TOMÁS

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Introduction

Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo

The revived UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies begins its second year this semester with a full staff complement, as approved by the Rev. Father Herminio Dagohoy, O.P., Rector Magnificus.

Named Resident Fellows are: Ralph Galan, Nerisa del Carmen Guevara, Eros Atalia, Lito Zulueta, Joselito de los Reyes, Chuckberry Pascual, Ferdinand Lopez and Jamie Siao of the Faculty of Arts and Letters; Dr. Augusto Aguila of the College of Pharmacy; Dr. John Jack Wigley of the College of Physical Rehabilitation; and Joselito de los Reyes of the Faculty of Engineering. Named Associates are: Dr. Rebecca Añonevo, Dr. Michael Corroza and Dr. Oscar Campomanes of the Graduate School. (The Resident Fellows are full-time faculty members while the Associates are part-time faculty members.)

Their appointments are in line with the vision of the UST CCWLS as a literary academy, the members of which will provide peer support for each other, serve as an inspiration for other writers and literary scholars in the UST community, and implement programs and projects designed to turn the USTCCWLS into a literary hub.

Given the bias – even in institutions like UST, which are viewed by the general public as bastions of classical learning and old-fashioned values – for disciplines preparing students for more lucrative professions, the writers and artists among us can only be gratified and grateful for this clear signal of support from the Office of the Rector. Without going into

the arguments for and against the effects on literary production of the democratic blogs and "notes" featured in social networking sites, one might interpret this move on the part of the UST administration as a recognition of the need to set standards where literature and literary scholarship are concerned, an important part of academe's responsibility to provide guidance to the young persons who enrol in order to learn.

Another step forward for the CCWLS is the presentation of the second issue of the revived literary journal, *Tomas.* Like the first issue, *Tomas 2* is a showcase for Thomasian literary talents.

In my Introduction to *Tomas 1,* I referred to National Artist Bienvenido Lumbera's Paz Latorena Commemorative Lecture. in which he underscored the need for literary scholarship to arrive at a fair assessment of the University's contributions to Philippine Literature. That important lecture, titled "Stepping Forward at 400: the Literary Production of UST," is part of this issue.

Lumbera traces this body of work – from its roots in the 1930s with Alejandro Abadilla and Genoveva Edrosa, through the post-war years with Frankie Sionil Jose (later named National Artist as well), Juan Capiendo Tuvera and Juan T. Gatbonton; Ophelia Alcantara Dimalanta, Wilfredo Nolledo, and Rolando Tinio in the '60s; Federico Licsi Espino, Rogelio Sicat, Norma Miraflor, and Cirilo Bautista in the '70s, to Neil Garcia in the 90s. He briefly discusses the writers' major contributions, giving part of the credit to the "dedicated, passionate teachers" who, though they taught literature, not creative writing, nurtured in their students "a love of language and intense respect for masters of literary craft," thus "awakening in them "the urgency of carrying out the task of making literature light one's way through life."

This essay has inspired a group of Thomasian writers in the faculty to want to undertake a catalogue of Thomasian writers, which might serve as a first step to retrieving and reprinting long-forgotten literary works.

In the meantime, the production of new literature and literary scholarships proceeds apace. Resident Fellows Ralph Galan, Augusto Aguila, and John Jack Wigley have recently released their first books, literary criticism, short fiction, and creative nonfiction respectively. Alumnus Carlomar Daoana won a Carlos Palanca gold for his suite of poems, which is included in this issue.

From alumni Cirilo F. Bautista and Recah Trinidad come excerpts from forthcoming novels, and from alumnus Albert Casuga, their contemporary, now residing in Canada, comes a second suite of poems (the first suite was part of *Tomas 1)*. CCWLS Associate Oscar V. Campomanes contributes a study of Linda Ty-Casper's novel, *Ten Thousand Seeds.* Another CCWLS Associate Michael Coroza (Secretary General of UMPIL), and alumna Alma Anonas-Carpio (literary editor of the *Graphic,* one of the few magazines still publishing literary pieces), contribute a suite of poems each, modern versions of traditional poetic forms by the former, and feminist poems by the latter. Resident Fellow Nerisa del Carmen Guevara contributes nonfiction which is both family memoir and social history about the Marikina shoe industry. Alumnus Jose Victor Torres contributes a play which is a monolgue inspired by a poem and an essay by Jhoanna Lynn Cruz.

The youngest generation of Thomasian writers is represented by faculty member Paul Alcoseba Castillo, winner of this year's Rector's Literary Award in the 28th Gawad Usteteka, who contributes his winning suite of poems; graduate student Zendy Victoria Sue G. Valencia, and alumna Katrina del Rosario, who both contribute sensitive recollections of troubled periods in their lives.

But even as we launch *Tomas 2,* we have sent out a call for submissions to *Tomas 3*, which will be open to all writers and literary scholars regardless of institutional affiliation or geographic location. Fiction (either short stories or excerpts of novels), nonfiction (essays, memoirs, profiles, travelogues, etc.), drama (for stage, film or TV), plays, art works, photo essays, cartoons, graphic fiction, (and interesting variants or combinations of the above) are welcome. Deadline for submission is July 31, 2013.

Dugo sa Gunita

Cirilo F. Bautista

Isa

Ako si Morel Pardo. Hindi mahalaga na paniwalaan ninyo ang aking ilalahad, pero nais kong maisatitik ang matagal nang nagpapabigat sa aking isipan at damdamin. Iyan ang mahalaga. Apatnapung taon na ako, mahilig lumikha ng tula, binata, malusog, at may mabuting trabaho. Hindi mahalaga kahit na ang mga iyan—paano ko ito sasabihin?—kung ihahambing sa mga pangyayaring aking kinasangkutan, o napag-alaman. Kung isang pagsasalin ang lahat ng buhay buhat sa wika ng pagiging makatao tungo sa wika ng pagiging makahulugan, ang panitikan ang pinakamakapangyarihang bagay sa lahat. Nagdaragdag ng lakas sa lakas at nagtatapos sa kahinaan ng katauhan ang bawa't buhay na iniluwal ng pluma sa papel. Dahil marupok ang damdamin, marupok din ang alaala—alamat lamang ang una kung hindi mapipigil ang kapalaluan ng ikalawa. Isang pagtatangkang magbigay katuturan sa mga madaling maglaho sa yungib ng paglimot, isang pagliligtas, ang kasulatang ito na atubili kong hinabi. Hindi isang pagliligtas, hindi, kung tutuusin, kundi isang paghahayuma sa lambat ng kapalaran.

Dalawa

Kahit gaanong kasugid ang aking pagsisikap, hindi ko na matandaan kung saan ko unang nakatagpo si Flora Sanchez. Marahil sa isang bahay-kainan, habang humuhigop ako ng ikalawang tasa ng kape; o sa isang tindahan ng sapatos na aking tinatangkilik dahil malapit sa aking tanggapan; o sa isang sinehan habang nakapila kami at bumibili ng tiket. Marahil. Pinahihirapan ko ang aking gunita dahil mahalaga na aking malaman—diyan nakasalalay ang hinahangad kong pagbuo ng ilang bahagi ng aking napunit na nakaraan. At hindi lamang tandaan, kundi tandaan nang tama at walang alinlangan upang mabigyang paliwanag ang dugo sa aking gunita. Mayroong mga tao at bagay na hindi natin masyadong binibigyan ng pansin sa pangkaraniwang buhay, subali't biglang darating ang pagkakataon na magaangkin ang mga ito ng pambihirang kahulugan dahil maikakabit natin sa isang maselang sinulid ng ating kaluluwa. Ganyan ang pakiramdam ko kay Flora. Maaaring sa isang panaginip kami unang nagkita—bakit hindi kung kaluluwa ang pag-uusapan—at hindi kataka-taka iyan sa liwanag ng mga bagong agham, at kung hindi kalilimutan na isang walang-katapusang bugtong ang buhay.

Matindi ang aking pagsisikap na matagpuan si Flora Sanchez.

Sumagi sa aking damdamin ang aking pagnanais na malaman kung saan kami unang nagkita nang dumaong ang bapor na aming sinasakyan sa Sorrento. Kahawig ni Flora ang isang babaeng nakilala ko sa paglalakbay—kulay-San Antonio ang buhok, maputing kutis, bilugang mukha, matangos na ilong, labing tila laging nakangiti, katamtamang taas, malusog na pangangatawan. Nauna siyang bumaba sa pantalan at habang minamasid ko siyang lumalakad patungo sa isang naghihintay na kotse, hindi ako makapaniwala na hindi siya si Flora.

Isang bahagi ng bugtong na aking nabanggit ang pagtungo ko sa Italya.

ISANG UMAGA SA KALAGITNAAN ng buwang Abril, abala ako sa aking gawain sa tanggapan ng pamahalaan na aking pinaglilingkuran nang pumasok si Dory, ang aking kalihim, at nagsabing mayroon akong panauhin. Tinignan niya ang nakasulat sa kanyang hawak na tarheta.

"Gianni Sorca ang pangalan, taga UNESCO," sabi niya.

Matipuno ang katawan ng lalaking banyaga na pumasok sa aking opisina, mababa ang tindig—marahil ay limang talampakan at apat na pulgada lamang—at laginling. Halos matakpan ng mapula at mahabang buhok ang kanyang mukha. Sikig siya kaya't malapad sa tingin ang kuwelyo ng kanyang berdeng kamisadentro. Nakatupi ang laylayan ng kanyang itim na pantalon sa ibabaw ng isang pares ng puting sapatos na goma. Matatag ang kanyang pakikipagkamay sa akin. Sa tantiya ko, kasing-gulang ko siya. Pinaupo ko siya.

"Dinaramdam kong gambalain kayo, Mr. Pardo," bungad niya, "gayong ako'y di ninyo kilala."

"Walang anuman iyon. Taga-UNESCO ka?"

"Isa akong tagasalin doon. Mayroon kaming pulong sa Maynila ngayong linggo. Sinamantala ko ang pagtatapos ng aming sesyon upang sadyain ka."

"Matatas ang iyong Tagalog. Saan mo natutuhan ang aming wika?"

"Sa inyong embahada sa Roma. Tinuruan ako ng isang Pilipina. Hindi mo naitatanong, isa akong Italyano, kahit na hindi ako mukhang Romano. Belga ang aking ama, Pranses ang aking ina. Lumaki ako sa Roma kung saan may negosyo ang aking ama. Marunong ako ng anim na lenguwahe. Matagal na ako sa UNESCO. Ang totoo'y ilang ulit na akong nakadalaw dito sa inyong bayan. Marami akong kaibigan dito na tumutulong sa akin—"

"Tumutulong?"

"Sa pananaliksik tungkol sa kalinangang Pilipino."

"Tila malalim ang iyong hilig sa aming bayan," sabi ko.

«Totoo. Ako'y isa ring"—at nag-aatubili siya nang ilang saglit—"makata, kagaya mo, ngunit hindi kasing-husay mo. At iyan ang nagdala sa akin dito. Nabasa ko na ang mga epiko mo. Nagandahan ako. May sinusulat din akong mahabang tula, sa Tagalog, na pangsamantalang pinamagatan kong *Daluyong*. Hihingi sana ako ng payo mo."

"Binibigyan mo ng kalabisan ang aking kakayahan. Gayon pa man, pagbibigyan kita. Habang nananganghalian sa aking paboritong kainan, mag-usap tayo. Paano mo nalaman kung saan ako matatagpuan?"

"Nagtanong ako sa Solidaridad Bookshop. Kilala ka ng may-aring si Frankie Jose."

Pinagbilinan ko si Dory ng ilang bagay, pinirmahan ang mga tseke at papeles sa aking mesa, at nagsadya kami ng aking bisista sa Jadestone Restaurant. Tinahak namin ang E. Rodriguez patungong Welcome Rotonda. Nasa likurang upuan kami ni Gianni at nasa manibela si Fajardo, ang tsuper ng aming opisina. Masikip ang trapiko sa kanto ng Araneta bago lumagpas ng Quezon Institute, at lumuwag lamang nang paakyat na kami sa gawi ng Banawe. Matamang pinagmasdan ni Gianni ang nadaraanan naming tanawin. Malinis at maayos na ang dating marurumi at magugulong bangketa. Wala na ang mga nagtitinda ng sigarilyo, mani, kendi, tinapay at pamatid-uhaw. Nawala na rin ang mga pulubing lumalaboy sa lansangan. Buhat nang igawad ang Batas Militar noong Setyembre ng nakaraang taon, dumating ang pagbabago sa buhay at pag-iisip ng sambayanan. Alam kaya ito ng aking katabi? Sa malayong luklukan ng Santo Papa, narinig ba nila ang dagundong ng mga trak na naglululan ng mga tahimik na sundalo, nakauniporme ng berde at may hawak ng marahas na armalite, patungo sa pook na tinusok na sa mapa at nagkakanlong sa mga inaakalang kaaway? Luminis ang mga kalsada, walang alinlangan, at nakikita namin sa aming pagkanan na tila bagong hilamos ang kahabaan ng Quezon Boulevard—tinanggalan ng mga pangit na karatula, nilagyan ng mga halaman, at winawalis oras-oras ng mga pangkat ng babaeng naka-kamisetang dilaw. Hindi ka na matatakot maglakad sa kalye Raon sa Maynila. Wala nang nakaumbok na baril sa bulsa o nakasukbit sa sinturon ng mga lalaking masasalubong mo. Higit sa sampung libong rebolber, riple at mabibigat na armas ang nasamsam ng pamahalaan. Nang tipunin ang mga ito sa isang lugal at ipakita sa mga peryodista, isang bundok na bakal ang nabuo. Naging unano ang mga opisyal ng pulisya na nakunan ng larawan sa harap nito.

"Nais kong malaman," baling sa akin ng aking katabi, "kung bumubuti ang lagay ng katahimikan at kaayusan sa Kamaynilaan."

"Walang duda," sagot ko. "Bumaba ang antas ng krimen. Paano hindi, eh, natatakot ang mga masasamang-loob. Puspusan ang paglaban ng gobyerno sa kanila. At mabibigat ang parusa. Alam mo na, nasa kamay ng Pangulo ang batas."

"Ibig mong sabihin, siya ang gumagawa ng batas? Hindi ba mapanganib iyan?"

"Sa ilalim ng mga kalagayan ngayon, huminto ang pag-andar ng kongreso. Dahil pinuno siya ng militar, may karapatang gumawa at magpatupad ng batas ang Pangulo. Siempre, puwede siyang magmalabis, at iyon ang masama. Ngunit sa tingin ng marami hindi niya gagawin iyon."

"Balita sa Italya, bago ako umalis doon na marami raw ipinapatay at ipinabilanggo—"

"Hindi lubos na makatotohanan ang balitang iyan. Hindi ipinagkakaila na dinampot ang ilang pusakal na kriminal at pulitikong nang-abuso ng kanilang posisyon. Ang mga kaaway ng estado—ang makakaliwa at rebolusyonaryo—kailangang pigilin sila sa paggawa ng gulo. Kung hindi, darami ang suliranin ng bayan."

"Hindi popular ang Pangulo, kung gayon?"

"Walang pag-aaral diyan. Ewan ko, pero hindi naman katanyagan ang kasangkot dito. Hindi siya mang-aawit o mananayaw na dapat magtamo ng palakpak ng bayan bago siya makagawa ng dapat niyang gawin."

"Nakatutulong ang numero," sabi ni Gianni, "kung nais mong mabatid ang pulso ng bayan. Nakasalalay ang buhay ng demokrasya sa kuro-kuro ng nakararami. Sila ang naghalal sa mga pinuno ng pamahalaan—"

"At nag-umpisa ng kaguluhan. Alam mo, hindi demokrasya ang pinakamahusay na uri ng pamahalaan— ito ang pinakamahina— dahil sinusunod nito ang gusto ng madla na walang sariling utak at kakayahan. Sino ang nagsabi na kailangan lumitaw ang isang superman buhat sa kamangmangan ng nakararami?"

« Si Nietzsche. Tinawag niya ang demokrasya na 'isang kahibangan sa pagbibilang ng ilong.' Pero alam natin na nagmamaktol lamang siya. Ang totoo'y Kristiyano siya hanggang talikuran niya ang relihiyon noong siya'y binata pa. Kamutin mo ang isang ateista at lalabas ang isang maka-Diyos."

"Sinabi mo. Sa kalagayan namin ngayon, ng aking bayan, ibig kong sabihin, sinusubok namin ang paraan ng nakakokonti sa paggabay sa nakararami."

"Nagtatagumpay ba naman kayo?"

"Maaga pa upang pagpasiyahan iyan. Kung hindi magbabago ang takbo ng lahat, maganda ang kalalabasan. Pero, bakit ba pulitika ang ating pinag-uusapan? Ngayon, sabihin mo ang totoo— ano'ng pakay mo sa pagtunton sa akin?"

Ngumiti siya. “Gaya nang sinabi ko, ako’y tagahanga mo. Hindi ako nagbibiro. Nabili ko ang dalawa mong libro ng epiko sa Solidaridad Bookshop at nagustuhan ko ang mga iyon. Mayroon din akong nasulat na epiko, hindi mo naitatanong, sa wikang Pranses, nilimbag nang pribado. Sa Tanganyika noong nakaraang taon, sinimulan ko ang isang tula, sa Tagalog, tungkol sa pagbabago sa Asya at ang ginagawa nitong kaukulang pagbabago sa pag-iisip ng tao. Kung madadalaw ka sa Tanganyika, maiintindihan mo kung bakit ako nagsulat ng tula doon. Pagkatapos ng trabaho ko sa pagpupulong, wala akong mapuntuhang lugal na naiibigan ko. At ang lungsod! Mainit, marumi, lahat ng itim na makausap ko tila gunggong o kriminal! Maaaring nagkakamali ako, nguni’t pakiwari ko’y galit sila sa akin dahil puti ang aking balat. Kaya’t namalagi ako sa aking hotel at pinalipas ang oras sa pagsusulat. At pagbabasa ng iyong epiko. Naipasiya kong hahanapin kita kapag napunta akong muli sa Maynila. Kahapon, nakausap ko si Frankie. Tinanong ko kung kilala ka niya—nakita ang mga aklat mo roon—at sinabi niyang kakilala ka niya. Binanggit niya kung saan kita matatagpuan, at narito ako.”

“Pinatataba mo ang aking puso,” sabi ko. “Kumusta ang iyong tula?”

“Ayun, nasadlak sa dusa,” sabi niyang umiiling. “Nahihirapan ako sa paudlot-udlot, patigil-tigil na pagsusulat. Kailangan ko’y mahabang panahon upang mahuli ang patuloy na daloy ng aking isipan, pero kailangang harapin ko sa araw-araw ang aking trabaho. Na nakababagot nguni’t dapat asikasuhin.”

“Problema ko rin iyan. Inabot ng limang taon bago ko natapos iyong una kong epiko.”

“Ang sumpa ng guniguni,” bigkas ni Gianni.

“Ha?”

“Inakala ng mga Griyego na hibang ang mga lumilikha ng sining. May mas mahalagang bagay na magagawa sila— maging sundalo, halimbawa. Kung isa kang makata, wala kang silbi sa lipunan. Alipin ka ng iyong guniguni.”

Napatawa ako. “Gayon na nga. Lalo na dito sa aking bayan. Kahit ganong kahusay ka, kahit ilang libro na ang nagawa mo, hindi pa rin uunlad ang iyong buhay. Mangilan-ngilan lang ang tatangkilik sa iyo dahil, ay, halos walang nagbabasa dito. Madaling mamatay ang manunulat dito.”

“Sa amin din,” sabi niya.

"Hindi. Napanood ko sa telebisyon kung paano pumipila ang tao upang bumili ng aklat sa Italya at Inglatera. Nakita ko ang mga tao na nagbabasa habang naghihintay ng tren o bus sa himpilan. Hindi, Gianni, kayo ay isang lipunan ng mambabasa. Huwag kang magpakumbaba."

"Sa tingin mo ba'y mababago ang kalagayan dito?"

"Alanganin ako. Paano mo mapagbabasa ang mahihirap na hindi nakapag-aral? Paano mo hahasain ang kanilang panlasa sa sining? Hindi ko sinasabing hindi iyan magagawa, nguni't kailangan ang mahabang panahon at malakihang puhunan."

"Kahit na nasa Pangulo ang lahat ng kapangyarihan?"

"Kahit na. May hangganan ang kanyang poder at hindi niya mahahawakan ang kamalayan ng bawat Pilipino."

Kumaliwa kami ng Marica Avenue. Sumagi sa sulok ng aking paningin ang daang patungo sa Pamantasan ng Pilipinas sa aming kanan. Hindi nagtagal muli kaming kumaliwa upang pumasok sa bakuran ng Jadestone Restaurant. Dalawang palapag ang gusali—mga restauran, silid-pulungan, at tindahan sa ibaba, at sa itaas, mga silid-paupahan para sa mga bisita at turista. Maluwang ang hardin na pumapaligid sa gusali, natatamnan ng mga nagtataasang palmera, kalasutsi, mga bulaklaking halaman ng iba't ibang uri—suntan, bird of paradise, gumamela, rosas—na nagdudulot ng makulay na kaginhawahan sa pananaw.

Bumaba kami ng kotse sa harap ng pangunahing pintuan. Naglakad kami sa loob ng bulwagan, tumawid ng isang pasilyo, at pumasok sa Joseph's Grill House. Pagkatapos naming pumili ng isang mesang malapit sa bintanang salamin, nilapitan kami ng isang serbidor na nag-abot sa amin ng listahan ng mga pagkain. Humingi kami ng puting alak. Nang dumaloy ang init ng isang lagok sa aking lalamunan, dumalaw sa aking gunita ang larawan ng isang maliwanag at luntiang bukirin, na sinundan ng isang gabing tahimik sa tabi ng Pasig, at kuminang ang malaking duyan na buwan sa langit at nagbadya ng nakabibighaning romansa.

"Dapat mong makita ang mga taniman ng ubas sa Italya," sabi ni Gianni habang iniikut-ikot sa kanyang palad ang kopita, "upang malaman mo kung bakit nahuhumaling ang buong mundo sa likidong ito. Anong trabaho mo sa iyong pamahalaan, kung di mo mamasamain?"

"Maliit ang aming opisina, subali't tuwirang nasa ilalim ng Pangulo. Kaya't kung ano ang kanyang ipagawa sa amin, iyon ang aming ginagawa—

karaniwang sa larangan ng pananaliksik, pagsusulat, at pagsisiyasat." Nag-atubili akong dagdagan pa ang aking nabigkas.

"Malawak na larangan iyan. Marahil, lihim ang inyong mga gawain." Hindi niya batid na napakalapit sa katotohanan ang kanyang sinambit.

"Hindi naman," iwas ko. "Masasabing kung walang panahon ang Pangulo, kami ang nag-iisip para sa kanya. Paminsan-minsan binibigyan niya kami ng maselan na gawain, iyong may kaugnayan sa kalusugan ng estado. Kadalasan, nakasusuya ang aming buhay sa opisina. Kasi, hanggang maaari, nais ng Pangulo na mag-isip para sa kanyang sarili. Alam mong matalas ang kanyang pag-iisip."

Dumating ang aming pagkain. Para sa akin, pinausukang salmon na nilagyan ng puting salsa at napapaligiran ng piniritong patatas at kabute, at isang tumpok nang umuusok na kanin; para sa aking bisita, tenderloin steak sa salsang itim, dinurog na patatas at gisantes. Ilang sandali kaming natahimik habang nilalasahan namin ang nasa aming harapan. Napansin kong okupado ang lahat ng mesa sa loob ng munting restauran. Mga kawani ng iba't ibang tanggapan ng pamahalaan ang karamihan ng nandoon, batay sa kanilang pananamit at pananalita. Namumukhaan ko ang ilan sa kanila.

Dinampian ni Gianni ng serbilyeta ang kanyang labi bago nagsalita: "Tinawag kong 'Daluyong' ang aking tula. Bukod sa isang malaking alon, may iba pa bang kahulugan ang salitang iyan?"

"Wala na, sa aking pagkakaalam. Liban na lang kung ang kataling-hagaan ang pag-uusapan, at maraming masasaklaw iyan." Uminom ako ng malamig na tubig. "Magandang metapora ang daluyong para sa rumaragasa, nag-aalab at di mapipigilang damdamin. Ganyan ba ang iniisip mo?"

"Hindi ko alam," sabi ni Gianni. "Hindi damdamin ng isang tao, sigurado ako, kahit na ng bayaning tauhan, kundi ng isang bayan. Maaari ba iyon?"

"Bakit hindi? Kung tutuusin, sino ba ang tunay na bayani ng isang epiko kundi ang lipunan, ang bayan, na may sariling katauhan at kamalayan. Kumakatawan ito sa lahat ng kasapi ng bayan—nagiging makabuluhan lamang ang kanilang kasaysayan, hangarin at pandamdam kung titignan nang nakakuwadro sa pananaw ng kabayanan."

"Isang paghahanda sa madugong pagsulong ng bayan, kung gayon, ang bantog na panimula—'Armas at tao ang kinakanta ko.'"

"Totoo. Walang halaga ang nag-iisang tao—isang butil lamang ng buhangin sa pampang— noon at ngayon. Nguni't isang lakas na puwedeng dumakma sa mga bituin ang katipunan ng mga tao... Ano ba ang balangkas na ginagamit mo?"

"Makabago, gaya nang ginamit mo sa *Sinag ng Araw sa Nabasag na Bato*." Saglit na namula ang kanyang pisngi. "Ang totoo'y sinunod ko ang ginawa mo. Ganyang kalaki ang paghanga ko sa iyo. Ipagpaumanhin mo."

"Natutuwa ako't may napulot ka sa aking sinulat. Subali't ang porma ay porma lamang."

Tinusok niya ng tinindor ang isang piraso ng karne, dinampian iyon ng salsa sa pamamagitan ng kutsilyo, at isinubo.

"Naniniwala akong kapag tama ang porma," sabi niya maya-maya, "lutas na ang kalahati ng iyong problema. At unti-unti nang magkakaanyo ang kuwento o alamat."

"Sumaiyo nawa ang lahat ng kapalarahan," biro ko, "na hindi dumarating sa akin kung ako'y sumusulat. Palaging isang pakikitunggali ang nararanasan ko. Nakatutulong ba sa iyo ang iyong pagiging isang tagapagsalin?"

"Paminsan-minsan. Kapag sinisikap kong ilagay ang aking sarili sa kalooban ng aking tauhan, isinasalin ko ang kanyang isip at damdamin sa wikang malapit sa akin. Kung Pranses ang wika ng tulang ginagawa ko, halimbawa, at isang lalaki doon ay Aleman, isasalin ko sa Pranses ang kanyang katauhan upang maging makatotohanan siya sa akin. Malaking pagkukunwari ang kasangkot diyan."

"Hindi ba nakagagambala ang namamagitang wika?"

"Hindi naman. Gaya nang sinabi ko, bihasa ako sa anim na lengguwahe."

"Pero iyan ay anim na katauhang nagsisiksikan sa iisang kaluluwa."

"Gayon na nga," tawa niya, "kaya't kulang na lang ang ako'y mahibang. At sinasabi nilang isang pagkakanulo ang pagsasalin!"

"Ang totoo, nasa panig ng wika ang kataksilan. Sunud-sunuran lang ang tagasalin. Tapos na ang limampung porsyento ng kanyang gawain hindi pa man siya nagsisimula, dahil nasa harap niya ang isang akda na naisulat na. Kailangan na lang niyang bigyang buhay iyon sa isang naiibang wika."

"At kailangan mo diyan ang maraming pawis at dugo." Dinampian niya ng panyo ang kanyang kumukintab na noo na tila upang patunayan

ang kanyang sinambit.

Sabi ko, "Alam ko. Kahapon, bilang paglilibang, isinalin ko sa Tagalog ang bantog na tula ni Verlaine—"

"Ang tungkol sa biyulin? Memoryado ko iyan."

"Oo. Buhat sa Ingles. Hindi ako marunong ng Pranses. Bihasa ka diyan kaya't masasabi mo kung malapit sa orihinal ang aking salin." Dinukot ko sa bulsa ng aking kamisadentro ang isang putol ng papel. Malakas kong binasa ang unang saknong—

Kung ang biyulin
ng hanging taglagas
ay mabuntong-hininga,
ang puso ko'y napupunit
ng kanilang malungkot
na paulit-ulit.

"Siempre, di mo makukuha ang dating indayog at rima ng orihinal," sabi ni Gianni, "pero tama rin ang kinalabasan. Gawin mong 'mga biyulin' para umangkop sa 'kanila.'"

"Oo, may katwiran ka." At binigkas ko ang ikalawang saknong—

At kung tumunog
ang oras sa kampana,
ako'y mananangis
sa pagkakatanda
sa lahat nang nawala
kong mga naglahong panahon.

Nag-isip nang matagal ang aking kaharap. "Bakit di mo tanggalin ang 'mga' para hindi maligoy ang linya?"

"Sige. Hindi ako nasisiyahan sa 'panahon' subali't wala akong mahagilap na ibang salita."

"Tama na iyan. Hindi naman magkatugma ang lahat ng huling kataga sa unang saknong, hindi ba?"

"Oo, at ganoon din dito sa huling saknong ng tula. Tama ka."

"Paano ang takbo ng huling saknong?"

Binasa ko iyon—

At ako'y humahayo
sa hangin na umiihip
at dinadala ako
dito at doon
na tila tuyo at itim
na dahon buhat sa puno.

"Magaralgal ang tugma," sabi ni Gianni, "kulang sa lambing o dilag ng tunog. Teka. Bakit hindi mo gawing 'at nagdala sa akin' ang ikatlong linya?"

"Puwede. At upang tumugma sa huling berso, gagawin kong 'doon at dito' ang ikaapat na berso. Bagay, hindi ba?"

"Bagay," sagot niya. "Ngayon, basahin mong muli ang tula."

Binasa ko ang buong tula na kalakip ng aming mga pagwawasto. Tumango-tango si Gianni.

"Maaari na," sabi niya, "pero alam mo na mapapaganda pa iyan. Iyan ang hirap— isa lamang marupok na tulay sa pagitan ng may-akda at mambabasa ang tagasalin. Palaging tinatanong ang kanyang kahulugan, nguni't hindi binibigyan ng tamang tingin ang kanyang kakayahan. Kung maganda ang kanyang salin, dahil iyon sa kagandahan ng orihinal. Kung pangit ang kanyang salin, dahil iyon sa kakulangan ng kanyang kaalaman. Talo siya kahit ano ang kanyang gawin."

Mahirap mahuli ang hustong kagandahan ng isinasalin, totoo. May angkin at pambihirang lasa ito na hindi maipipinta sa ibang dila," sabi ko.

"Nakabibighani ang tulang iyan ni Verlaine kung titikman mo sa wikang Pranses, maniniwala ka sa akin. Lalo na kung nandoon ka sa kanyang bayan... Kung magagawi ka sa Roma, puntahan mo ako at igagala kita sa kanyang daigdig. Malapit ang ng Paris—isang sakay lang ng tren."

"Malayo sa isip ko ang gumawi roon..."

Inilabas niya ang kanyang pitaka, dumukot ng isang tarheta, sinulatan ang likod na bahgi nito at iniabot sa akin. "Uuwi na ako sa isang linggo. Heto ang aking tinitirhan sa Italya, kung sakali man. Ituturing kong isang karangalan ang maging panauhin ka."

Agad kong kinalimutan ang paanyaya niya dahil pakiramdam ko hatid lang iyon ng kanyang pagsunod sa alituntunin ng kagandahang asal. Malayo sa isip ko na patutunayan ng mga susunod na pangyayari ang aking kamalian sa bagay na iyon. Habang tinatapos ang aming kape, inilarawan niya ang gawain ng isang tagasalin sa isang pandaigdigang kapulungan. Nakatatawa ang mga halimbawang ibinigay niya tungkol sa mga kahirapan at pagkakamali ng mga baguhang tagapagsalin.

SINALUBONG AGAD AKO ni Dory pagbalik ko sa opisina.

"May bisita ka," sabi niya.

Pumasok ako sa aking tanggapan at nandoon, nakaupo sa harap ng aking mesa, si Clara. Hindi pa rin nababawasan ang kanyang angking kagandahan kahit na maraming taon na ang nadaragdag sa kanyang gulang; lalong tumingkad iyon sa aking palagay. Mahabang buhok, mukhang kabigha-bighani, maputing kutis, katamtamang taas— nababatubalani kaming mga kaibigan niya sa kanyang mga katangian. Kaya't maraming puso rin ang nabasag nang kanyang pakasalan si Ricardo Santillan noong 1967, kabilang na ang akin. Subali't nanatili ang aming pagkakaibigan kahit na bihira kaming magkita.

"Clara! Malaking sorpresa ito," bungad ko. Tumayo siya at kinamayan ako.

"Dinaramdam kong gambalain ka," sabi niya. "May pulong akong dinaluhan diyan sa kabilang gusali at naisip kong dalawin ka. Kamusta?"

"Mabuti. Ikaw—hindi ka nagbago."

"Nagbabago ang lahat, Morrie. Hindi na Ortiz ang apelyido ko, halimbawa, at may isa na akong anak."

"Kay bilis ng panahon! Huli kitang nasilayan anim na taon na ang nakalilipas, lumalakad kang tila isang anghel patungo sa altar ng Manila Cathedral... Minsan-minsan nagkakabungguan kami ni Gerry sa mga pagtitipon ng mga negosyante. Kamusta ang iyong ina, at si Amado?

"Abala pa rin si Mama sa pamamahala ng aming opisina, at si Amado ang may hawak ng aming mga negosyo."

"Kilalang-kilala si Amado sa larangan ng kalakalan. Marami akong naririnig tungkol sa katalasan ng kanyang utak. At sa kahusayan ng kanyang panulat. Gustung-gusto ko ang kanyang mga bagong aklat ng mga tula."

"Salamat naman. Sasabihin ko sa kanya. Bihira na siyang makasulat. Kailangang iukol niya ang lahat ng kanyang panahon sa negosyo. Nahahabag ako sa kanya kung minsan. Pero hindi mo mapagsisilbihan ang dalawang amo."

"Iyan din ang aking idinaraing. Isang mabigat na bagay ang pumli sa pagitan ng panulat at pananalapi! Sa aking kaso, dahil hindi naman maselan ang aking posisyon, nakahahanap ako ng puwang para sa aking guniguni. At nakapaglilibang pa ako paminsan-minsan." Napansin ba niya ang pahiwatig ng dalamhati sa pagitan ng aking mga salita?

"Naikuwento sa akin ni Mama ang naitulong mo sa pamilya Barantes—"

"Maliit na bagay lang iyon," wika ko.

"—at iminungkahi niyang kausapin kita."

"Alam kong hindi ka nagpunta rito upang magtanong lamang tungkol sa aking kalusugan. Bakit, may problema ka ba?"

"Hindi ako— ang isa kong kakilala. Nawawala ang isa niyang empleyada."

"Naipagbigay-alam na ba iyan sa pulisya? Sila ang may kakayahan—"

"Makababuting huwag muna silang isangkot. Baka maraming kapahamakan ang mangyari kapag nabunyag ito nang wala sa oras... Kung magagawa mo para sa akin ang ginawa mo para sa mga Barantes..."

Isang bagitong detektib ako—iyan ang paglilibang na nabanggit ko kanina. Nang biglang naglaho ang bunsong anak ni Senador Francisco Barantes noong nakaraang taon, inupahan nila ako upang magsiyasat. Pagkatapos ng anim na linggo, natuntuon ko sa Montalban ang pinagkukutaan ng mga dumukot sa pitong taong batang babae, at nilupig sila sa tulong ng ilang ahente ng gobyerno.

"Alam mong hindi kita matatanggihan, Clara." Malaki ang utang na loob ko sa kanyang yumaong ama, si Carlos Ortiz, na nagbigay sa akin ng una kong trabaho sa kanyang kompanya.

"Salamat. Ibibigay ko anuman ang singil mo."

"Wala tayong pag-uusapang singil—"

"Hindi, Morrie, hindi ko tatanggapin ang tulong mo kung walang bayad. Pagsasamantala na iyon."

Alam kong walang bisa ang makipagtalo sa kanya sa puntong iyon. "Bueno, pero saka na natin bigyang-pansin ang bayad. Gusto kong malaman ang tunay na nangyari."

Ayon kay Clara, 1970 nang tanggapin si Flora Sanchez bilang kalihim ng Child Care Foundation, may opisina sa Escolta. Isang direktor doon si Clara. Masinop at masipag si Flora, at hindi nagtagal pinagkatiwalaan siya ng kanyang pinuno na si Angela, anak ni Don Agustin Zorilla, tagapayo sa Pangulo ng bansa. Kung wala si Angela, at madalas na wala siya, si Flora ang nagpapatakbo ng opisina— nagtatagubilin sa mga kawani, pumipirma sa tseke, humaharap sa bisita. Hindi mapipintasan ang kanyang mga gawi at pamamalakad kaya't napalapit siya sa puso ni Angela.

"Noong isang buwan," patuloy ni Clara, "bigla siyang nawala. Sinabi sa akin ni Angela na nagulo ang tanggapan sa hindi niya pagsipot. Hindi malaman ng mga kawani ang kanilang gagagawin. Tinawagan nila ang bahay ni Flora nguni't wala siya roon. Hindi alam ng kanyang pamilya at mga kaibigan ang kanyang kinaroroonan. Nawala siya nang hindi nag-iiwan ng bakas. Nakapagtataka."

"May— may tinangay ba siyang salapi? Karaniwa'y isa iyang dahilan," sabi ko.

"Wala. Maliit lang ang pondo ng Foundation. Nasa ayos ang lahat ng papeles ng bangko. Wala siyang ginalaw."

"Pambihira. Isang ulirang kawani na biglang naglaho. Bakit? Ilang taon na siya?"

"Dalawampu't walo, sa pagkakaalam ko. Si Angela ang lubusang nakakikilala sa kanya... Nababahala ako. Baka napahamak siya—"

"Kung gayon dapat nakarinig na sana tayo buhat sa pulisya o nakatunghay ng balita sa mga pahayagan. Hindi."

"—o nasa panganib."

"Maaari."

"Hindi mapakali si Angela. Naguguluhan ang isip. Gusto ko siyang tulungan kaya't dumulog ako sa iyo."

Hindi ko masabi sa kanya na batid ko rin ang pighating dulot ng pangamba at alinglangan dala ng pagkawala ng isang taong malapit sa aking buhay. Ilang taon na... Si Elena Rimante. Iniwasan ko ang mga galamay ng gunitang iyon.

"Wala bang nakuhang sulat o anuman na magpapahiwatig ng kanyang pinatunguhan?»

Umiling si Clara. Nakakunot ang kanyang noo. Sinulyapan ang kanyang relo.

"Alam kong marami ka pang aasikasuhin," sabi ko agad. "Gagawin ko ang aking makakaya."

Tumayo siya, dinampot ang kanyang hanbag at may kinuha roon.

"Heto ang aking numero. Anuman ang aking maitutulong, Huwag kang mag-aatubili..."

Pinasalamatan ko siya at inihatid palabas ng pintuan. Pagkatapos, isinaayos ko ang laman ng aking isipan upang matanto ang aking susunod na hakbang, subali't hinamak muli ng gunita ang aking damdamin. Nasalat ng aking puso ang larawang madalas umahon buhat sa libingan ng limot: isang marilag na dalaga, tumatawid ng lansangan upang pumasok sa isang gusali, ang tila natapilok, nakabawi ng kanyang panimbang, at paika-ikang nagpatuloy lumakad. Nang malapit na sa pintuan ng isang panaderya, bigla siyang bumagsak sa ibabaw ng kariton ng tindera ng bulaklak. Sumalpok ang kanyang likod sa mga rosas at biyoleta na nagbigay kulay sa kanyang maputlang mukha. Tumakbo ako upang tulungan siya nguni't pagdating ko doon, tanging ang mga bulaklak ang aking naabutan. Nasaan si Elena Rimante? Umiling-iling ako sa nasang huwag mapilitang lumikha ng kasagutan. Hinihinala kong hindi ko magugustuhan iyon. Sa halip, pinilit kong pansinin ang kapalit na tanong—Nasaan si Flora Sanchez?

Tatlo

Kinabukasan, maaga akong nagmaneho buhat sa aking tirahan sa Palomar Village. Sa mga matalas ang ilong, palagiang nangangamoy salapi ang isang parte ng distritong ito ng Quezon City, gayong masidhi ang paghahangad ng mga residente na itago ang kanilang kaginhawaan. Nag-

aangkin ng mga bahay sa kalyeng tinatahak ko ang isang alkalde, isang hepe ng pulisya, tatlong hukom ng Korte Suprema, dalawang aktres, at ang pinuno ng adwana. Malalaki ang punongkahoy na nagkukubli sa kanila. Sumapit sa aking pandinig ang huni ng ilang ibon buhat sa mga sangang nakayuko sa mga bakal na bakod. Ipinagdiriwang nila ang nakalulugod na araw ng Abril sa hindi ko malamang dahilan.

Nagmabilis ako pagkaliko sa España. Maraming tao ang naghihintay sa mga hintuan ng sasakyan—mga estudyanteng nakauniporme, mga babaeng bitbit ang bayong at basket, mga lalaking may kipit-kipit na pahayagan at naninigarilyo. Matagal silang maghihintay. Maiinis sila. Magmumura ang ilan. Hindi makalutas sa kahirapang ito kahit na ang batas militar, nasabi ko sa aking sarili. Umaga't hapon ang kalbaryo ng pangkaraniwang mamamayan na umaasa sa dyip at bus para makagalaw sa mga bituka ng lungsod. Kulang ang sasakyan, kulang ang kalsada. Alam kong ilang mahusay na panukala ang naipahatid na sa Pangulo, subali't pinipigilang makarating sa kanyang mesa ng ilan sa kanyang mga pinagkakatiwalaan. Mahika negra. Mahika blangka. Iyan ang lamat ng kanyang kapangyarihan. Sa dinami-rami ng kanyang inaasikaso, nalalansi siya ng mga mahusay magkunwari at manlinlang, sa loob mismo ng kanyang gabinete. Alam ko. Kilala ko sila. Ngunit sino ako upang magdamit mandirigma at tumayo sa kanilang harapan at magwika, "Hinto! Tama na iyan!" Isang palito ng posporo, palutang-lutang sa baha; isang sinanay upang ipagtanggol ang malalakas at may pangalan; isang sonetong lumpo ang huling berso—ha, ha, marami pang maidaragdag na metapora, hindi para wala kaya ako naging makata, pero isang kahulugan lamang ang makakamit ng lahat. Isinulong sa isang panaginip ang pag-asa at nais ng sambayanan, tinawag itong "pagbabago," at sapilitang nanatili sa poder ang isang tinatawag na henyo. Para sa kabutihan ng lahat. Kaya't isang uri ng paggalaw ang buhay ko ngayon na tila namamalikmata. Nababalot sa ulap ng walang-katiyakan. Bago sumapit sa Simbahan ng Quiapo, lumiko ako sa Evengelista, tumawid ng Rizal Avenue, at dumiretso sa Escolta. Subali't hindi ako nagrereklamo. Inilagay ko ang aking pagtitiwala sa henyo. Kailangan niya ng sapat na panahon para matupad ang mga layunin ng gobyerno.

Huminto ako sa tapat ng Lomax Building. Sa ikaapat na palapag ang opisina ni Angela Zorilla. Tinawag ko ang pansin ng isang babae na abalang nagmamakinilya sa harap ng isang nakapinid na pinto. Ibinigay ko sa kanya ang aking pangalan at sinabi ang aking sadya. Diniinan niya ang isang

buton sa kanyang mesa. Hindi nagtagal bumukas ang nakasarang pinto at lumabas ang isang kaakit-akit na babae.

"Mr. Pardo? Ako si Angela," sabi niya. "Dito tayo mag-usap."

Kinamayan ko siya. Nagtuloy kami sa kanyang silid-tanggapan.

"Ipinabatid sa akin ni Clara ang iyong pagsang-ayon na kami ay tulungan," patuloy niya nang nakaupo na kami. "Nagpapasalamat ako sa iyo. Lubhang maselan ang bagay na ito upang ipaubaya sa pulisya."

"Pero sila ang may sapat na kaalaman at kagamitan sa paghahanap nang nawawalang tao. Ako'y isa lang—"

"Alam ko. Kung gusto ko, makukuha ko ang tulong ng alin mang sangay ng gobyerno. Ang totoo'y iyon na nga ang lumalabas. Taga-gobyerno ka—tinignan ko ang rekord mo—at apat na taon nang naglilingkod sa iyong puwesto. Gamitin mo ang iyong mga koneksiyon subali't ayaw kong lumabas kailan man ang kaugnayan ko sa bagay na ito. Malinaw ba?"

"Kung iyan ang gusto mo. Mayroon ka bang pinangangambahang maaaring mangyari?"

"Marami, at trabaho mong pigilin ang mga iyon upang hindi magkatotoo."

Hindi ko alam ang ibig niyang sabihin, pero hindi na ako humingi ng paliwanag. Siya ang makapangyarihang anak ng isang makapangyarihang ama na matalik na kaibigan at tagapayo ng Pangulo. Napakalinaw ng pagkakawit, at kumikintab na tila gintong medalya ang babala— "Lumakad nang marahan."

"Nitong mga huling araw bago siya nawala," sabi ko, "may napansin ka bang kahina-hinala sa kilos ni Flora Sanchez?"

Saglit siyang nag-isip. "Wala. Ganoon pa rin siya—masayahin, masipag, at magalang sa lahat."

"May mga kaibigang lalaki ba siya?"

"May bubuyog ba sa pulut-pukyutan? Ah, mapanggayuma ang kanyang alindog kahit na hindi pambihira ang kanyang kagandahan." Kinuha niya ang isang polder sa kahon ng kanyang mesa at ibinigay sa akin. "Nandiyan lahat ang alam namin tungkol sa kanya. Kopya mo iyan."

Pinasalamatan ko siya. Nakaklip ang isang litratong may kulay sa unang pahina: Mukha ng isang babaeng itim ang buhok, maputi ang balat, matangos ang ilong, at sumisilip sa pagitan ng kanyang manipis na labi ang

mala-garing na ngipin.

"Ano'ng hinala mo sa nangyari sa kanya?" tanong ko.

"Kung hinala ang pag-uusapan, Mr. Pardo, marami. Nandiyan pa rin ang mga mandurukot, halimbawa, na nagtitinda ng mga babae sa Saudi Arabia at Japan. O sapilitang humihingi ng kapalit na bayad. O baka naman nagtanan siya... Marami, pero ano ang saysay kung haka-haka lamang? Kumuha ka ng mga katibayan at tignan natin ang ating magagawa. Ano man ang kailangan mo—"

"Sinabi na sa akin ni Clara."

"Mabuti. Kay Clara ka tuwirang mag-uulat. At inuulit ko, salamat sa iyong tulong."

Tumayo siya bilang pagtatapos sa aming usapan.

MAGANDA NGUNI'T MAPANGANIB, nasambit ko sa aking sarili habang ibinababa ng elevator ang aking katawan sa unang palapag. Lumakad ako patungo sa aking kotse. Dalawa ang loob ko kay Angela Zorilla. Sa bikas at galaw, kabilang siya sa makalumang katipunan ng kadalagahan; sa pananalita at pag-iisip, kaya niyang ilihim, gaya ng isang belyaka-ko, ang karubduban ng kanyang adhikain. Dumadaloy ang mainit na dugo ng katatagan at katapangan sa ilalim ng kanyang mahinahong kalooban.

Pagdating sa aking opisina, tinawagan ko ang isang kaibigan sa NBI. Naging kaklase ko si Reynaldo Boganla sa Santo Tomas. Mahilig na siya noon pa man sa buhay militar.Natatandaan kong siya ang pinakabatang naging komander ng aming ROTC. Higit sa lahat, mahusay siyang humawak ng anumang armas. Dahil diyan tinagurian naming siyang "boga." Nag-aral siya ng pagkapulis pagkatapos ng kolehiyo, natalaga sa METROCOM, at inilipat sa NBI pagkatapos niyang makapasa ng eksamen sa pagkakontador. Kagaya ko, binata pa rin siya.

"Oy, mukhang inaantok ka pa, Rey," biro ko nang sagutin niya ang aking tawag. "Baka naman sobra ang kayod mo at hindi ka na nag-aaliw."

"Iyan nga ang problema, e. Nag-aaliw ako kagabi at katiting ko nang malimutan ang curfew. Nawala ko iyong pases. Photo finish ang dating ko sa bahay. O, ano ang sa atin?"

"Tingnan mo nga kung matutunton ninyo ang isang nangangalang Flora Sanchez."

"Kailan nawala? Huwag mong sabihing isa na naman iyang katulong na tumangay ng alahas ng kanyang señora."

"Marso ng taong ito. Hindi. Kawani ng isa kong kakilala." Ibinigay ko sa kanya ang isang paglalarawan ng babae hango sa nabasa ko sa polder. "Interesado ako sa impormasyong magtuturo sa kanyang kinaroroonan."

"Sige. Titignan ko ang aking magagawa. Tatawagan kita pagkatapos ng isang oras."

Hinarap ko ang papeles sa aking mesa. Ipinaalaala sa akin ni Dory ang ilang kompromiso na dapat kong tupdin pagkapananghalian. Nguni't hindi ako mapakali. Nagsindi ako ng isang sigarilyo. Tinangka kong banaagin sa usok na umakyat sa kisame ang mga titik ng kinabukasan, pero hindi ako napahiwatigan ng kanilang kalatas gayong namuo at natunaw na ang mga hugis na pilak. Tinunghayan kong muli ang polder ni Flora. Sa aking ikalawang pagsusuri dito, tumunog ang telepono.

"Dinaramdam ko, Morrie," sabi ni Reynaldo Boganla, "wala kaming nahalungkat tungkol kay Flora Sanchez. Walang balita o sumbong sa kanya na magbibigay sa amin ng sapat na dahilan para sa mabungang pagsisiyasat. Kung gusto mo, ipapasa ko sa METROCOM upang lumawig ang—"

"Huwag na. Sapat na ang ginawa ninyo. Sabihin mo sa akin—tinignan ba ninyo ang listahan ng mga lumabas ng bansa sa lumipas na dalawang buwan—sa paliparan at karagatan?"

"Oo. Wala ang pangalan niya. Nguni't patuloy naming mamatyagan ang listahan."

"Mabuti. Dinaramdam ko, Rey, kung sinasayang ko lang ang iyong panahon—"

"Ano'ng panahon sa magkaibigan?"

"—pero mahalaga ang bagay na ito. Ipaliliwanag ko sa iyo balang araw."

Binalikan ko ng pansin ang natitirang gawain sa aking mesa. Bago lumipas ang ika-labing-isa ng umaga nagpunta ako sa Alfredo's Steakhouse upang kausapin si Tommy Leung, tagapamahala ng Philippine Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Pagkatapos mananghalian, pinag-aralan namin ang mga detalye ng isang palatuntunan na itatanghal ng kanyang kapisanan para sa karangalan ng pinuno ng aking opisina. Nagkasundo kami sa araw at oras ng pagtatanghal. Bago namin maubos ang aming kape, humingi ako

ng paumanhin sa aking kasama at iniwan ko siya sandali upang gamitin ang telepono ng restauran. Tumango-tango si Tommy nang akin siyang balikan. "Okay na 'to," sabi niya, at nagkamay kami bilang pagbibigay-bisa sa aming pinag-usapan. Pagkalipas ng ilang sandali, nagmamaneho na ako patungo sa Diliman.

MATANGKAD AT PATPATIN SI GERARDO ABELLA, na nasa katandaang gulang na, propesor ng panitikan sa Pamantasan ng Pilipinas. Makapal ang salamin sa mata na nakatalungko sa kanyang ilong at tila palaging nakaukit ang isang ngiti sa kanyang mukha. Namamayani sa kanyang silid sa faculty center ang kawalang-ayos. Namumugad sa ibabaw ng mga muwebles, nakikipagsiksikan sa plastik na baso at pinggan, lapis na walang tasa, sinsero, at payong ang kanyang mga aklat, magasin, at manuskrito.

Dinampot niya ang isang lumang pahayagan buhat sa isang silya at inanyayahan akong maupo doon. Naupo siya sa katapat na silya.

"Katatapos lang ng aking klase kaya't mayroon tayong kalahating oras bago ako dumalo sa isang pulong," sabi niya. "Ay, iyan ang buhay ng isang guro, Mr. Pardo, nahahati sa pagitan ng mga mapupusok na estudyante at matatapang na dekano. Ikaw ba'y dito nagtapos?"

"Hindi ho. Salamat sa inyong pagpapaunlak sa aking kahilingan."

"Ah, ang bagay na iyan... Ewan ko kung paano ako makatutulong sa 'yo. Pagkatawag mo kanina, hinalungkat ko ang aking talaksan"— at pailing-iling na sinulyapan niya ang kaguluhan sa kanyang paligid— "nguni't kaunti lang ang tala ko sa kanya."

"Sa ngayon ho'y nangangapa ako sa dilim. Naging estudyante ninyo ba si Flora Sanchez?"

"Hindi."

"Pero ibinigay niya ang inyong pangalan bilang sanggunian nang siya'y magprisinta sa Child Care Foundation."

"Alam ko. Ang totoo'y naging katulong na mananaliksik ko siya sa aking proyekto— noong nag-aaral pa siya rito. Dalawang semestre lang iyon."

"Mahusay ho ba ang pagtupad niya sa kanyang gawain?"

"Wala akong maireklamo. Kahit na political science ang kanyang kurso, sapat ang kanyang kaalaman sa literatura. Nagulat nga ako ng maba-

tid kong sumusulat siya ng tula. May mga akda siyang lumabas sa *Diliman Review*."

"May patutunguhan ho ba siya sa larangang iyan?"

"Sa palagay ko'y kulang pa sa timpla ng init at isip. At sa talas ng taludturan. Kaya marahil gumamit siya ng sagisag-panulat. Corazon Fuentes. Hindi ko alam kung nakamit niya sa katagalan ang kalakasan ng puso, ha,ha. Isang pagsisiyasat sa bisa ng wikang pampulitika sa paghubog ng damdamin ng ilang tauhan sa nobelang Tagalog ang proyektong natukoy ko. Kabagot-bagot na paksa iyan sa mga hindi akademiko pero dugo ng aming buhay dito, ha, ha!"

Upang mapigil siya sa anumang pagpapaliwanag tungkol sa masalimuot at hindi kaaya-ayang sangkap ng dilang pampulitika, ibinalik ko ang paksa sa aking pakay.

"Gaano ninyo kakilala si Flora Sanchez?"

"Bahagya lamang," sabi niya. "Marilag siya, masikap, at mabait makitungo sa iba. Pero malihim, at kung maaari ayaw niyang malapit nang lubusan kanino man. Alam mo'ng ibig kong sabihin?"

Tumango ako. "Gayon pa man, sa tingin niyo ba'y mayroon siyang naging kaibigan dito?"

"Mayroon siyang kasama-sama. Isang Pinoy at isang banyaga. Aking tagasalin iyong una, teka, ano nga ba ang kanyang pangalan? Ah, Darwin, tama, Darwin Yerba—subali't matagal nang natapos ang kontrata niya dito. Nagbalik na siya sa kanyang pinanggalingang opisina. Balita ko'y nasa foreign service na siya ngayon."

"At iyong ikalawa?"

"Ikalawa? Ah, oo, iyong Amerikano. Si Dick. Richard Corbet, isang guro buhat sa Maryland na gumagawa ng pananaliksik dito. Linguistics ang linya niya, at may sinusulat siyang aklat tungkol sa mga pariralang panlipunan ng mga Mangyan. Kung hindi ako nagkakamali, nais niyang patunayan na—"

"Nasaan na ho siya ngayon?"

"Ewan ko. Marahil wala na siya sa Pilipinas. Kung ako ang tatanungin mo"— at kinindatan niya ako—"lahat tayo'y dapat umalis ng Pilipinas. Hindi ako makagalaw dito, alam mo ang ibig kong sabihin, para akong sinasakal. Kahit ano ang sulatin ko, sinesensor. Hindi ako puwe-

deng magbiro tungkol sa Pangulo o sa kanyang mga adhikain. Alam mo ba, kahapon, isa namin katulong na propesor ang dinampot. Alam mo kung bakit? Sinabi lang niya na 'sa ikauunlad ng bayan, bisikleta ang kailangan.' Ganyan na ba ang gobyerno natin ngayon—isang samahan ng mga pikon?" At sa unang pagkakataon, natunaw ang ngiti sa kanyang mukha.

"Lubos na delikado ang ating kalagayan ngayon upang gawing paksa ng pagbibiro," tugon ko.

"Walang kalagayang napakadelikado upang bigyang katwiran ang paglabag sa karapatan ng mamamayan. Kahit batas militar ang namamayani ngayon, hindi nangangahulugang sasaludo ako palagi sa kanila, lalo na't kung sila ang tunay na mangungulimbat."

Hindi ko na tinugis ang kabigatan ng kanyang paratang. "Balita ko po'y maraming guro buhat dito ang ipinatawag sa Campo Crame upang tanungin."

"Iyan na nga ang sinasabi ko. Kami ang unang pinaghihinalaan. Pugad daw ito ng mga komunista at radikal. Maaari, pero marami rin sa ibang pamantasan."

"Si Flora ho ba ay may pagka-radikal?"

"Kakatwang naitanong mo. Nagkaroon ako ng hinala pero sa hinala lang iyon nagwakas. Oo, ilang beses ko siyang nakitang kausap ang mga pinuno ng grupong makapula rito, nguni't hindi katibayan iyan upang sabihing makapula rin siya. Baka dala lamang iyon ng kanyang angking pagkamausisa. Ano ba ang nagawa niya? Baka nagdadaldal gaya ng ginagawa ko at dinampot na. Sa gobyerno ka sabi mo."

"Wala kaming katibayan na may kasalanan siya. Sabi nga ninyo, mabait siya. At sa gobyerno nga ako nguni't isa lang maliit na empleyado doon."

"Wika mo iyan, pero idadagdag mo sa aking talaan ang sinabi ko ngayon. Isang gabi, magigising na lang ako na may nakatutuok na armalite sa aking ilong."

Natawa ako. "Napakaromantiko naman ang palagay ninyo sa amin. May pagtitimpi rin naman ang batas militar. At kung nababahala kayo sa inyong mga binitiwang pananalita, huwag kayong mag-alaala. Sa pagitan lamang nating dalawa ang ating pinag-uusapan."

"Salamat kung gayon. Paniniwalaan ko ang salita mo. Matanda na ako at mahina ang aking puso. Hindi ko matitiis ang buhay sa kulungan, lalo na't kung hindi makatarungan ang dahilan. Ang padaskul-daskol na paninikil sa mga tao ang isang masamang bagay sa batas militar. Ang pagpipiit sa mga pulitikong kalaban ng Malakañang, halimbawa. Ngayon, malaking kasamaan ang mapabilang sa oposisyon! At maraming alituntunin ang hindi makatwiran. Iyang pag-eespiya sa mga paaralan, isa iyan. Alam mo na nagtalaga sila ng mga tiktik-militar sa bawa't kolehiyo at pamantasan dito sa Kamaynilaan. Kunwari'y mga taga-alaga sila ng katiwasayan sa loob ng kampus, pero ang totoo ay minamanmanan nila ang kilos at salita ng mga kritiko ng pamahalaan. Lumilikha sila ng isang bansa ng mga pipi."

Kinapa niya ang kaha ng sigarilyo sa bulsa ng kanyang T-shirt. Dumukot siya ng isang Camel at sinindihan iyon sa ibabaw ng apoy ng posporo.

"Mali si Marx," sabi niya pagkatapos ng dalawang hithit. "Tabako ang opyo ng mga masa. Magastos ang relihiyon—kailangan kang magdamit nang magara sa simbahan... Tabako at panitikan, Mr. Pardo, ang nagbibigay ng konting sigla sa buhay ko sa ating madilim at mapanglaw na panahon." At nagbuga siya ng makapal na usok sa mga baso at lapis upang bigyang-diin ang kanyang mga salita.

"Pero dapat ninyong aminin na may nagagawang kabutihan ang batas militar," hamon ko sa kanya. "Tumahimik ang bayan, halimbawa, at nabawasan ang krimen."

"Bah, pansamantalang katahimikan. Laging kakapit sa patalim ang mga gutom kung hindi sila bibigyan ng trabaho, at susulpot muli ang mga walang kaluluwang kriminal pagkaraan ng maikling panahon, maniniwala ka.Sabi nga ni Steiner—"

"Puwede ho bang ibigay ninyo sa akin ang tirahan ni Richard Corbet?"

BUMALIK AKO SA OPISINA pagkatapos kong tiyakin muli kay Propesor Abella na hindi makaaabot sa militar ang kanyang mga pagpuna sa pamahalaan. Naaawa ako sa kanya. Hindi kailanman masisiyahan ang kanyang uri sa palakad ng sinumang pangulo. Lubos siyang nakabaon sa kumunoy ng pagpapasantaha upang mapansin ang pagbabago sa kanyang lipunan. Para sa kanya, at sa karamihan ng kanyang mga kasamahan sa pamantasan,

mali ang Malakañang ano mang gawin nito. Ang paggiba sa pamahalaan ang tanging kalutasan. Gayon pa man, nakatulong sa akin ang kanyang paglalarawan kay Flora, na sumasalungat doon sa ibinigay sa akin ni Clara at Angela Zorilla. Bagaman nagkakaisa silang tatlo sa pagpapalagay na maganda, masipag, at mabait si Flora, magkakaiba ang kanilang pakiwari sa kanyang pakikitungo sa kapwa. Madaling makipagkaibigan, maraming kaibigan—ayon kay Angela; malihim, hindi malapit sa iba, walang kaibigan—ayon kay Prop. Abella. Magkasalungat o nagbago lang si Flora sa paglipas ng panahon?

Nagdapit-hapon na ay nasa harap pa ako ng aking mesa. Hindi dahil sa marami pa akong gagawin kundi isinaayos ko ang aking mga pag-iisip at galaw ukol kay Flora Sanchez. Hindi ko itatanggi na natutuon ang malaking bahagi ng aking panahon sa babaeng hindi ko pa nasisilayan kahit na walang pagsulong ang aking paghahanap sa kanya. Pinalulubha ang aking pagkabigo nang pasulpot-sulpot na larawan sa sulok ng aking gunita, ng kamay ng isang mahiwagang nilalang na nagsasabog ng mga talulot ng rosas sa mukha ng isang magandang babae hanggang matakpan iyon ng walang-katapusang dugo. At sisigaw ako subali't walang ingay na lalabas mula sa aking bibig. Elena! Elena! Hindi ko na matandaan kung kailan ko siya huling nakita. Ni ang kanyang damit o ayos nang huli kaming nagkita. Nahiwa nang malalim ang aking puso nang lumisan siya, kung lumisan nga siya. Mahirap isalin sa kasalukuyang pananalita ng aking damdamin ang aming pinagdaanan, lalo na't kung susuriin sa harap ng kabiglaanan ng aming paghihiwalay, kung naghiwalay nga kami. Bakit ayaw mabuksan ang pinto ng gunita sa pagsusumamo ng aking puso? Ako ba ang pumipigil o ang isang puwersa na nagdaramot ng kasiyahan? Sa aking kamalayang nahihimbing, o sa aking kamalayang mulat—wala silang kaibhan—malimit kong matatagpuan ang aking sarili sa harap ng pintong iyon, sabik na mayakap ang babaeng nasa loob ng bahay. Dadaanan ko ng palad ang aking buhok, itutuwid ang aking kurbata. Hahatakin kong pabukas ang pinto nguni't hindi ito bibigay sa aking lakas. Wari isang dantaon na ang lilipas nguni't nakapinid pa rin ang pinto. Maririnig ko buhat sa aking likuran ang pananaghoy ng isang nilalang. Lilingon ako at aking mamamasdan ang isang maitim na kawalaan, isang malalim na katahimikan. Nasaan siya? Nasaan ako?

Sinundan ko ang buwan habang gumugulong ito sa kawad ng kuryente na nagkakabit-kabit sa mga luma at pangit na bahay sa Sampaloc.

Malamlam ang liwanag nito, kaya't mabilis na nilamon nang kumakalat na kadiliman ang natitirang bahid na asul sa langit. Mag-iika-walo na. Kanina, bilang pag-iwas sa paninikil ng gunita, ipinasiya ko pagkalabas ng opisina na sadyain ang tahanan ng pamilya ni Flora sa kalye Lealtad. Huminto ako sa harap ng isang bahay-paupahan na yari sa konkreto, kahoy at yerong palutpot, malapit sa palengke, isinusi ang kotse, at pumasok sa munting bakuran. Ilang halamang nakalagay sa paso ang nakalinya na tila mga tanod sa pasilyo bilang tatlo. Kumatok ako. Nabuksan ang pinto at sumilip ang isang mukha ng isang babaeng may gulang na.

"Mrs. Sanchez?" sabi ko.

"Ano ho ang gusto nila?" Naghihinala ang kanyang tingin at tinig.

"Ako ho si Morel Pardo. Nais ko hong kausapin kayo tungkol kay Flora. Tumutulong ho ako sa paghahanap sa kanya."

Napawi ang kanyang alinlangan. "Gayon ho ba? Tuloy kayo."

Maliit nguni't malinis at kasiya-siya ang loob ng bahay. May hagdang kahoy paakyat sa ikalawang palapag. Luma at marami nang gasgas ang mesang-kainan na nag-uupo ng apat. Gayon din ang mga silya na aming inupuan sa kapirasong sala. Ang larawan ni Kristo na may nag-aalab na puso ang tanging nakasabit sa dingding. Lanta na ang dalawang pulang rosas na nasa plorera sa ibabaw ng mesita. Maputi na ang buhok ng aking kaharap. Malalim ang mga guhit sa kanyang noo.

"Pasiyensiya na kayo sa aking pagpunta rito nang walang pasabi-sabi, Mrs. Sanchez," wika ko. "Wala kayong telepono kaya't nagbakasakali akong maabutan kayo."

"Walang anuman iyon. Ka-opisina kayo ni Flora?"

"Hindi ho, pero inatasan ako ng kanyang direktor na hanapin siya."

"Ay, iho. Hindi ako makatulog sa pag-iisip sa kanya. Bigla na lang siyang umalis, walang paapaalam."

"Ano ho ang suot niya noong huli ninyo siyang makita?"

"Nakapaldang itim siya, blusang puti. Sapatos na itim, mababa lang ang takong."

"Hindi ba siya nag-iwan ng sulat sa inyo o sa sinuman sa inyong pamilya?"

"Hindi. Iyan ang nakapagtataka. Isa siyang mapagkakatiwalaang anak. Tuwing umaalis siya, upang dumalaw sa aming mga kaanak sa La-

guna o kahit para lang sumaglit diyan sa kapitbahay, ay nagsasabi siya sa amin."

"Naipagbigay alam ninyo ba ito sa pulisya?"

"Pulisya? Hindi nila makikita ang bundok kahit nasa harap na nila iyon. Isa pa, hindi kami naniniwala sa kanila buhat nang masakuna ang yumao kong asawa."

Nabahiran ng kalungkutan ang kanyang mukha. Hindi ko na inungkat ang nangyari sa kanyang kabiyak—wala akong karapatang patakan ng kalamansi ang kanyang sugat.

"Iniisip ko hong baka mayroon akong mahiwatigan sa kanyang naiwang gamit," sabi ko. "Maaari ko ho bang makita ang kanyang kuwarto?"

"Hindi!" Malakas na sagot ng isang tinig sa aking likuran. Napatindig ako upang mamalas ang isang binatilyo na matipuno ang katawan. Nakasando siya, nakakorto, at may pasa sa kaliwang pisngi.

"Huwag kang tampalasan, Conrado," sabi ni Mrs. Sanchez. "Siya'y isang panauhin." Tinignan niya ako. "Ang isa ko pang anak. Dalawa lang sila ni Flora."

"Hindi ba panauhin ding itinuring natin ang dalawang lalaking nagpunta rito kahapon?" wika ng binatilyo. "At ito ang napala ko!" Hinimas niya ang kanyang pisngi.

"Dinaramdam ko, Conrado," sabi ko, "nguni't wala akong masamang hangarin. Gusto ko lang makatulong sa inyo."

"Iyan din ang sinabi nila," simangot niya.

"Sino ba sila, kung hindi mo mamasamain ang aking pagtatanong?"

"Rico Singson at Andres Norte ang mga pangalan. Dalawang butangero—"

"Pulis daw sila," sabi ni Mrs. Sanchez, "pero hindi naka-uniporme. May baril sa baywang. Nagtanong tungkol kay Flora at pilit na hinalughog ang silid niya. Pinagkakalat noong isa ang mga gamit ng aking anak na para bang basura ang mga iyon. Nagalit si Conrado at pinagsabihan siya. Nagkasagutan, sinuntok si Conrado. Mabuti na lang at pinigil siya noong kanyang kasama. Kung hindi, baka lalong napahamak ang aking anak. Masisisi mo ba siya sa kanyang inasal sa iyong kahilingan?"

"Hindi ho, at may karapatan siya sa gayong damadamin. Ako ho'y kaibigan ng kaibigan ni Flora at walang hangarin kundi malutas ang hiwaga

ng kanyang pagkawala. Kung inyong mamarapatin."

"Samahan mo siya, Conrado," sabing malumanay ni Mrs. Sanchez sa kanyang anak.

Kung ang katauhan ng isang nilalang ay masisipat sa kalagayan ng kanyang tinutuluyan, maayos at matahimik si Flora. Kapansin-pansin ang kapayakan at kawalan ng palamuti ng kanyang silid. Malinis ito at hindi mapagkunwari. Isang higaan na yari sa narra ang nasa sulok sa tabi ng bintana. Sa ibabaw nito nakalatag ang banig na buri, sa ulunan ang isang unan na may pundang pula. Nakatayo ang isang mataas na aparador sa kanang bahagi ng silid, may salamin sa pinto na nagtapon sa aking paningin ng aninag ng balisang mukha ni Conrado. Kahit humupa na ang kanyang galit, hindi pa rin maaamo ang kanyang pakikitungo sa akin.

Itinuro niya ang mga bagay na nakapatong sa munting mesa na nasa paanan ng kama.

"Iyan ang ipinagkakalat nila. Inayos ko na. Kung may gusto kang itanong sa akin, nandoon ako sa labas." At iniwan niya ako.

Binuksan ko ang aparador—nakasabit sa loob ang ilang bestida, blusa; nakasalansan ang damit-panloob, damit-pantulog, panyo. Sa katabing tokador ay nakahilera ang mga bote ng pabango at kosmetiko. Binatak kong pabukas ang mga kahon—ilan pang bote, suklay, gunting at isang pamputol ng kuko.

Pinagtuunan ko ng pagsusuri ang mga bagay sa mesa—mga lumang babasahin, ilang aklat kabilang ang *The Origin of the Species*, kumpletong akda ni Shakespeare, *Villa Magdalena* ni Bienvenido N. Santos, isang diksiyunaryong Ingles-Italyano. Dinampot ko ang huli at tinunghayan ang unang pahina.Sa kaliwang sulok nito, sa ibaba, nakasulat ang pangalang "Flora Sanchez" at ang parirala, "Binili 7-8-71." Bago pa ang aklat. Tinangka kong isipin kung ano ang saysay nito para sa kanya, nguni't walang dumatal sa akin. Dinaanan ko ng tingin ang mga pahayagan. Wala ring naipahatid sa akin. Akmang ibabalik ko sa mesa ang isang magasin nang malaglag buhat sa loob nito ang isang piraso ng papel. Lumipad-lipad na parang isang puting paruparo hanggang marahang lumapag sa sahig. Kinuha ko ito at nakita kong nakasulat doon— "Tiyak, sa Roma." Binigyan ko ng huling pagsisiyasat ang silid. Kipkip ang talatinigan, lumabas na ako at ipininid ang pinto.

Ipinakita ko kay Conrado ang aklat at winika ko, "Hihiramin ko ito."

"Kay Inay mo sabihin," sagot niya.

"Iyong dalawang lalaki—may nakuha ba sila buhat sa silid ni Flora?"

"Wala, sa pagkakatanda ko. Kaya marahil nagalit iyong isa at ipinagtatapon ang mga bagay ni Ate."

"Buhat noon, wala kayong inalis na gamit sa silid?"

"Wala. Nariyan lahat ang kanyang ari-arian."

"Sulat ba ito ng iyong kapatid?" Ipinakita ko sa kanya ang papel.

"Oo."

Sinundan ko siya pababa sa sala. Nananabik ang tingin sa akin ni Mrs. Sanchez.

"Mayroon ka bang natagpuan?" sabi niya.

"Oho, pero hindi pa malinaw ang katuturan. Gusto ko hong hiramin ang aklat na ito."

"Sige, kung nais mo. Sana'y makatulong iyan."

Ipinakita ko rin sa kanya ang kapirasong pael. "Sulat ho ba ito ni Flora?"

Ilang saglit niyang tinitigan iyon. "Sa palagay ko," sabi niya.

Binigyan ko siya ng aking tarheta. "Eto ho ang aking tirahan. Kung maaari, pagsabihan ninyo ako kapag may maiisip kayong makatutulong sa aking paghahanap."

Pinasalamatan ko siya at pinangakuan na padadalhan ng balita anuman ang kalabasan ng aking paghahanap sa kanyang anak. Nagbuntunghininga siya at nagwikang hindi siya tinatakasan ng pag-asa dahil isa siyang masugid na Katoliko, ngunit mahirap ang umasa kung walang inaasahan. Sinabi kong kailangan niya ang lakas ng loob sa mga ganitong pagkakataon. Sa pintuan, nagpaalam din ako kay Conrado. Nabigla ako nang ako ay kamayan niya. Kumirot sa aking puso para sa mag-inang ito na pinarurusahan ng tadhana para sa isang kasalanang hindi nila ginawa.

Tales from My Lost River

Recah A. Trinidad

1. Stolen

THE summer he was first seen walking with his grandson Francisco, the old man no longer had his cane. He was inching onward by holding the shoulder of the skinny boy.

The old man had suffered a massive stroke the year after his youngest son, 16, was abducted by Japanese troops at home.

A trusted carpenter and fisherman, he refused to stay down and sink.

There's a story here about the old cripple who beat the count, so to say, to continue with the battle.

He later moved out of the house he had built for his family.

He decided to live alone in a tree-shrouded shack close to the river.

This morning, the old man stepped out of his borrowed hut.

He was in threadbare white shirt and colorless knee pants made out of flour sacks.

He was firm-chested with thick worker's arms the shade of copper.

His sun-chiseled face was calm, his hair ashen.

A light breeze, the *amihan*, a blessing from the northeast, was breathing in the direction of the river, through wide-open bamboo windows, on brown nipa rooftops.

There was summer murmur in the trees.

There were neighbors who would say the barefoot traveler, once he had refused to continue living with his family, should've been junked, not in a shack, but in an infirmary.

These neighbors also suggested he should have used crutches, disposed of the confounding stick that helped conceal his full lameness.The old man, moving on in creaky dignity, was not being fancy. He was comfortable walking slowly, alone.

Other villagers thought he appeared like an overstaying broken warrior from a forgotten country. Just as in the past, he took another trek along the banks of the river, testing and feeling the sandy edge with his toes. He traveled past the entrance to the next village, all the way to the river's west bend, before returning to his shack an hour later.

They had been used to these wanderings and no longer asked if, say, the straying Quijote, armed with a petty stick, was still scanning for jewels lost in the forgotten time of his own grandfather.

He never spoke about it. They would've stamped their feet had he honestly told them he was there also to keep watch over the river.

The boy had heard other stories.

The old man had indeed hacked his bamboo cane in two after it fell a third time when he leaned it on the wall.

But much earlier, it had been said that he slammed his white warrior rooster, a three-time winner, dead and convulsing on the ground.

Going by his quick-boil temper, that was rather easy to believe.

There was no debate after the gallant fighter greeted its master with a wounding peck on the left forearm the morning it was taken from the pen for a routine pampering.

Unlike the poor cane, the win-win rooster did not disobey its master.

It merely overdid itself. But it also exceeded its competence.

It was not that simple, though.

There's another story here.

It's about the river.

Nearby dwellers lived and loved by the blessed body of water as though it was their own mother.

Noble natives would need only a small step to descend into the river whose banks were practically at ground level with the bare street.

Bits of forgotten jewels, loose pearls and stray nuggets from a buried treasure, had been discovered by early villagers. These precious beads, so said old folks, were found during one season of unusual plenty. They glinted and quivered among broken blue China ceramics, pastel pebbles, jagged white seashells and the fresh year-round clams called *tulya* on the river's clear sandy edge.

That river, a slice of paradise, had been lost.

**

THERE were many tales of life and death, magic and misery in the village.

The villagers were of diverse origins. They had contrasting tastes and beliefs. They were so familiar with everybody else they all got affiliated through mutual warmth or cold contempt.

There were many hidden lives, some strange and somewhat magical, if not comic and totally embarrassing; although the most known were those gladly depicted near or on the main street itself—an even stretch of sun-baked ground, the rust-colored *banlik*—that often served as riverside center stage.

Everybody knew each other in the village. It wouldn't take a whole day for the neighborhood to know who eloped, who had a miscarriage, who had gone missing, who gave birth (legitimate or not), who got bitten by Aling Titay's mad dog, who was seriously ill, who had gone berserk, who was getting married, who briefly returned from the dead, who won big in *jueteng*, whose sow had a liter, and how many.

Maybe it was only the portly Aling Luming, newly docked from the Visayas with husband David Barrientos, who did not know what was cooking in her neighbor's kitchen.

Why did terrible Tibo, the peppery transplant from far-off Aklan whose eyes were on a perpetual wild spin, chase Mang Ampong, the smallpox

king, with his *bolo* over the *sakla* table cursing?

How Ampong Bulutong, cornered, was saved from sure death after the killer blow got entangled with a backyard clothesline continued to be counted as a small miracle.

Why was Aling Titay, whose discolored bulging eyes screamed like those of a witch's from ghost town, forever on a chase with a claw stick after sun-smelling urchins who always had a fancy for her *santol* fruits overhead, impossibly sour as they were?

Wasn't it also to keep secret the afternoon sleep-in visits to her busty spinster sister by Padre Doro all the way from the Quiapo parish?

Was the fumbling town mayor speaking in riddles when he exclaimed about a village bully, a tested vote hauler, who still failed to get exactly what he was eating, although the glutton had already finished one whole *carabao*?

Was it the same wrinkled Donya Karay, red-haired widow of a known international sea vessel captain, who turned her colorfully fenced wooden house by the stagnant stream into a secret brothel after the officer's death?

**

THE river was wider than a stone's throw.

It would however take someone strong as the bronze-armed Totoy Tuason, he with the heaving chest and eyes of bright marble, to bring the river to measure.

The old man, Itay Kayong had been known for his strength. But he could no longer throw a pebble far. It was however not too surprising how he reluctantly got voted top reader of rain, if not better, maybe equal to the sun-beaten chief boatman Sabas Coronado, the acknowledged weatherman.

It was a clear sunny day.

The roadside *bakya* brigade—men in sleeveless undershirts, the *sando*, pampering warrior roosters, full-breasted mothers in windy blouses hanging the day's wash—was there in full force.

The scent of the *sabon luto* laundry soap wafted with the drizzling breath of newly cut grass. Neighborhood laundry danced on the clothesline like pennants in a parade.

There was no chance of rain whatsoever.

But shortly before noon, the old man reappeared from the shack.

He was limping as usual, but now in totally different attire. In full battle armor, he was a storm warrior raring to dig into enemy territory alone.

He had a new cane.

As expected, the roadside crowd, often behaving like a chorale, could only stare in awe.

He had his head gear on: the *salakot* made from an old pot-sized gourd. Strapped on his back was the reliable raincoat of woven *anahaw* strips.

They were one in swearing the crazy warrior must've irrevocably tripped over.

He was funny, a little sensational. But the streetside chorus, composed mainly of excitable, olive-skinned housewives, had no choice but take the old man as the day's headline.

He was suddenly top item in the busy rumor mill.

Meanwhile, the sidestreet crowd proceeded to regale with mirthful sneers.

But once the old man had come near the summer sun dimmed.

The peal of laughter next turned into the crick-crack of tiny bullets pelting the dry rooftops, the thirsty street.

Dust rose as parched earth got assaulted by angry rain.

There was a stampede to retrieve laundry from the clothesline.

A smell, closer to a stench—the stinging *alimuom*—issued like devils's breath from nowhere.

Everybody ran for cover, also for a slug of drinking water to comfort uneasy intestines.

The old man moved away.

**

EACH and every villager followed his own whim in reading the weather.

If today's sunset was salmon-hued or bathed in romantic pink, the next sunrise would be bright, sparkling.

After the rain stopped, hastily as it had started, the *bakya* brigade settled back in place.

It was not easy getting over what they had witnessed.

Did the old man talk to the trees?

How was he able to do that?

Was he tipped off by devotional birds?

What about the moth and other insect friends?

The old man was too remote to sense widespread wonderment.

He had no idea whatsoever he had posed a puzzle to other villagers, mainly the carefree ones who may never be able to see or feel hints from cloud and wind.

If he had allowed himself to be mystified, it was at how these schooled neighbors strayed off and next stayed at a proud distance.

Of course, they too had their own stories on how and why they squandered their birthright, the honest bond with native earth. They couldn't be blamed, but these younger villagers, unable to relate, could be partly right about the trees.

The old man was not alone because other village elders, the gut-feel therapist Endiong Medina, the *revolucionarios* Kikong Bararat, Lelong Ilyo Bartolome, Kaka Endong Cruz, the old man's violinist brother Vicente and the lead *herbolario* Jacinto Carlos, harbored reverence for great trees, man's original residence and sanctuary ahead of caves and temples.

Everything was related to everything else, no matter how distant, different.

Wasn't the night cry of the lonesome owl a call to the song of summer?

Weren't the anger and shriek of lightning ushers to the smile of morning?

The old man, humbly attuned, had long ceased to wonder.

Insects and birds, they too never hesitated to burrow like infants feeding from mother's breast, the musical cicadas digging at dusk under old branches into the tree's own armpit, playful *maya* and other warblers warm in the embrace of strong foliage.

The river itself was always there, never failing to provide, and no fisher was ever heard to have returned home empty-handed even on so-called lean days.

Prodigious as the river was, it also hummed an endless hymn, more of a mother's lullaby, straight from its bosom of virgin sand as it rolled from the mythical upper lake, emptying into the sunset bend towards Manila Bay.

It would not be an exaggeration to say the river had also lent villagers an idiom of calm and firmness. Therefore, it was only normal for folks to warn strangers before letting them get into the water.

So far there had been no case of a citizen of the community drowning therein or being stolen by the river.

**

THERE was a heated argument before his children, who insisted on caring for the old man, that finally allowed Itay Kayong to leave home. As part of the concession a full meal was delivered daily in a covered rattan basket to his borrowed shack.

After regaining remnant power, the old man would still descend, limping, into the river. But he made sure he took only as little as he honestly needed.

He was perfectly content with what was at hand.

He refused proud, useless wear.

He could neither read nor write. He could not sign his own name.

He found it fancy, if not foolish, to use or wear a watch.

He relied on the shade and shadows of the day, the behaviour of insects in his immediate surroundings, to tell time.

For example, the moth, *gamugamo*, would swirl and swarm at vespers to report an abundance of the silvery catfish and other related species in the river.

The old man also traced the possibility of rain based on the slant, shape and size of the moon, the temper and direction of wind.

Before suffering a stroke, he was always secure whenever fishing hard or paddling through another gentle season. He had always gone for quality

catch that would be taken to the town market or peddled around the village.

His rigless boat, whitish and carved out of a mighty tree, had since been hauled up the river, moored. The *banca* had served as ally and an extension of his old home whenever he would fish overnight.

The old man loved to drop bait and spear fish now from the edge of the river near his shack. It was a simple box-like hut with a roof of matted *nipa* strips topped by used galvanized iron. It had a wide window fronting the river, its main doorless back entrance facing the sunrise side to the east.

He had been using this place that belonged to a fellow carpenter, who sold him the lot for his original residence near the chapel, as a station during his great fishing days.They decided to bring in the rough wooden bed, placed on a platform a step above the earthen floor, once it had been agreed upon for the old man to move in.

He lost his dear wife to severe anemia the year after she had given birth to their seventh and youngest child, Gregorio.

He would have a regular change of weekday wear under the supervision of his second daughter, the demure former river maiden Jacinta.

He would be up before the sun, praying before preparing his needs. He sipped the honeyed pungence of steaming ginger tea, the *salabat*, before tending to his small garden, pruning plants that counted the bloomy *sampaguita*, the succulent *tampuhin* banana among his favorites.

The old man often took one mudfish, the *dalag*, which would end up broiled over embers, if not boiled into the clear *pinesa* soup. Tiny silvery shrimps, the *tagunton*, were always in abundance, clinging onto hyacinth roots like fancy earrings, a daily blessing there for the picking. The *talangka*, fresh water crablet, was always a welcome bonus, crawling out in full view like an army of festival clowns from the river's rich bosom.There was a host of other species to choose from, the spiky catfish called *kandule*, the *biya*, *ayungin*, and other gifts.

On top of these, there was the *tulya*, boiled into the humble but nourishing *sinuam* soup, together with rice washing, tomatoes and crushed ginger, a year-round favorite garnished with either chili shoots or *malungay* tips.

A gifted hard worker, the old man was seldom in need.

He was too proud to borrow anything from anybody.

He kept reminding: if you borrow today, you beg or cheat tomorrow.

The old man discouraged visitors.

He did not want to be bothered. Neither would he be a burden.

He would amaze neighbors, though, by taking an unannounced bus trip alone to the place of his elder cousins, Tiyo Simon and Ti Ibio, in a swampy barrio of Kawit, Cavite. There, he would buy at a bargain a dozen crescent thin blades, the *karet*. He would pit these reaping implements with wooden handle and sell them to regular customers who would call on him at the back of his shack.

He continued to make mid-week morning visits to his old house at the back of the faded but dignified wooden chapel facing the river.

He never waited for them to come over.

He shared by going out to distribute his small harvest, like the *duhat* berry thick as a thumb, fragrant healing herbs, ripe golden papaya, banana and the *dayap*, a shrill native lemon fruit, devoted aromatic to the delicate nectared egg custard, a favorite on fiesta tables.

The old man treasured silence.

**

DID Itay Kayong also see a glint of gold over his win-win rooster before the tested assassin itself got assassinated?

Francisco, who had been lent secret hints on how to pick cockfight winners, did not have the guts to ask.

It was taboo to address elders, unless young ones were called in or first talked to.

The boy, who among the grandsons was charged with delivering the daily meal, soon learned to visit the old man regularly. A religious type, the boy loved to do errands for his handicapped grandfather. He made it a point to pick up Itay Kayong's weekly three-pack purchase of native cigarettes from the sari-sari store run by the loving couple (Ms.) Celing and (Mr.) Tibang.

Were the mermaids, *sirena*, for real?

Was it true the last Japanese soldier—who stayed behind, was caught and beheaded in front of a vengeful village mob—a colonel in the Japanese army?

The old man spoke to the boy in a husky but sure voice.

There were ghosts, assorted ogres that the prayerful kid—honestly afraid of fire in hell and horned potbellied, greasy demons who leered from illustrations of weekly komiks publications—had wanted to verify.

What made them warn him against looking into the mirror after midnight, as he might find himself headless there?

The old man and the boy talked clearly, evenly with a humble accent typical of riverside folks, the Taga-ilog. The boy always punctuated his sentences with the conjunctive *po*, a reverential dangle also used by villagers in addressing elders and visitors.

The old man also loved to poke fun at the neat, calm-eyed kid. Often asked to guess riddles, Francisco didn't have to be told before sharing the latest news and rumors with his attentive grandfather. He would also be subjected to tests of young strength, like climbing trees, swimming back dog-like to the bank after being let loose in a deep portion of the river; freeing his right wrist from grandpa's whole grip, or simply fetching drinking water in a fat glass jug from the artesian well under the *camachile* tree close to the village chapel.

For his washing needs, the old man had earthen jars, the *tapayan*, and a big steel drum catching rain water through a funnel from his roof.

**

ONE Saturday morning, Francisco skipped his regular weekend slingshot hunt for sunbirds, the pesky *pipit*, in Kaka Censia's guava kingdom that was separated from Itay Kayong's adopted backyard by a pasture.

The boy decided to rejoin the old man who had just returned from the riverside trek. As soon as he had stepped through the makeshift gate, the old man addressed the boy from his window. He asked him to take off his white t-shirt. The boy was next told to go up the towering palm tree by the window and bring down a coconut. It was all unexpected. The boy had

never even once tried the chore. But if he had to think twice, he had no chance even to hesitate.

It was a task best left to his two elder brothers, his bigger cousins. Getting up was a real ordeal. Climbing the *duhat* tree was fun, so was moving from tree to tree without having to step down, biting off and eating marble-sized golden guavas straight from the twig, or picking and keeping green half-ripe ones, the *manibalang*, in his pocket on his way back to the ground.

For the coconut climb, Francisco was told to first breathe deep down his navel, the better to maintain balance, groping and gripping at the same time, in clinging safely to the thick scaly trunk. The true test was on his young legs, mainly on the heels that he had to use with chimpish dexterity. He had to gamble with his chest whenever forced to pause and cling bodily onto the palm trunk.

It took time and great effort, but he was up there soon, the bunch of young coconuts now close to his face. He succeeded in completing the chore, but only after he first fondled hard and twisted one young coconut to the right, then farther back to the left, feeling its hardy twig break, and sending it blogging to the ground with one hard snapping pull.

Francisco did not expect it but after he had clambered down, Itay Kayong was already there waiting to hand him something.

The old man, looking good and robust minus his thick spectacles, dug into his pocket and brought out a folding pocket knife, every neighborhood boy's obsession, with a deer horn for a handle.

Franciso had passed his first test of courage.

**

THE old man's younger brother, the bachelor musician Vicente, was a more convivial conversationalist. He would go out of his way, have simple supper in the old house on rainy weekends before regaling nephews, gathered breathless like tiny pups on the smooth bamboo-slat floor, with gripping tales.

To the thrilled kids that included Francisco, who like his handsome younger brother Jaime still had to see and know fully what a refrigerator was, Tiyo

Enteng's colorfully woven stories rivaled the *Mga Kuwento ni Lola Basyang* and the adventures of *Kapitan Kidlat*, whenever the box-like brown radio would break down or if electricity was temporarily out.

Much later, Francisco would be amazed to learn from his mother Jacinta that Tiyo Enteng played lead violin in the national orchestra that would be sent up to Baguio to serenade the vacationing MacArthurs.

His mother told Francisco that his Ti Enteng was supposed to have joined his band on a voyage to the United States. But the musician was stopped on his tracks by his own mother, who personally recalled the luggage Vicente had spirited out to the ship on the eve of departure.

A part-time fisherman who dived down the pristine river bottom for the sharp, silvery *kandule*, he never ever again played his violin.

The instrument was hung on a raw wooden post of the two-room *nipa* hut Vicente shared with his elder sister Criscencia, the silent, hunched healer who tended to the vast guava orchard.

Before the aborted voyage, Vicente always had a tune at the tip of his handsome nose, trying to lend life to a budding composition.

The violin was left to rot in the cold corner untouched.

Nobody knew whatever happened to Vicente's unfinished works.

**

ANYWAY, that summer they were seen walking together was not the first time Francisco had given his grandfather a hand.

They had first linked up while the old man was about to limp to his right, onto the main street, on his way to hear the *simbang gabi*.

This was the Christmas season following the Maytime when the boy turned nine.

Francisco, himself headed for church, chanced upon his grandfather leaning on his cane through the pre-dawn December haze. The old man wore thick, steel-rimmed eyeglasses.

Francisco kissed his hand and they next moved on, the old man's free hand now thankful, gentle on the boy's shoulder. The old man's ill-fated arm had

felt like a wooden baby cross when he, minus his cane, leaned on Francisco that summer morning the two were first seen together.

It was now shivering cold. The boy wore an old brown woolen jacket over his school uniform of white t-shirt and khaki shorts.The old man was in his Sunday attire of buttoned-up light cotton shirt and matching brown trousers. He wore his old shoes made of canvas. He had a thick *sando* underneath his shirt.

It was not a tiring walk, a little over a kilometer given a few uneven steps. The old man would allow himself to be roused by the early bells from the Sampiro Church, which started to peal exactly at 2:00 a.m. during the entire Christmas season from across the river. He would be in church in time for the 3:00 a.m. Mass.

In that first walk together, they did not talk about the omen, seen earlier in a water oracle by the old man's sister Kaka Censia, of how the river would be desecrated.

But even then, Francisco knew how his Itay Kayong had lost his youngest son Gregorio.

Francissco had himself been told by his mother Jacinta how Itay Kayong one night dreamt of having lost all his front teeth.

The old man, the boy was told, woke up terrified and failed to return to sleep that evening.

That omen next translated into a daytime nightmare.

**

IN the village deeply scarred by the last war, it was no secret how the young Gregorio had been nabbed by fearsome Japanese troops at home.

The day Gregorio was taken the old man came home unusually early from a carpentry job in a palatial residence near the San Felipe Neri parish church in the *poblacion*.

He was in the process of putting the finishing touches to a majestic *narra* stairway, a job exclusive to a gifted few who could firm up the hardwood architecture without the use of a single nail.

There were conflicting versions of how they were able to break the news of Gregorio's abduction.

All the old man's grandaughter Rosalina, a bubbly aspirant songstress, could clearly remember were sparks from a commotion on the floor.

There was a convulsive struggle after Tata Kanor, husband of Delfina and Rosalina's stubby, big-bodied father, grappled with the old man, before pinning him down.

The old man, after letting out a curse, would not let loose the glistening bolo which he had grabbed from the wall, jumping upon being told Gregorio had been nabbed.

It would have been a gory mismatch had the old man chased after the heavily armed Japanese soldiers.

Before the outbreak of the war, the old man had had to work longer hours; he would spend nights after returning from the day's carpentry assignment, to spread out his vast fishnet, the *pante*, marking boundaries with tiny floating lamps, in order to make sure he earned enough to send his youngest, a high school senior, all the way to college.

The old man had neither seen nor entered a schoolroom.

There had been no hint whatsoever of what finally happened to Gregorio; where he was buried, if he had been garroted, stabbed by a bayonet, or shot in the head.

In the first place, who among the villagers, from the elders to the infants, had not been either wounded, choked, trampled, scarred, stabbed, slapped, shocked, or orphaned in the last war?

Didn't Itay Kayong himself suffer irreparably after he was crippled by a stroke the year after Gregorio was taken?

He was no longer told about it but, if it were any consolation, Gregorio, although in agony, took no bruises on his fair face.

This would not be the case with his Tiya Sofia who got slapped cross-eyed by a foul-smelling Japanese soldier after she shoved her nephew in a failed attempt to hide Gregorio inside the living room aparador.

What would stand out as the last detail on Gregorio immediately before he disappeared for good had been preserved in one cruel canvas: the young

man with six other male neighbors that included Tirso, husband of Tiya Sofia, being dragged like farm animals across the old Sta. Ana church, in the direction of Intramuros. One eyewitness said Gregorio's arms were tied together at his back. Based on the description, a bone or two had visibly snapped. The arms were themselves bloodless pale, the elbows neatly joined at the rear, inches above the waistline, with steel wire cut off by the invading soldiers from a backyard clothesline.

A framed yellowed picture of the fair Gregorio, quiet eyes in an angelic stare, was hung in the *sala* of the old house, while his books were left out among mice and insects in the bodega, a favorite all-weather hideout and breeding place for stray cats, back of the old man's original residence.

**

FROM whom did Kaka Censia inherit her gifts of healing and clairvoyance?

Was it true Gat. Andres Bonifacio, father of the Katipunan (KKK), had been made to kneel and beg before he was killed by rivals from Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo's Magdalo faction in Cavite?

Wasn't it mere hearsay how the great Pancho Villa, the first world boxing champion from the Orient named after a revered Mexican bandit, had worked as a groom, a *pastol*, in the pasture back of Itay Kayong's shack?

Can they kill the river?

The old man boiled rice in a clay pot. He always had a small meal at sundown. He ate with his bare hands. He was careful not to spill or leave a morsel on his plate. He would have simple supper solemnly, like a priest celebrating Mass at twilight, before lighting the tiny kerosene lamp to keep him company through the night.

A devotee of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo, he made it a point always to pray to Christ's Hidden Wound.

The Wound, the old man loved to assure, was most meaningful and truly represented the core of Christ's Divine Wholeness.

In the Nazarene novena booklet, it was stated that Jesus Christ, asked once by San Bernardo at Claraval, bared a forgotten wound He had on his right

shoulder, while bearing the Cross to Calvary, which caused Him insufferable pain more than all His other afflictions.

The Wound, defined by an exposed broken shoulder bone and dug flesh that bled, was never remembered because it had been wholly unknown.

It was said Christ had all but given up because of that undefinable suffering.

San Bernardo had been advised to venerate the Wound in order for his prayers to be surely answered.

**

AFTER his evening prayer, the old man always made sure everything was in place, embers from the fire used in cooking the rice put out, before washing up.

He worshipped at Angelus by giving his thanksgiving, praying to the Nazarene, before retiring on his hard, mat-covered wooden bed protected by a white mosquito net.

The old man also heard Mass regularly but he received Communion only once a year, on Resurrection Sunday.

Asked once by Francisco why he didn't go to confession to receive Communion more often, the old man replied that there was no need.

The old man tried to explain that, whenever he would take and eat the Lord's body in Communion, he separately also allowed himself to be swept over. He would be wholly consumed, conquered in an honest bid to inherit Christ's love, humility and fortitude.

This way, the old man told the boy, he would be totally overtaken by a Divine Infection.

"Lord, I need You in my life, I now receive You, please put me under Your power and care. Come, reside in my heart."

The old man said that you—and not God who is perfectly permanent—must be the one to be moved in prayer.

He said the practice of offering bread as symbolic body during the sacred sacrifice was not original and had been done in much earlier times.

For honest change to happen the miraculous transformation must take place, not inside the chalice, but in the heart and soul, the core of the believer's being.

The old man took care for that bond not to be broken for the entire year.

Francisco, stunned by the unusual vehemence, found the unscheduled sermon crude and vague.

He failed to fully comprehend.

The boy honestly thought his grandfather did not know what he was taking about. Itay Kayong was tough but strange and could, in fact, appear like a central figure in a barber's tale.

Left alone, he remained like an apparition by Rembrandt, a singular shadow dusted in bronze. There was an assuring little light, a glint of serenity in that nameless corner where he had dared live and love his own way.

He cared for the river in the same way he was perfectly proud of his country and race.

All the while though, he had no inkling the President of the Republic, a monument of a man described as a God-sent champion of the masses, had ignorantly meted out a death sentence by approving a foreign outfit to operate in the river.

Next, his river, which had nurtured the well-being of the Tagalog race, got secretly savaged.

An American firm, alleging trouble-free quarrying, instead perpetrated a pagan rape and abortion—a hidden slaughter—of the benevolent waterway.

**

HERE was how it all started:

After getting up from the stroke, the old man assumed the role of bell-ringer in the village chapel, heralding the morning Fiesta Mass for the Mahal na Poong Santa Cruz ahead of the jumpy, screaming glee of brass bands.

For this special occasion the old man would report in his Sunday best: brown pair of pants, matching light checkered shirt, and canvas shoes. After his assigned chore with the morning fiesta bell, the old man would be back in front of the chapel in the evening.

He was in the same dignified outfit, shaven chin defining a regal nose, ashen hair oiled and silvery like a small crown. He soon took centerstage and proceeded to set off a big bunch of bamboo rockets, the *kuwitis*, from a makeshift stand.

He was definitely pleased, truly glad at being able to provide some thrill to sun-smelling kids, his momentary subjects.

Then, once down to the final bunch of about a dozen dazzlers, he allowed himself to get carried away. He loaded the standard and junked the launching platform before gathering the remaining *kuwitis*, a dozen, in his hand.

He proceeded to set off the mini rockets, cooly handling them one at a time. It was smooth sailing as in past fiestas. He wasn't exactly being heroic, but was visibly proud and grateful at the chance for a special spot in the celebration.

He was however down to the final four when the next rocket stayed. There was an abnormal dazzle.

He had no choice. He let go and dropped the stalled firework

Kids gasped and scampered, startled by the impending explosion.

The face of the old man froze into an idiotic mask

He did try to jump out but was coldly stalled by his sick legs.

Meanwhile, the missile in mutinee went pfft, whistling like a car tire instantly deflating. The dreaded big bang fizzled into a cloudy fart—prruuttt—right on his right foot.

The old man managed an empty smile while kids nearby hollered, thankful for the breezy sounding cloud of a miracle that saved them from possible harm.

He could've exploded as in the times when he hacked his cane or slammed dead his favorite warrior rooster.

The old man, humbled, shaken, tarried a bit before leaving the scene.

He was supposed to proceed to his daughter Jacinta's place a block from the riverside chapel.

He skipped the great traditional 10-course dinner prepared by Tiyo Magen Vasquez, the invited special chef from the Manila Hotel, for Itay Kayong's debonire son-in-law Macario, a well-loved orator and respected town councilor.

This was a very special Sunday, night of nights in the village.

There was a stun of firelies, the air dreamy with the breath of Maytime blossoms.

But everything suddenly felt as though it was the darkest night of the year.

Upon reaching his shack, the old man changed to his simple daily wear.

He took a glass of water, said his prayers and went to sleep.

Deep in the night, he woke up from a bad, bad dream, sister to a nightmare.

He dreamt he had dropped and lost his main molar, his own jawbone maybe, while trying to spear a great fish out in the river.

He was terribly shaken. It was an omen doubly dreadful than the one he had seen in his sleep before dear Gergorio was stolen.

**

IT was Celo Guillarte, a lean aspirant healer with a quiet brown face, who told the boy Francisco that the river would be lost.

Celo, son of Nana Sabel, a lead devotee to San Antonio de Padua, was apprenticing as a healer with Kaka Censia.

As told by Celo, his Kaka Censia, product of the masteral mystical institution up in Mount Banahaw, asked him to return in the afternoon after he dropped by her guava kingdom in the morning.

It was Good Friday, an exclusive day for testing amulets, and Kaka Censia, together with her brother Vicente, kept a wordless whole-day vigil around their bamboo house that sat by an old, massive mango tree whose thick trunk was sprawled on the damp mossy ground.

Celo returned after five, shortly before Angelus.

Kaka Censia brought out her *batya*, a big basin with corrugated edges, and poured water into it.

She readily lit a candle.

Celo stood by in total silence while the hunched lady with a small virginal face proceeded with her silent prayers.

Celo was asked which procession—the one at San Felipe Neri or Antipolo—he wanted to watch.

Puzzled, Celo did not say a word. The gentle-moving Kaka Censia next pried off what looked like a tea bag from her waistline. She pressed the tiny object on the edge of the basin whose water content were already shimmering in candle light.

Kaka Censia told Celo that what he was seeing on the basin that now functioned like a crude circular movie screen was the Good Friday procession at the parish of the Nuestra Virgen de la Buenviaje in Antipolo.

Cello said there were glittering shadows, apparently devotees ascending towards a wooden cross planted on top of a hill.

When Celo next asked to see the main Lenten procession at San Felipe Neri, Kaka Censia pressed the tea bag against the shoulder of the basin a second time.There was no gleaming shadow. The screen shuddered and next produced a dark, barreling blur that rolled and slithered through what appeared like the river surface.

It was huge, serpentine, but indistinguishable.

The fearsome object was next blotted out, the glimmer and the shadows were all gone.

The show was over in Kaka Censia's special Lenten theater.

Warned against a Secret Beast, Celo was told the river would be in for a dark fate.

**

THE river did not get lost. It was stolen.

That bright summer day when he allowed himself to be caught in the sudden noontime downpour, the old man was headed for an urgent destination.

He had to make a spot check after he was told by an excited Francisco that a big American firm, Norton & Harrison, was all set and ready to proceed with the approved quarrying of the river.

Everything happened too fast.

Early in the week, news of the impending job on the river had been whispered excitedly around the village.When Itay Kayong came, the main gear for the operation was already in its pre-determined perch. It stood out across the main road, a gigantic black rubber hose snaking from a vast open field all the way to the river's edge.

It was monstrous, to say the least, and could readily suck up a pair of horses. The ancient mahogany tree, the *mabolo* that reportedly hosted a cigar-chomping ogre, the *kapre*, had been chopped down to give way to the gigantic black gear. The great tree, a riverside landmark, had loomed like a sentinel watching over the vast vacant field separated by the street from the river.

There was a wooden hump being put up over the gigantic snaking tube to allow vehicles to cross through when the old man came.

It readily became a top feature, a main attraction among curious villagers, young and old.

Right there and then though, Itay Kayong swore the river would be in for trouble.

He knew he had to do something, quick.

In the first place, the river had been undergoing year-round dredging through the daily toils of other fishermen who also scooped up sand from the shallow portions of the river.

These poor folks would load collected sand on their waiting rigless boats, the *casco*, through which they would deliver to commercial users. That showed the river had needed no great outside intervention for it to remain clean and productive.

The old man tried to think of ways to at least let the neighborhood know that the operation in the river by an American company was neither foolproof nor safe.

He could have approached the tall, burly village chief but they were no longer on speaking terms.

As a last resort, the old man had thought of going to Malacanang for a possible audience with the popular pro-poor President, who had thrown the Palace gates open to the masses.

It was the only sane, safe thing to do.

He would plead the case of the river with his President.

**

THE following Saturday was unusually humid.The old man holed up in his shack after having seen the monstrous black hose.

He swore the awesome imported American gear would not be good for the river.

He was trying to find solutions.

He had wanted to check with Francisco for an update on the quarrying project by Norton & Harrison.

He also wanted to ask Francisco if he could be of help.

The old man wondered if Francisco could complete a letter he would try to dictate.

The boy had not shown up for the week.

By midmorning, Itay Kayong was stunned by the bang and blare from a brass band that was marching by. Something big was definitely happening, or a very important personage could be coming to the village.

This was the same street scream, a wake-up serenata played very early during the riverside fiesta celebrated every third Sunday of May.

The old man took a bite, put on his old brown cotton shirt and moved out, barefoot. When he reached the chapel, Francisco was running out of their place. The boy, in red t-shirt, paused to kiss Itay Kayong's hand and scampered off without saying a word.

The old man moved on towards where Francisco, in a big hurry to catch a big event, was headed.

There was a crowd milling on the grassy earthen edge of the river through where the gigantic hose had been made to snake up onto a brand new steel barge. The brass band was on stand-by.

The old man, refusing to mingle, stood alone under a tree.

There was a hush, then a commotion when a tall, handsome man, luminous in a national shirt woven out of pineapple hemp, strolled in. It was Ramon Magsay, President of the Republic.

Everybody stared in awe. The President was with a couple of Americans in casual wear and five Filipinos in formal attire. He towered like the legendary basketball star Carlos Loyzaga, toast of the sporting town.

President Magsaysay, a mechanic and former secretary of defense, indeed loomed like a living monument.

Everybody wanted to shake his hand.

The President was next made to ride a wide wooden ramp. Once he had gotten up and settled on the waiting steel barge, he was led by one of the two Americans to an elevated steel box. The band played Mabuhay and the President pulled down a waiting steel lever with a red ribbon on it, thereby sending into operation the Norton & Harrison Jackbilt Blocks Co.

The men on the barge that now served as a stage congratulated one another as the band played louder. There was a great cheer. But what rose through the applause, the instant celebration, was a monster's gurgle, a dreadful metalic grind and growl that seemed to rock the Earth's foundation.

The black hose whose heavy brass noozle had been dropped and landed like an anchor proceeded to suck up violently and wholesale fresh sand from the river's virgin bosom.

The old man stood alone dumbfounded.

This indeed was the Secret Beast his sister Crisencia had warned against.

The hidden desecration, the rape and abortion of his beloved river, had begun.

**

THE next day Francisco was early in Itay Kayong's place. The boy wasted no time to report that he had shaken hands with the President, not only once but twice.

The old man no longer bothered to comment. He did not bother to remind the boy that the awesome black rubber suction pump could be exactly what Kaka Censia had mysteriously featured as a slithering thick blur in her Good Friday presentation through a basin that served as makeshift movie screen.

In fact, the old man, feeling deeply disappointed, could not find a way to explain to Francisco how he had been shocked at the President, a living hero whom he honestly thought could be his last chance in trying to save the river.

The old man had indeed been dismayed, betrayed.

But he tried to keep everything to himself.

Anyway, it took little time before Norton & Harriswon went into full operation.

One year later, there was a visible change in the village. There were more jobs for young residents who worked out in the vast field, where they collected fresh sand transferred by the giant suction pump to the trenches and open ponds and then mass-produced into first-class concrete hollow blocks, an aid to faster reconstruction.

Residents got special prices, while others were allowed to buy the revolutionary construction material on credit

Soon, the young face of the village also started to harden.

Simple *nipa* houses one by one gave way to stiff concrete ones.

The fresh face of the riverside village had turned into a dry smirking mask.

Around the same time, a good number of working young males were also able to enroll in night school to complete a college degree. A group of village collegians that included the likes of Lino Licuanan, Terry and Bonie Matubang, Johnny Ignacio, Maning Reyes, Elen Jocson, Vergel Ahillion and Minong Mariano formed the Varsitarians.

Two years after the inauguration of the Norton & Harrison Jackbilt Blocks Co. the President of the Republic perished in a plane crash, a tragedy that

crushed the heart of the masses and shook the foundations of state.

There were two survivors in that tragedy over Mt. Manungal in Cebu. These were the dimunitive journalist Nestor Mata of the *Philippines Herald* and a red-feathered fighting cock.

There were unfounded reports of a bomb, which could have been concealed among eggs in a basket, causing the explosion. It was generally believed that the very popular chief-of-state was a product of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) political machinery.

**

EVERYTHING was related to everything else, no matter how distant, different.

A little over three years after Norton & Harrison started mass-producing construction sand-and-cement blocks, the deterioration of the river started to surface.

Fish did not only become scarce, their once mythic quality dipped. The once very useful water inevitably turned into waste. Villagers still took a dip and swam, but they no longer returned to the river to wash clothes there.

Meanwhile, the old man stayed through the secret desecration. He had long given up on the river. But he decided to stand his ground. He remained in his borrowed shack.

Years went by. The first to go, by the old man's quiet count, were his insect friends, like warblers, hummers, chirpers, led by the cicada and cricket that would lull and soothe him with a random symphony, both incredible and heavenly, from the river's shrubby edge and mossy banks deep on damp, cold evenings.

The river was still there but it was often mostly murky, if not lifeless.

The river of the old man was no longer there.

What continued to roll along was decay, if not the river's own grave.

This afternoon, the old man again took a trek to the west bend of the river, through the old path leading to the next village. It was now the height of

summer. Once the water level up in the Laguna Bay had dipped, the river current would turn around slowly and reverse from its original outlet at the mouth of the Manila Bay.

Before the great river was ravaged and fouled up, there was a period of supreme plenty, the *kaguno*, when freshwater fish, stunned and stirred by saltwater suddenly rushing in from the Manila Bay, would freely surface and mill dazed on the banks, thereby becoming easy pickings even for mothers and their kids, not unlike manna from heaven.

This unscheduled glorious event also would take place at the height of summer.

Not anymore. This one before the old man now was the dreadful *sibakong*, completely different, with the sick polluted river at its worst.

The old man paused to watch the sunset.

While watching the sick river, gurgling, frothing and drowning in its own filth, he also started to wonder: couldn't he have tried harder in his bid to save the river?

Too bad he could not even write his own name. How dumb could he get? The old man was quite sure President Ramon Magsaysay would have responded favorably, considering he had earlier decreed that "those who have less in life must have more in law."

The old man had felt totally helpless. He could have thought up other ways to send his message across. He had the guts but not the right training and intelligence for such an urgent noble venture.

At the same time though, he started to honestly ask himself: wasn't President Magsaysay, hailed as a champion of democracy, just as dumb as he was?

Or did the President play deaf and blind in signing a death sentence for his river?

Didn't President Magsasay allow himself to be a puppet of American enterprise?

Or was the President nothing better than a certified running dog of both Uncle Sam and the CIA?

**

THE old man returned shortly before Angelus.

He skipped supper, washed up and changed to an old white cotton shirt, his favorite.

He took a glass of water, lit the tiny lamp, said his prayers and went to sleep.

In his sleep, the old man dreamt of that blessed season, the summer of summers, in the village. There was a live orchestra and a guest nightingale featured in the grand village ball. There was the drizzling breath of sweet *narra* blossoms. Pairs of starry-eyed lovers were all on the well-lit dance floor, the lead songstress warbling a sweet, fiery number, when the skies up north of the village suddenly lit up, followed by repeated thunderous explosions. The great balls of fire in the sky were not fireworks, but the killer boom-boom and horrible bang of burning barrels of fuel oil stored in the nearby glass factory. Curtains fell on the old man's dream with that fiery scene.

The old man had allowed himself to be roused.

But upon realizing the colorful dream was nothing but a replay of the real-life fire that had hit the Choan Huat Glass Factory in the village about five years ago, he smiled it off. In that real-life conflagration, the sweet, pretty Carmen Perina, visiting with relatives at the gothic Salamanca residence across the two-room wooden schoolhouse, was singing a top-hit number when the glass factory that employed many residents got struck by a fire.

That grand affair was the annual ball of the Cactus Club. Perina was singing "Kiss of Fire" while the glass factory burned.

After shrugging off what he felt was a meaningless, uneventful dream, the old man went back to sleep.

Maybe he failed to refill the old lamp.

Shortly after midnight, a small breeze snuffed out the light.

Unlike before, the old man no longer bothered to restore it.

There was none of the required dampness but there, again, was the secret serenade.

It was sweet and shrill, nectar and poison, lullaby and dirge, greeting and goodbye from fetching secret friends in the old man's final solitude.

He had dreamt about the last summer of the great river.

**

(Note: There's a marked grave of Itay Kayong — Macario Ahillion, born March 10, 1893 — in the San Felipe Neri Cemetery in Mandaluyong. He died on July 20, 1962. He was interred in a concrete niche whose floor was made of patented concrete hollow blocks manufactured by Norton and Harrison, the American firm that had savaged and sucked up the virginal sandbed of the Pasig. Needless to say, Itay Kayong, by poetic design, ended up lying in what could now be considered the old bosom of his lost mother river. Thank you, indeed, and God Bless America!)

Poems from England

Carlomar Arcangel Daoana

Cold District

This could be a place of lucky prospects
As I, walking on your borough's famous street
Past midnight, bereft of anything
Except meaningless bills and a dumbness
That comes from being in a new city,

Might surreptitiously collide with the glee
Of the fresh or re-minted possibilities,
Might slip into an updated outfit of self,
Or if fortunate, might avail the revelation
Of the particular in your commonplace:

Shop windows (mannequins shrouded
For the night), telephone booths made ir-
Relevant by the use of cellphones, pocket
Garden thronged with autumn leaves
Where much later, a man will tourniquet

His arm with a garter and take a hit.
Which means, I am fully invested in you,
Cold district, the hope of Europe,
The font of English. You've handed me
Myself, scrubbed free of distinction

And impermanence, in the gaze of your
Citizens, on the doors of rushing trains
(False wind tunneling), in the chimera
Of modern art. You love me enough
To watch me in your ten thousand

Surveillance cameras. You won't see me
Waving or making undue complaints
But simply walking with intent,
Appearing to belong, like how
A young man should in a foreign place.

You treat me with indifference which
Is good advice. You allow me
To slow or quicken my pace, present
My credentials to the elements
And without strategy and draft,

Acknowledge the one good thing about
My life — the dignity of anonymity
Pre-supposed of its innocence,
Untouched by government or fraud —
As I make my way to Tottenham Court.

God's Children

Across the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral,
God's children have pitched a neighbor-
Hood of multi-colored tents overnight,
Intending to stay past autumn and winter.

Their faces shine even in the glum light,
Proffering leaflets to passersby and tenants
Of edifices near the vacant lots which they
Occupy. "Capitalism is crisis," they say.

"Grow the real economy." Their recalci-
Trance is startling, nourished by years
Of the proper cultivation of self-esteem.
Drinking coffee, reading subversive books,

Conversing with each other, it appears
What they have hoped for is already here:
The mechanism of power, having stopped,
Has now turned to the opposite direction,

Righting the scales, creating a surplus of jobs,
Sending bankers and politicians to prison
By the truckload. You can't help but admire
Their optimism, stark and encompassing.

In this country, waking up already signifies
A demented faith in the ordinary. Here,
God's children have lived in parcels of land
They have occupied for years. It is the city

That hems them in, ready with bulldozers,
Demolition teams, their tear gas and sticks.
They resume the hunger strike they began
On a day that's already smudged in memory.

Led to believe their lives are ephemeral,
They display their defiance by dodging a car,
An extortionist cop, a bullet, stray or otherwise.
They are always compelled to sell something.

When they extend their hands to beg, they trade
More than self-esteem for loose change.
They are cured of expectation — the one curse.
Their love is the purest form of suffering.

Unless they too are alleviated, unless they too
Can join in the boldness of our singing, the wicked
Will sleep uninterrupted and God's kingdom —
The future — will be forever cratered to the void.

Sainsbury Wing

Here they are, the living streaming into
This hall, strapped with the burden they wish
To carry — backpack, audio guide, umbrella

Shaken free of rain. Their breaths are an
Unquestioning clarity in the autumnal air
As they, at eye-level, engage with the figures

In the Quattrocento paintings and altarpieces —
Mannered exultations in oil and tempera — that
Used to hang in the chancels of European chapels

As points of contemplation and decoration,
Gold-leafed and gilt-framed, the luminous
Bodies in them swaddled in pleated garment,

Haloes as medieval spotlight. Their thoughts
(The living's), however, are rapid and inaccessible,
Filling the negative space in their heads with immense

Wondering and reflectivity that you swear
They have trained in this devotion of looking
Their entire life that the allegory of the wound,

The seated lion, the promise of a city seen
From an architrave is perfectly understood.
You want to know the kind of people they were

Before stepping into this gallery's segment,
The worries and aches and disappointments
That assailed them. Now, they have all the time

In the world, conducting themselves with
Utmost serenity, in the visible absence
Of meanness and contempt, that they

Begin to resemble the holy beings
And saints in their piety and attention,
Particularly the blue, enraptured angels

Of *The Wilton Diptych* (artist unknown)
Their arms folded across their chests,
White wings tipped with indigo tint.

Do the gallery-goers transform into
The subjects they behold, or at least by virtue
Of proximity, are completely overcome with points

Of divinity, the stiff flames fanning
Open into auras, signifying their split-
Second conversation? O how you want

To break into their reverie, exclaim that
Angels have long bled their majesty,
Demons and saints are conspirators to regimes

And religions, every piece anchors a time
Of superstition, meant to break the observer
Into supplication and guilt. Fra Filippo Lippi

Boticelli, Bellini — dead for five
Centuries — are insistent with their dogma
Of grace: bear anguish, be interior, avert your gaze.

Two Lakes

Not twins but distinct,
On separate continents,
Their nature similar, evident:

Reservoirs cupped by
Deep roots, earth, systems
Of drainage, containment.

Lidless corneas that blur
And clear, you are both
Hospitable to fowl and fish,

Repeat the commotions
Of the given, offer resolute
Models to human attention.

Dark panes under which
Pinpoint entities
Blossom and then die,

What do I choose
Between the two of you:
You high up

In the mountain,
Geographically elect, cleft
By a wall of stone,

Or you the one in the park,
Entirely man-made,
Glossed over by autumn?

Clutching you
In the mind like a pair
Of hand-held mirrors

Reflecting each other,
Unlaced of sky,
I cloud my breath

On both of you —
Balinsasayao, Leybourne —
In English.

Manor Event

(The Knole House, Sevenoaks, West Kent)

Even God can't hold a candle to this
House which, in its battlemented
Towers, inner courtyards, mazes
Of halls and rooms and staircases,
Disarms the charging light ready
To blast open its dungeons and
Secret passage, ignite its pillastered
Windows and ribbed ceilings,
Pillage its damask furniture and
Paintings. Withering the light's
Potency at first touch, this country-
Side manor asserts the virtues
Of something terribly man-made
And beside the point, displaying
Its capacity to flourish when it is,
In fact, stolid, unmovable, a bid for
Immortality amid the change-
Fulness of the season and scenery:
Copses of oak and elm and haw-
Thorn, and of deer flitting through
The estate or nosing the cars in
The parking lot near the west gate.

Nothing in your commoner life
Has prepared you for this:
The discomfort feathering your nape
As you pass through the hall lined
With men and women in mill-
Stone collars and capes and furs
Judging you from their gilded
Frames, their ghosts mincing
No words in their sheer irritation

At your presence as you pretend
To get the meaning of all this
Opulence, leave fingerprints on
Surfaces, bear upon this space
Your rather paltry taste. Should you
Smash a teacup, how would
They gasp? The house comes
Close to what you have imagined
The foreign to be: assured pro-
Venance and good bones, heraldic
Symbols, a model of fine taste
Articulated through fabric, silver-
Ware, no square inch unornamented.

It's the Venetian ambassador's room
That captivates you, where satyrs
And minor gods frolic across
The tapestries spanning the walls,
Their mythological roots explained
In small rectangles of text. The four-
Poster bed, tented in Genoan velvet,
Invites all manners of fantasy —
But only in your head as the sheets,
Eloquent and unruffled through
Centuries, will chastise any form
Of contact; the docent's stare reminds you
Of this. Emblematic of everything
Tight-lipped and wrong-headed
About the house, this room that is
*frail as a shell, as iridescent and as empty,**
Admits, as you pivot toward its
Window, a sliver of the world in its
Savage heft and spectacular un-
Purpose which tolerates this kind
Of sweet monstrosity for hun-
Dreds of years then topples it.

**frail as a shell…* : Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

Sa Paghahatid at Iba Pang Mga Tula

Paul Alcoseba Castillo

Sa Panahon na Walang Panahon

Ang oras, wari ko'y di matapos-tapos
Na paghahabulan nitong mga kamay
Na walang panahon upang makakaway
Sa mga sandaling laging nauubos.

Tila walang tigil ang pagpapalit-palit
Ng buwan at araw tuwing pinipilas
Ang mga panahong laging lumilipas
At ang mga taóng sadyang nawawaglit.

Kaya't malilimot ang naganap noon,
Ang ngayon at bukas at magpapadala
Ako sa oras ko nang di natatakot.

Dahil parating na ako sa panahon
Na walang panahon para mag-alala
Sa langit: sa lupa, patuloy ang ikot.

Sa Pamamaalam

"What can I tell you that you don't know
That will make you tremble again?"
—Louise Glück

Tila ika'y akmang muling magbibitaw
ng mga salitang tanging naiiwan
tuwing pumapanaw ang iyong pananaw

sa pananatili. Pagkat lumilisan
lahat sa sandali ng pananahimik.
Ngunit saan naman ngayon mananahan

ang ibig sabihing di maisatitik
gayong natuyot na itong mga bibig
nating dati nama'y laging nagtatalik

sa mga usapang walang nakikinig
kundi tayo lamang. Di na masarili
maging ang sariling pakikipagniig

kahit sa panahong ika'y nagdidili.
Ano pa ba'ng silbi ng pananalita
kung di na rin naman muling mahuhuli

ang naibato nang mga pagbabanta?

Manikyurista

Isa-isa niyang pinuputol
ang mga kuko

ng mga parokyano.
Hawak sa isang kamay

niya ang mga daliring
nilinisan ng dumi,

nakahandang gawing kambas
ang mga bagong tabas

nilang mga kuko:
mariin niyang ipinipinta

ang kaniyang kapalaran
sa kamay ng iba.

Sayawan

Walang mga mukha sa dilim
ang mga mananayaw na dumagsa

sa pintong itinutulak ng mga katawang
itinutulak din ng mga nais makaligtas.

At sa halip na sila'y makalabas,
nakapasok naman ang takot

habang apoy na lamang ang naiwan
sa gitna ng sayawan

kasabay ang lumalakas na ritmo
ng kaba, pag-awit ng mga sigaw

at banggaan ng mga katawang
nagsisiksikan patungo sa bungad.

Kapag tapos na ang sayawan,
mamamatay muna ang lahat

ng tugtugin bago sila makalabas
ngunit hindi na makikilala

ang kanilang mga mukha.

Sa Paghahatid

Tulad mong yumaong ngayo'y binubuhat
At inihahatid pabalik sa lupa,
Iisa ang daang ating tinatahak.

Ang bawat hakbang ko'y tila hinahatak
Ang sarili tungo sa pamamayapa
Tulad mong yumaong ngayo'y binubuhat

Sa saliw ng himig na sadyang makupad
Habang pinipigil ang patak ng luha.
Iisa ang daang ating tinatahak

Papunta sa hukay, bago pa ilagak,
Bumibigat lalo ang pagtitiwala
Tulad mong yumaong ngayo'y binubuhat.

Pagdating sa dulo saka masusukat
Ang layo ng hukay at mananariwa—
Iisa ang daang ating tinatahak.

Ipinamalas mo kahit di ko oras
Ang babagtasin kong daan sa paglaya
Tulad mong yumaong ngayo'y binubuhat,
Iisa ang daang ating tinatahak.

Channeling Shiva and Other Poems

Alma Anonas-Carpio

Channeling Shiva

I am Shiva, the Destroyer:
Master of the wild-whipping wind
And of the unstoppable surge of water,
Of the ravishing ravenous flame
And unpredictable, exploding earth.

I am change
In all its permutations.
I am the planet and cosmos
Reminding you who is boss.

When I dance,
Death does my bidding.
Destruction is my mace,
I hold up a shield of many tears
Woven to cover my fearsome face.

Look upon my gyrations and know
I will not leave you untouched.
I will not leave you intact.
I will not leave you.
I will not do as you beg.
I will not.

In my raiment of blood,
Through my crown
Of shimmering sighs,
With my many, spangled hands
I take hammer to anvil
And pound you relentlessly
Into the shape the Universe needs.
I take my cosmic flames
And purify you into place
In the heavens where you
Shall shine brightest and best.

I take shears to your shrub
And cut away what must fall
For new growth to come.
I am the upheaval you require
To emerge from the brazier
New and improved,
Upgraded and forward-bound.

I am Shiva, the Destroyer
You cannot get out of my path.
Yield and it will hurt less.
Yield and all will become new.
Yield and you will live
To grow another day.

I am Shiva, the Destroyer.
Through me, you master yourself.
I will not leave you.
I will never leave you.
Accept it and move on.

In the Quiet

In those molecular spaces
Between business and pleasure
In the tiny, darkened crevices
We miss between word and deed
I find a respite of sorts.

Here I crawl into myself,
Assuming yoga postures
That ball me up into a dot,
Warp me into a blur,
Create from my mass
A creature unseen and unheard,
A being silent, yet wild,
So I can breathe and think
More slowly, with deliberation
And that rare thing called pause.

In the quiet I hide from myself
To find that core of determination
Once more, to assay the world,
Shape my words, weave the images,

Call the spirit from the stone,
Conjure movement of shadow
And play of light,
Whisper of breeze
And roar of fire,
Sibilant hiss of water, draw
Silence from Earth's molten core.

In the quiet I am. Just am.
In the quiet time's nervous hands
Fall away and are lost,
The days and nights merge
Into a single stream of twilight.
The sands blow across my desert.
The waves crash upon my shore.
The leaves of my forest rustle
In poetry and song. I am. Just am.

Uncurling, unfurling the shivering leaf
Of consciousness, green and wet with dew,
I depart from my haven and stretch out again
Upon a world made new
By momentary absence
From the moment, the now, the here
That presses in on all sides like a wall-trap.
I regain composure, humanity, purpose.

I return as if from a far sojourn:
Welcoming all the demands of the noise.

Storm Child

Elemental moments
Are those I seize for my own.
Storm clouds birthed me,
Squalling loudly, and I
Claim bolts of lightning,
Grip them in each hand.
They burn me not.
Rather, they power
My every stride,
Each sprinting leap.

My voice is the bellowing gale.
Dark roils of clouds
Cascade down my back
As I toss my head forward
To surge like tempestuous surf,
Forward, to my target, my goal,
That which I will call mine.

I ride high waves
With childish glee,
I dive into whirlpools
With joy. The others flee.
I run headlong into the thick of it,
I race into the heaviest downpour,
The wildest typhoon.

The storm is my mother,
She will never hurt me.
In her wet bosom
I am content and peaceful,
In her powerful grip
I am secure.
It is her can-do spirit
That permits me to soar

Amid the thunder,
Through the high gale,
Across impenetrable precipitation,
Through the lashing lightning
And over a restless sea.

I find my silence
In her eye,
Find my music
In her banshee's wail.

Batten down the hatches,
But leave a window open for me.
She approaches in high heat and silence
And I must prepare to greet her.

Warp and Woof

The timelines of life
Run colorful ribbons, threads of thought,
Throughout dreams of what if,
That game of chance that
Never ends the same way,
But stabs at the toughened heart
More surely than a murderer's icepick could.

We wove our lives with threads we chose,
Colored them with our decisions and perceptions.

"I had such a crush on you then,"
One would say to another over a decade later
And both would pause oh-so-slightly
To think of what would have happened
On the road not taken.

We fed the woof to the warp
Without too much thinking,
With way too much impulse.
We forgot to look at
The fabric of it until now.

"Ah, but I was too drunk/high/busy with
Someone else's body in the pool."
Yes, the actual road imposes itself
Black and solid and certain.
But those imagined moments remain:
Such tiny, sharp shards of fiction
That could well have become truth.

A warp here, shot with a woof there.
The shuttle darts back and forth too fast to see
To predict or stop. All we do is stay with it.

"We could have loved each other,
You and I, and what would the world have become?"
Ah, the questions raised
About the left-hand path
When the right has been chosen and taken.
They come too many years after the fact
To be answered with any certainty or clarity.

Photographs shot by the imagination
Can document these streams of existence.
Songs sung by voices unheard
Will describe emotions unexperienced.
Dance can express the sensuality
That was never let loose.
Perhaps even black poet ink
Might scry that alternate universe.

How amusing now to think about, after a decade,
These moments of what-if and wherefore
And what-the-hell-happened?
Let's forget the regrets. They get us nowhere.
Somewhere there, curiosity stirs,
The brain whirs in an effort to process
Data that never was inputted.
The syntax error is inevitable
And our weaving loses some rhythm.
The shuttle pauses oh-so-slightly
As our minds wander and our hands falter.

We talk now of our lives as they grew
Organically from our choice
Of words not to say, options not to take
And things (or people) not to do.
Are we content? Perhaps. Perhaps not.
We will not know until we decide
Upon contentment or discontent.

But we are friends and we can wonder
Every now and then, when boredom sets in,
When old hurts ache and when new wounds
Are felt to the core and all we want
Is something to take our minds off
These things before us that really bug us
To the bone, to the soul, to the very core
That even God does not violate.

We are friends, woven of the same threads
But we are separate scarves,
Our fabrics do not mesh.
But that is what makes us friends,
This distance of respect, the space of air
That enables our similitudes, our shared hues
To fly free like banners of self
On the winds where we soar.

There are no regrets.
We take up the threads again
And busy our hands once more.
We bring our eyes back forward.
There is a tomorrow yet on the loom.

Ilang Nawaglit na Awit at Dalít

Michael M. Coroza

Magandang Bituin

Kung mayro'n mang bituin, tunay na maliwanag,
Sa gabing matahimik, maganda't marilag;
Dito sa puso ko, may bituin ng pag-ibig,
Ang gabi'y di kailangan upang siya'y mamasid.

Musika at Letra ni Tito Arevalo

Wala kang nariyan na laging maningning
Laon mang yumaon at di na darating
Ang asam na araw na mailibing
Ang panglaw na lubhang di ko ikahimbing.

Sa durungawan ko, kapag hinahanap
Ang mga nawaglit na mithi't pangarap,
Natatanaw kitang ang kislap ay irap
Na nagpapangatal sa labi't talukap.

Magandang bituing matagal nang wala,
Pagpalain yaring aking pagtingala;
Pag-asa ma'y ngaláy sa katutulala,
Wala kang nariyan sa aking pagtula.

Digmaan

Pag umuulan ng poot
Sa lupaing laging tuyot,
Walang hindi nalalapnos,
Makasalanan ma't musmos.

Pag bumabaha ng galit
Sa bayang laging mainit,
Nalulunod sa ligalig
Ang nawaglit na pag-ibig.

Matapos ang kalamidad,
Walang budhing umiigtad
Sa pang-uusig sapagkat
May basbas ng langit lahat.

At nangagkalat sa lupa,
Bakás ng muhing humupa:
Baság na hangad at haka
Ng kinatay na manika.

Siklo

Muli't muling lumuluwal
Ang dakilang pinapaslang
Upang hindi sumakamay
Ng kriminal ang tagumpay.

Katwiran

Balintunang mapanlingkis
Itong landas na matuwid;
Ang habag man ay humibik,
Nagigiyagis ang bait.

Katotohanan

Sa laksang luksang nagkalat,
Natibo yaring dalumat;
Talinghaga kong nasulat,
Patak ng dayap sa sugat.

Kapayapaan

Bulaklak na hinahangad
Ngunit di mapabubuká
Ng palad na nandarahas
At may bakás ng pulbura.

Huling Awit

Lagi kang tinatawag sa gitna ng hirap,
Nabibilang ko ang oras, ay! walang lumingap.
Kung mabalitaan mo na ako ay namatay,
Idalangin mo sa D'yos! Paalam, Irog!

Musika ni Resureccion Bunyi at Letra ni Jose Corazon de Jesus

Pag pintig ng puso'y huminto nang ganap,
Wala nang muli pang pag-asang kikislap
Sapagkat ni hindi makapagpadiklap
Ng galak ang bunton ng agnas na sarap.

Likumin mang lahat sa palad ang sidhi
Ng tuwang sa awa't dasal ay nagbinhi,
Nalalamukos din sapagkat ang budhi
Ay nakabaón na sa matris ng muhi.

At ang bukod-tanging nakapanunuot
Sa impis na dibdib ay balisáng sutsot
Na nagpapatibok ng dilim at poot
Na nagpapasukal sa puntod na limót.

Apollo Descending and Other Poems

Albert B. Casuga

Apollo Descending

(An Ars Poetica)

It is a fiery birthing: after the lonely call
of the last gull that darts after the last
glow of sundown; after the sandpiper's
song peters out to a lost bird's chirp;
after all the images have crept under
these breakwater boulders to surface
perhaps as frenzied dancers casting
shadows swaying underneath this tent,
this caravanserai of dreams; after this,
on a throne of palaver, a fire-bearer
lights the torches that fence us all in.

Like Apollo's captives, we cup flames
in our palms and sing polyglot hymns
to the beauty of words while we shower
our paths with pellets of fire, as we crown
the beggar queen with a flaming nosegay.

Silence

This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.
- T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men"

By sundown, they will be gone, like long shadows on my porch walls. All the fierce singing done, what remains is the quiet murmur of the bourn. Its stream will not return, nor will the swallows.

But while they flitted from tree tops to broken perches, did they not cry out their bravest songs? These are our elm trees, these are our willows, we pieced our homes here together, we roosted.

At the bluffs, we find the edge of the woods muted now. Soon, even the cackling gulls will dive a final swoon, catch the last crayfish lost on boulders left bare by ebbing tide that must also leave its shore.

It is troths like these that will not last, nothing endures. The silence can only become a whimper.

A Second Time Around

Malleable heart, mouth open to the sky and rain,
my discipline is to learn your one singing note—
to fish it out of the depths of a fountain like a penny
someone tossed there long ago, or like the sun
in hiding.
- Luisa A. Igloria, "Singing Bowl"

Is it your one singing note that I am deaf to,
one you have always kept unsung, unheard?

How deep must I plunge into the whirlpool
that your malleable heart has hidden, unmarked

uncharted, like uncollected coins grown old
in a broken fountain, tokens of desire or whimsy?

Dare I fish it out, this one uncollected penny,
from what depths it has reached in that well?

When you tossed it away, it was best forgotten
like some wilted petals in a convent's breviary.

I have coveted that one note, I have haunted
the barnacled wayside fountain, brackish now,

where you must have thrown it like a shrug
one winter over your cold uncovered shoulder.

In spring thaw, I could see it again, leaden
and rusty as the sun hidden by some penumbra,

and I must collect it now, make it sparkle
once again, rub it on my sleeve, and wrap it

until I could wheedle from its sheen that
one note you have always kept unsung, unheard.

Two Mornings

Waking up on Fifth Line, when the ground fog
creeps on moonlit streets like a late lover lost
under slept-on sheets, surprises me as still
the best time to rise when mornings are really
midday scrambles to catch something: bus,
tram, train, time, traffic, trash bins trampled
over, reeking tramps, ad nauseam. I am still.

On a porch, where houses are still better off
with them, I sip my minted tea as serenely
as I could, miming the movements of my mind:
if I knew then what I know now, if I loved then
as fiercely as I could have, if I could turn time
around and give it a kick in its arrogant behind,
if I could shelve that rushing sunrise and not
waken to carpenter bees and highway buzzing…

However languid or rushed my mornings are,
does not matter now. Waking up still beats not
getting up or not waking up to another still day.
I am most still when I can feel my shoulders shrug.

A Wailing Wall

Ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant *
- Tacitus

Either way, distance finds me
looking up or down this cliff,
an unlikely sanctuary I escape
into aching for scarce solitude.

How can one be alone among
the darting seagulls? Or silent
with lost memories jarred by
blasts of breaking waves below?

Here, gods revel in their haven
of whistling winds and clouds,
down there fishermen cackle,
chewing sargasso, guzzling gin,

while their thrown nets fill up
with flotsam floating around
moss-gowned boulders staring
at the sky like dark green eyes.

Is it this vast and empty space
between that scares me now,
when I should be murmuring
secrets to messenger winds?

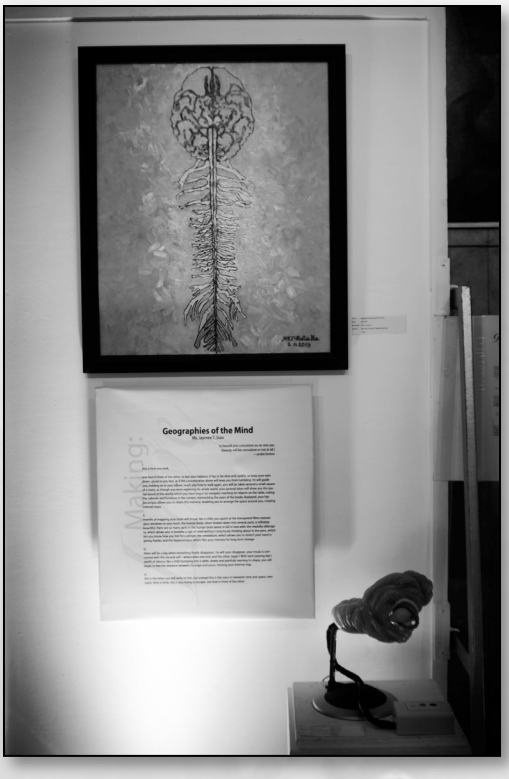
I would scream unbearable
pain, holler down bitter anger;
I must share muffled grief,
loosen taut shackles of despair.

Either way, I find wailing walls
in air, water, rocks, and wind;
like Job I weep for peace, hope
to gently fall in the cup of palms

waiting to catch my carrion
now carved out of a shattered
world of faithlessness and fear,
unable to hold on to life or love.

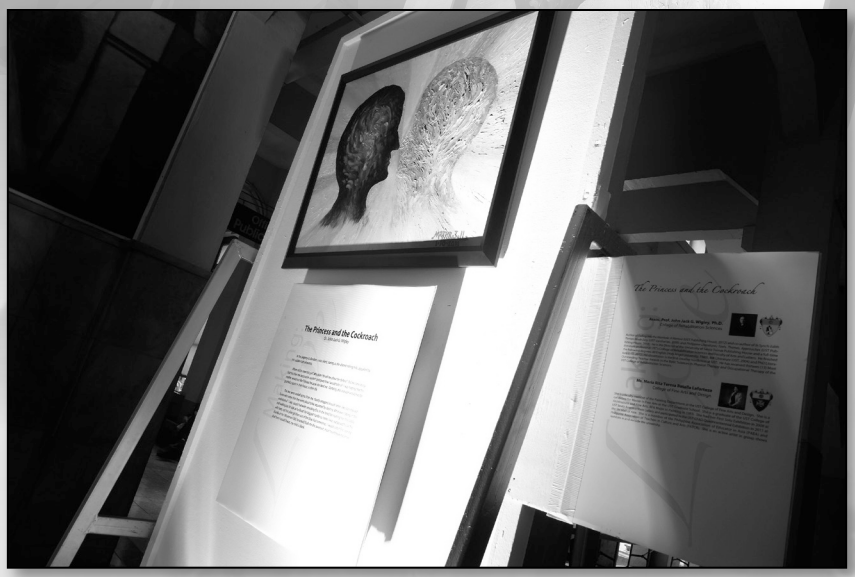
On this piece of jutting rock,
have I not found the little place
where I could reach His Hand
quickly were I to fall, either way?

* Where they create desolation, they call it peace…



GEOGRAPHIES OF THE MIND

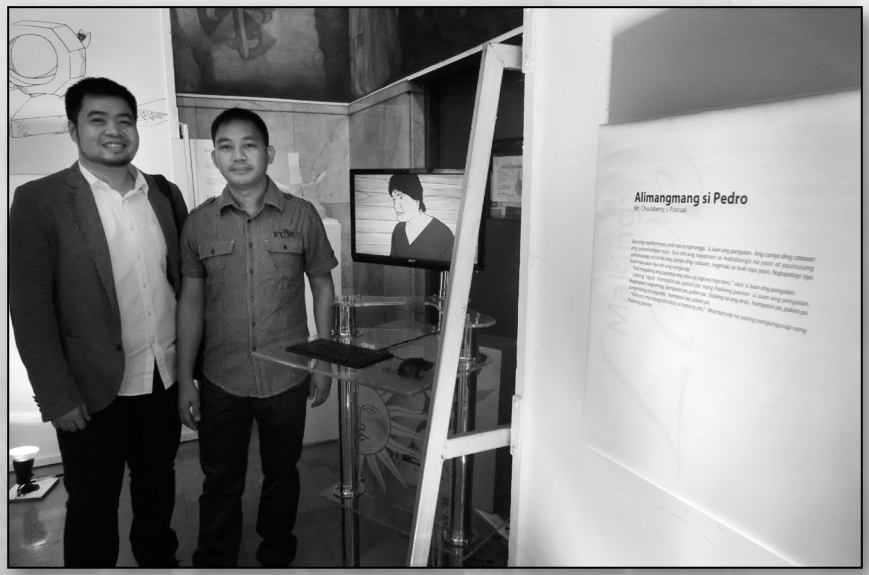
The Case of Maria Jimenez



The Princess and the Cockroach

Manok, Tibok, Tigok

Elegy



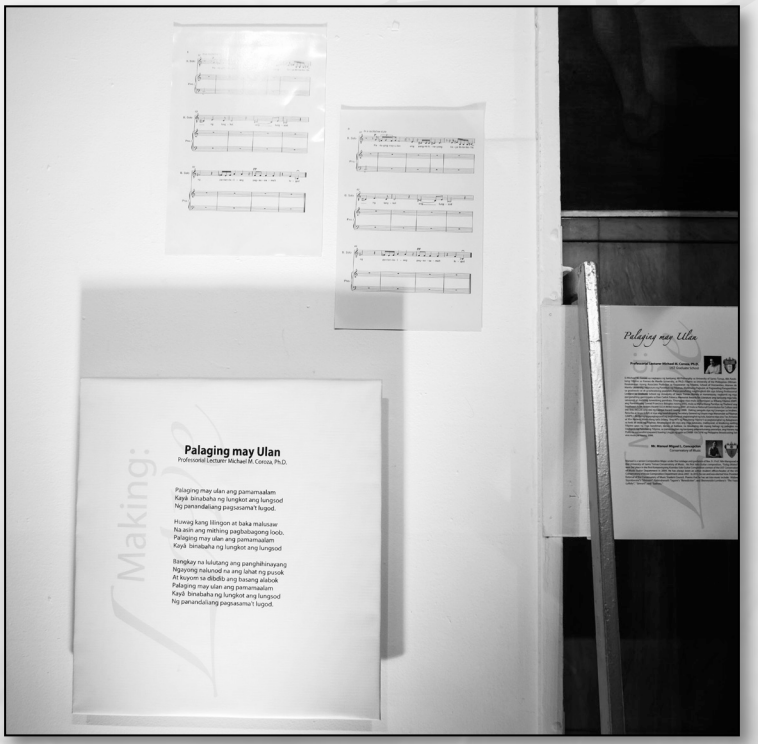
Alimangmang si Pedro

Roche's Limit

Bliss

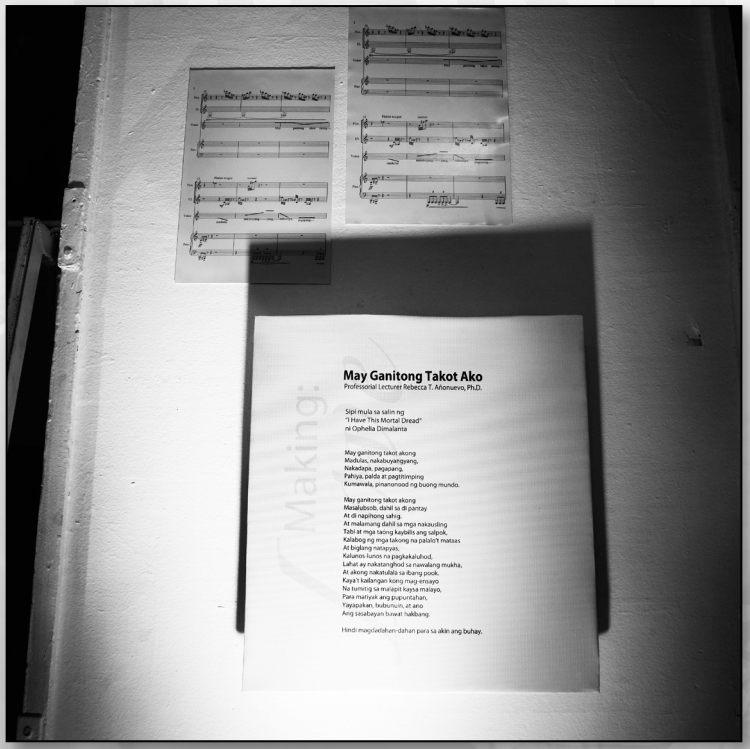
First Time

At Nagtama ng Paningin: Mga Tula ng Loob, Mga Laraw ng Labas

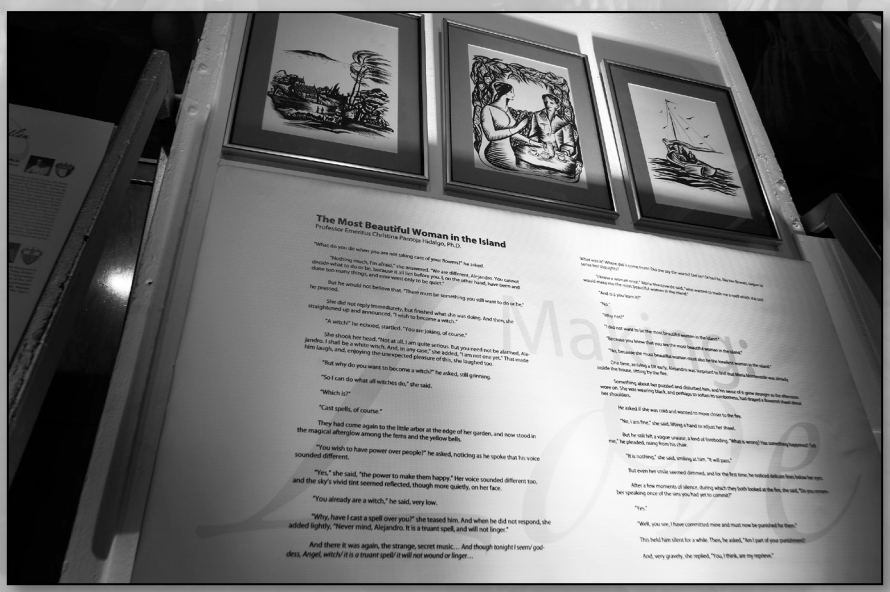


Palaging May Ulan

After Watching Puccini's Madame Butterfly



May Ganitong Takot Ako



The Most Beautiful Woman in the Island

In My Father's Shoes

Nerisa del Carmen Guevara

It was difficult to ask my mother questions about my father after he died in 2001, but my sister and I heard stories about him all the time. She would, nearly with every chore she did in the house and every person she talked to on the telephone, break into intense testaments of praise and vivid resurrections of memory in a high-pitched voice that reminded us of anger or frustration. No one could reprimand her effectively, the way she would sharply shock us with sermons in our childhood, after all, the love of her life and ours was dead. "*Ang Daddy ganito. Ang Daddy hindi ganyan.*" and so on.

But when I pushed a micro-recorder in front of her while we were eating dinner and asked her about father, she softened, became closer to silence than to voice and I was nowhere near any answer.

Maybe it was the question, "Mommy, do you still have Daddy's shoes?" That silenced her. There was no moral mentioned, there was no virtue or vice to be explained with my father as central metaphor. This was a question about something tangible in all our lives. Where are all of my father's shoes?

A dead man's feet are stiff. A dead man cannot wear his shoes. I remember telling the embalmer to put his favorite pair of dress shoes on his feet. I remember holding them like a pair of black kittens and passing them to someone in that funeral parlor. Now I don't know where they are. I do not remember what they look like. But I do remember shoes were important to my father.

I prodded mother and started with the simplest of questions and I learned that he was a size seven. He always wore dress shoes. He shined his own shoes and sometimes ours, when he wasn't busy being a pediatrician. His father, Tatay Clemente, owned the largest (so she says) shoe factory in Marikina then, Alex Shoes and made all his shoes for him. He always bought two pairs of shoes. He only started buying his own shoes after the factory closed. After all, my mother said, they were the Guevaras who started the shoe industry in Marikina.

It was not a topic greatly discussed even in my childhood, and was only mentioned in passing, usually when June came around and school shoes were bought at Cardams or Otto Shoes because they were Marikina shoes, and the word Marikina was synonymous to quality. Father took special care in the shops to hold the shoe and look at the soles to see if they were real leather and stitched all the way around. Those shoes lasted for years.

There were signs of my father's shoe scion past. When we moved to Silay in Negros Occidental and we were far from Marikina, he would have us step barefoot on a piece of bond paper and trace the shape of our feet on the paper and take it with him when he went to Manila. The pencil against the arch of our soles made us giggle. He had a scar on his left cheek shaped in the thin crescent of a horseshoe. He pulled the tail of a horse in the ranch in Calapan, Mindoro in his youth. I have a picture of him when he was a teenager. He was happy in a Lady Triumph sports car.

*

On the corner of Miguelin Street and España Street is the makeshift table of the *sapatero*, Ely "Bay" Rebong. He has been there for nearly 30 years, plying his trade in front of the Old Prudential Bank that has been around just a little longer than him. His costumer of twenty five years, Alfredo Gozum, calls him "*kaibigan*" and talks to him even when he has no shoes for shining or repair. That day, when I jumped out of an FX to UST to finally talk to him, his stall was damp: thin plywood peeling off looking more like wood shavings from age. It reminded me of the inverted hull of an old beached boat never to set sail again.

I needed him to spell out his name, and with shaky polish-stained hands he obliged and joked that he hadn't written anything down in a long

time. I wanted to look at his stall closely, at the shoes he had on the table, "FOR SALE" written in pentel pen propped on the cement, but he said it was raining so hard and his goods were not in order.

I think he knows that I know his stall had always looked that way, an installation more than a display of old shoes from his many customers. Those who were not able to pay for his services left him their shoes. And so there they were, growing like history on the old bank wall.

Like a security guard, he sits beside the security guards who joke that the reason why this Prudential bank hasn't ever been robbed was that robbers were afraid of Mang Ely. I thought that Mang Ely looked like Don Quixote without his armor, his old horse or his grand dreams.

That day, Mang Ely was shining the shoes of one of the security guards. Sitting on his haunches, he applied blackening fluid and waited for it to dry. After that, he applied shoe wax and buffed them with a rag. He said everyone from the train tracks to the professors of UST knew of him. He said for a shoe shine twenty-five years ago, he charged two pesos, and you could buy rice and milk with two pesos then. Now, he charges twenty to twenty five pesos, and that can only afford him a little rice and sugar.

He wiped his hands on the same rag he used to polish the shoes and dug into his pocket for his wallet and pulled out a calling card:

"Bay"
Shoe Repair Shop
We specialized Men & Ladies, Children Shoes made and repair
"Quality repair is our Guarantee"

Ely "Bay" Rebong
Proprietor/ Manager
Miguelin St. corner
Espana Sampaloc Manila
Contact Ben A. Mabini
Tel. # 732-03-53

He used to own a shoe repair shop on Mabini. Americans and Japanese tourists would ask him to make leather boots, low-cut shoes and high-cut shoes and, after a fitting, they could have the shoes in two days. Three days, when there were many customers. Made-to-order shoes, he calls them. And there were many made-to-order shoe shops like his. Besa. Glenmore. Those were busy days then.

"*May* magic *ako*." His small face beamed. He took the rag and pushed it into the hollow of his loosely closed fist. He waved his fist around and gestured like a circus ring leader, and with a flick of the wrist he made his rag disappear. He did magic to pass the time and to keep his hands and fingers nimble. The kids on his street would gather around him in pairs and there was a time he had fifteen kids prodding him for magic. Sometimes he did magic all day because there were no customers. He was well loved by Miguelin Street. Rio, the owner of a *carinderia* at the end of the street would give him hot food and hot rice in thin plastic bags. Alfred Gozum and several other men would stop by and chat with him for hours.

Alfred said, "*Palagi akong nagpapashine nang sapatos kasi kapag malinis ang sapatos mo, maganda kang tignan.*"

"*Meron pa akong isang* magic." Mang Ely took a peso and tucked it in his fist. His wrist was weak this time and I saw the coin pass from hand to hand. He scratched his head and gave me a shy smile.

I looked at my red muddied Camper shoes and had them shined.

*

"*Ang shoes ng* Daddy *mo, na kay* Uncle Totoy *mo.*" She said on the Sunday of our del Carmen reunion which was to happen in our compound in Maryland Street, Cubao. "*Kung gusto mo, sumama ka sa kanila pagkatapos ng* party. *Ipapakita niya sa iyo. Magbihis ka na.*"

Ten o'clock in the morning, she knocked on my door to tell me that. My room was on the top floor. My narrow herb garden gave off an intense scent of basil in the near noon heat. I dressed slowly. I was not much for reunions. I was always the odd one, with hair too long, and not a doctor, a lawyer or a businessman. I made an effort to go to these reunions after my father died. I deliberately wore clothes that didn't match to appear more or

less normal. I took a deep breath and went down the stairs. It felt like I was diving into the deepest part of the ocean.

Del Carmen children ran around the compound; del Carmen men drank their beer; del Carmen women sat plumply, eating. I made my rounds, kissing cheeks, putting food on my plate. This compound used to be one of the lots of the del Carmens' old houses. Divided fairly among the eleven children, it was a safe haven for close relations.

I remember always seeing my father with my Uncle Totoy, one of my mother's older brothers, in these reunions. My Uncle Totoy was sitting in his faded striped shirt with the men. I watched him from the corner of my eye. He was a dentist like my mother. But his skin was burnt brown by his years of fieldwork as an investigator for the Central Intelligence. He was the darkest one of my uncles on my mother's side. He had a huge smile and his eyelids wrinkled when he laughed. His hair was fiercely dyed a strong black. I realized I had never really heard him speak. I was always some distance from everyone else.

Father was a heavy smoker but he didn't drink. He would sit in a striped Collezione shirt beside my equally stripe-shirted uncles, hands usually on his knees trading jokes and stories. In the beginning, when he was healthy it was such a strong image: beloved doctor talking to other doctor relatives. He was the most passionate storyteller of the lot. His cheekbones were high, like mine. His smile was wide. He had a little belly that jiggled from all that *lechon*. But in the last few years before his death, though the same gestures were there, the same talk, he was gaunt and wheezing, though he looked very brave.

My Uncle Totoy was my father's best friend, my mother said. But that was not the reason she had for giving him my father's shoes. They had the same shoe size, she said. It was practical to do so. It was also practical to schedule a viewing of my father's shoes. She had called him during the week when I started looking for them. She went straight into making the appointment. It was to happen after lunch, around three.

I remember we only went to one Guevara reunion. I was in college then. I remember it was said to happen regularly in May. I remember my Father bringing home these huge T-shirts with the word Guevara printed in bold red. We sat in the garden of a resthouse somewhere in Marikina along with other color-coded Guevaras. I remember my father shaking

his head while driving back home to Cubao. We never went to another reunion again.

I only saw the Guevaras on All Soul's Day on the family plot in Loyola in Marikina. These were his brothers, my Uncle Bodie and my Uncle Boy. My Nanay, my Auntie Ossie and Auntie Linda were in the U.S. My Auntie Linda left nearly twelve years before anyone else. My Auntie Ossie and my Nanay followed after she was married in 1991. Uncle Boy was to follow a few years after. And after Uncle Bodie died, we didn't see anyone at all.

I remember we sat on foldable stools and ate on paper plates around the old marble *lapida* of my Tatay Clemente. Those uncles and my father told fabulous stories about the good old days: looking for tanso on the banks of a clear Marikina River when they were boys to sell for a few centavos. A favorite tale would be how they thought that Nanay's sweet corn was the sweetest corn in Marikina, and that it was even more magical because it looked like the pale cheap corn they fed to horses and chickens. They discovered later on that it was because she added sugar to the boiling water.

They always said that I dressed like my Auntie Linda. She was wild in her day, in her leopard prints and bandanas and Jackie O shades. Always living inside her head. They would talk from sunset to midnight. And we children, my sister and my cousins Mia and Rocky Boy would collect wax from the melting candles on any grave we could find them on, rolling them into balls until they looked like the marbled jades in some dragons' mouths.

A del Carmen reunion was brief as are all reunions of people who never really talk. We stepped into Uncle Feli's van and drove off to Seventh Avenue in Cubao. It was a quiet trip, with the two del Carmen brothers quickly disengaging and moving into their houses. They were neighbors.

There was a huge replica of Our Lady of Manaoag in the small living room of my Uncle Totoy's house. She had a mustard yellow polyester robe, and gold synthetic fringe around the wrists and hem of her white inner dress. She perched on a chipped blue-white cloud.

Uncle talked to me the entire time, looking at me in the eye. We sat close to each other. He took the chair near the door; I took the couch. But his story was as distant as the events he narrated. He even talked about me, saying my name as if I were not there. My cousin Jan sat beside Uncle Totoy. He was to take me home after. He had just defended his thesis the

day before and was still groggy. Uncle Totoy said that Jan wore my father's dress shoes for his college thesis defense. He was such a big boy. And his skin was milk white. Five-eight, maybe. How could he have possibly fit into those shoes? But he did.

Uncle Totoy told me that my father went to Pangasinan to see the Lady of Manaoag in 2000. He asked for ninety days to live because my sister had just given birth to his first grandson Elijah, and he wanted to spend time with him. He got better after that; he was even able to drive again. But after the ninety days were up, my father suffered his last heart attack and died.

Uncle Totoy said one of my uncles who was living in the States always sent him Florsheim shoes while he was studying. When he graduated and had to buy his own shoes, he always bought Alex Shoes. He didn't realize that my Tatay Clemente made the *hulmahan* for Alex Shoes. This was in the sixties. By the time my uncle and my father met, in the seventies, Tatay Clemente had left the shoe industry and was taking care of the fishpond and ranch in Mindoro.

He said my father bought shoes from Marikina even long after the Guevaras had left the business. A few minutes after our conversation had begun, my Uncle started crying. There was a lump in my throat, too. I asked my questions bravely. He said things that my father only whispered. "*Marami siyang plano para sa kaniyang mga anak. Marami siyang pinangarap para kay Ricci na hindi natuloy.*" He looked straight at me. I wasn't in that room at all.

I asked to see the shoes. He stood up and went into his room with Jan and came back with five pairs of shoes. We took inventory. He wasn't sure of the names of certain kinds of shoes. When I lifted a dark brown pair with a pattern of holes punched over the ankle and the nose, he just said there were shoes for formal occasions. Dress shoes.

Two pairs of Swatch Shoes moccasins. Dark brown. Suede with floppy suede shoe laces.

One pair of Rusty Lopez moccasins. Dark Brown. Calf leather.

One pair of dress shoes with gold buckle, its label worn off.

One pair of Rusty Lopez dress shoes with straight laces. Dark Brown. Pattern of holes punched in.

He said that there were eight pairs given to him. Since they shared everything in his household, his nephews borrowed them from time to time. So father's shoes were still walking on the streets out there in the world.

My father wasn't a fan of black shoes. All five pairs were brown in various levels of fashion. His moccasins were my Uncle Totoy's favorite. Rusty Lopez. Dark Brown. It had a small nose and little leather tassels. The pair had a gash on the left shoe, but they still held their shape.

The shoes looked warm in the middle of the living room floor. Like my father was going to step back into them anytime. I found my eyes wandering through doorways. I lifted a camel brown shiny dress shoe with a buckle on its side and felt young again. Good leather. Not a scratch on it. Solid tip. Leather sole sewn in. Not a stitch out of place.

Beginning with Words: What it Means to Stutter

Kat Del Rosario

It begins thus: it is as if the air disappears from your throat and your mouth; and your tongue, stricken with shock at this loss, would be left to fumble and search for ways to form words. It would try again, and again. It would fail every time. Your jaws would tense and become difficult to pry apart, the back of your neck aflutter with hundreds of little tremors, and it would all only stop when you do; it would only stop when you stop trying, and oh what exquisite relief. Sometimes at the height of excitement it would be like tripping over words and running into a barrier, only to slam into it repeatedly, and the only way out of this mess would be to realign the words and the sounds, and to start again.

It is called *utal* or *bulol*: stammering or stuttering. The more technical terms for it are speech dysfluency or verbal non-fluency, a condition wherein words and syllables are repeated (re-re-re-repeated) or prolonged (ppppprolonged) unnecessarily. It is a curious little speech impediment in that it has no physical source or cause, no crooked obstruction of mouth-parts to disrupt speech, no hard blow to the head that would cause any such speech-related parts of the brain to malfunction. We all have stories of distant relatives who, as children had been natural lefties, been forced to write instead with their right hands because all desks at that time had been built exclusively for righties. This forcible switching, elders continue to explain, somehow confuses the right side of the brain and the left side of the brain, resulting in the stuttering. Unfortunately, this illustrates nothing ex-

cept that the elders know just as much about stuttering as they know about the hemispheres of the human brain and the workings within. However there might be truth to the *bulol* origin story, in that the stuttering comes not from the forced switching of writing hands and the bumbling confusion of brain parts, but from psychological pressure and trauma. One can only imagine, through the stories our parents would tell us about how fortunate we are, that we had not been made to kneel on raw peas and grains for every misconduct, had our skirts pulled to our ankles for every series of wrong recitation answers, and how the lefties would have had their right arms bound to their writing desks, a hearty slap to the head received for any of the left hand's attempts at rescue. And one would wonder why entire generations before ours did not all stutter.

Even until today, people are misinformed about the causes of stuttering; there are not very many speech pathologists in the country for the large amount of people with speech impediments, let alone people who stutter. Because it does not have a physical cause, it is very often dismissed. To this day, my mother remains convinced that an inner ear infection had been the cause of my stuttering, and would mention a time when I had been almost crushed by a motorcycle as a little girl. It had baffled them so, how this little girl they had so ensured from birth to be gifted in letters (by inserting a dictionary under my pillow as a newborn, handing me newspapers as early as nine months old) would suddenly be overcome by stuttering.

"Maybe," my father offered, "maybe it is because you read too fast and think too fast that your mouth gets left behind." I would be made to read aloud, scolded and told to begin again when the beginning of a stutter would emerge, and in their frustration my parents would ask me what was wrong? What was wrong?

I don't know, I would tremble, I don't know.

***

However, it is the nature of all things to have physical origins. I remember a time when I did not stutter. I was small and loud and read well, and delighted teachers would send me off to spelling bees and oratorical contests and kindergarten-level beauty pageants where I would enthusiastically

quote Joyce Kilmer. Then again perhaps it could be attributed to a child's blind confidence, a fragile and temperamental thing that breaks as easily as it comes.

We started moving from the walled-in security of a subdivision that was slowly becoming too crowded to a remote *bukid* somewhere along the lower hills of Mt. Banoi, from a small school with one class per grade to the bigger and more popular Catholic School with more than five sections per grade, and more nuns than I had ever seen in my life up and about and outside of church.

My stuttering began then, feebly. I was bullied relentlessly; I would find my notebooks and sketchbooks torn and scribbled on, my glasses snapped in half, my watercolors all mixed to a murky brown. Boys would push me down the stairs yelling, "Lola, get a cane!" and the girls religiously avoided me because I had preferred the company of the schoolyard cats and insects and books. I was taken from a peaceful ideal environment and thrown unceremoniously into a pit teeming with the beginnings of social segregation and bias, with pre-set rules and ranking that I was not prepared for. I still do not think of them then as children, to have been so capable of creating their own primitive form of hierarchies and rules, their own adapted forms of torment because openly fighting was forbidden under the watchful eye of the Lord: a crucifix in every room, a speaker announcing pre-recorded prayers. It was more of a wilderness than our new home, being built hidden away among the trees.

Stuttering is not an all-encompassing condition; there are certain situations when stuttering does not happen. There is undisrupted speech flow. Stuttering is a fickle and selective condition. One day you find yourself engaging in a perfectly eloquent conversation with a child, or an animal, with specific people, or even with yourself, and you wonder why that can't be the case with everything and everybody else.

When I started to stutter I took to the company of animals, for they needed no words, and my grandfather who had taken up residency in a small shack he built from the ground, tending to the land and the trees and the livestock. He had little need for words too, choosing only to converse lengthily in Ilocano to my mother, disappearing for long periods of time into the mountains. He did not find it annoying that I asked too many questions.

"*Tatay*, is honey supposed to be that dark?"

"It depends on what the bees eat."

"Why don't you throw out the chicken blood?"

"Because it is delicious cooked with rice."

"Why does the turkey make that sound when we call out?"

"Because it wants to be a superstar, the only voice on the mountain."

"Why does the wind howl at night?"

"Because it is looking for the edge of the world."

Soon of course there would be no need for questions because I needed only to come nearer, for him to explain whatever it was that he was doing. He would teach me how to catch the little chicks that scurried off over the banana leaves chasing their mother's hindquarters, how to climb a tree without any slippers on, how to descend a steep slope sideways, and which trees were which, how to tell which fruits were ripe. He hid kittens under his bed and showed me where to hold them, told me why their mother would always be quick to snatch them up again. He showed me how the only way to kill termites was to pour gas on them, because they ate so much wood they were too hard to crush, and he allowed me tiny sips of *tuba* whenever he came back from one of his excursions in the rain with only his shorts on and an *itak* tied to his waist.

"If any of those boys hurt you again," he told me one day, "tell them your *lolo* knows how to use an *itak*."

"But they will arrest you."

"They'll never find me up here!"

How I had loved him. Until his disease started to take him. As did mine.

***

Since stuttering depends so much on the delicate balance that is someone's psychological well-being, it becomes exacerbated if that balance is even slightly tipped, or utterly disturbed. The social pressure to speak properly, to begin with, eventually creates a fear of stuttering that inevitably leads to worse fits of stuttering. Mockery and teasing is another cause: a stutterer is a constant source of comic relief. An uncle with a really, really bad stut-

ter was the butt of all jokes at every family reunion. Everyone would playfully chide him, "Just spit it out already!" to which his stutter would doubly worsen, much to the entertainment of all.

Dinners at home would not be so different, with my sisters making little musical numbers out of words I messed up. I would find no reprieve from my mother, who would join in this game. I would be itching to abandon the table but dinner was always family time, and one would not be allowed to indulge in such selfishness.

I could not explain how or why the stuttering got worse; perhaps it had something to do with childhood, or the onset of puberty when all children are at their most vulnerable. I had no friends at school, and refused to take part in recitations, deathly afraid of messing up in public. I supposed then, one could turn to God, as we were all wont and advised to, with the added convenience of three nearby chapels and the city church connected to the school through what I fancied were secret labyrinths the nuns used to come to and fro whenever they needed.

The church was a beautiful place to be in at noon, cool and dark and quiet, with its locked doors and stained glass windows casting very colorful shadows on the floor. At night I would dream of a huge pair of stone feet rising in the darkness behind those locked doors. Thinking I had found God, I covered myself with assurance. Yes you are going to be fine because you know where to find God.

Misfortune has its ways of hounding you, however. In the fifth grade I was nine going on ten, and I had to undergo the rites of Confirmation, preparations for which were to start a year earlier. I had tried to make myself pious like the virginal young saints our teachers had told us so much about, still very beautiful in their suffering, with God waiting to whisk them away the moment they died.

We were lined up and as I knelt before the priest in what would turn out to be my very last confession, the world too held its breath. He drew me so close to him that I could only confess my sins through whispers, and somehow his hands found their way from my shoulders to my chest to my trembling clasped hands to my waist to my skirt to my legs, and "I can't hear you, what else have you done, come closer," and he smelled like new laundry laced with sweat, and there was a sharp and heavy feeling at the center of all things like somehow I was not one with my own skin, and

I could think of no more sins so I made them up until I could think of no more, and finally when I was sent to pray how many "Hail Marys" I could remember only that I was so confused about why the world remained so still and my schoolmates so calm. And when I went to a teacher to report the incident, the words became strangled at the threshold of my mouth, and impatiently she told me to sit down as my body sought other ways of letting its troubles be known and I threw up all over the chapel floor.

There were no words for me after that, and every time I would be made to speak I would always feel like telling lies. I stuttered so badly I could not make it past one sentence read aloud, so I avoided the canteen because I could not pronounce the food that I wanted.

All at once I started noticing how men would look at me, and soon I began to despise the mere sight of them. To remedy this, much to my mother's despair, I cut my hair very short and taped flat the hint of breasts under my loose shirts, hoping that maybe then they would stop looking. I began to hate the touch of people, including my mother, my sisters. I drew away when my father would reach out for my shoulder. *Tatay*, who used to greet us with head butts, I hated the most. He would try to embrace me and I would pull at his hair and push him away, but he would keep doing it still and he would not wince, and sometimes I would catch him with a puzzled look on his face that at the time I thought stupid, and I would despise him even more. Soon those puzzled looks would keep coming, and eventually we would have to move him from his shack and into our new house because he would be gone for days, lost in the mountains he once knew so well. In our new house, he would always want to reach out to touch me, and I hated him until he died.

And then, my mother got me a cat: a small white kitten littered with grey tabby markings. I called it Pickles, for the pickle-shaped markings across its back. That was before *Tatay* fully developed Alzheimer's and I had just begun entertaining the idea of dressing like a boy. Those were happy days; I started to talk again, but mostly only to the cat. Pickles was one of my few friends, and my first coping mechanism. I found that there was something so honest about the way cats rubbed against you and sat close by; how, when they did not want to be held, they would be frank and let you know, and you would have to learn to keep a respectable distance; and they could be curt with you, but civil, until you learned how to ap-

proach them properly. There is a lot to be learned from cats. Soon I was brave enough to try and speak once again.

I discovered that cats thought it rude to stare, and I learned that it was easier to speak while looking away. Soon I found that speaking in a voice so low it was merely a bar above whispering hid the stuttering very well, and that when masked by the voices of other children speaking in unison was the only time that I could speak out loud.

These discoveries have come to light in the film *The King's Speech*, (which, to this day, I choose to consider a thriller rather than a drama) wherein the frustrated king-to-be is told to recite a Shakespearean monologue that he had previously blundered through, a second time, but with music being played into his ears. The result is a stutter-free recording. Another method to beat the stuttering is by saying things with a melody, and yet another is through aggressive fits of cussing. I wept with joy, glad to know that someone had made a serious film about stuttering, and that soon, people might even stop the teasing.

Of the most destructive ways of coping with stuttering is the resignation to silence. Self-expression is a frightening concept to consider, as it is most efficiently channeled through speaking, and very little else. A stutterer would resign himself or herself to avoiding self- expression because of severe stuttering spells, and so in avoiding this frustration altogether, abandons the chance to speak up at all. It is so difficult to speak freely and spontaneously or to discuss big issues extensively. Once, for a public speaking class in college, I had prepared a speech of five sentences. But when the time came I could not recall anything of it, despite having memorized it so intently the night before.

Upbringing could either be blamed or credited for what coping mechanisms a stutterer would use to deal with speech problems. I had grown up skipping across social classes. I had relatives who lived in farms so remote and houses so small they used car batteries to channel electricity, and I had relatives so wealthy they could go for weekend shopping sprees across Asia on a whim. One moment I would be told to keep my head low and always watch my manners around the elders, to always do the *mano*. The next moment I would be told that city relatives did not do *mano* and would like it better that you do *beso* instead, and the older painted ladies would quite playfully ask us about boys. I grew up around frivolously and

wonderfully insane gay aunts and uncles and great-uncles, and severe, eccentric old ladies who told us to always keep our knees together, and that there is a right time and place to be outrageous and a separate time to be stoic. I grew up in between languages, the English of my father's friends and co-workers, and the English you should use with their children, the Ilocano of my grandparents in Zambales where I was born, the spirited and feverish Batangueno of the province where I grew up, and the fluid, watery Tagalog spoken in Manila.

We were told to adapt accordingly. I would adjust my English in school because my classmates made fun of my accent, as I would adjust accents to flow better around the stuttering, much like water around stones. I would not use the English I grew up with because it was a minefield of stutter-inducing words, so I would speak English like I spoke Manila Tagalog because it was not as dangerous that way. Soon I could only carry conversations by mimicking the behavior and mannerisms of whoever it was I spoke with, adjusting my voice and movements to theirs. I would pick up speech affectations and adapt them as my own, for I had very little to work with. It became a hobby to sit listening to people talk, with an unfulfilled longing to join in; and I would be in awe at how fluidly they would speak their minds, and how cleverly they could maneuver from one topic to another so quickly. I could not do this, but somehow I was able to manage.

I had to prepare everything beforehand, what to say to certain people, in certain situations, nothing extensive, small talk at most; oral reading assignments would have to be printed out and typed in such a manner that some words and syllables would be lumped together to form one cohesive, stutter-proof sentence. Years later in grad school I would meet, for the first time in my life, a speech pathologist who took the same class as I, and we were both very surprised to learn about what other stutterers deployed to cope. I told her that I was quite good with really bad accents, and that I was less conscious about stuttering and myself in general when I have had a few liters of alcohol coursing through my bloodstream. So we began communicating in garbled interpretations of Scottish all night while getting happily drunk.

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There were other less destructive means of course. I took to painting first when I was little, but my mother kept shoving drawing paper into my mouth because she thought it got in the way of my studies. I took to writing because it was easier to conceal. Soon it became an avenue to explore words and sounds that I desperately avoided but deeply desired to use. Here, I could use as many consonants as I desired, make longer sentences without missing a beat. Here I did not need to linger with beginning vowels, or trip over *tree* or *three* or *trifle*; did not need to say *tarbaho* instead of *trabaho* or say *chu-rinity* instead of *trinity*. Where with stuttering I would use replacement letters and skip entire words altogether, or distract myself from the onset of stuttering with long languorous *uhhhs* and *ums* and *yunggg ano*, *ah*, *gan'to* or *ganire*, with writing it was easier to organize words, and any mistakes could be rewritten, and you could afford to think long and hard for the right word or phrase to use. In writing I could be funny, or sarcastic, non-monotonous. I could change tones and voices without mimicry. I could trust the people, the characters, and I could know them entirely without being so guarded. I was freed.

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The frustration would always remain of course, although there have been cases of stutterers curing themselves, or earpieces that would echo your voice to mimic the choral effect that discourages stuttering. I have read about a stutterer who used to shyly ask her fellow *jeepney* passengers to say "*para*" for her, who took drama classes and found herself cured; and watched this video about a boy with a stutter so bad it made my heart hurt just watching him, who is now a successful rapper; and a woman who, the first thing she did once her stuttering was cured, went to a restaurant and ordered what she had always wanted but could never say, fettuccine.

I read somewhere that people went into survival mode whenever they found themselves in a completely alien environment, that when faced with the prospect of a completely new beginning would very quickly find it in themselves to adapt, and I thought the idea so ridiculous that, disheartened, I told myself that I could never travel alone. I was content to live with several hundred cats, those sincere creatures, without human contact, with people joking that I would die of old age and all the cats I so loved would eat my body in a heartbeat. I had trouble with office jobs

because they required, at most, an advanced mastery of social interaction and spontaneity that I still could not muster. All I wanted to do was to keep to my desk and work and leave at the end of the day. I did not need the interaction, and I could pretend and mimic all I wanted, and people were going to remain such dark and slippery creatures, that I would prefer the furry warmth of cats and animals.

And then, one day—I cannot remember what day that was, only that my mother and I were talking about cats because she too liked cats, and *Tatay* did too, and the briefest of side-comments, so brief that had the conversation not been about cats I would have missed it entirely —she said, "*Tatay* arranged for you to have Pickles."

I pried her with questions. And she explained that he had noticed that I had become lonely and so he had walked through the entire *barang-gay* looking for a solution. And then one of his drinking buddies had a cat called Queen who had recently had kittens. I saw him in my head then, all rugged and lean and gray-haired and handsome, scratching his nape and grinning, asking his buddy "Ay, *kumpadre*, might I have one of those kittens for my *apo*?" And I remembered then, how I had burned with hatred for him with his head in my gut, and his vacant expression, and how I had felt the slightest tinge of relief when he had died, so that no one would ever reach out and touch me that way ever again, but that all along touch had meant so many different things like words, and that I had been oblivious and bitter and despicable for far too long.

When my mother left for Batangas, I stumbled around the room looking for a face towel. And when I found it, I wept all night.

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Stuttering usually tapers off through adulthood, and there are only about one in every five adults who stutter. I still do, but not as bad I used to. I had taken to heart what had been said about travel— about awakening the very human instinct to adapting to new environments and situations, running off to far-flung places without so much as a definite itinerary. And about how there was more to the world than caring about how well you sound, beginning with words.

Stuttering was as much a part of me as the hair on my head, or the abnormal bend in my spine, and all I needed was to take sports to ease the

pain, or wear larger slippers to counteract my weak balance and tiny feet. There are ways around everything, and taking them does not mean avoidance or fear. They are only a means to an end. Everything always means different things to different people. Like touch, like words, like how we say them, how we begin, and how we listen.

In My Stepfather's Language

Sooey Valencia

I.

"Is there guilt?" my brother Carlo asked me the afternoon we found out that our stepfather had died. After hours of being wordlessly still, I had finally broken down, sobbing into his shoulder. He smelled of smoke and ash, what the entire day had become. I gave him no answer as I pressed my ear to his chest and listened to the mourning drumbeats of his heart, half expecting them to stop at any minute. But they didn't and as he crushed his last cigarette butt into the ashtray, I stared at each of the butts that he had killed. Perhaps that was how he cried, I thought, by burning the weight of his tears with smoke and crushing his grief into an ashtray afterwards.

And all I could do was whimper weakly into his shoulder.

II.

"He's a good man, Bee!" my Aunt Zendy reasoned, giving me a pat on the shoulder. My brothers stared at the floor in disbelief, both wordless at the news: we would be moving to a country called Bahrain in two weeks to be with our mother. Worst, there was a new man in her life, as well as ours—a

stepfather. A Greek man, she said. An orthopedic surgeon. My tears started to fall at the words. Not one of those again, I thought. I had been around white coats all my life, and now I would have to be related to one. Another white coat.

"I don't want to go!" I whined, pounding my fists stubbornly, a blob of mucus dribbling onto my crumpled skirt.

"Your mother is happy," she sighed. "And it doesn't mean he's replacing your father. Your father will always be your father and will always love you. It's just that sometimes…" she let the sentence trail off, perhaps thinking that it was too early for any such conversation. We would hear the rest of it over and over when we were older.

"Imagine!" Aunt Zendy exclaimed after a short silence fell inside the living room. "You might even be sent to Greece for college! Your *Ates* and I could visit you there!" A glimmer of excitement lingered in her eyes. "You'd still be able to visit us in the summer and every Christmas, and if you want to stay longer… *aba, sige*!" she gave me a playful nudge. "O, ano? What say you?"

I shook my head and sniffed, my lips trembling.

"And he can help your sister with her walking," Aunt Zendy continued, turning her attention to my brothers.

At this, they both raised their heads, defeated. *Kuya* Billy, who always thought of others before he thought of himself, was the first to give in. His words came slowly. "Well, if he can help Curly, then… I guess… It's okay *na*. Yeah, *sige*. He can help Curly *naman*, eh. And mom's happy so…"

"Yeah. I… I guess he can help Curly. Pero *'di ba*…?" stammered *Kuya* Carlo, the oldest among us siblings, looking betrayed as he gave his hair a rough tousle. We could tell that he was more concerned about bigger things than a strange Greek man being able to help me. More mature things.

My aunt sighed, taking a long, deep sip from her can of Diet Coke as if to avoid having to answer. She pursed her lips and looked worriedly in the direction of my late cousin Kathy's picture sitting on the mini-altar. What else could she have told three confused children like us?

"I know this is hard for all of you, but give it a chance, okay?" she said, almost pleadingly. "Everyone deserves a chance. Who knows, you might even love him after all."

Kuya Carlo had begun to cry, slumping further into his chair.

Kuya Billy had turned red in the face and was breathing heavily into his t-shirt.

I had grown tired of crying and stared unblinkingly at the blue-and-white jars inside the glass cabinet across the sofa, the warmth of my cheeks against my palms.

III.

"So will I let the children fly tomorrow?" Aunt Zendy asked my mother over the phone one evening, two weeks later, as footage of the Gulf Air plane crash flashed on the television in the living room. All the programs on BBC had been reporting the same thing, and when we changed the channel, our eyes growing tired of the images of rescuers fishing dead bodies out of the sea and the announcements of the ever-rising death toll, we only found out that all the channels were broadcasting the same thing. My brothers and I cringed at the sight, our noses wrinkling as though the stench of death had leaped off the screen and into our nostrils. All three of us had our sweaty hands clasped tightly on our laps.

"*This must be serious*," I thought to myself, mouth half gaping. "*Very serious*."

I gave my aunt a pleading look, hoping that my puppy-dog eyes would convince her to postpone our flight.

"The little girl is crying," she tipped my mother, winking at me.

A pause, and then, "Your mother says your new Indian playmate Rameez is waiting for you," she reported. "A big, fat boy who loves to visit your mom everyday just to raid the fridge! The Godiva chocolates are almost gone *daw*, so you better hurry getting there! *Hay, naku!*" her mouth and eyes widened, feigning shock.

My eight-year-old fists clenched at the thought of another kid—an Indian boy at that—gobbling up my chocolates. For a moment I considered going, just to snatch them away from his greedy, chocolate-covered hands. While his finger-licking, fat figure filled my mind, Aunt Zendy had passed the phone to *Kuya* Billy, who was agreeing eagerly with something my mother was saying to him, the expression in his eyes changing from glum

and worried to excited and hopeful. "Yes mom… yes. I can't wait to go there *na*. *Yehey*! See you!" *Kuya* Carlo would go next, and, like *Kuya* Billy, would become filled with sudden enthusiasm at the thought of moving somewhere strange, something I still could not understand.

"Ah—um, yes sir! Yes. Looking forward to meeting you too, sir…" he was saying into the phone all of a sudden.

At this, I felt my face start to tighten, and my eyes began to blur with tears. Just as my brother held out the phone to me, I ran up to *Ate* Karen's tower, slamming the door shut.

The next day, no plane crashes, puppy-dog eyes, or crocodile tears could stop us from becoming unaccompanied minors on a flight bound for Bahrain. For nine hours we sat in cramped airplane seats watching sappy in-flight films that came with countless packets of greasy peanuts, leaving half-moons of yellow rice and heavily-spiced chicken uneaten, and trying to figure out how our stepfather looked until we fell into uncomfortable sleep.

The pilot's thickly-accented English roused us from sleep and soon, the passengers scrambled out of their seats, and pieces of luggage emerged from the overhead compartments. The man across us flashed a golden-toothed smile at our bewildered faces. "*O, ano pang hinihintay n'yo?*" he asked. "*Makabalik ng Pilipinas*?"

IV.

The strange Arabic letters all around the airport announced the absence of home. Heavily-bearded men wearing white robes and red-checkered headdresses covering their nearly bald heads were accompanied by scary-looking women draped in black that exposed only their eyes.

"*Their eyes are their only body parts*!" I thought, shivering as I clutched my copy of *Little Women* tighter to my chest, hoping that the thick volume would protect me from what I was seeing. If I held it tight enough, maybe I would be pulled into the world of the March sisters and would never have to see these strangers again, let alone my stepfather. I held it tighter and tighter, but nothing happened. Through my thick-rimmed, pink glasses, the world was moving fast.

My brothers, bags and boxes burdening their shoulders and hands, plunged into the sea of the unfamiliar, throaty language that would soon find its way into our mouths. Our eyes searched for our mother.

A woman on the other side of the glass wall waved her hands frantically to get our attention, her eyes beaming.

"It's mom!" *Kuya* Billy exclaimed, hurrying to meet her, *Kuya* Carlo trailing close behind. They both seemed lighter at the sight of her despite the heaviness of the baggage. I, on the other hand, forced out a smile and gave her a stiff wave.

It was not hard to notice how much time and living in a different country had changed my mother. She seemed more luminous. The wrinkles that our past life had imprinted on her had disappeared, and her smiles were wider and more genuine. She planted hard kisses on our cheeks, stamping them with lipstick. Even that had changed, I noted, curious at how such a place could transform her so drastically. Or perhaps it was something else, someone else. As if to answer my thoughts, a round Greek man with a hooked nose, shabby brown hair, shining almond eyes, and milk-white skin came to her side carrying a video camera. The bulge of his belly made it look as though he carried the entire world under his striped green shirt, the rest of it spreading into his denims, finally melting into his brown loafers.

"This is Uncle Kostas," my mother introduced. "Kos, these are my children, Carlo, Billy, and Curly," she gestured toward us.

"Hi, hi, hi," he greeted us, nodding eagerly, giving our hands firm shakes. "Kostas, Kostas, Kostas," he repeated his name three times.

My brothers smiled obligingly, almost sincerely, returning his firm grip.

Bending down, he looked at me, his beady eyes beaming with delight as he rested his warm, pillow-like hands on my cheeks.

"Hello, little girl!" he sang. I breathed deeply as he stretched my skin. "*Moro mou, moro mou, moro mou,*" he said through clenched teeth as he gave my cheeks light squeezes. He liked saying things in threes.

"Uncle," I mumbled, tears half-filling my eyes as I glowered at him.

Later, I would find out that he had just called me his baby.

V.

The ride home seemed longer than fifteen minutes. By the time the car stopped in front of a whitewashed building along Adliya Street in Manama, Bahrain's capital—I used to be so puzzled at the thought that such a tiny sand-engulfed island could still manage to squeeze in a capital—we all emerged from the car drenched in sweat, our heads pounding, our faces as red as tomatoes.

My new Uncle Kostas fanned under his armpits, where puddles had settled, darkening the green of his shirt. I snorted at the sight of the man, stopping only when he noticed me and began to shake his hips and whistle. Looking slightly rejected when I paid him no mind, he walked past me, digging into the pockets of his trousers for keys to the building's main door.

"*Pwede na siyang maging anak ni Kostas, mama! Magkamukha sila!*" Tita Tess, my mother's colleague at the Gulf Hotel, laughed that evening as she eyed me. She had come with her two sons, Jeck and Jude, to visit my mother and Uncle Kostas, and meet my brothers and me for the first time. The four boys had gotten along so well that within the next fifteen minutes of their meeting one another, the latest *Red Hot Chilli Peppers* album was already blaring from the stereo, and the door to our bedroom had closed. I was left there with the adults. I always was.

Tita Tess had been going on for hours about how beautiful she thought my eyelashes were ("*Ang ganda naman ng mga pilik-mata*!"), or how fair my skin was ("*Mestiza siya, mama!*"), or how my nose looked just like a Greek child's ("*Ang tangos ng ilong!*"). Uncle Kostas's laughter boomed out of his big body as my mother translated all this for him and Tita Tess took my face in her hands. "You look beautiful," she told me. "Just like your Daddy Kostas." At this, I turned away sharply, annoyed.

"*He is not my father,*" I thought as I imagined the wind's whistling, sand gathering into a storm.

VI.

In Bahrain, school began on Saturday. We came in the middle of the school year, hard questions welcoming the three of us.

STUDENT INFORMATION

Name: Zendy Victoria Sue G. Valencia
Grade: 3
Age: 8
Mother's Name: Caroline Valencia
Father's Name: ~~William Valencia~~
~~Kostas Karvelas~~
~~William Valencia~~
~~Kostas Karvelas~~

VII.

"You are not my father!"

"And I don't want to be your father! But tell me, huh? Who cooks your food? Who wakes up in the morning, five-thirty, just to cook you breakfast? Who teaches you your lessons? Who goes to your school to fight with the teachers when they don' want you to perform? Who reminds you to exercise every day? I try to be nice with you, but nooooo, you don' wan' it! With you, it always has to be the harsh way, you know? You're a brat, eh? Your father! *Re puste!* Tell me, what William did, eh? Tell me? What? Nothing!"

"*Kain ka lang ng kain, kaya ang taba taba mo eh!*"

"ENGLISH PLEASE!"

"*Wala akong pakialam! Mag-Tatagalog ako kung gusto kong mag-Tagalog!*"

VIII.

What my brothers and I heard behind the closed door:

"Why are you trying so hard to be accepted, Kos?"

"What do you want me to do *re* Caroline? I don' know what to do anymore, really!"

"If you want to be accepted, you don't do it like that. The children aren't used to that. You're too harsh! These are my children! I don't raise them that way."

"Harsh? Me? Nahhhh! Curly, she has to learn, you know? My father raised me this way. You know. Discipline. If you don't behave, *ah kala*! You would get it."

"And look how you turned out? If you're going to be this way, go back to Greece and take your discipline with you!"

He never left.

IX.

It was the dining table that broke the silence.

X.

"That's all you did today? Write?" Uncle Kostas asked me sternly one evening when he came home hot-headed from a long afternoon shift at the hospital and found me seated at the dining table, hunched over my blue hardbound notebook, penning a story in my childish handwriting. I believed then that I was writing a serious novel that would one day be published and had no time to answer him, let alone take a bath.

"*Waitwaiti'mgoingtolosethis…*" I slurred, rubbing my tired eyes with my nightgown that smelled of sun and salty perspiration.

He nagged me in Greek and marched with authority to the bedroom, returning almost instantly with my mother's comb. "Look at me," he demanded, tearing my eyes away from the page. "At least comb your

hair, you know? You know?'' he insisted, hacking the comb into the tangled bush that sat on my head, tugging fiercely at it. Irritated, I pulled away and he slammed the comb onto the table and disappeared into the room. I ran my hands through my hair making it fly in all directions and began to write again.

XI.

"*Ela re*! Put your legs in frog position! *Ela*, come on! We don't have all day *ah*?''

It was that time of day when he seemed to forget my name and all I heard him call me was Ela, which meant, "come on, hurry up,'' in Greek, a language that I learned in hasty snippets on those afternoons where the line between doctor and stepfather blurred, and all that seemed to matter was if I walked straight from the dining table on one side of the room to the chair he had placed on the other. To me, the long excruciating walk was like straddling the line between heaven and hell. "Heel strike!'' he would suddenly yell, causing me to trip on the tiled floor, turning my knees purple.

I would come home from school and the dining table would greet me, set up in the middle of the living room and, without eating, I would change into something loose, naked from the waist down. He would then push my tense thigh muscles lower and lower until I cried at the sound of crackling bones, and the soles of my feet would slip apart, giving up and my face glistened with tears.

The back of a chair was the enemy when he made me hold on to it and do a series of squats. I would stand straight and plunge down, getting up with a frustrated sigh when he said I was cheating or I wasn't standing straight enough. I gripped the chair tightly and imagined it flying across the room.

XII.

"Trust me, you know, I am a doctor,'' he told me as he held the hot iron above my left thigh. The hot compresses melted one Friday afternoon and blue gel leaked out of the pack inside the microwave. No breaths escaped

me as I stared, terrified at the iron being held just a few inches above my naked skin, its heat not really doing anything to relax my muscles, making them twitch nervously instead.

"Relax, relax," I assured myself between deep sighs.

` "Relax, relax, I am a doctor," he echoed soothingly. "Relax, relax, rela—"

The telephone rang.

And then, my thigh burned with the iron's heat.

"Hello, Zendy?" he was saying into the phone, slamming it down at the sound of my stabbing scream.

The skin of my thigh protruded like a brownish-blue crust, and he brushed egg yolk over it not saying anything.

For a moment trust was but another scar that would have to heal in a few weeks.

XIII.

When I made my stepfather angry, he always asked me what I would do if he died and I didn't learn any of the things he taught me. I would cry, he said, but then it would be too late. It was better to learn these things now while he was still alive.

XIV.

"It's okay, *moro mou*. Everything will be okay," he always reassured me when the therapy sessions ended and the dining table had been put back in its place. I pressed my tired, sweat-strewn face on it, feeling the warmth spread all over my body and wanting to believe him.

He sighed, planting kisses into my wet head of hair. "I'm sorry baby, but it has to be done that way, you know? If it doesn't hurt, it doesn't really help you. I mean, I don't want to do it," his voice broke. I looked up and saw him purse his lips together, his eyes regretful and clueless about what it was he could tell me. "But I have to. For you," he ended. The doctor in him disappeared as he sat down and told me this over and over again. "If I could do

it for you, I would, really. I would give you my own legs, *sou vara*. But what would you do with an old, fat man's hairy legs, huh?" he joked. "Nothing! *Re puste*, a beautiful girl like you! Better to have your own strong legs than mine! Mine are *malakias*! I mean, look at me, ah! Fat and you know I try to lose weight and it doesn't happen! Frustrating, I know. But I try. But what I try for? I am old, my life is over. Soon, I die," as he said this, he threw up his hands like he always did, for dramatic effect. "But you, your life is just starting! Let me help you, huh?" he continued, taking my face in his hands.

I smiled, nodding. Inside I could feel it again, an anger brewing inside me, not towards him, but towards everything else that turned him into a monster in my eyes, the monster that he wasn't: my stick-thin legs that seemed to take so long to get stronger, and when they did, they didn't stay that way too long.

"Trust me, mmm? Everything will be okay. I mean if everything isn't going to be okay, what else do I do it for? I could sleep you know? Watch TV! Say, *ah kala*! I just leave Curly alone and let her have fun and *kala*, I don't care. But no I care about you. So trust daddy, okay?"

I nodded. "Okay."

"Good girl, now go take your shower while I cook some nice pasta for you to eat!" With that he laughed and fetched me a towel from my room.

XV.

"Hey *moro mou*, I made for you something nice," he said, watching me study at the dining table. "You study hard, *ah*? That's good," he gave my shoulder a squeeze. "I made for you a multiplication *teble* so that you will beat all your classmates when you recite it next week. And they will lose because they do not know how to *multiplicate* in their minds. But you, *sifteiki*, very smart!"

In his steady doctor's hand he had written the multiplication tables from one to ten with his special multi-colored pens, and laminated it too. "I go to your room and put it on your wall so you see it every day and memorize it little by little. Good job!" he said, getting up.

"Thank you," I said, without looking up from the chapter I was reading, an appreciative grin spreading on my face.

"What is nine *ix* nine," he asked me a few weeks later the night before my Math final.

When it took me more than a minute to answer and he saw that I still counted out the product with nervous fingers, he lost his patience and told me: "You have to concentrate, *re* Curly! You have to try *hardur* than most *peepul* because in the real world *peepul* are evil. You're *eh* smart girl but you don' concentrate, you have to know these things because you can't walk and they will be your weapons, you know, *ah*?"

XVII.

It was Thursday when everything in our family changed. It all started with the slamming of a bedroom door on the other side of the hallway, and Uncle Kostas opening ours asking us to "Please come out because mommy needs you."

"It's hard… it's hard, Kos," she said, choking on her tears. It was the first time I had ever seen my mother cry, her face buried in her hands as she shook. The white pills were scattered across the dining table, some spilling over to the floor. She had been taking them for months, and since then there was a silent certainty within us all that the house had become a time bomb about to explode at anytime.

"It's hard, it's hard," she repeated tearing her hair, Uncle Kostas looked crushed as he patted her helplessly on the back. "Your mother has something to tell you," he said as we sat down.

My mother looked at us with bloodshot eyes and said, "I'm sorry it's been like this for us. I know it's hard. But we have to get through this as a family."

Uncle Kostas put his arms around my mother telling her that she needed to stop smoking and taking the pills because we needed her. "The kids and I need you," he said, nodding toward us to come and comfort our mother.

We needed her. We needed her and we needed to be a family. We needed her and from then on we called Uncle Kostas, Daddy.

XVIII.

It was my stepfather who taught me how to speak Greek.

He had worked for Dr. Pistevos, his mentor and the best child orthopedic surgeon in the whole of Athens, for free for months just so my mother would not have to spend any money for my operations—something I only found out and came to understand when I got much older.

The week before my operation in April, I sprawled on the green couch in his apartment in Athens, heavily bundled in thick blankets, watching Greek news. They were showing the bloody *salibatbat* scenes in Pampanga and the pictures were the only things familiar to me. As the program went to commercial, I squinted trying to read the Greek word for news that flashed on the screen in bold, Greek letters, yelling in triumph when the two-syllable word finally figured itself out in my mouth. That same evening, my stepfather came home with a children's Greek dictionary complete with pictures, and Greek food.

"*Souvlaki,*" he told me, stuffing the soft, foot-long, juicy beef wrap in my mouth. "Like the *shawarma* in Bahrain, but much better. The Greeks do everything better! You like it, *moro mou,* mmm?" I nodded, wolfing it down, and he did a celebratory dance, gyrating his hips and jutting his lips in and out.

In the days that followed he taught me the simplest words. The pain in the hospital was forgotten and we spent the days pointing at pictures and swallowing the language.

"*Spiti,* house. And soon we will go home," he said, when the painkillers would give out.

"*Milo,* apple…," he pointed at the apple that sat next to the tasteless soup on the food tray. "*Gala,* milk… Again, the milk better than in Bahrain, eh? When we get home I give you some, Milko. In Bahrain the milk is *skata*!" Shit. "Everything *goot* comes from Greece! Everything!"

"*Yiatros,* doctor," Dr. Pistevos chimed in as he did his rounds. "*Mifo vas…* Don' be afraid."

"*Spanakopita! Yasas moro mou, ti kanies?*" my step-grandmother Katy came in with a basket of spinach pies, her bright blue eyes looking worriedly at me as she shook her head and gave me a kiss.

A lot of other Greek words would follow later, but my stepfather would always end the days with the same words, to make me remember:

"*S'gapo, agapi mou.*"

"I love you too, Daddy," I would reply before falling under a deep sleep.

XIX.

Eleven years later.

The autopsy of memory.

The room opens with the turn of a key and everything greets you as you enter: everything that was once your stepfather, all that he owned and all that he had become. They have all stayed in their places like obedient children. Even the coldness of the marble tiles has refused to leave. Your stepfather never liked carpets, you remember. Next to the sofa, the cat slippers you used to borrow to go to the bathroom haven't walked an inch. Not a ripple of sleep on the sofa. His shelf tells many stories: medical books shut closed gathering dust, in them the familiar handwriting that taught you the multiplication table; the CDs you would listen to in the car on the way to the movies every Friday; a bundle of movie tickets—most of which were to films you wanted to go to; he always asked the ticket collector if he could keep them—remind you of the time you found him snoring when the lights came on after the third Harry Potter film; bottles of Giorgio Armani perfume, half-empty—the smell of his wrist before going to work, the presence of an absence; a pair of shades and no sun. A heavily-taped envelope is swept under his study table—the letters written to your mother. Your stepfather never liked teddy bears but Mr. Green, the one he won at one of the many Christmas raffles at the hotel your mother worked at, sits on top of the TV, a small patch of cotton coming out of an opening in his back. You pick him up and decide to take him home with you, making a mental note to sew the poor thing up.

This apartment was never so silent or so clean; it always had an essence of movement, of being lived in—as though it had a breath of its own. Your stepfather's winter jacket would cling lazily to the back of an armchair; a coffee stain would stamp itself on the surface of the glass table or

on the much-circled TV guide; the video recorder would grumble at the precise hour he had set it to record movies he would bring back home to you and your brothers, labeling each tape with his special multi-colored markers. You and your brother enjoyed those, and the subtitles helped you learn the Greek alphabet by heart. The numbers would follow.

But no one lives here anymore and soon the entire place will be bare, will be absent. Even the dead flowers hanging in the hallway will be gone. As the door closes, the tinge of regret opens little by little inside your heart.

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Single Mama Pesto

Jose Victor Z. Torres

(from the poem "Single Mama Pesto"
and the essay "Sapay Koma"
by Jhoanna Lynn Cruz)

Character:

Racquel - 40 years old. A single mom with two children, Dani (12 years old) and Richie (8 years old)

(The lights open onstage. There is a small kitchen table at center stage. There is a small pile of fresh and dried basil leaves on the table, a bottle of olive oil, a canister of Parmesan cheese, a small jar of pine nuts, some bulbs of garlic, and salt and pepper grinders. There is a closed cookbook on a wooden bookstand. An electric blender is standing empty on one side of the table. Beside it is a ceramic mixing bowl.)

(Racquel enters carrying a pasta maker pot full of drained spaghetti noodles. She pours the noodles into the ceramic bowl. She puts the pot aside, tests some of the noodles for firmness then faces the audience.)

Racquel: Pesto. I've been planning a small party with this as the main course for several months now. It's my first time to make it. I'm going to mix it from scratch following a cookbook. (pause) Well, at least part of what the cookbook says. I already have an inkling on what to do. (pause) I think. (looks at the ingredients) Basil leaves. Garlic. Olive oil. Parmesan cheese. Pine nuts. (pause) Very expensive pine nuts. I could've substituted cashew nuts. Even peanuts. But the taste would be different. (pause) No substitutes. That's my rule. Especially for a first time.

I was going to surprise the kids with this dish. It's their first time to try pesto. They're at school now. But I guess Dani, my twelve-year old daughter, already suspected what I was going to make. I mentioned it to her before. She saw the picture in the cookbook and even checked it out on the Internet. To this day she can't understand how something—to use her words—"icky green" could taste good. She is sharp that child of mine. We usually do the groceries together and she saw me picking out the ingredients from the shelves. She popped the question when we went to the market to get basil leaves. "You're going to make that pesto, aren't you?" she asked. (pause) Who am I to lie to an observant kid?

"So, when are you going to make it?" she asked.

"Next week," I said, "To celebrate our third year in our new home."

"Did you invite friends?" she asked. I said yes.

"Do you think they will still be your friends after they taste your pesto?" she said. (pause and smiles)

The sarcasm she gets from her mother. And yes, she can be infuriating. Just like her mother. Then she asked, "What did Richie say?"

Richie. Ricardo, after his father. The spitting image. And at eight, a handful. And the other third of any family decisions we make. But before he could say anything, I just told the two—quite forcefully, in fact—that it will be the best pasta they will ever taste. Icky green and all. They have to agree because they know their mom is a great cook. (pause) But they just rolled their eyes. Dani then turned to her brother and shrugged. "We can always have *lechon manok* from the corner if it fails, right?" (pause) Smart kid.

(Racquel opens the bottle of olive oil and pours a little on the pasta then mixes it in.)

Their father knew how to cook. (pause) He wasn't better than me. I taught him to cook from scratch. (laughs) That is, if you can call cooking things out of a can cooking from scratch. (turns to the audience) This is a secret that I kept from the kids. I taught him to cook. Well, it was more of a challenge. I challenged him to cook. When he succeeded, I knew, that in a crazy sense of things we would end up together. (pause) I gave him everything. Until I forgot what was mine.

(Racquel exits. The lights change. Racquel enters again as a young live-in partner, twelve years earlier. She is carrying a chopping board. She is talking to her partner.)

Glad you're home. (pause) I was just going to make dinner. (pause) Corned beef. You can peel the potatoes, if you like. Yes, corned beef with potatoes. (pause) Yes. It's edible. (pause) Where did you get the idea that I can't cook? That was the assumption when we started living together a month ago, right? That one of us can at least cook. Yes, beyond canned stuff, I can. (pause) I *can*. Can the canned. (pause, then smiles sarcastically) Yes, funny. Just peel the potatoes. Thank you. (pause) Don't complain. (pause) Yes, you are. (pause) Oh, you can do better? The last time I heard, you could only boil and grill. (pause) Ok! I dare you. (takes the cookbook from the stand and slams it down on the table.) If you can cook every dish in this book, I will consider the question you asked me before. (pause) Yes, the one you asked before we first agreed on this living-in arrangement. (pause) Ok. At least five dishes. Prove it and maybe… just maybe, I will say "yes".

(The lights change. Racquel goes to the table and places the chopping board on it.)

And he did. And I said yes. Oh, getting married wasn't an impulsive thing. I *was* already thinking about it. And after that, I never had to cook a single dish for the next seven years that we were together… (pause) And there were so many dishes that he cooked. (pause) So many times we ate together in those seven years. There were so many cookbooks in that small apartment of ours that we had to buy one of those tiny shelves you see in the hardware stores in the mall to place them in. Then… when everything was over, he didn't want them. Or he probably didn't need them anymore. I packed them in boxes and took them with me when I moved away with the kids. (pause) There were so many dishes… but he never cooked this one.

(Racquel looks at the ingredients for the pesto sauce. She then turns to the cookbook, opens it, glances at the page then slowly closes the book. She takes a deep breath.)

(To herself) I know how to do this. (pause) I… know… how… to… do… this. (pause and more firmly) I know how to do this.

(Racquel looks at the pile of basil leaves then opens the blender.)

(To herself) Memory. Don't fail me now. (to the audience) Basil leaves. (pause) I have to confess something. The first batch I bought were dried ones. (laughs) Hey, it's my first time, remember? It turned out I need fresh leaves. (pause) Always knew it had to be fresh. (laughs) Yes, I did. (pause) Did you know there are several kinds of basil plants here? The other local ones have smaller stems but small leaves. The ones from Baguio—like these—(shows the leaves) have thick stems and you have to chop them off. Or else the pesto will be bitter. But the leaves are nice and big. It is best I use these ones.

(Racquel takes several pieces of paper towels and begins to pat the leaves dry.

I don't know how many basil leaves should be used. (pause) I knew it always had to be fresh. It's because of the bittersweet taste… It's because of the smell. (pause) Have you taken a fresh basil leaf and crushed it between your fingers? (takes a leaf, crushes it, inhales and sighs) Sweet. Earthy, leafy smell. The scent of something good. Like the scent of a new life.

(The lights change. Racquel moves downstage as she folds the paper towels into a small diaper pouch. She is talking to her mother.)

We named her Dani, Mama. Danica. She's a lovely girl, your *apo*. *Singkit* when she smiles. (laughs) Well, I know you can't tell when a baby is smiling sometimes. Especially when it's just a month old. (pause) Me? I'm fine. I'm doing well. (pause) I'm living with him now. At his parents' house. (shrugs) He brought me home once the baby was born. (pause) I know. They say that it's always difficult to live with the in-laws. But we don't have much. Not yet. And I know this is just a step to something better. (pause) Yes, I believe that. I had always believed that. And I always believed in this marriage. Even though it came at a most unexpected time for you. Even for my in-laws. (pause) Everything seems to be always unexpected. (pause) But it will work. I am going to make it work. We'll make it work. Just you wait and see.

(The light changes. Racquel goes back to the table and continues drying the basil leaves and placing them in the blender.)

Bittersweet. That's the taste of basil leaves. Bittersweet. Like marriages. Like life. Especially when reality bites. Especially when reality checks in. (pause, she then stares at the remaining pile of leaves.) The recipe said that for every four cups of leaves there should be one cup of oil. (pause) I forgot how many leaves I have here. Couldn't find the measuring cups. (pause) It could be too much. Or too little.

(Racquel pauses and looks at the pile of leaves, then takes the recipe book and opens it. She looks at the recipe again then closes the book.)

Sometimes it doesn't take an instruction manual to make things work. Or to make things what you want them to be. Sometimes what is shown or said in the manual isn't exactly the same result. Like life. Like relationships that matter. Like marriage. Like the relationships that come with marriages….

(The lights change. Racquel goes downstage. She is talking to her husband.)

It's been two years now. All I want you to do is to stand up for this. *This*. Our marriage. Our family. Stand up for what you have right now. I'm tired of being quiet and silent about what is happening around us. (pause) Don't give me that explanation of what your mother… (pause) *Our* mother… your… mother said. I'm not blind. I can feel and see how much I am disliked by your family. In this house. (pause) Ok, not dislike… if you don't want me to use that word. How much I don't conform… does that sound better? (pause) Now I make it sound like I'm a social deviant. (pause) Why do I have to be treated this way? What must we do to be accepted? (pause) If you can't do it for me… do it for Dani. For our child. (pause) Do it for our children. (pause) Children. (pause) I'm pregnant. (pause) And I hoped that everything would be better before this one would be born. Everything would be fine by then… wouldn't it?

(The lights change. Racquel goes back to the cooking table and finishes placing all the basil leaves in the blender.)

Richie always had a good appetite. It never was a problem to feed him. (pause, she then checks the leaves in the blender again) I guess this would be enough. I had to mix some of the young leaves with the mature ones. (pause) Their father, I must admit, was younger than me. But people

change as things come along. (pause) I did. (pause) He didn't. (pause) It was probably the reason for what happened next. I became a mother taking care of three children—two young ones… and an adult one. And… it was too much. (she looks into the blender and nods) Garlic.

(Racquel takes a head of garlic and pounds it with the blade of a cleaver. The bulb slightly splits. She pounds it again, stronger this time. Nothing happens. Racquel curses under her breath, inhales, then slams the cleaver a bit too hard. The bulb breaks into several cloves. Racquel gets six cloves then crushes them with the side of the cleaver blade. Each blow becomes stronger and stronger until she slams down the cleaver, removes the skin from each clove, and then drops them into the blender. Her eyes have noticeably become red and teary. She sniffs then wipes her nose with the back of her hand.)

Too little. Too much. (pause) I always liked garlic. It's the smell that gets to me. (motions to her eyes and nose) You see? (pause, she then sniffs again) I always give the lousiest excuse when I cry. (pause) Cheese. And the other ingredients to cut the bitterness. (pause) Parmesan cheese.

(Racquel takes the canister of Parmesan cheese and begins to sprinkle cheese inside the blender, then checks the mixture.)

Too little.

(Racquel is about to pour a little more cheese when the lid falls off and a large amount of Parmesan cheese falls into the blender. She shrieks and covers her face.)

Nooooo!

(Racquel walks downstage. The lights change. She is talking to her husband)

Too much! Too much! Too much of this! Too much of that! (pause) It was just too much… Now you come home like this! Spending more time with your friends. (pause) It was a weekend? (pause) It was happy hour? Why? What are you happy about? No one is happy in this house. (pause) We… us. We were supposed to be happy. We. Us. (pause) Weren't we? WEREN'T WE? (pause) This was a marriage we agreed on. Everything just has to mix together… to be together to make it right. To make it work. To make it better. Even if it was too much. Or too little. Or even just right. (pause) What went wrong? It wasn't supposed to end up that bad. I mean… when ingredients are mixed badly… it can always be remedied.

Can't it? That should happen. Shouldn't it?

(Pause. The lights change back. Racquel takes a spoon and fishes out the canister's lid and most of the cheese from the blender.)

There are always remedies. That's one thing about cooking. Before something goes really wrong, you try to remedy it. But when it really goes wrong… (pause) You just have to look for solutions. Sometimes the most difficult decisions to make are the simplest solutions. Not that it was a simple way of escaping. But … it was the only thing that could be done.

(Racquel finishes spooning out the excess cheese. She gets the bottle of olive oil. She measures out some olive oil in a measuring cup then pours it in the blender.)

No. I don't remember the leaves swimming like that. (pause) Oil soothes they say. Quiets. Calms. In a sense, it's the calm after all the tumult one can think of. It makes you think clearly. It cuts the bitterness. Like in pesto.

(The lights change. Racquel moves downstage and faces her husband.)

Would you take care of them by yourself? No. Not their grandparents. You. Yourself. As a father. Can you? (pause) Can you? (pause) If you cannot handle the job of being a husband, can you handle the work of being a father? (pause) I can do this. Alone. Without you. And the kids will like it. Because I have to show them that I can manage to live my life without you anymore. (pause) But I won't take them away from you. No. I won't. I cannot change the fact that you are their father. (pause) But everything will be under my terms. My conditions. My instructions. Because I know that I can raise them even without you. This is my life now. (pause) No. You will still be their father. No matter what. (pause) It is unfortunate. That no matter what we try to make together, one ingredient seems to have failed. (pause) Love does expire. It can lose its flavor. And spiciness. And sweetness. And what remains is just… a tasteless ingredient.

(The lights change. Racquel goes to the blender and stirs the olive oil and cheese a bit, then takes the bottle of pine nuts.)

Pine nuts. The recipe said half a cup of pine nuts. Pretty expensive for just a small bottle… but I guess it's worth it. Especially for things that you do for the first time. (holds up the bottle) This looks too little for half a cup. But I guess it will do. (pause) It's funny. I had to look up what pine nuts were when I decided to make pesto. They actually came from pine cones.

Those little things where the trees came from. They're seeds… And from these seeds come the tree. A new tree. (pause) A new life.

(The lights change. Racquel goes downstage. She is talking to her mother.)

I decided to leave him, Mama. I'm sorry. (pause) I'm sorry that it turned out this way. (pause) You weren't a bad mother. And I'm sure as hell wasn't a bad daughter. It was no one's fault. It's just that… things simply didn't work out. (pause) I'm moving to a new place. To a new life with the children. I know you may not understand this, but… It was the only solution I knew if I were to get my life back. And the life I wanted for the children. (pause) What did Dom say? (pause) Nothing. I guess he also saw that it was hopeless. (pause) The children? They would understand soon. Richie is still too young. But Dani… (shrugs) I guess there's some explaining to do.

(The lights change. Racquel goes to another part of the stage. She is talking to Dani.)

Dani… do you know what a leap of faith is? (pause) It is something that you do when you see things are hopeless and when you discover that some time, some place, you can start all over again. Once you know that the time or place exists, you take that step… a leap… if you like to start something new. (pause) The thing is… you don't know what is beyond that place. What lies ahead. (pause) That is where faith comes in. Faith in what? (pause) In God? Or to whoever is watching over us. (pause) I have decided to take a leap of faith. With both of you. Richie and you. (pause) Well, it's more of a where. (pause) Do I know the place? I've been there. It's a nice place. And I'm sure you and Richie would like it. (pause) No, I don't know anyone there. (pause) That's where the leap of faith comes in. (pause) There is one person. A friend. And this friend has friends. And from these friends we can have more friends. (pause) And you and Richie will have places to go to. And it will be such a wonderful place… Yes, your father can always visit. (pause) Do you understand? (pause) Leap of faith. (pause) Oh, baby… don't cry. Don't cry. I know you're scared. Please don't cry. I'm scared, too. But it's the only way. It's the only thing I know we can do. (pause) And if we do this together, it will all work out. You will see. And remember, when we take a leap of faith… someone will always catch us. (pause) You will see… You will see…

(The lights change. Racquel goes back to the table, takes the bottle of pine nuts, opens it, then pours the contents into the blender. She looks at her watch then at the blender.)

They're arriving anytime now. The guests are arriving soon. Guests. Friends. It's been three years. And there are lots of friends who are willing to lend a helping hand. Who support you. Who will always be there. (pause) They're going to expect a good dinner. (looks into the mixture in the blender) It looks ok. I mean, beyond all that… stuff… something good might come out of it.

(Racquel places a finger on the "On" button of the blender)

Here goes. (inhales deeply then exhales) Leap of faith.

(Racquel presses the button. The blender begins to whirl. Slow at first, then faster. The mixture inside the blender turns into a yellowish-green liquid mass. After a while, she stops the blender, removes the lid, and pours the pesto sauce onto the hot pasta. She inhales the aroma and licks a bit of the sauce that has stuck to her fingers)

That taste of another year. A new year of a life that I shall live. Live and enjoy.

And I will never lose …

I swear.

(Racquel begins mixing the pasta as the light slowly fades out.)

(Blackout)

CURTAIN

Reinscriptions of the 1899 U.S.-Philippine War in Filipino American Fiction

Oscar V. Campomanes

In a future and further development of this project,* I seek to discuss characteristic forms of reinscription of the 1899 U.S.-Philippine War in a range of Filipino American texts, from Ninotchka Rosca's historical novel *State of War* and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* to a little-noticed story by Cecilia Manguerra-Brainard, "The Black Man in the Forest" (I had originally intended to train the focus on Brainard's text in this essay, but have shifted it, for now, to Linda Ty-Casper's novella *Ten Thousand Seeds*). By "reinscription" here I simply mean the use of the medium and power of fiction-making by certain Filipina-American writers to intervene in the historiography of a major event in the birthing of U.S. imperialism and Philippine neo/colonial modernity: the 1899 U.S.-Philippine War (which historians now periodize as extending beyond the 1902 termination date prescribed by official and U.S. imperialist historiography on this event and the "Benevolent Assimilation" of the Philippines by the United States, as its first and major colony, to which this war of American conquest and Filipino resistance ultimately led).

First, I make the point that the 1898-99 colonial encounter between the Philippines as an emergent nation and the U.S. as a New Empire on the rise, which escalates into one of the bloodiest conflicts in the annals of modern colonialism (and becomes the object of a reciprocal amnesiac

politics and the subterranean persistence of popular memory concerning its key events and agents in both countries) is both "allegorized" and "localized" in these fictional narratives (in the case of Brainard's story, for example: in the fateful encounter between a band of starving Filipino guerillas and a straggling African American soldier in an imagined jungle setting typifying the theater of war associated with this conflict; with Ty-Casper's novella: in the quest of an American colonial-prospecting couple, the Rowbothams, to find their way clearly through the thickets of the conflict in the Philippines, on the trail of the American expeditionary and occupation forces, and as they engage/encounter their assertive Others/natives).[2] Second, I show how the fictional yet patently historiographic lens through which these narratives sieve a major historical event for its more marginal or minor aspects (such as the historic deployment of African American soldiers, some of whom eventually defected to the Aguinaldo-led guerrilla resistance, a neglected aspect of the history that Brainard's text speaks to; and the vaunted ambivalence of Americans of the time—for example, those tagged as "anti-imperialist"—about their otherwise unconsidered identification with an imperialist project, an aspect of this history that Ty-Casper obliquely alludes to) functions to help readers imagine potential kinds of solidarity and empathy across the sharp polarizations among "local" belligerents of this war (polarizations that official and professional historical accounts tend to foster in often depicting the U.S.-Philippine conflict in broad imperialist/nationalist strokes). I hope to conclude, in a later and more elaborated version, with the critical point that the creative allegoresis and localization of the War accomplished by these narratives, its own turn (and chosen angles of vision, again here, focally, in Ty-Casper's case), significantly refigure some of the questions most often debated but never quite radically addressed by theoretical discussions of the fictionality of history and the historicity of fiction, especially when considered in the context of war/s and war "memories."

Naming and "Titling" as Marginal yet Major Forms of Reinscription

"What do you want from this poor country of ours when yours is so big and rich? Why will your President not receive Señor Agoncillo whom our President sent to tell him about our aspirations?" These words assail Edward Rowbotham, the male American protagonist of Linda Ty-Casper's

Ten Thousand Seeds (1987), on his visit to Malolos, the capital of the Philippine revolutionary government. (The novel chronologically sets this incident during the crucial month of October 1898.) The two-part question is raised by a Filipino soldier-sentinel in the dialect. Edward is thus unable to understand a single word. What clues him to "the question [that] he could have not answered," were it linguistically accessible to him, is the "earnest voice" of the Filipino guard.[3]

Edward searches through his deepest thoughts after the unidentified Filipino poses the question with a hint of rebuke. Because the question is rendered in the vernacular, Edward is merely compelled to attend to its earnestness. Instead, he reframes it into a quasi-philosophical rumination that elides its specific and pressing valences: "Why are we here?" (*We*, in this case, encompass his wife Calista, and the Americans as an invading presence in the Philippines at the time). Failing to find any answer to this abstractive reformulation, he aimlessly moves on to his next set of encounters with all sorts of characters in American-occupied Manila. "Edward wanted the answer to drop out of the sky," which is a response that typifies his and Calista's gropings toward the meaning(s) of their decision to head for the Philippines on the heels of the American expeditionary and occupation forces.

Ty-Casper's novel coextends the couple's Philippine sojourn—their story of innocence, missionism, enterprise, and eventual disillusionment in respect to the U.S. colonial venture—with the 1899 U.S.-Philippine War that inaugurates the fitful genesis of Philippine-American neo/colonial relations. The novel structures their quest by reference to the swift developments that unfold between September 1898, after the United States installs a military government in the Philippines (and the 1898 Treaty of Paris negotiations between the U.S. and Spain begin), and March 1899, after the Philippine-American war erupts (with the ratification of the Treaty in the U.S. Senate by a close margin of one vote). Through these allegorical, even heuristic maneuvers, the novel signally intervenes in the history-writing about the initial phases of turn-of-the-century Philippine-American encounters as these were fatefully ushered by a nearly-genocidal American war of conquest and nearly-suicidal Filipino war for independence.[4] Of particular interest to us is Ty-Casper's decision to make the imaginary lives and thoughts of her American protagonists propel the narrative and the action of the novel. It recalls her strategy of handling her Spanish characters

rather than Filipino characters as the narrative screens for her novel on the 1750s Philippines, *The Peninsulars*.[5]

Ty-Casper recalls being frequently asked "why there are more Spanish than Filipino characters [and] why there are good Spaniards" in that work of historical fiction. She replies,

> The Spaniards held the reins of power all throughout 377 years of our history. In a novel recreating the 1750s and the political ferment of the times—meant to serve as background for two other novels in a trilogy about the rise of our national consciousness—I could not ignore the fact that the Spaniards were numerically ascendant in the exercise of power. Similarly, much as I wanted to have all the Filipino characters wise and good and selfless, facts show that we have always been capable and willing to oppress one another, as lustily as though foreign to each other. To deny this is to blind ourselves to a danger constantly facing us from within... The Spaniards oppressed each other as well. I thought we were the only victims. But if there were *caciques* [in the Philippines], so were there in Spain... If the Spaniards threw our dead onto bone piles and unconsecrated grounds, they also dishonored *their* dead: in the frenzy of the wars among themselves, they danced in the streets with the disinterred bodies of their nuns and priests.[6]

This disquisition may be read as a statement of interrelated acts in critical historiography assayed by a U.S.-Filipina writer concerned with the exploration of the complexity of colonization and war that both entangle and divide peoples with opposing interests. Firstly, an attempt is made to break down the exteriority of colonial power and to redraw its tangled lineaments. There is an other "history" to the specter of colonialism, Spanish (and American), that is occluded from the gaze of the colonized. What remains unexamined, Ty-Casper seems to be saying, is the toll exacted by the colonial venture on its own Euroamerican exponents and executors. Along with the certitude and power that colonialism assumes

on its own behalf is a dynamic of ambivalence and powerlessness, an unremitting terror in the face of its own historical traumas.[7] Secondly, the ambiguous virtuality of Filipino nationalism is raised, and Filipinos are urged to explore its puzzling, even self-conflicted, dimensions. Filipinos also have to examine the history of their own complicity in their oppression by foreign aggressors. The seeming dubiety or weakness of Filipino nationalism might merely be the obverse to a self-abusiveness that lies in wait for its moments of emergence.[8]

Ten Thousand Seeds, however, only leaves the call to interrogate the problematics of Filipino nationalism implicit. Instead, the lives of the Rowbothams provide the occasion for a critical and in-depth scansion—in terms of allegoresis, the ways in which these protagonists are made to function, not so much as multi-dimensional characters, but as social and representative types, although "local" too—of turn-of-the-century American imperialist politics and rhetorics against the Filipino nation-building project. To the extent that contemporaneous Filipino nationalism gets some exposition in the novel, it is only as a series of pronouncements made by liminal Filipino and expatriate European characters who make their entry into, and egress from, the novel's scenes and episodes when convenient. Their discursive mediations of Filipino sentiments prompt the American couple's fitful awakenings to the paradoxes of the United States' venture into the archipelago and the dramatic rise of the USA as a global power at the expense of Asia's first republic. Powerful historical revisions are nonetheless registered in this seeming displacement of one nationalist discourse by another. (The novel posits imperialism as the penultimate expression of American nationalism at a fortuitous historical juncture.) The most telling is the invocation, in the question posed by the Filipino soldier, of Felipe Agoncillo's unavailing attempts to represent the political aspirations of Filipinos to an indifferent William McKinley on his 1898-1899 diplomatic missions to the United States.

Suggestive inversions—reinscriptions, if you like—already ensue in giving emergent and resurgent Filipino nationalism a proper name ("Señor Agoncillo") and in reducing William McKinley to a "title" ("your President") in the soldier's question. Indeed, the significative and discursive order installed by imperialist-nationalist American historiography consigns Agoncillo to an infrequent footnote and strips him of his representative status/power while *naming* McKinley as the metonymic medium for the

trajectories of the American dream of a Pacific/Oriental empire.[9] Too, the apposite metonymy of General Emilio Aguinaldo in American rhetorical and historiographical constructs undergoes a different but related reversal. The same question ascribes to Aguinaldo the title that he claimed ("our President") and thus "legitimates" the fledgling republic that he had helped to secure before its demise under the hands of American interventionism. Inversely, contemporary imperialist rhetorics and later historical accounts reduce Filipino nationalist resistance to the proper name of "Aguinaldo" while ridding Aguinaldo of his political purchase and delegitimating the first Philippine republic as "the Aguinaldo government."

Ty-Casper thus implicitly engages the tendency of historians to write out the inscriptive ploys of American imperialist discourse itself in available accounts of the Filipino republican experiment. She infuses what may seem as innocuous cues of naming and titling with a powerful narrative charge. She demotically explains, for example, that in "refer[ring] to government officials by their rank, not their names [in this case, in *The Peninsulars*], I wanted to imply the power and authority which positions give to individuals who wielded them." Although she adds that "it is natural to refer to officials by their rank, out of respect, and with no confusion in mind about exactly who is indicated," we are already cued to the political effects that official symbolisms perform in imperialist rhetorics or history-writing and in their revisioning by postcolonial texts.[10]

Figurations of Felipe Agoncillo and Filipino Revolutionists in Imperialist Historiography

Felipe Agoncillo, the diplomat sent by Gen. Emilio Aquinaldo and the Comité Central Filipino to the USA and France between September 1898 (the beginning of the Treaty of Paris negotiations) through February 1899 (the moment of the U.S.-Philippine War's eruption), did indeed figure as a central actor in this historical war (and the "history wars" that followed it)—although U.S. diplomatic and international relations historiography would not reflect this fact and actively minimize his agency in its conventional accounts—and so Ty-Casper's specific allusion to his diplomatic campaigns in the soldier's question, no matter how minor or marginal, is quite crucial.

If Ty-Casper chose to train her novel's focus on fin-de-siècle American imperialist discourse, Felipe Agoncillo (among the Filipino nationalists) singularly advocated for an exacting interrogation of its various claims over the Philippines and Filipinos. If Agoncillo inhabits the margins of historical accounts for reasons that this essay cannot, on account of space limitations, dwell on, the specific allusion to Felipe Agoncillo in the encounter or exchange between the Filipino soldier and the novel's American hero is telling precisely because it seems extraneous to the hero's quests.[11] Thus is how we are behooved to regard Filipino nationalism in its states of siege/crisis as a discourse about, and from, the margins of turn-of-the-century American imperialist politics and discourses. Hence, Ty-Casper extends, as she invokes, in this historical novella the stance adopted by Agoncillo and other Filipino leaders to contest American enunciations about their struggle for national independence from a marginal locus. (It is locus, a non-place, to which circumstances and extreme disadvantage consigned the Filipino revolutionary leaders and fighters; just as, respectively, it is a dis/location that constrains and contains the Filipino-American fictionist herself, owing to a peculiar and related institutional invisibility common to U.S Filipino writers and intellectuals until recently, given the self-denial of U.S. imperialism as already extensively discussed by critical historians and scholars, including myself in previous work).[12]

Marginality in the case considered in this essay belongs, more generally and strikingly, as a stance to the representational protocols of both Filipino and American actors, who figure thus as contemporary protagonists or as subsequent writers/historians. This shared marginality of Filipino and American political-cultural discursive relations generates different effects and outcomes even as it may exemplify what Sara Suleri once called the "mimicry between the strategies of the colonizer and those of the colonized."[13] Recall that even critics like Edward Said had tended to slight American imperialism/orientalism, especially as they developed around East Asia and the Philippines, as derivative of European antecedents. This dismissal of the American variant as an uncultured clone of Eurocentered models of high-humanist intellectualism is itself an odd effect of American historiographical amnesia, or, at the very least, is the very predicate for the continued and powerful prevalence of the latter. It does not help matters any that historians or scholars of American empire-building in its own peculiar and particular Orient (the Philippines and the

Asia-Pacific), like contemporary imperialist American pedagogues and ideologues, substantially endorse it as an exceptional, if self-abnegating, enterprise.

We now turn to representative strains of the history-writing on these key events and agents of the war, first to be able to hold Ty-Casper's minor or marginal reinscriptions or narrative strategies (as a historical fictionist) in bold relief against (and by comparison with) it; and second, as a consequence, to be able to show how, with such exemplary reinscriptions, she closely yet subtly engages some of the most problematic and radically unproblematized staples of established historical wisdom on this momentous war. We shall see then how even the most unlikely scholars to reproduce American imperialist *marginalia*—if we can call its often orientalist and reductive strategies of minoritizing Filipino historical agency and agents as such—tend to fall prey to its hegemonic sway at precisely the moments when they seem to be aspiring to produce more critical history-writing than is available or than what exists.

Emphasizing the twin strategies of resistance and self-marginality adopted by the Filipino revolutionaries and their republican experiment certainly risks valorizing what, as its leading scholars would argue, was an abortive and deeply flawed nationalist movement. But a representative review of the historiographical fate of the Philippine Revolution/republican experiment, would make one see that Ty-Casper's reinscriptive strategies in her fiction-making—the ways in which the Filipino aspiration to self-determination of the time are refracted by and through an allegorical and local story of an American couple's inability, in their own aimless colonial prospecting, to appreciate their ambivalence about it, and unwitting complicity in its defeat—are of no small moment, and even in their most minor and marginal significations are highly transformative and productive interventions in history-writing and a "poetics" of historical knowledge ("memories" and their contestations).

Such a historiographic critique would show how, when understood only in terms of the patriarchal cast, political ambitions, and ethnic/class-specific interests of some of its leading factions, the Filipino republican experiment could only but be dismissible as a pathetic parody of its 18th-19th century American and European predecessors. What Ranajit Guha divines as the "mediocre liberalism" of the Indian upper classes under

and after the Raj—"a caricature of the vigorous democratic culture of the epoch of the rise of the bourgeoisie in the West"—may have been an immanent feature of its Filipino (and élite-led) counterpart,[14] as, in fact, has generally been asserted by leading American Filipinologists of all stripes or persuasions. Viewed from the postcolonial and transnational moments, this revolution and its republican/post-Enlightenment project can and does seemingly appear to be just another "naturalizing" discourse that adverted (while acceding) to Europe as the "habitus" of modernity, rationality, and normative humanism.[15] In the interrogative terms of Nicholas Dirks, was it one more and tardy variant, perhaps, of "the same old histories, increasingly tired and belatedly Whiggish stories of national self-determination and the unfolding of freedom?" With much import for the present discussion, Dirks asks: "how can we avoid caricaturing history the second time around; must we always consign the 'other' to farce?"[16]

Indeed, caricature and parody have been the historiographic lot of the Filipino nationalist upsurge of the 1890s even in the most empathetic revisionist accounts. When not ignored altogether in recountings of similar struggles before and after its time,[17] it is dismissed as an ephemeral (if vexed) attempt at nation-building by "semi-civilized" peoples who are culturally diverse and hopelessly divided. Consider these typically sardonic passages from Benedict Anderson's otherwise perceptive digest of current Philippine studies wisdom on the period:

> In 1899, a Republic of the Philippines was proclaimed under the leadership of 'General' Emilio Aguinaldo, a youthful caudillo from the province of Cavite... It was, however, a fragile republic, with more than a few similarities to Bolivar's abortive Gran Colombía. It had no purchase on the Muslim southwest; parts of the Visayas seemed likely to go their own independent way; and even in Luzon mestizo leadership was contested by a variety of religious visionaries and peasant populists... Moreover, the mestizo generals themselves (who included the grandfathers of both Ferdinand Marcos and Benigno Aquino, Jr.) began to follow the pattern of their American forbears, by setting themselves up as independent caudillos. Had it not been for William McKinley, one might almost say, the Philippines

> in the early twentieth century could have fractured into three weak, caudillo-ridden states with the internal politics of nineteenth-century Venezuela or Ecuador.[18]

The "fragility" of the republican experiment is explained solely in terms of its tenuous hold on its intended subjects and on its projected territorial scope. In turn, this unsecured sovereignty is attributed to ethnic/class differences among the populace and the unbridled political ambitions of "mestizo generals." The "General" himself (note the qualifying quotation marks) is representable only as a "youthful caudillo" or a poor Asian copy of his hemispheric "American forbears." Worse, Aguinaldo's generals contest his authority by being insubordinate or "independent" and by supplying more variants of his own example. In this context, McKinley's, or American, intervention in the Philippine revolution against Spanish colonialism can somehow be upheld as both fortuitous and desirable.

More significant is the ways in which the varied genealogical strands of this republic make its "failures" attributable to the racial/cultural or ethnological traits of its advocates and agents. For John Farrell, for example, the historical significance of the abortive Filipino republican enterprise lay in its mimetic character in relation to its Western—specifically American—progenitor/s.

> Americans draw too much upon their own national experience when they see every revolution or civil war as an independent movement. Actually, and a close study of events in the Philippine Islands in the 1890s supports this view, what really happened was that an Asiatic people began against Spain and after an interval resumed against the armed forces of the United States, a revolt which, at least in some respects, resembles other national and racial uprisings against the West which have occurred since that time and in other parts of the Far East. It is always a disadvantage in reporting these events that they are more easily appreciated as independence movements; western sympathizers have always been readily enlisted for that reason; and in their origins these revolts may indeed,

> invariably, have had something to do with misrule or the failure to rule properly. But when these rebellions culminate in violent revolution, certain evidences of what are more like conflicts of culture, or race wars, have become more or less standard; the self-appointed leaders speak for Asiatics, but they echo an ideology borrowed from Europe. This serves to get them an audience and a body of sympathizers abroad, while at home they use the same propaganda to exploit racial and religious antagonism. The attempt to grab power may involve prolonged warfare, featured by numerous atrocities, and not only against one or more European governments; there may be also internecine conflicts, and repeatedly there has been warfare carried on against large segments of the population who are either loyal to the West or have responded poorly to propaganda for lack of comprehension.[19]

Familiar orientalist tropes pockmark this homogenizing excursus by Farrell. A historically specific revolutionary moment (in which "an Asiatic people began against Spain and after an interval resumed against the armed forces of the United States") becomes the invariant elaboration of other "national and racial uprisings against the West." The inaugural singularity of that movement ("since that time") is strained through the customary reflex to locate it in the "Far East" and thence render its characteristics predictable *en avance*. Its nationalism, while acknowledged, is marked with a "racial" (read: "irrational") accent. Although labeled a "revolution" it could have only begun as a series of "rebellions," with both such forms characterized by atrocious violence. Once unleashed by its perpetrators, revolutionary violence itself would not discriminate between colonizer and colonized. The former is punished for "misrule" or "failure to rule properly" and "large segments" of the latter suffer punitive actions for loyalism or poor comprehension of revolutionary propaganda. "Internecine conflicts," due to power-hunger among the "self-appointed leaders," punctuate the consequent and retributive orgies of bloodletting.

The sardonic streak in Anderison's critique stems from an effort to make continuous the contemporary political atrophy in the Philippines

and the historic collusions between colonists and indigenous élites. Farrell, in fact, has been credited with bringing to light in a U.S. context (and by the 1950s) the U.S.-Philippine War, after half a century of American historiographical neglect of it as a major historical event in the making of U.S. imperial modernity. But if Filipino revolutionists become farcical facsimiles of Western/American models even in accounts like Anderson's and Farrell's, then we are not surprised about how they figure—if at all—in official or master American historical narratives of the period.

NOTES

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1 I am grateful to Dr. Cynthia Marasigan, professor at Binghamton University, for educating me about this little-known dimension of significant African American presence and participation in this first ever war fought by the USA beyond its borders, as I supervised her fieldwork in the Philippines for her outstanding dissertation on the subject a few years ago. See her "Between the Devil and the Deep Sea: Ambivalence, Violence, and African American Soldiers in the Philippine-American War and Its Aftermath," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2010.

2 Linda Ty-Casper, *Ten Thousand Seeds* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1987), 62.

3 For an exemplary discussion of how a literary text successfully aspires to recast historical narrativity, see Robert Lee's "Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* as an Intervention in Asian American Historiography," Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Ed. *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's "The Woman Warrior"* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1991).

4 *The Peninsulars* (Manila: Bookmark, 1964).

5 Ty-Casper, "Literature: A Flesh Made of Fugitive Suns," *Philippine Studies* 28 (1980), 63. The projected trilogy that she mentions in this essay is completed by *Ten Thousand Seeds*. The second volume, *The Three Cornered Sun* (Quezon City: New Day, 1979) does focus on the Filipino side of the Philippine Revolution against Spain in 1896. (This mo-

ment figures in Philippine political and cultural historiography as the fullest expression of Filipino nationalism at the epochal end of Spanish colonial rule, although crushed at the precise moments of its possibilities with the arrival of the United States as a new colonial power. Its reinvigoration thus paradoxically consists in the U.S.-Philippine War that broke out in 1899, after the Filipino nationalists resisted the American imperial advance that was defined by its ideologues as a disinterested intervention against Spain, on behalf of Cuban and Filipino "insurgents.") In thus refocusing on the American side with her concluding volume, Ty-Casper frames the rise of Filipino national consciousness between the two colonial discourses/projects and closes the triangle. Her reference to *caciques* in Philippine history may be contrasted to constructive genealogy of the ascent of this social class to political leadership through the Spanish/American colonial and Filipino postcolonial periods, offered by Benedict Anderson, "Cacique Democracy and the Philippines: Origins and Dreams," *New Left Review* 169 (May/June 1988), pp. 3-33.

6 Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1-6. Suleri detects a "dynamic of powerlessness underlying the telling of colonial stories" and an "ensuing terror that must serve as the narrative's interpretive model." Part of colonialism's deceptive face that requires postcolonial disfigurement for Suleri is its terrorist/terrifying aspect before its subjects (which masks the colonizer's own nameless terrors when confronted with the other's "cultures"). Suleri adds: "Such terror suggests the precarious vulnerability of cultural boundaries in the context of colonial exchange. In historical terms, colonialism precludes the concept of 'exchange' by granting to the idea of power a greater literalism than it deserves. The telling of colonial and postcolonial stories, however, demands a more naked relation to the ambivalence represented by the greater mobility of disempowerment. To tell the history of another is to be pressed against the limits of one's own—thus culture learns that terror has a local habitation and a name (p. 2)."

7 See Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 1-26, for an excellent discussion of the aftermath of decolonization in African countries like Ghana where "great expectations" for national freedom and progress were frustrated by the "violent uncoupling of the diverse strands" that anticolonial and independence movements had harmonized without regard for "the mo[u]rning after." These coalitions, which limited their goals to the attainment of nationhood, did not address the tasks of social reconstruction and the class/other stratifications that colonialism installed/bequeathed. As a consequence, independence "has paradoxically borne witness to stagnation, elitism, and class domination, and to the intensifying structural dependence—economic, political, cultural, and ideological—of Africa upon the imperial Western powers." Lazarus locates the middle-class "messianism" in the rhetorical politics of African nationalists and intellectuals as a fount both for their overvaluation of "the emancipatory significance of independence" and for the resulting tropes of disillusion and despair in later postcolonial African writings such as those by Ayi Kwei Armah. Although concerned with mid- to late-20th century histories and cultures of nationalist struggles in another context, Lazarus's formulations are relevant to any assessment of the trajectories of Filipino nationalism against/under the American colonial regime and after de/neo-colonization in 1946. When read with caution, especially in terms of its privileging of certain notions of "historical facticity," David Joel Steinberg's "An Ambiguous

Legacy: Years at War in the Philippines," *Pacific Affairs* 45.2 (Summer 1972), 165-190, is extremely suggestive on the forms of self-empowerment that ironically weakened Filipino nationalist politics from the time of Emilio Aguinaldo through the postcolonial regimes in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

8 As an actor and symbol, McKinley unaccountably absorbs the contradictory meanings of a "reluctant" or "calculating" drive of the United States to world power at the advent of the 20th century according to Marilyn Young, "The Quest for Empire," Ernest May and James Thomson, Eds., *American-East Asian Relations, A Survey* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 131-142. An informative but problematic account of this basic tension (or such fascinating oscillations) in the historiographical representations of McKinley is Joseph Fry's "William McKinley and the Coming of the Spanish-American War: A Study in the Besmirching and Redemption of an Historical Image," *Diplomatic History* 3.1 (1979), 77-98.

9 *"Fugitive Suns,"* 69.

10 On Felipe Agoncillo's abortive but semiosically effective diplomatic campaigns on behalf of the fledgling Filipino republic given the "insoluble crisis" of legitimacy that his efforts were able to institute in the very bosom of American imperialist discourse and politics of the time (and thereafter), see Oscar V. Campomanes, "The Japanese Analogy as Limimal Crisis-Effect in Initial Filipino-American Encounters, 1898-1899)" in Kiichi Fujiwara and Yoshiko Nagano, Eds., *The Philippines and Japan in America's Shadow* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2011).

11 On this self-marginality in an age of, and between, empires, as revolutionary strategy and tactic advocated by both Agoncillo and the premier ideologue of the Philippine Revolution Apolinario Mabini, see Oscar V. Campomanes, "*La Revolución Filipina* in the Age of Empire," *Japanese Journal of American Studies* 18 (2007), 87-105; Special Issue: "American Studies in Trans-Pacific Studies." On institutional Filipino American invisibility (and inaudibility) in American public and academic/literary cultures, see Oscar V. Campomanes, "Filipinos in the United States and their Literature of Exile" in V. Rafael, Ed., *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures* (Pasig City, Phils.: Anvil Publishing, 1995 [1992]); NVM Gonzalez and Oscar V. Campomanes, "Filipino American Literature," in King-Kok Cheung, Ed., *Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Oscar V. Campomanes, "Filipinos, Filipino Americans, and U.S. Imperialism" [interview with A. Tiongson Jr.], in A. Tiongson Jr., et al, Eds. *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006; Pasig City, M. Manila: Anvil Philippine edition, 2008). For the invisibilization of Philippine English and Filipino American writers in American literary and institutional cultures, see Oscar V. Campomanes, "Cecilia Manguerra-Brainard, Scenographer," in *C. M. Brainard, Vigan and Other Stories* (Pasig City, M. Manila: Anvil Publishing, 2012).

12 Suleri, *Rhetoric of English India*, 15.

13 "Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography," in Guha, Ed., *Subaltern Studies VI* (Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 214. Here it may be said that Filipino and American historians substantially agree on a similar character/cari-

cature of the élite leadership of the revolution. See Anderson, "Cacique Democracy," and Steinberg, "Ambiguous Legacy," for terse condensations of these historians' slightly variable (they would say, "nuanced") representations of the national and local élites as always-already compromised political opportunists and half-Enlightened despots.

14 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?," *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992), Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories Special Issue, 20-21; Vincent Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993 pap.), ix-xi; David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), esp. 46-47.

15 "History as a Sign of the Modern," *Public Culture* 2.2 (Spring 1990), 26.

16 *The World Atlas of Revolutions*, for example.

17 "Cacique Democracy," 9-10.

18 John Farrell, "An Abandoned Approach to Philippine History: John R. M. Taylor and the Philippine Insurrection Records," *The Catholic Historical Review* 39.4 (January 1954), 388-389.

Stepping Forward at 400: The Literary Production of UST

Bienvenido Lumbera

As an academic center for the production of young literary writing, UST did not figure prominently in the firmament of critics until a young man named Wilfrido D. Nolledo came into the horizon. In 1953, the Marian Year National Literary Competition picked Nolledo's short story "The Beginning" as First Prize winner. Nolledo had not attended the Silliman Writers Workshop, then the arbiter of what was considered as well-crafted writing in English as per the standards of the American New Criticism. Neither did Nolledo come from the University of the Philippines where the arsenal of creative writing luminaries was turning out winners in the annual Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature.

UST in the 1950s was best known for its Colleges of Law and Medicine, so the emergence of Nolledo broke the public impression that UST was insignificant as a producer of young writing. Now, on its 400th year as an institution, it is high time that its important contribution to Philippine literature be counted. While it has always run an academic unit emphasizing the creative arts in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, no all-out effort has to date been made to name the UST authors who made their mark in the history of Philippine literature.

As early as the decade of the Thirties, two writers had appeared to change the course of Philippine writing. The first was Alejandro G. Abadilla whose rebellious temper took him to the US West Coast away from his family in Cavite. The time was a period of ferment in the literary

scene in the US, and working as a journalist in the Filipino communities Abadilla had apparently come in contact with radical American writing. When he returned to the Philippines in 1931, he enrolled in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters and obtained a Ph.B. major in Philosophy.

The Commonwealth was inaugurated in 1935, and the prospect of independence excited young people dreaming of a cultural renaissance for Filipinos. A new writers' group calling itself Panitikan arose, and Abadilla was among its organizers. Panitikan wanted to break away from writing that popular weeklies like *Liwayway* had made the orthodoxy. In 1940, Abadilla managed to get *Liwayway* to put "Ako ang Daigdig." The poem created a scandal. It did away with the standard syllabic count of Tagalog versification. It violated the conventional stanzaic arrangement of lines. It did not observe the rules of capitalization. It was "free," verse that was then unknown in the pages of a popular weekly.

In his slim volumes of poetry, *Ako ang Daigdig at Iba Pang Tula* (1955) and *Piniling mga Tula ni AGA* (1965), Abadilla waged his personal aesthetics even as contemporaries in Panitikan doubted the validity of the changes he wanted to bring into the writing of Tagalog poetry. He also wrote prose, asserting his anti-conventionality as a critic of poetry and editor of various textbooks and anthologies. With young fictionist Elpidio Kapulong, he co-wrote the novel *Pagkamulat ni Magdalena* (1958), provoking controversy with its candor (unusual in its time) in the portrayal of the sex act in a Tagalog novel. In the textbook-cum-anthologies that he edited for use in high school and early college, he pursued his advocacy for the modernization of Tagalog writing. Indeed, Abadilla can legitimately claim the honor of infusing a sense of the modern in the study and the writing of Tagalog literature. Through him, UST can claim a share in the honor of contributing to the forward growth of Philippine writing in general.

A second pathbreaker from the 1930s was the BSE graduate Genoveva Edroza, whose Tagalog stories, in the innovative tradition of Panitikan, of which she was a member, changed the content of Tagalog fiction. Where the usual stories in popular magazines were plain narratives appealing for their plot twists and turns, Edroza's fiction probed with sensitivity and insight the inner lives of her characters. In her hands, the short story became more than entertainment reading; it held the reader's interest because it

allowed the reader to understand other people and to feel with them. Edroza's collection of early stories and essays *Ako'y Isang Tinig* has served as a standard reference in high schools and colleges. Her most popular work is perhaps *"Kuwento ni Mabuti"* which tells with great restraint the pathetic story of a prim schoolteacher who confides her own past indiscretion to assuage the grief of a troubled female student. Told from the point of view of the young girl who idolized the teacher, the narrative reverberates with implications of youthful awakening and the beginnings of mature compassion.

Edroza continued to write through several crucial periods of our history, and when she died she left behind stories that recorded the lives of Filipinos as they experienced the Pacific War, the turmoil of the Liberation years, the tensions of the Martial Law period, and the insecurities of the years of seeking employment abroad. As a faithful recordist of the times, she had through her fiction made readers remember and understand their society and the various issues that it has had to weather through the years.

The post-Pacific War years saw the arrival in UST of two students from the Ilocos region who were to find a place in Philippine writing in English. The first was a restless peasant-boy from Pangasinan who immediately stood out and established a reputation for intellectual leadership. He was Francisco Sionil Jose, a Philosophy and Letters student whose training in journalism was to earn him the post of editor-in-chief of *The Varsitarian*. Without finishing his college studies, he moved on to a career in journalism, travelling all over the country, covering big stories and absorbing the culture and the political and economic issues facing the nation. In 1959, he broke into the literary scene with a short story that won the top prize in the Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature. "The God Stealer" was about a citified Igorot tourist guide who stole his grandfather's "god" to gift to an American tourist, and suffered as a consequence a tortuous reintegration into the culture of his tribe for desecrating his people's tradition.

"The God Stealer" was Jose's first creative work to catch the attention of critics, and its socio-cultural content was to get further elaboration in his subsequent fiction which saw a journalistic eye for cultural detail wedded to a richly inventive narrative skill. In Jose the critics found a disconcerting talent whose creative drive defied the literary fashion set by the New Critics in the academe who prized formalist correctness in language and craft. The

five novels comprising what is now known as the Rosales Saga—Po-on *(Poon)*, *Tree*, *My Brother, My Executioner*, *The Pretenders*, and *Mass*—trace the history of the Filipino people's struggle against colonial domination, class suppression, cultural decay and political corruption, a prose epic that no previous writer had attempted before.

Among Filipino writers, Jose stands alone as the only one with an international reputation, having been translated into more than 25 languages from Europe, Latin America, the Far East and Southeast Asia. Indeed, when the Nobel Prize committee is able to turn its gaze to writing in Southeast Asia, Jose is the likeliest to catch its eye.

Contemporaneous with Jose was Juan Capiendo Tuvera, another Ilocano and also a journalist. Tuvera's fiction earned high encomium from Edith Tiempo, the matriarch of fine writing, in the introduction to *Stories and Other Writings*. Tuvera's treatment of the lives of peasants in the Ilocos countryside is noted: "All this the writer's pen etches with meticulous and restrained carefulness, and thereby extracting a terrible beauty out of the human agony endured, and breeding a species of love and tenderness for the human being in his portion of mortality and frailness."

The Palanca was the venue that called early attention to Tuvera's talent when it awarded top honors to "Ceremony" (1955) and "High into Morning" (1957). A narrative set in the war-torn Vietnam of the 1950s, "High into Morning" tells about a Filipino employed by the US forces and his truncated casual love affair with a girl who could not settle down in any one place. Tuvera, in the early 1950s, was telling a story that anticipated the mood of the existentialist 1960s, delineating the sense of emptiness and futility when loving and permanent relationship eluded men and women wandering about in an alien setting racked by war.

In his later years, Tuvera was drawn to serve the reactionary bureaucracy of the Marcos dictatorship, and the expected culmination of a fine creative writing career failed to yield the masterpieces of his mature years.

Juan T. Gatbontgon was an undergraduate student in 1951 when his story "Clay" was published by the *Philippines Free Press*, and subsequently won First Prize in the magazine's annual competition. The story is about a 16-year old boy in a small town in Pampanga early in the postwar years who had been befriended by an American G.I. named Clayton. Proud of

his new-found friend, he introduces the soldier to his favorite teacher Miss Rosete. Clayton takes the teacher to a dance in the camp, and later within hearing of the boy, brags to fellow G.I.s about his sexual conquest of the native woman. The boy is crushed, disillusioned both with his American friend and the teacher he idolizes. Aside from the prestigious prize from the *Free Press*, "Clay" was also accorded First Prize by the Palanca Awards. The prizes however failed to spur on the young talent. The next time he came out with another story was in 1963. The piece titled "A Record of My Passage" won another Palanca award. Its author, however, has not come out with more fiction. Instead, he put out a compilation of essays written while he was editor of *The Sunday Chronicle* in the 1960s. Little Reports brought together what might very well be the precursor of a prose genre that has come in our time to be designated as "creative nonfiction."

As we have seen in the foregoing, UST had begun to assert itself as a center for new writing, and its notable literary products were three young authors who competed for attention alongside writers turned out by Silliman and UP. Of the three, the flashiest was fictionist Wilfrido D. Nolledo whose poetic prose stood apart from the style of his contemporaries. Nolledo wielded the English language as though it were his personal invention. "Rice Wine" is his frequently anthologized work in which the distinctive prose was intimately wedded to a sense of history.

In 1970, the US publisher E.P. Dutton published *But for the Lovers*, a novel about the Pacific War and how it physically and spiritually damaged the Philippines. Nolledo's narrative unfolds within the language web of his characteristic prose, liberally sprinkled with puns and verbal play in Tagalog and Spanish. The story revolves around a set of characters who are embodiments of history, legend and popular culture, evoking the country's past and cultural development: Alma, the young woman symbolic of the "Filipino soul," and Molave, the unkempt young man who acted as Alma's guardian, suggestive of the sturdy heroic spirit (tough as *molave* lumber) of the patriots who seek to preserve the national soul.

When Nolledo joined the *Philippines Free Press* as a journalist in the late 1960s, he found himself in direct contact with the men and women who make history as bureaucrats, politicians, economists and entertainment moguls. The dense realities of daily life crowded into his fiction and plays. It seemed the characters and events he wrote of cried out to be ad-

mitted into his art. Young writers dazzled by his independence as a creative artist lionized him, and we have the phenomenon of the first Thomasian writer inspiring adulation among beginning and aspiring writers from outside the University.

A walking writing workshop even before the Center for Creative Writing and Studies was founded in 1999, Ophelia Alcantara Dimalanta was a constant source of inspiration to the young and aspiring writers inside the UST campus. She was a graduate of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters who stayed on in UST as a teacher till her death in 2009, truly a literary institution, who for three terms served as the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Letters. As a poet, her output has been acclaimed for its penetrating account of one Filipino woman's sojourn in Philippine society, an artist's lyric recording of the griefs and joys of moving through life. Her books are notable for their poetic idiom, a seemingly inexhaustible fount of images and sounds that bespeak a sensibility ever fresh and original. *Montage* (1974), *Time Factor* (1984), *Flowing On* (1988) and *Lady Polyester: Poems Past and Present* (1993) contain some of the most outstanding poetry written by the author. *The Ophelia Dimalanta Reader Volume 1 (Selected Poetry)* (2004) assembles what the poet herself considered her enduring works.

The Philippine Poetic (1976) established Dimalanta as a leading proponent of New Criticism, its formalist orientation serving as a guide through the poet's technique and achievement. Dimalanta, at the time of her death, was chair of the influential Manila Critics Circle which annually honored the best books of the year.

A contemporary of Dimalanta in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters was Constante Casabar who initiated in Ilocano fiction a literary reform with his introduction of social realism in the novels that he wrote for the popular weekly magazine *Bannawag*. In his years in UST, Casabar absorbed lessons from Western masters like Hemingway and Steinbeck, who were in vogue then as outstanding realists. In *Dagiti Mariing Iti Parbangon* (available in Tagalog translation as *Silang Nagigising sa Madaling Araw*), he tells about an idealistic young townsman of a mythical town in the countryside of Ilocos with its corrupt government officials, conformist middle-class residents, terrorizing toughies and law-abiding peasants struggling to survive. Readers read into his works the hardships and venalities of con-

temporary life in Ilocos towns, and the powers-that-be who felt alluded to in Casabar's hard-hitting novels made life precarious for the author and his family. In the end, Casabar and his family found themselves emigrating to Canada and then the United States where the novelist eventually died, leaving behind for his readers a heritage of more than 28 novels.

In the 1950s, Rolando S. Tinio was an undergraduate poet writing in *The Varsitarian* imitations of Rabindranath Tagore. After graduating with a Ph.B. Philosophy degree, he took off for the United States and enrolled in Paul Engle's Writing Workshop in the State University of Iowa. It was there that he grew into a Westernized Filipino poet whose aestheticism extended to theater theory, costume design and difficult poetry. Upon his return to the Philippines, he found a job as English instructor at the Ateneo de Manila University.

The Ateneo de Manila Experimental Theater was his first project in drama, for which he did a radical production of the classic *Oedipus Rex*, testing by practice theater theory he had evolved from his studies in Iowa. The result was a stunning production that overwhelmed a few but failed to bring in a general audience. For Tinio, it was the start of a personal artistic search for a stage practice that would suit the conditions of contemporary theater and theater-going in the Philippines. He next went into the production of Tagalog translations of popular modern foreign plays like Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. From there he moved on to the staging of revivals of traditional Filipino dramatic forms: the *zarzuela Paglipas ng Dilim* and the *komedya Prinsipe Baldovino*. In the Martial Law years, he came under the patronage of Imelda Marcos and he was funded by the Ministry of Public Information to run a theater group in the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Teatro Filipino, of which Tinio was director, production designer and translator, made available to young Filipino theater-goers translated productions of modern European plays. After his death, posthumous honor came to Tinio when he was named National Artist for Theater and Literature, an honor that he fully deserved for revolutionizing theater practice in the Philippines.

Aside from his achievement in theater, Tinio also left his mark on Tagalog poetry. Two poetry collections, *Sitsit sa Kuliglig* and *Dunong-dunungan*, document his contribution to literature with his introduction of colloquial idiom and tone to Tagalog poetry, which had been mired in

didacticism and sentimentality as its burden from the past. Indeed, in the person of Rolando S. Tinio, UST has produced a genius of an artist who stands high in the pantheon of Philippine theater and literature.

Federico Licsi Espino came into the literary scene of the Sixties with *In Three Tongues* which offered a young poet's works in English, Spanish and Tagalog. The young author would turn out to be a literary historian, critic, translator and fictionist, modest and unobtrusive in spite of his literary achievements. He brought Filipino readers—teachers, authors and literature students—an awareness of Third World writing through his translations of poems from India, Africa, Japan, Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia in the compilation *Mga Tulang Afro-Asyatiko* (1975). The quality of his literary output was affirmed by the numerous prizes he won from prestigious institutions like the Palanca Awards, the CCP Literary Contest, the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa, the *Philippines Free Press*. Among his notable works are *From Mactan to Mendiola* (1971), *Toreng Bato… Kastilyong Pawid ang Bagwis ng Guniguni* (1967), *Counter-Clockwise, 1965-1969* (1969), and *Hampas sa Diwa, Himas sa Gunita* (1983). *Tambor de Sangre* (1977) was awarded the Premio de Poesia de Ramon de Basterra in Madrid.

In 1963 the landmark anthology *Mga Agos sa Disyerto* came out with short stories by young fictionists previously published only in campus newspapers. "Tata Selo" was a standout among the stories, and it was authored by a Thomasian named Rogelio R. Sicat. The story told about a peasant who killed the abusive landowner under whom he served. Jose Rizal's *El Filibusterismo* provides the pattern for Sicat's narrative in his novel *Dugo sa Bukang-Liwayway*, with Ibarra as the model for the young man who wants to bring changes in his native village. Sicat's Simon is assassinated at the close of the novel, and by this time, the villagers have begun to unite in response to Simon's reformist ideals. *Moses, Moses* is a full-length play with resonances of contemporary political events, wherein the mother of a son being pursued by the law in the person of a corrupt town official chooses to be the executioner of her own son rather than yield him to an executioner with filthy hands. In another play, a writer torn between his duty to his needy family and his desire to pursue his art ends up dead. *Saan Papunta ang Paruparo?* dramatizes the tension in the artist through the symbolism of the butterfly that entices the artist to his doom in an accident. A one-man play, *Tatalon* is Sicat's rendition of a news item about a *jeepney* driver

from an urban poor community who committed suicide. Sicat's play shows the driver debating with himself between suicide and commitment to the cause of workers like him.

Norma O. Miraflor was known to readers as an author of English stories that appeared in the *Philippines Free Press*. In 1970 she pleasantly astounded fellow writers in the ranks of activists when the story *"Sulat Mula sa Pritil"* appeared. It was in the form of a monologue, and the speaker is a high school student complaining about his English teacher and in the process depicting his family and the community in which he lived. In her biographical sketch for an anthology of English stories, she announced that this story was to lead to a trilogy of novels in Filipino. In 1970, *"Sulat"* was followed by *"Kumpisal."* Here, another urban poor boy is "confessing" his gradual awakening to the relevance of the protest movement to the conditions of their life. As in *"Sulat,"* Miraflor is able to reproduce in an authentic rendition, through the point of view of her central character, the voice of the youth of the period. This is the fictionist's valuable heritage for the young writers who came after her—the successful rendering in fiction of the speech of the period, leading to a realistic depiction of the temper of the revolutionary times. She migrated to Singapore to take up a journalist's job, leaving the door open to the stylistic contemporanization of narration that Jun Cruz Reyes was to pick and carry to its logical conclusion. Miraflor continued to write in Singapore, producing the novel *Island of Wives* in which she displays her facility in creating characters whose lives she pursues to reveal yet another talent, this time in expert narrativization. Thus far, her activist followers are still waiting for the promised trilogy.

Cirilo F. Bautista, poet and fictionist in English and Filipino, teaches at De La Salle Manila where he set up the Bienvenido Santos Center for Creative Writing. *The Cave and Other Poems* was his first book of poems which appeared in 1968. His use of English for his poetry is put to the crucible with his project of writing an epic on the growth of the Filipino nation. Opening the epic was *The Archipelago* (1970), followed eleven years later by *Telex Moon* (1981). The final book came out in 1999 as *Sunlight on Broken Stones*. The completed epic now comes under the title *The Trilogy of Saint Lazarus* (2001). It was awarded the Centennial Literary Prize in the epic category, an affirmation of Bautista's stature as the leading socially conscious contemporary Filipino poet writing in English.

Bautista has written English translations of the poems of Amado V. Hernandez collected in *Bullets and Roses* (2003). His books of Filipino poems are *Sugat ng Salita* (1985), *Kirot ng Kataga* (1995), *Tinik ng Dila* (2003), and *Latay sa Isipan* (2007). *Galaw ng Asoge* (2004) is his novel in Filipino.

Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo was a byline in numerous travel essays which traced the writer's sojourn in foreign countries where husband Antonio Hidalgo served on assignment as a UN official. When the couple settled down in the Philippines, Hidalgo taught English, literature, and creative writing at the University of Philippines, and buckled down to do serious creative writing. *Recuerdo* took shape as an epistolary novel representing letters from a mother to her daughter. The novelty of the project as a narrative is that the letters happened as befitting a literary work conceived in the age of cyberspace on the Internet. The Palanca judges in 1996 were impressed by the creativity of the writer and awarded *Recuerdo* the Grand Prize for the novel.

Hidalgo continued to write prodigiously and has produced another novel and several story collections, notably *Ballad of a Lost Season* (1987), *Tales for a Rainy Night* (1993), *Where Only the Moon Rages* (1994), and *Catch a Falling Star* (1999). The former director of the UST Publishing House, Hidalgo is now head of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies.

UST has produced literary criticism that has impacted on the field in the work of J. Neil Garcia. *Philippine Gay Culture* (1996) is Garcia's original contribution to an academic area that has skittishly avoided going too deep on the subject of homoerotic sex. His book now stands as the standard text on homosexuality as it has been manifested in Philippine writing, and as the authority on the parameters by which studies on poetry and fiction dealing with gay relationships must deal with. An extended essay on Federico Licsi Espino's story "Lumpen" encompasses the various implications of Garcia's criticism as it has deepened since 1996.

Aside from criticism, Garcia has been writing poetry and his verse has been collected in several volumes of which *Closet Quivers* (1992) is the first. His poetry, marked by notable sensitivity to the nuances of language, enmeshes the reader in the cultural repercussions of his themes.

It is significant to note that literary production in the University, in the beginning, was an offshoot of sheer talent and the personal drive of its students. No special courses were offered for the cultivation of creative talent, there was only a wide-awake consciousness in the students that events and personalities were in the process of shaping a nation, and there was a need to arrest this in language: to remember in some future, or to remind a loved one of events shared in the prime of their lives, or to express rage or joy that had to be captured in writing for no reason at all. In this regard, there were dedicated passionate mentors who rubbed off on their students the love of language and the intense respect for masters of literary craft. Such were the likes of Paz Latorena, Josephine Bass-Serrano, Carolina Garcia, Erlinda Francia-Rustia, Jose Hernandez, Jose Villa Panganiban, and many others who labored in the groves of academe and awakened in their students the urgency of carrying out the task of making literature light one's way through life.

The quiet labor of the iconic UST teachers paid off. The names of Abadilla, Edroza, Sionil Jose, Tuvera, Nolledo, Casabar, Dimalanta, Sicat, Bautista, Miraflor, Hidalgo and Garcia constitute a glittering roster that can hang side by side with the names of writers produced by Silliman and UP. The University of Santo Tomas at 400 can step forward as a writing center to claim an honored place in Philippine literature.

The Contributors

Alma Anonas-Carpio is the Associate Editor of the weekly Philippines Graphic magazine and has won a Palanca Award for her poetry in English (1994) and the Intel Excellence Award for her reportage on technology. She is a writer's wife and a mother to twins who show a bent in what may well be the family trade in words. Alma also writes a blog, www.filipinowriter.com, under the nom de plume Pusangitim. She also once wore the teacher hat and loves her pailful of wily tomcats, Osiris and Moe. When she is not writing, she is slaying demons and dragons in one form or another on her computer or using her many editions of Dungeons & Dragons rule books. She dreams of space-walking for real someday.

Cirilo F. Bautista is Professor Emeritus of Literature at De La Salle University, Manila. A poet, fictionist and critic, he has published 18 books of poetry, fiction, criticism and translation in English and Tagalog for which he has won such awards as The Philippine Centennial Literary Prize, The Palanca Hall of Fame, Gawad Jose Corazon de Jesus, Gawad Gatpuno Villegas, Gawad Balagtas and Gawad Manuel L. Quezon. He has taught literary courses at the University of Santo Tomas, Saint Louis University, Ohio University, and Waseda University.

Oscar V. Campomanes teaches literary and cultural studies, and specializes in critical theory, semiotics, American Empire critique and Filipino American postcolonialism in the Department of English of Ateneo de Manila University, where he also recently served as Coordinator of Research & of the PhD Program (June 2007-May 2010). He holds a Ph.D. in American Civilization from Brown University, USA. A new essay of his just appeared in the anthology edited by Kiichi Fujiwara and Yoshiko Nagano, *The Philippines and Japan In America's Shadow* (National University of Singapore Press, 2011), a tri-national critical and scholarly effort funded by the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science, University of Tokyo, and Kanagawa University. A book manuscript, *Figures of the Unassimilable:*

American Empire Critique, Filipino-American Postcoloniality & the U.S.-Philippine War of 1898-1910s is in preparation for a Philippine university press, with a revised and enlarged edition planned for a subsequent US/international publication. Dr. Campomanes also occasionally writes art criticism for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*.

Paul Alcoseba Castillo teaches in UST's National Service Training Program (NSTP). He is currently pursuing an M.A. in Creative Writing at the UST Graduate School. He has been a fellow to the 17th Iligan National Writers Workshop and the 2012 UST Summer Creative Writing Workshop. He is a member of the Linangan sa Imahen, Retorika, at Anyo (LIRA). His poems in Filipino have been published in *Ani*, the official literary journal of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. He won 1st Prize in the Tula Category as well as the Rector's Literary Award of the 28th Gawad Ustetika.

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