after a week, umalis siya. Ni hindi man lang nagpaalam. Ni walang sulat o ano man. Hanggang ngayon, ni ha, ni ho, wala.
- ANTON: Sabagay, ‘di kayo nagkaanak.
- PIO: Mabuti kamo, hindi. Kundi’y made-deprive siya ng pagmamahal ng isang ina at an early age.
- ANTON: Talagang hindi ba kayo magkasundo?
- PIO: Hindi niya talaga masikmurang pag-pipinta e. Malayo ang damdamin niya sa sining. Kumpleto naman siya sa gamit— hindi ko naman siya pinababayaan - suwerte nga siya dahil naka-pag-asawa siya ng pintor na may kaya. E kung sa struggling Mabini artist siya napunta, ‘di gutom siya— kaya suwerte ka pa rin.
- ANTON: Sana nga.
- PIO: Pero kahit anong sabihin nila— na de kalibreng national artist na raw ako— mayroon pa rin akong mga insecurities. Siguro, hindi mawawala yon.
- ANTON: Mabuti nga ‘yan. Macha-challenge ka pa rin sa iba. Sa mga new trends. Para di ka magsawa sa ginagawa mo.

PIO: Hindi yon e. Alam kong natural yang ganahan ka sa kompetensiya ng craft. Para maging masigasig ka. Pero, pag ang inaalala mo ay ‘yung style mo, nakaka-insecure talaga.

ANTON: May sarili ka namang style a.

PIO: Pero ‘di pa sapat ‘yon. Parang kulang. Hindi ko lang alam kung ano.

ANTON: Pero d’yan ka sumikat.

PIO: Yun nga’ng nakapagtataka— sa estilo kong ito ako sumikat, pero ‘di pa ako kontento, ‘di pa ako masaya. Kailangan ko sigurong hanapin pa ang direksyon na pupuntahan ko para maabot iyan. Kailangan ko sigurong mag-eksperimento. Hindi kasi ako sigurado na tama ang ginagawa ko— o ito nga ba talaga ang estilo para sa’kin— Parang may kulang—hindi ko alam kung ano— at kung bakit.

ANTON: Baka inspirasyon.

PIO: Imposible. Sa dami ng accolades na natanggap ko, sasabihin mo bang wala akong inspirasyon—

ANTON: E sino’ng inspirasyon mo?

PIO: Inspirado ako sa lahat ng temang pinipinta ko. Kaya gusto kong trabahuhin. Kagaya ni Mara— ang pag-rerebelde sa sarili kong estilo—Nararamdaman kong nag-rerebelde ako sa art form na nakagisanan ko. Gusto ko’ng mag-iba. Gusto kong ibahin— Gusto kong magwala.

ANTON: Hindi siguro sa estilo mo ikaw nagkukulang. Kundi sa sarili mo. Nararamdaman mo sigurong may kulang sa buhay mo. Kaya naiimpluwensiya ang pananaw mo sa pagpipinta.

PIO: Sa palagay mo?

ANTON: Ewan ko. Analysis ko lang ‘yon.

PIO: Hindi naman siguro psychological to ‘no.

ANTON: Bakit hindi—

PIO: Ewan— pero nararamdaman ko na hindi pa ko nakakarating sa gusto kong puntahan. ‘Yung nais kong makamtan.

ANTON: Kung mag-iiba ka ng estilo’y baka mabigla ang mga tagahanga mo— mga followers mo. Siyempre, kailangan mo rin silang

unawain. Dahil kailangan mo sila. Iyong mga kolektor— Mga kritiko mo— Mga dealers— baka hindi ka na nila maintindihan.

PIO: Hindi nila ako kailangang intindihin. Kung gusto nilang ginagawa ko, huwag na silang magtanong pa. Magtiwala sila sa mga likha ko. Kung ayaw nila, hindi ko sila pipilitin.

ANTON: Mukhang nagiging emosyonal ka na.

PIO: Si Manansala, nung namatay— nagpipinta pa rin. Marami siyang ‘di natapos. Sa palagay ko, mayroon pa siyang gustong sabihin. Hindi lang niya masabi.

ANTON: Ikaw ba, alam mo ang gusto mong sabihin?

PIO: Alam ko. Pero hindi mo rin masasabi. Magpipinta pa rin ako ng magpipinta hangga’t gusto ko. Walang makakapigil sa ‘kin. Kahit sarili ko.

Ilang sandaling katahimikan.

ANTON: Pio.

PIO: Bakit?

ANTON: ‘Yung solo exhibit ko, huwag mong kalimutan.

PIO: Kalimutan ko na’ng lahat, huwag lang ‘yan.

ANTON: Sinabi mo ‘yan a.

Magngingitian ang dalawang magkaibigan. Unti-unting didilim ang entablado.

IKATLONG YUGTO

Makalipas ang limang buwan. Sabado, alas seis ng gabi sa studio ni ANTON. Kasalukuyang nag-iinuman ang barkadang sina ANTON, SANTI at CALOY.

ANTON: Inom pa kayo a. Ang daming beer diyan.

SANTI: Mukhang happening talaga 'to. Hindi gaya last year. Nag-Mister Donut lang tayo.

CALOY: Asenso ba?

SANTI: Oo. Wala kasi n'on e.

ANTON: Ang tagal ng mga 'yon a. Sabi ko, alas otso.

SANTI: Parang 'di mo kilala 'yung mga iyon.

CALOY: Baka may mga tinatapos.

ANTON: Bahala sila. Basta ubusin natin 'to. Nagpabili pa 'ko ng dalawang case atsaka lechong manok.

SANTI: Paborito mo?

ANTON: Basta manok. Tsaka 'yung pinaghalong manggang hilaw tsaka sibuyas, kamatis at bagoong.

SANTI: Sarap na pulutan n'on! (kay CALOY) Mapapasubo ka nito, pards.

CALOY: Oo nga e. Ang taba-taba ko na.

SANTI: Ba, kailangan, mag-celebrate tayong tatlo. Kahit walang dumating sa kanila.

ANTON: Ang sabi sa 'kin ni Ador, alas singko pa lang, nandito na sila.

CALOY: Nakita ko siya kanina sa tapat ng Caltex.

ANTON: Kailan?

CALOY: Kani-kanina. Nung bumili ako ng yosi papunta rito.

ANTON: Anong sabi?

CALOY: Susunod na raw siya. Hahabulin lang daw 'yung buyer niya sa Hotel Aurelio. Oorder pa raw yata ng ilang reproduction ng kalendar— 'yong pinagawa sa kanya.

ANTON: Naka-tipak na naman si loko a. Magdudusa nga lang siya sa ka-kokopya.

CALOY: Kahit na. Pera pa rin yon, ‘ba.

SANTI: Susunod na siguro ‘yon. Diyan lang pala sa Hotel Aurelio e.

CALOY: Unless magtagal pa siya roon.

ANTON: (kay CALOY) Hoy, hindi mo ginagalaw yong beer mo a.

SANTI: Baka lumutin ‘yan.

CALOY: Hindi naman talaga ‘ko umiinom e.

SANTI: ‘Ba, dapat matuto ka. Sa barkadang to, walang di umiinom.

ANTON: Huwag mong demonyohin ‘yan, oy— straight ‘yang kumpare kong ‘yan. Pati nga sa asawa, napagkakamalang under.

CALOY: Loko mo, baka maniwala ang kliyente ko.

SANTI: May nililihim ka pala, pards. Kaya ka pala laging late sa usapan. Siguro, hindi ka makaalis-alis agad sa inyo. Pinaghuhugas ka pa siguro ng plato.

ANTON: May surpresa ko sa inyo, oy.

SANTI: Ano? Blow-out na naman ba?

ANTON: Hindi, oy.

SANTI: E ano?

ANTON: Ano’ng kala n’yo, kayo lang ang may karapatang mag-celebrate?

SANTI: ‘Di ba birthday mo— Ano pang ice-celebrate natin?

ANTON: Hulaan n’yo—

SANTI: Wow naman, pare - ayoko nang manghula. Mag-inuman na lang tayo.

ANTON: Siret?

SANTI: O sige— sige.

Ilang sandaling katahimikan.

SANTI: Ano? Pa-suspense ka pa.

ANTON: BUNTIS SI DELIA.

SANTI: Ha? Galing a! Nakaisa ka na naman.

CALOY: Nadale mo. Ikasa mo pards.

Maggi-give me “five” sila.

SANTI: Bilib na talaga ko sa‘yo.

CALOY: Dapat lang ‘di ba— (kay ANTON) Nakapag-solo exhibit ka na— Malaki ang kinita— kaya magblow-out. Dapat lang.

ANTON: (kay CALOY) Ikaw, kailan ka naman mag blo-blow-out? Pangako ka ng pangako. Nakihati ka na’t lahat.

CALOY: Hindi, a -

ANTON: Ang suwerte nating tatlo ‘no— Hindi na tayo yagit ngayon. (kay CALOY) Ikaw, nagpipinta na uli. (kay SANTI) Tapos ikaw, binalita na sa ‘kin ng San Juan group. Saan bang exhibit n’yo?

SANTI: Sa Pinaglabanan daw.

ANTON: Okay ‘yon. Kabarkada ko ‘yung iba ryan.

SANTI: Kung ‘di dahil sa yo, ‘di sana ko sasali.

ANTON: Okay naman sila e. Bakit, may ibubuga ka naman a. Suggestion ko, sumali tayo sa art competition ng AAP next year. Kung trip n’yo.

SANTI: Puwede. (magbabago ang isip) Hindi— mas bilib kasi ako dito sa dealer ko. (kay CALOY) Baka kalimutan mo na kami a. Mukhang ganadong-ganado ka na kasing mag-pinta. Sino bang inspirasyon mo?

CALOY: Sino pa, ‘di asawa ko.

SANTI: Ang corny mo. Asawa mo na nga, inspirasyon mo pa. Dapat, iba.

CALOY: Dapat asawa ko. Siya ang nagbebenta ng gawa ko e.

ANTON: Oo nga. Dapat lang.

SANTI: E ‘di pag bayad sa kaniya, deretso sa grocery.

ANTON: Pagkain naman nila e.

SANTI: Hindi man lang dumadaan sa palad mo?

CALOY: Iba ang pinadadaan ng misis ko sa palad ko.

SANTI: BASTOS. Anim nang anak ninyo, a.

ANTON: (kay SANTI) Mabuti kamo, ang misis niyang nagbebenta sa mga gawa niya. Inuuna siyempre ‘yung sa kaniya.

SANTI: Marami ding nagpapabenta sa kaniya kayat may kompetensiya na kayo sa pagde-deal.

ANTON: Misis na nga niyang nagde-deal. Nagpipinta na lang siya ngayon. (kay CALOY) ‘Di ba?

SANTI: Oo nga pala.

CALOY: Artist na rin ako ngayon, oy. Kala mo ikaw lang.

SANTI: Pero wala ka pang seryosong gawa.

CALOY: Darating din tayo diyan. Isa-isa lang.

SANTI: Good luck, pare.

Magtatagayan sila.

CALOY: Thank you.

SANTI: Wala na ‘kong dealer ngayon.

CALOY: Kay misis, gusto mo?

SANTI: Dealer mo yon e. Siguradong uunahin ‘yung sa‘yo.

CALOY: Hindi ganiyan ang misis ko. Honest ‘yon. Tsaka kikita rin naman siya kahit ‘di sa kin ang mabenta niya.

SANTI: Pero iba na rin ‘yung sa‘yo. Pareho kayong kikita. Unless hindi mo siya binibigyan ng komisyon.

CALOY: Anong hindi e, buong bayad nga, sa kaniya lahat napupunta.

ANTON: Ibig mong sabihin, walang napupunta sa yo, kahit piso?

CALOY: Binibigyan naman n’ya ‘ko.

SANTI: Under ka talaga.

ANTON: Anong malay mo, sinusuwerte si Pareng Caloy dahil mabait siya sa kaniyang asawa. Mapag-bigay.

CALOY: Tsaka hindi na ko nambababae ngayon.

ANTON: Dapat.

SANTI: Hmm— baka lalaki naman.

CALOY: Inggit ka lang.

SANTI: Saan, sa panlalalaki mo?

ANTON: Psst— Tama na nga kayo diyan.

Sandaling katahimikan.

ANTON: Pero utang ko lahat to kay Pio.

SANTI: Kala ko ba, inimbita mo siya?

ANTON: Hindi na niya siguro kayang lumabas. Naka-wheel chair na e.

SANTI: Sinong kasama niya sa bahay?

ANTON: May nurse siyang kinuha.

SANTI: Ang buhay nga naman— parang kailan lang e, ang lakas-lakas ng tao. Ngayon, hindi na makalakad.

ANTON: Ganiyan talaga.

SANTI: Pang-ilang stroke na niya 'yon?

ANTON: Pangatlo na. In fact, bihirang nakakaligtas sa pangatlo. Buti nga, nabalado lang.

CALOY: Anong huling ginawa niya?

ANTON: Sariling bersyon niya ng Madonna and Child. Atsaka 'yung self-portrait niya.

CALOY: Sa oil?

Tatango lamang si ANTON. Sandaling katahimikan.

ANTON: Atsaka mayroon siya'ng ginagawang hindi niya matapus-tapos. Mukhang iba'ng klase. Atsaka 'di nagco-compliment ang mga color scheme. Parang cubist na 'di mo maintindihan—

SANTI: Expressionist kung gano'n.

ANTON: Oo.— (sandaling katahimikan) Naalala kong sabi niya sa 'kin no'n— na may hinahanap pa siya ng hindi niya alam kung ano. Hindi pa siya kuntento sa mga nagawa niya. Baka 'yon na 'yong umpisa ng pagrerebelde niya— Sayang at di niya natupad 'yon.

SANTI: Ganiyan talaga ang buhay. Umiikot 'yan. Kaya patuloy na nagbabago ang pananaw mo, sa ayaw at sa gusto mo.

CALOY: Kung magsalita ka, 'kala mo, ilang ikot ka nang nagbabago ng pananaw. E hanggang ngayon nga, nandiyan ka pa rin sa nature-tripping mo.

SANTI: Impressionism `to. Sariling impression ko `to ng nature.

CALOY: Still life impression ng nature, kamo.

ANTON: Tama na nga kayo diyan. (sandaling katahimikan) Mahihirapan na sigurong makapunta `yon.

SANTI: Puwede ka pa ring mag-ghost artist sa kanya—

ANTON: Paralyzed na'ng kalahati ng katawan niya, Santi. Kaya hindi rin siya makakapirma.

SANTI: Wala na nga—

ANTON: `Yon din nga'ng binabalak ko non e. Para man lang makaganti sa kabutihang ginawa niya.

CALOY: Kung i-nominate kaya natin bilang National Artist. Ang Mabini group ang mage-endorse.

SANTI: Oo nga `no. Puwede `yon. Atsaka sigurado akong marami ring pipirma sa endorsement na `to. Hindi lang— Mabini group kamo. Baka pati ang kabilang kampo. Tatalaga, magaling naman talaga siya e. Ano—

CALOY: Kaya lang, kumukuha siya ng ghost artist— parang may kontradiksyon yata—

SANTI: Oo nga `no. Sabagay, tama ka riyan. Nakakahiya nga. Ba't di ko naisip `yon?

ANTON: Alam mo kung bakit?

SANTI: Bakit?

ANTON: Kasi minsan, kapag nakaugalian na— at nakasanayan na, akala natin tama.

CALOY: Hindi lang minsan kamo. Madalas. Atsaka may bahid pulitika naman `yang mga yan e. Prerogative ng Presidente ang maghirang nang National Artist— kung sino'ng mapagtripan nya— o kung kanino siya may utang na loob kahit hindi naman karapat-dapat. `Di ba?

SANTI: Basta, ang importante'y in-love tayo sa ginagawa natin. (sandaling katahimikan) Basta, pag natuloy ang exhibit namin, gagawin ko ang gusto kong gawin— Walang makakadikta sa'kin. (kay ANTON) kahit ikaw— (kay CALOY) o ikaw – Bakit, `di ko naman ibebenta sa `yo a—

CALOY: Sino ba'ng may saging ibenta mo—

ANTON: Kahit anong gustuhin mo, gawin mo. Huwag kang magpapalila sa kanila. Kaya lang, ang sabi ko, bigyan mo ng social concern ang mga tema mo.

SANTI: Social concern? Para lang maging sensational?

ANTON: Ganiyan ba'ng pagkilala mo sa 'kin—

SANTI: Ikaw, kilala kita. Sincere ka sa mga protests mo. Pero hindi lahat ng mga social realists, ganiyan. Maraming peke d'yan as much as there are other pekes in this world. Pretending to be socially conscious. Socially relevant. This is a much abused term. Kaya I'd rather remain 'irrelevant' than be a great pretender like the rest. Marami na masyado ang mapagkunwari at mapagbalatkayo sa mundong ito.

Hindi siya papansinin ni ANTON. Mapapansin niya na wala ng beer at pulutan sa mesa.

ANTON: (sisigaw sa labas) DELIA—
(sa kaniyang sarili) Pambihirang babae 'to o—

CALOY: Hayaan mo na. Darating rin 'yon.

ANTON: E kanina pa e.

CALOY: Baka nasa labas lang—

Sandaling katahimikan.

SANTI: O, 'di ba—

Hindi siya papansinin ni ANTON. Magmumuni-muni lang ito habang umiinom ng beer. Sandaling katahimikan.

ANTON: Noong araw, ang mga gawa ko raw, parang Rembrandt. Parang Van Gogh— Parang Picasso— Naisip ko, wala pa 'kong artistic identity no'n in terms of style.

- CALOY: Hindi ka ba naco-compliment no'n— 'Yang i-compare ka sa mga masters?
- ANTON: Natutuwa ako. At the same time, malungkot. Because that means I still need to be original. I have to work on my style.
- CALOY: But you cannot divorce yourself from them. Somehow, one way or the other, you'll be influenced and inspired by these people.
- ANTON: Totoo 'yan. I'm not discounting that. In fact, it's an advantage to idolize these masters in order to have a firm background in classical art. But you should know your limits. You should learn when to divorce them and when to reconcile with them, when to stop getting awed by their works and when to begin creating your originals. In other words, influences and inspirations should always be put to an advantage. Because at the end of the day, it's your style that really matters.
- SANTI: Pero pinilit mo ba? 'Di ba, ikaw ang may sabing darating at darating din 'yon—
- ANTON: That was my experience. Kahit anong gawin mo, hindi lalabas 'yan. Darating na lang talaga. But you have to help yourself by doing lots of research, readings, attending and participating in lectures, seminars, workshops, symposia— And most of all, experience, experiencing life to the fullest. Live it, and not just paint it. Immerse yourself in it. In other words, be a part of it. Get involved! Of course, you could merely observe like the rest but be very keen and sharp with your observations.
- SANTI: (pabiro) Nag-lecture si Anton!
- CALOY: (kay SANTI) Oo nga. Mukhang ganadong-ganado a.
- SANTI: (kay CALOY) Hayaan na natin. Tatal, birthday naman niya e.
- ANTON: `Tang-ina n'yo `a. Pinag-tritripan n'yo na naman ako a. Ayaw n'yo `yon. It's food for thought.
- SANTI: E ba't 'di na lang nila tayo bigyan ng proteksyon sa mga turistang `yon -
- CALOY: Sino?
- SANTI: 'Yung mga foreigners na nage-exploit na kung 'kala mo, sinong kaya tayong bilhin ng kanilang mga dolyares— 'Yung

mga nagbi-business ng mga paintings abroad— Porket mura ang labor dito, ‘kala nila pati art works natin, presyong galunggong—

CALOY: Hindi. ‘Yung nagbibigay ng proteksyon—

SANTI: Sino pa kundi ang gobyerno natin— Ba’t ‘di nila tayo ipagtayo ng isang artists’ village kaya, para maiwasan ang mga ito— at para ma-regulate ang mga artists’ fee sa mga consumers na ‘yan—

ANTON: Audience—

SANTI: Mga audience na ‘yan. O magtayo tayo ng unyon para maka-impose tayo ng minimum fee sa isang painting— regardless of its quality, o isang flea market sa mga bargain commercial paintings. Para mahiwalay ang mga ‘to sa mga serious art works— mga obra natin.

CALOY: Hindi ba discriminatory ‘yan?

ANTON: Depends on how you look at it. From whose point of view?

CALOY: Sabagay— Sasabihin ng mga serious artists, sa kanila ang mga obra at ang mga nagko-komersiyal, sasabihin nilang sa kanila ang pang-masa. Kaya hindi mo malalaman kung ano ang iba-bargain—

ANTON: Maging honest na lang dapat ang gumagawa. Sila ang mag-husga kung anong paintings nila ang pang-flea market o hindi. O alin sa mga gawa nila ang tinuturing nilang mga obra. Then they decide for themselves. And not the others, like those entrepreneurs who don’t know any better about the craft except to market them. Mabuti sana kung lahat ng mga artist-dealers gaya mo— (kay CALOY)

SANTI: Hindi ba si Michaelangelo, nung nagkasakit, nagalit sa Pope dahil gusto niya’ng ipatapos ang “Creation” niya sa Sistine Chapel kay Raphael— Hindi pumayag si Michaelangelo. Pinagpatuloy din ni Raphael pero si Michaelangelo pa rin ang nagtapos— Sira lang ang kamada kung ibang artist na ang magpapatuloy. Maaaring ituturing na small fraction ang sa kaniya. O maaaring hindi na kaniya. Hindi kasi magiging buo ang world view mo. Hindi bigay na bigay— Kahit ba

estudyante niya si Raphael, unethical pa rin ‘yung ginawa ng Pope. Hindi man lang nirespeto ang pagkatao niya bilang artist— ‘Yon— Isang classic example ‘yan sa mga producers o financiers na hindi marunong kumilala sa dignidad ng isang artist— o ng isang ordinaryong tao na lang— Ang mga ganiyan, dapat makasali sa artikulo ng konstitusyon ng ating unyon at sa Code of Ethics kung makapagtatag tayo, kung saka-sakali—

Ilang sandaling katahimikan. Maaalala ni ANTON na uutusan niya ang asawa upang kumuha ng beer at pulutan.

ANTON: (sisigaw) DELIA— (kina SANTI at CALOY)

Gusto n’yo pa ng beer?

CALOY: Mamaya na. Hintayin natin ‘yung iba.

ANTON: Marami pa d’yan.

SANTI: Hayaan mo sila. Ang tagal nila e.

CALOY: Wala pa ‘yung katulong mo?

ANTON: Wala pa e. Kaya ang kumare mo’ng gumagawa ng lahat.

CALOY: Ang inaanak ko nga pala—

ANTON: Do’n sa labas. Nangangapitbahay siguro. Walang alam ang mga ‘yan kundi laro.

SANTI: ‘Di bale. Bakasyon naman e.

ANTON: (sisigaw siyang muli) DELIA—

CALOY: Pinabili mo kamo ng lechong manok at beer—

ANTON: Pero dapat, nandito na ‘yon. Kanina pa ‘yan e.

SANTI: Hirap ng walang katulong ‘no—

ANTON: Mabuti kamo, mabait ‘tong asawa ko. Wala kang maririnig na reklamo.

CALOY: Suwerte ka rin sa asawa—

ANTON: Magbibig-anghel ka rin sana—

SANTI: Totoo naman a.

ANTON: Ibig kong sabihin, sana’y tuloy-tuloy na.

CALOY: At sana'y tuloy-tuloy na rin ang suwerte natin.
SANTI: Dapat—
ANTON: Sandali a. Ako na lang ang bahala.

Tatayo si ANTON at lalabas patungong kabilang kuwarto.

SANTI: 'Buti pa. Marami sigurong ginagawa 'yon.
CALOY: Sabihin mo, sumali siya sa 'tin—
SANTI: Hindi mahilig si mare sa mga ganito. Mas gugustuhin pa no'n matulog.
CALOY: Birthday naman ni pare e.

Mag-iinuman sila at papapak sa natitirang pulutan.

CALOY: Ang bait ni ANTON 'no—
SANTI: Oo. Walang kaparis. Sa lahat yata ng kaibigan natin siya ang naiiba. Masasabi mong kayamanan ang magkaroon ng ganiyang klaseng kaibigan. Mas malapit pa 'ko diyan kaysa sa mga kapatid ko e. Pag may problema 'ko, sa kaniya 'ko lumalapit. Kahit anong problema— tutulungan ka. Gagawa at gagawa siya ng paraan. Ganon din ba siya sa 'yo?
CALOY: Nung college kami. 'Yung barkada ko, barkada rin niya, kahit three years ahead kami sa kanya. Maraming kilala si Anton. May PR 'e. Sabi ko nga sa kanya, kumandidato siya no'n sa student council. E ayaw— masyado raw siyang mae-expose.
SANTI: Sira rin ang ulo ng loko—

Magtatawanan sila. Maya-maya'y may parang malakas na kakalabog sa labas na mukhang nanggaling sa kabilang kuwarto nina ANTON. Magtataka ang dalawa.

CALOY: Ano 'yon?
SANTI: Ewan ko. (sisigaw sa labas) ANTON—

Ilang sandaling katahimikan. At maririnig nila ang boses ni ANTON sa labas.

ANTON: Putang ina!

Magtitinginan ang dalawa.

SANTI: Bakit?

Ilang sandaling katahimikan. Maya-maya'y papasok si ANTON sa studio. Malungkot at pawang tulala. May dala-dala siyang kapisasong papel na nakalukot sa kanang kamay niya.

CALOY: Anong nangyari—

ANTON: (ipapakita niya ang kapisasong papel kay SANTI) Putang ina

Babasahin ni SANTI ang sulat.

CALOY: Anong nakalagay?

Ilang sandaling katahimikan. Matitigilan si SANTI at titingin kay ANTON. Aagawin ni CALOY ang sulat sa kamay ni SANTI at babasahin ito.

SANTI: Pambihira—

ANTON: Putang-ina—

SANTI: Pabayaang mo siya. Ginusto niya e. Wala tayong magagawa. Mapipigil mo ba—

CALOY: (pagkatapos basahin ang sulat) Hayop naman—

Itatapon ni CALOY ang sulat sa bintana.

ANTON: Hindi ko nga alam kung ano'ng nagawa ko. Hindi naman ako nagkulang sa kaniya. Mahal ko naman siya.

Mapapaiyak si ANTON.

SANTI: Okay lang `yon.

Tatapikin ni SANTI sa balikat si ANTON.

CALOY: ‘Di kaya may napagtripang iba—

SANTI: Imposible. Halos araw-araw, nandito lang `yon. Hindi naman lumalabas.

ANTON: Hindi lang siya siguro para sa `kin.

Mapapaupo si ANTON sa silya. Pawang mabigat na mabigat ang pakiramdam niya.

CALOY: E kung ganon e, bakit?

ANTON: Ewan ko.

SANTI: Talagang ganiyan ang mga artists. Hindi halos maintindihan ng iba. E ang sarili natin, ‘di natin maintindihan minsan e, iba pa kaya—

CALOY: Mahirap ba tayo talagang intindihin?

SANTI: Sa palagay ko. Ewan ko sa `yo.

Ilang sandaling katahimikan.

SANTI: Kalimutan mo na `yan. Mawawala rin `yan. Buti nga’t hanggat maaga’y, nalaman mo na—

ANTON: E ang mga bata—

SANTI: Kami ang bahala. Nandito naman kami sa tabi mo.

CALOY: Oo, pare. Kami ang bahala sa kanila—

Ilang sandaling katahimikan.

CALOY: Ano kaya’ng ibig sabihin ng sinulat niya— “kung gaano kasalimuot at kapanglaw ang iyong paga-artista, gayon din ang dahilan ng aking pag-alis— “

May luhang tutulo sa pisngi ni ANTON habang nakangiti siya sa dalawa niyang kaibigan.

ANTON: Salamat, Santi— Caloy—

Tatapikin ni ANTON sina SANTI at CALOY.

SANTI: (tatayo siya) Tara. Mag-inuman tayo—

CALOY: Sige. Ako ang bibili—

Lalabas si CALOY.

SANTI: `Buti pa nga.

Sandaling katahimikan. Maya-maya'y may kakatok sa pinto sa labas.

SANTI: (sisigaw mula sa labas) `TON, SINA ADOR NANDITO—

SINA ADOR/BARKADA: (mga boses mula sa labas) HAPPY BIRTHDAY
TO YOU— HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU— (kakantahin
nila) HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HAPPY BIRTHDAY— HAPPY
BIRTHDAY TO YOU—

Unti-unting didilim ang entablado.



SCREENPLAY

Take Me to Amerika

Jose Mojica

SETTING: Late 90s

CHARACTERS:

Jessa- Late 20s. Dreams of living abroad and becoming an American citizen

Junjun- Jessa's older brother. Grew up in the streets. Hates Americans.

Nanay- Jessa's mother.

Tatay- Jessa's father.

Lola- Jessa's grandmother.

Princess- 8 years old. Jessa's younger sister. Smart/Nerdy.

Tito Boy- Parlorista Gay. Used to live with Americans in Subic.

1. INT. JESSA'S ROOM. DAY

Different American magazines are laid out in front of JESSA. She stands in front of the mirror as she tries out different clothes, imitating the models from the magazine. As she puts on her make up, she calls to her family outside her room.

JESSA: Nay! Tay! Kayo lahat! Nakaayos na ba kayo? Patapos na ako.
 Saglit na lang 'to.

PRINCESS: (speaking outside the room) Yes po, Ate. Naka-ready na po.

JESSA: (to mirror) Oh my gad. I'm so excited. This is a bery important day. It's like I'm getting marry. Well. Hindi pa. But apter this day. I will. And I will pinally go to America with my pyuture hasband. I lab you, James.

She finishes fixing her make up and closes her scrapbook with James' photo and all his details. She leaves the room.

2. INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY

Everyone wears pambahay except for PRINCESS who is in her Sunday dress. Jessa sees her LOLA praying, her NANAY doing her nails, her TATAY reading a newspaper while drinking coffee, Princess sitting properly, and JUNJUN breaking up with her girlfriend over the phone.

JUNJUN: (to phone) E di maghiwalay na. Ako pa ang tatakutin mo kala mo ang ganda-ganda mo, ang itim naman ng kili-kili mo. Bahala ka...

Jessa goes down the stairs (slow-mo). Everyone looks at her, stunned. Their mouths open. Junjun looks away from Jessa and shuts his phone. He goes out of the house.

JESSA: (runs after Junjun) Kuya Junjun! San ka na naman pupunta? Kayo Nay? Tay? Bakit hindi pa kayo nakaayos? Kanina ko pa sinasabi na magmadali kayo kasi darating na si James.

Everyone ignores her until she screams.

JESSA: (screaming) Ano ba!

Everyone stands up and starts moving.

TITO BOY arrives from Divisoria carrying lots of large plastic bags with American style clothes and decorations inside. He sees everyone rushing.

TITO BOY: Ay! Nakakaloka. Bakit nag-papanic ang mga jutao?

JESSA: Kasalanan n'yo 'to e. Kung hindi kayo late dumating, kanina pa sana nakabihis ang mga 'to.

TITO BOY: Kakadating ko lang 'yan agad ang sasalubong? Nakaka-stress mag-Divisoria ha. Lapot na ang make-up ng lola mo.

JESSA: Sorry po. Medyo nag papanic lang talaga ako. Alam n'yo naman na importante sa'kin ang araw na 'to.

TITO BOY: Relax, darling. Bawal ma-stress ang beauty mo. Wit bet 'yan ng mga Kano. Don't worry. We can handle this.

3. MONTAGE SEQUENCE

They start decorating the house as though it is a foreigner's house. Jessa rehearses their English as they decorate. Princess speaks well, way better than Jessa. But aside from Princess, her family finds it difficult to speak. They say the wrong things. Tito Boy keeps on insisting what is right, telling them he knows more because of his experiences with foreigners in Subic.

Tito Boy takes out the false eyelashes he has bought from Divisoria.

TITO BOY: Ay! Bongga 'to girl. Try mo 'to o. Yan!

JESSA: Sure ka dito Tito ha? Trust ko ang wisdom mo.

TITO BOY: Oo, pak na yan! Nasaan pala ang red gown para kay Nanay?

Lola suddenly appears.

LOLA: Hoy, Boying. Umayos ka. Ayoko ng red gown na yan. Walang red gown!

After decorating, Jessa asks them to wear the clothes Tito Boy has bought for them.

TITO BOY: Ano na Jessa? Come on, let's rehearse our lines. Hey, everybody! Sit down na.

Everyone gathers around the living room.

TITO BOY: Let's start with Nanay.

Nanay stands up and walks in front of the television.

NANAY: I'm the mother op Jessa. Jusko. hirap na hirap ako nung pinanganak yan. It's so difficult to release her from my vagi... from wombs.

CUT TO

TATAY: (nervous) Ah... Hehe. Ah... Pano ba ire. Ako'y... Me. I'm. Pader op Jessa. Plis sit down. Later, we drink until we... lasing! Ah basta alagaan mo 'yang anak ko ha. Mahal na mahal ko 'yan.

CUT TO

LOLA: (frowning, combative with their teasing)

CUT TO

TITO BOY: (dancing) Hi, My name is Madonna. And because I'm always on the go, a woman that never rests, you can call me Curacha. You know, like the famous Filipina bold star, Rosanna Roces. Charing! Jessa grew up with me in the parlor. You know, parlor girl. She just sits there the entire day. Reading magazine or

watching sa cable. Kaya lang iniwan ko s'ya nung pumunta ako sa Subic to work. There, I met a lot of Americans. Like you, James. Sa akin nga 'to nagmana. Look. Same bet. Ay. Teka, nasaan nanaman si Junjun?

CUT TO

Junjun is in front of a sari-sari store with his barkada. They are drinking Coke and smoking cigarettes. One of Junjun's friend is beatboxing.

JUNJUN: (outside the house—rapping) Yo! Junjun nga pala ang tawag ng madla. Sa away ako daw ay walang kadala-dala. Laki sa kalye, kilabot ng mga babae, lahat sila ay takot kapag ako na ang umere. Sa tabas ng dila, wala silang panama. Lalo na ang Kanong 'kala mo ay maangas. Baka mamaya 'pag nakita ko na s'ya, isang solid na sapak at sa kalsada'y dadapa. Break it down yo.

4. INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

Junjun enters the house.

JESSA: (to Junjun) Sa'n ka ba galing, Kuya? Bakit di ka pa nag aayos?

Junjun walks out. Jessa runs after Junjun.

5. EXT. STREET. NIGHT

JESSA: Kuya, ano ba?

JUNJUN: Ano bang pakialam ko d'yan sa porener na 'yan? Ang laki-laki ng ginastos mo dyan sa handa-handa na 'yan wala naman tayong pera. Sigurado ka ba na pakakasalan ka n'yan?

JESSA: Oo, bakit?

JUNJUN: Ilang buwan pa lang kayong mag-syota? Tatlo? Lima? Anim? Baka nga sa susunod na buwan hiwalay na kayo.

JESSA: Hoy! Wag mo akong itulad sa'yo na lingguhan magpalit ng syota. Mas madalas ka pa makipaghiwalay kaysa maligo.

JUNJUN: Walang basagan ng trip!

JESSA: Wala talagang basagan ng trip! 9 months na kami magka-chat at nung last na umuwi si James dito, nag shopping kami sa Greenhills. Pumunta rin kami sa Tomas Morato. Uminom kami tapos nag-Motel. Kaya alam ko na lab n'ya ako. Nag-bibidyo call pa kami. At ano naman kung gumagastos ako? You don't care. Dis is my money.

JUNJUN: Ano rin kung wala akong pakelam sa mga porener na 'yan! Money money ka pa dyan. Wala ka ngang trabaho kaya umaasa ka sa James na 'yan. Gusto mo lang s'ya para makapunta sa America at magkaron ng magandang buhay. At tigilan mo na 'yang Ingles-Ingles. Nakakasuka ka mag-Ingles.

Jessa is about to hit Junjun with her slippers. They hear Tito Boy calling them.

TITO BOY: Jessa! Junjun!

6. INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

Jessa enters the house. She almost cries after seeing that her family looks like “foreigners” (her ideal America). Tito Boy hugs her, and her family follows. They hear a car honk and they all panic. James, Jessa’s boyfriend, arrives. They all stop. Even their neighbors. Even the world outside. Jessa holds James’ hand. They enter the house.

NANAY: It's you! James. Come, come. Napaka gwapong bata naman nito sa personal. Malayong-malayo sa picture na pinakita ni Jessa.

James hugs Jessa before he enters and carries her. She gropes for the ring but finds nothing.

JESSA: Nasaan na yung singsing?

JAMES: (confused) Honey, what are you looking for?

JESSA: Nating. (whispering) Maybe its surprise.

James steps in and looks around. He starts to get confused (looking at the interior of the house—the ideal America).

NANAY: Peel at home. You know mano po? (acting it out) Bless bless? Do it. Do it. (to Tatay) Halika nga dito ng ma-sample ko kay James.

TATAY: Bakit sa'kin? Ikaw nga ang mas...

NANAY: Ano?

TATAY: (trying to Nanay's hand) 'To naman, di na mabiro.

NANAY: Hmm.. Ewan ko sa'yo. (to James) Come on, James. Do it. Like this.

Nanay shows James how to do mano po. James puts everyone's hand on his forehead (mano po) including Princess.

TITO BOY: No mano for me. I want beso. Mano po makes me older.

James kisses Tito Boy's cheek. Everyone laughs.

JESSA: (to James) You're early. I tot you will arribe late.

JAMES: The cab driver told me that he knows short cuts. We passed by many small roads with kids playing basketball everywhere. And there was no traffic. I paid the driver five thousand.

EVERYONE: Five thousand?!

JAMES: Yeah, he told me that it should be 5500. But since he found me nice, he gave me 500-peso discount.

JESSA: You're got crazy. No, no. I mean. You got... uh... naloko ka.

PRINCESS: (to James) Ate said you got deceived, cheated, swindled, hoaxed.

JAMES: Oh, I see. Never mind that. At least I got here fast and safe. I'm just so excited to see you guys.

Tatay sneezes.

JAMES: Are you okay, Tatay?

TATAY: Aprub! Aprub! Dust prom clothes. Ukay-ukay.

JAMES: What do you mean by ukay-ukay?

TATAY: Ah... Ukay.

Tatay starts to sweat in his suit.

Lola, in her blonde wig, keeps looking at the tattoo on James's wrist and makes a sign of the cross. Lola suddenly asks James out of nowhere.

LOLA: James, pakakasalan mo ba talaga itong apo ko?

Everyone goes silent and looks at lola. They hear someone from outside. Lechon arrives.

7. INT. DINING AREA. NIGHT

Lola and Junjun bring in the dishes. None of them is American. They are all Filipino dishes. Jessa gets frustrated. Junjun flexes his non-existent muscle as he lays down the dishes. He also stares James down.

JESSA: OMG. Bakit puro pang ulam natin. Di naman magugustuhan ni James ‘yan. Mag-order na lang kaya tayo ng chicken at spaghetti sa Jollibee?

JAMES: No, no, no. It’s okay. I’d love to eat all of them. Food is a great way to know another’s culture, right?

James tries out different food. Although at times reluctant, he enjoys everything.

NANAY: How’s America? Have you seen the Tower? Eipel?

JAMES: Eiffel Tower is in Paris, Nanay. I come from Los Angeles.

JUNJUN: Lakers! Pero wala na ‘yan. Talunan naman ‘yan. Mga talunan!

JAMES: Well...

TITO BOY: I once had a boyfriend who came from Los Angeles. He has big...

Jessa giggles annoyingly. Everyone looks at her with judging eyes. Jessa continues to eat as if nothing happened.

TATAY: Tekang. James, hab you try Pale Pilsen? Good beer. Good beer. (to Junjun) Kumuha ka nga ng beer sa ref.

JESSA: (to James) Are you enjoying?

JAMES: Of course, honey.

Junjun returns with a beer. He gives it to James.

JUNJUN: O ano, sabay tayo? Straight ah.

NANAY: James, say “tagay!”

JAMES: Ta-kay?

NANAY: No, no. Ta-gay!

JAMES: Ta-gay!

JESSA: ‘Wag n’yo na turuan ng mga Tagalog. English naman kami sa America.

JUNJUN: O tara na. Ano ba ‘yan. Tagay!

Junjun finishes the beer faster than James.

JUNJUN: Wala pala ‘to e. Talunan talaga.

NANAY: (to Junjun) Pst! Tumigil ka na nga. (to James) James, what can we see in Los Angeles?

PRINCESS: They have Disneyland, Hollywood, and Los Angeles Zoo.

JAMES: That’s right, Princess. How’d you know?

PRINCESS: I read it from Ate’s book po, Kuya James.

NANAY: We also hab the same here. We hab Boom na Boom. We hab Manila Soo.

TATAY: Parang inaalala mo lang kung sa’n tayo nag de-date noon. He he.

NANAY: Naku, matagal na ‘yun. (to James) Anyway, we hab Quezon City, the city op stars. Many op sikat artista lib there. And ABS and GMA are there. You should go and audition. You can be sikat because you’re pogi.

JESSA: James, will you take me there after our mar—

Jessa sees Lola bowing her head, eyes closed.

JESSA: Lola! Anong nangyari?

TITO BOY: Inay!

They all panic.

NANAY: Nay, nay. Anong nangyari?

TATAY: Junjun, ano ka ba? Tumawag ka ng ambulansya. Mamamatay na ang lola mo!

TITO BOY: Nay, wag mo kaming iwan! Diyos ko!

JAMES: What’s happening?

JESSA: Lola! Bakit ngayon pa? Araw ko to e!

Princess stands up and walks to Lola. She shakes her, but Lola doesn't wake up.

TITO BOY: Nasan na ang red gown ni Nanay? Paki-kuha nga Princess. Yun ang isusuot sa libing.

Lola suddenly wakes up.

LOLA: Hoy! Ayan na naman yang red gown na 'yan. Naririnig ko na naman.

TITO BOY: Sabi sa inyo e. Kilala ko yan. Pero di ko rin alam kung bakit galit na galit sa red gown.

NANAY: Susmaryosep naman, Nay. Kala namin kung napano ka na.

LOLA: Nakatulog ako. Hindi ko naman naiintindihan ang pinag-uusapan n'yo. Puro America. America. (Lola takes off her costume) Kung nandito lang ang lolo n'yo, baka nabatukan na kayong lahat. Matapos niyang ipag laban ang bansa... Diyos kong mahabagin. O s'ya. Mabuti pa ay mauna na ako sa katre.

Lola stands up. Jessa takes her to bed.

When she comes back, she sees James eating with his hands. She feels disgusted.

JESSA: (to James) What are you doing?

JAMES: They taught me how to eat with my hands. Filipino custom. I enjoy it.

JESSA: Kayong lahat! Ano bang ginagawa n'yo? Bakit ba tinuturuan n'yo pa si James ng mga ganito? Nakakadiri. Hindi naman nya magagamit 'yan dun. Mga walang class. Kaya ayoko dito e.

Everyone shushes. Jessa walks out. Tatay follows her.

8. EXT. VERANDA. NIGHT

Jessa is about to light her cigarette. Tatay takes it from her and keeps it in his pocket. Tatay sweats again in his suit. Jessa starts to sob.

JESSA: Sorry po, Tay. Hindi ko lang po maintindihan kung bakit gustong gusto ni James yung mga gan'on.

TATAY: 'Di ba yun naman talaga ang gusto mo? 'Yung magustuhan kami ni James? Pero mas mahalaga pa rin na gusto n'yo ang isa't isa. Tingnan mo kami ng Nanay mo, lagi kaming nagtatalo pero lagi rin kaming nagkakaayos. Kasi nga, gusto ko naman lahat sa kaniya.

JESSA: Parang biglang nawala po kasi yung James na kilala ko.

TATAY: Alin?

JESSA: 'Yung porener. 'Yung may class. Yung American.

Tatay hugs Jessa. James follows them and tries to talk to Jessa. Tatay taps James' shoulder and leaves. Everyone in the family tries to peek from the corner.

JAMES: I'm sorry honey. I don't know what I did wrong. I was just enjoying with your family. By the way, remember what I told you?

JESSA: Is it about the...

JAMES: (James holds Jessa's both hands as though proposing) Our company is relocating here in the Philippines! We can now live together kasi Ma-hal ki-ta!

JESSA: Wha- what? What the pak are you saying? Mahal? Stay here? Where will you lib?

James stops, shocked.

JAMES: What do you mean? I thought...

Jessa slaps James and rushes inside the house.

JAMES: Hey! Honey!

9. INT. JESSA'S ROOM. NIGHT

Jessa sits and opens her scrapbook. She tears out James' page and throws it away. She picks another American from her collected details and copies it on her desktop computer.

JESSA: (typing on computer screen) Hi Charles! Wanna talk? (with YM emoticon)

END



CRITICISM

Ang Pagbabalik ng Panitikan sa Puso ng Sambayanan

Virgilio S. Almario

“PERFORMATURA.” GUSTO KONG magsimula sa pamamagitan ng pagpuna sa pamagat ng ating pagdiriwang. Bakit “performatura”? Saan bang wika nagmula ang “performatura”? Sa Latin? O bakâ likha lang ng malikot na isip ng pasimunong si Vim Nadera? Ipinaliliwanag ang pamagat ng subtitle na “Performance Literature Festival.” Pista ng Performance Literature. Palagay ko, malaki ang kaugnayan ng praseng “performance literature” sa pagkaimbento ng “performatura.” Neolohismo ng *performance* sa Ingles at *literatura* sa Español.

Nabása ko naman ang isang press release noong Lunes sa PDI, na nagsasabing ang literatura ay “intellectual” kono, kaya hindi nakaaakit sa sambayanan. Sa gayon, ang layunin ng *Performatura* ay gising ang interes ng mamamayan sa panitikan. At paano? Sabi ng press release, sa pamamagitan ng pagtataas sa “oral literature to the level of written literature.”

Palagay ko, napakaganda ng adhika ng *Performatura*. Pero masamá ang lohika ng press release. Una, hindi nakakaakit ng mambabasa ang kasalukuyang nakasulat na panitikan dahil sa maraming problema. Hindi dahil sa “intellectual” lámang. Marami ngang nakalathalang tula o kuwento na basura kaya di dapat mabása ng taumbayan. Ngunit ang pangunahing dahilan kaya hindi makabása ang mga ordinaryong Filipino ay dahil napakamahal ang libro. Dahil di nakararating ang libro sa baryo at probinsya. Dahil nakasulat sa wikang hindi nilá ginagámit. Dahil tungkol sa mga karanasang malayô sa kaniláng búhay. Atbp, atbp.

Sa kabilâng dako, hindi dapat maliitin ang panitikang pabigkas.

Maaaring di ito “intellectual” sa istandard ng mga edukado sa banyagang kultura at pilosopiya. Ngunit may tagalay itong mataas na uri ng karanungan. Karunungan higit na ninanais marinig ng bayan dahil hango sa kaniláng karanasan at paniwala at nása wika at anyong minamahal nilá. Samakatwid, ang layuning “to raise oral literature to the level of written literature” ay hitik sa aristokratang damdamin kung hindi baluktot na pag-unawa at pagpapahalaga sa panitikang pabigkas, lalo na ang mga tradisyonal na panitikang pabigkas.

Ang punto ko, ang buong pistang ito ngayon ay higit na dapat magadhikang ibalik ang panitikan sa puso ng sambayanan. At hindi maibabalik ang panitikan sa puso ng sambayanan sa pamamagitan ng “pagtataas” ng panitikang pabigkas sa antas ng nakasulat na panitikan.

Kailangan ang wastong pagpapahalaga at pagtingin sa panitikang pabigkas.

Halimbawa, suriin ang pamagat ng ating pista. Sinabi ko nang napakaganda; hitik sa malikhaing paglalaro sa salitâ. Ngunit paglalaro sa dalawang banyagang wika. Táyo ring mga edukado lámang, kung sakali, and mapapangiti sa naturang laro. Paano kaya ang masa? Ang pinakamasugid sa kanilá ay titingin sa diksiyonaryo. Ngunit para mabigo. Kaya kailangan niláng marinig ang paliwanag ni Vim Nadera. (Kung sa bagay, bakâ wala naman silá ngayon sa CCP at táyo-tayo ring mga burges at edukado and audience ng Performatura.) Ngunit ang nais ko pang sabihin, kung tunay na gusto nating ibalik ang panitikan sa puso ng sambayanan at dapat muna nating titigang mabuti ang ating sarili. Dahil bakâ ang ninanais nating idulot sa kanilá ay ang ating sarili, at hindi ang kailangan niláng mahalin. Dahil bakâ pinaglalaruan din lámang natin, tulad ng mga politiko’t negosyante, and kaniláng puso’t kalooban.

Balikan ko pa ang press release. Bakit kailangang banggitin si Pio Zirimu? Dahil isa siyang lingguwistang taga-Uganda na naging matagumpay sa pagbúhay sa pantikang pabigkas. Ok lang. Ngunit, at ito ang aking malaking ngunit, kailangan bang sambayanan ang modelo ng Uganda para magbalik ng kaniláng pagmamahal sa panitikan?

Sa aking munting kaalaman, buháy na buháy ang panitikang pabigkas sa puso ng ating mga kababayan, lalo na sa kanayunang hindi nasasaula ng komersiyalismo’t mordenong teknolohiya. Sa gayon, ang higit nating kailangang palaganapin ay ang nása puso nilá bagaman sa paraang

binabago alinsunod sa ating adhikang pambansang pagbabago. Dapat táyong mag-umpisa sa mga anyo at wikang alam nilá.

Kagabi, ginawa kong palaisipan kong paano ko ba ipapaliwanag ang “performatura” sa aking mga kababayan sa Bulacan. Naghanap ako ng mai-tutumbas kong salitâ sa nais na ipakahulugan ni Vim Nadera sa “perfor-matura.” Pinaglimian ko ang mga salitâng-ugat na “**tanghál**,” “**hárag**” o “**hárag**,” at “**ganáp**.” Pawang may aspekto ito ng ibig sabihin sa Ingles ng *performance*. Ngunit paglaon, inalis ko ang “tanghál” dahil higit na itong na-kaugnay sa “**pagtatanghál**” na ginagámit sa pagsasadula at sa eksibit. Inalis ko rin ang “hárag” o “hárag” dahil waring higit na nauukol sa pagsasabi ng nása isip, gaya sa “**pahayagán**” o sa maramihang pagkilos gaya sa “**pama-mahayág**.”

Tinitigan ko ang “ganáp.” Sa matandang diksiyonaryo, may una itong kahulugan “*cumplimiento*” sa Español. Na kung isasaling muli sa Filipino ay katumbas ng “**pagtupád**” o “**katupáran**” ng isang gawain. Kung isa-salin sa Ingles, puwedeng “*execution*” at “*performance*.” Bilang pang-uri, ginagámit natin ito ngayong singkahulugan ng “**kompleto**” o “**lubós**” o kaya “**natupád na**” o “**nabuò na**.” Tinutukoy nitó ang isang trabaho o isang aktibidad na dapat tuparin o kumpletuhin. Kayâ ang trabaho o aktibidad ay “**nagaganáp**” hábang tinutupad o sa buong panahon ng pagtupad. Ang mga gumagawa o kalahok sa trabaho ay may “**gampánin**” o tungkuling dapat tupdin. Mula dito ang idyomatikong salitâng “**kagampán**” o buntis, dahil malapit nang matapos ang kaniyang gampanin.

Hindi ko hinahangad na magkaroon kayo ng hilig tulad ng bisyo kong magbuklat ng mga diksiyonaryo at tumitig sa ugat ng mga salitâ. Ngunit katulad din nitó ang kailangan nating sipag upang tuklasin ang ating mga tradisyonal na panitikang pabigkas. Hindi maari ang medyo-medyo lang. Kailangang ganap nating gagap ang nais nating palaganapin. Halimbawa, nabása kong may marathon reading kayo ng *Florante at Laura*. Napakagan-dang proyekto para muling akitin ang madla kay Balagtas. Dahil kinakata ang *Florante at Laura*. Kayâ tinawag itong “awit” ni Epifanio de los Santos. At may patunay si EDSA na narinig niyang inaawit ang mga saknong ng *Florante at Laura* ng isang magsasaka at ng isang bangkero hábang nagtatrabaho. Idadagdag ko pa na sana ay may talakayan sa kabuluhan ni Balagtas ngayon. Ang totoo, nais kong isúlong na kung iimbata ng mga sikát na ma-nunulat, mas pagsalitain silá hinggil sa paborito niláng panitikang-bayan.

Para mas makatulong silá sa adhika ng *Performatura*.

Ang ibig ko pang sabihin, mahabáng panahon ang kailangan para matupad ang adhika ng *Performatura*. Binabati ko ang CCP sa pagtangkilik ng pistang ito. Binabati ko si Vim Nadera at mga kasáma sa magandang proyektong ito. Sana magpatuloy at higit pa itong lumaganap. Sapagkat kapag nangyari iyon, magkakaroon ng katuparan ang adhika ngayon ng *Performatura*. Magkakaroon ito ng magandang---**Kaganápan**. At hindi ko ibig sabihin ang bastardong gámit ng akademya sa “kaganapan.” Ang “kaganapan” hindi bílang sinonimo lang ng “pangyayari” kundi ang “Kaganapan” bílang wakas o katuparan ng isang performance.

Kayod pa!

Ferndale Homes

30 Marso 2017

Nobelistikong Kompulsiyon: Pagbasa sa Moog (1991)

Chuckberry J. Pascual

“Tuwina, pag may nilulutas, munti ma’t masaklaw na suliranin, sumasangguni ka sa nakalipas. At mag-isa ka man, o may kasama, pilit na lalakbayin mo ang nakaraan. Maglalakbay ka: maghahanap, magsasaliksik, manghihinagap. Ang nakaraan mo’y ngangyunin.”

B. S. Medina, Jr. (19)

Sa *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ibinahagi ni Freud ang kuwento ng isang batang naglalaro gamit ang isang bolang nakakabit sa sinulid. Aniya, pirmi itong ipinupukol ng bata palayo, iyong hindi na nito makita ang bola, at pagkuwa’y hinihila itong muli gamit ang sinulid. Nakilala ang kasong ito bilang “*fort-da*” na ang ibig sabihin ay “nawala” (*fort*) at “narito” (*da*). Binigyang kahulugan ito ni Freud bilang pamamaraan ng bata upang matanggap ang pag-alis ng kaniyang ina. Naging isang uri ng ehersisyo ang pagkawala at pagbabalik ng bola sa pinagdaraan ng bata. Nagiging katanggap-tanggap ang pagkawala, dahil sa pag-aabang sa dulot na lugod (*pleasure*) ng pagbabalik. Nakakatulong rin ito upang makasambot ng kapangyarihan ang bata sa sitwasyon na tila wala siyang kontrol. Sa pagbabanyuhay ng pag-abandona bilang isang laro, isa na siyang *aktibong* ahente, sa halip na *pasibo* lamang, na naghihintay sa tuwina. (Freud 8-10)

Mahalaga ang interpretasyong ito ni Freud sa larong fort-da sa pag-unawa ko sa mga akda ni B. S. Medina, Jr. Tulad ng batang inuulit-ulit ang

pagpukol at paghila sa bolang may sinulid, inuulit-ulit din ni Medina ang ilang elemento sa mga nobela. Ito ang dahilan kung bakit isasangkot din ang mga nobelang *Salingdugo* at *Huling Himagsik* bagaman ang pangunahing tatalakayin sa papel na ito ay ang nobelang *Moog*. Kung ang takot na maiwan (fear of abandonment) ang problemang tinatangkang lutasin ng batang naglalaro ng fort-da, ang iminumungkahi ko namang nilulutas ni Medina sa kaniyang mga nobela ay ang trauma ng panghihimasok ng bansa sa kaniyang pamilya. May partikular na tuon rin sa isyu ng kolaborasyon, na matingkad na inuusisa sa tatlong nobelang ito.

Pagtukoy sa moog

Ang *Moog* ang unang nobela ni B. S. Medina, Jr. Taong 1991 ito unang inilimbag, at nagwagi sa Gawad Palanca noong 1993. Maigsi lamang ang nobela: binubuo ito ng apat na kabanata. Sa kabila nito, malawak ang panahon na sinaklaw ng akda. Taong 1941 hanggang sa pananakop ng mga Hapon ang saklaw ng unang kabanata, habang maipagpapalagay naman na tapos na ang EDSA Revolution sa mga sumunod na kabanata. Sa kabila nito, tila ikinukuwadro ni Medina ang kaniyang nobela higit bilang isang nobelang domestiko, kaysa nobelang historikal.¹ Narito ang nakalagay na paglalarawan sa nilalaman ng aklat:

Bawat tao ay isang moog. Isang hugis ng kamalayan, isang hubog ng pagkatao. Bawat supling ng tao ay isang bagong moog: bagong kamalayan, bagong pagkatao. Ang nobelang ito ay kasaysayan ng ipinagpapalagay na unang moog, pinagmulang moog na di maitatatwang mag-iiwan ng kaniyang tanda---matiim, matibay. Kasaysayan ito ng isang pamilya---Enrico, Vi, Rel, Ruso, at Risa---na may moog na pinagmulan, at bawat isa sa kaanak ay nagtatayo ng moog na di makakawala sa kamalayang-mula na iyon. May inihahabilin ang nobelang ito: sapagkat may pinagmulan, may uuwian din nga kung iibigin, kung mamarapatin.

1 Batid kong hindi naman eksklusibo sa isa't isa ang domestiko at historikal (maaari namang magkaroon ng nobelang domestikong historikal, halimbawa), ngunit para sa papel na ito, ang distingsiyon na tinutukoy ko ay kung alin ang mas binibigyang timbang sa nobela: ang nobelang domestiko ay mas may pagpapahalaga sa mga isyung personal, at ang nobelang historikal ay iyong mas pagtutuon sa mga malalaking puwersang pangkasaysayan, kundi man pambansa, at kung paanong nahuhubog nito ang takbo ng naratibo.

Gayunpaman, walang alinmang panghabangpanahon.
Maging ang moog. (n.p.)

Sapin-sapin ang pagpapakahulugan dito ni Medina sa salitang moog. Una, patungkol ito sa mismong indibidwal na gumagabay at nagsisilbing tanggulan ng iba. Ang “ipinagpapalagay na unang moog” ay ang ama ni Enrico, ang pangunahing tauhan ng nobela. Maaari ring patungkol ito sa institusyon ng pamilya, na nagsisilbing moog sa bawat miyembro nito, hanggang sa tulad ni Enrico, ay bumuo na rin ng sariling pamilya, at sa gayon ay magtayo na rin ng sariling “moog.” Ang ikatlong pakahulugan sa moog ay nasa lebel ulit ng indibidwal, pero mas mayroong kinalaman sa kaniyang identidad, sa pagkabuo niya bilang isang subheto na bukod at hindi maaaring pasukin ng ibang tao.

Interesante ang pagpili sa salitang moog para ilarawan ang katangian ng indibidwal at pamilya, dahil sa paglalarawan ni Medina sa pangako nito ng kawalang maliw. Una, wala raw maliw ang epekto ng “pinagmulang moog.” Kahit magtayo na ng sariling moog ang mga indibidwal, hindi pa rin “makakawala” ang mga ito “sa kamalayang-mula.” Ikalawa, sa pagturing sa pamilya at indibidwal bilang moog, na may kahulugang “kuta o tanggulan” (*UP Diksiyong Filipino*, 569), kakambal nito ang konotasyon ng panganib. Mahalagang sumuling sa moog, ang maging isang moog, upang maging ligtas mula sa mga (inaasahang) atake. Kakapal pa ang pangako ng panganib kapag isinaalang-alang ang pagtatapos ng sipi mula kay Medina: “walang panghabangpanahon. Maging ang moog.”

Ngayon, batay sa mga ito, maaaring ipagpalagay na para kay Medina, ang impluwensiya ng magulang (ang pangunahing moog) ay walang maliw, na kaya nitong saklawan ang buhay pamilya ng anak, kahit na ang anak na ito ay bumuo na rin ng pamilya. May implikasyon ito sa usapin ng pinagmulan (origin). Kung susundan nga ang ganitong lohika, ang haharapin ay isang mahabang kadena ng impluwensiya, na ang dapat tuntunin ay ang bukod-tanging “pinagmulang moog.” Ang pag-unawa ba sa indibidwal kung gayon ay usapin ng pag-unawa sa kaniyang magulang, o sa epekto sa kanya ng kaniyang mga magulang? Usapin ba ito ng orihinaryo?

Saykoanalitiko ang problemang ito, dahil mayroong kinalaman sa mga pasikot-sikot at pagkabuo ng kamalayan ng indibidwal, partikular

sa mga nakalipas na pangyayari sa kaniyang buhay, na nananatiling may impluwensiya sa kaniyang kasalukuyan. Ang usapin ng orihinaryo na nabuksan sa pagpapakahulugan sa moog ay maaaring tugunan ng paghahanap sa primal scene, na para kay Freud ay ang pagsaksi ng isang paslit sa pagtatalik ng kaniyang mga magulang (Freud *Complete Works* 1468-1476).

Sa nobela, malinaw ang pagposisyon sa ama ni Enrico bilang “pinagmulang moog.” Nakatuon ang unang kabanata sa mga karanasan ni Enrico noong kaniyang kabataan. Maaari ngang basahin ang nobela na magsisimula lamang sa ikalawang kabanata, at hindi naman maaapektuhan ang takbo ng kuwento. Pero dahil naroon nga ang unang kabanata, tila ipinapahiwatig ng nobela na ito ang sumisipa sa naratibo: nangyari ang mga nangyari sa mga sumunod na kabanata dahil sa unang kabanata, hindi nakawala ang mga ito sa “kamalayang-mula.” Sa saykoanalisis, ito ang laging binabalikang kabataan; at tunay naman: ang kabanatang iyon ay nagsasalaysay ng kabataan ni Enrico.

Ang trauma ng bansa

Ano ngayon ang maituturing na primal scene ng nobelang *Moog*? Ano ang traumatikong pangyayari na nasaksihan ni Enrico, na siyang dahilan ng kaniyang mga sumunod na desisyon sa buhay?

Naganap ang mga pangyayari sa unang kabanata noong panahon ng Ikalawang Digmaang Pandaigdig. Nagsimula ito sa pagdiriwang ng Pista ng Santo Niño (Medina 1), at nagtapos sa paglilibing sa ama ni Enrico. (36-37) Sa pagitan nito, ipinakita ang pagsasalikop ng personal at pambansang karanasan, na kapwa nagkaroon ng epekto kay Enrico sa mga sumunod na kabanata.

Ipinakilala muna ang ama, si Augusto Galdula, bilang isang makapangyarihang pigura sa buhay ni Enrico. Isa itong mediko, kuntodo mayroong sariling klinika, ngunit nagsisilbing patnugot sa diyaryo. (7) Ito ang pinuno ng kanilang tahanan na maituturing na kombensiyonal, dahil mayroong malinaw na paghahati sa mga papel: ang ina ang namamahala sa mga gawaing bahay, at ang ama ang inaasikaso (“Si Nanay ang nag-aasikaso sa lahat ng pangangailangan ni Itay—mulang bihisan hanggang pagkain nito.”) (10) Inilarawan ang ina bilang “maliit na babae” na mistulang “kinuyumos na bulaklak” kapag nasa bisig ng lalaki. (8) Habang ang ama ay

“di kalakihang tao, ngunit matipuno ang katawan” (5) at may utos na hindi dapat baliin: ayaw nitong dumarayo ang kaniyang pamilya sa ibang bahay kapag mayroong pagdiriwang; sila raw ang nararapat na dayuhin. (9) Mas tumitingkad ang mga kombensiyonal na katangian na ito dahil umabot hanggang sa panlasa sa kape ng mga magulang ni Enrico: “Matapang magkape si Itay. Nahawa na rin si Inay. Maraming gatas ang panimpla ni Inay. Walang asukal si Itay.” (15)

Ang kaniyang mga kapatid naman ay maituturing ding kombensiyonal. Ang pinagkakaabalahan lang ni Josie, ang kaniyang kapatid na babae ay pag-aasawa, kaya nakabuhos ang atensiyon nito sa kaniyang mga manliligaw (26), habang ang kuya naman niyang si Edgardo, ang bukod-tanging may lakas ng loob na manindigan sa kanilang ama: sumusuway ito sa utos (9), at pumupuslit sa bahay. (11, 14)

Ipinakilala rin sa unang kabanata ang Ninong ni Enrico. Ito raw ay “kakatawan ng Tatay. Kapwa malakas ang kanilang tinig. Mahalakhakin sila kapwa. Kapwa nananabako. Laging may dalang baston si Ninong... Si Tatay man ay mayroon.” (5) Pero hindi natatapos ang pagkakatulad ng dalawa sa pisikal, dahil bumuo na rin si Enrico sa kaniyang isip ng magkatambal na pag-uugali, gawi, at pagkatao ng dalawa: “Sa guniguni ko, si Ninong at si Tatay ay magkaisa ng hilig. Sa pananamit. Sa pananabako. Sa pagbabaston. Sa pag-uusap sa mga bagay-bagay na may kinalaman sa kabuhayan, gobyerno, pulitika, at babae... Para silang magkabiyak na bunga. Anino ng isa ang kabila.” (5-6)

Mahalagang detalye ang pagtaguri sa Ninong at ama bilang “anino” ng bawat isa. (34) Dahil sa takbo ng kuwento, matutuklasan ni Enrico na may mga katangian pala ang kaniyang Ninong na taliwas sa kaniyang mga inaasahan (na bunga naman ng kaniyang kombensiyonal na pagpapalaki): wala pala itong sariling anak, nambababae pala ito, at nang maglaon ay siyang naging instrumento para bumagsak ang kaniyang ama. Gayundin, may mga desisyon ang kaniyang ama, na katunggali ng desisyon ng kaniyang Ninong.

Bagaman masasabing tama naman si Medina sa paglalarawan sa kaniyang nobela bilang domestiko, kung hindi man insular, dahil ang pangunahing layon ay ibahagi ang kasaysayan ng isang pamilya, itinatanghal rin sa kaniyang akda ang intrusyon ng mga usaping bayan sa kanilang mga buhay. Noong kasagsagan ng digmaan, lubos na tumaliwas sa ama si

Edgardo, at naging isang gerilya. (29) Naging gerilya rin ang Ninong ni Enrico. Nang mapaalis ang mga Hapon at bumalik ang mga Amerikano, ito rin mismo ang nagsuplong sa kaniyang ama bilang isang kulaburetor (26-28)

Ang pagkawasak ng imahen ng kaniyang ama, ang pagkakahati ng pamilya dahil sa mga paninindigang pampolitika—kasama sa kompigurasyong ito ang “Ninong” bilang anino ni Augusto Gatdula—ang maituturing na traumatikong pangyayari sa buhay ni Enrico. Nanghimasok ang bansa sa ipinagpapalagay ni Enrico na tahimik na espasyo ng kaniyang buhay, at nahirapan siyang tanggapin ito. Tingnan halimbawa itong pagtatangka niyang bigyan ng katuwiran ang kolaborasyon ng kaniyang ama:

Kulaburetor si Itay. Nakipagmabutihan siya sa kaaway na Hapon. Siya ang nagpatakbo ng peryodiko, pagkat hiling ng may-ari ng pasulatan na halinhan niya ang editor na nagpapanggap na may sakit. May sakit! Walang sakit si Itay. May sakit ang editor. Utos ng Hapon na patakbuhan ang peryodiko. May pamilya si Itay. Wala bang pamilya ang may sakit na editor? Hindi isasapanganib ni Itay ang kaniyang pamilya. (29)

Tila mayroong pagtutol ang nobela sa pakikisangkot ng bansa, dahil ibinababa ng katwirang ito ang lebel ng diskurso mula pambansa patungo sa personal. May pagkilala sa eksternal na puwersa, may pagkilala sa kapangyarihan ng mananakop, ngunit ang pagtutuos ay nasa usapin pa rin ng pamilya. Mababanaag din ang argumentong ito sa naging pahayag ng ina ni Enrico sa kaniyang Ninong: “Ano ba naman? Kilala mo ang kaibigan mo!” (29)---isang asersiyon na ang dapat tingnan ng Ninong ni Enrico ay ang personal na relasyon, ang pagkakakilala niya sa “ubod” ng pagkatao ni Augusto Gatdula, at hindi ang mga politikal na implikasyon ng mga personal na desisyon nito noong panahon ng Hapon.

Hindi na idinetalye ang pinagdaanan ni Augusto Gatdula matapos arestuhin bilang kulaburetor. Basta sinabi na lamang na napawalang sala naman ito, at nang maglaon, inatake sa puso at namatay. (30) Sa burol ng ama, natuklasan ni Enrico ang panibagong aspekto ng buhay nito bilang

anino: nagkaroon ito ng anak sa ibang babae, at hindi lamang sa kung sinong babae, kundi kay Linda, ang kinakasama ng kaniyang Ninong. (36) Hindi na muling binalikan ang aspektong ito ng kuwento,² at sa halip ay ibinulid na lamang sa mga panganib na pinagdaraan sa paglaki ng indibidwal: “Naisip ko na hindi malayong maaagnas na yaong mga tanong na naghanap ng kasagutan nang marami ring pista ni Santo Niño.” (36) Dahil dito, muling nilulusaw ng nobela ang usaping pambayan patungo sa personal, dahil nalalambungan ng personal na intensiyon ang dapat sana’y makabayang desisyon na arestuhin si Augusto Gatdula: aba, pinindeho pala nito ang sariling kaibigan, kaya isinuplong na kulaburetor ng mga Hapon!

Malinis ang pagsasara ng kabanata sa ganitong paraan, dahil nagsimula ito at nagtapos nang may alusyon sa pagdiriwang ng pista ng Santo Niño. Pero may saykoanalitikal na aspekto ring mahuhutok sa pagtatabing ito ng kasaysayan ni Enrico at ng Santo Niño: bagaman lumaki na si Enrico, at “namulat” na sa mga katotohanan ng buhay, nananatili pa rin siyang maliit, nananatiling bata, kahit na siya ay “diyos,” at may kakayahang magtayo ng sariling moog.

Sa mga susunod na kabanata, itinatanghal na si Enrico bilang isang responsableng lalaki na mayroong sariling pamilya. Mayroon siyang tatlong anak, sina Rel, Ruso, at Risa. Pinapalaki niya ang mga ito, kasama ang kaniyang asawang si Vi.

Sa unang kabanata, ipinahiwatig na lumalaki si Enrico na tulad ng kaniyang ama: “Sabi nga ng Nanay ko, gaya ko rin daw ang Tatay ko. Ayaw nang talagang basta magbalita lamang; sinasabayan ng sigabo ng guniguni ang mga sinusulat.” (20) At nagkatotoo ito: sa kanya naiwan ang pinapahalagahan nilang bahay sa Kalamba (49), at salita rin ang ikinabuhay: nagtatrabaho siya dati sa isang sangay ng gobyerno na namamahala sa information service, hanggang sa bumukod at nagtayo na lamang ng sariling negosyo. (53) At kung nanghimasok ang bansa sa buhay ni Augusto Gatdula sa pamamagitan ng pananakop ng mga Hapon, nanghimasok naman ang bansa sa buhay ni Enrico Gatdula nang maganap ang EDSA Revolution. Naritong muli ang isyu ng kolaborasyon sa mapaniil na gobyerno, ngunit sa pagkakataong ito, hindi na dayuhan ang

2 Mayroon ding posibilidad na hindi pala talaga baog ang kaniyang Ninong, at nagkaanak sila ni Linda. Pero dahil hindi naniniwala ang Ninong na kaya nga niyang magkaroon ng anak, pinagbintangan niya si Augusto Gatdula. Madali itong isipin, dahil inamin mismo ni Linda na si Augusto ang kaniyang unang inibig.

gobyernong mapaniil. Walang pagbanggit sa pangalan, ngunit malinaw na administrasyong Marcos ang tinutukoy sa nobela. Basahin ang sipi:

Ang tanggapan naming nakikipag-ugnay sa gobyerno ay binubuhay ng administrasyong nanganganib na mapalitan (ibinabadya ng EDSA, at kasaysayan na ang nagtala sa naging pasiya ng bayan). Tanggapan namin ang tumulong sa paghahanda ng isang malawakang *information plan*—para sa ikabubuti ng bayan, sa ikabubuti ng lahat. Isa ako sa mga kasangguning gumuhit ng planong iyon. Itatatwa ko ba? Ang gayong katotohanan ay alam ng aking pamilya. Alam ni Rel, ni Ruso, ni Risa. Tiyak kong kaisa ko si Vi kung magpapasya kami. Hindi kami sumama kay Ruso sa EDSA. (77)

Tulad ng kaniyang ama, naging isang kulaburetor din si Enrico. Tulad din nito, hindi niya ikinahihiya na ginawa niya ito para buhayin ang kaniyang pamilya. Ngunit hindi tulad ng kaniyang ama, na itinulak din sa kolaborasyon ng pagiging pinuno ng neighborhood association (27), wala nang ibang buhay na isinasaalang-alang si Enrico maliban sa kaniyang sariling asawa at mga anak. Kaya bagaman maaaring mabanaagan ng delikadesa ang desisyon na hindi pumunta sa EDSA, higit itong kakikitaan ng nananatiling katapatan sa mga Marcos. Mas titingkad pa ang pagtanaw ng utang na loob sa pagtukoy sa gobyernong Marcos bilang “gobyernong bumubuhay sa aming tanggapan” (78) at sa maluwag na pagtanggap sa stigma ng pagiging loyalista sa pahayag na “Mabuti nang mabuti kung sasangguniin pa rin kami ng kahaliling administrasyon.” (78)

At mularito, binibitiwan ng nobela ang pakikipag-ugnayan sa bayan—may higing ng pagpapaubaya sa “ibinabadya ng EDSA, at kasaysayan na ang nagtala sa naging pasiya ng bayan”—at itinuon na lamang ang atensiyon sa usaping personal. Dito na inilahad ni Enrico ang problema ng isang magulang—ng isang “pinagmulang moog”—na walang magawa kundi pagmasdan ang unti-unting paglayo ng mga anak, ang pagsasarili ng mga ito, ang pagtatayo, kung hindi man pagguho, ng kani-kanilang mga moog: ang pagbukod ng tirahan at maagang pagtatrabaho ni Ruso, ang pag-aasawa ni Rel, at ang hindi inaasahang pagkabaliw ni Risa.

Ang kompulsiyon ng repetisyon

Ayon kay Hartmann, ang kaalaman ukol sa trauma ay mayroong dalawang elemento. Basahin ang sipi:

[T]he traumatic event [is] registered rather than experienced. It seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche. The other is a kind of memory of the event, in the form of a perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche. (537)

Labis na insular ang paggamit ng terminong pagrehistro, sa halip na pagdanas. Maaaring unawain ito bilang pagsaksi sa isang pangyayari: mayroong pag-igpaw sa pisikal at aktuwal na pagkasangkot sa dahas ngunit tumitimo sa isip (psyche). At lumilitaw ang mga marka ng dahas na ito, ang pagtimo sa isip, sa pamamagitan ng pag-uulit. Sa kaso ni Enrico, traumatiko ang pagsaksi sa pag-aresto sa kaniyang ama (29). Dito maaaring ugatin ang pag-uulit o kung minsan ay kadoblehan (sa fort-da, iisa ang bolang nilalaro ng bata, pero nagiging doble ito dahil ito ang umaalis at bumabalik na bola) na matatagpuan sa nobela.

Nagdaang panahunan at unang panauhan ang perspektibong gamit ni Medina sa *Moog*, kaya maaaring ituring na pagbabalik-tanaw na lamang ang unang kabanata. Ang pagtingin niya na anino ng isa't isa ng kaniyang ama at Ninong ay maaaring basahin bilang manipestasyon ng pag-uulit at kadoblehan: nang mawala ang kaniyang Ninong at hindi na bumalik, maaari niyang isipin na hindi naman talaga ito nawala dahil kapiling pa rin niya ang kaniyang ama. Nang magbalik naman ito para arestuhin ang kaniyang ama—at ang trauma nga ay gumuho ang kaniyang ideyalisasyon rito—isinasalba pa rin ng kaniyang Ninong ang imahen ng ama, dahil itong huli ang kumakatawan sa batas at katuwiran.

Inilarawan din ni Hartmann ang predileksiyon ng paglalahad ng trauma sa pamamaraang pantastiko. Aniya, “[a]ny general description or modeling of trauma, therefore, risks being figurative itself, to the point of mythic fantasmagoria.” (537) Kadalasan din, ang mga paglalahad na ito ay nagtatangkang maging klinikal at makatwiran (rational). (538) Sa unang malas, realistang nobela ang *Moog*. Maaari rin itong maikategorya bilang

isang nobelang historikal, dahil mayroong pagpapahalaga sa paghubog ng mga makasaysayang pangyayari sa naratibo. Pero kung babalikan ang pagtukoy ni Auerbach sa *Divina Commedia* bilang taluktok ng tinagurian niyang “figural tradition” (*Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* 67-76)—ang pagtawid ng Bibliya mula sa pagiging dokumento ng espesipikong kasaysayan ng mga taga-Israel patungo sa pagiging alegorikal na teksto, i.e. lampas sa kasaysayan—maaaring mabanaag ang kakayahan ng naratibong historikal na maging “fantasmagoriko.” Fantasmagoriko at realistiko ang akda ni Dante dahil mayroon itong reperensiya sa mga historikal na personahe, at naglalarawan ng mga pangyayari sa kabilang buhay.

Realistang nobela ang *Moog* pero may katangian din itong hindi realistiko, na maaaring sabihin na fantasmagoriko. Maaaring ugatin ang katangiang pantastiko ng realismo sa manipulasyon ng panahon. Tingnan halimbawa itong paliwanag ni James Wood ukol sa kontribusyon ni Flaubert sa tradisyon ng realismo sa panitikan, pagkatapos niyang sipiin ang isang eksena sa *Madame Bovary*:

Flaubert perfected a technique that is essential to realist narration: the confusing of habitual detail with dynamic detail. Obviously, in that Paris street, the women cannot be yawning for the same length of time as the washing is quivering or the newspapers lying on the tables. Flaubert’s details belong to different time signatures, some instantaneous and some recurrent, yet they are smoothed together as if they are all happening simultaneously. The effect is lifelike—in a beautifully artificial way. (42)

Maaaring sabihin na lantad naman ang katotohanang ito ukol sa realismo sa simula pa lamang. Representasyon lamang talaga ito, at isang malaking panlalansi na kailangang tanggapin ng mambabasa. Pero sa kaso ng mga nobelang historikal, mas tumitining ang panlalansi, dahil idinadamay ang mismong rekoleksiyon ng mambabasa sa mga aktuwal na nangyari. Nilalabusaw ang nakaraan, nilulusaw sa imahinasyon ng nobelista, at nalulusaw pang muli sa re-imahinasyon ng mambabasa. Sa ganitong pagtingin, halimbawa, maaaring sabihin na may pagkakatatulad

ang fantasmagoria na matatagpuan sa *The Book of Urizen* ni Blake, sa rekompigurasyon ng kasaysayan sa mga nobelang historikal, kumbensiyonal man o iyong itinuturing na historiographic metafiction, speculative history, at iba pa.

Matatagpuan ito sa *Moog* na tulad ng *The Book of Urizen*, ay naglalahad ng isang primal scene. (Hartmann 538) At kung ipinosiyon ni Blake ang Paglikha ng Mundo bilang pangunahing trauma ng sangkatauhan, ang intrusyon ng bansa sa institusyon ng pamilya naman ang trauma kay Medina. Tulad ng trauma, mapanakit ito, ngunit sa kabilang banda, ay mapanlikha rin. Sa wika nga ni Medina, ang “pinagmulang moog [ay] hindi maitatatwang mag-iwan ng kaniyang tanda...” (n.p.)

Hindi lamang nalimita ang naiwang tanda na ito sa isang nobela, kundi umabot sa mga sumunod niyang nobela. Mas titingkad ang pag-uulit ni Medina sa nobelang *Salingdugo*. Halos kaparehong-kapareho ito ng *Moog*, pinalitan nga lamang ang mga pangalan ng tauhan, at ginawang mas ekstensibo ang naratibo.

Nagbubukas ang *Salingdugo* sa kabanatang may titulong “Ang Tanda.” (*Salingdugo* 1) Tulad sa *Moog*, rekoleksiyon din ang pambungad ng *Salingdugo*. Minumulto si Absalom Segundo ng kaniyang nakaraan, partikular, iyong alaala ng kaniyang pamilya, at ng bahay na kaniyang kinalakhan, ang Casa Primera (*Salingdugo* 3; 52). Ang naunang bersiyon nito sa *Moog* ay tinawag namang “bahay ka-Kalamba.”³ (*Moog* 41) Ang bugso ng malakas na hangin ang nagdulot ng rekoleksiyon na ito kay Absalom Segundo, tulad ng malakas na ulan at hangin rin ang nagbunsod ng rekoleksiyon ni Enrico sa ikatlong kabanata ng *Moog*.

Umurong ang panahon sa *Salingdugo* dahil naganap ang mga pangyayari sa nobela noong Batas Militar. Gayunman, kung simpleng paghahanda ng “information plan” ang paglalarawan sa trabaho ni Enrico sa *Moog* (77), inilantad na sa *Salingdugo* ang kalikasan ng trabahong ito. Nagsimula si Absalom Segundo bilang “information officer” ng delegasyon ng “First Lady” noong nagpunta ito sa Japan (16-17), at nang maglaon, tuluyan nang nagsilbi bilang bahagi ng PR team ng Malacañang. At gaya rin ni Enrico, anak siya ng isang babaeng tahimik at kombensiyonal, si Fortuna, at ng isang “medikong peryodistang makata” (53) na siyang namahala sa

3 Mayroong pagkakataon sa nobela na tinawag ring “bahay sa Calamba, ang ka-Kalamba” ang Casa Primera. Tingnan ang B.S. Medina, Jr. *Salingdugo* (Manila: DLSU Press, 1997), 69.

periyodiko nang dumating ang mga Hapon. (86) Nagkaroon din si Absalom Segundo ng isang nakatatandang kapatid na naging gerilya. (87) At gaya sa *Moog*, ang pangangatwiran sa kolaborasyon ay muling nauuwi sa salpukan ng pamilya at bansa, ng personal at politikal, na nauuwi sa paghihiwalay ng dalawa. Basahin ang sipi:

(Hindi naman kailangang magpasya pa; sa panahong iyon, mahirap ang mawalan ng hanapbuhay. Wala naman iyon sa larangan ng putukan; nasa larangan iyon ng paghahanapbuhay sa anumang paraan. Kung hindi nagpatuloy ang pasulatan saan iyon dadamputin? Sa klinika. Bakit hindi? *General Medicine* ang alam ng Tatay niya. Kaya nga hindi niyon pangahasan ang dinaramdam ng Nanay niya. Kay Dr. Manuling pinatingnan. Ayaw pa rin daw nitong tumanggap ng kahit anong bayad. Nagdadala lamang ang Nanay niya ng anumang lutuin. Suman sa latik. Tama.) Ngunit ang pasya ni Dr. Absalom Primero ay pasya para sa lalong nakararami sa pasulatan. “Para ito sa munting bayang ito,” sabi ng Tatay niya sa ilang kasamahan. At sinabi ng Tatay niya sa Nanay niya na bakit nga ba hindi magsusulat? “Trabaho lang ito.” (*Salingdugo* 86-87)

Lumitaw lamang bilang napilitang inosenteng kultural na kulaburetor (De Viana 9) si Augusto Gatdula at inihahambing pa nga sa mga bayani (bagaman palihis, at pakuwestiyon sa kanilang nagawa para sa bayan): “Si Dr. Gatdula. Gat. Gat Jose Rizal. Gat Andres Bonifacio. Wala namang mapatutunayang ginawa ang mga iyon.” (*Moog* 27) Mayroon ding asersiyon ang unang nobela sa kadalisayan ng loob ni Gatdula, pero ibang tao ang bumabanggit rito; nanatiling tahimik si Gatdula sa kaniyang sariling mga motibasyon. Naiiba sa kanya si Absalom Primero. Binibigyang diin ng sipi sa itaas hindi lamang ang paghihiwalay ng pamilya sa bansa, kundi pinaaabot pa ito sa usapin ng buhay at kamatayan, sa *survival*, kung may higing ng katwirang naturalistiko. Sa panahon nga naman ng digmaan, tila nagbabalik sa kahayupan ang tao. Kung hindi magtatrabaho para sa mga Hapon, mamamatay sila sa gutom. Walang silbi ang politika, ang bayan,

dahil tulad ng mga hayop sa gubat, ang mahalaga lamang ay manatiling buhay. May pangmamaliit sa kakayahan ng edukasyon na sumagip ng buhay—mediko rin ang ama, pero suko ang kaalaman sa karamdaman ng ina—at maging ang serbisyo ng isang eksperto ay ibinababa sa lebel ng pagkain: nakabubusog ito, hindi katulad ng pera na walang intrinsikong halaga.

Magkapareho ang sitwasyon na nagtulak kina Absalom Primero at Augusto Gatdula na ipagpatuloy ang pagpapatakbo sa diyaryo: nagkunwaring may sakit ang punong editor, at kinailangan ng kapalit. Ngunit kung ibabatay sa motibasyon at pag-unawa sa kanilang parehong sitwasyon, nagkakaiba sila. Maaaring isama si Gatdula sa mga tinaguriang kultural na kulaburetor na bagaman naging bahagi ng mekanismo ng propaganda ng mga Hapon, ay sadyang biktima ng mga pangyayari. (De Viana 9) Mas may huwiso si Absalom Primero sa kaniyang mga desisyon, at hindi lamang simpleng biktima ng sitwasyon, dahil pinagsalita siya ni Absalom Segundo. Mailalarawan nga ang kaniyang mga pahayag bilang isang uri ng *doublespeak*: kapag ang mga kasamahan sa diyaryo ang kaharap, “para ito sa munting bayang ito”; kapag ang kausap ay sariling asawa, “trabaho lang ito.” May sangsang ang ganitong pananalita ng wika ng mga kulaburetor na nakikipagtulungan sa kaaway para isulong ang personal at oportunistikong mga layon.

Dahil sa pangangatwiran na ito, nalalambungan ng pagiging makasarili kahit ang tila “pagsasakripisyo” ni Absalom Primero na maging kabesa ng barangay, maliban pa sa pagiging editor, dagdag na responsibilidad para sa mga mananakop. “Para sa ikatatahimik natin” naman ang kaniyang katwiran. (*Salingdugo* 88) Hindi malayong ang “natin” rito ay patungkol lamang sa pamilya, at hindi sa mas nakararami.

Ang ikatlong nobela, ang *Huling Himagsik*, ay isa namang dramatisasyon ng relasyon ng isang pamilya na muling pinanghimasukan ng politika. Ngunit sa pagkakataong ito, mas pahiwas ang pagtalakay nito sa trauma ng bansa, dahil mas tumutok sa relasyon na pinahagingan lamang sa *Moog* at *Salingdugo*: ang tunggalian ng amang kulaburetor at anak na gerilya.

Ang ama sa *Huling Himagsik* ay si Juan Andres, isang heneral (*Huling Himagsik* 3). Asawa niya ang matapang na si Salvacion (16), at mayroon silang anak, si Israel, na naging isang rebelde na lumalaban sa pamahalaan

(14, 16). Kaiba sa naunang dalawang nobela, hindi masyadong nilinaw ang panahon sa nobelang ito. Hindi sapat ang mga espesipikong detalye para ilugar kung kaninong administrasyon ang pinagsisilbihan ni Andres.⁴ Pero ang binigyan ng diin sa pagkakataong ito ay ang nakaraan na nagmumulto sa kasalukuyan ng nobela: ang mga pag-aalsa at himagsikan noong ika-19 na dantaon sa Pilipinas.

Higit nang malinaw ang politikang kaakibat ng kolaborasyon sa pagkakataong ito—hindi na mga dayuhan ang nasa pamahalaan, at hindi rin naman diktador—bagaman mas nagiging komplikado ang itinatanghal na salpukan ng mga motibasyon. Maka-kaliwa si Israel, at tinitingnan ang kaniyang desisyon bilang pagpapatuloy sa digmaang bayan na sinimulan pa noong panahon ng Kastila, lalo na at mayroon itong pagkiling sa mga lumad; gobyerno naman ang pinapanigan ni Juan Andres. Kaiba sa paninindigan nina Augusto Gatdula at Absalom Primero, mas mapapangatwiran ang paninindigan ni Andres na may pagsasaalang-alang siya sa kapakanan ng nakararami. Basahin ang siping ito:

Rebelde, *my foot!* Sino ba ang talagang rebelde? Ang naghahayag na siya'y kalaban ng gobyerno sa kapalpakan nito? Isang nagpapakitang-gilas na matapat siya sa usapin para sa mahihirap, pero hindi siya lulusong sa larangan, gaya ni Israel, gaya ni Salvaciong ina nito? O ang nagtatago ng gayong paninindigan, at gumagawa ng hakbang para maitangkakal ang pinagmamalasakitan? O sino ang rebelde? Ang nagsusuri sa problema? O ang kumikilos na nang di ganap ang paniwala sa nagsusuri pa? (24)

Kung babalikan ang interpretasyon ni Freud sa larong fort-da, at ihahalintulad si Medina sa batang inihahagis ang bola para lamang hilahin ito, tila nagkakaroon na ng hugis sa siping ito ang resolusyon sa trauma sa mga nobela ni Medina: hindi talaga maiiwasan ang pagsangkot ng pamilya sa mga usaping pambansa, at hindi laging malinaw ang distinksiyon sa tama at mali sa mga panahong nagaganap ito. Hindi lubos na masama ang

4 Kung ibabatay sa taon ng publikasyon—1998—maaaring ipagpalagay na administrasyon ni Ramos ang pinagsilbihan ni Juan Andres. Ngunit binubura pa rin ito ng paulit-ulit na pagkuwestiyon ng nobela sa taon ng pangyayari.

mga kulaburetor dahil kahit personal ang kanilang motibasyon, mayroon din namang ibang nakinabang sa kanilang pakikipagtulungan sa kaaway, e.g. ang mga manggagawa sa palimbagan, ang mga kasama nila sa barangay. Gayundin, hindi rin dalisay ang intensiyon ng mga kumokondena sa mga kulaburetor, at nalalambungan din ng impluwensiya ng personal na posisyon ang kanilang mga desisyong politikal. At sa kaso ng mag-ama sa *Huling Himagsik*, lantaran nang kinuwestiyon ni Medina ang krisis sa awtentisidad na nasa ubod ng trauma ng kaniyang mga nobela: sino ba ang tunay na kakampi ng bayan, ang kulaburetor/taong gobyerno/ama o ang gerilya/rebelde/anak?

Ayon kay Rodi-Risberg, matapang ang panitikang trauma. Hindi ito kumukurap sa harapan ng inilalarawang “panlabas na reyalidad.” Basahin ang sipi:

literary works that depict trauma, rather than looking away from its external reality, often explain social causes of abuse and offer social critique. Narratives of trauma are concerned with socio-political, cultural, pedagogical, historical, and ethical issues and functions. In tackling the consequences of situations *in extremis*, trauma fiction signals an ethical function: it deals with both the causes for and the consequences of a particular traumatic experience from a more personalized, integrated, and complete scope than explorations into trauma in other fields may do. (15)

Matatagpuan ang katangiang ito sa mga nobela ni Medina: mayroong pagtatangka na hutukin ang dahilan ng traumatikong karanasan batay sa mga panlipunang salik. May implikasyon ito ng pagpapahalaga sa espesipiko at historikal na katangian ng nobela. Nagtangka rin ang kaniyang mga akda na ipaliwanag ang mga motibasyon ng mga taong inakusahang kaaway ng bayan sa mga kritikal na yugto ng kasaysayan.

Gayunman, mayroon pa rin itong kakayahan na burahin ang mismong mga katangian na ito—ang historikal at espesipiko—at makikita ito sa mas eksplisitong demonstrasyon ni Medina ng relasyon ng nakaraan at kasalukuyan sa *Huling Himagsik*—tulad ng ama at ninong ni Enrico sa *Moog*, mistulang anino sila ng isa’t isa—dahil sa pagsasalitan, kundi man

pagsasalimbayan, ng mga inilalahad na pangyayari sa nobela. Ang mismong estilo rin na pinili ni Medina ay maaaring ikawing sa modernistang stream-of-consciousness—na maaari ring ituring na fantasmagoriko kung papansinin ang walang kaayusang agos ng panahon, imahen, at pagsunod sa lohikang hindi ginagabayan ng realism—dahil halos lahat ay nagagagap lamang ng mambabasa sa pamamagitan ng kamalayan ni Juan Andres—at ang kamalayang ito ay pasikot-sikot, panay ang pakikipagbalyahan sa mga lumipas na pangyayari, na nag-aanyo bilang mga talatang nakapanaklong. Sinasalamín din ito ng estruktura ng nobela: napapagitnaan ang kabanatang nagbabalik-tanaw ng dalawang “aklat” na nasa kasalukuyan ang panahon. Tingnan halimbawa ang siping ito, na naglalarawan ng pagsasalimbayan sa isip ni Andres ng pagdedesisyon tungkol sa pagligtas sa buhay ng isang rebeldeng babarilin, ng alaala ng nakaraan, habang binabalikan niya sa isip ang panahon na naging bihag siya ng mga sosyalista:

Muli, tumigil ang mundo. Nalampasan na niya, ni Juan Andres, ang mga iwa sa lupang sinugatan ng mga sunud-sunod na putok. Kanina. Ngayon may mga iwa sa kanlungan, mga iwang sugat ng mga nagdaang paghahamok. *Viva la independencia...* Mabuhay! Ngunit sa ibang sugat sa katawan ng kanlungan—Mamatay ang suwail! Sino ang suwail? “Magsama-sama!” May mga gurlis, guhit, karit, krus, kris? (Yao din ba ang kanlungan ni Maypag-asa noon? Kasama ang Jacinto, Plata, Arellano. Yao din ba?) Ginigiyagis ng ilang gunita si Juan Andres. Gunita ng isang yungib isang Biyernes Santo. Biyernes Santo bang muli? Tuwing ganitong kakanlong sa yungib, naghihingalo ba ang kaluluwa? O yumao na ang katawang lupa? O mababanaagan na ba ng bagong kaayusan? (84)

Tulad ng ginagawa ni Flaubert at ng mga realista, nilalabusaw niya ang panahon at pagkilos, ngunit hindi para lansihi ang mambabasa at papaniwalain sa isang artipisyal na kariktan ng kaayusang realistiko sa papel, kundi para lusawin ang pagkakaiba ng dalawa. Tulad ng paglalarawan ni Auerbach sa pagkalusaw ng partikularidad ng kasaysayan ng Bibliya, patungo sa pagbabanyuhay bilang alegorya (*Scenes from the Drama* 67-

76), sa walang tigil na pagsasalpok ni Medina sa nakaraan at kasalukuyan ng kaniyang nobela, lumulutang din ang naratibo, at maging ang tauhan mismo ay nawawalan ng historikal na panimbang. Kaya nagkakaroon ng lohika ang mga ganitong uri ng pagtatanong at pagdududa sa nobela: “Nilundag niya ang may hawak ng riple. Remington? Remington ng 1896? Remington ng 1945? Remington ng 1986? Remington ng 1998.” (3)

Sa kaniyang tatlong nobela, tinuntungan ni Medina ang kasaysayan para iangat ang kaniyang naratibong inuulit-ulit sa estado ng alegorya, sa estado ng partikular at unibersal. Partikular ito, dahil laging sinasala sa lente ng personal at pamilya, at maging sa bansa, ngunit unibersal ito dahil mayroong tungkuling etikal—ano ang tama at mali?—at dahil ang pambansa at politikal na drama ay nagbabanyuhay bilang dramang saykoanalitikal: ang negosasyon ng kapangyarihan ng ama at anak, ina at anak. Ang mga nobela ni Medina ay tila isang larong pampanitikang fort-da: kinailangan niyang ulit-ulitin ang kuwento tungkol sa kolaborasyon, ang pagkawasak ng imahen ng ideyalisadong figura ng ama, ang panghihimasok ng bansa sa pamilya, para maging katanggap-tanggap ang sakit, mapaghilom ang kaniyang trauma.

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The Pulse of the Text: Using Digital Tools for Closer Reading

Ramon Guillermo

ABSTRACT

The use of computer-aided techniques in literary and cultural analysis has seen a surge in popularity in recent years due to the increasingly widespread availability of digitized textual and cultural materials. The Marxist literary scholar Franco Moretti (1931 -) is an example of this trend. However, the actual utility of many of these methods has not exactly been clear or obvious to students, scholars and researchers in the literary field. This paper will attempt to present and explain the intuitive utility of a set of digital tools which can be used in the analysis of textual materials. In contrast to the so-called “distant reading” advocated by Moretti which require the availability of massive digital corpora which are not yet available for many national literatures, these tools are examples of techniques which, in combination with traditional “close reading” can arguably lead to close(r) readings of texts. This paper will use Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s (1925-2006) novel *Bumi Manusia* (1980) and its Filipino and English translations to serve as examples in translation analysis.

I. Introduction

This essay is an attempt to provide a step-by-step guide to the use of an experimental digital tool for textual analysis. A program written in the computer language Python (<https://www.python.org/>) will produce new-word, hapax legomena, repetition, lexical complexity and average betweenness centrality graphs for individual textual entities. (However, simplicity of exposition requires that only the first three types of graph be discussed below.) To give a more or less comprehensive idea of the possible range of applications of this digital tool, an original text in Bahasa Indonesia will be analyzed along with its English and Filipino language translations.

II. Graphing Texts

Modern lexicography has established that the frequency of co-occurrence or “collocation” of lexical elements in language use can serve as data for the analysis of word meaning. The empirically observable (or measurable) strength of connection between lexical elements in a text is known as “cohesion.” However, the more conventional methods of tracking cohesion, e.g., concordance analysis, have usually been limited to the consideration of words in pairs. Gilbert Youmans (1991; 1994) demonstrated quite some time ago the utility of new-word graphs in the study of a type of lexical cohesion which goes beyond the limitations of traditional collocation analysis. In the intriguing approach he developed, a graph is produced by moving a “scan window” of variable length through a text one word at a time until it reaches the last word at the end of the text. The program counts the number of words in each successive scan window which appear for the first time in the text. All words which have previously occurred in the text will not be counted. Likewise, words which appear in a window multiple times will only be counted once. Since function words and other frequently occurring words aren’t filtered out, the scan windows at the beginning will naturally produce values much higher than all other succeeding scan windows.

The theory is that valleys and peaks in such graphs can be used to detect thematic (or topic) boundaries and transitions in texts. The generation of the abovementioned new-word graphs provide interesting textual information because these make visible the phenomenon of “inter-

collocation” which goes beyond the pair-wise approach of conventional collocation analysis. Peaks in new word graphs indicate points where whole clusters of words, rather than just pairs, rise suddenly to the textual surface. According to Michael Stubbs,

Youmans’s work is a neat example of an all too rare event in linguistics: a previously unknown phenomenon which can be observed with a relatively simple technique. His method works, and provides replicable findings, in a small area of the social world which was previously thought to be closed to systematic study, it makes visible a kind of linguistic patterning which was previously invisible and unsuspected. (2002, 143)

III. Description of the Computer Programs

Two programs, “textanalysis-1.py” and “textanalysis-2.py” (See Appendix A), will be described below which generate data for new word, hapax legomena and repetition graphs. Data for two other types called “lexical complexity” and “average betweenness centrality” graphs will also be generated by the programs and will be described in passing below. Users of these programs should install the Python language distribution known as Anaconda so that the required mathematical modules can be accessed (in particular, Networkx) (www.continuum.io/anaconda). These two program files can be loaded or typed in and executed within the Spyder user interface included in the Anaconda package. The program files (with file extension “.py”) must be placed in the same folder as the text data to be processed.

Important information for the execution of both programs should be typed in by the user at the blanks indicated at the beginning of the program code when these have been opened in the Spyder interface. The user must specify the file name of the “.txt” file to be processed (which should be in the same folder as the program to be executed) and the length of the scan window. The length of the scan window is still an experimental matter but mostly depends on the length of the text to be processed as well as the desired degree of resolution. A longer text will generally require a longer scan window. Overall, the setting of the length of the scan window

depends on obtaining a balance between the extremes of being swamped in detail or losing too much of it. As a rule of thumb, the user is encouraged to experiment for longer texts such as novels with scan window lengths of 250, 500, 1,000 and 2,000. In addition to the abovementioned information, “textanalysis-2.py” requires that a file called “stoplist.txt” be placed in the same folder as the text file to be analyzed. The “stoplist.txt” should contain a list of words which the user wished to filter out of the analysis. These are usually the frequently occurring function words of the language of the text to be analyzed. Function words and other words of low significance for the study among the one hundred most frequent words of the whole text could be included in the stoplist. The stoplist should just be a continuous listing of words separated by spaces with all words in lower case.

If the text(s) are not yet available in digital format, the encoding of the text(s) to be analyzed can be done manually or with available optical character recognition (OCR) software. However, with the latter option, it is still necessary to proofread the automatically encoded text since accuracy issues still arise given current limitations in the technology. It is suggested that two copies of the encoded text be maintained. The first version should be as close to the formatting of the original text as possible while the second is the same text which has been reformatted for the purposes of analysis. The reformatting should proceed as follows: (1) all punctuation and non-alphanumeric characters should as much as possible be deleted; (2) all tabs, carriage returns and multiple spaces between words should be removed; (3) if feasible, all characters should be reduced to lowercase (this may represent a problem for languages such as German); (4) files should be saved with a “.txt” extension. Some languages would be more amenable to these reformatting steps than others so it necessary to experiment in such cases.

The first output of the first program (“textanalysis-1.py”) is a text file (file extension “.txt”) with a name which includes the first three words of the text file under analysis and the setting of the length of the scan window (this will be the naming convention for all files generated by the two programs) (filename begins with “1-TEXT”). The beginning of the text file will include information on the total word count (“tokens”), the number of unique words in the text (“types”) and the lexical complexity of the text (number of types divided by the total number of tokens).

However, the main content of the file is a list of words numbered and listed according to their order of appearance in the text. This file will be useful as a reference when looking up the contents of specific scan windows. The second output will be a text file (".txt") which is another numbered list of words listed according to their first appearances but with their subsequent reoccurrences blanked out (filename begins with "2-WORDFREQS"). The column to the right of the words indicates the frequency of appearance of each word which appears in the list. This file can be sorted in any spreadsheet program to obtain ordered frequency lists of the text being analyzed. The third output of the program will be a "comma-separated" spreadsheet file (with extension ".csv") with three columns (filename begins with "3-NEWWORDS"). The leftmost column contains the scan window number, the middle column contains the total number of new words counted within that scan window, and the rightmost column contains the number of new words in the window expressed as a fraction of the length of the scan window (total new words divided by the length of scan window). The range of values in the second column will be from zero to equal the length of the scan window while the range of values in the third column will be between zero and one. Obviously, the last scan window number in the leftmost column will be equal to the total length of the text minus the length of the scan window. The fourth output of the program will be another spreadsheet file (".csv") which has three columns (filename begins with "4-HAPAXA"). The leftmost column contains the scan window number, the middle column contains the total number of single occurrence words (or "hapax legomena") counted per scan window, and the rightmost column contains the number of hapax legomena in the window expressed as a fraction of the length of the scan window.

The first output of the second program ("textanalysis-2.py") is a spreadsheet file (".csv") containing textual "repetition" data (filename begins with "5-REPETITION"). In the same manner as the first program, this is produced by passing a scan window of variable size one word at a time through a text from beginning to end. The program totals the frequency of occurrence in the whole text of each word per scan window. This type of repetition data can show the areas in the text where the most "popular" words in the text as a whole occur. High points in the repetition graph may therefore be read as textual zones with a high cohesive relation to the text taken as a whole rather than with any of its specific parts. Obviously,

areas of the text where many function words occur together will have high values. This is mitigated by a stoplist function which screens out specified function words and other nonsignificant frequently repeating words (listed in the “stoplist.txt” file) from the count. The format of the repetition data has three columns. The first column contains the scan window number, the second contains the aggregate number of frequencies of occurrence of all words in the scan window (excluding words in the stoplist), while the third column contains the value in the second column divided by the total number of scan windows and therefore stands for the average rate of appearance of the words per scan window in the text as a whole.

The second output of the “textanalysis-2.py” program is a file (“.csv”) contains lexical complexity data (filename begins with “6-LEXCOMP”). It was mentioned above that the first program (“textanalysis-2.py”) computes lexical complexity for the text as whole by dividing the number of types by the total number of tokens. The range of values for lexical complexity is from “most complex” (1.0), wherein the total number of unique words (types) is equal to the total number of words (tokens), to least complex (approaching zero). Calculating lexical complexity as the scan window of variable length moves along the text can more specifically indicate the areas of the text where lexical complexity is high or low. Areas of high lexical complexity indicate points in the text where the vocabulary is particularly rich and may therefore be useful for some types of textual analysis. Areas in the text with a high occurrence of new words or hapax legomena may also be areas of highly complex vocabulary. The first column in the spreadsheet file contains the scan window number while the second contains the value for lexical complexity.

The third output is a spreadsheet file (“.csv”) containing the “average betweenness centrality” value for all types within the span of the moving scan window (filename begins with “7-BETCEN”). When the text as a whole is taken as a complex network of interconnected words or “nodes,” “betweenness centrality” is a measure of the degree or strength by which a “node” serves to connect other nodes and clusters of nodes to each other. The output spreadsheet file consists of two columns wherein the first is the scan window number while the second indicates the average betweenness centrality values of all the nodes within the scan window. To serve as a reference for the analysis of the betweenness centrality graph, a fourth file

(".csv") will be outputted which contains three columns (filename begins with "8-BETCENLIST"). The first is the scan window number, the second will be the words in the file in their order of appearance in the text, while the third will be the betweenness centrality value corresponding to each word listed in sequence.

IV. Step-by-step Translation Analysis: Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* (BM)

Although the examples below will be from translation analysis, applications to other areas of literary and textual analysis should be immediately evident to the reader (the first application to translation studies is Guillermo (2009b)). In spite of their general applicability, the graphs seem to be particularly useful for translation analysis since these can serve as language-independent bases of comparison between the source and target texts in translation. The tools are "language-independent" because they do not discriminate in any way between languages in producing their output. The tools also do not bring any presuppositions about grammar, morphology or semantics to the texts to be analyzed.

The great Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer's (1925-2006) (1980) *Bumi Manusia* (BM) and its English and Filipino language translations will serve as the main examples in the analysis below. BM is the first volume of Pramoedya's famous *Buru Quartet* which is said to have been originally composed orally while Pramoedya was imprisoned by the dictator Soeharto on Buru Island from 1969 to 1979. A runaway bestseller in its first printing, it was banned in Indonesia soon after its year of first publication in 1981. UNESCO's Index Translationum (<http://www.unesco.org/xtrans/>) lists various translations of this novel into English, German, Japanese, Korean, Dutch, Spanish, Norwegian and Swedish from 1982 to 2004. More pertinent for the present study are Max Lane's (1996) English translation, *This Earth of Mankind* (TEOM), which was first published in 1982 by Penguin Books, and Thelma Kintanar's (1989) Filipino translation entitled, *Ang Daigdig ng Tao* (ADNT), which was printed by the Solidaridad Publishing House in 1989.

BM, TEOM and ADNT were digitized using a combination of OCR software and manual encoding. Two versions were maintained for each text. One version was meant to stay as close as possible to the original

formatting of the texts (in “.doc” or “.rtf” formats) while the other version was processed to facilitate automated analysis by removing or deleting all formatting such as the following: punctuation marks, non-alphanumeric characters, double spaces, tabs, carriage returns and reducing the whole text to lowercase. The latter versions were saved in “.txt” format using the initials of the titles as filenames “bm”, “teom”, and “adnt.” These files were then placed in individual folders together with the programs textanalysis-1.py and textanalysis-2.py. After the programs were run, the files generated in “.csv” format labeled 3-NEWWORDS, 4-HAPAXA and 5-REPETITION were opened in a spreadsheet program for visualization and analysis.

A. Variable Length Scan Windows for BM

Figure 1 shows new word graphs for BM with different scan window lengths of 250, 500, 1000 and 2000 (by plotting the output file 3-NEWWORDS, set at four different scan lengths). It can be observed that although the different scan lengths exhibit the same general form for a single text, the features become more pronounced as the scan window gets longer. The degree of resolution can therefore be adjusted to match the desired level of detail by experimentally varying the length of the scan window. For the purposes of this discussion, the level of detail provided by setting the scan window length at 500 has been considered sufficient.

The occurrence of high values at the starting point of new-word graphs is to be expected since all types are counted as new words at the beginning of the scan process. For example, the 500-word scan window for BM from the first word to the five hundredth registers 311 new words. This means that unique types make up 62.2% of the words in the first scan window while the remainder consists of repetitions of these newly introduced words which may subsequently resurface at different rates.

B. Combined New-Word, Hapax Legomena and Repetition Graphs for BM

Figure 2 shows the combined new-word (blue), hapax legomena (red) and repetition (green) graphs for BM with a 500-word scan window setting for all three. (The plotted values on the new-word and hapax legomena graphs are the wordcounts per scan window divided by the scan window length, or in this case, by 500.) The visible relationship of

new-word occurrences to hapax legomena occurrences can be observed in this graph. Obviously, the hapax legomena graph cannot have a greater value than the new-word graph at any point since single occurrence words practically make up a subset of the total number of new words for each scan window. It can also be seen that the hapax legomena graph follows the peaks and valleys of the new-word graph for the most part even though the percentages of hapax legomena occurring in each window can vary quite significantly. The general trend seems to be that the hapax legomena and the new words graphs begin to overlap almost completely as one moves towards the latter third of a text since most new words at this point will no longer have the occasion to resurface in the succeeding parts of the text. In general, hapax legomena graphs can help detect lexical islands in the text which pertain to themes or topics which arise only once.

On the other hand, intercollocated lexical elements which continue to repeat may exert a further generative effect on the text as they resurface in various subsequent parts of the text. To aid in the investigation of the latter phenomena, a “repetition graph” which is also produced by scanning the text from beginning to end can show the points in the text which contain the lexical items which repeat most frequently throughout the text as a whole (excluding the most frequently occurring function words). While the values for the new-word and hapax legomena graphs range between 0 and 1, the value for the repetition graph is the average number of appearances of the lexical items in each respective scan window in all scan windows (the total number of repetitions of all the lexical items in the scan window divided by the total number of scan windows). Other more refined techniques for detecting repetition phenomena can be devised. For example, generating the average lexical overlap of each scan window with all other scan windows in the text seems to present a good alternative (Hoey 1991). However, this latter method requires much more processing power than is generally available especially for longer texts such as novels. The relationship between the new-word graph and the repetition graph is still a matter of study, but these do not at the outset, exhibit clear patterns of correspondence. It seems to be the case, however, that there is a roughly inverse relationship between hapax legomena graphs and repetition graphs. This is intuitively plausible since these two graphs exhibit the opposed logics of non-repetition and high repetition. The final high peak at the end of the BM repetition graph (point 94593 with a value of 0.297) indicates

the probable recapitulatory nature of the last sections of the text (this was also remarked upon in Guillermo (2009b)).

C. Combined BM, TEOM and ADNT Graphs

Figure 3 shows the combined new-word graphs of BM, TEOM and ADNT with the 500-word scan window settings (the x-axis indicates values for BM only). Since both TEOM and ADNT are longer texts than BM (see Table 1), both had to be rescaled, resulting in a certain degree of distortion. Nevertheless, rough and somewhat irregular correspondences between the peaks and valleys of TEOM, BM and ADNT can be observed throughout the graph. The scatter-plots of BM with TEOM and ADNT shown in Figure 4 are useful for visualizing their respective degrees of correspondence. The tendency of the scatterplots to form a straight line indicates degree of correspondence which cannot be purely random. One infers from this that new-word graphs exhibit a degree of stability across translations (Cabatbat et al. 2014). (Tests for Pearson's correlation shows high statistical significance with $p < .001$ for all pairs BM and TEOM, BM and ADNT and TEOM and ADNT.) The combined hapax legomena and repetition graphs of BM, TEOM and ADNT shown in Figures 5 and 6, exhibit some correspondences which seem to be irregular and contingent as opposed to the relative regularity observed in the new-word graphs (scatterplots also do not reveal relationships of correlation). An interesting feature is the valley at point 60204 of BM where no new words are introduced (y-axis value is 0). A corresponding dip does not occur in TEOM and ADNT.

Now that the general relationships have been sketched out, it is possible to zoom in to particular points or sections of the text.

D. New-Word Peaks and Text Alignment for BM and TEOM

Three peaks in the BM new-word graph can serve as examples for demonstrating the utility of the graphs which have been generated. These are points A, B and C corresponding to BM scan windows numbered 18975 (with 99 new words), 29333 (with 81 new words) and 34602 (84 new words). Figure 7 indicates the location of these points on the BM new-word graph with the hapax legomena and repetition graphs included for comparison. All three of these areas on the BM graph demonstrate the

occasionally inverse relationship between hapax legomena and repetition graphs. For example, at approximately BM point 20907, the hapax legomena graph peaks while the repetition graph dips drastically. Figure 8 shows the corresponding points in BM (18975, 29333, 34602) and TEOM (23177; 36438; 43657).

The extraction of the contents of the 500-word scan window for all three corresponding points in BM and TEOM (using output files 1-TEXT and 2-WORDFREQS) show significant overlaps in all three cases (see Table 2). Using BM as reference, points A for BM and TEOM start at almost exactly the same part of the text with the sentence in BM, “dia lahir pada hari pasaran *Paing*” and its direct translation in TEOM as, “he was born on the market day of *Paing*.” Point B is just off by a few words with BM starting just one sentence before the phrase “terlalu rendah untuk dibicarakan” (unworthy of discussion) and TEOM starting exactly on the words, “as worthy of discussion.” The case of Point C is a bit more complex. TEOM starts with the phrase, “had once dreamed,” while in BM, the same phrase “pernah aku impikan” (I have dreamed), occurs much later, 150 words into the middle of the scan window. These examples indicate that, although new-word graphs may be used for aligning two texts in a translational relationship with each other, its degree of accuracy for specific areas of text may also be highly variable.

E. The Analysis of New-Word Peaks: Seed-words and Major Themes

The extracted words which make up the new-word peaks exhibit certain interesting traits. It can be observed from the current example that new words with a frequency of one (hapax legomena) usually make up the majority of new words in each new-word peak as soon as the initial burst of new words at the beginning of the text has subsided. The present hypothesis is that the new words which have the subsequent highest rates of occurrence while moving forward in the text as a whole seem to be the ones which perform a strongly generative function in determining the dominant thematics of the new-word peak. As a matter of convention, and purely for heuristic purposes, the five words with the highest frequency from each new-word scan window will be extracted and labelled “primary seed-words.” However, in the interest of simplification, only the nouns

among these most frequent words will be considered as properly “seed-words.” (see Table 3.)

The primary seed-words which have been identified for BM are, “Sastrotomo” (the name of Sanikem’s father; with 1 occurrence in the scan window itself and 14 appearances subsequently in the whole text), “juritulis” (“clerk” or, more archaically, “scribe”; 4 occurrences in the scan window and 15 appearances subsequently), “Sanikem” (the original name of the central female character of BM; 1 occurrence in the scan window and 16 appearances subsequently), and “ayahku” (“my father”; 1 occurrence in the scan window and 16 appearances subsequently). On the other hand, the seed-words for TEOM are as follows, “Tulangan” (the location of a sugar plantation on Java; 2 occurrences in the scan window and 10 appearances subsequently), “clerk” (3 occurrences in the scan window and 11 appearances subsequently), “Sastrotomo” (1 occurrence in the scan window and 14 appearances subsequently in the whole text), “relations” (1 occurrence in the scan window and 14 appearances subsequently in the whole text), and “Sanikem” (1 occurrence in the scan window and 18 appearances subsequently in the whole text).

Three seed-words appear in two connected sentence near the beginning of BM point A, “*Ayahku* bernama *Sastrotomo* setelah kawin. Kata para tetangga, nama itu berarti: *juritulis* yang utama” (My father was named Sastrotomo after marriage. The neighbours said, this name means: the foremost scribe/clerk). This conjunction between “Ayahku” (“my father,” named “Sastrotomo”) and “juritulis” (“clerk” or “scribe”), “triggers” the way whole section of text corresponding to point A converges within itself the thematic zones of family, community and honor, on the one hand, with those of employment and modern production relations on the other (Figure 9). In TEOM however, only one seed-word in the same sentences appears, “My father changed his name to *Sastrotomo* after he was married. The neighbors used to say the name meant the foremost scribe.” However the seed-words “Sastrotomo” and “clerk” (as with “relations” and “Sanikem”) arguably trigger the same processes of convergence of lexical thematics (Figure 10). The striking conjunction between the discourses of individual and family “honor” and “promotion” (in employment) occurs in a sentence in BM, “Ia impikan *jabatan* lebih tinggi sekali pun *jabatannya* sudah cukup tinggi dan *terhormat*” (He dreamed of a higher position/

post even though his current position was high enough and respected/honored). Figure 11, shows just how rich this particular section is with respect to this convergence of themes in BM. The same conjunction occurs in TEOM, “He dreamed of a higher *post* even though the job he held was quite a *respected* one.” This logic of equating promotion with a rise in social status is even more explicit in the phrase, “kenaikan jabatan, kehormatan dan ketakziman” (promotion in position, honor and status), wherein a “rise” (kenaikan) in one’s employment occurs simultaneously and in parallel with a “rise” in honor and status. This is translated in TEOM as, “rise in position, respect or esteem.” BM point A includes words such as “upah” (salary), “gaji” (wage) and “uang” (money) which closely intertwine with words such as “hormat” (honor; respect) “takzim” (honor; respect, esteem) and “martabat” (status; dignity; prestige). These latter cluster of words are mirrored in Lane’s translation by the triad of “respect,” “esteem” and “dignity” (though the appearance of the word “dignity” already occurs beyond the 500 word boundary of TEOM point A).

F. Translational Semantic Shift: Honor to Respect

The main difference which arises between the relevant sections from BM and TEOM is that a certain shift seems to have occurred which can be articulated in English as a shift from the idiom of “honor” to “respect” (Table 4). It is true that these two words necessarily overlap in meaning and usage in the English language. For example, a popular definition of “honor” is “great respect.” Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conflate these two terms (Olsthoorn 2015). One difference is that “respect,” as well as the concept of “dignity,” can be generalized to encompass all humans such that we are called upon to uphold “human dignity” and exercise a properly egalitarian “respect for others.” This evidently does not hold true for “honor” which is essentially an exclusive concept. If everyone were honored in the same way, the very notion would lose its meaning. Secondly, although “esteem” is arguably similar to “honor” in possessing a certain exclusivity in its application, the former term shares with “respect” to the characteristic of being dependent on recognition, whether by one’s self, as in “self-respect” or “self-esteem,” or by others, while “honor” has an element which is held to be irreducibly intrinsic to its possessor, who on this basis, expects it from others. Because of this nuance, “honor” lends itself more easily to concepts of ascribed status whereas “respect” dwells

more comfortably in the world of achieved status and social mobility. Thirdly, “honor,” like “shame,” has connotations which are more strongly collective, in the familial and communal sense, than “respect” with its more individualistic usages. Overall, it is said that in the English language the idiom of “respect” has taken over the formerly dominant, and in some respects already archaic, idiom of “honor.” For example, the term “honor killings” could not be written as “respect killings” or even as “dignity killings.”

On the broadest level of usage, the words “hormat” (or “kehormatan”) and “takzim” (or “ketakziman”) spans the range of meanings covered by the English words “respect,” “esteem” and “honor.” On the other hand, “martabat” (or “kemartaban”), borrowed from Arabic, covers the gamut of terms “rank,” “status,” “prestige,” and “dignity” (Cf. Tan 1981; Saber et al. 1980; Riemer 1987). “Hormat” cannot simply be reduced to either “respect” or “honor” outside of its context of usage, and this context is quite often simply too complex to permit an easy disambiguation (Echols and Shadily 2016; Departemen Pendidikan Nasional 2016). The use of the triad “respect,” “esteem” and “dignity” in the English translation results in the foregrounding of a more contemporary English idiom behind which has been occluded the idiom of “honor.” The consequence is that the ironic humour which arises when Pramoedya pits traditional “family honor” against the shameless desire for “job promotion” and money in the context of modern economic relations loses much of its impact in the translation. As if to heighten the bitter humor of the situation, Pramoedya also related how Sastrotomo made use of prayer, fasting, magic and the mystical arts to attain his ambition of promotion to paymaster.

Given its already more strongly egalitarian and individualistic connotations, the English idiom of “respect” cannot so strongly bind the disparate discursive fields of family, community and honor, on the one hand, with those of employment, commodity economy and modern production relations on the other. Pramoedya’s use of the idioms of “hormat,” “ketakziman,” and “martabat,” on the other hand, more fully dramatizes the collision between the lived textures of tradition and the inroads of economic modernity. In fact, the whole novel ends with the word “hormat” (“Kita telah melawan, Nak, Nyo, sebaikbaiknya, se hormat hormatnya.” Translated by Lane as, “We fought back child, Nyo, as well and honorably as possible.”), which shows how BM point A perhaps

unexpectedly captures in miniature what may be the main dilemma of the novel as a whole. It should be emphasized that, more important than the apparent contradictory dualisms at play in these discursive phenomena, one should observe closely how these elements are closely imbricated and articulated with each other.

V. Some Reflections on the Problem of Translatability

In his classic essay on the Javanese concept of “power,” Benedict Anderson included a strongly worded cautionary footnote,

In the ensuing discussion of Javanese political ideas, I am attempting to map out a pure model for analytical purposes. Traditional Javanese political culture was an extremely complex phenomenon, in which, as in any other culture, it would be naïve to try to discern complete consistency. In that traditional culture an indigenous matrix was imperfectly compounded with heterogeneous Brahmanic, Buddhist, and Islamic elements. Nonetheless, the slow process of absorption and synthesis over the centuries prior to the “coming of the West” permitted the crystallization of a relatively high degree of internal consistency. The model I am trying to delineate is thus an “ideal type” which should not be taken as a historical reality... Java’s subjection to Western political, economic and cultural domination has, particularly in the past hundred years, set in motion an irremediable process of decrystallization. Contemporary Javanese political culture is therefore a heterogeneous, disjunctive, and internally contradictory complex of traditional and Western elements, with a lower degree of internal logic and coherence than in the past... (1990, 20)

Despite the manifold processes of “decrystallization” which have already taken place in Javanese political culture, Anderson continued to make a case for incommensurability when it came to certain concepts, “When I say that the Javanese have a radically different idea of power from that

which obtains in the contemporary West, properly speaking this statement is meaningless, since the Javanese have no equivalent word or concept” (4). Aside from the problem of translating “power,” one surmises that it was precisely the “high degree of internal consistency” and coherence of worldview which enveloped such Javanese concepts as “*rasa*,” “*budi*,” “*nyawa*” and “*sampoerna*” which made Anderson despair of finding any translational equivalents for these culture concepts in the existing idioms of English when he was himself translating a work by Pramoedya and other Indonesian writers (Guillermo 2017). Taking a cue from Anderson’s insights, one could argue that Pramoedya, in the short text analyzed above, acutely dramatizes a process of “decrystallization” or destructureation of the originally tightly integrated conceptual cluster “*hormat*,” “*takzim*” and “*martabat*” in the face of capitalist modernity. Moreover, the translational “flattening” of “*hormat*” as the equivalent of “respect” in English facilitates and smoothens the immediate process of translation while also participating in what may be conceived of as a bidirectional process of decrystallization.

The abovementioned considerations are the reasons why discussions of “untranslatability” which merely evolve around individual words and their etymologies isolated from their associated semantic fields (undergoing processes of decrystallization and crystallization) are inadequate and inconclusive (Guillermo 2009a; Guillermo 2016). On the other hand, an overly rigid privileging of internal consistency, logic and coherence of conceptual assemblages conceived as permanent impediments to translation, cannot fully take into account the dual historical dynamic of crystallization and decrystallization which in certain crucial ways respectively enable and disable translational processes.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study has attempted to provide a step-by-step introduction to using a digital tool for the analysis of textual entities. Since almost all aspects of the method described above are experimental, further testing would be necessary to understand and explore their full potential and limitations. These techniques are at present conceived as being complementary to the more familiar qualitative approaches in close reading, textual analysis and social criticism. It could be the case that future rigorous critical and philological studies in the analysis of individual texts

might include these methods as a matter of course. What is more doubtful is that these methods in all their simplicity can become stand-alone and self-sufficient. The great Filipino literary scholar, Resil Mojares (2017, 110), expressed enthusiasm about the potential of these approaches in generating “fresh scholarship” in the humanities.

In the aggregate, all natural language texts fall in a range between least and most complex. However, within the texts themselves, there is a constant oscillation between the repetition of the old and the introduction of the new. This unceasing oscillation can be called, metaphorically, the “pulse” of the text. Norman Fairclough gives a useful guide in deepening an understanding of this phenomenon as being deeply embedded in the social nature of language,

It is important to avoid a one-sided emphasis on either repetitive or creative properties of texts. Any text is part repetition, part creation, and texts are sites of tension between centripetal and centrifugal pressures. Texts will vary in the relative weight of these pressures depending upon social conditions so that some texts will be relatively normative whereas others are relatively creative. Centripetal pressures follow from the need in producing a text to draw upon given conventions, of two main classes; a language, and an order of discourse – that is, a historically particular structuring of discursive (text-producing) practices... Centrifugal pressures come from the specificity of particular situations of text-production, the fact that situations do not endlessly repeat one another, but are, on the contrary, endlessly novel and problematic in new ways... The tension between repetition and creation, centripetal and centrifugal pressures, manifests itself in varying degrees of homogeneity or heterogeneity of textual forms and meanings... The heterogeneities of texts code social contradictions. It is this property of texts that makes them the sensitive indicators of sociocultural processes and change I referred to above in discussing texture. Social contradictions may even be condensed into particular collocations in texts, particular patterns of co-occurrence

and mutual predictability between words, for instance, the collocation *enterprise culture*. The homogeneities/heterogeneities of texts can be shown through intertextual analysis of the links between a text and other texts and text types, which is a necessary complement to linguistic analysis within the analysis of texts. (1995, 7-8)

The type of computer-aided “close(r)” reading being advocated here is also more feasible with respect to languages such as Filipino/Tagalog, Indonesian, Malay etc. which do not yet have large text corpora comparable to the 4.5 billion word Bank of English (<https://collins.co.uk/page/The+Collins+Corpus>), the 4 billion word German Reference Corpus (<http://www1.ids-mannheim.de/kl/projekte/korpora.html>) or even the 105 million word Kotonoha Japanese Language Corpus (<http://www.kotonoha.gr.jp/shonagon/>). Given the current limitations, some further research projects or applications might include the following:

- Refining the interpretation of both peaks and valleys in new-word graphs;
- Elaborating on the relationships between the different types of graphs produced by the programs;
- Tests for translational correlations for large numbers of translations in several languages of a single text;
- Tests for translational correlations for large numbers of translations into a single language of a single text;
- Testing for correlations between different texts of the same genre such as romance novels of roughly the same length and by the same publisher;
- Analysis of different types of texts, e.g., expressive or informative;
- Textbooks in different scientific disciplines can be used to test the ability of the tools to detect thematic boundaries
- Collections of texts of a single author arranged chronologically can be used to detect shifts in vocabulary usage which may be useful in mapping intellectual history.

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Table 1: *Bumi Manusia* (BM), *This Earth of Mankind* (TEOM) and *Ang Daigdig ng Tao* (ADNT)

| Title and Language | Tokens | Types | Lexical Complexity (Types/Tokens) |
|-----------------------|--------|-------|-----------------------------------|
| BM (Bahasa Indonesia) | 95251 | 10239 | 0.10749493443638387 |
| TEOM (English) | 124747 | 7961 | 0.0638171659438704 |
| ADNT (Filipino) | 126041 | 10845 | 0.08604343031235867 |

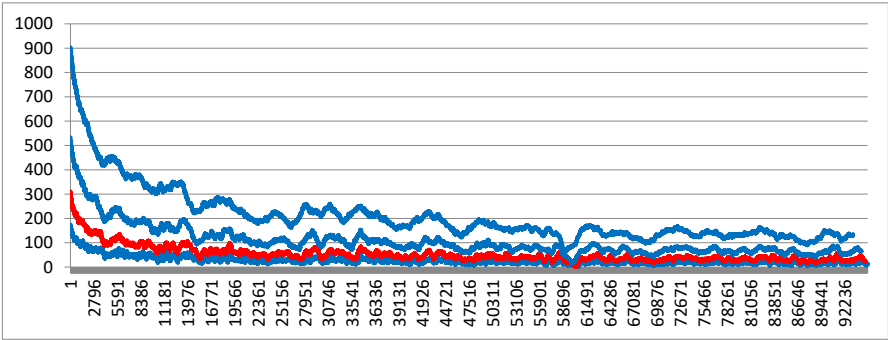


Figure 1: New-word graphs with different scan window lengths for BM from top to bottom: 2,000; 1,000; 500 (red); 250

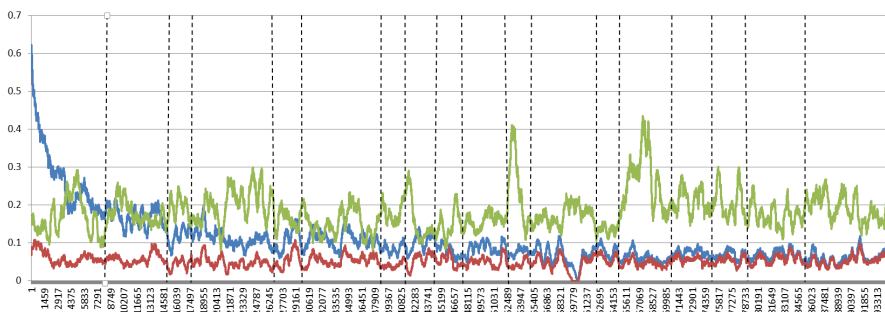


Figure 2: New-word graph (blue), hapax legomena graph (red) and repetition graph (green) for BM set at scan window lengths of 500 with values divided by scan window length (500) (dashed lines mark the start and end of chapters)

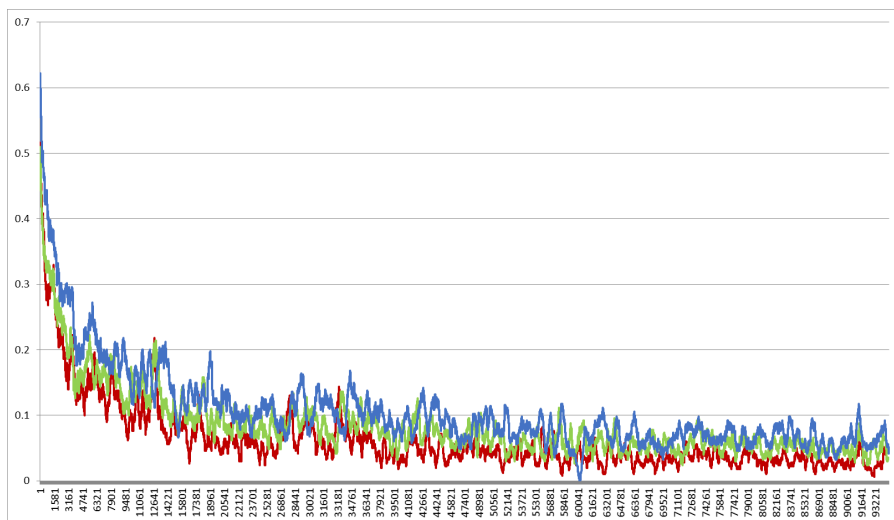


Figure 3: New-word graphs for BM (blue); TEOM (red) and ADNT (green) set at scan window lengths of 500 with values divided by scan window length (500)

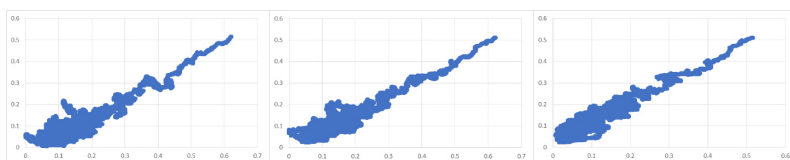


Figure 4: Scatterplots for BM and TEOM (left); BM and ADNT (middle); and TEOM and ADNT (right) (Pearson's correlation tests for all pairs exhibit high statistical significance with $p < .001$).

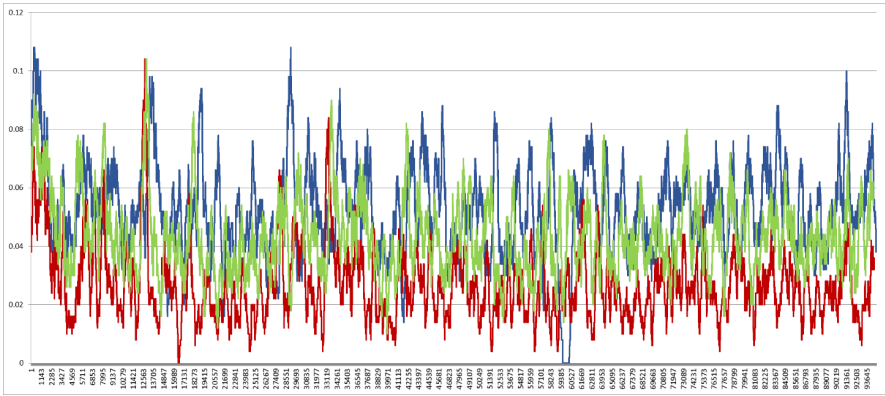


Figure 5: Hapax legomena graphs for BM (blue), TEOM (red) and ADNT (green) set at scan window lengths of 500 with values divided by scan window length (500)

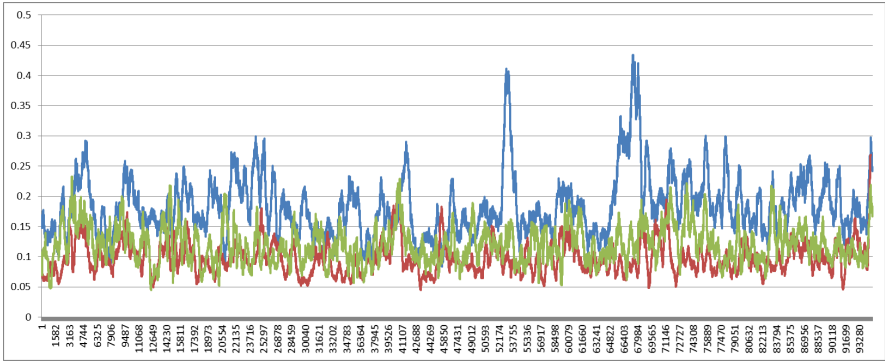


Figure 6: Repetition graphs for BM (blue), TEOM (red) and ADNT (green) set at scan window lengths of 500 with values divided by scan window length (500).

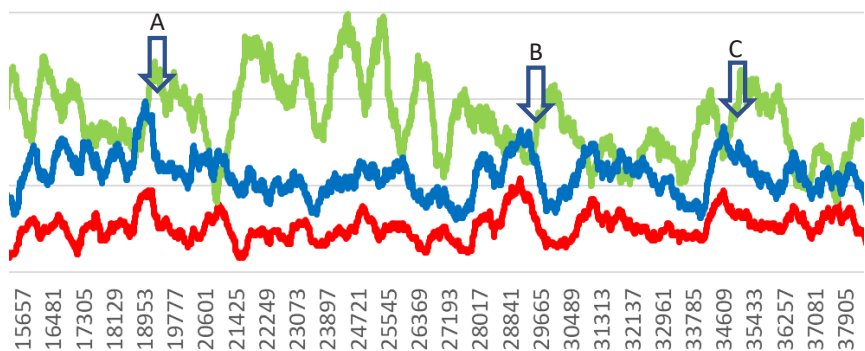


Figure 7: Peaks A, B, and C in BM (blue) new-word graph in comparison with hapax legomena (red) and repetition (green) graphs using scan window lengths of 500.

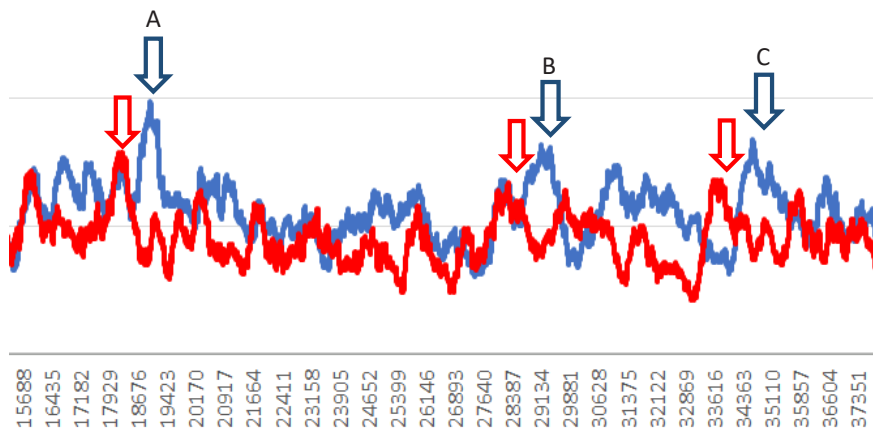


Figure 8: Peaks A, B, and C in BM (blue) and TEOM (red) new-word graphs using scan window lengths of 500 with values divided by scan window length (500)

Table 2: Peaks A, B, C and Text Alignment (words in bold are recurring new words; words in bold italics are hapax legomena)

| BM 18975-19474 (99) | TEOM 23177-23676 (66) |
|---|--|
| <p>punya seorang abang paiman dia lahir pada hari pasaran <i>paing</i> maka dinamai dia dengan <i>suku</i> depan <i>pai</i> aku tiga tahun lebih muda dinamai sanikem ayahku bernama sastrotomo setelah kawin kata para tetangga nama itu berarti jurutulis yang utama kata orang ayahku seorang yang rajin ia dihormati karena satusatunya yang dapat bacatulis di desa baca tulis yang dipergunakan di kantor tapi ia tidak puas hanya jadi jurutulis ia impikan jabatan lebih tinggi sekali pun jabatannya sudah cukup tinggi dan terhormat ia tak perlu lagi mencangkul atau meluku atau berkuli bertanam atau berpanen tebu ayahku mempunyai banyak adik dan saudara sepupu sebagai jurutulis masih banyak kesulitan padanya untuk memasukkan mereka bekerja di pabrik jabatan lebih tinggi akan lebih memudahkan lagi pula akan semakin tinggi pada pandangan dunia apalagi ia ingin semua kerabatnya bisa bekerja di pabrik tidak sekedar jadi kuli dan bawahan paling rendah paling tidak mandorlah untuk membikin mereka jadi kuli tak perlu orang punya sanak jurutulis b semua orang bisa diterima jadi kuli kalau mandor setuju ia bekerja rajin dan semakin rajin lebih sepuluh tahun jabatan dan pangkatnya tak juga naik memang gaji dan persen tahunan selalu naik jadi ditempuhnya segala jalan dukun jampi mantra bertirakat memutih berpuasa seninkamis tak juga berhasil jabatan yang diimpikannya adalah jurubayar kassier pemegang kas pabrikgula tulangan sidoarjo dan siapa tidak berurutan dengan jurubayar pabrik paling sedikit mandorte mereka datang untuk menerima uang dan membubuhkan cap jempol ia bisa menahan upah minggu kesatuan si mandor kalau mereka menolak cukaian atas penghasilan para kuhny sebagai jurubayar pabrik ia akan menjadi orang besar di tulangan pedagang akan membungkuk menghormati tuan tuan totok dan peranan akan memberi tabik dalam melayu guratan penanya berarti uang ia akan termasuk golongan berkuasa dalam pabrik orang akan mendengarkan katanya tunggu di bangku situ untuk dapat menerima uang dan tangannya mengibakan bukan kenaikan jabatan kehormatan dan ketakziman yang ia dapatkan sebaliknya kebencian dan kejiikan orang dan jabatan juru bayar itu tetap tergantung diawangawang tindakannya yang menjilat dan merugikan orang menjadikannya tersisih dari pergaulan ia terpencil ditengah lingkungannya sendiri tapi ia tidak peduli ia memang keras hati kepercayaannya pada kemurahan dan perlindungan tuantuan kulit putih tak terpatahkan orang muak melihat usahanya menarik tuantuan belanda itu agar sudi datang ke rumah seorangdua memang datang juga dan disugunya dengan segala apa yang bisa menyenangkan mereka tapi jabatan itu tak juga tiba malah melalui dukun dan tirakat ia berusaha menggendam tuan administratur tuan besar kuasa agar sudi datang ke rumah juga tak berhasil sebaliknya ia sendiri sering berkunjung ke rumahnya bukan untuk menemui pembesarnya karena sesuatu urusan untuk membantu kerja di belakang tuan administratur tak pernah mempedulikannya aku sendiri merasa risi mendengar semua itu kadang dengan diamdiam kuperhatikan ayahku dan merasa iba betapa jiwa dan raganya disesah oleh impian itu betapa ia hinakan diri dan martabat sendiri tapi aku tak berani bicara apaapa memang kadang aku berdoa agar ia menghentikan kelakuannya yang memalukan itu para tetangga sering bilang lebih baik dan paling baik adalah memohon pada allah sampai berapalah kekuasaan manusia apalagi orang kulit putih pula doaku</p> | <p>elder brother paiman he was born on the market day of <i>paing</i> so he was named with the first syllable <i>pai</i> i was three years younger and named sanikem my father changed his name after he was married to sastrotomo the neighbors used to say the name meant the foremost scribe people said that my father was very industrious he was respected as the only person in village who could read and write the sort of reading and writing used in offices but he wasn't satisfied with just being a clerk in the factory he dreamed of a higher post even though the job he held was quite a respected one he no longer needed to hoe the ground or plow or labor or plant or harvest sugar cane my father had many younger brothers and sisters as well as cousins as a clerk he had great difficulty in getting them jobs at the factory a higher post would have made it easier and also it would have raised him up higher in the eyes of the world especially as he wanted his relations to be able to work in the factory as something more than just laborers and coolies at the very least they should be foremen you didn't need a blood relative as a clerk to get jobs as coolies anybody could get a job as a coolie as long as the foreman agreed he worked diligently and became even more diligent for more than ten years but still no promotion though his salary and commission rose every year so he tried every other way the traditional javanese magic men the dukuns magic formulas he even went on rice fasts monday and thursday fasts still no result he dreamed of becoming paymaster cashier holder of the cash of the tulangan sugar factory in sidoarjo and who did not have business with the factory paymaster there were the cane foremen they came to receive their money and leave their thumbprints if the foreman refused to accept a toll on the coolies' wages he could withhold the foreman's gang's weekly wages as paymaster he would be a big man in tulangan merchants would bow down in respect the pure and mixed-blood tuans would greet him in malay the stroke of his pen meant money he would be counted among the powerful in the factory people would listen to his words sit down on the bench there in order to receive their money from his hands pathetic these dreams did not bring him a rise in position respect or esteem on the contrary they brought hatred and disgust and the position of paymaster remained hanging in limbo far away his crawling behavior which often harmed his friends caused him to be cut off from society he was isolated in the midst of his own world but he didn't care he was indeed hard-hearted his trust in the generosity and protection of the white-skinned tuans could not be broken people were sickened</p> |

Table 2 (cont.): Peaks A, B, C and Text Alignment (words in bold are recurring new words; words in bold italics are hapax legomena)

| BM 29333-29832 (81) | TEOM 36438-36939 (65) |
|--|---|
| <p>Pada negeri dan bangsa ini sekali pun barang dua kali pernah disinggung dalam diskusisekolah temanteman menganggap bangsa ini masih terlalu rendah untuk dibicarakan secara selintas mereka menyamarkan dengan pelacur pelacurnya yang memenuhi kembang jepun warungwarung kecil restoran dan pankas rambut verkoper dan kelontongnya yang sama sekali tak dapat mencerminkan suatu pabrik yang menantang ilmu dan pengetahuan modern dalam suatu diskusisekolah waktu guru tuan lastendienst mencoba menarik perhatian para siswa orang lebih banyak tinggal mengobrol pelan ia bilang di bidang ilmu jepang juga mengalami kebangkitan kitsato telah menemukan kuman pes shiga menemukan kuman dysenteri dan dengan demikian jepang telah juga berjasa pada umat manusia ia membandingkannya dengan sumbangan bangsa belanda pada peradaban melihat aku mempunyai perhatian penuh dan membikin catatan lastendienst bertanya padaku dengan nada mendakwa eh minke wakil bangsa jawa dalam ruangan ini apa sudah di sumbangkan bangsamu pada umat manusia bukan saja aku menggeragap mendapat pertanyaan dadakan itu koleh jadi seluruh dewa dalam kotak wayang ki dalangjikan hilang semangat hanya untuk menjawab maka jalan paling ampuh untuk tidak menjawab adalah menyuarakan kalimat ini ya meneer lastendienst sekarang ini saya belum bisa menjawab dan guru tu itu menanggapi dengan senyum manis sangat manis itu sedikit kutipan dari catatanku tentang jepang dengan adanya tulisan dari majalah pemberian robert catatanku mendapatkan tambahan yang lumayan banyaknya tentang kesibukan di jepang untuk menentukan strategi pertahanannya aku tak banyak mengerti tentang hal demikian justru karena itu aku catat paling tidak akan menjadi bahan bermegah dalam diskusisekolah dikatakan adanya persaingan antara angkatan darat dengan angkatan laut jepang kemudian dipilih strategi maritim untuk pertahanannya dan angkatan darat dengan tradisi samurainya yang berabad merasa kurang senang bagaimana tentang hindia belanda sendiri di dalamnya dinyatakan hindia belanda tidak mempunyai angkatan laut hanya angkatan darat jepang terdiri dari kepulauan hindia belanda setali tiga uang mengapa kalau jepang mengutamakan laut hindia mengutamakan darat bukankah masalah pertahanan terhadap luar sama saja bukankah jatuhnya hindia belanda ke tangan inggris nyaris seabad yang lalu juga karena lemahnya angkatan laut di hindia mengapa itu tak dijadikan pelajaran dari majalah itu juga aku tahu hindia belanda tidak mempunyai angkatan laut kapal perang yang mondarmandir di hindia bukankah milik hindia belanda tetapi milik kerajaan belanda daendels pernah membikin surabaya menjadi pangkalan angkatan laut pada masa hindia belanda tak punya armada satu pun nyaris seratus tahun setelah itu orang tak pernah memikirkan gunanya ada angkatan laut tersendiri untuk hindia tuantuan yang terhormat mempercayakan pertahanan laut inggris di singapura dan pertahanan laut amerika di filipina tulisan itu membayangkan sekiranya terjadi perang dengan jepang bagaimana akan halnya hindia belanda dengan perairan tak terjaga sedang angkatan laut kerajaan belanda hanya kadangkadang saja datang meronda tidakkah pengalaman tahun 1811 bisa berulang untuk kerugian belanda aku tak tahu apakah robert pernah membaca dan mempelajarinya sebagai pemuda yang ingin berlanglang buana sebagai pelaut boleh jadi ia telah mempelajarinya dan sebagai pemua darah eropa kiranya dia mengandalkan keunggulan ras putih tulisan itu juga mengatakan jepang mencoba meniru inggris di perairan dan pengarangnya memperingatkan agar menghentikan ejekan terhadap bangsa itu sebagai monyet peniru pada setiap awal pertumbuhan</p> | <p>as worthy of discussion they offhandedly equated japan with the prostitutes who filled up the kembang jepun and with the little cafes restaurants and barber shops with the hawker and his goods none of these reflected the japan that was challenging modern science and learning in one discussion when my teacher mr lastendienst tried to get the students interested most just chatted lazily to each other he said that japan was also experiencing a flowering in the field of science kitsato had discovered the plague bacteria shiga had discovered dysentery bacteria and in that manner japan too had been of service to humanity he compared it with the dutch nation's contribution to civilization seeing that i was fully engaged in the subject and was taking notes mr lastendienst asked me in an accusing tone of voice eh minke the javanese delegate in this room what has your nation contributed to humanity i would not have been alone in being so startled to hear that sudden question in all likelihood all the gods in the chest of the shadow play puppet-master would have exhausted their energy just to answer so the best way of getting out of my difficulty was to utter the following sentence yes mr lastendienst i can't answer at this time and my teacher reacted to this with a sweet smile very sweet that's just a little from my notes about japan now with the articles in the magazine robert gave me my notes had been supplemented by quite a bit of extra information about the current developments in japan and the struggle over its defense strategy i didn't understand much about those things precisely because of that i noted it all down at the very least it would be excellent material for use in a school discussion it said there had been competition between the japanese army and navy a maritime defense strategy was then chosen and the army with its centuries-old samurai tradition was dissatisfied and the indies itself in the article it said the netherlands indies has no navy only an army japan is made up of islands the netherlands indies is just a great string of them why does japan emphasize naval defense while the indies emphasize the land isn't the problem of defense against the outside the same didn't the indies fall into the hands of the english a hundred years ago precisely because of the weakness of the indies navy why hasn't that lesson been learned the warships that sailed back and forth in indies waters did not belong to the netherlands indies but to the kingdom of the netherlands governor-general daendels had made surabaya a naval base in a period when he had not a single ship almost a hundred years later still no one gave any thought to the indies having its own navy the honorable gentlemen in charge put their trust in the british naval defenses of singapore and the american naval defenses of the philippines the article speculated about</p> |

Table 2 (cont.): Peaks A, B, C and Text Alignment (words in bold are recurring new words; words in bold italics are hapax legomena)

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>BM 34602-35101 (84)</p> <p>gamelan nenenda yang selalu <i>terbungkus</i> beledu merah bila tak <i>ditabuh</i> setiap tahun bukan hanya <i>dilaras</i> kembali juga <i>dimandikan</i> dengan air bunga <i>bersamaan</i> dengan gamelan datang juga <i>jurularas</i> ayahanda menghendaki bukan saja <i>gamelannya</i> juga <i>larasnya</i> harus <i>murni jawatimur</i> maka sejak pagi pendopo telah bising dengan bunyi orang <i>mengikir</i> dalam <i>melaras</i> pekerjaan <i>administراس</i> kantor kebupatian b berhenti seluruhnya semua membantu tuan <i>niccolo moreno</i> seorang <i>dekorator kenamaan</i> yang didatangkan dari surabaya ia membawa serta kotak besar <i>alatalat hias</i> yang selama itu tak pernah kukenal dan pada waktu itu juga baru aku tahu <i>memajang</i> adalah satu <i>keahlian</i> tuan <i>niccolo moreno</i> datang atas <i>saran</i> tuan asisten residen b dibenarkan dan <i>ditanggung</i> oleh tuan residen surabaya pagi itu juga aku harus menemuinya dengan tangannya sendiri ia <i>ukur</i> tubuhku seperti hendak <i>membikinkan</i> pakaian untukku setelah itu <i>diarkannya</i> aku pergi pendopo itu telah <i>dirubahnya</i> menjadi <i>arena</i> dengan titik berat pada potret besar sri ratu wilhelmina dara cantik yang pernah aku impikan</p> <p>dibawa dari surabaya dilukis oleh seorang dengan nama jerman <i>hussenfeld</i> aku masih tetap mengagumi kecantikannya <i>bendera</i> triwarna <i>dipasang</i> di manamana tunggal atau dua <i>bersilang</i> juga triwarna <i>pita</i> panjang <i>berjuluran</i> dari potret sri ratu ke seluruh pendopo dan bakalnya <i>meraih</i> para <i>hadirin</i> dengan <i>kewibawaannya</i> <i>tiangtiang</i> pendopo <i>dicat</i> dengan <i>cat tepung</i> yang baru kuperhatikan waktu itu pula dan dapat kering dalam hanya dua jam daun <i>beringin</i> dan <i>janur</i> kuning dalam <i>keserasan</i> warna tradisi mengubah dinding dan <i>tiangtiang</i> yang <i>keringkerontang</i> menjadi sejuk dan memaksa orang untuk menikmati dengan <i>pengelihatannya</i> maka mata pun <i>dಾಯunkan</i> oleh permainan warna bungabunga kuning biru merah putih dan <i>ungu</i> indah <i>meresap</i> bungabunga yang dalam kehidupan seharihari <i>berpisahan</i> dan dengan diamiidam <i>berjengukan</i> pada pagar lama <i>kebesean</i> dalam hidup ayahanda tiba juga gamelan sudah lama <i>mendayu dayu</i> pelahan tuan <i>niccolo moreno</i> sibuk dalam kamarku <i>merias</i> aku siapa pernah sangka aku yang sudah dewasa ini pula seakan aku dara akan naik ke <i>puadai pengantin</i> selama <i>merias</i> tak <i>hentinya</i> ia bicara dalam belanda yang kedengaran aneh <i>datar</i> seperti keluar dari rongga mulut pribumi jelas ia bukan belanda menurut ceritanya ia sering <i>merias</i> para bupati termasuk ayahku sekarang ini para raja di jawa dan <i>sultan</i> di <i>sumatra</i> dan <i>borneo</i> ia telah banyak membikin rencana pakaian mereka dan masih tetap dipergunakan sampai sekarang katanya pula pakaian pasukan pengawal para raja di jawa ia juga yang <i>merencanakan</i> diamiidam aku mendengarkan tidak mengiakan juga tidak membantah sekali pun tak percaya sepenuhnya ia telah kenakan padaku <i>kemejadada</i> berenda kaku seperti terbuat dari selembar kulit penyu tak mungkin rasanya <i>membongkok</i> dengan kemejadada ini <i>gombaknya</i> yang kaku seperti kulit sapi juga membikin leher segan untuk maksudnya supaya badan tetap tegap tidak sering menoleh pandang lurus seperti gentlemen sejati kemudian ia kenakan padaku kain batik dengan <i>ikat pinggang</i> perak gaya <i>pengenaan</i> kain itu diatur <i>sedemikian rupa</i> sehingga muncul <i>watak</i> ke <i>jawatimurannya</i> yang gagah itu yang kiranya dikehendaki ayah aku tetap <i>manda</i> seperti anak dara sebuah <i>blangkon</i> dengan gaya <i>perpaduan</i> antara <i>jawatimur</i> dan <i>madura</i> sama sekali baru <i>kreasi</i> <i>niccolo moreno</i> sendiri terpasang pada kepalaiku menyusul sebilah <i>keris bertatahkan permata</i> kemudian baju <i>lasting</i> hitam berbentuk jas pendek dengan <i>cawat</i> pada</p> | <p>TEOM 43657-44156 (72)</p> <p>had once dreamed after brought from surabaya the work of a german artist named <i>hussenfeld</i> i still admired her beauty the dutch <i>tricolors</i> were hung everywhere <i>singly</i> or in <i>twos</i> tricolor <i>ribbon</i> also streamed out from the portrait to all parts of the pavilion and would later <i>captivate</i> the audience with its authority the <i>pavilion's</i> columns were painted with some new kind of paint made from <i>flour</i> that <i>dried</i> within two hours <i>banyan-tree</i> leaves and <i>greenish-yellow</i> coconut <i>fronds</i> in traditional <i>color harmonies</i> <i>transformed</i> the dry barren walls into something <i>refreshing</i> and <i>impelled</i> people to enjoy their beauty eyes were <i>drawn</i> by the play of <i>flowers' colors</i> yellow blue red white and <i>purple</i> a <i>saturation</i> beauty flowers that in day-to-day life stuck <i>separately</i> and silently out along <i>fences</i> the big night in my father's life arrived the gamelan had already been <i>rumbling</i> softly and slowly for some time mr <i>niccolo moreno</i> was busy in my room dressing me up and <i>adorning</i> me who would have ever guessed that i already an adult would be dressed up by somebody else a white person too as if i were a maiden about to <i>ascend</i> the <i>wedding</i> throne all the time he was dressing me he spoke in a <i>strangesounding monotone</i> dutch as if it came out of the chest of a native he obviously wasn't dutch according to his story he often dressed and adorned the bupati including my father tonight and the <i>sultans of sumatra</i> and <i>borneo</i> he'd <i>designed</i> many of their clothes and even now was often summoned by them he said also that the <i>costumes</i> of the <i>guards</i> of the kings of java were designed by him silently i listened to his stories neither <i>affirming</i> nor refuting them although i didn't believe them fully either he had dressed me in an embroidered <i>vest stiff</i> as if made from <i>tortoiseshell</i> i could never have bent over in it the stiff leather <i>collar dissuaded</i> my neck from turning around indeed the <i>intent</i> was that my body should be straight and stiff not turning around <i>frequently</i> eyes straight ahead like a true <i>gentleman</i> then a batik sarong with a silver <i>belt</i> the <i>style</i> in which the batik was <i>worn</i> truly brought out that dashing east javanese character that's what father no doubt wanted i <i>suffered</i> all this like a young maiden a batik <i>blangkon headdress</i> a mixture of east javanese and madurese styles something entirely new <i>niccolo moreno's</i> own <i>creation</i> was placed upon my head then came a <i>ceremonial sheathed</i> short sword a <i>keris inlaid</i> with <i>jewels</i> then a black <i>outer upper garment</i> like a coat with a cut at the back so the people could admire the beauty of my <i>keris</i> a bow <i>tie</i> made my neck usually <i>active guiding</i> my eyes to their targets feel as if it were being <i>snared</i> hot <i>perspiration</i> began to <i>soak</i> my back and chest in the mirror i found myself looking like a <i>victorious knight</i> out of those stories of the <i>legendary eleventh-century prince panji</i></p> |
|---|---|

Table 3: BM Peak A Seed-words (numbers in brackets refer to number of appearances in the scan window; numbers in parentheses refer to number of subsequent appearances)

BM 18975-19474 (99)

| | 1 | 2-5 | 6-20 | Top 5 (seed-words) |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| dan [21]; ia [17]; orang [9]; tak [9]; yang [9]; akan [7]; di [7]; itu [7]; lebih [6]; untuk [6]; jadi [5]; juga [5]; mereka [5]; pabrik [5]; tidak [5]; Tuan [5]; aku [4]; bisa [4]; datang [4]; dengan [4]; memang [4]; pada [4]; paling [4]; sendiri [4]; tapi [4]; tinggi [4]; agar [3]; atau [3]; bekerja [3]; ke [3]; para [3]; semua [3]; uang [3]; adalah [2]; administratif [2]; apalagi [2]; baik [2]; banyak [2]; berhasil [2]; besar [2]; betapa [2]; bukan [2]; dalam [2]; dapat [2]; dia [2]; dinamai [2]; dukun [2]; kadang [2]; kalau [2]; karena [2]; kata [2]; kulit [2]; lagi [2]; mandor [2]; menerima [2]; merasa [2]; naik [2]; perlu [2]; pula [2]; punya [2]; putih [2]; rumah [2]; sebagai [2]; sebaliknya [2]; segala [2]; semakin [2]; seorang [2]; sering [2]; sudi [2]; tahun [2]; tetangga [2]; tuantuan [2]; abang [1]; adik [1]; Allah [1]; apa [1]; apaapa [1]; atas [1]; baca [1]; bangku [1]; belakang [1]; Belanda [1]; berani [1]; berkuasa [1]; berkunjung [1]; bernama [1]; bertirakat [1]; berusaha [1]; bicara [1]; bilang [1]; cukup [1]; dapatkan [1]; dari [1]; depan [1]; desa [1]; diamdiam [1]; dipergunakan [1]; diri [1]; dunia [1]; golongan [1]; hanya [1]; hari [1]; hati [1]; impian [1]; impikan [1]; ingin [1]; jabatannya [1]; jalan [1]; jiwa [1]; kantor [1]; katanya [1]; kawin [1]; kebencian [1]; kehormatan [1]; kejjijikan [1]; kekuasaan [1]; kepercayannya [1]; keras [1]; kerja [1]; kesulitan [1]; kuasa [1]; kuperhatikan [1]; lahir [1]; lingkungannya [1]; maka [1]; malah [1]; manusia [1]; masih [1]; melalui [1]; melayu [1]; melihat [1]; membantu [1]; memberi [1]; membikin [1]; membungkuk [1]; mempunyai [1]; memutih [1]; menahan [1]; menarik [1]; mendengar [1]; mendengarkan [1]; menghormati [1]; menjadi [1]; menolak [1]; menyenangkan [1]; muda [1]; nama [1]; oleh [1]; padanya [1]; pedagang [1]; peduli [1]; peranakan [1]; pergaulan [1]; pernah [1]; puas [1]; pun [1]; raganya [1]; rendah [1]; rumahnya [1]; sampai [1]; sanak [1]; satusatunya [1]; saudara [1]; sedikit [1]; sekali [1]; sekedar [1]; selalu [1]; sepuluh [1]; sesuatu [1]; setelah [1]; setuju [1]; si [1]; siapa [1]; situ [1]; sudah [1]; tabik [1]; tangannya [1]; tergantung [1]; terhormat [1]; termasuk [1]; tetap [1]; tiba [1]; tiga [1]; totok [1]; tulis [1]; tunggu [1]; urusan [1]; usahanya [1] | berapalah (1) [1] berkuli (1) [1] berpanen (1) [1] berpuasa (1) [1] bertanam (1) [1] berurutan (1) [1] cap (1) [1] cukaian (1) [1] diawangawang (1) [1] diimpikannya (1) [1] disesah (1) [1] disugunya (1) [1] ditempuhnya (1) [1] guratan (1) [1] jampi (1) [1] kenaikan (1) [1] kerabatnya (1) [1] ketakziman (1) [1] kuhnya (1) [1] mandorlah (1) [1] mandortebu (1) [1] Meluku (1) [1] membubuhkan (1) [1] mempedulikannya (1) [1] mencangkul (1) [1] menggendam (1) [1] menjilat (1) [1] mingguan (1) [1] muak (1) [1] pabrikgula (1) [1] Pai (1) [1] Paing (1) [1] pangkatnya (1) [1] penanya (1) [1] penghasilan (1) [1] seninkamis (1) [1] sepupu (1) [1] suku (1) [1] tebu (1) [1] terpatahkan (1) [1] terpencil (1) [1] tersisih (1) [1] tindakannya (1) [1] tirakat (1) [1] | diterima (2) [1] gaji (2) [1] tahunan (2) [1] mantra (2) [1] kassier (2) [1] kas (2) [1] jempol (2) [1] menjadikannya (2) [1] ditengah (2) [1] kemurahan (2) [1] seorangdua (2) [1] pembesarnya (2) [1] risi (2) [1] hinakan (2) [1] martabat (2) [1] menghentikan (2) [1] doaku (2) [1] Paiman (3) [1] pasaran (3) [1] pemegang (3) [1] kesatuan (3) [1] bayar (3) [1] perlindungan (3) [1] memudahkan (4) [1] bawahan (4) [1] persen (4) [1] Sidoarjo (4) [1] upah (4) [1] juru (4) [1] merugikan (4) [1] iba (4) [1] berdoa (4) [1] kelakuannya (4) [1] utama (5) [1] kuli (5) [3] jurubayar (5) [3] | rajin (6) [3] bacatulis (6) [1] memohon (6) [1] dihormati (7) [1] memasukkan (7) [1] pandangan (7) [1] menemui (8) [1] mengibakan (9) [1] Tulangan (10) [2] memalukan (12) [1] Sastrotomo (14) [1] jabatan (14) [7] juritulis (15) [4] Sanikem (16) [1] berarti (16) [2] ayahku (19) [4] | Sastrotomo (14) [1] juritulis (15) [4] Sanikem (16) [1] berarti (16) [2] ayahku (19) [4] |

Table 3 (cont.): TOEM Peak A Seed-words (numbers in brackets refer to number of appearances in the scan window; numbers in parentheses refer to number of subsequent appearances)

TOEM 23177-23676 (66)

| | 1 | 2-5 | 6-20 | Top 5 (seed-words) |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| the [35]; he [20]; in [16]; and [15]; a [12]; as [12]; of [11]; to [11]; his [10]; was [9]; would [7]; be [6]; factory [6]; on [5]; or [5]; could [4]; him [4]; but [3]; even [3]; father [3]; have [3]; higher [3]; money [3]; more [3]; my [3]; no [3]; not [3]; people [3]; their [3]; they [3]; with [3]; at [2]; blood [2]; did [2]; didn't [2]; down [2]; dreamed [2]; every [2]; from [2]; get [2]; had [2]; it [2]; job [2]; just [2]; magic [2]; meant [2]; name [2]; position [2]; post [2]; receive [2]; respect [2]; respected [2]; s [2] ; so [2]; still [2]; than [2]; there [2]; though [2]; used [2]; very [2]; were [2]; who [2]; world [2]; years [2]; younger [2]; able [1]; accept [1]; after [1]; also [1]; among [1]; away [1]; became [1]; becoming [1]; behavior [1]; being [1]; bench [1]; big [1]; born [1]; bow [1]; bring [1]; broken [1]; brother [1]; brothers [1]; brought [1]; business [1]; came [1]; care [1]; caused [1]; changed [1]; contrary [1]; coolie [1]; cut [1]; day [1]; difficulty [1]; disgust [1]; dreams [1]; elder [1]; especially [1]; eyes [1]; far [1]; first [1]; for [1]; friends [1]; getting [1]; great [1]; greet [1]; ground [1]; hands [1]; hanging [1]; harvest [1]; hatred [1]; held [1]; I [1]; if [1]; indeed [1]; Javanese [1]; laborers [1]; least [1]; leave [1]; listen [1]; long [1]; longer [1]; made [1]; Malay [1]; man [1]; many [1]; married [1]; men [1]; midst [1]; mixed [1]; need [1]; needed [1]; off [1]; offices [1]; often [1]; one [1]; only [1]; order [1]; other [1]; own [1]; pen [1]; person [1]; plant [1]; powerful [1]; pure [1]; quite [1]; raised [1]; read [1]; reading [1]; refused [1]; remained [1]; result [1]; rice [1]; rise [1]; said [1]; salary [1]; satisfied [1]; say [1]; should [1]; sisters [1]; sit [1]; skinned [1]; society [1]; something [1]; sort [1]; ten [1]; that [1]; them [1]; these [1]; three [1]; thursday [1]; traditional [1]; tried [1]; trust [1]; up [1]; village [1]; wanted [1]; wasn't [1]; way [1]; well [1]; went [1]; which [1]; white [1]; words [1]; work [1]; worked [1]; write [1]; writing [1]; year [1]; you [1] | cash (1) [1] commission (1) [1] coolies' (1) [1] counted (1) [1] cousins (1) [1] diligent (1) [1] diligently (1) [1] dukuns (1) [1] foreman's (1)[1] formulas (1) [1] gang's (1) [1] generosity (1) [1] hard-hearted (1) [1] hoe (1) [1] holder (1) [1] isolated (1) [1] limbo (1) [1] merchants (1) [1] Monday (1) [1] Pai (1) [1] Paing (1) [1] plow (1) [1] promotion (1) [1] scribe (1) [1] sickened (1) [1] syllable (1) [1] toll (1) [1] weekly (1) [1] withhold (1) [1] | market (2) [1] foremost (2) [1] industrious (2) [1] coolies (2) [2] relative (2) [1] fasts (2) [2] thumbprints (2) [1] stroke (2) [1] esteem (2) [1] harm (2) [1] foreman (2) [2] Paiman (3) [1] labor (3) [1] sugar (3) [2] cane (3) [2] jobs (3) [2] foremen (3) [2] agreed (3) [1] tuans (3) [2] pathetic (3) [1] crawling (3) [1] protection (3) [1] cashier (4) [1] Sidoarjo (4) [1] easier (5) [1] wages (5) [2] | anybody (6) [1] paymaster (6) [4] named (7) [2] neighbors (8) [1] Tulangan (10) [2] clerk (11) [3] rose (11) [1] relations (14) [1] Sastrotomo (14) [1] Sanikem (18) [1] | Tulangan (10) [2] clerk (11) [3] Sastrotomo (14) [1] relations (14) [1] Sanikem (18) [1] |

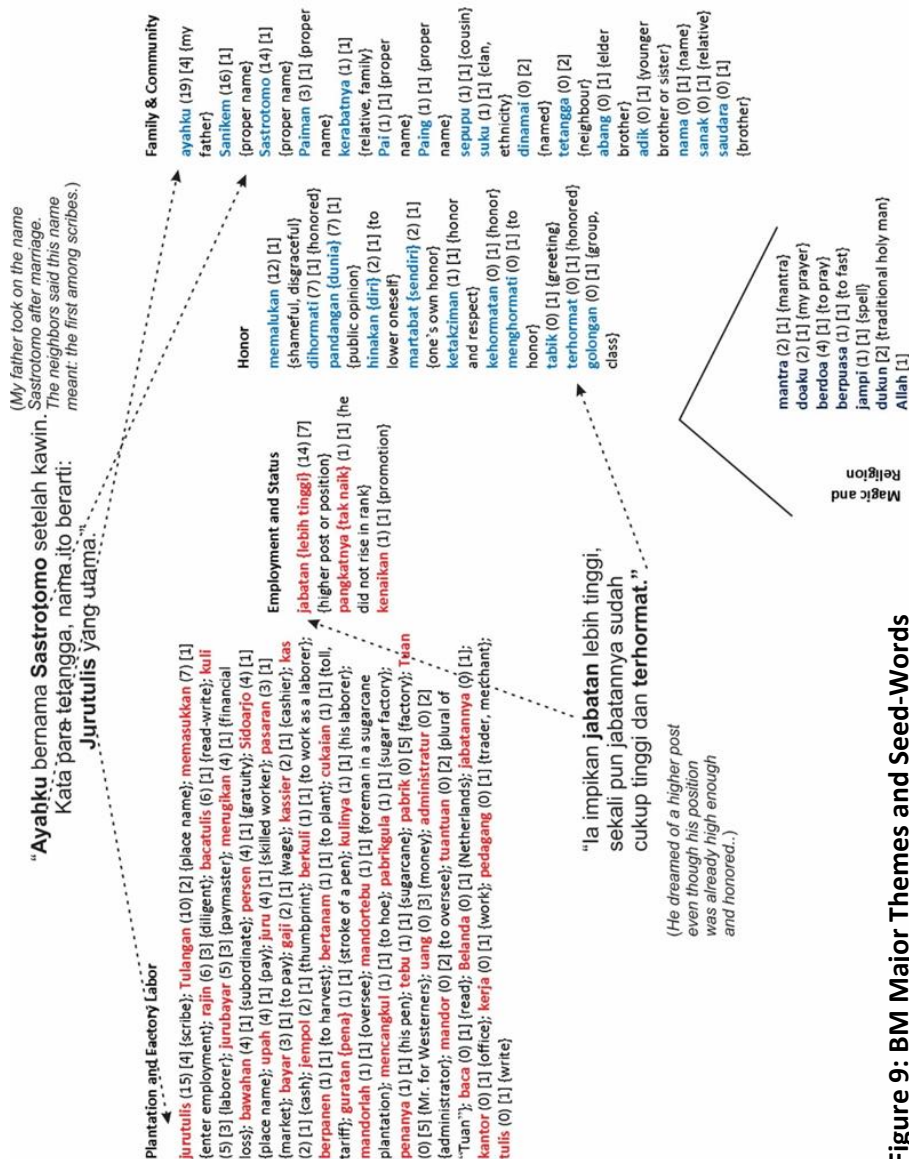


Figure 9: BM Major Themes and Seed-Words

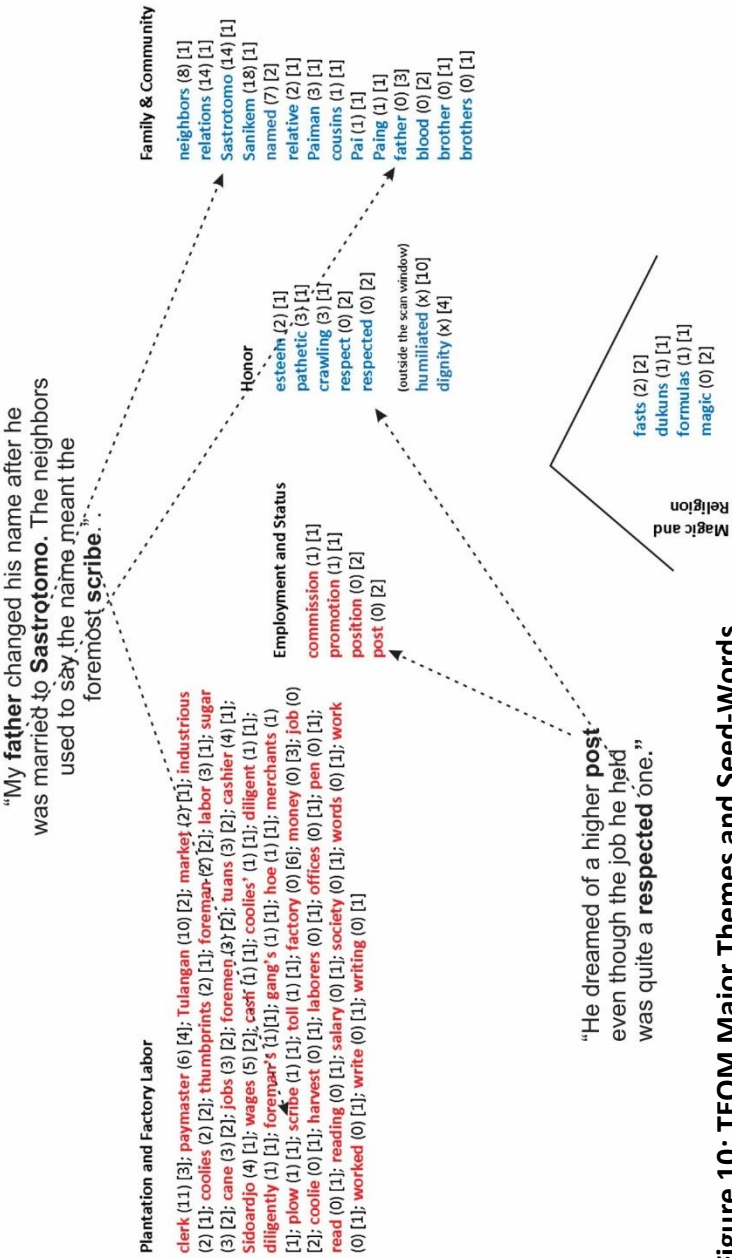


Figure 10: TEOM Major Themes and Seed-Words



Figure 11: Concordance plots of textual occurrences of “family & kinship” (top) and “economic” (bottom) terms in BM. Points 18975-19474 indicated in box with dotted lines.

Table 4: Reduction in TEOM of “Honor” to “Respect”

| BM | | TEOM |
|--------------|---------------------------------|---------|
| Ke(hormat)an | Respect; Esteem; Honor | Respect |
| Ke(takzim)an | | Esteem |
| Martabat | Rank; Status; Prestige; Dignity | Dignity |

Appendix A: textanalysis-1 and textanalysis-2 Programs (the symbol “>” at line beginnings should be replaced by a space when encoding)

```
#####
# PROGRAM NAME: textanalysis-1.py
# AUTHOR: R.G.
# INSTITUTION: UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES DILIMAN
# DATE: June 2017
# WRITTEN IN PYTHON 3.6
#####
# SCAN LENGTH
# ASSIGN A VALUE FOR THE LENGTH OF THE SCAN WINDOW
# RECOMMENDED VALUES DEPENDING ON THE LENGTH OF THE TEXT:
# 20, 50, 100, 300, 500, 1000
SCN=[INPUT SCAN LENGTH HERE]
filename="[INPUT FILENAME HERE]"
#####

print ('RUNNING TEXT ANALYSIS ')
text=open(filename + '.txt', 'r')
S=text.read()
LO = S.split( ); TITLE=LO[0]+'-'+LO[1]+'-'+LO[2]
L1 = LO
L2 = [0]*len(LO)
L3 = [0]*(len(LO)-SCN)
L4 = [0]*(len(LO)-SCN)
```

```
#####  
# PROGRAM NAME: textanalysis-2.py  
# AUTHOR: R.G.  
# INSTITUTION: UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES DILIMAN  
# DATE: June 2017  
# WRITTEN IN PYTHON 3.6 (ANACONDA)  
# REQUIRES INSTALLATION OF NETWORKX  
#####
```



```
#####
# LEXICAL COMPLEXITY
#####

S=' +SS+'
L0=S.split( )
L1 = [0]*len(L0)
ctr=1
textdata6=open('6-'+LEXCOMP-'+str(SCN)+'-'+TITLE + '.csv', 'w')
for i in range (len(L0)-SCN):
>>>>L2=[0]*SCN
>>>>for j in range (SCN):
>>>>>>>L2[j]=L0[i+j]
>>>>L3=L2
>>>>L4=' '.join(L3)
>>>>for k in range (SCN):
>>>>>>>if L3[k]!='@@@': continue
>>>>>>>if L3[k]!='XXX': continue
>>>>>>>wrd =' '+ L3[k]+' '
>>>>>>>L4=L4.replace(wrd,' @@@ ')
>>>>>>>L3=L4.split( )
>>>>>>>L3[k]='XXX'
>>>>>>>L4=' '.join(L3)
>>>>L3=L4.split( )
>>>>for l in range (SCN):
>>>>>>>if L3[l]!='XXX':
>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>L1[i]+=1
for l in range (len(L0)-SCN):
>>>>textdata6.write(str(ctr)+' '+str(L1[l]/SCN) + '\n')
>>>>ctr=ctr+1
textdata6.close ()
print ('FINISHED LEXICAL COMPLEXITY!')
```

```
#####
# BETWEENNESS CENTRALITY
#####
```

```
S=' + SS + '
L0=S.split( )
L1=['0']*len(L0)
L2=['0']*len(L0)
L3=['0']*len(L0)
L4=['0']*len(L0)
for i in range (len(L0)-1):
>>>>L1[i]=L0[i]
>>>>L2[i]=L0[i+1]
import networkx as nx
G=nx.Graph ()
for i in range (len(L1)):
>>>>G.add_edge (L1[i], L2[i])
S= nx.betweenness_centrality (G)
for j in range (len(L0)-1):
>>>>L4[j]=(S[L1[j]])
```

```

textdata7=open('7-'+BETCEN-'+str(SCN)+'-'+TITLE+'.csv','w')
ctr=1
for i in range (len(L0)-SCN):
>>>>z=0.0
>>>>for j in range (SCN):
>>>>>>>if i+j >len(L0)-1: break
>>>>>>>z= float(L4[i+j])+z
>>>>textdata7.write(str(ctr)+' '+str(z/SCN)+'\n')
>>>>ctr=ctr+1
textdata8=open('8-'+BETCENLIST-'+str(SCN)+'-'+TITLE+'.csv','w')
ctr=1
for i in range (len(L0)):
>>>>textdata8.write(str(ctr)+' '+L0[i]+' '+ str(S[L0[i]]))+'\n')
>>>>ctr=ctr+1
textdata7.close ()
textdata8.close ()

print ('FINISHED BETWEENNESS CENTRALITY!')

```

The Contributors

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