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

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Introduction

Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo

Every seat in the room was taken. Some people had made themselves comfortable on the floor. The exchange between the panelists and the audience was lively. This was the panel discussion on the novel during the Philippine Literary Festival (sponsored by National Bookstore and Raffles Hotel) in August 2015, and the size of the audience surprised me. I didn't think the novel would be one of the more popular topics.

The most interesting question came at the very end. The moderator had announced that she would take just one more question. And this young woman had literally leapt to her feet – she had been sitting quietly on the floor, in front, a little to our right. Now she looked determined to have her say.

She introduced herself as a Wattpad Pad writer, adding that some of her books had been converted into print books and were being sold in National Bookstore. She did not say whether any of them had been made into films or “*teleserye*.” Then she asked her question: “How literary is literary?”

At first my fellow-panelists and I weren't quite sure what her question meant. The young lady tried to explain, stumbling a bit on her words, obviously a little nervous. “We have a lot of readers,” she gushed. “A lot, really! But... we would like to become literary... like you... but how literary is literary?”

We tried to answer the question. But at some point, it occurred to me that maybe we were not addressing what she was really asking. From her halting attempts at an explanation, I thought that what she was telling

us was that she – and maybe some other Wattpad writers – were aware that, though popular, their writing was not regarded as quite on the level of what she was referring to as “literary writing,” that they weren’t... *respected* perhaps? And that what she really wanted from us was advice on how they could get there.

I said so to her, and she nodded, looking relieved. “We want... someday... to write like you, Ma’am and Sirs,” she said earnestly.

“I’ll give you a straightforward answer,” I said. And then, I surprised myself by saying something I didn’t know was what I actually felt. I knew about Wattpad, of course, but I had never given it much thought. In my mind Wattpad fiction was on the level of the old radio soap operas, or the paperback romances, part of “commercial culture.”

But what I said to the young woman was this: “I think you’re doing good. You’re getting more Filipinos to read – and write – than ever before. And now you’re telling me that you want to become better writers. That too is a good thing. But I don’t think you should make it your goal to write *like us*. We’re senior citizens. You don’t really want to sound like us, do you? In fact, I don’t think you could even if you tried. We belong to different worlds practically.”

She looked a little puzzled. I told her that I thought she and her friends should focus on taking the next step. And that would mean studying the writers who – though they might be a little older than themselves – are still young enough to be part of their generation. I mentioned a few names: Vlad Gonzalez of UP, Eros Atalia and Joselito Delos Reyes of UST; Ferdinand Jarin of the Philippine Normal University. The young woman nodded again, vigorously. She did know them, she said.

“Did you know that they too are academics, like the three of us here?” I asked. “But they are writing books that are very different from what we write. And they’re good too. Vlad was published by Miflores, the small publishing house which made that kind of writing its niche – books by young writers, which are funny, and fun, but also intelligent and well-written. Eros, Joey and Ferdie have been published by Visprint, which has taken over from where Miflores left off.”

The young woman was smiling now.

“And there are the writers who are a little older, but are still in your general neighborhood,” I continued, “like Lourde de Veyra, Chris

Martinez, Rica Bolipata-Santos... Chris was published by Milflores. Rica was published by both Milflores *and* the University of the Philippines Press, an academic publishing house. And Lourd has been published by the University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, another academic publisher. They may not have as many readers as you and other Wattpad writers have, but they certainly have many more than *we* have. And they enjoy the respect of their students and their colleagues. So, take the next step by going in their direction. Someday you may become as good as they are. Or you might become better. And then you'll take the next step, going in a direction you cannot yet know at this time."

The young woman looked satisfied. I had given her an answer that had surprised her, but that made sense. What she didn't know was that it had surprised me more than it had her.

That evening, on my way home from the Raffles, I thought to myself: but if that's really what I think – if I wasn't just playing to the galleries – why don't I write books like theirs?

The obvious answer is that I couldn't even if I wanted to. I write in the only way I know how. And, though I might encourage – and even enjoy—an entirely different sort of writing in my students and my young colleagues, I remain committed to writing for, and producing, literary journals like *Tomás*, which are dedicated to the kind of literature which, though its audience might be small, serves its own purpose.

Writers of all generations have tried to define that purpose. But there are periods in our history when it becomes startlingly clear. The period we live in today, in this country, is one of them – one of those periods when events, both natural and man-made, conspire to drain one of all hope that better times lie ahead. A looming national election used to bring on optimism, no matter how tentative: change seemed possible.

Not this time.

In *Sonoran Desert Summer*, John Alcock, professor of Zoology at Arizona State University, describes June in the desert as "the month of almost no hope" for all living creatures, with the temperature at 102 degrees, rainfall at two-tenths of an inch, and "a wind that has removed almost every hint of moisture from the desert world."

"It is a time for hanging on," he writes, "enduring, letting the days pass."

But, suddenly... “from the boulders on the still shaded lower slope of Usery Mountain comes a song, the clear, descending trill of a canyon wren. Loud, defiant and encouraging, it announces a survivor. A blur of chestnut brown and white, the wren bounds from rock to rock, at perfect ease in its home in the desert.”

Sometimes I think that this might be the reason we do it. For writers in a journal like this one, this is their song, “defiant and encouraging.”

Ours is a rich harvest this term. In the succeeding pages, the reader will hear the voices of both our most distinguished writers/scholars, as well as emergent voices. Since *Tomás* is the official literary journal of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies, and the Center’s mandate includes both providing a support group for established writers as well as nurturing of young writers, both are assured of space here.

Breaking with usual practice we have chosen to open this issue with Criticism. We wish to highlight the fact that literary scholars and critics are also a part of the Center, that our pages are open to literary commentary, or commentary on the arts, or on culture.

At the top of the list are National Artist Virgilio Almario and University Professor Emeritus Gémino H. Abad, who are both poets and critics.

Almario’s essay “*Ang Katotohanan at Kabutihan ng ‘Kagandahan’*” opens with a discussion of the term “*Kagandahan*” as it is used in everyday speech, popular culture, and academic discussions. It then focuses on the *awit*, *korido* and *komedya*, literary forms neglected by our own critics. The neglect, Almario argues, might be traced to a reliance on Western standards of what is aesthetically pleasing. He concludes his thoughtful and incisive essay by urging diligent research and analysis of such works, as well as of terms like “*gayak*” and “*payak*,” which may provide valuable insights which will enrich our understanding of our culture and our identity as a people.

Abad’s essay, “Reading as a Liberating Art,” seeks to explain how poetry works and why it humanizes. “... Of all studies that humanize, it humanizes best,” he writes, “because it cultivates the life of feeling and the imagination.” The essay, which exhibits the lucidity and brilliance – not to mention the lyrical style – which characterize both his poetry and his scholarship, touches on some of the author’s favorite themes: the complex

process of reading, the “duplicitous” nature of literature, language as the means by which literature is “invented.”

The essay by Philippine Women’s University President Jose Francisco Benitez was originally delivered as a keynote lecture during an international literature conference on “Text and the City” (which opened in UST). It explores the concept of the city as text and a text as city. The city, according to Benitez, “is woven from multiple and diverse strands that form patterns with a grammar and a syntax, with rules that dictate the parameters of social practices... It is a particular type of sedimentation of social relations, a particular type of spatialization of modes of social reproduction... The city is also a text in a third sense, in the sense of a text’s intertextuality and open-endedness. As sites of social relations and practices, cities are never alone, never absolutely autonomous.” As illustrations, his provocative discussion takes up the short story by Macario Pineda, “Kasalan sa Malaking Bahay” and the film *Tirador* by Brillante Mendoza.

“*Tagalog-Waray Connection: ang Tugma at Sukat ng Siday*” by Jerry B. Gracio is an important contribution to the existing body of critical work on our national poetics. Taking off from the Talaang Ginto: Gawad Surian sa Tula, one of the oldest, and most prestigious literary awards in the country, it discusses the fraught issues of poetry in Tagalog as distinct from poetry in Filipino, and the privileging of Tagalog-centric aesthetic standards. Gracio asserts that it is time to respect variety – in particular in the poetry by writers from the regions – arguing that an open attitude can only benefit the development of the Filipino language.

“Speculations for the Soul: Shades of the Catholic Imagination in Carlomar A. Daoana’s *Clairvoyance*” by the young scholar Ma. Ailil B. Alvarez’s is a bit of a rarity. It is one of very few commentaries, in the body of existing literary criticism in English, which focus on the Catholic imagination. This rarity must necessarily strike one as unusual, considering the clear predominance of Catholicism over other religions in the country. Alvarez’s essay seeks to tease out the Catholic strands of thought in Daoana’s poems, utilizing insights drawn from several Catholic literary and cultural scholars, and doing so with both astuteness and sensitivity.

We are equally elated by the short fiction in this issue. “Winter Butterfly” is by Ninotchka Rosca, Filipino-American novelist and activist, best known locally for her novels *State of War* and *Twice Blessed* (both

published by Norton with local editions published by Anvil). This new story is about a day in the life of a social worker, haunted by her beautiful brother who died at sea fifteen years earlier, as she moves about the city's grey streets, trying to learn to handle her clients "with detached compassion." It is an exquisite story, clearly the work of an artist at the peak of her powers. A line from the story itself seems to describe it best: "Exact and precise, needing no elaboration."

Augusto Antonio Aguila's "A Condition of Worship" is the soliloquy of an obsessed man, a forty-year-old academic trapped in a hopeless passion for a young volleyball player. The situation is made more sharply ironic and more deeply humiliating by the protagonist's unrelenting awareness that this is not a new story: it is Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice," however it might differ in some of its details, a pathetic tale that he has taught in many of his own classes. In the words of one reviewer: "The story's competent and contemporary voice is a welcome addition to Filipino prose and deserves recognition."

The poets – once referred to by Alfred A. Yuson as "literature's cavalry" – are led by Yuson himself. Yuson writes in practically all the literary genres, and is so good at each one, that one is hard put to choose which of them he is best at. There are those who are firm in their conviction that it is as poet that he is most triumphant. The new suite of poems included here is a good argument for their position. The poems sound several notes, from the tender, almost wistful "Dream of the Next Half (for D.)," to the despairing "What Else But Such," and the ironic "Guitar at Sea," with a few others in between. This is poetry doing what Yuson did with prose in his first novel, *The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Cafe*.

Given the dearth of translations of literary works in any of the languages used by Filipinos, Ralph Semino Galan's suite of poems – which consists of what he describes as "*malayang salin*," (free translations) of the work of five of our most widely admired and respected women poets in English – is a valuable contribution. One reviewer has expressed satisfaction at Galan's faithful and effective rendering of both the ideas and emotions from the original poems. Another reviewer has lauded its efforts at capturing the cadence of the original poems. And still another has suggested that one value of translation work like this is that it calls attention to techniques used by poets working in English, which will benefit poets who work in other languages.

Ned Parfan's is a new voice in Philippine literature in English, and it is a brave voice. In "From *Tilt Me Till I Bend*," it takes on different personae – male, female and gay; tests different forms; slips into different moods. One reviewer particularly praised its "spare and confident tone." Another one singled out "the stillness at the heart of each poem, a stillness that enables one to hear the anguished cry."

Vijae Alquisola's "*Paglasa sa Pansamantala*" consists of short, engagingly accessible poems, which, while using food and cooking as metaphors, and apparently dealing with the everyday and the mundane, actually take on current issues like the K-12 scheme, the government's ineptitude, gender repression. One reviewer sums it up succinctly: "Madulas ang wika, kontemporanyo ang dating, maliwanag ang talinhaga."

Filipino-American poet Deedle Rodriguez-Tomlinson closes our poetry section with "Manila, 1970's and Other Poems." Quiet and unpretentious, employing the rhythms of everyday speech, these deceptively simple poems initially seem to be nostalgic portraits of seasons and places left behind. But a closer reading reveals them to have their own urgency, and darkness, and pain.

Our nonfiction section opens with a most unusual memoir by the Rev. Father Angel Aparicio, O.P., perhaps the first contribution by a Dominican priest to our journal, since its founding 16 years ago by the late Ophelia Alcantara-Dimalanta. Though short, his memoir covers an entire lifetime, even as it focuses only on what the writer refers to as "signposts." Candid and unsentimental, the narrative is the more touching for its being so restrained. And, perhaps when words fail him, or perhaps when he is tempted to loosen the tight reins holding the emotion in, the writer allows other writers to speak for him: Juan Ramon Jimenez, T.S. Eliot, St. Paul, St. Therese of Lisieux... And that too, serves the story well.

Filipino-American writer Gina Apostol has published 3 novels. Her latest, *Gun Dealer's Daughter*, and an earlier one, *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata* were first published by Norton, but have Philippine editions (Anvil). Her reflections on the writing of her latest novel, winner of the PEN/Open Book Award and shortlisted for the William Saroyan International Prize, should be interesting and useful to beginning novelists and critics alike, given the dearth of this sort of writing by Filipinos based in the country.

OFW narratives have become so ubiquitous, that they set off alarm bells in most readers' minds from the very first paragraphs. But in *"Aestemasu: Japan Japan Sagot sa Kahirapan,"* Romulo B. Baquiran, Jr. once again combines comedy and pathos, without letting go of the light touch, which is rapidly becoming his signature mode. While depicting the familiar problems that confront overseas Filipino workers, he does so "sa paraang magaan at kuwela," in the words of one reviewer. This is in large part due to the self-deprecatory tone adopted by his narrator, even as he reveals the bewilderment, amazement, hesitations, and contradictions experienced by all who navigate the slippery slopes of a foreign culture.

"Claiming Our Inheritance" by Jhoanna Cruz and "Someday" by Arnie Quibranza Mejia deal with the same subject from two different perspectives: that of a woman with children and a new partner, and that of a single man. They are similar in that the protagonists are at risk. There is a certain fragility, a certain precariousness about their chosen lifestyles. One is trying to build a safe, loving home for her children, while swimming upstream, so to speak. The other is afraid to endanger his hard-won freedom and peace of mind by reconnecting with his brother.

"Tangke" is a simple coming-of-age story, made more poignant, not just by the boy-protagonist's having to endure both poverty and the bullying of his peers, but also by his ability to escape this trap through his optimism. In effect, he makes up for the literal smallness of his body, and the limitations of his options, with the height of his dreams. Ferdinand Jarin's is one of the exciting new voices in our literary scene.

We close this issue with another story of childhood – though this tale is much gentler – told by a writer familiar to readers of Philippine non-fiction, particularly travel writing. Alice Sun-Cua revisits her Iloilo childhood home in "The Studio at 57 Guanco Street." With a practiced hand, she recreates the scene in loving detail, embracing both the sweetness and the sadness which inevitably accompany such reminiscing, as well as the realization that she has never really left home.

Even as *Tomás 5* goes to press, the reports from the peer reviewers of *Tomás 6* have come in, so pre-production has commenced.

To work, then.

Note: We are now accepting contributions for Tomás 7, from all writers, including non-Thomasians and non-Filipinos. Contributions may be in English or Filipino: fiction (short stories or novel excerpts), poetry, creative nonfiction (essays, memoir, profiles, travel writing, literary journalism, journal excerpts, etc.), drama (1-act plays or short film scripts), graphic fiction, comic strips, photographic essays, and experimental work which may not fit into any of the above. Please submit both hard and soft files of your manuscript. These and soft copies (CD or USB) may be mailed or delivered to the UST Center for Creative Writing & Literary Studies, Ground Floor, Miguel de Benavides Bldng.; the soft copy may also be emailed to ccwls-tomas@mun.edu.ph)

Criticism

Ang Katotohanan at Kabutihan ng “Kagandahan”

Virgilio S. Almario

National Artist for Literature

ANO BA ANG “Kagandahan”? Mahiwaga nga ba ito? Magdaraya? May “Kagandahan” nga bang walang silbi? Matagal nang dapat sipatin at titigan ang “Kagandahan.” Upang mahango ito mula sa kumunoy ng mga popular at akademikong haka’t pananaw, katulad ng mga binanggit ko sa mga tanong sa itaas, mga nagkakatulungan ngunit nakapipinsalang popular at akademikong haka’t pagtanaw na itinanim at nilinang ng ating nakasulat na kasaysayan. Isinusulat ko ngayon ang “Kagandahan” nang may malaking titik at nakapaloob sa panipi upang ipahiwatig ang aking pagtuturing dito bílang problema sa pagtitig at upang ibukod ito sa kagandahan ng pakahulugang pambalana sa katangiang ito. Kailangang iligtas ang “Kagandahan” sa kinasadlakang piitan ng ating pagwawalangbahala. Sinasabi nating “magandang bulaklak” o “magandang damit” at sa paraang tila alam na ng lahat ang kagandahang nais nating tukuyin. Sinasabi rin nating masyadong maurirat ang sinumang magtatanong pa kung bakit maganda ang bulaklak at ano ang maganda sa damit. At totoo naman, sa paglakad ng panahon, may nabuo na táyong mga pagkakaisa sa katangiang tinatawag nating kagandahan. Isang katangiang tunay namang taglay ng maraming bagay sa ating paligid, ang katangian ng buwan, bukirin, busáy, atbpang itinatangi nating aspekto ng kalikásan o ng maraming obhetong pangkultura na ginawa ng tao (bahay, bangka, tabak, lambat, sombrero, atbp, bukod sa damit) at binibigyan ng ganitong uri ng pagpapahalaga.

Ngunit wika ko, “sa paglakad ng panahon,” at taglay ng parirala ko ang isang panukala na bunga ng kasaysayan ang anumang pamantayan natin ng kagandahan. Ang ibig sabihin, at bílang bahagi ng bokabularyong pangkultura (o wikang pangkalinangan, para higit na luminaw ang ninanais kong koneksiyon), “nilinang” ito at produkto ng pinagdaanang mga karanasan ng isang pangkat ng tao. Na dahil sa pangyayaring ito mismo ay hindi natin nauusisa kung ano nga ba ang ibig nating tukuying maganda. Na dagdag pa dahil malimit nating maranasan, maaaring nagkakaisa o napagkakaisahang pamantayan ito sa loob ng isang maliit na komunidad ngunit isang pagkakaisang mahirap maganap sa isang bansang tulad ng Filipinas na may iba’t ibang pangkating pangkultura. Halimbawa, panahon pa ng Americano ipinahayag na pambansang bulaklak ang sampagita ngunit may mga nagmumungkahi hanggang ngayon na ilang-ilang ang higit na karapat-dapat. Masisira ang kredibilidad ng lupon ng inampalan kung isang Tiboli o isang Ilokano ang nakaupô sa isang paligsahan kung alin ang mas magandang damit sa tinalak o sa inabel. Lalong malaking sakít ng ulo ang pagtukoy sa “Kagandahan” ng isang tula, pintura, eskultura, o anumang tinatawag na likhang-sining, at siyá kong nais pagtuunan ng pagsipat at pagtitig.

Sa dakong ito pa lámang ay ninanais ko nang ipanukala ang “Kagandahan” bílang isang pangngalan/pang-uri sa isang natatanging likha ng tao at itinatangi alinsunod sa gayong pamantayan. Sa kabilâng dako, ninanais ko ring ipanukala na bunga ng ating kasaysayang pambansa ay hindi umiral ang gayong pamantayan sa paraang pambansa, at lalo na sa maituturing na uri ng lumaganap at popular na pagpapahalaga sa “Kagandahan.” Kaugnay ng naturang panukala ay hindi ko naman ninanais igiit lámang ang guwang sa panlasa ng isang edukadong titser at ng isang tinderero ng taho. Totoong kagyat mamamangha ang isang barbero kapag ipinagparangalan ng isang *art critic* ang kagandahan ng pintura ni Ang Kiukok. Subalit hindi ito simpleng pagkakahating “burges/masa” sa ating lipunan. May *art critic* na magpapahayag ng higit na kagandahan ng Fernando Amorsolo kaysa Ang Kiukok. Subalit hindi rin ito basta pagkakaiba ng “paaralang pangkagandahan” sa sining. Huwag nating lubusang isisi sa kamangmangan ng barbero ang ating sarili’t napag-aralang kamangmangan. “Nilinang” din ng ating edukasyon sa sining kahit ang mga naturang paraan ng paglutas sa nagtutunggaling pagpapahalaga sa “Kagandahan.” Samantala, malaki ang posibilidad na may iba pang isyu’t kontrobersiyang pansining ang nananatiling nakalutang sa ating isip dahil na rin sa malabò at paimbabaw nating

pagtitig sa “Kagandahan” at lalo na, dahil sa higit nating pagsisikap na ituring ito nang hiwalay sa totoo at mabuti.

Bukod pa, ninanais kong buklatin ang pangyayari kung bakit ang lumaganap na pagpapahalaga sa “Kagandahan” ay ginagamit sa paraang waring **naganap-na**: isang pangyayaring historikal, ngunit walang pinagdaanang kasaysayan kayâ naipatuturing na bahagi ng kalikásan kung hindi man katutubo sa ating wika, at kayâ sinasabi ring unibersal. Na siyá ring ibinabalik na katwiran upang ipaliwanag ang kaganapan-sa-sarili ng “Kagandahan,” ang ibig sabihin, katutubo ito at unibersal kayâ hindi nanganailangan ng kasaysayan. Sapagkat higit na nakairal ang pangyayaring ito sa sapin o bahaging popular ng ating pambansang kamalayan, ninanais kong gamiting ehemplo ang pormasyon ng naturang hubog ng “Kagandahan” sa isip ng madla samantalang binubuklat at inuusisa ang mga yugto ng pormasyon sa pamamagitan ng teksto’t pangyayaring pampanitikan.

Mula sa mga naunang talakay ay nais kong tukuyin ang ilang makabuluhang daloy ng aking pagsipat at pagtitig sa pormasyon ng “Kagandahan” sa loob ng sitwasyong Filipino. Una, nakatuon ang aking sipat sa naging kasaysayan ng “Kagandahan” sanhi ng kolonyalismo at kayâ higit na magtatangi sa pagkatha nitó alinsunod sa Kristiyano’t Kanluraning karanasan ng bansa. Ikalawa, at sa kabila ng naunang panukalang tuon ng sipat, magsigang ang aking titig sa pagtuklas ng mga posibleng ugat na katutubo’t sinauna bago nasapnan o nabalutan ng halagahang kolonyal at Kristiyano. Ikatlo, nakasalig ang pagtugaygay ko sa pormasyon ng “Kagandahan” sa tekstong Filipino—na di-maiiwasang mga limbag na teksto, kahit sa mga halimbawang malinaw na produkto ng panitikang-bayan ngunit naging bahagi ng dokumentasyong pangwika at pampanitikan sa panahon ng kolonyalismo—bagaman palagiang inusisa ng pagtitig sa bawat tekstong Filipino ang posibleng bahid ng naturalisadong sangkap na Kristiyano’t Kanluranin. Ikaapat, kailangang ipanukala ng pagtitig ang mga posibilidad ng pag-iba at paghiwalay ng anyo’t pahayag na Filipino sa kahit inulirang konseptong Kanluranin. Ikalima, pagkatapos ng lahat, ang naging pormasyon ng “Kagandahan” alinsunod sa kasaysayang Filipino ay makabuluhang aspekto ng pagpapahalagang Filipino at isang aktibong puwersang umiimpluwensiya sa nagiging anyo at talakay sa “Kagandahan” sa kasalukuyan.

Matagal nang ipinahayag na hindi unibersal ang “Kagandahan.” Iba ito halimbawa sa *beautiful* ng Ingles at sa *belleza* ng Español. Bagaman, da-

hil sa kasaysayan, lalo na dahil sa ating kasaysayang kolonyal, marami nang katangian ng *belleza* at *beautiful* ang napasanib sa popular at akademikong paghaka ngayon ng “Kagandahan.” Hindi rin dapat kaligtaan ang mga diakalaing pagkakahawig ng katutubo sa “Kagandahan” at ng ipinalalagay ding katutubo sa ganitong dalumat sa ibang bansa o ibang panig ng mundo. Isaalang-alang ang ganitong pangyayari: Hindi naman sinabi ng mga misyonero na di-maganda ang mga likha ng ating mga ninuno. Idineklara lámang nilá itong mga “likha ng demonyo” ngunit waring itinuring ng mga binyagang Indio na dahil likha ng demonyo ay hindi nga maganda ang sining ng pag-ukit ng mga sinaunang bathala’t diwata. Dahil sa bago niláng pagsampalataya, itinakwil ng mga binyagang Indio kung hindi man kinalimutan (o ipinalimot?) ang kanilang nagsinang sining. Naglaho ang kung anumang iyong sinaunang maganda’t katutubong sining ng pag-ukit ng mga binyagang Indio at nabalutan/napailalim sa isinapi/isinapin na Kristiyanong sining. Ang sining ng maganda’t Kristiyano, siyempre, ang malimit na nakakaengkuwentro ngayon ng mga antropologo sa mga pook ng binyagang Kristiyano. Matagal nang trabaho ng antropolohiya ang pagtukoy sa mga sangkap na pandaigdigang sangkatauhan. Ngunit higit na nahuhulog ang mga paghukay na antropolohiko sa mga tagpo ng pagsasanga bago matagpuan ang simula, sa mga paghihidwa nang hindi matunton ang unang sanhi, sa mga kopya’t inobasyon bago ang nag-iisa’t hakang Ulanan, sa mga bakás palayò sa unang hakbang, kung bagá, sa dalampasigan ng isda ni Darwin.

Kayá hindi mahalinhang ang Agham ang Pagsampalataya.

Ngunit Pagsampalataya din ang ugat ng “Kagandahan” bílang unibersal. Sang-ayon sa mga mito, bahagi ito ng santinakpang nilikha ng isang Panginoong Maykapal. Katutubo din at matalik na bahagi ito ng lahat ng bagay na bunga ng Dakilang Paglikha at kayá maaaring tukuyin alinsunod sa ikinalulugod na katangian ng Kalikásang Pandaigdig. Gayunman, ang kasaysayan ng Pagsampalataya ang siyá ring patnubay sa naging pagpangitain sa “Kagandahan.” Bawat Pagsampalataya ay nag-iwan ng hubog at paglalarawan sa ulirang “Kagandahan”—kani-kaniya, iba-iba—at maituturing ngayong dokumentasyon sa pagiging di-unibersal ng pagpangitain sa “Kagandahan” ng iba-ibang Pagsampalataya.

“Magpaglilong Kagandahan”

ANG PARAAN NG PAGTUKOY sa “Kagandahan” alinsunod sa naging mga dominanteng Pagsampalatayang Kanluranin, sa kasawiang-palad, ang pinairal sa atin ng ating kasaysayang kolonyal at naging matingkad na bahagi ng ating popular na kamalayan. [Bagaman may mga palatandaan ng gayunding epekto ng sinaunang pagsampalataya sa mga relikyang sinaunang likha at matandang panitikang-bayan. Dapat itong igawa ng isang hiwalay na titig.] Kayâ naging popular na hambingan natin ng “maganda” si Venus ng mitolohiyang Griego-Romano o si Birheng Maria ng Kristiyanismo. Dahil sa pagsamba, o dahil sa lubos na pagtitiwala sa edukasyong Kanluranin, ni hindi natin inusisa ang kronolohiya ng pagpangitain kay Venus at kay Birheng Maria, gaya ng dapat inunawa nating epekto ng pagwasak sa poleteistikong pagsampalatayang Griego-Romano ng monoteistikong relihiyong Kristiyano, upang maigawa ng magkabukod na dambana sina Venus at Birheng Maria. Sa mga edukado ngayon, maaaring maipahiwatig ang pagkakaiba sa lastag na pag-imahen sa kapanganakan ni Venus sa ibabaw ng kabibe at sa nakabálot sa saplot na Inmaculada Concepcion. Ngunit sa karaniwang makata sa panahon ng awit, korido, at komedya, ang bawat butihing prinsesa ay maaaring ihambing nang magkasabay kay Venus at kay Birheng Maria. Sa *Florante at Laura*, halimbawa, si Laura ang epitome ng “Kagandahan” alinsunod sa pagtanaw at pagpapahalaga ni Florante. Nang unang mamalas ni Florante si Laura, inilarawan niya ang prinsesa ng Albania sa ganitong paraan:

“siyáng pamimitak at kusang nagsabog
ng ningning ang talàng kaagaw ni Venus.
Anaki ay bagong umahon sa bubog,
buhok ay naglugay sa perlas na batok;

“tuwang pangalawa kung hindi man langit
ang itinatápon ng mahinhing titig.
O ang luwalhating buko ng ninibig,
pain ni Cupidong walang makadakip!

“Liwanag ng mukha’y walang pinag-ibhan
kay Febo kung anyong bagong sumisilang;
katawang butihin ay timbang na timbang
at mistulang ayon sa hinhin ng asal.”

Dapat nating ipagpalagay na isang Kristiyano si Florante. [At siyempre, Kristiyano si Balagtas.] Ngunit dapat din nating ipagpalagay na natutuhan niya sa Atenas ang mitolohikong pagsilang ni Venus sa ibabaw ng mga alon sa dagat, gaya ng ginugunita sa dakilang pintura ni Botticelli, at iyon ang unang ipinagunita sa kaniya ni Balagtas nang lumitaw si Laura hábang kinakausap siyá ni Haring Linceo. Ngunit isang Kristiyanisadong Venus na si Laura. Bagaman may buhok na tila nakalugay na perlas sa batok ng isang paganong diyosa, tigib ang prinsesa sa “mahinhing titig” at “hinhin ng asal” ng isang Kristiyanong santa. Isang marikit na tagpo ito ng nagsanib na bayagang Europeo’t Kristiyano sa popular na sapin ng pambansang kamalayan, nagsanib na ang “Kagandahang” Europeo’t Kristiyano sa pag-imahen kay Laura, nabuo nang magkasanib sa pagkakatanghal ni Balagtas, at hindi nahahalungkat ang naging kasaysayan.

Gayunman, saglit na kutitap lámang ito sa nadirimplang isip ng binata. Bago ito’y inaalaala niya ang sanhi ng kaniyang kasawian, ang mga kabuktutang nilikha ni Adolfo dahil sa labis na pag-ibig sa kapangyarihan, at lubha niyang ipinagngitngit ang hinala na pinagtaksilan siyá pati ng kasintahan. Sa laot ng kaniyang panibugho ay naihibik niya nang buong pait sa ika-41 saknong ng awit:

“Katiwala ako’t ang iyong karikitan
kapilas ng langit, anaki’y matibay;
tapat ang puso mo’t di nagunamgunam
na ang paglililo’y nása kagandahan.

Buntis sa napag-aralang kabuluhan ng “Kagandahan” ang nabanggit na ipinapahayag ni Balagtas kay Florante. Pangunahin dito ang halos natural na pagbibigay ng “tiwala” sa kagandahan at ang naganap na ring pagsira (“paglililo”) sa gayong tiwala—ang Orihinal na Kasalanan—sang-ayon sa Bibliya. Naglahò ang Eden dahil sa unang pagtataksil, at tinupad ito ni Eva—ang sinaunang kinatawan ng “Kagandahan.” Mula dito, at gaya ng na-

tanto ni Florante, madaling malilining kung bakit babae ang kasarian ng “Kagandahan” at kung bakit kalarawan ng kahinaan ang babae. Ang “kahinaan” ng babae ay higit kaysa pisikal na kalikasán ng “anak ni Eva,” manapa, anak siyá ni Eva kayâ kulang din sa wastong bait at muni.

Siyempre, dapat ding isaalang-alang na panimulang bahagi pa lámang ito ng kabuuang pagpurga kay Florante, ang proseso ng paglilinis sa kaniyang isip at damdamin, upang maghunos mula sa mapusok na mandirigma tungo sa isang makatarungang hari ng Albania. Lumikha rin si Balagtas ng isa pang “Kagandahan,” si Flerida na sa paglalarawan ni Aladin kapag kapiling ng ibang mga prinsesa ay tila “si Diana sa gitna ng maraming nimpa” ngunit may “pusong bayani.” Matalino kahit ang pagkasangkapan ni Balagtas sa mitolohiyang klasiko. Sa kaniya mismong talababâ, ipinaliwanag ni Balagtas na si Venus ay “diyosa ng pag-ibig at kagandahan” samantalang si Diana ay diyosang “maibigin sa pangangaso, huwaran ng kagandahan at panginoon ng mga Nimfas.” Kapuwa uliran ng “Kagandahan” ang dalawang diyosang Romano ngunit isiningit ni Balagtas ang karagdagang anotasyon na “maibigin sa pangangaso” ukol kay Diana, isang dagdag na katangian ni Flerida bílang “Kagandahan” na nagtataglay ng “**pusong bayani**”—isang babaeng mandirigma, matatag magpasiya, at sa dulo’y siyáng nagpawala ng palaso na kumitil sa pangunahing “lilo:” si Adolfo—at maaaring ituring ng ating pagbása ngayon na palatandaan ito ng pagsisikap ni Balagtas na gamitin ang napag-aralan upang igpawan ang napag-aralan.

Hindi pa natin lubusang napagwawari ang naturang leksiyon mula kay Balagtas. Nakabilanggo pa rin ang ating titig sa itinuro sa ating paraan ng pagtanaw sa loob ng panahon ng kolonyalismo. Lubhang orihinal siya para sa ating napag-aralang Kanluraning pagtitig. Pagkatapos ng dakila ngunit napugtong Himagsikang 1896, waring ang naganap na modernisasyon sa ika-20 siglo ay higit pang nagpakapal sa pader ng edukasyong Kanluranin na nagpipiit sa ating pambansang kamalayan, pinipigil kung hindi man tahasang sinisiil ang kislap-diwang may adhikang palayain ang pambansang pananaw at may programang bumuo ng matipunong palatuntunan tungo sa pagpapakahulugang Filipino.

Isang halimbawa nga ng ating kasawian ang mababaw/paimbabaw at nakasandig sa pagpapakahulugang Kanluranin nating paraan ng pagtitig sa “Kagandahan.” Noong 1887, nag-ukol ng pag-aaral sa *arte metrica* ng mga Tagalog si Rizal, ang itinuturing nating pangunahing palaisip ng lahi,

ngunit hindi niya pinag-ukulan ng paglilimi ang hubog ng “Kagandahan” sa katutubong tugma’t súkat. Binanggit lámang niyang “(1)as poesias mas bellas y poeticas” (ang mga taludturang napakaganda at napakamatulain) ay nakasulat sa *cuartetos* o aapating taludtod at inalala niya si Balagtas bílang “*un modelo de modo de hablar de los tagalos*” (isang huwaran sa paraan ng pagpapahayag ng mga Tagalog). Kung sakali, ito ang patnubay natin upang muli’t muling balikan ang *Florante at Laura*, gaya ng isinagawa ng mga Balagtasista sa panahon ng Amerikano, at hanguan ng maituturing na tradisyonal na mga pamantayan sa pagtula. Ngunit limitado sa pagbuo ng magandang tugma’t súkat ang pag-aaral ni Rizal at sa kawalan ng ibang patnubay ay maituturing na pangunahing sanhi ito kayâ nabilanggo tungo sa paghubog ng tulang may tugma’t súkat ang tradisyonal na pagtula ng mga Balagtasista.

Noong 1929, sinikap dagdagan ni Lope K. Santos ang kodigo ng tugma’t súkat mula sa mga tuntunin ni Rizal. Hindi lámang iyon. Sa pamamagitan ng mahabàng lekturang *Peculiaridades de la poesia tagala* ay sinikap ni L.K. Santos na saklawin ang ipinalalagay niyang mga esensiyal na katangian ng katutubong pagtula. Apat, wika niya, ang sangkap ng tula: (1) tugma, (2) súkat, (3) talinghaga, at (4) kariktan. Ang unang dalawa, wika pa niya, ang bahaging “organiko o materyal” ng tula; ang hulíng dalawa ang “kaluluwa” (*alma*) o ang bahaging “espiritwal.” Gayunman, nobenta por-siyento ng kaniyang paliwanag ay naukol sa tugma’t súkat, lalo na upang magdulot ng elaborasyon sa mga sinabi ni Rizal sa lektura nitó sa Berlin hinggil sa pagbuo ng taludtod. Sa kabilâ ng asersiyon hinggil sa higit na kabuluhan ng talinghaga at ng kariktan ay iilang pangungusap ang naiukol niya sa mga ito.

Isang napakahalagang pahayag ni L.K. Santos ay ang depinisyon ng talinghaga bílang “isang pagtatanghal na hindi tuwiran o pagpapahayag na matayutay ukol sa isang kaisipan, damdamin, lunggati, layunin, pangyayari o anumang bagay na ninanais mailabas sa pamamagitan ng mga salità o mailarawan sa pamamagitan ng mga pariralang may angkop na mga súkat at tugma.” (*Es como una manifestacion indirecta o expresion figurada de algun pensamiento, sentir, deseo, objeto, hecho u otra cosa cualquiera que se quiere exteriorizar con palabras o describir con frases medidas y rimadas convenientemente.*) Kasunod nitó ang pahayag na ang kariktan (na tatawagin din niyang “kagandahan”) kasáma ng talinghaga ang bumubuo sa “tunay na kalu-

luwa” (*el alma verdadera*) ng tulang Tagalog. Bakit? Dahil “pinatitingkad” diumano ng kariktan at talinghaga “ang antas ng inspirasyong nagpasigla nitó. Sinasalamin at inililitaw ang kakayahang pangkaisipan, ang kalidad ng kaisipan, ang pagiging pihikan ng damdamin, ang sigla ng guniguni, ang yaman ng wika, at sa isang salitâ, ang pinagsanib na kultura ng makata.”

Tigib sa makabagong pagmuni ang naturang mga pahayag ni L.K. Santos. Sa pamamagitan ng kaniyang depinisyon ay ibinigay niya sa talinghaga ang kapangyarihan upang maging pangkalahatan at “mapagbuong simulain” (na ginamit ko noong 1985) na nangangasiwa sa paglikha ng tula. Tila ito “utak ng paglikha:” idinidikta nitó ang nagiging balangkas, hubog ng sagnong, organisasyon ng mga kaisipan, makinaryang panretorika at pantayutay, paraan ng paglalarawan, atbpang kailangang sangkap upang magdulot ng malinaw, ganap, at nagsasariling batayan ng kahulugan. Binigyan din niya ng batayang historikal ang talinghaga sa pamamagitan ng pag-sasabing nagmumula ito sa “pinagsanib na kultura” (*la cultura integral*) ng makata, salungat sa karaniwang haka na isa itong “hiwaga”—“*misterio*,” sa interpretasyon ng Noceda at Sanlucar (1754)—at mahirap maintindihan. Wari ngang nais ni L.K. Santos na hawiin ang tabing ng hiwaga na ibinalot sa talinghaga, ipaturing na alamat ang gayong pambálot, kaugnay lalo na ng isa pang sinaunang paniwala na bunga ito ng “inspirasyong dibino,” at upang ilantad ang materyalistang sinapupunan nitó.

May dobleng talim ang pagmuning ito ni L.K. Santos hinggil sa talinghaga. Sa isang bandá, kaagad mahihiwatigan ang pailalim na pagtung-gali laban sa nakamihansang operasyon ng tula na nakasandig sa “inspirasyong hulog ng langit,” isang hakang maaaring ugatin mula sa Huwarang Anyo ni Plato ngunit pinalayaw ng Kristiyanong pagsampalataya hinggil sa isang henesis ng lahat ng bagay sa santinakpan mula sa isang Diyos na Manlilikha. Ang mistikal na bukal na ito ng talinghaga ang malimit gamiting katwiran noon kung bakit mahirap ipaliwanag ang “Kagandahan.” Sa kabilâng bandá, ganap na nakasandig ang kaniyang paniwala sa historikal at kongkretong matris ng paglikha, sa pinagdaanang karanasan at edukasyon ng makata—sa isang *cultura integral*—at higit na nakapangyayari sa paghubog ng isang likhang-sining. Nakasalig sa makabago’t siyentipikong haka ng Realismo (kapuwa mula sa bukal na Europeo nitó at bukal na Americano) ang kaniyang hakang talinghaga bílang salamin at tanghalan ng daigdig ng makata, ang kaniyang “kakayahang pangkaisipan, ang kalidad ng kaisi-

pan, ang pagiging pihikan ng damdamin, ang sigla ng guniguni, ang yaman ng wika,” atbpang materyal na puhunan bílang manlilikha.

Ang Realistang pagmuni sa talinghaga ni L.K. Santos ay dumaloy mulang Europa sa pamamagitan ng mga akdang Propagandista bago matapos ang ika-19 siglo at sa pamamagitan ng modernong edukasyong Americano sa bungad ng ika-20 siglo. Ngunit nilinang din ito ng mapagpalayang kaisipang Katipunero mula sa halimbawa ni Balagtas. Dapat balikan sa bagay na ito ang sinipi ko nang saknong ni Balagtas hinggil sa “Kagandahan” subalit upang unawain naman ngayon ang iwi nitóng hálagáhan na maituturing na kawangki ng hálagáhang Realista:

“Katiwala ako’t ang iyong kariktan
kapilas ng langit, anaki’y matibay;
tapat ang puso mo’t di nagunamgunam
na ang paglililo’y nása kagandahan.

Sa *Florante at Laura*, himutok ito noon at paglait ni Florante sa ipinalalagay niyang taksil na kagandahan ni Laura. Nais ko ngayong ipanukala ang alegorikong pagbása sa saknong upang mailantad ang pinagbatayan nitóng paraan ng pagtanaw sa “Kagandahan,” gayundin ang kaibhan nitó sa nangibabaw na poetika sa panahon ng kolonyalismong Español sa isang bandá, at ang naging silbi nitó sa ideolohiyang mapagpalaya ng panitikang Katipunero na may malaking posibilidad na nasimsim din ni L.K. Santos sa kabilâng bandá.

Ang Katutubong Ganda

UPANG HIGIT NA maitampok ang radikal na kabuluhan ng pagtanaw sa “Kagandahan” alinsunod sa ipinatititigan kong saknong ni Balagtas ay mainam na sipatin ang mga unang nakasulat na impormasyon hinggil dito. Muli, isang malungkot na pangyayaring nakasulat sa wikang Español o bahagi ng dokumentasyong Español ang pinakaunang mga limbag na impormasyon hinggil sa “Kagandahan.” Katutubo ang salitang-ugat ng “Kagandahan,” ngunit nasasaplutan ng pakahulugang banyaga sa wikang banyaga. Dumarating sa atin ito ngayon sa pamamagitan ng isang banyagang wika at mahirap ganap na tarukin ang nangyaring distorsiyon sa inilapat na kahulugan ng mga misyonerong Espanyol.

Sa bokabularyo halimbawa nina Noceda at Sanlucar (1754) ang lahok na “**gandá**” ay may pakahulugang “*Lindeza, hermosa, logro*.” May dalawang mukha ang “ganda” sa tingin ng mga butihing padre. Nása isang panig ang *lindeza* at *hermosura* na kapuwa tumutukoy sa mainam na anyo at nása kabilâng panig ang *logro* na may kaugnayan sa mabuting kapalaran. Itinuturing na “maganda” sa isang panig ang nakalulugod sa pandamá, lalo na sa paningin; at sa kabilâng panig ang tagumpay at pakinabang na nakamit ng isang tao. Bagaman nakakatulad ng ibig sabihin ay higit na kapaki-pakinabang ang mga paglilinaw sa dalawang pakahulugan ng *Vocabulario Tagalo* (1624) ni Fray Francisco de San Antonio.

GANDA-1, pc. El bien, que se halla en persona, que no hay que tacharle, por ser de suyo buena, sin que se adorna y componga. Y de aquí, cualquier cosa, que tiene tan buena hechura, que sin ponerla más adorno, es: *Magandá*.

GANDA-2, pc. La ganancia, que se saca del trato:empleo Diez tostones; si saco veinte, es: *Ibayiu*: si saco treinta, es: *Gandá*. *Ginagandahán siya nang calacal*; saque ganancia de el. *Ang gandá sa acquiring puhunan, ay sanggayón*. En este sentido no tiene más composiciones, empero dar a logro. *Nagpapagandá*: el que lo da, y el que lo recibe. *Pagandahán*: Darlo or recibirlo, de una ó de otra parte.

Nasabi ko na ang panganib ng distorsiyon bunga ng pangyayaring nakabatay ngayon ang tinititigan nating pakahulugan sa pagkakatalâ ng mga banyagang misyonero. Maraming ebidensiya ng gayong sinasadyang pagbago sa katotohanan dahil sa iwing prehuwisyo ng banyagang mananakop laban sa itinuturing na imperyor na kultura ng sákop. Napakaposible din ng pagbaluktot ng kahulugan, hindi man sinasadya, dahil sa limitasyon ng pagkaunawa ng isang banyaga sa ating wika. Gayunman, bukod sa tila ito kaso ng kapit sa patalim, dahil wala nang iba akong alam sa ngayon na magagamit na sanggunian, makabuluhang isaalang-alang ang posibilidad na ibinuhos ng mga padre ang talino’t kakayahan upang makabuo ng isang kapani-paniwalang aklat sa leksikograpiya na alam din niláng sasailalim sa balidasyon ng susunod sa kanilang henerasyon ng mga misyonero.

Mula dito, maaaring ihaka na ang unang pagdalumat sa “Kagandahan” ay katangiang umaakit o tumatawag ng pansin. Hindi lámang iyon. Ang pangunahing pang-akit nitó ay ang “**nakalulugod**” sa pandamá. Bílang pamantayan, anumang bagay o sinumang tao na ituring na “maganda” ay nagtataglay ng pang-akit na maaaring tamasahin: karaniwang nakaaaaliw sa matá, masarap lasapin, mabango sa pang-amoy, banayad sa tainga, o malambot at makinis haplusin. Isang kahanga-hangang pagkakataón ang magtaglay ng “Kagandahan” at maaaring asahan ng nagtataglay nitó ang paghanga ng sinilangang lipunan at daigdig. Nakatatakam ang “magan-dang” paghahanay ng kakanin sa restoran; pinapalakpakan ang “magan-dang” pagtugtog sa piyano; ipinagmamalaki ang “maganda” at bagong damit; napapalingon ang lahat sa “magandang” hubog ng katawan ng binibini; pangarap ng marami ang “magandang” kotse.

Ang ikalawang pagdalumat sa “Kagandahan” ay katangiang umaakit sapagkat “**nakasisiyá.**” Ang pamantayang “nakasisiyá” ay iba, bukod sa malimit ituring na higit, kaysa “nakalulugod.” Sinusúkat ang “kasiyáhan” sa idinudulot na kabutihan. Ang isang bagay na “maganda,” alinsunod sa ikalawang pamantayang ito, ay hindi lámang “nakalulugod” sa pandamá. Sa halip, ang pang-akit nitó ay nása idinudulot na gamit o silbi, at siyempre, gamit o silbi sa tao at sa daigdig ng tao. Itinuturing nitó ang “Kagandahan” na isang **kasangkapan** tungo/ukol sa isang layunin o wakas. “Maganda” ang bahay na makinis ang pagkakayari. Ngunit higit na “maganda” ang bahay na hindi naibubuwal ng hangin at bagyo. Kaagad ding mapapansin na ang ganitong “Kagandahan” ay sinusukat alinsunod sa pangangailangan. “Maganda” ang isang matalim na palakol dahil nakasisibak ng matigas na kahoy ngunit “maganda” rin ang matigas na kahoy bílang haligi dahil hindi kinakagat ng anay; “maganda” ang mainit na panahon dahil mabilis tinutuyo ng araw ang ibinilad na palay, ngunit “maganda” rin ang panahong maulan para sa alaga ng bagong tanim na palay.

[Pagmunian pa natin ang naturang maituturing na dalawang taal na pagtingin sa “Kagandahan.” Maaaring pansinin na nahahawig ito sa talakay ni Plato, halimbawa, sa *Ang Republika*. Maaaring usigin: Hindi kayá dahil taga-Europa ay nabigyang diin ng mga misyonero ang katangian ng “Kagandahan” alinsunod sa pamantayang Europeo? Subalit maaari ding isaalang-alang na maaaring isang pook ito ng pagsasanib ng katutubo at ng banyaga—ng di-karaniwang pagkakasundo sa engkuwentro ng dalawang

kultura sa ating kasaysayan—at maaaring gamiting mulaang batayan ng pagsusuri sa kasaysayan ng “Kagandahan” sa Filipinas. Hindi nasasaklaw ng naturang pagsasaalang-alang ang isa pang posibilidad—na ang paman-tayan o katangian ng “nakalulugod” at “nakasisiya” sa katutubong “Kagan-dahan” ay maaaring iba (ibang-iba) sa “nakalulugod” at “nakasisiya” sa Eu-ropa.

[Titigan halimbawa ang halagahang “**kagandahang-loob.**” Isa itong tiyakang katutubo’t sinaunang halagahan at kailangang itampok sa hanay ng mga tinatawag na “halagahang Filipino” ng mga moralista’t edukador. Ito ang birtud na kailangang taglayin ng isang tunay na Filipino, kasáma ng “marangal,” “malikhain,” “matuwid,” atbpang kabayanihang makapag-dudulot ng pagbabago’t kaunlaran sa bansa. Ngunit limiin pa. Hindi ba’t ang binanggit kong “marangal,” “malikhain,” at “matuwid” (at makatwiran) ay mga katangiang “nakalulugod” at “nakasisiya” ng sinumang nagtataglay ng “kagandahang-loob”? Malaki ang posibilidad na ganito ang sinaunang turing sa naturang birtud. Ipinasasaklaw ng komunidad o nayon sa “kagan-dahang-loob” ang itinuturing niláng nakalulugod at nakasisiyang katangian ng “pagpapakatao” upang maging mabuting bahagi ng lipunan.

[Nakatakda itong sapnan ng katangiang kailangan sa kaayusang kol-onyal. Masigasig na idinagdag halimbawa ng Simbahan ang “**kawangga-wa**” bilang tatak ng banal na “kagandahang-loob” at kalakip ng pagsisimba, pagrorosaryo, pag-aalay ng kandila, pagsunod sa sakramento, atbp. Matalik na kaugnay nitó ang “paglilimos” (mula sa Español na *limosna*), lalo na sa mga “pulubi” (mulí, mula sa Español na *pobre*, dahil wala sa sinaunang bokabularyo ang “limos” at “pulubi”). At marahil, ang higit na matalinong pagbaluktot sa “kagandahang-loob” ay ang pagdidiin sa “**kagandahang-asal,**” isang katangiang ipinataglay sa mga sákop at iniangat pang senyas ng *urbanidad* hanggang sa mga sermon ni Padre Modesto de Castro. Sa ngayon nga’y naipagkakamali ang “kagandahang-asal” sa mga sangkap ng “kagandahang-loob” at sa gayong paraan naituturo na ang etiketa ng wastong pananamit, wastong kilos sa pagtitipon, wastong pag-upô, at pag-sagot ng “po” at “opo”—na mga aral sa kagandahang-asal—ay katutubong mga birtud sa “kagandahang-loob.” May mga pahayag pa na katutubo rin sa atin ang *hospitalidad*—bagaman nakapagtatakáng wala táyong katutubong salita para sa kagandahang-asal na ito—upang iaryl na “kagandahang-loob” ang pagpipista at pagkakaloob ng makakáya sa bisita sukdang mamulubi.]

Mula dito at batay sa dalawang naturang taal na pagdalumat, sa nagdaang panahon ng nakasulat/nakalimbag na kasaysayan ng Filipinas ay binalutan/sinaplutan ang “Kagandahan” ng mga katangian, pamantayan, at pagtingin na malimit na sumisikil sa una o sa ikalawang katutubong pagdalumat alinsunod sa “simoy” ng panahon, maliban sa ilang maikling yugtong mapagpalaya at may adhikang usisain ang kairalan.

Sa ating panitikang pambansa, isang kauna-unahang limbag ukol sa “Kagandahan” ay ang tulang papuri ni Don Pelipe de Jesus sa librong salin ng *Barlaan at Josaphat* (1712) ni Fray Antonio de Borja. Sa ika-11 sagnong ng mahabang dalit ni P. de Jesus ay naipatalastas niya:

Ang Padre Antonio de Borja
kay Hesus na Compañia,
siyang naging dalubasa
nitong **aral na maganda**. (akin ang bold)

Pagkaraan ng ganitong introduksiyon, iniulat ni P. de Jesus ang natutuhan niyang “**aral na maganda**” sa aklat ni Fray de Borja. Sa gayon, pagkaraang purihin ang misyonerong nagsalin ng *Barlaan at Josaphat* ay nagmistulang isang sermon ang tula ni P. de Jesus para sa mga kapuwa Tagalog—isang sermon hinggil sa halaga ng aklat na pinupuri niya at sa mga pakinabang na idudulot nitó sa mambabasang Indio upang maging tunay na Kristiyano. Para sa atin ngayon, ang “aral na maganda” ni P. de Jesus ay isang pahayag ng paglalagat sa layuning “Kagandahan” ng pagsulat sa panahon ng kolonyalismong Espanyol. “Maganda” ang panitikan o aklat ng panitikan na may “aral,” at nakasaad sa tula mismo ni P. de Jesus ang mga “aral” na itinuturing na “maganda” sa panahong iyon, halimbawa’y pag-iwas sa mga layaw at bisyo, pagpapakumbabâ, pagsasakripisyo, at sa maikling salitâ, pagsunod sa mga utos ng Simbahan upang magkamit ng biyaya sa Langit. Isang makapangyarihang talinghaga ni P. de Jesus hinggil sa umiiral na kawalan ng “aral na maganda” sa hanay ng mga Indio ay ang ika-29 sagnong:

Katawan mong madudurog,
uuori’t mabubulok,
siyang sinusunod-sunod,
hinihimas, inihirog.

Sa ating pananaw ngayon, sinasabi ni P. de Jesus na lubhang nakatuon ang hilig ng tao sa pagsunod sa pansariling nais, sa lubhang pagtamasa sa ngayon at dito, at nalilimot ang pag-aalaga ng kaluluwa, ang pagtunton sa kabanalang kailangan upang magtamo ng kaginhawahan sa kabiláng-búhay. Bakit mo sinusunod ang hilig ng katawan mo? Surot niya sa mga Indio. Pansamantala lámang ang katawan mo, uuorin iyan at mabubulok kahit ano ang gawin mo pagsapit ng kamatayan. Ang higit mong dapat asikasuhin hábang nabubúhay ay ang mga “aral na maganda” ng Simbahan upang makaligtas ang iyong kaluluwa at magkamit ng walang-hanggang “Kagandahan” sa Langit.

Ang “aral na maganda” ni P. de Jesus ay isang pagdidiin sa isang higit na kapaki-pakinabang na *logro* at *ganancia*. Iginigiit nitó ang isang “Kagandahan” ng kabutihan alinsunod sa isang **pamantayang etikal**—ang moralidad na Kristiyano. Malimit na itinatanghal ito sa tunggaliang birtud vs bisyo: birtud ang “aral na maganda” at kabaligtaran ang pangit at masamâng landas ng bisyo. [Magandang alalahanin pa ang ganito ring pamantayang moral sa *arete* ni Plato upang masipat ang malalim na ugat ng huwarang “aral na maganda” ni P. de Jesus.] Ang “aral na maganda” ng Kristiyanismo ay isang mahusay na kasangkapan upang magkamit ng isang higit na permanenteng ginhawa sa kabiláng-búhay kaysa panandaliang ligaya ngayon at dito sa lupa. Itinuturo ng “aral na maganda” ang paraan ng pagpapakabanal sa búhay bílang totoong daan—ang “daang matuwid,” sasabihin sa *Barlaan at Josaphat*—para mailigtas ang kaluluwa sa parusa’t sumpa ng Impiyerno.

Kasangkapan ng Katotohanang Kolonyal

SUBALIT IDINADAKO NG “aral na maganda” ni P. de Jesus ang “nakasisiyá” sa pamantayan ng “totoo.” Ang “Kagandahan” ay “maganda” hindi lámang dahil sa dulot na kabutihan kundi dahil sa taglay na Katotohanan. May himig na nag-aatas ang tula ni P. de Jesus. Nása antas na imperatibo at hindi dapat suwayin. Mapapahamak ang sinumang sumuway. Samantala, naghihintay ang gantimpala, ang *tiyak* at garantisadong gantimpala, sa sinumang sumunod sa kaniyang natutuhang “aral na maganda” mula sa aklat ni Fray de Borja. Tulad ng ibang pamantayang etikal, ipinatitiyak ng moralidad na Kristiyano na nais palaganapin ng aklat ni Fray Borja ang Katotohanan ng mga “aral na maganda” sa pamamagitan ng

garantisadong pag-akyat sa Langit. Hinubog ng Katotohanang Kristiyano ang pinaniwalaang “Kagandahan” sa wika ni P. de Jesus.

Ang Katotohanan ng “Kagandahan” ang nais suriin ng ika-41 saknong ni Balagtas.

Nagsimula ang kritika ni Balagtas sa pamamagitan ng pagpapasok sa sangkap ng “**tiwala**.” “*Katiwala ako’t ang iyong kariktan/ kapilas ng langit anaki’y matibay*,” pagtatapat ni Florante sa unang dalawang taludtod ng ika-41 saknong. Naniwala diumano siyá sa “Kagandahan” (kariktan) ni Laura at kayá ibinigay ang ganap na “tiwala.” At ano ang batayan niya sa gayong pagtitiwala? Nagtiwala siyá sa “Kagandahan” ni Laura dahil lubhang ikinasiyá niya ang katangian nitóng “matibay.” Pansinin din ang paghahambing sa “Kagandahan” bilang “kapilas ng langit” kayá inakalang “matibay.” Makabuluhan ang naturang paghahambing sa yugto ng paglililaw ukol sa mapaghimagsik na saloobin ng saknong ni Balagtas. Samantala, higit munang dapat pag-ukulan ng pansin ang panukalang “tiwala” bílang kahingian sa “nakasisiyá” upang maituring na Katotohanan ang “Kagandahan.”

Ang “Kagandahan” bilang kasangkapan ay itinuturing na mabuti kapag naglilingkod tungo/ukol sa isang layunin o wakas. Nasusubok ang naturang kabutihan sa pamamagitan ng aktuwal na gamit, sa *totoong* paglilingkod ng kasangkapan. Nasusubok ang layunin nitóng maging matibay, matatag, mahusay, atbpang katangian ng mabuting kasangkapan. Sa paulit-ulit pang gamit ay lumilitaw at tumitingkad ang *totoong* pakinabang nitó, ang *totoong* kabutihan nitó bílang kasiyá-siyáng kasangkapan. Sa ganitong pagsubok natitiyak ang katapatan ng kasangkapan sa itinakdang layunin para dito, at sa gayon, nabubuo ang “tiwala” sa “Kagandahan” ng kasangkapan. Ang isang punongkahoy ay ginawang haligi dahil inakalang matibay. Nasubok ang tibay nitó bílang haligi nang hindi maibuwal ng nagdaang malakas na hangin ang bahay. Nasubok pa ang tibay ng haligi sa pagdaan ng mga bagyo. Dahil sa nakitang *totoong* tibay ng haligi ay nabuo ang tiwala ng komunidad sa punongkahoy upang gamitin itong haligi sa mga bahay. Naniwala ang komunidad sa katapatan ng punongkahoy sa gamit nitó bílang matibay na haligi.

Ang ibig sabihin, kailangan ang sapat na panahon upang matarok ang katapatan ng kasangkapan sa itinakdang gamit nitó. Kailangan ang **panahon ng pagsubok** upang mapatunayan ang *totoong* nakasisiyá,

upang matiyak na totoo ang “katotohanan” ng “Kagandahan.” Sapagkat maaaring may hanggahan palá ang kabutihan nitó. Paano kung biglang matuklasan na pinamahayan ng anay ang pinaniwalaang matibay na haligi? Matibay lámang palá ang punongkahoy laban sa hangin at bagyo ngunit mahinà sa kagat ng anay. Biglang naligalig ang buong komunidad na nagtiwala sa paggamit ng punongkahoy bílang haligi ng kanilang mga tahanan. Kailangang magpalit ng mga haligi at kailangang humanap ng ibang punongkahoy na mapagtitiwalaang may higit na tibay. Kailangang humanap ng punongkahoy na matibay laban sa hangin at bagyo at matibay din laban sa anay. At sa pagpapalit ng mga haligi, kailangan din niláng buwagin ang kanilang mga tahanan. Gayon kabigat ang pinsalang idinudulot ng radikal na pagbabago, kung maaaring ihambing ang magaganap na halos pagwasak sa bahay dahil sa pagpapalit ng mga haligi. Samantala, nasira at naglalaho ang tiwala sa unang punongkahoy na ginamit bílang haligi. Bumagsak sa aktuwal na gamit ang Katotohanan ng unang punongkahoy, bumagsak ang totoong “Kagandahan” nitó bílang haligi.

Napakahirap umani ng tiwala. Kailangan ang matagal na panahon at ulit-ulit na pagdudulot ng kasiyáhan upang pagtiwalaan ang isang “Kagandahan.” Ito ang subersibong mensahe ng ikalawang taludtod sa ika-41 sакnong ni Balagtas. Nagtiwala diumano si Florante na matibay ang “Kagandahan” ni Laura dahil “kapilas ng langit.” Katulad at bahagi si Laura ng “aral na maganda” ni P. de Jesus. Ngunit sa yugtong ito ng panibugho at paghingi ng katarungan sa Langit ni Florante ay natarok niyang maaaring magtaksil ang “Kagandahan.” Wika ni Florante sa ikatlo’t ikapat na taludtod ng ika-41 sакnong, *“tapat ang puso mo’t di nagunamgunam/na ang paglililo’y nása kagandahan.”* Hindi si Laura lámang ang tinutukoy na “kagandahan.” Nagpapahiwatig ng himagsik laban sa nakamihansan ang talinghaga ni Balagtas. Iginigiit naman ngayon ni Balagtas ang posibilidad na maaaring di-totoo ang “aral na maganda” na pinalaganap ng panitikan mula sa panahon ni P. de Jesus. Kung ang kagandahan ni Laura na “kapilas ng langit” ay maaaring magtaksil, hindi ba’t maaaring isunod na huwag ganap na magtiwala sa Katotohanan ng “aral na maganda” hinggil sa kabutihan ng Langit? O kayâ, at isa pa rin itong marikit na himagsik. O kayâ, nais ipanukala ni Balagtas na huwag lubhang magtiwala sa tibay ng “Kagandahan” kahit ito’y “kapilas ng langit.” Muslak si Florante, lubhang mapagtiwala, kayâ nalinlang tungo sa kaniyang kahabag-habag at tila wala

nang kaligtasang kapalaran. Hindi niya ginamit mabuti ang bait upang mag-ingat. Na hindi ba't isang leksiyon din para sa mga mambabasa na mag-ingat kahit sa nagpapakilala-sa-sarili na “aral na maganda” at “kapilas ng langit”?

[Higit pa sanang napatnubayan si Florante kung narinig niya ang isang matandang dalit hinggil sa “magandang ginto.” Ganito ang dalit na inilathala ng Noceda at Sanlucar:

Galing nang magandang ginto,
Ualang tumbagang cahalo,
Macaitlo mang ibobo
Di gumitang nang pagpalo.

Napakataas ng pagpapahalaga noon pa sa ginto. Isa itong kinalulugdang metal, itinuturing na mamahaling hiyas. Ngunit higit na nais itanghal ng dalit ang “galíng” ng tinutukoy na “magandang ginto,” na dahil dalisay at walang kahalòng mumurahing bakal (“tumbaga”) ay may dagdag na angk-ing tibay. Tatlong ulit na itong tinunaw (“makaitlo mang ibobo”) subalit hindi man lámang nagkalamat nang pagpapaluin. Ang ibig sabihin ng dalit, pasado sa marahas na pagsubok—sa literal na “palihan” ng tibay—kayâ bukod sa nakalulugod ay nakasisiya ang “magandang ginto.” Higit itong karapat-dapat sa tiwala kaysa tulad ni Laura, alinsunod sa kasalukuyang pagmumuni ni Florante, na agad pinagtiwalaan ng ating bida dahil may “Kagandahang” “kapilas ng langit.” Higit na kailangan ang mahigpit na pagsubok na katulad ng pinagdaanan ng “magandang ginto” upang mapagtiwalaan ang isang “Kagandahan.”]

Dagdag pang marikit na siste sa talinghaga ni Balagtas ang yugto ng pagbigkas ni Florante sa ika-41 saknong. Binigkas iyon ni Florante sa gitna ng matinding panibugho, sa gitna ng masidhing hinala na pinagtaksilan siyá ng kasintahan, at sa yugtong nalilito at nagsusuri ng katotohanan ang ating mandirigmang bida. Hindi pa niya naaabot ang totoong yugto ng karunungan. Ngunit kahit nása yugto pa lámang ng bubot na kamulatan ay nabigkas na niya ang isang makabuluhang aral laban sa “aral na maganda.” Wari ngang nais ni Balagtas na ibahagi sa mga mambabasa ng kaniyang awit na hindi kailangan ang putíng buhok ng karunungan upang marating ang gayong pagmumuni. Kung sakali namang ituring itong subersibo ng Aw-

toridad at usigin siyá ay maaari niyang ikatwiran na bunga lámang iyon ng nagdedeliryong isip ng kaniyang desperadong tauhan.

Totoong napakahirap hulíhin ang “Katotohanan” sa wikang alegoriko’t matalinghaga.

Mga Kahingian sa Talinghaga

ANO’T ANUMAN, ANG ika-41 saknong ni Balagtas ay maaari ding basáhing subersiyon laban sa banyaga’t kolonyal na “Kagandahan.” Iginigiit nitó ang higit na pagtitiwala sa katutubong **bait at katwiran**. Higit na maraming naliwanagan si Florante hábang mag-isang nakapugal sa punongkahoy sa gitna ng “*madilim, gubat na mapanglaw*” at minumuni ang pinagdaanang búhay. Nakaigpaw siyá mula sa muslak na pag-iisip ng isang kabataan tungo sa mapapait ngunit makabuluhang mga karunungan sa tulong ng kaniyang sariling kuro at nag-iisang pagdalisay sa kaniyang makulay na mga karanasan. Mula sa pagtatakwil sa napag-aralang mga “aral na maganda”—ang lagom ng banyaga’t kolonyal na “Kagandahan”—ay nakausad ang kaniyang istorya/historya sa totoong pagsasarili at sa kailangang karunungan upang magampanan ang naghihintay na tungkulin sa kaniyang bayan.

Kinipil ni Balagtas para sa atin, at kaipala para kay L.K. Santos, ang isang panukalang *cultura integral* ng “Kagandahang” Filipino.

Hindi mahirap hakain na iniisip ni L.K. Santos si Balagtas nang kaniyang isulat ang kaniyang hakang totoo at materyal na “magandang” talinghaga. Ang totoo, tulad ni Rizal ay nag-ukol siyá ng mataas na pagdakila kay Balagtas, kabilang na ang mahirap pantayang kakayahan ng Sisne ng Panginay na malikha ang talinghaga laban sa kataksilan at kawalan ng katarungan ng pananakop na banyaga (“*El gran merito de estos versos del “Florante” consistia en haberlos podido escribir y publicar el autor, en tan habil modo de denunciar el imperio de la traicion y la injusticia, aliadas, bajo cuyo sufría pacientemente su propio país, sin que la rigidísima Censura de entonces...*”)

Gayunman, hindi sapat ang modelo ni Balagtas tungo sa ganap na paglaya ng kamulatan mula sa hulmahang nilinang ng kolonyalismo. Ito ang nakatanghal na pangwakas na balintuna sa *Peculiaridades de la poesia tagala* ni L.K. Santos. Matapos ang tinalakay kong malusog at mapagpalayang pagpapakahulugan sa talinghaga, ang pagsusuri ni L.K. Santos ay dumausdos pabalik sa pamantayang banyaga’t kolonyal ng “Kagandahan.”

Nagsimula ang pagdausdos pabalik sa pagbanggit niya na may dalawang uri ng talinghaga: ang (1) mababaw at ang (2) malalim. Waring wasto pa ang naturang urian nang ipataw niya ito sa bugtong, lalo na upang linawin na may mababaw na bugtong dahil madaling maintindihan at sa katunayan ay maaaring gamitin ng musmos, samantalang may bugtong na sadyang malalim at pinaghihirapang lurukin kahit ng tigulang. Inulit niyang halimbawa ng malalim na talinghaga ang *Florante at Laura* na nagtagumpay ipahiwatig ang nakalulunon na kondisyon ng Filipinas sa ilalim ng pananakop sa pamamagitan ng isang popular na tulang pasalaysay.

Subalit bumigat ang suliranin at lumitaw ang pagdausdos pabalik nang ipaliwanag niya kung ano ang mga kahingian ng malalim na talinghaga. Tatlo diumano ang kahingian. Una, kailangang ang talinghaga ay ipahayag sa wikang alam ng madlang bumabása o nakikinig. Ikalawa, kailangang magkakaugnay ang mga paghahambing at pagpapalit bukod sa may mahigpit na kaugnayan ang mga ito bílang talinghaga sa inihahambing at pinapalitan. Ikatlo, kailangang ang mga salitâ at pangungusap sa talinghaga ay “wasto, tiyak, marangal, masigla” (*correcto, conciso, noble, enérgico*). May mabubuting simulaing maaaring matutuhan sa una’t ikalawa, bagaman maaaring mahalata sa dalawa, alinsunod sa ibinigay niyang ehemplo, ang lubhang pagsandig sa popular na idyoma at pagsikil sa adhikang mag-eksperimento. Sa ikatlo higit na tumanghal ang hilig na konserbatibo ni L.K. Santos hinggil sa wika ng pagtula. Hindi mapasusubalian ang kabuluhan ng tiyak (*conciso*) at masigla (*enérgico*) sa pagpili ng talinghaga. Ngunit muling umiral sa konsepto niya ng wasto (*correcto*) at marangal (*noble*) ang luma na’t mapaniil na pamantayang ninanais igpawan ng mapagpalayang “Kagandahan.”

Pinasok, o muling binalikan, ni L.K. Santos ang karaniwang dapat inaasahang bitag ng pamantayang etikal—ang paggigiit sa “Kagandahan” ng Katotohanan nitó; at sa kaso ng “Kagandahang” kolonyal at Kristiyano, ang Katotohanan ng mga “aral na maganda” na nagpiit sa alindog ng “Kagandahan” sa bilangguan ng mapanakop na mithiin ng kolonyalismong Espanyol—ang pinaratangan ni Balagtas na “mapaglilo” o di-totoong “Kagandahan.”

Bago magpatuloy, isa munang dapat ipagpaunang paglilinaw: Kailangan ba ng “Kagandahan” ang pamantayang etikal? O kayâ: Nakasasamâ ba sa “Kagandahan” ang pamantayang etikal? Ang sagot sa unang tanong,

hindi kailangan ngunit mahirap maiwasan. Ang sagot sa ikalawang tanong, maaaring makasamâ at maaari ding hindi makasamâ.

Para ipaliwanag ang mga sagot, kailangang sipatin ang “*etika*” bílang isang banyagang dalumat, isang salitang hatid ng kolonyalismo mula sa Griyegong *êthicos*, kayâ nag-ugat sa ating kasaysayan nang kahanay at kaagapay ng doktrinang Kristiyano. Hindi nangangahulugang walang ganitong tuntuning panlipunan ang ating sinaunang barangay. Hindi maaari. Hinihingi itong bigkis sa anumang malaking kalipunan ng tao upang patnubayan ang asal, kilos, at pananalitâ ng bawat isa alang-alang sa pagkakaisa, pagsulong, at pagtatanggol ng kapakanan ng kalipunan. Maituturing halimbawang katutubo at etikal na dalumat ang “kapuwa” at “damay”—na nag-aatas ng obligasyong isalang-alang ang búhay ng iba tungo sa pagpapakatao. Ngunit kung bagâ sa “aral,” ang kapuwa o damay ay hindi isang kodigong dapat isaulo at lalo na’y hindi nakalimbag sa aklat. Naisasalob lámang ito ng isang musmos na miyembro ng komunidad sa pamamagitan ng pagsunod at pakikiramdam sa halimbawang ugali ng nakatatanda.

Marahil, pinakamalapit nang salin ng “etika” ang naitalâ nina Noceda at Sanlucar na “**aral na magalíng**.” Kung mumuniin din ang pakahulugan ni Fray San Antonio sa “**galíng**”—“*Bien, que se halla en cualquier cosa hermosa, graciosa, de buen parecer. Es propia {para} la vista.*”—nakatimo sa pagtingin sa “magalíng” ang katutubong “Kagandahan.” Kung hindi man iisa, may mga aspekto ng pagsasanib ang “magalíng” at “maganda” sa pagmuni ng ating mga ninuno. [Muli, maaari ngayong pagdudahan ang ganitong pagtitiyap ng “Kagandahan” at “kagalíngan” dahil nakasalig sa ulat ng mga misyonero. Maaaring lihim at nais ng mga leksikograpo ang naturang pagtitiyap upang maipasok bílang “taal” ang pagtatagpo ng dalawang dalumat, at sa gayo’y maihanda ang katwiran ukol sa isinagawa niláng pagpapalaganap sa mga “aral na maganda” noong panahon ng pananakop. Ngunit saan táyo dadalhin ng gayong duda? Lubha nating pinahuhusay ang kanilang mapanakop na talino. Samantala, may ibang mga patunay upang mabawasan ang ating suspetsa.] Ang isinasalob na halimbawa ay isinasalin sa tunay na asal, kilos, at pananalitâ ng nagsasalob, paulit-ulit, hanggang maging “**ugali**” at paglipas ng panahon ay halos wala-sa-loob na isinasagawa sapagkat “nakaugalian” o “nakamihansan.” Ang kabuuan o bawat sangkap ng “nakaugalian” ang tinatawag na “**kaugalian**”—ang batas o tuntuning gumagabay sa búhay ng mga kasapi ng ating sinaunang lipu-

nan, na itinataguyod sa pamamagitan ng mga salawikain at awit, ipinalalaman sa mga alamat, kuwentong-bayan, at epikong-bayan, bukod sa ipinagdiriwang sa mga pagtitipon at ritwal ng sambayanan. Binubuo ito ng mga “aral na magalíng” dahil itinuturing na kailangan ng tao tungo sa kagalíngan ng kaniyang sarili at ng kaniyang komunidad.

Ang kaugalian ay may kapangyarihang tulad ng tinatawag nating “batás” ngayon. Ngunit bahagi pa lámang ng pagpapairal ng kaugalian noon ang pagiging “batás” nitó. Bakit? Sapagkat kawangki nitó ang itinuturing noon na “**batás**,” na sang-ayon sa ating mga misyonerong leksikograpo ay “ang pagbubukás ng bagong landas o ang paglalakad sa pamamagitan nitó” (*El acto de abrir nuevo camino o ir por el.*) Kaugnay mismo ng paglakad sa isang bagong landas ang tinatawag na “pananalunton” o “pagtunton” na siyáng ugat naman ng “**tuntúnin**” natin ngayon at itinuturing nating kapatid ng kasalukuyang “batás.” [Hanggang sa *Diccionario Tagalog-Hispano* (1914) ni Pedro Serrano-Laktaw ay pagdaraan sa batis o estero ang “batás.”] Kayá kinailangang ipahiram ng mga Español ang “*ley*” (na malimit bigkasin at isulat na “*lei*” at may dalawang pantig sa mga komedya at korido), “*réglá*,” at “*reglaménto*” upang ipakahulugan ang utos na mula sa isang awtoridad. Noong araw, hindi “batás”—sa pakahulugan natin ngayong utos mula sa isang tao o pangkat na makapangyarihan—ang kaugalian; ngunit “batás” ang kaugalian sapagkat napatunayan na ng karanasan ng komunidad na nagdudulot ito ng “daang matuwid,” sapagkat may kasaysayan ito ng “kagalíngan” para sa lahat.

Maging ang pagiging “**bihása**” noon ay nagmumula sa panununton sa “nakaugalian,” nagmumula at tumitibay sa pag-aaral at pagsasagawa ng kaugalian. Anupa’t ang “nakamihasan” ay itinuturing na singkahulugan ng “nakaugalian.” [Kayá’t makikita sa “**kabihasan**” ngayon bílang salin ng *civilization* ang posibleng kaibhan ng pagdalumat natin sa orihinal na sibilisasyon mulang Kanluran.] Bagaman dapat ipagpauna ang maaaring pag-uuri noon pa sa “nakamihasan.” May masamá at may mabuting “nakamihasan,” at itinuturing na bunga ito ng masamá o mabuting pagkatuto ng batà o ng masamá o mabuting pagpapalaki ng magulang sa anak. Mahalaga ang ibinibigay na edukasyon ng magulang sa posibleng pagiging bihasa ng anak, na maaaring lumitaw na bihasang magnanakaw o bihasang magsasaka. Ito, kaipala, ang isang seksiyon ng “aral na magalíng” mula sa ika-197 saknong ng *Florante at Laura* hinggil sa wastong edukasyon ng anak:

“Pag-ibig anaki’t aking nakilála
di dapat palakhin ang batà sa sayá,
at sa katuwaa’y kapag **namihasa** (akin ang bold)
kung lumaki’y walang hihinting ginhawa.”

Ang seksiyong ito ng awit ni Balagtas ang maituturing na solido’t tahas na pagpapahayag ng kaniyang hálagáhang etikal. Sang-ayon na rin kay Balagtas, ang uri ng nakamihasnang nagpapasiya sa ililitaw na “bait at muni” ng tao. Pinapanday ng nakamihasnang (at nakaugalian) ang magiging pagpapahalaga ng tao sa tama o mali, sa wasto o di-wasto, sa lahat ng kaniyang mga gawain, lunggati, at pangarap, ang pamana ng lipunan sa kaniyang *cultura integral* at gagamitin niya sa paglikha ng “Kagandahan.”

Katotohanan Bílang Kumbensiyon

UULITIN KO, HINDI ipinagbabawal sa sinauna’t katutubong “Kagandahan” ang pamantayang etikal. Itinuring na malusog na sangkap ng panitikang-bayan ang mga “aral na magalíng,” bukod sa totoong nakapahiyas ito sa mga salawikain at buod ng maraming awit at sinaunang salaysay. Ang nakaugalian bílang pamantayang etikal ay tinanggap na “maganda” sapagkat ikinasisiyá at pinaniniwalaang nagdudulot ng kabutihan. Ang “aral na magalíng” ay naituturing na totoo at “maganda” kapag napatunayang nagpayabong sa bait at muni at nagpalusog sa sariling pagkatao. Subalit itinuturo din sa atin ngayon ng sariling kasaysayang pambansa na maaari itong abusuhin at gamitin upang sumikil sa katutubong “bait at muni” ng tao. Sa loob ng 300 taón, ang mga “aral na maganda” na tinulungan ni Don Pelipe de Jesus na lumaganap ay maaaring totoong “maganda” ngunit naging kasangkapan sa pananakop, naging kariktang mapaglilo sa wika ni Balagtas, at naging hadlang sa kalayaan ng mga Filipino. Mula kay Balagtas sa gayon ay nagsimula ang panahon ng paglitis sa pinairal na pamantayang etikal ng “Kagandahan,” nagkaroon ng kasukdulan sa panitikan ng Himagsikang 1896, lalo na sa pamamagitan ng sigaw na “Kalayaan!” laban sa lahat ng manipestasyon ng panahon ng kolonyalismo, at inaasahan nating ninanasing ding linangin ng lektura ni L.K. Santos noong 1926.

Dapat isingit ang munting paglilinaw sa “kalayaan” bílang “Kagandahan” alinsunod sa pamantayang Katipunero. Isa itong pamantayang etikal. Ngunit isa itong mapagbagong reaksiyon o malikhaing sintesis/pagbása

sa isinagawang paglitis ni Balagtas laban sa “mapaglilong Kagandahan” ng “magandang aral” sa panahon ng kolonyalismo. Sang-ayon sa payak na argumentong Katipunero, kung mapaglilo ang “Kagandahan” ng kolonyalis-mong Español at bingi ang Langit sa lehitimong hibik ng bayan (ng katulad ni Florante), itinuturo ng bait at katwiran na kailangang isandig ang “Kagandahan” sa ibang pamantayang etikal. Ano ang ibang pamantayang etikal para sa “kalayaan” ng bayang inaapi? Ito ang naging Himagsikang 1896 bílang higit na maganda, makabuluhan, at makatotohanang “aral na magalíng” at ang “kalayaan” bílang pangunahing katangian ng “Kagandahan.” Alinsunod sa katwirang ito ay iniusig ni Andres Bonifacio sa mga kababayan ang sumusunod:

Nasaan ang dangal ng mga Tagalog?
Nasaan ang dugong dapat na ibuhos?
Baya’y inaapi, bakit di kumilos
At natitilihang ito’y mapanood?

Hindi lámang nagtataksil ang España sa sandugo at ipinangakong Liwanag sa sinakop na Filipinas. “Nilalapastangan at niyuyurakan” pa nitó ang dangal ng bayan, kayâ makatwiran at lehitimo ang maghimagsik.

Ngunit hindi ganap na naisaloob ni L.K. Santos (at ng iba pang Balagtasista) ang kabuluhan ng “kalayaan,” alinsunod sa simulain ng Katipunan, sa kaniyang pagmuni sa dapat sanang magbagong pagpapakahulugan sa “Kagandahan.” Tulad ng nasabi ko na, lumitaw ang kaniyang pagdausdos pabalik sa inihanay niyang tatlong kahingian ng talinghaga. Lalo na ang ikatlo. Ulitin natin ang ikatlo: kailangang ang mga salitâ at pangungusap sa talinghaga ay “wasto, tiyak, marangal, masigla” (*correcto, conciso, noble, enérgico*). Ang mga pang-uring “wasto” at “marangal” ay kaagad nagpapahiwatig ng pamantayang etikal upang maging “maganda” ang talinghaga. Na kung babalikan ang nagdaang paliwanag ay hindi masamá dahil may katutubong ugat ang pamantayang etikal sa Filipinas. Hindi masamá, ngunit mapanganib. Sapagkat maaaring mairalan ang pamantayang etikal ngayon ng naging dominanteng doktrina sa panahon ng pananakop at sumikil sa kalayaan ng “bait at muni.” At nahulog siyá sa naturang bitag—ang pag-iral ng isang naging dominante at masamáng nakamihansan—hábang inaadhika ang “wasto” at “marangal” sa talinghaga.

Ang “**wasto**” ay isang patibong sa pamantayang etikal. Nangangahulugang lagi ito ng disiplina sa asal, kilos, at wika ngunit maituturing na kailangang sangkap sa pagtatanghal ng paggálang at paggagalangán ng tao/mga tao sa lipunan. Makabuluhan din itong kontrol laban sa mapagmalabis na aplikasyon ng demokrasya. Ngunit masamá ito kapag naging abusadong paghihigpit laban sa kalayaan, lalo na upang supilin ang malikhaing pag-iisip at damdamin, at pairalin ang isang kodigong dapat sundin ng lahat. Ngunit ang “wasto” bílang mahigpit at hindi maaaring suwaying atas ang mahihiwatigan mismo sa paglalataw ni L.K. Santos sa mga tuntunin ng tugma’t súkat. Mula sa tinipon ni Rizal na mga nakamihasnan sa tugma’t súkat ng mga Tagalog ay inilalataw na ng lektura ni L.K. Santos ang “Kodigo ng Tugma’t Súkat”—ang batas na sinusunod niláng mga Balagtasista at batas na dapat sundin ng mga makata upang maituturing na “wasto” at “magan-da” ang kanilang pagtula.

Narito na ang sintomas ng pagtigas ng nakamihasnan, kahit sabihing katutubo at nakabubuti laban sa banyaga’t kolonyal, ang pormalisado bílang matigas na hulmahan ng paglikha, ang malusog na tradisyon bílang isang estatiko at hindi na dadaloy na kumbensiyon. Nagiging kasabwat pa ng ganitong paghihigpit ang “marangal.”

Sino ba ang ayaw maging “**marangal**”? Napakahalaga nitó sa pagkatao ng nais lumayang sákop. Ito ang pangunahing salik ng pagkatao na yinuyurakan ng pananakop. Tinatangalan ng mananakop ang sákop ng dangal at mataas na pagtingin sa sarili upang magkaroon ang ikalawa ng matinding isipang-alipin, ng ganap na isip-sungyaw (*inferiority complex*), at manatiling alipin ng panginoong mananakop. Kung nayurakan ang dangal sa panahon ng kolonyalismo, himok ni Bonifacio, kailangan itong muling maitaas. Sa gayon, kapag binása ang programang mapagpalaya nina Bonifacio at Jacinto ay nangunguna ang pag-antig sa dangal ng mga kababayan upang ikahiya ang pagiging busabos at matutong maghimagsik. Maghimagsik upang mabawi ang inagaw na kalayaan, muling maibangon ang puri’t karangalan, at makasúlong tungo sa ikadadakila. Samakatwid, hindi masamá ang lumikha ng “marangal” na talinghaga.

Ngunit malaki rin ang posibilidad na ang pagtingin sa sariling dangal ng isang sákop ay kinubikong na ng pananakop. “Kubikóng” ang tabla na nagkalukot-lukot ang rabaw dahil nababad sa tubig; kubikóng ang kamu-latan na nabaluktot ang taal na katwiran at pagpapahalaga dahil sa naghar-

ing masamâng impluwensiya. Ang ibig sabihin, dahil sa matagal na pagkababad sa kultura ng pananakop, posibleng ang nais ikarangal ng sâkop ay maging katulad, kahit sa bisyo, ng kaniyang mananakop. Pinakamalubhang manipestasyon ng kubikong na kamulatan ang paggaya ng alipin sa kilos, asal, at lunggati ng dapat sana’y kamuhian niyang mang-aalipin. Lumitaw ito sa ambisyon ng mga Propagandista na maging kapantay sa karapatan ng mga mamamayang Español. At lumitaw din ito sa paliwanag ni L.K. Santos hinggil sa “marangal” na wika ng tula. Muli, may iba’t ibang uri ng wika at mainam na maalam gumamit ang isang tao ng angkop na wika para sa layunin at target ng kaniyang pahayag. Ngunit ang “marangal” na wika para kay L.K. Santos ay katulad halos ng kaniyang “wasto” at isang paraan ng pagbubukod sa wika ng nakatataas kaysa wika ng nakabababang uri ng tao sa lipunan. Ang “marangal” na wika ni L.K. Santos ay wika sa bulwagan ng mga pribilehiyado at disente at nagtatakwil sa itinuturing na wika ng lansangan at bulgar. Ang “marangal” na wika niya ay mula sa dibdibang pagsasaulo ng mga tuntunin at kumbensiyon upang maging nakalulugod sa tingin ng Awtoridad. Sinipi niya ang isang koplâ upang ipakita ang tinatagaw niyang wikang “di-marangal” (*innoble*):

Sa kagutuman ko sa iyong pag-irog
Katulad ko’y langaw at ikaw ang pulut.

Isa diumanong di-marangal na prase ang “kagutuman sa pag-irog” at hindi wastong gamitin sa tula ng pagsisintahan. Marahil, dahil nagpapagunita sa primitibo at malahayop na kahayukan. Samantala, nagdaan ang panitikan ng Filipinas sa pagsisintahan ng mga prinsipê at prinsesa na itinatanghal ang pag-ibig sa paraang “pino at pormal” at halos ritwal pati ang pagniniig sa hardin. Hinatulan din niyang dalawang pangngalang “**malaswa**” (*indecentes*) ang “langaw” at “pulut” at bilang talinghaga ay bulgar, nararapat lamang sa mga kasayahang pantaberna (*tertulias de taberna*), at hindi ginagamit sa pagpapahayag ng maseselang damdamin (*sentimientos delicados*). Sinamantala din niya ang pagkakataóng ito upang punahin ang uri ng popular na pagtula noong panahong iyon, sirka 1929, na ginaganap sa mga liwasang-bayan. Kinagigiliwan diumano ang mga tindero ng bulgar na talinghaga sa mga *ferias de la belleza*—ang mga pagpuputong o koronasyon ng mga reyna ng pista, at pati na ang bantog noong balagtasang—at pinagkakakitahan ng mga mambeberso ang naaalih namang madlang “nakabakya.”

Ang “wasto” at “marangal” ni L.K. Santos ay isang napag-aralang pormalidad mula sa nakaraang wika sa panahon ng kolonyalismo, may bahid ng urbanidad alinsunod sa modelong wika ng kagandahang-asal ni Padre Modesto de Castro, at nagtatanghal sa konserbatibong mukha ng makabansang kilusang Balagtasista sa panahon ng Americano. Maaaring lingid ito sa kaniyang kamalayan, ngunit ibinabalik nitó sa dambana ng “Kagandahan” ang espiritung mapaniil na inumpisahang tuyain ni Balagtas at pinaghimagsikan ng Katipunan. [Ang totoo, ibinalik nga ng mga trabahong katulad ng ginawa ngayon ni L.K. Santos ang kolonyal at feudal na pamantayang etikal, na siyempre pa’y muling isinaloob ng sambayanang hindi pa nakahuhulagpos sa bilibid ng rosaryo at kumpisalan, at muling nakapangyari hanggang sa kasalukuyan.] Muli nitóng hinahati o nilalagyan ng hangganan ang malikhaing kalayaang idinulot ng Himagsikang 1896. Nabalutian din ito ng Awtoridad upang magpairal ng Sensura. Ang disentang wikang ninanais niya ang tahasang magbabawal sa tinatawag na “wika ng silid-tulugan” at mahigpit pa sa mga Hermana sa pagsasakdal laban sa anumang mamarkahang “malaswa.” Bawal ang seks o anumang uri ng erotisismo sa sining at panitikan hanggang makaraan ang Ikalawang Digmaang Pandaigdig. Sa wikang “wasto” at “marangal,” ang anumang pangyayaring sensuwal, at lalo na’y seksuwal, ay kailangang kumutan ng makapal na pahiwatig, sukdang maging katawa-tawa ang “nabásag ang banga,” “naluray na bulaklak,” “kalapating mababà ang lipad,” “naglalaro ng apoy,” atbpang matanda na’t de-kahong talinghaga.

May katotohanan ang pagtatanggol na isang uri ito ng makabayang reaksiyon laban sa “lubhang moderno” kung hindi man “mapanakop na kultura” na dulot ng Americanisasyon at nakatakdang lumumpo sa umuusbong pa lámang na diwa ng kalayaan at pag-ibig sa bayan. Subalit hindi napansin ng mga Balagtasista na isinasaloob nilá bílang makabayan ang mga katangian ng “Kagandahan” na pinaghimagsikan nina Rizal, Plaridel, Bonifacio, at Jacinto. Isa ito sa makabuluhan ngunit malungkot na resulta ng naunsiyaming diwa ng Himagsikang 1896. Mabilis ang naganap na pagbansot sa diwang makabayan at mapagpalaya, mula sa loob at mula sa labas, mula sa hanay na repormista’t kontra-rebolusyon sa loob ng Republikang Malolos at mula sa dumating na bago, higit na malakas at higit na matalinong mananakop na Americano. Lubhang nakalilito ito para sa bagong sibol na makabayan ng ika-20 siglo na gaya ng pangkat na Balagtasista ni L.K. Santos, lalo na sapagkat edukado pa silá sa panahon ng kol-

onyalismong Español. Ang pananaig ng kanilang edukasyong kolonyal ang hindi nilá namalayang konserbatismo sa kanilang posturang makabayan bílang mga Balagtasista. Umiral ang ganitong konserbatibong pormalidad sa ibang *bellas artes* at kahit sa bagong dáting na aliwang pang-entablado, radyo, pelikula, at telebisyon.

Ang ipinaliwanag kong pagdausdos ng pamantayan sa “Kagandahan” ni L.K. Santos ay hindi lámang manipestasyon ng nakubikóng na kama-layan ng sákop na Filipino kundi palatandaan din ng malakas na bisà ng kolonyalismo pagkaraan ng tatlong siglo sa Filipinas. Mababakás ang naturang mapaminsalang bisà sa wika pagkatapos dumanas ng oryentasyong kolonyal at Kristiyano. Balikan natin ang halimbawa kong “**kawanggawa**” bilang isang itinimong katangian sa “kagandahang-loob” sa panahon ng kolonyalismong Español. Alinsunod sa paraan ng pagkagamit nitó mag-mula sa panahon ng Español hanggang sa kasalukuyan, ang “kawanggawa” ay katapat ng *caridad* sa wikang Español. Sa pamamagitan ng pagbabalik sa matatandang diksiyonaryo ay maaaring patunayan na hindi ito isang katutubong salitáng Tagalog. May “awà” at “gawà” sa Noceda at Sanlucar, ngunit walang “kawanggawa.” Ang *caridad* sa Noceda at Sanlucar ay walang katapat na salita at sa halip ay may paliwanag na “*pag ibig sa Dios at sa capoua tauo.*” Na kung tutuusin ay isang mainam na depinisyong Tagalog para sa konsepto ng *caridad*. Wika nga sa unang kahulugan ng *caridad* ng Real Academia Española, “*En la religion cristiana, una de las tres virtudes teologales, que consiste en amar a Dios sobre todas las cosas, y al prójimo como a nosotros mismos.*” Gayunman, kahit sa Español pagkuwan ay naukol ito sa paglilimos bunga ng awa. Ang naturang direksiyon ng *caridad* ang maaaring ituring na sanhi ng paglikha sa “kawanggawa”—mula sa pinagdugtong na “awa” at “gawa” o “gawa dulot ng awa” o higit pa, “gawa para sa kaawa-awa.” At ito ang naging pangunahing tungkulin ng “kawanggawa” bilang isang birtud sa lipunang Kristiyano sa Filipinas. Maaari ngang usisain ngayon kung ang mga pagkilos na kawanggawa sa kasakuluyan ay bunga lámang ng awa sa naghihirap o nasakuna at hindi dahil sa “pag-ibig sa Diyos at sa kapuwa tao.” Ang higit na makatuturan sa ating talakay ngayon, itinuturing natin ang “kawanggawa” na waring isang katutubong bahagi ng ating wika at hindi isang likhang salita sa panahon ng pananakop upang higit na maging lehitimo sa ating pagpapahalaga ang isang birtud na Kristiyano.

Nagdaan din sa edukasyong Kristiyano at kolonyal si L.K. Santos. Dumausdos ang kaniyang pamantayan hinggil sa “wasto” at “ma-

rangal” sapagkat hindi sapat ang kaniyang naging damdaming maka-
bayang dulot ng Himagsikang 1896 upang maigpawan at ganap na
maiwaksi ang kaniyang “nakamihasnan”—ang wika ng nakamihasnan
niyang wasto at marangal alinsunod sa pamantayang kolonyal at Kris-
tiano. Kayâ napakahalaga ng matatag na pagpapakahulugang Filipino
sa pagsipat at pagtitig ng bawat munting eksena ng ating kasaysayan.

Himagsik na Modernista

NOONG DEKADA 60, sa ilalim ng alyas na “Rolando B. Ilagan” ay ini-
lathala ni Alejandro G. Abadilla ang tulang “Erotika 3” at ang banat niya sa
unang sакnong:

Ang salitang ganda’y di para sa iyo,
Beybi peys mong iya’y mahahalikan ko.

Tigib sa himagsik ang tula ni A.G. Abadilla laban sa “wasto” at “marangal”
ni L.K. Santos. Ang pamagat mismo ay wala sa bokabularyong Balagtasista.
Ang “beybi peys” ay pariralang Ingles, *baby face*, kung sakali’y produkto ng
kinamumuhang Americanisasyon ng henerasyon ni L.K. Santos, bulgar,
at maging ang himig ng pagsambit ay mahihiwatigan ng itinuturing na “di-
marangal” at “malaswang” damdamin. Ang unang taludtod, “*Ang salitang
ganda’y di para sa iyo,*” ay hitik sa pag-uyam laban sa ibinantayog na uri ng
nakalulugod na “Kagandahan” sa umiral na panahon ng “wasto” at “ma-
rangal.” Ginagagad—o ginagaya sa paraang patuya; isang *parodia*—ni A.G.
Abadilla ang huwarang “Kagandahan” ni L.K. Santos.

Bago pa iyon, itinatag na ni A.G. Abadilla, kasáma ang ilang kapuwa
kabataang manunulat, ang Kapisanang Panitikan noong 1935 at nagsaga-
wa ng iba-ibang paraan ng pagsalakay sa moog ng pormalidad ng mga na-
katatandang Balagtasista. “Sinúnog” ng mga Panitikero ang mga akda ng
katandaan sa isang demostrasyong pampanitikan sa Plaza Moriones noong
2 Marso 1940, nilamuray ni Teodoro A. Agoncillo sa isang lekturang pang-
madla ang iginagálang na nobelang *Banaag at Sikat* ni L.K. Santos, sumulat
ng walang tugma’t súkat (“**malayang taludturan**” ang naging tawag ngay-
on) si A.G. Abadilla bukod sa sumulat ng isang napakaseksuwal na nobela,
Ang Pagkamulat ni Magdalena katulong si Elpidio Capulong. Ipinaliwan-
ag pa ni A.G. Abadilla ang kaniyang programa ng rebelyon sa “Ang Tula”

noong 1938, na tinawag niyang “tugmang sanaysay,” at tahasang inialay kay L.K. Santos kalakip ang mapagbironong pag-asa na “maitago ito sa kalupi” ng “Paham ng Wikang Tagalog.” Narito ang unang saknong ng “pangaral” niya kay L.K. Santos:

Sa akin,
Itinatanong mo
Ang tula kung ano...
Subali
Ang bulong ko kaya't tinig na mahina'y
Makapukaw na rin sa tulog mong diwa?
Sa akin
Kung gayon,
Muli mong itanong kung ano ang tula.

Ang sumunod na mga saknong ni A.G. Abadilla ay mga paraan ng pagtukoy niya sa kung ano ang tula ngunit kasalungat ng mga inaakala niyang turing sa tula ni L.K. Santos. Nilinaw pa niya sa isang sanaysay noong 1967 ang isinagawang himagsik laban sa pinalaganap na “Kodigo ng Tugma’t Súkat”: “Makikita... ang maliwanag na pagtatangka naming masira ang pinagkagawiang pagtugma ng mga makata natin. Kinusa namang paiklin ang ilang taludtod (sa halip na pare-pareho ang sukat) sa palagay na sa pamamagitan ng gayon maaaring masira ang lakad-sundalong-sabay-sabay-na-lagpak-ng-paa ng karaniwang tugma. Gumawa kami ng rima, di maikakait, subali’t madalas ay may patlang at napapatlanganan ng mga taludtod na hindi karima ng sinundan o ng sumunod. Kawikaan nami’y sa pamamagitan niyan maaaring tumunog na karaniwang *salitaan* ang mga talata o taludtod na pawang may sukat bagaman di magkakatulad.” Tinutukoy ng kaniyang “karaniwang *salitaan*” ang impormal at kumbersasyonal, na di-marangal, bulgar, at malimit pang malaswa alinsunod sa pamantayan ni L.K. Santos. Hindi kataká-taká na wika ang malaking bahagi ng ipinanutalang pagbabagong Modernista sa “Kagandahan” sa loob ng ika-20 siglo.

Ang mga naturang pahayag ni A.G. Abadilla ay nangangailangan ng bagong paglitis sa wika at sa kinakatawan nitóng kamulatan hindi lámang bilang himagsik sa nakatatandang henerasyon nina L.K. Santos kundi mag-ing sa persepsiyon ng henerasyon ni A.G. Abadilla sa nagdaang pananakop na Español at sa kasalukuyan noong pananakop na Americano.

Kagandahang Walang Kasaysayan

MULA SA PAGSIPAT natin ngayon ay maaaring ituring na isang reaksiyon din ang Modernismong pinangunahan ni A.G. Abadilla sa problematika ng “Kagandahan” dahil sa binansot na diwa ng Himagsikang 1896 at matagumpay na pananakop ng mga Americano. Higit nang nakinabang sa edukasyong Americano ang henerasyon ni A.G. Abadilla samantalang nakararamdam ng matinding pagsikil mula sa pinaiiral na Awtoridad ng mga Balagtasista. Nakita rin nilá ang posibilidad ng kabaguhang idinudulot ng Americanisasyon, isang bagay na ganap namang pinagpipikitan ng matá ng mga Balagtasista, kayâ kinailangan niláng repormahin ang kung anumang taglay din niláng makabayang simulain at igiit ang Modernismo bílang isang higit na praktikal at isang higit na kabutihan para sa makabagong “Kagandahang” Filipino. Ito rin, sa ibang salitâ, ang ideolohiya ng naging dominanteng politika sa lipunang Filipino sa loob ng nakaraang ika-20 siglo.

Inuntol ng Modernismo ang dominasyong Balagtasista, ngunit hindi nitó sinariwa ang makabayan at mapagpalayang diwa ng Himagsikang 1896. Sa halip, ang usisa ni Balagtas hinggil sa “mapaglilong kagandahan” ay naging fulkrum tungo sa sari-saring pagdistansiya palayô sa pamantayang etikal ng “Kagandahan.” Modelo mismo si A.G. Abadilla sa gawaing ito. Ang malimit niyang pag-aalay ng papuri sa **“kagandahang hubad”**—na maaaring halaw sa Romantisistang pagpangarap sa *noble savage*—ay mabilis maipapakahulugang pagsalungat sa isang “Kagandahang” nagdudulot ng kabutihan na binigyang-diin ng kolonyalismong Español at nagpatuloy na patnubay ng panitikang Propagandista’t Katipunero at hanggang sa kapanahong mga Balagtasista. Ayaw niya ng anumang ideolohiyang pampolitika, ayaw niya ng teknolohiya at ng “pagkukumagkag” para isúlong sa lungsod ang makasariling interes, lalong ayaw niya ng mga bolahan kahit sa hanay ng mga alagad ng sining. Lalong ayaw na ayaw niya ng ipokrito sapagkat lagi niyang mithi ang “katapatan” at damdaming “payak”—na kaagapay ng kaniyang “kagandahang hubad.”

Dahil na rin sa kapanabay na “estetisismo” ni Jose Garcia Villa—ang lider na Modernista sa panitikan natin sa Ingles—ang lunggating “kagandahang hubad” ni A.G. Abadilla ay ipinagkamali ng mga kapanahon sa mithing “Sining alang-alang sa sining”—ang lumaganap na etiketa para sa “Kagandahang” nagtatakwil sa hibo ng politika, at higit pa, nakaukol lá-

mang ang paglikha sa pamantayang “nakalulugod.” [Bago ko makalimutan, isang etiketa ring mula sa Kanluran ang naturang etiketa.] Siyempre, angkop na pambukod ito sa inaakalang pagsalungat niya sa mithiing politikal ng mga Balagtasista. Hindi natatapat ng naglalapat ng etiketa na higit na politika ng wika kaysa wika ng politika ang sanhi ng tagisan ng mga Panitikero sa pamumunò ni A.G. Abadilla at ng mga Balagtasistang kahanay ni L.K. Santos. Ang totoo, maliban sa ilang sagad-sa-butong Amboy, ikapopoot ng sinuman sa magkabilang panig na libaking alagad ng Americanisasyon at igigiit ang makabayang sandigan ng kaniyang pagtula.

Gayunman, kapansin-pansin ang mga pangungusap na maaaring ipakahulugang paghahangad ng ikalulugod lámang sa paglikha. Kapansin-pansin ito sa mga Modernistang manunulat at artist na naakit ng mga kilusang makabago sa Kanluran at lubhang nagpapahalaga sa indibidwalistang pagpapahayag. Halimbawa, ang teatrong absurdo. Ang abstraksiyonistang pintura. Ang surreal. Ang ekspresyonistang eskultura. Handa rin silang ipagmalaki ang pinag-aralan sa Europa at Estados Unidos. Hitik ang kanilang wika sa bokabularyong pangkritisismong nasimsim mula sa mga banyagang sanggunian. Ngunit muli, bukod sa iilan na isinaloob ang posturang kosmopolitano, malakas ang saloobin sa kanilang hanay na lusawin ang banyagang oryentasyon sa ilog at lawa ng pambansang karanasan. Paglimian halimbawa: Bakit sa hanay ng mga Modernista hinugot ang mga unang propeta ng “panitikan mula sa masa, para sa masa” pagsiklab ng makabayang aktibismo sa bungad ng dekada 70? Bukod kay Amado V. Hernandez, nasaan ang mga Balagtasista sa panahon ng Unang Sigwa ng aktitibismo? Dahil ba tumanda na ang mga nabubúhay pang kapanahon nina Jose Corazon de Jesus? Sa kabilâ ng muling-pagkabuhay ng pamantayang makabayan mula sa nabansot na Himagsikang 1896 ay kahina-hinala ang matagal na pagbabantulot ng mga Balagtasista upang digmain ang “Imperyalismo, Piyudalismo, Burukrata-Kapitalismo” na iniwang pamana ng kolonyalismong Español at Americano.

Ibig ko ring balikan sa dakong ito ang ipinambungad kong pahayag hinggil sa ahistorical na pagtuturing sa “Kagandahan.” Maliwanag na marahil sa aking pagsipat ang henealohiya ng bawat isa sa mga pangunahing pagtingin sa “Kagandahan” sa kasalukuyan. May pinagmulan ang bawat binhi ng mga naturang pagtingin, malimit na mula sa Kanluran—o ang ibig kong sabihin, sa abot ng aking kaalaman sa ngayon ay may kakayahan lá-

mang akong buklatin ang mulaang Kanluranin at nag-aalinlangan pa sa akong munting impormasyon hinggil sa mulaang Asiano—may nag-alagang panahon at dominanteng pangangailangan ng panahon, at kayâ hindi dapat ituring na tila bathalumang isinilang nang ganap mula sa kilay ni Zeus.

Halimbawa, may isang sanaysay si Gemiliano Pineda na may pamagat na “Kagandahan, Pag-ibig at Pangako” at nangangatwiran laban sa paniwalang ang kagandahan ng babae, pag-ibig ng lalaki, at pangako ng politiko ay hindi dapat pagtiwalaan dahil tiyak na hindi magtatagal. Kung totoo man diumano ang nabanggit ay dapat isaalang-alang ang halaga ng bawat isa sa isang takdang panahon. Inisa-isa niya ang idinudulot na mga kabutihan ng kahit pansamantalang kagandahan ng babae, at iginiit na:

Oo nga’t ang kagandahan ay kumukupas, kagaya rin ng bulaklak na nalalanta at nawawalan ng halimuyak. Nguni’t sa panahon ng pamumukadkad ng isang bulaklak ay nakapagdulot ito ng kaligayahan sa maraming mga puso at nakaakit ng mga ngiti sa mga labi. Ang kagandahan ng isang babae ay kadluan ng inspirasyon ng mga makata, manunulat at pintor; iyon ang talang maliwanag na ang tanglaw ay pumatnubay sa landas ng maraming nakikipagsapalaran. Ang panghalina ng babae ay nakakapara ng malamig na hanging du(ma)rampi sa pawisang mukha ng isang naglalakbay.

Alisan mo ng kagandahan ang kababaihan ay para mo na ring inalisan ng mga bituin ang bughaw na kalangitan.

Isang nakatutuwang ehersisyo sa pamimilosopo ang sanaysay ni G. Pineda. Ngunit tigmak sa namamayaning pagtanaw sa “Kagandahan” ang kaniyang argumento. Kaagad mahihiwatigan ang dominanteng pag-uri sa “Kagandahan” bílang babae at bílang “kadluan ng inspirasyon.” Ang pagbanggit dito bílang isang bulaklak ay isang de-kahon at gasgas nang hambingan. Nakatampok sa kaniyang argumento ang pamantayang “nakalulugod.” Wika nga ng isang makatang Romantisista sa Ingles: “*beauty has its own excuse for being.*” Nabása tiyak ni G. Pineda ang naturang napakapopu-

lar at tila kawikaan nang pangungusap at tiyak ding ikinalugod niya batay sa kaniyang takbo ng pag-iisip sa sanaysay. Subalit may pagsisikap din si G. Pineda na tumulay tungo sa pamantayang “kasiyá-siyá.” Ang “Kagandahang” lugod ng matá ay nakapagbibigay din ng kabutihan bukod sa “kadluan ng inspirasyon.” Nagiging patnubay ito sa paglalakbay, ulat niya, at tumitighaw sa págod.

Sa kabilâng dako, hindi isang inosente’t impormal na sanaysay lámang ang inilathala ni G. Pineda. Mahihiwatigan sa talakay niya ang hindi ipinakikilalang pagsangkot sa nagtutunggali noong pagtanaw sa pamantayan ng “Kagandahan.” Malaki ang posibilidad na ninanais niyang magbigay ng sintesis, ang pagtutugma sa “nakalulugod” at sa “nakasisiyá” na ninanais din ng maraming kapanahon niyang alagad ng sining, ngunit sa paraang umiiwas makipagdebate o magsagawa ng dibdiban at akademikong prolegomena. Subalit nais kong turulin ngayon na ang ganitong uri ng diskusyon ang nagpapalaganap sa usaping tulad ng “Kagandahan” bílang isang pangyayaring tila **walang-kasaysayan**. Napairal ang palagay na alam **na** ito ng madla, na popular **na**, at sa gayon, ang pagtitig na tulad ng ginawa niya ay hindi nangangailangan ng anumang sipat sa ugat o pinagdaanan, at nangangailangan lámang ng kaukulang resolusyon batay sa kasalukuyang pagtanaw at pangangailangan. Halimbawa, ang bahaging sinipi ko mula sa sanaysay ni G. Pineda ay may hibo ng kontrobersiyang **anyo versus nilalaman**—isang usaping ikinatigatig ng mga manunulat sa Ingles na sumunod sa palitan ng opinyon ukol dito nina Jose Garcia Villa at Salvador P. Lopez bago magkadigma, at pana-panahong patuloy na nagmumulto sa sirkulo ng mga alagad ng sining hanggang sa ating panahon—ngunit hindi niya táyo binibigyan ng kahit munting sulyap sa kasaysayan. Parang ang tunggalian ay isang kagaganap na pangyayari, isang mainit na tsismis na dapat kutkutin sa *What’s the Buzz* o isang “nagbabágang” alingasngas na dapat mabilisang ibalita ng Radyo Patrol, at ang kaniyang sanaysay ay isang boto para sa isang binuksang *public survey* na matatapos sa araw ding ito, isa lámang numero sa magiging pangkalahatang bilang ng kaniyang panig na maaaring manalo o matálo, isang resulta na maaaring paniwalaan o hindi ng madla, at tapos **na**. Búkas, maaaring iba naman ang pag-usapan ng sambayanang sumusubaybay. O kayâ, búkas, maaaring may ibang tumalakay sa natapos na paksa ng survey at maaaring magkaroon muli ng survey at maaaring iba naman ang maging resulta kaysa nagwagi ngayon.

Ang ibig sabihin, ang paraan ng diskusyong katulad ng sanaysay ni G. Pineda ay hindi makatutulong sa ating binubuklat na katangian ng “Kagandahan.” Siyempre, pribilehiyado ang titig natin ngayon sa sanaysay ni G. Pineda dahil nakalutang ito sa pagpangitain natin ng nagdaan nang kasaysayan. Tinititigan natin ito nang may “distansiya,” wika nga sa estribo ng dyipni, dahil may panahon nang namagitan sa petsa ng pagkalathala ng kaniyang sanaysay (1967) at sa pagtitig natin ngayon. Pribilehiyado rin ang titig natin dahil napapatnubayan ng isinagawa nating sipat sa kasaysayan ng “Kagandahan” sa loob ng mahabang panahon ng ating nakasulat at nakalimbag na panitikan.

Paano kung malí o baluktot ang ating sipat?

Walang masamá. Kayá laging may puwang para sa muling pagsulat ng kasaysayan. Walang-hanggan ang posibilidad para sa Pagwawasto samantalang aktibo at malusog ang saliksik. Hindi aktibo lámang kundi “malusog.” May aktibong uri ng saliksik ngunit may kimkim na sakiting layunin. “Malusog” ang saliksik na hayagan, maingat, at nag-aadhikang magdagdag ng kaalaman upang higit nating malirip ang katotohanan ng “Kagandahan.” Walang isang Sipat na may monopolyo sa katotohanan. Ngunit kailangang isagawa ang sipat, at kung maaari’y isang bago at muling sipat, bago ang anumang titig upang maging higit na mayaman sa gunita ang titig, upang magkaroon ng sapat na batayan at tatag ng kalooban ang titig, at upang maging masigasig ang titig sa pagbuklat at pagsisiyasat sa mga dominanteng sapin ng kamalayan.

Kahit ang nais na “wasto” at “marangal” ni L.K. Santos ay kailangang isaalang-alang sa kinapalooban nitóng panahon sa kasaysayan. Bakit ba itinuring niyang malaswa ang “langaw” at “pulut” bílang hambingan ng pag-irog? Batay sa isang sipat kanina ay bunga ito ng maaaring hindi niya namamalayang pagdausdos pabalik sa katangian ng “Kagandahan” na naiiralan ng pamantayang banyaga at kolonyal. Ano ba talaga ang hindi “wasto” at “marangal” sa naturang paghahambing? May kasaysayan ba ng pagiging malaswa ang “langaw” at “pulut?” Mabilis nating magugunita ang karima-rimarim sa langaw bílang tagapagdála ng karamdaman, gamitin man natin ang kaalamang sinauna ng mga arbularyo o ang imbestigasyon ng agham. May kamandag na lagda ang “halik” ng langaw at totoong hindi maitutulad sa nararapat na kabanalan ng pag-irog, alinsunod sa batayang Kristiyano. Ngunit ang “pulut”? Ni wala akong maapuhap

na masagwa sa teknikal na literatura ng pulut. Sa ating panahon ng Organiko, inirerekomenda itong higit na masustansiyang pagkain kaysa asukal mulang tubó. Inimbento nga ang “pulutgatá” upang pagbuklurin ang malinamnam na katangian ng pulut at gatá tungo sa pagpapahiwatig ng walang-kahulilip na kaligayahang dapat tamasahin sa unang mga gabi’t araw ng ikinasal. Ngayon, hindi kayâ nagnanais bumuo ng bagong talinghaga ang makatang sumulat ng taludturang kinokondena ni L.K. Santos? Maaari. Hindi kayâ ninanais niyang magdulot ng himagsik, himagsik sa pamamagitan ng eksaheradong pagtatanghal sa “pag-irog ng langaw sa pulut”? Maaari. Himagsik ito upang ligaligin ang pihikang damdamin ng tulad ni L.K. Santos. Gayunman, hindi kayâ ang di-pagtanggap ni L.K. Santos sa talinghaga ay may kaugnayan sa ginamit na tayutay ng makata? Mapagmalabis ang paghahambing. Tinatawag itong *hyperbole* sa retorikang Griego. Na isang matanda na’t nakamihasnan ding paraan ng pagpapahayag sa Filipinas. May nakakita ng ahas at ipagmamalaking “gahita ang ahas” upang manggilalas ang mga kanayon. Ang mumunti ay pinalalaki ng tsismisan sa baryo. Marahil, nása likod ng isip ni L.K. Santos ang ganitong “bisyo” sa tradisyonal na pagpapahayag, wika nga’y luma na at promdi, lubhang kulang sa panukatan ng ninanais niyang repinado at urbanisadong wika, kayâ hindi niya mapahalagahan ang ngayo’y posibleng purihin naman nating senyal ng “madilim” na pagpangitain sa modernong búhay.

Itinatanghal sa atin ng sipat sa panahunan ng pahayag ni L.K. Santos ang hangganan ng kaniyang pamantayan ng “Kagandahan” bílang kodigo at batayan ng Awtoridad. Ang kapangyarihan ng ganitong Awtoridad ay “nabubulag” sa naiiba at kakatwa—na maaaring hudyat ng orihinal at kinakailangang banyuhay ngunit napagkakamalan ng katulad niya na paglabag sa batas—at laging nakatakdang paghimagisikan ng nagsusúlong ng pagbabago.

Paglikha Bílang Pagsisilang

MAKIKINABANG NAMAN táyo sa pagsisikap ni L.K. Santos na pagsanibin ang talinghaga at kariktan (o “Kagandahan”) at ituring itong kaluluwa ng paglikha. Makabuluhan, lalo na, ang pagtukoy niya sa talinghaga bílang ang itinuturing kong “mapagbuong simulain” at pinagsanib na mga karanasan at materyales na kinasangkapan ng makata sa paglikha ng “Kagan-

dahan.” Ang ibig sabihin, “Kagandahan” ang layunin ng talinghaga. O ibig sabihin pa, isinisilang sa paglikha ng talinghaga ang “Kagandahan.”

Isang paghahambing ang ginamit ko sa “**isinisilang**.” Inihahambing natin ang proseso ng paglikha sa “**pagsisilang**”—ang buong panahon at mga hakbang na kailangan mula sa paghahasik ng binhi sa sinapupunan, pagkakahugis ng nililikha, hanggang sa paglabas nitó na isang sanggol. Isang lumang paghahambing na ito. Ngunit hindi natin gaanong pinakikinabangan sa pagdalumat sa “Kagandahan.” Malimit kasing nakatitig lámang táyo sa **tapos na**, sa isinilang na anak—ang “Kagandahan”—kayâ malimit ding tigib táyo ng panggigilalas sa anyubog nitó. Narito ang ugat ng nakamihasnan ding pagtuturing sa talinghaga bílang “hiwaga” (*misterio*). Mahiwaga ang paglikha dahil hindi natin sinisiyasat ang mga naganap sa “pagsisilang” ng “Kagandahan”—ang mga pinagdaanang hakbang ng “mapagbuong simulain,” ng pagkilos ng talinghaga, bago ipinanganak na “Kagandahan.”

Ang “pagsisilang” ang kasaysayan at layon ng sipat. Na sa panig ng talinghaga ay nangangahulugan ng pagpili sa mga angkop na materyales at pagpapasiya kung paano kikipilin ang mga materyales na napili tungo sa pangarap na nilikha. Dalawang tanong samakatwid ang sinasagot ng sipat. Una, ano ang mga kailangang sangkap sa gagawing paglikha? Ikalawa, paano huhubugin ang mga tinipong elemento? Sa ganitong paraan ng pag-uusisa ay natatanggal ang mistikal na belo kapag tumitig sa “Kagandahan.” Hindi ito “hulog ng langit” at lalong hindi isang “inspirasyon” o “makalangit na kabaliwan” (*divine madness*) mula sa mga Diwata at Musa. Sa halip, mula ito sa daigdig at panahon ng makata, mula sa kaniyang *cultura integral*, mula sa mga kongkretong sangkap ng búhay at pinagdaanan ng makata.

Lumilitaw din sa atin ngayon ang tunay na saligan ng kadakilaan ng makata bílang manlilikha at ang tunay na saligan ng “Kagandahan” bílang katotohanan.

Magandang balikan ang isang alamat sa Panay hinggil sa paglikha ng bagay-bagay sa santinakpan. Sang-ayon sa alamat ay nagmula sa walang-anyong kawalan ang mga bathalang sina Tungkung Langit at Alunsina at ang tahanan nilá nang maging mag-asawa ang unang pook ng kaayusan at kapayapaan sa santinakpan. Ngunit nag-away ang mag-asawa at iniwan ni Alunsina si Tungkung Langit. Ang pangyayaring ito ang nagdulot ng kalungkutan sa santinakpan sa kabilá ng kapayapaan at kaayusan. Lubhang nangulila si Tungkung Langit dahil sa matagal na paghihintay kay Alunsi-

na. Naisip niyang likhain ang dagat upang maging salamin at doon hintayin ang paglitaw ng naglayas na asawa. Hindi lumitaw ang imahen ni Alunsina sa dagat. Sa buwisit, bumabâ si Tungkung Langit at lumikha ng lupa, at upang maaliw, nilagyan ang lupa ng mga hayop at halaman. Sa laot ng lungkot, tinipon niya ang mga hiyas ng asawa at isinabog sa langit sa pag-asang bumalik ang asawa kapag nakita ang mga ito. Ang kuwintas ni Alunsina ang naging mga bituin, ang suklay ang naging buwan, at ang korona ang naging araw.

May higit pang malumbay na karugtong ang alamat. Ngunit nais kong huminto sa paggunita ng salaysay at pagmunian natin ang naganap na paglikha. Matingkad sa alamat na ito ang mga tinalakay nating pangyayari sa proseso ng “pagsisilang.” Higit pa, sapagkat ipinanukala ng alamat na ito ang pangangailangan ng isang **sanhing lunggati** upang lumikha. Hindi basta naisip ng bathala, tulad sa ginaganap sa maraming alamat, na gumawa ng mga nilikha para mapunô ang walang-anyong kawalan. Sa halip, bunga ng masidhing pangungulila ang mga paglikha ni Tungkung Langit. Sasabihin natin ngayon, ang pangungulila ng manlilikha sa isang pangarap na anyo. Ang pangungulila ng manlilikhang si Tungkung Langit sa pinapangarap na anyo ni Alunsina. Sa gayon, ang mga nalikha sa santinakpan ay may mithing sumagot sa layunin ng paglikha, lalo na sa unang nilikha—ang dagat upang doon salaminin ang inaasahang pagbabalik ng pinapangarap na anyo. Ang pangwakas na kalipunan ng mga nilikha, ang mga lawas pangkalawakan, ay hindi rin mula sa wala; sa halip, hinugis ang mga ito ng haraya mula sa mga tunay na materyales—ang mga naiwang alahas ng asawa.

Ang paggunita ko ngayon sa alamat ni Tungkung Langit bílang manlilikha ay isang paraan ng pagpapatibay sa haka ng “pagsisilang.” Nahiwatigan na noon pa ng ating mga ninuno ang buong kasaysayan ng paglikha at lubhang makabuluhan ang pagtatampok sa pangungulila bílang sanhi ng paglikha. Ibang-iba ito sa mga karaniwang alamat ng pananaginip sa isang “Kagandahan” ng isang manlilikha dahil higit na materyalista ang batayang damdamin ng pagkilos ni Tungkung Langit. Dagdag pa, ipinahihiwatig sa alamat ng Panay ang posibilidad ng paglikha ng “anak” na iba sa sanhi ng paglikha. Sa karaniwang alamat, ang produkto ng paglikha ay isang repleksiyonistang kaganapan ng pinangarap. Nangarap ng isang binibini ang isang eskultor at sinikap niya itong buháyin sa pamamagitan ng isang estatwa. Itinangi ng isang pintor ang isang dalaga at idinambana niya ang

“Kagandahan” nitó sa isang larawan sa kambas. Namighati ang isang mandudula dahil sa pagkamatay ng kaniyang pamilya sa digma at isinulat niya ang isang dula laban sa karahasan. Hindi ganoon si Tungkung Langit bílang manlilikha. Nilikha niya ang dagat upang hintayin doong lumitaw ang imahen ni Alunsina. Nilikha niya ang mga bituin, buwan, at araw upang maging palatandaan ng “Kagandahan” ng asawa. Kung ninais ng alamat ng Panay na ipakita ang paglikha bílang katapatan-ng-nilikha-sa-pinangarap, hindi ba’t higit na dapat nilikha ni Tungkung Langit ang kahit isang imitasyong anyo ni Alunsina? Kung gayon ang nangyari, hindi papasok sa isip ni Tungkung Langit ang paglikha ng dagat, lupa, at mga lawas pangkalawakan. O kayá, kailangan niyang pangulilahang isa-isa ang mga ito upang mailikha ng katapat na anyo.

Taglay ng imahen ni Tungkung Langit ang kadakilaan ng manlilikha. Nag-iisa sa walang-anyong kawalan (marahil, ang orihinal na “Toreng Garing”?) ngunit dahil nairalan ng isang masidhing sanhing lunggati ay kailangan niyang lumikha upang baguhin ang kaniyang daigdig o katayuan. Siyempre, tinutukoy natin dito ngayon ang makatuturang paglikha at hindi iyong produkto ng kawalang magawa, pagsasabóg, paglilibang, pangangarap nang gising, atbpang katulad na gawain. May sapat siyáng kapangyarihan bílang bathala, lalo na bílang bihasa sa “nakamihasan”—ang kailangang edukasyon upang mapatnubayan ng kasaysayan at tradisyon ang kaniyang “pagsisilang.” Bahagi rin kaipala ng kaniyang kakayahan bílang bihasa ang kadalubhasaan sa kaniyang sining—ang angkop na kasanayan at kaalaman sa iba’t ibang aspekto ng kaniyang pinasok na larang, ang kailangang *techne*, sa wika ng mga Griego, ngunit higit na nangangahulugan ng pagkakaroon ng malusog na “sarili” sa wika ng ating mga ninuno.

Ang “**sarili**” ang taal na “puhunan” ng tao-manlilikha at ang pangunahing puhunan ay ang mga talino’t kakayahang kaloob ng kaniyang pagkalikha, ng wika nga ni A.G. Abadilla’y kaniyang “kabathalaan,” ng halimbawa’y “sariling bait” upang malining ang tama o malí at ng “sariling pag-iisip” upang mapigil ang malahayop na silakbo ng damdamin. Ang “sarili” ang tulad ng puhunang ekonomiko ay tumutubò at nakikinabang sa bawat karanasan at inter-aksiyon sa nagsinang mundo, pinalalago at pinayayaman ng panahon, natututo sa kirot at sugat ng tunggalian, nakabukás sa pangangarap at pangitain. Ang “sarili” ang malikhaing kapasidad ng manlilikha, ang mga sangkap na ipinagkakaloob sa binhi ng isisilang, bukod

sa ito rin ang sustansiyang ipinangangalaga sa binhi sa buong panahon ng paghubog tungo sa kagampan. Ang “sarili” ng manlilikha ang pinakamalaking bahagdan ng kaganapan ng pagsisilang, ang saligan ng kadakilaan o kapahamakan ng isinilang na likhang “Kagandahan.”

Materyalistang Saligan

TINUTUKOY, SA WAKAS, ng buong proseso ng paglikha bílang pagsisilang ang tunay na saligan ng “Kagandahan,” na walang iba kundi ang katotohanan. Pansinin kaagad na kailangang isulat ko ang “katotohanan” nang may maliit na titik. Upang ibukod ito sa Katotohanan bílang Awtoridad. Upang ipahiwatig ang katangian nitóng pambalana, naaabot ng karaniwang pagpapahalaga, at nagagamit sa pang-araw-araw na pamumuhay. Ang katotohanan ang garantiya ng pangkalahatan, kung hindi man ng pangkaramihang kabutihan, at isa sa gantimpala nitó sa atin ang “Kagandahan.”

Magandang muling alalahanin sa dakong ito ang ika-41 saknong ni Balagtas. Ipinamamalay noon pa ng salitâ ni Florante na katotohanan ang saligan ng tunay na “Kagandahan.” Iyon ang pangunahing implikasyon ng kaniyang pagtatakwil sa naranasan niyang “paglililo” ng “Kagandahan.” Hindi totoo ang “Kagandahan” kapag naglililo—nagtataksil, nanlilinlang, o kahit napaghihinalaan ang katapatan. Ang “Kagandahan,” tulad ng katotohanan, ay kailangang matapat at matibay. Sa ganitong pagtingin, ang “Kagandahan” ay higit kaysa bulaklak na kumukupas ni G. Pineda. Ang katotohanan ng “Kagandahan” bílang bulaklak ay hindi ang pagkupas ng bulaklak kundi ang pagiging bulaklak ng bulaklak, ang pang-akit na idinudulot ng bulaklak sa sandali ng pamumukadkad, na siyáng sanhi at layunin ng pagiging bulaklak nitó. Nilikha ang bulaklak bílang “Kagandahan” hindi upang kumupas kundi upang maging nakalulugod at nakasisiyáng bulaklak. Ibang katotohanan ang pangyayaring kumukupas ito, isang pangyayaring maaaring kaugnay rin ng “Kagandahan,” ng pangyayaring walang permanente’t unibersal na “Kagandahan,” ngunit iba kaysa katotohanan ng paglikha sa bulaklak bílang isang “Kagandahan.” Kung tutuusin, nagaganap ang pagkupas ng bulaklak bunga rin ng mga di-permanenteng sangkap sa naging paglikha sa bulaklak, ngunit sapagkat ang kaakit-akit na pagbukad nitó ang higit na layuning katotohanan sa “Kagandahan” ng bulaklak at hindi ang higit na pagtatagal bílang bulaklak na halimbawa’y *paper roses*.

Ang ibig ko pang sabihin, may ibang katotohanang nais patunayan ang “Kagandahan” ng *paper roses* at iba sa katotohanan ng bulaklak na tinukoy ni G. Pineda. Ang totoo, ang “Kagandahan” ng katotohanan ng *paper roses* bilang nagtatagal na bulaklak ang patuloy ngayong pinaunlad ng teknolohiya upang bukod sa bulaklak na nagtatagal ay maabot pa ng artipisyal na bulaklak (ang *paper roses*) ang ibang katangiang ikinapaging-bulaklak ng natural na rosas kapag bumukad sa hardin. Maaari ngang dumating ang paglikha ng artipisyal na bulaklak sa yugto ng “Kagandahan” na hindi iginagawad sa “kariktan” ng natural na bulaklak.

Nais ko namang samantalahin, sa dakong ito, ang kailangan kong ipaliwanag na higit kong hilig gamitin ang salitang “kagandahan” kaysa “kariktan” na higit namang priyoridad ni L.K. Santos. May ganda ba ang “ganda” na wala sa dikit ng “dikit”? Kung babalikan ng bokabularyo ni Fray Francisco de San Antonio (1624), ang unang paliwanag ng misyonero tungkol sa *dicquit* (gayon ang ispelang nilá noon sa “**dikit**”) ay walang pinag-ibhan sa pangkalahatang katangian ng “ganda.” Ngunit idinagdag ni Fray San Antonio ang dalawa pang pakahulugan: una, ang “dikit” na bunga ng pagkakaroon ng apoy (*encender fuego*); ikalawa, ang “dikit” na naglalarawan sa pagkapit o paglapat ng isang bagay sa isa pa (*pegar*), lalo na sa tulong ng kola o anumang malapot na dagta. Mga katangian o kahulugan ito ng “dikit” na wala sa “ganda” ngunit mga katangian, lalo na ang ikalawa, na hindi kailangan ng “Kagandahan.” Ang unang kahulugan hinggil sa apoy ay nagpapatindi rin sa pagtuturing sa kariktan bilang katangiang biswal at hindi maisasaklaw sa katulad na kagandahan alinsunod sa ibang pandamá. Halimbawa, maganda at marikit ang kulay ng talulot at ng bahaghari. Tinatanggap ding marikit ang magandang tugtugin. Ngunit hindi karaniwan ang paglalarawan na marikit ang maganda dahil makinis ang rabaw ng tabla. Malimit ding marikit ang maliliit ngunit nakapag-aalinlangang tawaging marikit ang kahit isang magandang higanta.

Mula naman sa siniyasat nating trabaho ng manlilikha ay mahihiwatigan na ang katunayan ng paglikha ang nagpapaging-totoo sa “Kagandahan.” Siyempre, may iba’t ibang uriang “mababaw/malalim” ni L.K. Santos. Ngunit higit na kailangan nating alalahanin ang posibleng uriang na salig at mula sa “mapaglilong Kagandahan” ni Balagtas. Mula kay Balagtas ay maaari nating ipahayag na ang higit na mataas na uri ng katunayan ang lumilikha ng higit na totoong “Kagandahan.” Sa praktikal at utilityong pamantayan,

ang higit na mataas na uri ng katunayan ay maaaring mangahulugan ng tinatawag na “kabuluhan,” maging tinapay man o baril, sa pangangailangan ng lipunan. Maaari, bakit hindi? Subalit hindi nagiging totoo ang “Kagandahan” dahil naging tinapay o naging baril, dahil nakatighaw sa matinding gútom ng sambayanan o naging sandata sa pagtatanggol ng karapatan ng mayoryang inaapi; sa halip, nagiging totoo ang “Kagandahan” dahil totoo ang naturang pangangailangan at layunin sa paglikha. Magkagayunman, hindi iyon ang palagiang layunin ng “Kagandahan” bukod sa maraming katotohanang maaari at kailangang paglingkuran ang “Kagandahan.”

Narito ang demokratikong sandigan ng katotohanan na iba sa Katotohanan ng Awtoridad. Nag-uutos ng ganap na paglilingkod ang Katotohanan ng Awtoridad, nagpapaturing-sa-sarili na nag-iisang Katotohanan. Sa gayon, laging itinuturing ng Katotohanan bílang Awtoridad ang “Kagandahan” bílang ordinaryong kasangkapan—tulad ng alipin, nilikha upang maglingkod—at walang ibang posibilidad. Para ngang tinapay o baril lámang, at wala na. Ni hindi maaaring maging bulaklak. Ngunit gaano katapat at gaano katibay ang “Kagandahang” likha ng gayong Katotohanan bílang Awtoridad? Naalala ko ang mga pelikula ng siyudad sa hinaharap na hitik sa makakapal, matataas, at itim-at-puting pader. Sagana naman marahil sa tinapay ang mamamayan. Subalit maligaya kayâ?

Dahil nag-aatas at naghihintay lagi ng paggálang at pagsunod ang Katotohanan bílang Awtoridad ay malimit itong tuyaing “moralismo”—ipinatuturing ang sarili bílang hindi maaaring suwaying Kapangyarihan at napagkakamalan ang sarili na establisado sa habang-panahon—kayâ malimit na hindi nagiging maláy sa pagbabago ng panahon, at ang mabigat, hindi nagiging maláy sa pagbabago ng itinuturing din nitóng permanenteng kodigo ng “Kagandahan.” Maraming alingasngas hinggil sa “marangal” o “malaswa” sa “Kagandahan” ng likhang-sining ang bunga ng pinaiiral na “Kagandahan” (o moralidad) ng Katotohanan bílang Awtoridad ukol sa likhang-sining na nagpapanukala ng iba o bagong katotohanan. Malimit na ang pagdakila sa “Kagandahan” bílang nagsasarili at tiwalag na hubog ay reaksiyon lámang din sa ganitong mapaniil na Katotohanan bílang Awtoridad. Sa gayon, bílang reaksiyon pa lámang ay isinilang na ang naturang nagsasariling hubog mula sa isang materyal na katunayan—ang pinaghihimagsikan nitóng Katotohanan bílang Awtoridad—at kahit itanghal lámang ng makata o pintor sa loob ng kaniyang pribadong silid ay bahagi pa rin ng materyal na mundo ng kaniyang silid.

Hindi saklaw ng kasalukuyang paghahambing ng “Kagandahan” sa pagsisilang ang pagtimbang sa bigat o gaan ng katotohanang nagsisilang sa “Kagandahan.” Isa iyong maselan at matagal na pagsisiyasat. Maraming pananaw noon at ngayon at di-maiiwasang bahagi ng pagsisilang ang gayong politika. Marahil nga. Napakahirap timbangin ang hindi “mapaglilong Kagandahan” na batay sa isang matapat at matibay na katotohanan. Malimit na pinaslang na ang “Kagandahan” bago napatunayang “mapaglilo” ang nagsilang at nilitis na Katotohanan. Sa ibabaw ng lahat, pinatutunayan mismo ng gayong diktadura ng Katotohanan bílang Awtoridad ang matalik na pagsasalig ng “Kagandahan” sa katotohanan. Nililikha ang “Kagandahan” mula sa katotohanan at para sa katotohanan. Nakasalig sa katapatan at tibay ng pinagsaligang katotohanan ang katapatan din at tibay ng “Kagandahan” upang magdulot ng kabutihan at pakinabang.

Sa ibang pangungusap, ang nakalulugod at nakasisiyá bílang mga pamantayan ng pang-akit ay napatatnubayan tuwina ng katotohanang nagpasilang sa nakalulugod at nakasisiyá. Dagdag pa, matalik na nakagabay sa katotohanan ng “Kagandahan” ang ikinalulugod at ikinasisiya ng tumatanggap na madla. Pagkatapos o sang-ayon sa katotohanan ng “Kagandahan” nagaganap ang posibilidad ng idudulot nitóng kabutihan o pakinabang. Hindi kailanman ipinapasiya ng inaakalang Kabutihan ang katotohanan ng “Kagandahan,” at kung maganap man ang ganitong pagkakataón, tulad ng naipaliwanag ko na sa unahan, ay nananatili lámang ang “Kagandahan” alinsunod sa pinaglilingkuran nitóng Kabutihan, at sa gayon ay walang ganap na kalayaan. Nauuna muna ang matatag na pormasyon ng “Kagandahan” bílang katotohanan bago maging kabutihan. Ang “Kagandahan” ang pinakamatingkad na kaganapan ng katotohanan; hindi isinilang upang maglingkod sa katotohanan kundi bílang katibayan ng katotohanan ng katotohanan. Kapag naalipin ang “Kagandahan” ng isang Katotohanan, ng mahigpit na Awtoridad ng isang pamantayang etikal, ang “Kagandahan” ay nagmimistulang puta, mumurahín, komersiyal, at walang-katapatan— isang “Kagandahang” walang-sarili, nakabilanggo ang pag-iral sa pinaglilingkurang Kabutihan, at kasangkapan lámang ng iwi nitóng kasinungalingan.

Sinasalungat din ng pagtanaw na ito ang banyaga’t kolonyal na pagtuturing sa “Kagandahan” bílang babasaging kristal, maselang palamuti, dalisay na aliwan, perpektong kaganapan, atbp, atbp. Mga aspekto ito ng

alamat hinggil sa ahistorical na “Kagandahan” at malimit na hambingan upang pagtibayin ang “Kagandahang” babae at mahinà. Mga katunayan ito ng naging dominanteng banyaga’t kolonyal na sapin ng ating kaisipang pambansa. Sa bukal ding ito natin nainom ang banyaga’t sinaunang pama-hiin hinggil sa “malikhaing sining” na dapat diumanong ihiwalay sa katotohanan at mga usaping may alikabok ng mundo. Ang pormasyon ng “Kagandahan” bílang babae, mahinà, nakaaliw na hubog, o nakapagsasariling kaganapan ay mga mukha lámang ng kabuuang estetika ng kagandahang kailangang idambana sa isang templong nakabukod sa magulong agora, o sabihin nating marungis na liwasan, ng katotohanan at kabutihan.

Ang pagsisilang sa “Kagandahan” ay isang materyalistang pangyayari na naglalahok sa mga materyales ng ating mundo, at naglalayong ibahagi sa ating mundo. Ang tinatawag na “estetika,” sa gayon, na minana natin sa dalumatang banyaga’t kolonyal, ay hindi paglikha ng “Kagandahan” mula sa kawalan at nakalutang sa kawalan. Maaari natin itong tawaging “malikhaing sining:” malikhain dahil nagdaraan sa proseso ng pagsisilang, sining dahil produkto ng sariling bait at muni. [Magandang buklatin sa lumang diksiyonaryo ang orihinal at katutubong kahulugan ng “**sining.**”] Produkto ito ng masalimuot na pagtitipon at paghahaluhalo ng pinagsanib na mga karanasan sa daigdig sa kawali o lansungan ng talinghaga, ang layunin at wakas ng naturang mapagbuong pagsasanib, at inaasahang pagbibigyan ng puwang sa daigdig ng mga dinatnang nilikha bukod sa nilunggating ituring na nilikha sa píling at gitna ng totoong daigdig ng mga pinakikinabangang nilikha. Ang kaganapan o anak ng paglikhang ito ang “Kagandahan” at unang tinawag ng ating mga ninuno na Tula.

Nais ko pang idagdag ngayon na hindi ganap na banyaga’t kolonyal ang tinatawag nating “estetika.” Bagaman hiram na salita, nakatimo sa itinuturing nating “estetiko” ang sinauna’t katutubong kaparaanang malikhain at pumatnubay sa pagsisilang ng tugtugin, tayutay, bul-ul, patalim, pútong, habi, okkir, kulintang, at kahit bahay-kubo bago dumating ang kolonyalistang Kanluranin. Kailangan lámang muling titigan at paglimian ang bawat piraso ng ating sinaunang pamana upang higit nating makilála ang ating sarili. Dili kayâ, at tulad ng proyektong ito sa pagsisiyasat sa “Kagandahan,” kailangang ipakò ang ating pagtitig sa lumang salita, tangalan ng putik at lumot, dalisayin, pagitawin o tuklasin ang lantay na atay ng kahulugan, at pagyamanin/payamaning puhunan ukol sa makabago’t

pangkasalukuyang pangangailangan. Isa itong patuloy at walang humpay na proyekto ng pagtitig sa bawat makaengkuwentrong piraso ng gunita. Titigan halimbawa ang “**gayak**.” Sa Noceda at Sanlucar, nangangahulugan lámang ito ng preparasyon. Ngunit nabubúhay pa ngayon ang mga alingawngaw ng higit ng makabuluhang gawain kapag ginamit ito. Maririnig pa ngayong: “Gumayak ka’t magsisimba táyo.” Hindi ito utos para maghanda lámang sa pagpunta sa simbahan. Ipinahihiwatig mismo ng “gumayak” ang kaukulang pagbibihis ng damit na angkop sa pagdalo sa misa. Maririnig ding: “Dapat igayak ang bahay natin para sa pamanhikan.” Higit naman sa “pagbibihis” ang kailangan sa paggayak ng bahay. Una, dapat maglinis ng tahanan. Ikalawa, dapat isaayos ang lugar at ang mga kailangang gamit (silya, mesa, atbp). Ikatlo, dapat maghanda ng maipakakain sa inaasahang mga panauhin. Ikaapat, dapat maglagay ng kortina, bulaklak, o anumang palamuti. Atbp, atbp.

Nais kong sipatin ngayon ang “gayak” bilang isang natatangi sa karaniwang gawain kapag naghahanda para sa isang aktibidad. Nangangahulugan ito ng isang pagbabagong-anyo. Ang “iginagayak” o “ginagayakan” ay hindi lámang binibihisan at nililinis gaya sa aking ginamit na mga ilustrasyon. Dumadanas ito ng transpormasyon upang maging iba sa karaniwan nitóng anyo o kalagayan. Ang gayak ay isang malikhaing gawain upang maging nakalulugod at nakasisiya ang ginayakan. Nangangahulugan ito ng pagsasaayos ng bagay-bagay, ng mga bahagi o detalye, tungo sa isang adhikang “Kagandahan.” Ang dambanang ginayakan ay nilalagyan ng palamuti (pumpon ng bulaklak, espesyal na tela bilang sapin ng dinadalanginang sagisag, ilaw o kandila, pahiyas, atbp). Gayundin ang tahanan. Ang bukana ng bakod ng tahanan ay tinitirikan ng singkaban o hanay ng mga singkaban. Ang pintuan ay may adornong itinirintas na palaspas ng niyog o pinaglingkis na mga sanga ng kamuning na may mga tusok na bulaklak. May balag na kumot na may pahiyas na mga bulaklak upang masilungan ng mga panauhing hindi magkakasiya sa loob ng bahay. Makikita pa ang ganitong gayak sa mga nayon kapag may kasalan o may nakaburol na patay. Samantala, mapapansing isinanib ito sa Kristiyanismong paggayak sa kapilya kapag pista at kuwaresma at napagkakamalan ngayong dinalá pa—imported—at nilinang para sa atin ng mga misyonero.

Nais ko pang ipanukala ang gayak bilang sining ng pagpapalamuti (o “pagpapamuti”) at may diwang kasalungat ng payak at linear na arkitektura

ng bahay-kubo at katulad. Ang gayak ang estrombotiko't maborloloy na dyipni, tinalak, at sarimanok. At kahit ang sari-saring pinakbet at haluhalo kasalungat ng simpleng paksiw at kinilaw. Hindi kayâ noon ay sining na magkatunggali ang “gayak” at ang “payak”? Tungkulin ng pagpapakahulugang Filipino ang patuloy at walang-humpay na saliksik at paglitis. Sa kaso nga ng gayak at ng payak, anuman ang maging sagot ng pagsisiyasat, hindi sapat ang sinasabi ngayong hiram na *horror vacui* o ang *naif* upang ipaliwanag ang “Kagandahang” Filipino.

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Reading as a Liberating Art

Gémino H. Abad

In sum: our poet in whatever language lives and breathes poetry at the zenith of excellent writing, “the achieve of, the mastery of the thing.” (Hopkins: 73)

Our poet because the subject of his poems is *our* consciousness, *our* experience, in our own “scene so fair,” for which he has forged a language *from* English.

In whatever language: Spanish, English, Tagalog, Cebuano, whatever, because of the nature of the creative process, “that craft or sullen art.”

First, the ground of language – the soil of thought and feeling – is broken. The Latin word *versus* means “furrows”; thus, *verses* signals the work of cultivation. For the writer, no historical language is a *given*; it is *forged*, in the triple sense of that word: “to bring into being; to make, mime, or simulate; to forge ahead, to advance.”

The writer then *translates* his perceptions of reality, his consciousness of it *as imagined*, into language. The word “translate” is from Latin *transferre, translatus*, “to carry or ferry across.”

So, the writer ferries across the void of language his own soul’s freight without hurt or injury to mind’s import and aim – *the void of language* because the meanings of our words arise, *not so much* from the “differential play” among the words as from *lives lived as imagined*.

* Revised as drawn from “English Literature Teaching in the Philippines: Problems and Prospects,” CETA Journal, vol. 5, no. 1, 1988: 1-6.

Thus, it is only from his own way with language, his craft and cunning with language, that we recognize the poet – *in whatever language*.

One need only read close and imagine well.

Reading as a Liberating Art

You might, at the outset, ask: Why read literature (for on that I focus) and study it at all? The short answer is: of all studies, it humanizes; among all things that humanize, it humanizes best because it *cultivates the life of feeling and imagination*.

When you examine a day in your life -- a day traveling to Sagada or a day shopping -- you quickly discover that it has vanished; it is the same as yesterday or the other day; it does not seem to have much reality or meaning, and yet, you had lived through it. The reason is that it has no words, or its words are those in daily use, for ready communication and commerce.

But when you read literature -- read it so as to produce it -- then you discover life, the very living of it; it becomes so real, so alive, in the mind's imagination: that vista of rice terraces, that monstrous traffic on EDSA. And the reason is: now that trek has all the words -- the words in daily use, or words found anew or freshened in their relationship and play with other words; in any case, words well chosen and ordered for perceptive expression; indeed, communication still, but beyond that, it may even reach a certain level as spiritual basis for community.

Spiritual? -- why, yes, for it soothes our hunger for our own reality, and tempts us to aspire for that nobility which our daily lives miss. Such is the value and power of (excellent) literature; it is what makes the reading and teaching of it unique: we have a personal stake in it.

Nobility? One might perhaps read literature the way one is moved to prayer and is moved by it. Prayer proceeds from a condition of helplessness; we do not pray when we are convinced of our ability and power. When we read a novel or poem, we are most moved when we are helpless before its beauty and power: we are not convinced we have got it whole for, rather, it has got us. If we have got it, we read no further, we produce no literature. The effect of literature is like the effect of *Our Father* when we realize it can only be the prayer of a very courageous and unselfish man:

for its words mean *Thy will be done*, which discounts our will, and its words beg forgiveness *as we forgive*, which we are often not quite inclined to do.

The act of reading, essentially work of imagination, is an act of civilization, of humanization. The finest symbol of civilization is the figure of a man reading a book. In that act, he gathers the world's best minds, and he is connected, in his isolation, to all humanity. In the rout and routine of day-to-day living, one has to learn the discipline of solitude, the conquest of distraction. The reader is not a passive consumer of texts; he is an active producer of meaning. His solitary act makes itself conscious of its own participation in the construction of the text; it is a rite of passage from sensitivity to a given weave of words to originality of thinking. The poet creates the poem; the reader produces its text. The poem has many possible texts.

The Matter of Our Reading

I would stress *our* because there are always other possible readings or interpretations, and because *our* is often an unexamined tyranny, a collective sensibility, as it were, posing as obvious and definitive.

Any reading is *a* reading; it grounds itself in the very essence of language's usage -- the differential play of meaning. Within a given linguistic system, "tree" has no meaning except in differential relation to other meanings in *plant, bush, shrub, grass*, etc. Is bamboo tree or grass? Is banana plant or bush? Within a poem, "tree" has no meaning except in differential relation to other meanings in the poem's word-weave, and to "tree" in other forms of discourse like science, religion, folk mythology, psychology of dreams, etc.

Thus, in reading a poem, for instance, it is often liberating to read *consciously*: to make oneself aware of the process of reading as one reads (what might Tadena have in mind by that word "stave" in his poem, "This Side of Perishing"? [Tadena: 30] or can I picture to mind's eye Frost's "honeysuckle" in his poem, "To Earthward" [Frost: 226-7]). *As one reads*: that is, as one actively produces a possible text of the poem (a paraphrase, if you will), as one actively produces a *con-text* by which to grasp the poem's meaningfulness. That *con-text* is what goes with the poem's word-weave and so, reads it by that reading lamp. One makes oneself aware of the very process of the *construction of meaning* at the time of reading; one need not be over-anxious

about the poet's own meaning -- his is *one* reading or interpretation of an experience *as imagined*; besides, in the author's absence, *his* reading may be subject to fruitless wrangling. The reader is free, but that freedom implies a scrupulous care and responsibility: he must make himself aware of the meanings that he secretes as he reads. The way he reads *reads him*, too: it shows his subjectivity, his own consciousness of a self that is often wordless; it shows his ideology, the way he thinks and feels and so, lives in those concrete and real relations with other people in his own milieu.

Perhaps we should stress this: at the moment of reading, what we are or have become necessarily supports or justifies our reading. Our reading then even gives us a handle to examine ourselves. Our own subjectivity (our hidden and elusive self) is part of the *con-text* which makes possible our reading. Our own feeling, for example, is part of the poem's meaning in our reading of it; our own knowledge is certainly part of what or who we are; this knowledge includes other works (texts) we have read, which then may enter into, or influence, our reading. The poem's meaning -- its "established" (granted) historical-cultural meaning -- may have an independent status of sort, but it is our own reading of it that matters to us. *Our reading is our matter.*

Being aware of the peril and the delight over the play of meaning that the poem releases, your reading becomes one as best as you can arrive at. This awareness liberates us from our anxiety over our limitations even as it also liberates the poem because we open it and ourselves to other possibilities of meaningfulness. In this way, our reading may become slightly more than *just* another reading.

That Differential Play of Meaning

In most pieces of writing, the differential play of meaning that constitutes language is only more or less suppressed. Science and law, for example, as specific forms of discourse, achieve a stability of interpretation preordained by their specific ends or purposes; they are forms of knowledge which are more or less stable or guaranteed. We distinguish murder, homicide, manslaughter, etc. with their corresponding forms of penalty. Yet there are loopholes and ambiguities in the realities created by law; as the cliché goes, the finer the net, the more holes. The court's decision arrests the play of lawyers.

But other pieces of writing (in poetry as a generic term) foreground the play of language. They not only foreclose it, they incite it. To the extent that the poem's imaginative energy is the play of its words, it can free itself from the natural, historical language that grounds it -- free itself from both the historical-cultural milieu and the contemporary usage of that language; it opens itself up to other possible readings that free it from its original *con-text*, and as well, its present readers (we, now, aren't the only possible readers).

The poem, then, is capable of releasing the play of language; the reader, too, as he reads is released into that play. The poem (not all) harnesses that play, valorizes it. Our reading, now, is only *a* stability of meaning, a temporary arrest of the play. Our reading is our equilibrium. Our consciousness of self, our subjectivity, achieves a kind of poise, a settlement with its own discourse; and our ideology or way of thinking maintains in our reading a peace and order among our words.

We usually think that there is only a certain range of possible meanings for a given poem that we can pretty nearly exhaust; yet this range, in fact, should alert us to the ever-present possibility that the words the poem *contains* -- holds and controls -- may secrete other grounds for other integrations of the poem's meaningfulness. There may always be more than meets "the considering eye."** It is only our reading now that is limited. The poem itself stays open to other readings; we can do no less but remain open.

The best reading is that which sees clearly its limitations, that which can criticize its own privileged standpoint. As I've often remarked, "criticism" is from Greek *krinein*: "to divide (distinguish or discriminate) and to judge," which relates to English "crisis." A crisis occurs when one's own "theoria" or standpoint (hidden, unexamined assumptions) is brought into the open and interrogated.

Literature as the Art of Letters

The most fundamental fact about literature is that it is the art of letters. Art implies skill from practice and imagination. The literary product

** I adopt the title of Manuel A. Viray's poem in ME: 225-6.

is an artifice: an artifact, an invention, from the materials of language and human experience. The *matter* of literature is language, its *subject* a human experience. By this *subject-matter*, a new reality is created -- yes, of course, a *fictive* reality. This new reality is sponsored by language; although it is rooted in human experience *as imagined*, it is yet itself a new experience: as the word *experience* (from Greek *experiri*) suggests, a testing, a trial, a judgment of reality.

Because of this *duplex nature* of literature -- or *duplicitous*, if you will -- it is crucial that one is sensitive to the play of language and is himself alive as a human being, alive at all points of contact with reality by which our humanity is always being realized.

Let us focus on language whose usage is the fundamental mechanism by which our human reality is composed or constructed. It is the same mechanism -- but consciously, efficiently operated -- by which literature is *invented* (*found within language*). Literature, therefore, is the deepest and highest expression of the reality that our use of language establishes.

There is *a* language that poetry creates for itself from a given natural language. That language that poetry re-invents *matters* it. It is different from other uses of the same natural language which make possible *other forms* of discourse. The poet, for example, may not be interested in the *communication* of meaning, but its *production*; he deals with language not so much as a *vehicle* of meaning as its *generator*. The poems of Carlos Angeles are *in* English; that is their natural medium. But they are also poems *of* Carlos Angeles *from* English; they are, as it were, translations. As I've often remarked, to *trans-late* (from Latin *trans-ferre*) is "to bear across": that is, the poet bears his poems across words recognizably English. But to bear is not only to endure or carry one's burden; it is also to bear fruit. *Across* is crucial in that work of *trans-lation* that is the poet's special calling: for there are mind's or heart's crossings which no language can negotiate unless poetry re-invents it. "Crossing," says Cirilo Bautista, "the foggy fjords of the skull"; or Alfred A. Yuson: "why do I bleed so / from such sharp points of dreams?"***

*** Bautista, "Addressed to Himself," 1968, NC: 448-9; Yuson, "Dream of Knives," 1983, HS: 103.

We create the realities that we prefer: for instance, democracy over communism, as manifest in our laws and institutions. Or, we create the realities that are mysteriously given us to perceive (even as Rilke or Yves Bonnefoy does). Often, though, we perceive only what our words permit us to see, for our words already secrete a way of looking, a habit of perception, a mode of feeling. To see beyond our words is to enter into *their* constructs of reality and *criticize* their inscapes. To see beyond may well be to see finally the frailty of our human reality, the nakedness of our creaturehood.

Simply to illustrate the mechanism by which our words construct our reality, take the words *brother, sister* in English and *kapatid* in Tagalog. The English rests on sexual/biological differentiation. The way of looking and feeling inscribed in -- literally, *written into* -- the word *kapatid* rests upon another ground where the same reality is differently perceived. For *ka-patid* is "fellow-cut," or *ka-putol* (*utol*), that is, cut from the same umbilical cord, sharing the same placenta.

A poet may of course employ more often his community's language, its own speaking; he will affirm the communal wisdom, its way of looking and feeling that has sustained the community. He is, let us say without denigration, the conservative poet, and language for him is its daily usage for conversation and commerce. Such poetry depends quite simply on the language of its time and place, it does not seek to criticize and transform it. The burden and glory of such poetry is its sense; its subject or theme is all or almost all. There is no fruit of new seeing, only a fresh renewal of established ways of seeing and feeling. There is only writing that clearly reads itself because the words only propagate a way of looking and feeling that already inheres in the words themselves in their interplay. We are not of course saying that such poetry is so because it often employs only simple, ordinary vocabulary; in fact, the poem that so employs it may also be the most difficult to write and yet give one pleasure and light. What we are at principally is the poem's *manner of expression*, its distinctive style.

But another poet may venture beyond language; he may not always be content with the ways of seeing that the common use of language endorses. He discovers his own distinctive *subject-matter* in a special clearing of his own thought and feeling -- a clearing that he establishes within the language of his poem. This is why, when we first read his poem, he

may appear incomprehensible. He has transformed the language that we know only from its common usage; he has reinvented our language, forged it anew.

Perhaps we can best understand this transformation by noting that *feeling* is first without words, though it is already there, as real as what provoked it; but *thought* is not anything at all, or real only as a haze of abstraction, before it has a distinctive *form* or structure through words. Feeling -- or better perhaps, a sudden intuition -- is the poet's native ground. He is a man of powerful feeling, a lightning rod of intuition, before he is a man of powerful thought. The ground of his feeling or intuition is what is most unique about every poet, and that ground, the inner geography of all his verses, grows more spiritual (or soulful, if you will), more authentic, the more a language is found anew or reinvented to establish its forms in our imagination. Says T. S. Eliot:

If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. ...

.....
So I find words I never thought to speak
 In streets I never thought I should revisit
 When I left my body on a distant shore.

.....
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.****

At first, the soil of a given language is only broken, as verses (Latin *versus*: "furrows"). The language so tilled cannot at first *speak us* anew because no speech has as yet been found. But as the common usage of lan-

**** From Eliot's "Little Gidding": Eliot: 138-45.

guage, and its accepted or conventional poetic idiom, are cauterized of dead eyes, or made to serve new perceived connections between things, the poet begins to discover his own special clearing *within the language* where the words become no longer vernacular or foreign but the poem's own singular diction. A *new speaking* has been found, and may even speak us more truly than our usual way with words.

23 October 2014

Text and the City

Francisco B. Benitez

I would like to thank the National Book Development Board and the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies, particularly Dr. Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo, for the invitation to speak today. When I received the phone call from Prof. Hidalgo, it wasn't clear to me if I was invited primarily because of my training in what now seems to be a previous life in the field of comparative literature and cinema, or if it was because I am currently the president of the Philippine Women's University. But when I accepted the invitation, I had to wonder what I could say from the vantage point of either position about the theme selected today. Dr. Lumbera seems more current and hip than I, treating text as a form of mobile communication, while to me "Text and the City" seems to echo a popular television series about independent women in New York.

Speaking of independent women... established almost 100 years ago, and in anticipation of an independent Philippine Republic that was still to come, PWU was founded initially to provide women "useful education for virtuous citizenship." From the very beginning, the experience of gendered exclusion from public life and the full political recognition of women's active participation in nation-building, motivated the school's founders to

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educate women as organizers of civil society, without losing track of their roles in the domestic and familial sphere. The school has always endeavored to balance work and home, the private and public spheres; to bridge the gaps caused by modernity's fragmentation of social life. PWU's founders were acutely aware of the boundaries that created bordered centers and peripheries of power, that segmented and spatialized everyday life into distinct spheres of activity organized and valued differentially, and they sought to cultivate a public reason capable of interrogating, if not intervening, in this inequitable segmentation.

For the Founders and for PWU, families are a primordial site for social intervention and transformation. Civics then was always a core orientation of the school—but a notion of civics that insisted on the interconnect- edness of individual, familial, communal and political life. In retrospect, this experience and insight of PWU into our social reproduction might in fact, be pertinent to today's discussions.

Civics and citizenship are, in fact linked to the etymology of the word “city”—connected as the word is to “civitas,” the social body of the citizens. *Civitas* is related in turn to the ties that bind us as a community and as a society, to the rules and the ordering that organizes us, to the manner by which we recognize our rights, duties, and our obligations to one another and to a body larger than ourselves. Cities are administered spaces where citizens can gather and congregate, and where centers of sovereignty reside. But like all sites of sovereignty, cities are not homogeneous socialized spaces. Cities have heterogeneous elements whose borders are real even if generally socially contingent, such as: differentially ordered populations (Foucault's definition of racism), public policies and planned or unplanned urban development, with infrastructures such as roads and markets, multiple types of demographically differentiated public transportation, malls and places of worship, slums and *esteros* used as sewage alongside expensive green and sustainable skyscrapers. It is made up of political divisions where buses can be blocked at borders, or where taxes are collected by one district one day and then possibly given over to another center of power with a stroke of a court's pen. It is made up of neighborhoods and families—communities and individuals with histories of their experiences with one another, who produce as well as survive, contest, transform, or maintain these conditions and the consequences of this structuration of everyday life.

In this sense, a city *is* a text and a text *is* a city: it is woven from multiple and diverse strands that form patterns with a grammar and a syntax, with rules that dictate the parameters of social practices. Who goes where? Which malls or restaurants do we generally visit? It has a texture—a unique structure of feeling—that arises from the specific histories of and possibilities in the particular configuration of value and conjuncture of forces in a specific moment and place. Our idea of a city is also a text in a second sense, in the sense of being a palimpsest of the accretion of events and moments of its inhabitants’ practices and actions, of their *diskarte* or Greek *metis* (Latin’s *metis* would be of interest here too), as they act and react to changing conditions—from climate change and floods in hospitals, to the exigencies of global commodities and markets, to the transforming political conditions both locally and globally, to the everyday events of the density of their being-with one another. To understand the city as a text is also an attempt to provide a structured spatial identity to a system that expropriates or commandeers value from the fluidity of exchanges and flows of capital, commodities, populations and their labors and desires, in the interest of a specific mode of social production and reproduction that concentrates it in the hands of a few. To paraphrase Henri Lefebvre “cities are permeated with social relations, they are not only *supported* by social relations, but are also *producing* and *produced* by social relations.”

Cities are a particular type of sedimentation of social relations, a particular type of spatialization of modes of *social reproduction*. We often imagine cities as entities that provide a form or a structure, a fixed point where the accumulation of value can be seen in the very cost of capital required for the infrastructure of the city. Or we imagine it as a passive setting, a terrain that we, like characters in a text, simply traverse, a landscape or field we play on. Following urban landscape scholar Dolores Hayden, I would suggest that the increase in the intensity of the flows of information, commodity, labor and capital has made place-specific memories and identities even more crucial and important today. “Places make memories cohere in complex ways. People’s experiences of the urban landscape intertwine the sense of place and the politics of space.”¹ Social history manifests itself in our urban landscapes and part of the function of art and literature is to make legible the terrain of our daily life’s choreography and to disturb what

1 Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (MIT, 1995), p.43.

Ranciere has called “the distribution of the sensible.” But this image of the city as a fixed point, or a hub, is itself the freezing of the transformative powers of the practice of everyday life. Cities, as well as the *civitas* of its inhabitants in their day-to-day actions and encounters change the possibilities of the city even as what Michel De Certeau might call their “popular ingenuity” transforms or challenges the conditions of urban survival.

But the city is also a text in a third sense, in the sense of a text’s intertextuality and open-endedness. As sites of social relations and practices, cities are never alone, never absolutely autonomous. Seen in these terms, spaces and spheres, their boundaries and borders, are never completely discrete. They shade off into one another. They are linked by flows of exchange and the regulation of the mobility of populations. An environmental analysis of the city and its relationship to various spaces would reveal an ecosystem, reveal the conditions upon which the city’s very existence depends. Cities belong to a variable geometry of hierarchically ordered locations in continuously changing networks of flows of value and production. Similar to the binary of the domestic and the public spheres with which the PWU founders struggled, the city is always co-constituted and symbiotic with rural spaces, with other cities.

As an example, I’d like to look at a text that deals not with the city directly, but with the rural space. In his short story “Kasalan sa Malaking Bahay,” Macario Pineda presents a small rural town in the middle of preparations for a wedding in the home of the landlord. First published June 12, 1946, in *Malaya* (Free) magazine,² the story is ostensibly about the wedding of Anita, daughter of Doña Isabel the local landowner, and Dr. Arturo, a man she has met while in school in Manila (perhaps even at UST). As the story unfolds, we realize that there is a backstory to the story we are being told by Tonio, our farmhand narrator. By the end of the story, we discover that Kapitán Monang, Doña Isabel’s father and Anita’s grandfather had imprisoned Tonio’s father, Mang Terong, for helping Arturo’s father, farmhand Mang Alfonso, deliver letters to his daughter some forty years ago. Isabel and Alfonso’s *foiled* love story (in both the senses of failed

2 The date of 1946 is given by Soledad Reyes in her “Themes in the Stories of Macario Pineda,” while *Maiikling Katha* of 1957 is the source given by E. San Juan Jr. in his Introduction to *Modern Pilipino Literature* (Twayne Publishers, 1974). As a source for the Tagalog stories, I have used Pineda, M. (1990). *Ang Ginto sa Makiling at Iba Pang Kuwento*. (S. Reyes, Ed.) Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

and as a figure for contrast) from 1906 has found, according to Alfonso, its fulfillment in the marriage of Alfonso's youngest child Arturo to Isabel's daughter Anita. In fact, Alfonso tells us at the end of the story that it seems his expulsion from the town by Kapitan Monang only served the purposes of destiny to see Anita and Arturo marry. Legible only in retrospect, a prior act of exclusion and class division is thus *figurally* completed in the diegetic present. Like a *figura* in Eric Auerbach's sense, the later marriage fulfills the prefiguration of the earlier love story. Tonio points out that the significance of the event is lost on the guests from Manila who do not understand the importance of a marriage from the *lahi* of the *kasama* with that of the *kapitans'* who have ruled the town for generations. Pineda makes apparent the poignant irony of the peasantry not fully recognizing themselves as the true producers of the social structures within which they labor. The symbol and image of rural accumulation and concentration of value, the Big House does not exist in isolation, but only in relation.

Manila in the story is shown to be a site of possibilities, where education can provide class mobility, but the mobility is tracked from within the confines of rural space's boundaries. The story seems to suggest that changes in value, in terms of social and cultural capital, come to the rural space from the "outside," from other spaces where the socio-economic constellation, prospects and constraints are different. Doctor Arturo, the son of Alfonso, comes back to his father's hometown to marry. Arturo has moved class positions from being the son of a *kasama* to being a doctor, something only possible because Alfonso left the confines of the rural town to move to Manila, because in turn of Kapitan Monang's cruelty. The city, unlike in other stories like, say, *Maynila sa Kuko ng Liwanag*, has provided Alfonso's family with the opportunities to climb the ladder to the Big House that the rural space had precluded. Within the confines of the rural space this story uses as a social field, class mobility is in fact circumscribed. The wedding at the big house is the occasion that brings the city and the country—and most importantly the apparent edges of their boundaries—into focus.

In one of the "silences" or oblique references in the story, it turns out that Tonio himself has desires for Anita, aside from his relationship with *kasama* lass Belen. These desires are revealed through a short exchange between Anita and Tonio. Tonio, speaking to his companions confesses that he loves Anita's perfume. Anita overhears their conversation and, touching his arm, promises to give Tonio some perfume. Tonio's joy at this act is

described as second to none. Though the farmers are shown to have their own objects of desire and relationships, Tonio's unrequited desire for Anita shows the continuity of the social structures of the past. The supposed formal resolution of a forty-year-old class divide continues to the present. The laughter at the end of the story resonates with empty promise of a narrative's formal resolution to real social contradictions. The figural completion of Alfonso and Isabel's love story opens up the possibility of an incomplete *figura* in Tonio's desire for Anita—of a fulfillment that is still to-come. The smile of the Big House then can be read as the smile of the continuing class divides in spite of the wedding, it becomes a figure for the continuing social map that constitutes the fields and terrains within which subjectivity gets constituted. The social map of the big house exposes differential valuations for objects of desire, with the lady of the manor, whoever this may be, still the desired object after forty years. Instead then of resolving the social contradictions of 1906, the ending of the short story asks us about the spectral haunting of class divisions in an independent Philippines even after the end of formal US imperial relation. This haunting functions as well in the mode of reading the legibility of the past's injustices for us who now come upon this story and are challenged by the silent structural critique woven into the image of the smiling big house as a structural locus of social relations and the differential accumulation and concentration of value.

I propose that we see the city as a nexus of woven strands of exchange and relations, of a social map with a particular grammar and syntax—an ordering and organization of our social selves, of our community. This nexus in turn is a knot that manifests the accumulation, concentration, and flows of value—of systems, institutions, and practices of *people*. However, as a product of social practices, both individual and institutional, the city is a contested terrain. The very act of navigating the social maps of both the hidden and the overt transcripts of power, has the potential to change the system's conjunctural arrangements. Whether or not such potential changes in conjunctures become changes in structures remains to be seen, but what Ranciere has called a "dissensus" in the ways social maps are produced clears spaces for something else to emerge, it articulates possibilities for an alternative ordering of things, and it is a function of texts and of art to imagine these alternatives, and in some cases even to compel us to imagine otherwise. Let me provide another and last textual example, this time a filmic one.

Filmed in a documentary style, Brillante Mendoza's 2007 film *Tirador* follows a small group of petty thieves who live among the slums of Quiapo. The film is relentless in showing in excruciating detail the conditions of their mundane everyday lives as they struggle to survive in the city and the seemingly arbitrary manifestation of police and political power. Wanting to look tough on crimes more than solving them, electoral candidates set police to sweep the slums and interrupt the everyday lives of the inhabitants. Mendoza's camera articulates public and private spaces and exposes the public and private uses of these spaces. The film contrasts the authority of the state with the practices of the people as components of power as a relation. Treated like an ensemble film, we are shown the various means the slum dwellers use to cope with survival in the city. In a way, the city and its slums become the main protagonist in the film. Set during a campaign season of the 2007 elections, the film ends with a prayer rally for senatorial candidates. By the end of the film and almost prescient with the current outrage over pork and PDAF, the audience is clear that the mark of the *tirador* is the Filipino people themselves and the greatest pathos comes from the promises of politicians, the ways in which they play on our utopic impulses and desires for a better world.

What I find interesting in the film however is the manner by which the elections permeate everyday life—the film's *mise-en-scene* is filled with their posters that decorate people's walls in the slums, the shirts the characters wear, the stickers and the tarpaulins that become shades of tricycles, the calendars that become functional artwork on their make-shift walls—these show on the one hand the ubiquity of politics in everyday life, and on the other hand the *bricolage* practice of Filipinos who can transform and take material and use it for survival. The texture of the materiality of their lives is interwoven with campaign paraphernalia as well as with the unequally structured system. The ending of the film seems on the one hand resigned to the lack of confidence in the political system of our *civitas*, but on the other hand stands as an ethical challenge to the audience. In this sense, a city is a text and a text is a city.

If the city is a Deleuzian assemblage of our *civitas*, and of the grammar of our community's ordering, texts are, in turn, like cities: they are socially-symbolic acts that open us up to our community's past, present and possible futures. They imagine possible worlds as well as make legible

our current ones. Texts are images woven into forms, and like cities, they are also social. Even texts not written for readers, texts whose aesthetic intent is to express some inner truth or individual experience takes part in various publics. Texts open us up to exchange and webs of interlocution. Texts like *Tirador*, and I would argue *Kasalan sa Malaking Bahay*, remind us on the one hand of the textual need for a formal resolution to real social contradictions, but also of the enduring ethical challenge such texts make upon our communities and our *civitas*. They invite us to reflect upon our encounters with others and on the ethics of how our relationships implicate us in larger and larger webs of interaction, each with their own effects and generative forces. In this way a city is a text and a text is a city in another sense: it has a performative aspect that directly implicates us in the potential emergence of a Habermasian communicative reason.

The situated-ness of narration, the interplay between the storytellers and their audience, though not formally a part of the narrative, are the conditions of possibility of narrative's circulation and actualization. In many ways, the selection of what to narrate is also the choice of what to exclude or silence in the particular linking of parts and sequences in a narrative, as well as the other narratives (actual or potential) that circulate within the same field that must be silenced. As Seyla Benhabib has argued:

Retelling, re-memembering, and reconfiguring always entail more than one narrative; they occur in a "web of interlocution," which is also a conversation with the other(s). Others are not just the subject matters of my story; they are also tellers of their own stories, which compete with my own, unsettle my self-understanding, and spoil my attempts to mastermind my own narrative. Narratives cannot have closure precisely because they are always aspects of the narratives of others; the sense that I create for myself is always immersed in a fragile "web of stories" that I as well as others spin.³

³ Seyla Benhabib, "Sexual Difference and Collective Identities: The New Global Constellation," *Signs*, Vol. 24, No. 2. (Winter, 1999), 348.

The very open-endedness of textuality, its dependence upon a chronotope and upon a relationship with other texts, is like a city—a space of encounter. In this space of encounter, narratives link subjects and communities; while textuality’s performance provides a stage for a narrative’s interruption, its elaboration, and its transformation. How then do we learn to negotiate competing narratives in this terrain of struggle? What sort of social formations and individual stories emerge from this kind of field? How do we create tissues of narrations in the face of dispossession? The treatment here of distinct intersecting or contiguous metonymic spaces, the city and the country, and the continuity of the structural differentials upon which the country or the city as such is constituted, suggests that the spatialization of community and sociality necessitates the imagination of their limits and their boundaries for the purposes of practical reason. I read *Kasalan sa Malaking Bahay* as arguing that the distinctions and disjuncture between various spaces co-existing at the same time, and perhaps most importantly that our movements between them (even if just imaginarily) provide us with a sense of the comparative, and makes legible the structures and forces of our subjectification.

The Big House’s grin at the end of the story opens up the interpretive space to alternative narratives. The last scene in *Tirador* where candles are lit to join in prayer and hope also has a double effect. Like *Tirador*’s last scene, how should we comprehend Bembol Roco’s silent scream at the end of *Maynila sa Kuko ng Liwanag*; or Philip Salvador’s gun at the end of *Ora Pro Nobis* or *Fight for Us*? The “open-ended endings” of these texts foreground the hierarchies and inequities of our current *civitas* manifested in the way our very spaces are organized and segmented, as well as launch an ethical challenge to us readers and viewers. How then shall we contend with the legibility of our everyday life and experience that they have expressed? After we light the candle and pray for change, what other course of action shall we take? I hope the writers and authors, the critics and intellectuals here today will take on this challenge to continue cultivating a public reason and debate that grapples with these questions.

Mabuhay po ang mga makata, manunulat at manunuri. Thank you and good morning.

Tagalog-Waray Connection: Ang Tugma at Sukat ng Tula at Siday

Jerry B. Gracío

Sa nakaraang dalawang taon, ang Talaang Ginto: Gawad Surian sa Tula—ang isa sa pinakamatandang timpalak pampanitikan sa bansa—ay hindi na tumatanggap ng mga lahok na nasa malayang taludturan. Para manalo sa naturang kontes at itanghal na Makata ng Taon (*Poet of the Year*)¹, kailangan mong sumunod sa istriktong batas hinggil sa sukat at tugma na nasa antas tudlikan.

Sisiw lang ang panuntunang ito sa mga makata mula sa Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, at mga lalawigang Tagalog, kung saan buhay pa ang tradisyong Balagtasian o maging ang katutubong anyo ng pagtulang pasalita tulad ng ginagawa sa pagpuputong o duplo. Mamaniin lang din ito ng mga kasapi ng LIRA² dahil nagsisimula ang lahat ng klase sa LIRA sa pagtalakay sa sin-ing ng tugma at sukat. Pero *nose bleed* ito para sa marami; mahirap nang magtugma, antas tudlikan pa! Pupusta ako na sa hanay ng mga makatang nagsusulat ng tula sa Filipino, marami ang hindi nakakaalam kung anong hayop ang tugma na nasa antas tudlikan.

Agad humirit ang kaibigang si Richard Gappi sa Facebook. Tagalog-centric daw ang panuntunan, *bias* sa iba pang mga makata na hindi Tagalog pero nagsusulat ng tula sa Filipino. Dalawa ang antas ng tugma (*rhyme*) sa tradisyunal na tulang Tagalog: ang **tugmang karaniwan** at **tugmang tudlikan**. Sa tudlikan, hindi lang dapat magkakatumugma ang mga dulong pantig (*end rhymes*), kundi pati ang bigkas ng salita. Halimbawa nito ang saknong 10 ng “Kay Celia” mula sa *Florante at Laura* ni Francisco Balagtas na hindi lang nagtatapos sa pandulong pantig na “**an**” i.e.: “larawan”, kina-

lagian”, do’ngan”, at “tuntungan”; pare-pareho ring malumay ang bigkas ng mga salitang ito na nasa dulo ng bawat taludtod (*line*):

Nililigawan ko ang iyong larawan
Sa Makating ilog na kinalagian
Binabakas ko rin ang masayang do’ngan,
Yapak ng paa mo sa batong tuntungan.

Kung mahirap ang tugmang tudlikan para sa mga taal na Tagalog, lalong mahirap ito para sa mga hindi taal na Tagalog dahil maaaring iba ang bigkas ng mga salitang Tagalog na nasa korpus ng Wikang Filipino kapag sinasalita ng mga taga-Bisaya o Mindanao, ng mga Ilocano at Meranaw. Halimbawa, ang “do’ngan” sa kasisiping saknong (*stanza*) ni Balagtas (na mula sa “daungan”) ay malamang bigkasin nang mabilis at hindi malumay ng mga Waray at maging “**dungán**” (*sabay, in unison, at the same time*). Kung gagamit naman ng *culture-specific* na salita ang mga hindi Tagalog bilang pantugma sa tula—na ini-encourage natin para makapasok sa korpus ng Wikang Filipino ang mga salita mula sa mga katutubong wika sa Filipinas—paano malalaman ng hurado kung malumi, malumay, mabilis, o maragsa ang bigkas nito? Totoo, puwedeng tumingin sa mga diksiyonaryo, pero ang ilan sa mga bokabularyo at sanggunian sa ibang mga wika sa Filipinas ay hindi nagpo-provide ng tuldik o gabay sa pagbigkas.

Kailangan pag-isipan ang problemang inihahayag ni Gappi sapagkat may implikasyon ito sa pagde-develop ng Wikang Filipino, sa pagpapayabong ng iba pang mga wika ng Filipinas, at sa paghuhubog ng Panitikang Filipino—isang panitikan na hindi lang nakasulat sa Tagalog kundi sa iba pang mga wika ng Filipinas at umuusbong dahil isinulat sa Wikang Filipino, ng mga hindi taal na Tagalog.

Katutubong Anyo

Likás ang tugma at sukat sa katutubong tula. Kailangan lang titigan ang mga sinaunang bugtong at salawikaing Tagalog para patunayan ito. Halimbawa, ang bugtong na ito tungkol sa banig:

Bongbong cong liuanag
con gab-i ay dagat.³

[Bum/bong/ kung/ li/wa/nag/
kung/ ga/bi/ ay/ da/gat././]

O ang salawikaing ito:

Natotoua con pasalop,
con singili,i napopoot.⁴

[Na/tu/tu/wa/ kung pa/sa/lop,/ /
kung/ si/ngi/li'y/ na/po/po/ot././]

Aaniming pantig (*six syllables*) ang sukat ng naunang bugtong, wawaluhing pantig (*eight syllables*) naman ang sukat ng halimbawang salawikain. Magkatugma ang mga huling salitang “liwanag” at “dagat” sa bugtong tungkol sa banig; magkatugma naman ang “pasalop” at “napopoot” sa salawikain tungkol sa mga mangungutang na natutuwa kapag pinautang pero nagagalit kapag sinisingil.

Sa *Vocabulario* nina Noceda at Sanlucar, nakatalâ ang iba pang halimbawa ng mga katutubong anyo (*form*) ng tulang Tagalog tulad ng **tanaga** at **dalít**. Ang tanaga, ayon kay Noceda at Sanlucar ay: “*Poesía muy alta en tagalo, compuesta de siete sílabas, y cuatro versos, llena de metáforas,*”⁵—isang mataas na uri (*muy alta*) ng tulang Tagalog, tulad nito:

Mataas man ang bondoc
mantay man sa bacouor
yamang mapagtaloc,
sa pantay rin aanod.⁶

[Ma/ta/as/ man/ ang/ bun/dok/
pan/tay/ man/ sa/ ba/ko/od/
ya/mang/ ma/pag/ta/luk/tok/
sa/ pan/tay/ din/ a/a/nod././]

Ang dalít naman ay binubuo rin ng apat na saknong at may sukat na wawaluhin, gaya ng dalít na ito tungkol sa mga *social climber* (mga sapsap

na chumuchorva sa mga apahap) na hindi na palá bago, uso na noon pang unang panahon:

Isda acong gaga sapsap
gagataliptip calapad,
caya naquiquipagpusag,
ang calagoyo,i, apahap.⁷

[Is/da/ a/kong/ ga/ga-/sap/sap/
ga/ga-/ta/lip/tip/ ka/la/pad,/
ka/ya/ na/ki/ki/pag/pu/sag,/
ang/ ka/la/gu/yo'y/ a/pa/hap././]

Katutubong anyo ng tulang Tagalog ang tanaga at dalít. Sa ibang mga wika tulad ng Sugbuanon (Cebuano), may mga katutubong anyo ng tula na nakalista sa mga sinaunang diksiyonaryo gaya ng **sumbingay**, **balak**, **garay**, **inagung**, **uriyan**, **kumintang**, **guyo**, at **awit**.⁸ Sa kasamaang palad, hindi tulad sa *Vocabulario* nina Noceda at Sanlucar, hindi nakapagtalâ ng mga halimbawa ng anyong ito.

Sa *Historia* ng Heswitang si Francisco Ignacio Alcina, binabanggit din ang mga katutubong anyo ng tula sa Wikang Waray⁹ gaya ng **ambahan**, **bikal**, **balak**, **siday**, **kanugon**, at **awit**. Ayon kay Alcina, ang ambahan ay: “*un modo de cantinelas, que cada uno consta de dos versos sueltos, cada uno de siete silabas; pero en ellos dos se ha de acabar el sentido y la sentencia de lo que se dice...*”¹⁰ Isang balada kung gayon ang ambahan, may dalawang saknong (blank verses) na binubuo ng sukat na tig-pipituhing pantig, tulad ng tanaga ng mga Tagalog. Hindi malinaw ang porma ng iba pang anyo ng tula na tinukoy ni Alcina, at muli, sa kasamaang palad, sayang at hindi nagbigay ang paring Heswita ng halimbawa ng mga anyong pampanulaan na kanyang natukoy.

Malinaw na may tugma at sukat ang ilang katutubong anyong pampanulaan sa mga wika ng Filipinas. Pansin nga ni Resil B. Mojares, may mga sumusunod umanong katangian ang panulaang Sugbuanon na makikita rin sa katutubong panulaan ng ibang rehiyon sa bansa:

...[A]ng paggamit ng asonantal na pagtutugma, isang pansilabang sukat na tumatakbo sa lima hanggang labindalawang silaba bawat linya ‘karaniwan dito’y heptasilabiko’; (2) ang paggamit ng dalawang magkatugmang linya o *couplet*, at ang *quatrain* bilang mga yunit ng taludturan, at ang kahalagahan ng tinatawag ni Encina na *enigma*, na nauukol sa *tanghaga* ng Cebuano.¹¹

Walang Tugma at Sukat!

Pero hindi lahat ng katutubong anyong pampanulaan ay may sukat o istriktong sumusunod sa panuntunan hinggil sa tugma at sukat. Maging ang ibang katutubong anyo tulad ng siday ng mga Waray, ayon kay Alcina, ay iregular ang sukat, inuulit-ulit at pinapalitan ang mga salita.¹² Ang mga sinaunang **tigmo** ng mga Sugbuanon, **patigo/tiriguhon** ng mga Waray, o **lallagunut** ng mga Gaddang ay di istrikto sa tugma at sukat, di tulad ng marami sa mga sinaunang bugtong ng mga Tagalog:

Sugbuanon:	
Gisukgay ang nilugaw	7
Midagan ang tinap-anan. ¹³	8
Waray:	
Kun kakan-o pa nagmingaw,	8
Dida pa nanamok. ¹⁴	6
Gaddang:	
Taggat a baggat	5
Pannuan na ina allang y agat. ¹⁵	11

Kahit ang mga kantahing bayan (*folk songs*) ay hindi sumusunod sa istriktong sukat. Ang **laji**, halimbawa, ng mga Ivatan ay hindi sumusunod sa sukat at tugma, gayundin ang marami pang awiting bayan sa iba’t ibang wika ng Filipinas. Narito ang unang saknong ng isang kantahing bayan sa Waray, na bagamat may tugma, ay hindi eksakto ang sukat:

An tamsi nga tikbubulan	8
Gutiyay ko la hidakpan.	8
Lugaring, Nining, kay hinsalipdan	9
Han lubi nga kalanyogan. ¹⁶	8

Kung sakaling may tugma at sukat, nagkataon lang ito, o hinihingi ng pagkakataon para makasunod sa melodiya. Sabi nga ng kritikong si Virgilio S. Almario, “Kahit ang mga nalimbag ngayong mga bagong saliksik sa tulang bayan ng mga grupong etniko sa Mindanaw at Lalawigang Bulubundukin ng Hilagang Luzon ay waring mas napapatnubayan ng melodiya kaysa anumang panuto ng regular na tugma’t sukat.”¹⁷

Kodipikasyon ng Tulang Tagalog

Saan nanggagaling kung gayon ang mga istriktong panuto hinggil sa tugma at sukat?

Kay Jose Rizal.

Sa isang lektura sa Sociedad Etnografica de Berlin noong 1887, nilagom ni Rizal ang mga naunang pag-aaral hinggil sa pagtulang Tagalog nina Gaspar de San Agustin at Francisco Bencuchillo.¹⁸ Ayon kay Rizal, ang sukat ng tulang Tagalog ay binubuo ng aanimin, pipituhin, wawaluhin, at lalabindalawahing pantig. At dahil ang tangi niyang dalang aklat na Tagalog habang naglalakbay sa Europa ay ang *Florante at Laura* ni Balagtas, ilalatag niya ang mga panuntunan sa pagtula sa sukat at tugma na ginamit ni Balagtas sa kanyang *magnum opus*.

Si Rizal ang unang magsasabi na magkakatumang ang mga patinig na “**karaniwan**” tulad ng matá, sála, at sasambá at ang mga patinig na “**mabigat**” tulad ng dalitâ, tuwâ, at nasà. Ibig sabihin, magkakatumang ang mga salitang nagtatapos sa patinig na may impit (*glottal stop*) at mga patinig na walang impit.

Si Rizal din ang magsasabi na magkakatumang ang “**katinig na malakas**” (*consonante fuerte*) na binubuo ng mga katinig na **b, d, g, k, p, s**, at **t**; at ang mga “**katinig na mahina**” (*consonante débil*) na **l, m, n, ng, y**, at **w**.

Seselyuhan ni Rizal ang usapin hinggil sa tugma at sukat at idedeklarang walang *verso libre* o *free verse* sa pagtulang Tagalog dahil aniya, “*por presentarse su idioma fácilmente a la rima y por se ésta muy sencilla y natural.*”¹⁹ Ang tuntuning ito ang susundan ng iba pang makatang Tagalog na tatawa-

gin ni Almario bilang mga “Balagtasista”.²⁰ Noong 1929, sa isang lektura sa Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, ilalahad ni Lope K. Santos ang mas komprehensibong mga tuntunin sa pagtula na lumalagom sa mga pag-aaral nina San Agustin, Bencuchillo, at Rizal.²¹ Lalo pang malilining ang mga istriktong panuntunan hinggil sa tugma at sukat at isusulong ng mga Balagtasista ang mga antas ng tugmang “pantigan”, “tudlikan” at “**dalisay**”—mga tugmaang pahirap nang pahirap nang pahirap.

Kodipikasyon ng Siday

Hindi ganito ang mangyayari sa panulaan ng iba pang mga wika sa Filipinas.

Bagaman may pagtatangka sa kodipikasyon ng mga anyo ng tula sa iba pang mga wika ng Filipinas, hindi ito naging masaklaw at tumimo sa mga manunulat sa wikang katutubo. Halimbawa, noong 1908, pahapyaw na tinalakay ni Norberto L. Romualdez ang poetikang Waray sa kanyang aklat.²² Ayon kay Romualdez, may tugmaan ang tulang Waray pero hindi ito eksakto tulad ng tulang Español. Gumagamit din diumano ito ng sukat na aanimin, wawaluhin, at lalabindalawahin. Kakatwa na hindi isinama ni Romualdez ang sukat na pipituhin, na siyang sukat ng ambahan, ang tanging sukat na binabanggit ni Alcina sa kabanata ng kanyang *Historia* na may pamagat na “*De las letras y modo de escribir de los Bisayas; y de sus poesías, varias y particulares, de que se precian.*” Marahil, ito ay dahil sa noong ika-20 siglo, nabura na sa gunita ng mga Waray ang ambahan at ang anyo nito, wala nang makatang nagsulat gamit ang pipituhing pantig. Kayâ ang natira sa sukat ay ang aanimin at lalabindalawahin, na siyang ginagamit sa mga sekular na tula, at wawaluhin, na siyang sukat na ginagamit sa *Pasyon* na nakasalin sa Wikang Waray at sa mga sulating debosyonal at relihiyoso tulad ng novena at mga *pangadyi*.

Sinunod marahil ng mga ka-kontemporanyo ni Romualdez ang kanyang inilatag na panuntunan. O puwede ring inilarawan lang niya ang kasalukuyang anyo ng tulang Waray sa kanyang panahon. Karamihan sa mga siday na nalathala mula 1900 hanggang 1960s—ang panahon ng pamamayani ng mga manunulat na kasapi ng **Sanghiran san Binisaya** (Akademya ng Wikang Bisaya) na itinatag ni Romualdez at ng kanyang mga ka-manunulat na Waray—ay may sukat na lalabindalawahin, tulad ng sagnong na ito sa isang tula ni Casiano Trinchera:

An ak kasingkasing imo la gintukso,
Nga hadto han anay kun harus maglukso,
Harapit umambak, lumusad ha dughan;
Ka di ko pagyakan, ka di ko pagmughan.²³

Konsistent si Trinchera (at ang kanyang mga kapanahon na sina N.L. Romualdez, Iluminado Lucente, Eduardo Macabenta, Vicente I. de Veyra, Pablo Rebadulla, Agustin El O'Mora, atbp.) sa kanilang sukat, bagaman minsan ay sumasablay ang tugma. Ang siniping siday ni Trinchera ay binubuo ng walong saknong na tiglalabindalawahin. Ang tugmaan ay **aabb**, na tinatawag na “**tugmang sunuran**” sa Tagalog, maliban sa saknong 5 na **isahan** ang tugma (**aaaa**). Hinahanapan ko ng dahilan kung bakit nagsingit si Trinchera ng tugmang isahan sa mga sunurang taludtod, pero wala akong makita. Hindi papasá ang taludturang ito sa istriktong anyo ng mga Balagtasista na nagtatadhanang ang mga taludtod sa isang tula ay dapat isahan kung isahan, sunuran kung sunuran, **inipitan** (**abab**) kung inipitan.

Tugmaan ng Siday Ayon kay Rizal

Hindi ko binabanggit ang “pagpasá” ng siday ni Trinchera sa pamanayang Balagtasista dahil gusto kong gamitin ang lenteng Balagtasista sa pagtingin sa anyo ng siday. Naniniwala ako, tulad ni Romualdez na walang eksaktong panuntunan hinggil sa tugma at sukat ang siday. Dahil dito, gusto kong ipanukala na gamitin ang kodipikasyong naganap sa Tagalog, partikular ang talakay ni Rizal hinggil sa tugma at sukat, para ilarawan ang anyo, partikular ang tugma at sukat, at tingnan ang pagsisikap na *i-codify* ang siday sa maagang bahagi ng ika-20 siglo.

Sa isang panimulang pag-aaral sa anyo ng siday, sinabi ng makata at kritikong si Merlie M. Alunan na awit ng papuri ang orihinal nitong anyo, binibigkas sa mga kasal, binyag, pagtatapos, panunumpa sa tungkulin, etc.²⁴ Sa tala ni Alcina, totoo namang tula ng papuri ang siday, binibigkas para ikuwento ang kabayanihan ng mga ninuno, papurihan ang kagandahan ng kababaihan, o katapangan ng kalalakihan. Naghunos ito para gamitin sa binyag, kasal, etc. sa pananakop ng mga Español at Amerikano. Hindi binanggit ni Alcina ang sukat at tugma ng orihinal na siday. Kayâ uulitin ni Alunan ang sinabi ni Romualdez na ang tradisyunal na siday ay may tugma at sukat, kadalasan, lalabindalawahin. Para kay Romualdez, ang sukat na

lalabindalawahin ay hindi totoong lalabindalawahin kundi aanimin. Pero ayon kay Alunan, ang hati sa gitna ng lalabindalawahing pantig ay *caesura* o *line break*. Gayunman, wala pa ring binanggit si Alunan kung paano nagtutugma ang mga dulong pantig sa siday.

Pansinin ang ginagamit na halimbawa ni Alunan para ipakita ang anyo ng tradisyunal na siday, isang tula ni Filomeno Singson na isinulat noong 1930s:

Bukad nga pinili sinin akon tuna,
Tanom minayoyo, marol pinalangga,
Bisan nabubutnga ka sadton kagurangan,
Tungod kahamot mo, hintutultolan ka.²⁵

Tiglalabindalawahin ang una at ikalawang taludtod ng siniping saknong. Pero hindi na labindalawa (12), sa halip, labintatlo (13) ang ikatlong taludtod . Kung gagamitin ang panukalang pagbása sa tugmaan sa Tagalog sa lektura ni Rizal, ganito ang magiging tugmaan ng naturang saknong: *aaxx*—magkatugma ang “*tunà*” at “*pinalanggà*” na parehong may impit, pero hindi magkatugma ang “*kagurangan*” sa “*ka*” sa dalawang huling linya. Sa tulang Tagalog, tatak ng kahinaan ang paggamit ng “*ka*”, “*mo*”, “*na*” at iba pang panghalip, pantukoy, etc. na isa lang ang pantig.

Maaaring pagkaligta ito. Puwede naman kasing ayusin ang mga tu-
ludtod na ito: aalisin lang ang “*ka*” sa ikatlong taludtod at rebisahan ang
ikaapat na taludtod, at presto, maaayos ang sukat ng saknong at ito ay ma-
giging tugmang sunuran (*aabb*):

Bukad nga pinili sinin akon tuna,
Tanom minayoyo, marol pinalangga,
Bisan nabubutnga sadton kagurangan,
Tungod kahamot mo, akon hintutolan.

Ginamit ko ang tugmaang sinasabi sa lektura ni Rizal hinggil sa pan-
ulaang Tagalog dahil kung titingnan ang mga kantahing bayan ng Samar at
Leyte at ang mga siday ng mga makatang Sanghiran, mukhang sumusunod
ang mga ito sa padron ng tugmaang inilahad ni Rizal. Ibig sabihin, sa mga
salitang nagtatapos sa patinig, magkakatugma ang mga walang impit (hal:

súpo, úpo, luyó, dúro), magkakatugma rin ang mga may impit (hal: tunà, pinalanggà, dilà, hunà-hunà). Sa mga katinig, magkakatugma ang “katinig na malakas” (*consonante fuerte* ayon kay Rizal) na binubuo ng mga katinig na *b, d, g, k, p, s*, at *t* (hal: bukad, sabrag, ap-ap, dagat, barás); at ang mga “katinig na mahina” (o *consonante débil*) na *l, m, n, ng, y*, at *w* (hal: balay, lam-aw, gindakal, sawang). Hindi kataka-taka sapagkat magkapareho naman ang tunog ng Tagalog at Waray at ng iba pang mga wika sa Filipinas.

Pansinin halimbawa ang isahang tugma (**aaaa**) sa kantahing bayang ito na may sukat na lalabindalawahin:

Si nanay si tatay di ko babayaan
Kay damo nga dogo an akon naotağ
Kung pag-iisipon an siyam ka bolan
Ğa pag-inokoy ko sa kan nanay tiyan.²⁶

[Si nanay si tatay, di ko babayaan
Kay damo nga dugo an ako nautang
Kun pag-iisipon an siyam ka bulan
Nga pag-inukoy ko sa kan nanay tiyan.]

Narito naman ang isang saknong sa tula ni Eduardo Makabenta na ang tugmaan ay inipitan (**abab**) na may iregular na sukat (8/7/8/8//):

Diri gad ha im mahawid
Paturon han paglakat,
Ibilin kalayo, tubig
Di ak ha im maglalanat.²⁷

At ang halimbawa ng tugmaang sunuran (**aabb**) sa tulang ito ni An-dikula na lalabindalawahin din ang sukat:

Dalagan, dalagan, pagtuwad ubanon
Kasakit sa ulo pagpinamation,
Korinit ni Kuan, daw ginpipisitan
Tungod san asawa siya ginrabutan.²⁸

Koneksiyong Tagalog-Waray

Sa pamamagitan ng paggamit sa tugmaang Tagalog sa talakay ni Rizal, mabubuksan ang matagal nang tinutukoy ngunit hindi matukoy-tukoy na tugmaan sa siday ng mga Waray. Malamang, maraming tututol dahil magmumukha na naman itong paggamit ng lenteng Tagalog para basáhin ang panulaan sa ibang wika ng Filipinas. Pero kung tititigan ang anyo ng mga tulang isinulat ng mga makatang Sanghiran, mapapansin ang pagkakahawig nito sa mga tulang Tagalog na isinulat sa parehong panahon.

Pangunahin dito ang paggamit ng saknong na may apat na taludtod. Ito ang anyo ng awit na ginamit ni Balagtas sa *Florante*. Ang karamihan ng mga tulang malilimbag sa mga unang publikasyon sa Samar at Leyte ay gagamit din ng apat na saknong sa isang taludtod. Maging ang lalabindalawahing pantig, pati na ang *caesura* na gagamitin sa siday, ay siya ring ginamit ni Balagtas.

Kunsabagay, hindi katutubong anyo ang awit. Mula ito sa French na *alexandrine* na nadala ng mga Kastila sa Filipinas. Nakuha ba ng mga Waray ang *alejandrino* direkta sa mga Español—kasama na ang apat na taludtod sa isang saknong, lalabindalawahing sukat at *caesura* sa bawat taludtod—o pumasok ito sa panulaang Waray sa panahon ng kodipikasyon ng Panulaang Tagalog? Gaano kalawak ang impluwensiya ng panulaang Tagalog sa siday sa mga unang yugto ng nakalimbag na tulang Waray?

Wala akong sapat na panahon para sagutin ito ngayon. Kailangan pa nating titigan ang mas maraming siday, pag-aralan ang iba pang uri ng panitikang Waray, kasama ang mga panitikang debosyonal tulad ng novena para masagot ito.

Pero ang paggamit sa lektura ni Rizal para tukuyin ang tugmaan ng mga naunang siday ay patunay sa pagkakapareho ng tunog ang ating mga wika. Patunay din ito sa pagkakapareho ng mga anyo ng ating mga tula, gaya ng una nang binanggit ni Mojares.

Hindi *hermit islands* ang Samar at Leyte. Nakikipag-ugnayan ito sa mga kalapit-pook at maging sa Maynila. Malaganap na ang ugnayang ito bago pa dumating ang mga Español. Kahit ang sinaunang paraan ng pagsulat ng mga Waray, ayon kay Alcina ay natutuhan ng mga Bisaya mula sa mga Tagalog (na nakuha naman ang paraan ng kanilang pagsulat mula sa mga Muslim). Ayon kay Alcina, tinatawag na “Moro” ang paraan ng pagsulat ng mga Bisaya kahit na hindi nasakop ng mga mga Muslim ang Samar at

Leyte. Matatandaan na nang dumating ang mga Kastila sa Maynila noong ika-16 na siglo, mayroon na itong pamayanang Muslim at Muslim ang mga maharlika pang pamilya na naghahari sa Maynila at sa mga karatig-pook. Ang pagtawag na “Moro” sa sinaunang paraan ng pagsulat ng mga Waray ay patunay sa malawak na impluwensiya ng Maynila at ng mga Tagalog sa bahaging ito ng kapuluan. Ayon nga kay Alcina:

[L]os caracteres de estos naturales, o por major decir, de que usan de posos años a este parte, enseñanza que se les comunicó de los tagalos, y estos aprenderion de los burneyes que viniéron de su gran isla de Bornei a la de Manila, con quen tenían trato considerable... De estos burneyes aprendieron los tagalos sus caracteres; y de éstos los bisayas. Y por esto les llaman caracteres o letras de “Moro”, pues los moros se las enseñaron; y aunque no llegó a los bisayas o no admitieron... aprenderion sus letras.²⁹

Kung may naganap na ugnayan sa mga Bisaya at Tagalog noon pang ika-16 na siglo, na naging daan upang gamitin ng mga Waray ang paraan ng pagsulat ng mga Tagalog, hindi rin kataka-taka kung maimpluwensiyahan ang mga manunulat na Waray ng mga pampanitikang anyo mula sa mga Tagalog (at iba pang pangkating etno-linggwistiko sa bansa), at *vice versa*, at gamitin ang mga anyong ito, kasama ang tugma at sukat ng mga Tagalog sa kanilang pagsulat ng siday. Sa kaso halimbawa ni Romualdez, ang kanyang pag-aaral hinggil sa Wikang Waray ay may kalakip na pananaliksik hinggil sa Tagalog at iba pang mga wika sa Filipinas at hindi ako magtatataka kung nabása niya ang *Arte Metrica del Tagalog* ni Rizal. Hindi rin ako magtatataka kung ang sukat at tugma sa tradisyunal na siday ay impluwensiya ng malaganap na kodigo sa pagtulang Tagalog na pinalaganap ng mga Balagtasista sa maagang yugto ng ika-20 siglo.

Ang totoo, una na itong ipinanukala ni Almario sa kanyang pagtitipon ng mga unang sulatin hinggil sa panulaang Tagalog. Sabi ni Almario:

Walang ganitong kodipikasyong naganap sa pagtula sa alinmang katutubong wika ng Filipinas kaya’t naging makapangyarihan ang pinairal na kodigo ni L.K. Santos

at mga kasamang makata-kritiko sa unang hati ng ika-20 siglo tungo sa pag-alinsunod dito ng pagtula sa Ilocano, Bicolano, Kapampangan, at mga aktibong wika sa Visayas magmula sa naturang panahon.³⁰

Hindi ko matanggap ang pahayag na ito noon, lalo pa't walang suhay ang mapanlahat na pahayag ni Almario. Hindi ko matanggap ito bilang Waray, nakakasira ng *pride*. Pero matapos titigan ang siday ng mga makatang Sanghiran na kapanabayan nina L.K. Santos, ang tugma at sukat na *common* sa siday at tulang Tagalog, ang patterns hinggil sa tugmaan at sukat na parehong makikita sa mga pagtulang Balagtasista at sa mga makatang Sanghiran, kumbinsido ako sa *strands* ng impluwensiyang Tagalog sa panulaang Waray sa maagang bahagi ng siglo 20. Kumbinsido ako na ang pagtatangka sa kodipikasyon ng siday, bagama't naudlot, ay bunsod ng nauna nang kodipikasyon sa panulaang Tagalog. Maliban kung may magpapatunay na hindi ito direktang nakuha mula sa mga Tagalog kundi sa French at mga Español, o kaya naman ay *intrinsic* ito sa panulaang Waray. Hihintayin ko ang pag-aaral na iyon.

Bagaman laging tinatalakay sa mga pag-aaral hinggil sa panitikang Waray ang pagsisikap ng mga unang manunulat ng Samar at Leyte na ipagtanggol ang kanilang sariling pinulungan sa gitna ng pamamayani ng Ingles, at kalaunan ng Tagalog/Pilipino, hindi napagtutuunan ng pansin ang kasabay na pagsisikap ng mga manunulat na Waray sa pagbubuo ng bansa. Palaging idinidiin ang satira hinggil sa mga *Tagalized* na Bisaya sa mga tula ni Trinchera, El O'Mora, Makabenta, at Lucente. Pero hindi natatalakay ang mga kaparehong tula na pumupuri sa marol bilang pambansang bulaklak, sa mga bayaning si Rizal at si Bonifacio, sa Katipunan bilang isang pambansang kilusan na hindi lang nakasentro sa Katagalugan, kundi ang lawak at saklaw ay abot at inaangkin hanggang sa Samar, sa Leyte, at sa buong Filipinas. Hindi nababanggit ang ugnayan ng wikang Tagalog at Waray, na ipinapakita ng pagsasalin ng *Florante at Laura* sa Wikang Waray,³¹ isang uri ng balorasyon o pagdakila, isang uri ng pag-angkin sa isang akda na bagama't nakasulat sa Tagalog ay dadakilain bilang obrang Filipino.

Dahil dito, naging makitid ang pagbása at pagpapakahulugan sa “iroy nga tunà” na isinatula ni Lucente. Naging Leyte lang ito. Na para bang ang “iroy nga tunà” ni Lucente ay Leyte lang. Ni hindi ang Samar. Ni hindi ang

buong Filipinas. At dahil sa pagiging *allergic* sa Tagalog, hindi natin nasilip o ayaw nating silipin ang ugnayan ng tulang Tagalog at ng siday na Waray. Para tuloy umunlad lang ang siday *in a void*, naghunos mula sa antigong siday ni Alcina at naging siday sa panahon ng Sanghiran na ni hindi natin matukoy ang pinagmulang anyo.

Malaki ang paniwala ko na kung hindi nabuwag ang Sanghiran, kung nagpatuloy ang mga manunulat na Waray na magsulat sa Waray at hindi piniling magsulat sa Ingles (dahil ang totoo, karamihan sa mga intelektwal na Waray ay mas piniling magsulat sa Ingles kaysa sa Waray o Filipino), magpapatuloy ang kodipikasyon ng panulaang Waray, uunlad o maghuhunos ang anyo ng siday.

Pero sa ngayon, tila may malaking guwang (*gap*) sa kasaysayan ng panulaang Waray—dahil pagkatapos mamatay ni Lucente noong 1969, wala na halos nagsulat sa Waray. Hindi *consistent* ang mga panuntunan sa tugma at sukat sa siday dahil huminto ang mga manunulat na Waray sa pag-sulat gamit ang kanilang pinulungan. Ngayon lamang tayo muling nakakaranas ng pagsiglang muli ng tula, dula, at kuwentong Waray. At napakarami pang kailangang aralin at sulatin.

Tungo sa Panulaang Filipino

Babalikan ko ang dahilan kung bakit ko ito isinulat: ang reklamo ni Gappi hinggil sa pagiging Tagalog-centric ng tuntunin sa Talaang Ginto sa nakaraang dalawang taon. Bagaman nagpanukala ako na gamitin ang lektura ni Rizal para ipaliwanag ang ilang hindi matukoy na elemento sa siday, partikular sa tugmaan, naniniwala ako na hindi dapat ipataw ang mga kodigo ng tulang Tagalog sa umuusbong na tulang Filipino.

Kung naniniwala tayo na ang Filipino ay isang wika na patuloy na umuunlad, magkakaroon ng baryasyon sa pagbigkas ng mga salita na bagama't mula sa Tagalog ay bibigkasin nang iba sa bigkas ng mga Tagalog. At dahil ang tugmang tudlikan ay nakabatay sa tamang bigkas (na kinakatawan ng mga tuldik), *bias* na kaagad ito sa mga di taal na nagsasalita ng Tagalog.

Naniniwala ako sa pagluluwag ng tuntunin at dila habang hindi pa nagkakaisa sa napakaraming usapin hinggil sa wika. Dahil dito, hindi dapat ipataw ang tuntunin hinggil sa mga antas ng tugmaan sa mga hindi taal na Tagalog na nais tumula sa Filipino. Hindi ko sinasabing huwag

nating pag-aralan ang mga antas ng tugmaan, pero dapat malinaw na antas ito ng tugmaan sa Wikang Tagalog. Ipaubaya natin sa mga hindi Tagalog kung gagamitin nila ito sa pagsulat ng tula gamit ang Wikang Filipino. Kung hindi nila gagamitin, paki naman natin. Ibig kong sabihin, himukin natin sila pero huwag itong i-impose. Kayâ importante ang proyektong STS (Sining ng Tugma at Sukat) ng LIRA na lumilibot sa buong bansa para ipakilala ang tugma at sukat ng Tulang Tagalog. Sa ganitong paraan, nagiging maláy ang guro at manunulat sa rehiyon sa tradisyong ito ng panulaan sa Tagalog, maikukumpara ang naturang tradisyon sa panulaan ng mga rehiyon, mababalikan ang kasaysayan at pag-unlad, hindi lang ng panulaang Tagalog, kundi ng panulaan sa iba pang mga wika sa Filipinas. Ang bayan ang magsasabi kung gagamitin nila ang kodigo ng pagtulang Tagalog at aangkinin ito o ilalangkap sa kodigo ng pagtula sa iba pang mga wikang Filipino hanggang sa maging tunay itong kodigo ng pagtula para sa buong kapuluan.

Pero sa ngayon, huwag muna. Sapagkat ang totoo, dahil sa tuntuning ito, lalong nagmumukhang “Makata ng Taon sa Wikang Tagalog” ang Makata ng Taon. At hindi naeenganyo ng ganitong mga tuntunin ang ibang mga manunulat na hindi Tagalog na magsulat ng tula sa Wikang Filipino at sumali sa Talaang Ginto. Sagka ito sa pagpapayabong ng Panulaang Filipino.

Mga Talâ

1 Sinimulan noong 1963, sa mungkahi ng numero unong rebelde ng Panulaang Tagalog na si Alejandro G. Abadilla at sa patnugot ng noon ay Surian sa Wikang Pambansa (Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino ngayon), ilan sa mga naging Makata ng Taon ay sina Teo Baylen (1964), Rogelio Mangahas (1969), Teo Antonio (1976), Jesus Manuel Santiago (1978, 1979), Lamberto Antonio (1980), Fidel Rillo (1987), ang National Artist na si Virgilio S. Almario (1984), Ruth Elynia S. Mabanglo (1992), at ang National Artist na si Cirilo F. Bautista (1993).

2 Linangan sa Imahen, Retorika, at Anyo, ang klinika at organisasyong pampanulaan na itinatag ni Virgilio S. Almario noong 1985. Sa LIRA nagmula ang ilan sa mga pangunahing makata sa Filipino sa kasalukuyan tulad nina Victor Emmanuel Carmelo Nadera Jr., Romulo Baquiran Jr., Rebecca Añonuevo, Roberto Añonuevo, Michael Coroza, Edgar Calabia Samar, Mesandel Virtusio Arguelles, at Joselito D. delos Reyes.

3 Nasa Juan de Noceda at Pedro de Sanlucar, *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala*. Unang inilimbag noong 1754. Muling inilathala ng Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, nang may salin sa Filipino, 2013. Ginamit sa papel na ito ang edisyong 1860 na inilathala sa Maynila ng Imprenta de Ramirez y Giraudier, p. 38.

4 Noceda at Sanlucar, p. 281.

5 Noceda at Sanlucar, p. 324.

6 Noceda at Sanlucar, p. 321.

7 Noceda at Sanlucar, p. 74.

8 Tingnan halimbawa ang entri hinggil sa naturang mga salita sa *Arte de la lengua Zebuana* ng Agustinong si Francisco Encina na nalathala noong 1801.

9 May mga manunulat at iskolar na hindi tinatanggap o may agam-agam sa pagtanggap ng “Waray” bilang pantukoy sa wikang sinasalita sa Samar-Leyte. Ang iba ay gumagamit ng Leytenhon-Samarnon, Lineyte-Samarnon, Samarnon, Leytenhon, etc. Bunga ito ng *pejorative* na konotasyon ng “Waray” na ang literal na kahulugan ay “wala” na ayon nga sa makatang si Agustin El O’Mora ay “pagtamay-tamay la”—at inimbento lang ng mga kargador sa pier ng Maynila bilang pagmamaliit sa wika at sa mga katutubo ng Samar at Leyte. Hangga’t hindi nagkakasundo ang mga iskolar hinggil sa pangalan ng wika na sinasalita ko, ang mas popular na Waray muna ang gagamitin ko—sa kabila ng *pejorative* na konotasyon nito. Wapakels muna ako sa isyung ito hangga’t walang kaisahan ang mga iskolar at kapwa ko manunulat.

10 Tingnan ang Ignacio Francisco Alcina, *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas... 1668*. Inilathala nang may salin sa Ingles ng UST Publishing House noong 2005. Nasa pahina 42 ng Part One, Book 3, Vol III ang siniping talata.

11 Resil B. Mojares, “Balak: Isang Introduksiyon sa Panulaang Cebuano,” nasa *Panulaang Cebuano*, salin ni Don Pagusara, Isinatipon ni Erlinda K. Alburo. Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1993.

12 Hinggil sa siday, ayon kay Alcina, ito ay: “*Sólo tienen algunas repeticiones algo cansadas, porque vuelvin a repetir muchas veces, coñadir sólo una dos palabras, muchas y muy largas razones.*” Alcina, p. 46.

13 Pagusara at Alburo, p. 2.

14 Mula sa “Tinalunay”, hindi pa nalathalang manuskrito ng Panitikang Waray na inedit ni Merlie M. Alunan.

15 Maria Luisa Lumicao-Lora, *Gaddang Literature*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984, p. 73.

- 16 Mula sa di pa nalalathalang manuskrito ni Alunan. Una ko nang ginamit ang tulang ito bilang epigraph sa ikalawa kong koleksiyon ng tula. Hindi ko na maalala kung saan ko ito orihinal na nabása, dahil nawawala ang iba ko pang sanggunian hinggil sa panulaang Waray.
- 17 Virgilio S. Almario, *Taludtod at Talinghaga, Mga Sangkap ng Katutubong Pagtula*. Pasig: Anvil Publishing, 1991, p. 47.
- 18 Nasa Aleman ang orihinal na lektura na isinalin mismo ni Rizal sa Español. Tingnan ang Jose Rizal, “*Arte Metrica del Tagalog*,” nasa *Poetikang Tagalog, Mga Unang Pagsusuri sa Sining ng Pagtulang Tagalog*, Virgilio S. Almario, ed., Quezon City: Sentro ng Wikang Filipino, 1996, mp. 47-57.
- 19 Rizal, nasa *Poetikang Tagalog*, p. 50.
- 20 Basahin ang Virgilio S. Almario, *Balagtasismo Versus Modernismo: Panulaang Tagalog sa Ika-20 Siglo*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1984.
- 21 Lope K. Santos, “*Peculiaridades de la poesia tagala*,” nasa Almario, *Poetikang Tagalog*, mp. 60-159.
- 22 Norberto L. Romualdez, *Bisayan Grammar and Notes on Bisayan Rhetoric and Poetics and Filipino Dialectology*. Tacloban: Pagpahayag Co., 1908. Muling inilathala ng Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, 2013. Ginamit ang edisyon ng KWF na may salin sa Filipino.
- 23 Sagnong 2 ng tula ni Casiano Trinchera, “Malingoon nga Gugma,” nasa Victor N. Sugbo, *Tinipigan*, Manila: NCCA, 1995.
- 24 Tingnan ang Introduksyon ni Merlie M. Alunan sa *Mga Siday han dyVL*, Manila: NCCA, 2005.
- 25 Alunan, *Mga Siday*, p. 4.
- 26 Romualdez, p. 229.
- 27 Huling sagnong ng “Despidida kan Kirikay” ni Eduardo Makabenta, nasa Jose Duke S. Bagulaya, *Writing Literary History, Mode of Economic Production and Twentieth Century Waray Poetry*, Quezon City: UP Press, 2006, p. 232.
- 28 Unang sagnong ng “Pagpalabi sa Isigkatawo, Kaaway san Pagpaubos” ni Andikula (pseud.), sa Bagulaya, p. 212.
- 29 Alcina, p. 48.
- 30 Almario, “Ang Unang Panahon ng Pagsusuri sa Katutubong Pagtula,” introduksiyon sa *Poetikang Tagalog*, p. ix.
- 31 Nakita kong may salin ng *Florante* sa Wikang Waray sa isang listahan ng iba’t ibang salin ng naturang akda, hindi ko lang maalala kung sino ang nagsalin at kailan ito nalathala, nawawala ang notes ko, hindi rin ako nakahanap ng kopya sa National Library nang magpunta ako doon. Dadagdagang ko ang notes na ito sa susunod.

Speculations of the Soul: Shades of the Catholic Imagination in Carlomar A. Daoana's *Clairvoyance*

Ma. Ailil B. Alvarez

Poetry and the Quest for the Divine

One analysis of *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien, whose blatant Catholicism is less known among lovers of his fantastic worlds and creatures, is focused on the author's use of runes as symbols in his story (and later, in his own developed, fictitious language). Runes—tiny fragments of bone or stone that have traditionally had some divinatory purpose—have been used in both pagan and Christian cultures. In the Middle Ages, this system of writing was thought to possess supernatural powers because “all language was thought to be magical” (The Tolkien Society, n.d.); however, in the Christian context, this is to indicate that language has a Divine origin, having descended from Above. This is nothing if not an excellent defense of literature that seeks to embody the belief that all language is an access to a realm beyond this earth, a conduit to approaching the Infinite, the Abstract, the Intangible.

Poetry, then, becomes spiritual—in the impulse of writing and an approximation of the lyricism of the spirit, and in the very movement of the lines, the enjambments, into verses, there is the intimate connection between language, artistry, and the divine. In Catholic literature how these two are seamlessly interlaced is explained by Ron Hansen (2004) in his essay “Writing as a Sacrament” —“Good writing can be a religious act, [...] insofar as it provides the graced occasions of encounter between humanity and God.” As the writer shares in the work of creation through his work, his output becomes proof that literature, the very art of language, can be

endowed with a sacred dimension. Thus, writing is not only sanctified, but also considered a covenant.

In light of these ideas, this paper will attempt to study Carlomar Daoana's third poetry collection *Clairvoyance* (UST Publishing House, 2011) by teasing out the Catholic strands of thought embedded in the verses—concealed, perhaps even unintentionally, but nonetheless present. This analysis will utilize a confluence of various readings that define the Catholic imagination, culled from the writings of various literary and cultural scholars who are avowedly Catholic: Andrew Greeley, Carlos Aureus, Michael J. Himes, Ron Hansen, Joseph Pearce, Mary Reichardt, and Angela Alaimo O'Donnell. In doing so, it is hoped that it can contribute to the oft-overlooked research on Philippine Catholic poetry in English.

The Collection

In an interview with online magazine *Designed by Words*, Daoana clearly wanted *Clairvoyance* to be more spiritual than his earlier two collections:

More than its metaphysical and occult implications (although they count too, being rich in conceptual associations), the word 'clairvoyance' attracted me for the way it sounds, its polysyllabic beauty. Its etymological French meaning (*clair*=clear; *voyance*=vision, seeing) seems to me the oblique pursuit of every poem, a transparent thing where the mysterious, the spiritual if you may, could shine through (2011).

The collection embodies the 1:1 correspondence between poetry and spirituality, as the poet demonstrates the meditative quality of language.

The collection thus lends itself quite readily to a Catholic reading, as its impetus (without subjecting this analysis to a strictly biographical criticism) is geared towards the realm that both recognizes and transcends the realities of this world. Close to twenty (20) of the forty poems in the collection are touched on in this paper, selected on the basis of their relevance to the chosen analytical framework.

An Invocation

The entire collection resounds of a prayerful, meditative tone, contacting the mystical in language that is tangible. Thus the first poem, “The Spirit,” aptly sounds and functions like an invocation, and it is fitting that the collection opens with this piece—readers can only surmise whether its placement was inadvertent or not.

The Spirit

By the grove
I waited for the spirit
To come.

The spirit came,
Plunging
With a cloud of bees.

This is the versification of the quiet sensibility of a time yet to arrive, being accessed in the language of “now.” There is a serene contemplation on the Intangible, a kind of patience that is reached only with zen-like clarity. Only with opening oneself up to the stirrings of the spirit in quiet meditation can one be confronted with an assault of some form of enlightenment, achieved only as one opens himself to the expression of Grace (defined by Himes as “the outpouring of the love of the Trinity”). The attempt to personalize the active metaphor—“plunging with a cloud of bees” instead of descending with tongues of fire (cf. Acts 2:3), (as when The Holy Spirit comes down upon the apostles succeeding Jesus’ ascension), yet recalling the same painful sensation of being awakened and transported (if not “charged,” to borrow Gerard Manley Hopkins’ famous descriptive of the world being fired up by the “grandeur of God”) into another state, only this time, it stings rather than burns—at first seeks to distance the association of the said invocation to the Third Person of the Holy Trinity (as the “s” in “spirit” is not capitalized). However, it can also conversely suggest a conversation of the soul with the Infinite, an awakening to the dialogue of Truth as it funnels Itself into a mortal receptacle. The descent of the spirit may be understood as a descent *into* the spirit—the metaphysical merging with the physical, dialoguing in dualities of form and formlessness.

The poem is then followed by two full blank pages. More than acting as a preparatory gap, enticing the reader to plunge (just as readily, but cautiously) into the rest of the collection, this decisive, paginated pause works to invite the reader to savor the immensity of the unsaid, to meditate on this textual silence—implying that the most profound of truths cannot be approximated in words. This whitespace, these breaks in the lines, the margins surrounding words, attest to the poet’s craftsmanship. His restraint, his economy of words, capture not only his subtle, refined personality that extend themselves into his poetry, but also the intended effect of intertextuality. They leave the reader to converse with the text and to fashion his own meaningful insight from it.

Imag(in)ing God: Incarnational and Sacramental Principles At Work in the Verses

These two principles are basically what constitute a distinctly Catholic Imagination (cf. Reichardt, 2003; Greeley, 2000; Aureus, 2000): The incarnational principle is God becoming like us, or one of us, suffering like us and for us—a teaching that not all Christian sects accept, but that Catholics do so, readily. This emphasizes Greeley’s notion of the Catholic imagination, which is the Immanence (God-with-us), not Transcendence (God-beyond-this-world), of God (the latter characterizing the Protestant imagination). Similarly, Reichardt extends the incarnational principle to mean that we should not shy away from suffering, nor should we deny the negative things in the world—the Catholic imagination celebrates what is good as Godly, but is not confined to it; it acknowledges the evil in this world, too, and turns it around—uses it as means of sanctification.

In this context, it is related to sacramentality, which is described as “point[ing] to the visible becoming invisible, the abstract becoming concrete, the Mystery becoming knowable through mediated realities” (cf. Greeley, 2000; Aureus, 2000; Himes, 2005; Reichardt, 2003). In a way, it is a search for the path to sanctity in the workings and windings of the world. Similarly, Himes (2001) declares it to be the manifestations of God’s presence in the world; and O’Donnell (2012) further clarifies it as abstracting God’s infinity through his finite creations, in order to access and marvel at His greatness. If one’s worldview is sacramental, then one believes that everything in the world is “engraced”—everything, even sin, potentially

leads all back to God (Himes, 2001). Moreover, this demonstrates that the paradox of the Catholic imagination is in its polarization between the “sacred and the secular” (O’Donnell, 2012).

Daoana’s Catholic imagination could not have been emphasized better than in “He Who Comes to the World Bearing a Cross.” The title alone embodies the incarnational principle: in the language of the Angelus, this most definitely refers to the Word becoming flesh, and dwelling among us. The Christology pushed forward by Daoana is not necessarily original—it is one of a misunderstood figure of salvation, a falsely-accused or misrepresented Figure through which we attain our redemption. This denial of the Truth, a refusal to see the Savior for Who He is, translates itself into cruelty, and becomes a form of suffering. Yet the poem focuses more on the perceptions of the people external to Him. Using the first person, the speaker both observes and identifies with their lack of faith and unwillingness to believe, their hypocrisy, their imposed expectations and unreasonable judgments:

He Who Comes to the World Bearing a Cross

The man happens
Enters the picture
He has good intentions
Intention meaning the categorization of desire as an agent of
goodness in the world
But intentions are not enough
We need proof
We need the water to be transformed into wine
We need him to walk on water
He does all of them
Obligingly
We clap our hands and turn on the TV
We say, you’re such a magician, visit us again some time
And when we are no longer charmed by his tricks
We need him to suffer
We need to see him walk for miles bearing wood that makes
his muscles shake violently

We need to see him humiliated
We question the motive of goodness
We are certain he's keeping explosives in the trunk of his car
He wants to rape our children
He wants to profit from our weakness
But he emerges, comes to us with his bright wounds
He touches us
We fall on our knees trembling

The merit of the poem is in its successful updating of an otherwise archaic, period-specific event (Jesus Christ on Earth, 2000 years ago). Through the use of jarring juxtaposition of images of postmodernity (“TV,” “explosives,” “profit”), the poem situates problems in the contemporary, making them more current, more relatable—primed for contemplation into the perils of this world, including war on/and terrorism, crimes against children, and the evils of capitalism. Here it becomes clear that this is a God who chose to be one like us, one who elected to embrace the suffering of the world, in hopes of “touching” us and moving us to our core, “our knees trembling.” Thus, the poem is also a prime illustration of the principle of sacramentality: God-with-us, suffering for us “not so we do not have to, but to show us *how* to.” At the same time, the poem ends on a note that is didactic but not preachy: only if we allow ourselves to be touched by God can we realize that our being cannot suffice to encompass the infinity of His greatness, and only by opening ourselves up to His grace can we be overwhelmed by His presence, so much so that we come face to face with the Truth.

Clearly related to the Incarnational principle is the belief in the Transubstantiation, that the Bread and Wine become the actual Body and Blood of Christ during Mass. The path to belief through this teaching is most easily seen in “Dream Sequence: Church.” At first read—from which some sense of surrealism must be expected, based on the title alone—the poem sounds like the persona is struggling with faith and belief, and a disillusionment with the agent/institution of dogma (the Catholic Church) as well as with the edifice that functions as a house of prayer (church)—precious images (“ivory statues”) of saints are stolen, the church is “silent” and “contemptuous,” reducing the persona to a “small” and “commonplace” figure:

Dream Sequence

I. Church

in the dream a day is three centuries
so the church is there solely to be there
the cracks in the fresco exist
right from the beginning
the ivory saint has been stolen
from day one
the corridor that leads to the rooms
of priests
sways with a rocking motion
because no one is permitted
because the sea is the only thing
to aspire for
and this church regards me
contemptuously
as I bang the tongue of bell
and stagger through the arched door
the walls respire with the heat
in my mind the sea is solid
with statues
so many of them not wanting
to be brought in this smoky blue light
the church remains a point of view
it will not say anything
but remains the hand that twists
the globe of this dream and shakes it
so I can remain small, commonplace
with no right to reach the exposed heart
of Christ
that now starts despite the helix of barbed wire to palpitate

Despite earlier misgivings, the poem ends with a hint of faith, at the point when the metaphorical becomes literal (“the exposed heart / of Christ”), which can only refer to the Blessed Sacrament. To the nonbeliev-

er, this detail remains beautiful poetic imagery, metaphorical at best. But to the believer, this is the point of intersection between the literal and the figurative: the metaphor *is* truth, and at this moment, a piece of reality in the midst of surrealism is introduced. Thus, the bread (the Sacred Host) is acknowledged as heart of Christ struggling to beat, for him (the speaker), perhaps for the Church. The movement (“palpitating”) is a rapid, irregular beat, one that occurs because of stressors to the heart as an organ. In this image the speaker seems to personify Jesus as a God in pain for what the teachings of the Church have done to him, hurting the few faithful who want to believe but find it difficult to. Yet it is also in this palpitating heart that the speaker finds consolation and life; that in the journey of questions, he still finds his way back to a God who would give up His flesh and expose it in painful strife (“despite the helix of barbed wire”), though in the form of the Sacred Host. It is also in this moment when the speaker realizes his unworthiness, that his earlier-perceived smallness no longer feels like a negative thing, but a declaration of fact: in the Presence of the Divine, coming into contact with the physicality of His immense love, any creature can be humbled into inadequacy.

The other poems that embody the Incarnational and Sacramental principles include “Dream Sequence: Snow,” where the lines “I in rapt attention of ruin / in the hush room watch the commotion / shiver into consciousness / become itself an entity” allude to the Ideal coming into Being, of Idea becoming Real(ity); and “Father and Son,” “Motherhood,” and “Marriage,” all of which acknowledge the bitter realities of domestic life. The first about a strained paternal dynamic; the second, about the uncertainty of daily life, a reluctance to transition, which is likened to pregnancy—the anticipation of giving birth to new form and stage in life; and the third, about divorce, separation, and a bitter end to a relationship, leading one to reconstruct the truth and oneself. All three do not shy away from suffering: these are not denied, but these are not celebrated either. The poems echo the most intuitive pains of human relationships, but are not averse to them; despite the mournful or grave tone adopted by the speakers—the three poems illustrate the acceptance that life is not perfect—the acknowledgment of such pains serve to reinforce the notion that suffering cannot be avoided, but that the only solution is to seek something higher, for the redemptive purpose of such turns in people’s lives.

Some poems in the collection contain social critique, an attempt at uniting art with social consciousness—in effect, becoming the kind of poetry that “bears witness to suffering” (O’Donnell, 2012), therefore grounding faith and sacramentality in the world, into something more concrete, into life as lived. In the incarnational principle both Divine and Human Natures intertwine seamlessly in the person of Jesus Christ, believing in God’s love and being in the service of others, as seen in the Catholic narrative, is not dissociated from reality; there should be no distinction. “Dream Sequence: Intramuros” is one such example. An unabashed social critique, it seems to condemn the deliberate distancing of people who have no historical memory (“we are not good historians”), presenting a city that needs to seclude itself desperately behind stone walls—no small thanks to the corruption in the country’s prime political institutions (“religion and government fornicate in one gilded bed”). The apathy is depicted in sinister tones: “during the afternoon’s long, slim light / shadows snake on the pavement / people with footsteps stream past the iron gates.”

Similarly, in “News,” a poem that renders in verse the complexities of headlines in all their unsavory details: “worsening weather still / sweeping / its heavy robes, smothering / people / in its wake, dirty monsoon / in their eyes” and “wars keep happening / like fire- / cracker explosions on the map / that bullets still locate the softest skull / of a child.” The deliberate enjambment of words renders the rhythm of the lines almost telegrammatic, staccato in delivery—and the jarring sound replicates the speed at which such news is conveyed, both in manner, as in the news anchor’s speech pattern, and in dissemination, as in the speed at which the news spreads.

At the same time, there is a seeming condemnation of the distancing of a life lived in art but devoid of social awareness:

[...] nothing about your
indignation
is useful so you live the only life
you know
you will make love with your
husband

tonight you will write your
small poems
you will consume almost
nothing
because of that you deserve
some kind
of reward your hands are clean
you're spared
from committing murder in this
lifetime

Both poems clearly illustrate that the tragedies are sacramental, in that they remind readers to be constantly in touch with reality, at the same time emphasizing the interconnectedness of realities, regardless of one's situation and location.

Aureus (2000) says that there is a necessity now, with all the negative forces in the world and the seeming lack of hope or knowledge on how to deal with them, to "ensoul" society with the Catholic imagination. "Alexandria," a poem that echoes the lavishness of Alexander the Great's glorious city in the age of antiquity, bespeaks of the death of human connection in the modern city, as it is the one thing that is sacrificed for the sheen of glamor and the immediacy of gratification:

Alexandria

Is the cityscape the final arbiter
To the doom long held
Between the eyes of pharaohs?

Isn't it such an achievement—
Our stark assembly of stars
Held in long columns of glass.

Who wants to locate a soul
On the forty-fourth floor?
Down below is a convenience store.

I look up and the buildings stagger.
We know you are small, ha ha ha,
They say, and the concrete shimmers.

Alexandria, bring me back
To the flick of sand that roars
Before a slanting pile of bricks.

They fashion heaven here.
The seraphs finesse their ties
Into Windsor knots.

I need to be treated like copper.
I can't stand the elevators
Singing like coffins.

Blast open the enclosed spaces
With the army adrift
In your winds.

Heal the sewers.
Allow blossoming.
Let the black fruit fall.

The last stanza implies that some form of healing is necessary (“Heal the sewers. / Allow blossoming”) in order to restore the beauty of the vivacity of life—a romantic yearning for the one point in the historical past that the speaker desires. Only with that kind of spiritual charge can the true glory of society be restored.

But it is in “Architectina” that one sees an illustration of how even (post)modern society clamors for order. It is not accidental that the title is a play of words on architecture, the “art of crafting space” (Gilbert, 2003) more than a glorification of buildings erected for their functional and aesthetic purposes. The first four stanzas seemingly glorify the “stripping down” of modernist architecture and everything associated with it: wooden surfaces, complex patterns (reminiscent of the Art Deco move-

ment), the ornamental design. Modernism as a movement in art is a break away from classical design, but it also visually celebrates order: clean lines, exactness of measure, patterns of repeated shapes—“culture dictat[ing] our sense of the beautiful,” which can only be found in symmetry and order. The persona questions whether “it is in the straight line that we can find the beautiful,” and concludes that “This severity seems the downfall of modernism.”

The next two stanzas contain the suggestion that perhaps it is post-modernism—the fragmentation, the amalgamation that reveals a lack of any unifying force, the beauty of surfaces—that truly celebrates freedom found in “independen[ce] from chthonic nature.” Even sex is elevated as, in the words of F. Sionil Jose (1989), “the only honest thing in this world:” “The culmination into an orgasm is the beautiful. / Anonymous sex [...] / Greatly affirms the truth about human nature.”

And yet a turn in the poem emerges in the next stanza:

Devotion, however, is innate to our flawed nature
And people come together not solely for sex
And in spite of the imposition of modernism
We still crave for order, repetitions, patterns
Even in our architecture, environment. Beautiful
If we can imbue our world a sense of ornament.

There is the sense that this stems from an abrupt recognition of an innate compulsion that naturally flows into things: Everything must restore itself to order, for chaos, simply, cannot last. This resounds of a craving for coherence; that it is natural, built-in, embedded in human nature. And what is this if not proof that man proceeds from God, who is Order Himself—all things He created are by His intelligent design?

On a related note, Aureus says that the Catholic imagination is necessarily baroque (2000). The fact that the word “ornament” is used repetitively throughout the poem, placed strategically in lines that, indeed, render its position ornamental, if not self-referential: the term looking for and into itself. This seems to suggest the paradox that the excesses are necessary to remind us of the desire for simplicity. God is the source of everything ornate, but He is also the language of simplicity, of generality, so that He can “draw all things unto Himself.”

In these poems, it can easily be seen that the only way to imagine God is through His constant reaching out and willing interaction with His people, and to know Him through the world is to succumb to faith and belief that He dwells within us, and suffers for us. God can be seen and known, the poems seem to assert, through the struggles in faith of those who want to believe. This is summed up succinctly by Mary Reichardt (2003):

Fully comprehending a Catholic view of incarnation and sacramentality means that one can embrace without reservation any work of art that represents life truthfully—its goodness, beauty, and joy along with its evil, sin, and misery.

Concretized (In)Finitude: God as the Ultimate Mystery

The way to represent God in literature is to think of Him as the Ultimate Unknowable, Whom no words in any language can contain nor define. Himes (2001) puts it best:

If it cannot be said, be silent. If you do not know how something can be said correctly, do not say it. But [T. S.] Eliot wisely knows that there are some things that are so important you dare not keep silent. You know that you cannot say ‘I love you’ in any way that is adequate, but you also know that you cannot simply be silent, that you have to try to say something, however badly. There are those so important that one simply cannot be silent about them. This is preeminently true when we speak of God.

In Daoana’s poems, one gets a sense of the restraint, delicateness, simplicity and minimalism of the zen-like brush stroke on the cover—all indicate an innate, intuitive grasping, a yearning for what cannot be fully knowable in this life.

“Voyage Out” fittingly illustrates the terms to approach the Infinite, precisely by going back in abstraction to consider the origins of Creation, as if to journey through the past (history) and into space (science) as if to determine one’s purpose on earth. The poem adequately suggests the marriage of science, the physics of things, and the philosophical means of

arriving at a spiritual enlightenment; at the end of it, we will come face to face with the energies of the cosmos, which are vibrations of the Universe humming to the tune played by the Creator—for what is it but the manifestation of the Infinite Greatness of The Author of Life? “[A]nd where the parameters can’t anymore be breached, / energies sizzle, darkness collapses before the slit, / the great parenthesis” When Time is wound back far enough, the poem says, the people to whom the speaker alludes can only come face to face with God, “parenthetical” in our inability to utter His greatness; He becomes the Ultimate Unsaid, for language cannot contain him—the Most Precise Implication, intuitively revealed in Creation.

Similarly, in “Counsel,” the specificities of life magnified into something greater; connected to the pulse/throb of the mysteries of the Universe:

Truth is, we can not make each other significant.
We have banged our lives together once and nothing out of it.
We stare into an empty space until it punctures into stars.
The universe’s larger indignities are beyond us.

In “Water Wheel,” the poet declares, “The concept of a dam is similar / To the concept of God,” after saying that “The water, as you know, cannot be / Immobilized.” More than a symbol of cleansing, of baptism, of the ebb and flow of life, the constant turning of how the world works, the water confined in the dam is used here as an image of liquid that allows itself to be contained, though its shape cannot be predetermined. It is the Source of Life, from where “Animals, at the onset of unmediated dawn / will drink,” and where a “miracle” is performed, when “the nearby village makes use / of something that is there already: [...] the river / which is now ululating in a field of stones.” The poem seems to say that though the water provides for everything needed in this life, the way the world drinks from it is utilitarian at best. Yet the speaker asks, “Should we / Fasten our beliefs in such small things?”

“Parcels of Time: Unknowable Future” seems to provide the answer, as the poem shoots for a time in the uncertain order of chronology when the elusive mystery can be unlocked:

Emerging from light-years of sleep,
Our freedom will be absolute,
We shall be harmless and armed
With keys to many doors whose use
We no longer care to know.

What is the Ultimate Mystery? It is as Dante illustrated in his *Divine Comedy*:

He says that he was dazzled by a light that initially blinded him. But as the intense light burned his eyes, it healed them so that he began to discern that the light was actually the interaction of three concentric globes of three colors, [Dante's] image for the Trinity. As his eyes were simultaneously seared and strengthened, he could look into the very depth of the light, and there he saw one exactly like himself. In one of the greatest statements of the Catholic humanist tradition, Dante saw that, as a result of the Incarnation, at the heart of God is one like him and you and me (Himes, 2001).

Some poems, however, do not always approach God in such mystical metaphors, but rather through another path. Some of them sound accusatory, portraying God as indifferent (“the god to be faulted / looking blameless” in “Afterlife” and a “collector of ransom[s]” in “Unknowable Future”, and other unflattering portrayals. In a similar vein are “Skepticism,” “Parcels of Time: The Past,” and “Parcels of Time: Unknowable Future.”).

However, in light of a Catholic reading, these “accusations” against God can only be connected with the notion of *via negativa*, which is “a way of describing something by saying what it is not, esp. denying that any finite concept of attribute can be identified with or used of God or ultimate reality” (Oxford Dictionary). Joseph Pearce also speaks of a “dark path to Christianity” (Pearce, 2006), exemplified in such literature as the short stories of Flannery O’Connor, “Silence” by Shusaku Endo, and “The Power and the Glory” by Graham Greene (Reichardt, 2003), where darkness only leads to light, or, that the light can only be attained by enduring a path of darkness. But these dark notions are not to be taken at face

value; rather, they seek to challenge prevailing notions of belief and direct the path of the reader-believer into profound reconsideration of truths he takes for granted.

In “If God Were,” for instance, the speaker contemplates the patterns of Creation, trying to discern the “manic hand” that made them, but hears a version of “deranged music / That which we perceive as order.”

Who wants to live in the negative, aware
Of these swarms of tendencies arranging them-
Selves into bits and pieces we recognize—
Fruitfly, fly, fruit—and the flame in them
Is possibly whim, but premeditated, fashioned
From the remnants of what stars there were
By this manic hand that can’t quite wrap around
A clock or itself—a bud, a potential of its own—
Only—following its own deranged music
That which we perceive as order—the proof—

This is not to be taken as fact; this is merely the impression of the speaker, questioning what he perceives is the Truth, of the Being of God. The seeming accusation stems from an apparent frustration to know, to define, the Ultimate Mystery—but it simply, cannot be known. Moreover, the entire poem is elliptical; the lines end when they should not; nothing is ever really finished, as if to linguistically render the point that these Truths are truly beyond human understanding; approaching the unknown and unsayable—that no one but the Creator of the Universe can put a definitive stop to such speculations.

Thus, in the spirit of reading the poems *via negativa*, it is only when such notions are challenged that one’s convictions can be tested, and hopefully, firmly reified.

In Tongues of Fire: Interjections of Religious Language

It is noticeable throughout the collection, even in the most religion-neutral of poems, that Daoana’s poems cannot escape from the “cameo appearances,” to use a film reference, of terms that contain a clearly religious allusion. While not strictly only in the realm of Catholic language,

the terms used may be readily associated with Biblical connotations, or at least carry some spiritual dimension.

“Rothko’s Pink,” for example—a poem clearly inspired by the expressionist painter’s series of abstract works featuring squares of pink that supposedly convey an exact emotion (this he calls color field painting)—makes use of the words “heresies,” “silence,” “angel,” and “light” to articulate the meditative prompting of the visual art:

the field of color vibrates
upon which the charge surges sweeps the bright
pink square arena to squanders and heresies
silence blooms against glass
the tongue of an angel under
a microscope or that brief arc
by which salmon captures light [...]

“Flotation Device,” which lyrically narrates the escape of a murderer and his victim being found abandoned in the most undignified of ways, makes use of the words “ascension” and suspension as corollary ideas, as if to suggest the victim’s transcendence of death:

It is the take-off and then the freeze

The body is suspended

In liquid, clearer than air and more volatile [...]

Where else in her body will you stick your hopes with pins?

After this ascension—incomplete and alas, forever—

She is clarified, she is triumphant, she is immobilized

“Alternate Reality,” which in part is about desire and sexual release, and a relationship gone wrong, pinpoints the addressee’s belief in the “holiness of documents” at the end of the poem—perhaps, alluding to the sac-

rament of marriage, if not an elevation of the belief in something legal and binding to define their togetherness:

And you, noteworthy with
a birthmark
On your left flank, accomplish
the task
At hand as you—who believe in
the holiness
Of documents, the folly of
erasures—
Bank on the side of the real.

Lastly, in “Two Figures,” which may be literally about figures as in a sculptural piece, contain some powerful lines about being in “the womb of the afterlife” and being “afflicted with something more than hope:”

Both of them crawl from their chairs which sink their wood into the soft earth
They seek the light of each other which is the eye they left in the womb of the afterlife
The eye blinks the blur of what is considered as the eternal, identifying element
But how about them, the two on their knees, searching for a hard notion of glass
Aren't they eternal and identifiable too? Look how they poke the clay with their fingers
They know what they are doing, they are afflicted with something more than hope

The use of religious allusions seems to endow each of these poems with an authoritative reverence for what the idea signified; it is almost as if the mere use of the term gives an added layer of significance to what was originally meant—one that is undoubtedly more meaningful, as it shows concern for something beyond the concerns of this world. On the other hand, they can also be seen to endow the otherwise secular poems with a consciousness that may be taken to resound with the language of a Catholic imagination. This also demonstrates a key fact: while the interpreta-

tion of the text must be held separate from the writer's intentions, this is a clear illustration that the poet is certainly not free from the influence of his Catholic sensibilities; this reality is lived in breathed, and thus inevitably—perhaps deliberately, perhaps subconsciously—make their way into poetry.

Conclusion

Clairvoyance, without question, is a testament to the author's craftsmanship: The trademark Daoana style of careful restraint, extolling beauty in simplicity; maximization of whitespace to articulate necessary silences in reading the poems; the attentiveness in selecting words, choosing them on the basis of sound and rhythm—these all attest to the poet-as-artist's elevated role as co-creator: He whose tool is language, who appraises creation in rhythmic cadences that sing love into being (to paraphrase Himes and St. Thomas Aquinas), who wields words as weapons and holds the power to enchant and uplift. Every language is indeed inherently powerful, divine, and poetry, like all writing, can be a covenant. Instead of progressing in linear fashion, the poems gyrate, a symmetrical move to the direction of the brush stroke the cover artist's hand sweeps the canvas with: the circular clarity, of Eternity, that only a spiritual understanding can circumscribe, where, in the title of Flannery O'Connor's best known short story, "everything that rises must converge" (O'Connor, in Reichardt, 2003). The poet's language, therefore, reveals the works' tendency to aspire for something more—and in light of a Catholic reading where the principles of incarnation and sacramentality are unearthed, imag(in)ings of God discovered, and interjections of religious language pinpointed, this is indeed possible.

Sometimes the language can be faulted for being too "airy" and abstract—it can suffer from a lack of the "relatability" of images used (as in "Unknowable future," which feature "seagulls" and "meteorites"), or hampered by the weakness of rhyme (as in "Parcels of Time: Tomorrow"). However, in the poems that do attempt to concretize the approximations of the abstract, it should seek to draw the readers to an epiphany, of sorts—the immanence of God, His presence in everything around us, so that everywhere else is a manifestation of His Grace—the Ultimate Mystery made knowable through the tangibility we are only able to perceive—the sacramentality of it all. v

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Fiction

Winter Butterfly

Ninotchka Rosca

Go with the rhythm of the brightliner, one of the few stainless steel subway trains still plying the tracks from borough to borough, backward, forward, this side, that side—constant motion signifying – well, nothing really, only making the stillness of her brother, wedged between two men burly in dark padded winter coats, even more remarkable. She'd lassoed him with a sidelong glance but hung fire, studying instead the men's hands grasping the horizontal bar which had replaced passenger straps – two hands which, were it not for skin color, could've belonged to one man. Having traced whorls and folds and wrinkles on those hands to boredom, she eased her head to the right for a full look at her brother. In his blue-green-yellow plaid short-sleeved shirt, blue jeans and white sneakers, he was an affront to the season. She acknowledged him with a half-nod; he glowed even more—briefly— but gave no other response. She was not surprised. He had been dead, after all, for fifteen years, lost somewhere in the waters between North Africa and Europe, sometime during his fifth run around the world aboard a cousin's ship. He had not been found and was likely body-surfing the waves still in an imitation of life. He came to her periodically, for no reason at all. He brought no message, no wisdom from the other realm. His presence was message enough.

She envied the dead their ability to make mere presence a message. Exact and precise, needing no elaboration.

*Salt-bleached asphalt
and a lightning-shock of cold
Spearing brine scent
from snow dunes
through immobile air
Warning -- of that
From which we came
To which we return.*

The sea shall have it all.

She managed to push through a seemingly impossible crush of people, made even more impossible by the girth of heavy winter coats. Identical specters in black or dark blue, rushing together for the elevated platform lit by yellow mercury lamps, and then rushing down the stairs to the city's gray topography. It was a clear night, the cold a concise blow from the deep black of the sky overhead, At the start of each winter, she would consider heading for a place of relentless heat and blue skies – but her soul metamorphosed inevitably and became one with the season, half-hibernating and singing to itself with the creak of icicles and the whistling of the snow.

He followed her, this specter whose name had become submerged in the label brother. She never caught him moving. He was just there, six feet away, never too far not to be caught by a single glance over her shoulder. She should be grateful, she supposed, that he had not shown up water-logged, hair plastered to his brow and with eyebrows, eyes, nostrils and mouth rimmed by salt crystals, his cheeks sliding off bones. She thought she heard him laugh. He wouldn't; he had been vain while alive; why would he be different in death?

*Two imitation Riding Hoods
Step into the gray path
Cleared through the snow
By a man who pauses,
Shovel at rest as snow drifts*

*Erase his work;
The young women, crying
“Coooie! Cooooie!” at passing cabs,
Trail the scent of chemical roses.*

He had been vain and merry, though only 5 feet 5, lanky and slim like a ballet dancer. He had been mistaken or taken for a pushover since grade school, bullied – casually and cavalierly – in the endemic violence that had been their home country. Bullied, beaten up, his lunch money stolen, his books messed up until, without saying a word to anyone, least of all to her, he enrolled in every dojo in the neighborhood, earning four black belts. That did not stop the bullying, since the constant exercise made him even more lissome and graceful, much like a girl as the bullies said. Good-looking, light-boned and always happy, hazel eyes twinkling from contained stars. Broken bones – collar, ulna, thigh, even a finger or two – had attended the trail of his journey to manhood and his peregrination around the world, until that terrible winter storm met the ship somewhere between North Africa and Europe and he was taken. His fate, as the song went, was still unlearned.

It was unfair. He who had set himself to find a rightful place ended up in a place that was no-place. “Safe winds” had been her words to him at each departure; “interesting paths” had been his reply – mockery from both of them, since they knew each other well, being only eleven months apart in age.

She had to smile, even though the memory was sharp as a dagger; she had not said those words nor heard his reply in sixteen years. But the pain had to be shooed away because she was already passing through the lobby doors of MJ’s apartment and had found/pressed the buzzer button. Where others used their cell phones to announce their arrival, she preferred the buzzer. It was a salute to tradition.

She had been here before and many other places like this, in the course of her days as a city social worker. MJ was in a fourth floor apartment, reachable by an elevator paneled in faux wood and smelling forlorn, the scent of the city’s underbelly. In the corridor, she told her brother to stay and to behave, much the way she had done when they were children.

He had been the youngest, the first to go among her siblings who, without fanfare, had followed him one by one. She had long concluded she would be the last of them, because of her penchant for safe winds.

MJ was her usual chirpy self, long hair tied back from her round face, looking younger than her thirty-one years. She had an apron over jeans and t-shirt and almost by rote, helped her out of her coat, brushing snow flecks from her hair, showing how working with the infirm and the young had become almost second nature. MJ offered coffee, tea and even soup she had managed to whip up in the tiny kitchenette her slum landlord had managed to carve out of a bigger apartment, turning what was a bed space with a water closet into a residential studio for which full rent could be charged. MJ worked seven days a week to feed the rent, herself and her brother with five children and a land that seemed to have been created to swallow money, what with the flood, the drought, the earthquake... Disaster land—that was what MJ called the slope of mango trees and a wooden house her mother had left to her and her older brother.

She, the social worker, had helped MJ escape a diplomat employer who had brought her to this country and then set her to work twenty hours a day at half the salary he was charging his own government. It had not been too bad in the beginning; MJ was used to long hours of work. But the diplomat also had a penchant for getting drunk periodically, during which he would conclude that his wife, children and the household help brought him nothing but misery. When he began trying to beat them up, including MJ, — well, that was no longer tolerable. One day, MJ had had to lock herself in the servant bathroom and call for help finally. It had been a minor scandal.

She accepted soup and three pieces of the dolmades MJ loved to make—grape leaves stuffed with ground chicken, rice and spices which she had learned to prepare for a Lebanese employer. MJ let her take the lone chair and she cradled the tray with the soup bowl and plate on her lap while MJ herself sat on the bed. Their knees were almost touching. MJ rested elbows on thighs and said her older brother had sent her a letter, saying an irrigation system had to be built for the land, which meant more money needed, and that his daughter, her oldest niece, was graduating from high school and the family would like to host a party for relatives, friends and town mates.

MJ said, “Imagine that? My oldest niece, graduating!”

She would seize on the good news, of course. They spoke of how her papers were going through the bureaucracy slowly; soon she would have proper documentation. “I would like to be a cook,” MJ said, “when I have papers.” At the moment, she was working as home care person for two – a young man who’d been turned paraplegic by a motorcycle accident and an octogenarian in the first flush of senility. Two days for one, three days for the other and on weekends, she cleaned four apartments, half a day for each.

And was this fine by her?

Oh fine, fine; the senile one was not yet a bother, just forgetful; sometimes she would forget the comb in her hair and leave it there, hanging like a pink bat. The paraplegic was okay, too, except that ... MJ frowned a little and said the paraplegic was behaving strangely.

What did that mean – strangely?

MJ smiled, dimples on both cheeks deepening; her eyes widened a little. “I have to bathe him, see? I help him into the bath tub and take a washcloth and lather him down. Today, he said he didn’t like the wash cloth down there; that I should soap him down there with my hands. He said he would pay extra.”

MJ’s voice had become as thin as a girl’s.

“Yes. So I did. Then when he was dressed and I was preparing his lunch, he called me to come and look at his computer screen. He had some porn movie in there. Why was he doing that?”

What did she do?

“Why was he doing that?” She repeated. “I didn’t know what he was trying to do. I couldn’t know what was going on.” And MJ raised guileless eyes to her face.

She wanted to retort that of course, you did, MJ did; you had known full well what the man was after. But MJ would wait until someone else labeled what was happening, denial being the first defense one learned in a lifetime of servitude. She wanted to say, ah, MJ, pretend-innocence can only get you this far and no farther.

Instead, she said carefully: “This does not seem like a good job for you.”

MJ wondered aloud then how she could get a cake to her graduating niece. “She likes chocolate.”

“Who doesn’t?”

But in her was this mantra: you know, don’t you, you know what it is; this is how it begins; you know, you do know...

Later, in the foyer, her brother watched impassively as she stopped walking, turned toward the nearest wall and leaned her forehead against it, overcome by the impossibility of it all. She had thirty-two “clients,” as they were called in her world; five had been raped twice that she knew of – once as girls and once as they wandered strange lands; a dozen had discovered themselves to be supporting not only children and husbands but also the latter’s mistress or two; six had children who had been targeted by methamphetamine dealers; all had had to respond to ever-increasing demands for subsidy from relatives to the nth degree of consanguinity. She could however swear on the Bible and every other religious book in the world that all remained cheerful, finding that straw of good news in a haystack of bad.

“They are clients,” her supervisor had said, back then when she was hesitantly starting this career. “They are not friends. They are emotionally invested in their need. You are simply part of that. They come and they go. Detached compassion is the best way to deal with them.”

Detached compassion. Her supervisor was one of the little people, only four foot four but had managed to get herself through college and grad school and was licensed so thoroughly in something like twenty-one states

that it had been extremely risky for the city to deny her employment. She had risen through the ranks, as she was fond of saying, sometimes clasping her hands over her head in a gesture of victory.

This morning, though, she had seemed terribly imposed upon. One of her clients had returned to her boyfriend who had left her badly bruised twice. Supervisor had said, “that’s that; he will likely kill her one day, I assuredly hope not but in any case, she’s only eighteen years old and by the time she’s twenty-five, her life will be over. Or something like that. Seen it before. Still can’t understand it. Maybe she took Florence Nightingale literally, that pain’s better than paralysis. I did all I could and she didn’t even have as heavy a disadvantage as...” She’d broken off, flung hands into the air in gesture of surrender and had walked in that rolling gait of hers to the ladies’ room. It was an hour before anyone noticed she had not come out and they’d knocked and pleaded and finally called 911 and four wide-shouldered men had broken down the door. There she was, soaking wet, before the lavatory sink into which water poured from the faucet and slopped to the floor. She was using her coffee mug to scoop water from the sink and over her head, while muttering, “messes, messes; gotta clean up the mess...”

And all she could think of, while watching the paramedics subdue Supervisor – it had seemed brutal, as the tiny woman had tried to slither through the gigantic men’s grasp and resume her quaint bathing– all she could think of was how Supervisor was now a client. She had found herself stepping away, sidling between desks to the wan square of sunlight wrestling its way through a dust-encrusted window.

They come and they go. Much like you, she said to him who was in his summer clothes, though you never asked for anything. And now look, you have become a golden sea lion.

Brother glowed briefly. She heard him say, you have become a winter butterfly.

*Wings woven of ripples,
Antennae of icicles
Eyes of reflected starlight
The winter butterfly
Hovers over sunken boats of
Golden leaves embedded
In packed snow, sipping
A cocktail of sadness*

“Safe winds,” she said to him. “Interesting paths,” he replied.

There was the familiar tree, stripped bare and dark now, in the front yard of a building midway to the brightliner’s station. She hardly recognized it from the green and orange beauty it had been in spring. Snow blanketed the ground about it. No one had been shoveling there. A blackened branch, with six serpentine twigs, had broken off and lay on a snow mound near the sidewalk. She picked it up, wrapped her right hand about its thicker end and wondered if the warmth of her flesh would entice it to sprout cherry blossoms.

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A Condition of Worship

Augusto Antonio Aguila

This presents some sort of danger. I think I have read this somewhere. Is it “Death in Venice”? Yes! That’s it; Thomas Mann’s classic! The sweet ecstasy of just looking; the sheer pleasure of just watching, invigorated by a presence, enraptured by a quick glance; I am damned for life! This is probably what poetry in motion means. That beauty! That kind of beauty that strikes you blind, hits you hard at the pit of your stomach, and takes all your breath away. Every leap, every dash, a trickle of sweat, back of hand wiping wet parts of skin and fabric, that unaffected concentration to score a point, to get the ball to the other side, defying gravity, to be the hero. And I am here, transfixed by solitary rapture, the sweetest torture. Is this a case of life imitating art?

It’s Gustave and Tadzio all over again, but with a new twist this time. I am not as old as Gustave. He must have been a hundred years old, smelling of damp earth and clay, wrinkled to the bone, ravaged by heartbreak and time. He must have been an ugly sight; quite pathetic as he oggled and drooled over a boy fifty years his junior. And how old was Tadzio? Thirteen or fourteen perhaps, a young, juicy, succulent twink. I am no Gustave. I am still in my prime. I just turned forty a few months ago. They say forty is the new thirty. I feel good about it; it is a lie. Sometimes we need convenient lies in order to go on living our sad lives.

I look young for my age; early thirties they say. I go to the gym regularly, three times a week. I do it religiously, tiring myself with weight-lifting, crunches, squats, cardiovascular workout. It pays to be well-built.

The body is made for making love. One poet said that we love only “with” body. I totally agree. I believe the lies perpetuated by people my age, but the truth is I’m forty and I can do nothing about it. Forty-year-olds are responsible for the greatest advertising strategy of this century, which simply means Ta-dah – that they could still have lots and lots of sex. This is what it’s about – sex with a capital S. When one turns forty, it follows that we feel more confident about what we know and we become more secure about ourselves. We have to because we have no choice. Once looks fade, one must attain a certain level of respectability. Respect is all we’ve got. By age forty, we are expected to have already climbed the corporate ladder, finished our MAs and PhDs, and written all those useless and worthless research papers that nobody reads except those doing research themselves who are mostly clueless about what they are doing. We have to content ourselves with achievements, respect, dignity, etcetera, etcetera, but the truth is, the biggest problem and preoccupation of those who are in their forties and above is their “desirability”. We waste our time and actually enjoy our pathetic efforts to slow down the aging process. Why don’t we get tired of it? Haven’t we had enough? How many more fucks do we need! Would we still want to fuck at seventy? But fucking -- the ability to still get it up, fuck all night and make your partner see stars and sing the star-spangled banner ala Mariah Carey with that signature whistle in you forties is the litmus test.

I thank God I have good genes. I still have my hair, lots of it. I take after my father who in his seventies still has sexy, wavy hair. My late mother had prominent cheekbones which I inherited, and when you have high cheekbones, you know that it will take time before your facial skin sags. Many of my high school friends and colleagues my age and even younger have receding hairlines or have just gone bald. That is why I love high school and college reunions. I flatter myself. I reassure myself that I am still desirable despite my age. But at the end of the day, I know I am still forty, and in ten years I will be fifty.

When I think about *Death in Venice*, I can’t help but cringe. I used to love the novella. I taught it my classes. I hate to see myself in Gustave, but I will be in a few years’ time if I don’t stop this madness. I always thought I could detach myself from the texts that I teach no matter how affected I am by the sad plight of my favorite characters: Renee, the fifty something

conciierge who hides her intelligence in Muriel Barbery's *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*; Ricardo, the man who falls madly in love with a worthless woman in Mario Vargas Llosa's *Bad Girl*; Midori, the girl who falls for a guy who is crazy about a suicidal girl in Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, Josie O'Meara, the widow who falls for the assassin who holds her hostage in Edna O'Brien's *The House of Splendid Isolation*; Senhor Jose, the lonely employee who gets obsessed with a name printed on an old index card in Jose Saramago's *All The Names*; and fuck, Gustave, the old man who falls in love with a young, beautiful boy in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*! Why does love have to be so tragic?

Right now I'm listening to Maroon 5's "Love Somebody" on my iPod. I play it over and over as I watch him and the other players in their blue and yellow jerseys position themselves to hit the ball. I am not the cheesy type but I am making an exception this time. "If I fall for you, I'll never recover. If I fall for you, I'll never be the same" sings Adam Levine, the group's lead singer. It's funny how lyrics of pop songs seem to say the exact words and *say* them to you at the right moment especially when you try effortlessly to *cinematize* your moment. This is the fifteenth time I'm playing the song. I feel like a fool. I should have some self-respect. Right now I have none. Well, at least it's my secret. I want to reveal it big time soon, but right now, I'm just giving him hints, like staring at him when he's not looking; and when he looks my way, I hold that gaze for a few seconds, and then I smile at him and look away or go back to the book I'm reading. I'm reading pulp, a sappy romance novel about a middle-aged woman during the 19th century falling in love with her maid's nineteen-year-old son. It's kind of right up my alley at the moment.

"I may only be half way there, but take me all the way..." Levine continues. Now why this song? It was the song playing when he sat beside me at the burger joint. I asked the team to follow us, my friend Ryan and me, after volleyball practice to the burger joint right in front of the gym. Only two of them did. I was ecstatic when I saw him enter the glass door. The other player was a nice gay guy with a small frame and a waif-like body. I asked them about their zodiac signs and learned that my Tadzio is a Virgo.

We started talking about music which was a good start, since I am a music lover myself. I learned from the other guy that Tadzio could sing well, like a member of those boy bands. He said he liked Maroon 5 and

the song playing at that moment. What a coincidence! I like the band too. Does that mean we're soul-mates? I think I am going too far.

After that classic love-at-first-sight episode, I stalked him on Facebook. I was quite pleased with the things I saw on his page. There were those usual photos taken during outings. He looked good in his chinos, summer shorts, and shades. There were photos of him dancing on the beach with his colleagues; having dinner with friends; posing with students who looked love struck, particularly the girls; some serious-looking photographs of him in some seminar or conference listening to a faceless speaker; a few photographs with his family members mostly his sisters, all quite pretty. My favorite showed him lying in a hammock reading a book to a toddler.

This is dangerous. I don't think I can pull this off. Well, maybe I can. Have I lost my touch? I hope not. I am not really very good at this. I am afraid that once I start the chase, I won't be able to stop. This is all Thomas Mann's fault. This is literature's curse. We bibliophiles are masochists; we pattern our lives after our favorite tragic characters—to suffer in silence, to wallow in misery, to listen to cheesy love songs when we're on the brink of slashing our wrists. We never learn our lesson. I should be thankful that it's happening to me now; the sooner the better. I don't think I would be able to handle this in my *fifties* or *sixties*. I can't do a Mary Carson, Barbara Stanwyck's character in that made-for-TV melodrama movie *The Thornbirds*, an old woman falling in love with a young, handsome priest.

Tadzio in the novel is a god, the personification of male beauty, the kind of beauty that unintentionally destroys lives. You toss and turn in your bed. You hurt everywhere, a hurt that is both painful and sweet, so sweet that you crave it. That's exactly what's happening to me now, especially the tossing and turning in bed.

He's my Tadzio. When I met them at the gym before the volleyball practice, the members of the team were introduced to me by my best friend Ryan, a brilliant graduate student currently enrolled in the Ph.D. program for literature. There were only seven of them that time. I knew with just one look that most of the players were gay, although Ryan assured me that the others who happened not to be around were straight. I don't think any straight guy would be so passionate about or waste his time on volleyball, a sport that allows you to strike a sexy pose while suspended in the air for

a few seconds as you hit the ball with a dramatic spike. There's Yul, a call center agent who has time for volleyball despite his busy schedule; Bryan, a member of a popular TV dance group, the one with my Tadzio at the burger joint, works in an advertising agency; Bill, a thirty-something Chinese ophthalmologist, quiet and refined; Howie, with thick eyebrows and an annoying scowl, a full-time graduate student taking up Masters in Hospital Administration; Cheesecake, a gorgeous transgender who resembles Marian Rivera and works in one of the big television networks; Rizza (or Elmer), his six-foot-two best friend, an MBA student who loves talking about beauty pageants; Adrian, a former student leader in his undergraduate days, with a great smile, really nice bod, muscles in the right places, charming. He would be number two in my list. If Tadzio does not respond, I think he would do. And then there's Roel, the team captain, a working student during his college days, Psychology magna cum laude. Like me, his girlfriend watches the practice and the games regularly. There's Coach RJ, a player for the national volleyball team who also dabbles in painting and archery. And then there's Justin, my Tadzio, twenty-four years old, about five-foot-nine, fair-skinned with a neatly-trimmed stubble, dark brown eyes that light up when he smiles, lean and ripped like a volleyball player should be. He teaches Management and Marketing courses in a college run by priests in a nearby province.

It just happened. That sounds like a cliché, but aren't all love stories clichés. There is a formula to it. Your eyes meet, you exchange a few words, and then BANG, you're in love or at least you think you are. I hate the feeling. I despise the enslavement that love does to people. It's an addiction. Once you've tasted it, there's no getting over it. You feel like you just want to watch the one you love forever. To hell with fucking responsibilities! To hell with what other people will think! To hell with the world! Later you realize that you have wasted so much time, effort, money, and tears. But what the heck! It feels good!

I know that he knows. I have no doubts about it. I can feel the tension between us. I don't think I'm imagining it, but I should be the one to make the first move. Though I have to be careful, I must come up with a good plan, a plan that will not make me look stupid, desperate or too interested. I have to consider my position in the University. That's one major problem when you're mature and quite accomplished. You can't just make a mistake, unlike young people who can break down anywhere, in the

streets, at the train station, in the football field, in the cemetery. But when someone like me becomes a fool for love, it's not only sad, it's pathetic and disgusting.

I asked Ryan what I should do. I hate how I sounded asking him that question. The high pitched voice that came out of me was that of a lovesick, boy-crazy, teenage girl desperate to get noticed by the boy who doesn't even know she exists.

I can't just go on this way, stealing glances, waiting for him to respond. I am the older one. I should make the first move. There are many possible ways. I want to ask him if he's single or if he's seeing someone. That's more like it, very adult, very mature, very masculine, and very much playing the role of noble "pursuer," but I might just get an immediate answer that I don't want to hear, like: "Yeah, I'm seeing someone" or "I'm dating" or worse "I'm in love with someone." That would shatter me. But he could also say "I'm single," and that would mean I can go in for the kill.

I can't ask him "Would you consider dating an older or a more mature man?" That would sound really awful. I don't want to sound like I'm pleading, begging, selling myself short; or give him the impression that I'm second best or damaged goods. I have too much pride.

A safer strategy is to ask my friend Ryan to fish for some information. I can miss one practice and he could ask Justin the pertinent questions. I am not even quite sure if he's gay. I just think he might be because he plays volleyball. He looks straight, but he just might be acting straight. If he's straight, then that's a dead-end street. Ryan is very willing to do this for me. But that would make me look like a coward. It would be too obvious that I need someone to ask the questions for me.

I could ask him out for coffee casually after practice, maybe to join me and Ryan, talk about the usual things: work, studies, hobbies, movies, books that he reads, sports, volleyball, volleyball, and more volleyball. After a few coffee dates, I can ask him as well as his team to go out for a night of KTV. I will secretly dedicate songs like Vertical Horizon's "You're A God," Michael Johnson's "I'll Always Love You," George Michael's sexy "Father Figure" and if push comes to shove, I just might sing my best rendition of "I Want Your Sex," which I could sing with the signature George Michael moan and breathy vocals. That would get his attention. But that

would be too cheap. I don't want to sound like a *matrona*, desperate to get into some kid's pants.

I could play the dependable, intelligent man, giving him valuable advice about his master's thesis—detached, but caring and concerned, someone he would look up to. Something like a mentor-student relationship. Socrates and the Pederasty tradition, yeah something like that, very Greek. I just have to be a little careful because he might end up seeing me as the father or uncle he never had. Or I could just tell him that I like him. No frills, no mincing with words, no drama. Get it over and done with. I should decide soon.

I'm praying for a sign. Yes, I believe in signs. I prayed to get someone before and I got him. He was a married man, and thirty years old. I was only thirty-three. He said he was open to same-sex relationship. I had doubts of course. We were dating for about two months and I still wasn't quite sure whether he was "the one." The sex of course was spectacular. When his three-year-old son got sick, I told him to text me if he needed help. I accidentally put my mobile phone on silent mode and when I got out of bed to go to the bathroom, I saw my phone blinking. A message at two in the morning! It was him. He was asking for help. I told him I would be there. That was the sign. I went to the hospital and gave him five thousand bucks. He told me he couldn't believe it; he realized that I truly loved him. This went on for five years, until he got an offer to work in the Middle East. I didn't stop him. It was a good five years anyway.

I'll ask for a sign again. But right now. I'll just play it cool. I'll just enjoy what is actually going on. The fleeting vision of Justin, dripping with sweat, looking super sexy and sturdy just standing with both his hands on his waist and exchanging hi-fives with the other players, moving briskly, perfectly synchronized with the others, blocking deadly spikes, taking a break, and as if in slow motion, energizing himself with Gatorade that slowly spills down to his neck, taking his shirt off revealing a sinewy and sinuous body, smiling and walking past me with his blue towel around his neck. I take half breaths. I close my eyes and for a few seconds freeze the moment in my mind.

I had a strange dream. I woke up sweating. I've been sweating a lot lately. In my dream I was praying to a female saint. I just don't re-

member her name. I'm not even sure if there is a saint who looked like her. She did look familiar but I couldn't place where I'd seen her. She was wearing a brown robe. She was dressed like a nun, like most female saints. She was quite tall, had pale skin, thin lips, a pert nose, prominent cheekbones, and sleepy eyes. She had big breasts, cup C perhaps. I never thought saints could be so well-endowed. She was standing on a rock about three feet high in front of a tree with silver leaves. Her hands were clasped as if in prayer. Her lips were moving and her eyes were looking up in the sky. She didn't seem to mind me, but I was sure she knew I was there.

There were differently colored birds flying around her, all of them chirping. It looked like a scene from an old Disney movie where the only thing that looks real is the actor singing and tap dancing with cartoon characters. There were strange insects crawling on the rock where she was standing. Two looked like pink praying mantises with glass butterfly wings. Another looked like an ant, but it was five inches long, greenish, with a head as big as that of a grasshopper. There were three smaller insects that resembled beetles but instead of the usual dots, one had zebra stripes, the other had a leopard spots, two had green and blue candy swirls on their wings, and another had strange handprints on its wings. I recited a memorized prayer. I tried to call her attention by waving to her but she didn't respond. She was still engrossed in her prayer. I sat on what looked like a marble bench, like those you see in big campuses, where lovers sit and whisper sweet nothings to each other. After a few minutes, she opened her arms wide and smiled as she looked up the sky again. Afterwards, she closed her eyes and bowed her head. I stood up and walked a few steps towards her. When she saw me smiling sheepishly at her, she cocked one of her eyebrows, took a deep breath, turned her head sideways as if annoyed, then looked at me from head to foot, sizing me up.

"And may I know who you are? I didn't see you coming?" She was obviously irked by my intrusion.

"I didn't mean to intrude..."

"Oh but you did! I was praying intently and you had the nerve to bother me!" she said. I detected a fake American Southern drawl in the last three words especially in the word bother, which sounded like *bawther*.

She reminded me of wasted Southern belles in those sad Tennessee Williams' plays.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Sister... Saint... Saint?"

"You mean you don't know me?" She glared at me.

"Well, I'm not that religious you know. I pray...yes, I do pray...but I don't know the names of all the saints. I'm quite familiar with some of them...you know, there's Saint..."

"So you're saying I'm not as famous as the other saints? How dare you...you puny mortal!"

"It's not that. It's just that...I apologize...you're Saint...?"

"That's Saint Voodah for you?"

"Saint Voodah? You're kidding right?"

"Let me remind you that you're talking to a saint and if you don't behave..."

"I'm sorry, Saint Voodah. I'm in a dream, in my dream, so this is more surreal than surreal...I'm really sorry...it's just that the name Voodah sounds..."

"Surreal?"

"Yes, because...because, you're rather a sexy saint. I don't mean to offend but I've never seen a saint as...as...well-endowed as you...with all your curves."

"Oh really! I think I'm going to like you after all!" Saint Voodah giggled. She flipped her hair like those models in shampoo commercials on TV. She said the word fooler the way Kathy Bates said it in the movie *Misery*.

"That's why I didn't think you were a saint. You're more like a bombshell," I said.

"Oh stop it! Although I don't blame you for thinking that because those who have this same dream say the same thing," Saint Voodah seemed to love the attention she was getting from me. I had a feeling she was demented. Maybe she only thought she *was* a saint. But if she really was a saint, she might be able to help me.

Saint Voodah was smiling to herself, pleased with what she just heard. I was a bit shocked when she cupped her breasts, like she was getting them ready for something.

“By the way Saint Voodah...”

“Yup...” she said the words without looking at me.

“I have a question. Actually I need your...” I had to plead for my cause while she was still in a good mood, though I didn’t think there were moody saints.

“Help...you need my help...am I right, Jerry?” Saint Voodah had guessed what I was going to say next.

“You know my name? Well yes, Saint Voodah. I really need your help.”

“Duh! I’m a saint remember. Even before you say what’s on your mind, I know what you would ask for. And of course everyone needs my help. I mean who doesn’t? I’m the one you go to when you need signs. Long before semiotics became a field of study, even before Roland Barthes studied signs, I was already giving them away, and these theorists claim to know everything about signs! Bah!” Saint Voodah was losing her temper again.

“So you’ll...”

“Do I have a choice? That’s why I’m here. That’s my job, to help needy mortals like you with your pathetic wishes. I hate being on-call all the time, but what can I do?”

I kept quiet. Saint Voodah looked exasperated again.

“You know you have a point Jerry. That Justin, the guy you have the hots for, is a damn looker. He’s a hottie. I don’t blame you. If I were human, I would’ve done the same thing and felt the same way, but I’m glad I’m a saint. I don’t have to worry about things like...”

“Please help me Saint Voodah. I really need your help. I’m kinda lost right now,”

“Oh c’mon Jerry, you don’t look lost or helpless to me. I mean you’re nearly six feet tall. You’re in your forties, quite intelligent, so you don’t strike me as a vulnerable person. You’re very strong, I can tell.”

“But this time I’m not. I don’t know what to do. I need... I need...”

“A sign?”

“Yes a sign, Saint Voodah, unless...unless you can make him love me...”

“Look here Jerry. I’m a saint, not Cupid. It’s a different world. If you want you can call out to him, but I’m sure he’s gonna mess up your life even more! Why did I ever end up a saint for gay men!”

“I’m sorry. I’m just desperate...”

“Aren’t you humans always desperate?”

I kept silent again. I didn’t want to make her angry. She was my only chance.

“Okay Jerry. I’ll help you. I’ll give you a sign.”

“You will? You really will?”

“Of course! Why are you even having this dream in the first place if you wouldn’t get a sign?”

“All right. What is it Saint Voodah? I’m excited to know.”

“On the third game, when you see a bouquet of peach roses, it means...”

Suddenly Saint Voodah’s voice seemed garbled. I couldn’t hear her voice. All I could hear was a loud repetitive ringing. Saint Voodah was slowly disappearing from my sight. She was still saying something when I opened my eyes. It was my alarm clock ringing. It was five a.m.

“Damn!” I shouted at my alarm clock. “I was this close to that saint’s message! Damn!”

A bouquet of peach roses on the third game – that was it.

The gym is packed with people, mostly teenagers in blue and orange shirts. There are adults too, probably parents of the volleyball-obsessed kids. Loud music from Kesha, Rihanna, Jason Derulo, Katy Perry, Bruno Mars, and yes, Maroon 5, artists that I am very familiar with, blasting through the speakers. People carrying all sorts of things—elongated balloons, battery-operated plastic rods, about two-foot long, party poppers, luminous sticks, and multicolored flaglets. They are ready to wave them up in the air when the game started. It’s the third game. The team won the first two games which meant things were going as planned, based on what Saint Voodah had told me.

“All I have to do now is to keep watch for a bouquet of peach roses in this sea of black, brown, and burgundy heads,” I tell myself.

I am seated in the front row of the bleachers to have a good view of the game, and of course of Justin. From the side entrances of the gym, the players enter. The crowd cheers. They wave at the crowd. They see me and I wave back. Justin looks at me and smiles. It’s a shy smile. He lowers his gaze for a moment and looks at me again. I hold his gaze for a few seconds and he smiles at me, a more reassuring smile, one that goes straight to my guts. I take it as a signal that he *knows*.

The warm-up takes some ten minutes. Everyone can see that both teams are in top form, but I have a strong feeling my team will win. I always have feelings like that and they usually come true.

He looks fresh, like he has just taken a bath. I can imagine the smell of his hair, just like that time when he sat beside me. He smelled of jasmine only muskier. His skin, particularly his neck and shoulders, was citrusy, lemony fragrant. It looks like he had just had a haircut that morning, a few hours before the game. He looks handsome as usual in his blue and lime green jersey. There is no trace of roughness in the way he carries himself inside the court. He’s sleek and elegant as a gazelle, fluid and flowing like honey and melted butter, yet somehow solid and steel-like. While the other players look overwrought, exerting too much effort to toss, block spikes, and dive dramatically on the court’s hard wooden floor, Justin is king of cool and quiet confidence, sleek like a brand new car with just a glint of soft but masculine vulnerability.

The third game is crucial, because if my team wins, it would mean playing in the semi-finals. Although I’m not much of a sports fan, I kind of enjoyed the past few weeks just watching them practicing and playing, doing death-defying stunts just to get the ball over to the other side of the net. I used to play volleyball during my elementary years, a little in high school, but I forgot all about it in college, because I became more preoccupied with reading. I’m tapping my feet, the right one first, then the left, then the right again. It’s a sign of nervousness. I had been thinking about this game for days.

The referees arrive, two heavy-set women with short hair. They look like men. They’re wearing dark blue tight-fitting shirts which emphasize their big breasts. The shirts have two white stripes on both sleeves which

match their jogging pants. They look dead serious like those abusive wardens in women's prisons. I know they have to put on a very convincing no-nonsense scowl to make the players and the audience think they can't be bullied.

The players of both teams mechanically shake hands. The game starts but I can't concentrate because I have to be on the lookout for peach roses. That Saint Voodah was probably just a fraud. Why did I ever allow myself to get duped by that bogus saint? People were screaming, waving flaglets and phallic balloons.

The first set is very intense. There's a lot of shouting, mocking, and berating. We have to win two sets. Both coaches have grave expressions on their faces. They call timeouts to remind the players of their strategy, their tactics, and how to "kill" the other team. How this actually works is beyond me. How to actually anticipate what the other players will do and what your teammate are thinking when you're focusing too much on taking the lead is somehow lost in my language? Literature is definitely much easier.

We win the first game. This inspires the team. They're all smiling. I know RJ is telling them to do everything to win the second game. Justin is dripping with sweat, breathing heavily, but looking pleased. I'm looking around, feeling stupid, waiting for a bouquet of peach roses to drop from the ceiling. Then I decide to give up on the idea of seeing peach roses and just enjoy the second set. Maybe I should ask another saint, a more reliable one, for a clearer sign next time. Gyms, perspiration, love, and roses don't actually go together. Why did I fall for that in the first place?

The second set starts. The other team scores a succession of three quick points. The guys on my team are not able to receive the first three serves. This stuns them. I start cheering for my team. When they don't get the fourth serve, RJ calls for a timeout, and I see him making chopping gestures with his hands. Is he explaining some new strategy, or just scolding them for being such klutzes? The players nod their heads. I see Justin looking at the scoreboard, 4-0, in favor of the other team. He breathes deeply a few times. He is listening intently to what the coach is saying. They return to court after shouting "UNITED" which is the team's signature cheer. The game continues and my team is back in fighting form. They immediately garner four points to the team's six. That is a good sign.

The game continues. I am screaming and shouting. I can't hear my own voice. People are jumping up and down. I have forgotten all about the peach roses. Howie, one of the players, attempts to take the ball which comes hurling towards him like a rocket. He makes a quick jump to lessen the impact as the ball almost hits his face, but he lands on one foot. He is suddenly on the floor, squirming in pain. RJ calls for another timeout. I stand up, gasping at the mishap. His teammates carry him to the bench. The resident physical therapist immediately goes to him. He signals to the other players to give them some room. He makes Howie rest in one corner as he examines his foot. He opens his first aid kit and applies something to it. Justin goes to him and puts his hand on his shoulder. Howie does not respond. He seems to be in shock.

The players, except for Howie, return to their places. My team looks wounded, but I can sense that they are going to get even and eventually win the game. I see it in their eyes, the kind of burning fury that you see in people when they're mad.

I think this is the magic of sports. While playing, your team becomes family. For a while, I envy them because I am a mere spectator even though I am their manager. Managers are not really part of the team. You support them but the game can go on with or without you. You don't make points. You don't sweat like everyone else. You don't feel that rage when the team is losing or the same kind of joy when they win. Players have their own secret language that you can only know a little about. They appreciate your presence, but you're not technically a member of the team even if you have your own set of jerseys just like the ones they're wearing in the game. But I'm happy with whatever access I have to the team. I don't think they are even aware of any of this. I guess I am the only one "intellectualizing" my position in the team.

My players don't waste much time. They move faster, glide in the court with graceful fierceness, and shout their coded lines of attack, like warriors intent on winning the battle. The other team tries hard but they fail. I know they can sense the animal fury raging inside my players. Sports is all psy-war. It is about bullying your opponents. You send them clear signs of predatory power, like a spider or a scorpion closing in on a helpless insect.

The other team is losing steam. And in one magical and powerful swoop, Justin delivers a spike that hits the face of one of the players of the other team really hard. That is the one point the team needed to be declared the winner. We all scream and cheer. Justin's teammates carry him on their shoulders. He is their champion not only for winning the game that will secure them a sure spot in the semi-final round, but also for the sweet revenge he has exacted for Howie who is clapping and screaming from where he is seated.

I go outside to congratulate the team. Howie is carried out by the therapist and he is made to sit on one of the chairs placed just right outside the gym. The members of the team are gathered around a sofa and two love seats, sweaty and tired, but beaming with pride. I approach them and offer my congratulations. They all say thank you and have a group hug with me. I particularly congratulate Justin for the winning spike. I shake his hand and the feel of his sweaty palm and fingers send, (as they say in romance novels) shivers up and down my spine. He smiles back and thanks me.

"This calls for a celebration!" I say.

"Pizza! Pizza! Pizza!" they all shout in unison.

"Sure, sure! There's one across the street, Cabbie's. Or do you want to go somewhere else?" I ask them.

"Cabbie's fine, sir!" Bryan says.

"Okay, I'll..." I am about to tell them something, when a security guard appears. He is carrying a bouquet of peach roses.

"Wow! Is that for me?" Cheesecake says.

I look at the bouquet of roses. I am unable to say anything. Saint Voodah was telling the truth after all. Bless her!

"Where did these peach roses come from?" I ask myself.

"Are you Justin Gutierrez," the lanky, dopey-looking security guard asks Cheesecake.

"Of course not! I'm Cheesecake!" Cheesecake retorts.

"Maybe they're for me?" Rizza says.

"Didn't you hear what *manong* guard said, They're for Justin!" Adrian says.

"For me?" Justin looks genuinely surprised.

“Why would anyone give me these ... ah..ah flowers?” Justin smiles, examining the bouquet of roses.

“Owws, *kunwari ka pa!* I’m sure you know it’s from you know who!” Cheesecake teases him.

“Who? I have no idea?” Justin says in a confused tone, but he seems flattered by the attention he is getting from his team mates, and by the idea that he has a secret admirer.

“*Naku, dedma pa daw oh!*” Rizza jokes.

I look at the bouquet of roses with both strange fascination and profound hatred.

“You have a secret admirer!” RJ says.

“Really, I have no idea!” Justin says.

“Look at the card! Maybe there’s a name there!”

Justin looks at the card. It read: “Congratulations! From B.”

“Who the hell is B?” Justin asks.

“C.mon! you mean you don’t know?”

Justin is red in the face.

I know this is my cue to leave.

“Well guys. I’ll just see you at Cabbie’s in a while,” I say. No one hears me. No one is interested in what I am saying. Why would anyone care about pizza? A mysterious bouquet of peach roses holds more mystery and wonder? I tap RJ on the shoulder and tell him I will meet them at the pizza place. RJ just gives me a perfunctory nod and resumes teasing Justin just like the others.

I walk slowly away from them. I can still hear them laughing. I don’t want to look back where they are gathered around Justin, all excited about the flowers. I suddenly feel the need to breathe.

Finally I am out of the gym. I don’t want to see them anymore, but I had promised them that celebration. I should play my part well. I have always been true to my word. As I cross the street going to Cabbie’s, I can still hear the laughter.

The bouquet of peach roses, the card with the mysterious letter B written on it, the team excited about this new development in Justin’s life, the futility of telling Justin what I feel for him ... these will be, for now, the secret sources of my misery.

P o e t r y

Idyll of Split Season

Alfred A. Yuson

Yes You Can

You can say anything.
Poetry is expectation.
Poetry is a bowl of rice grains
you a) check for chaff; b) boil to extremes;
c) allow to simmer before
withdrawing the pandan leaf
that you then toss as documentation, into
a trashcan w/out folding like origami.

When asked, you can say anything.
Poetry is this or that... Insights, images, sentiments,
a recall of what has yet to happen, a wish, a dream,
hope of love to spring or not to be discontinued,
a winter of solace, a summer of wild greens,
all the seasons with random kinds of moons
and seascapes ... You can say anything. If and when
poetry, anything can be uttered, muttered:
lyric or prophecy.

And also as poets we stammer
through otherwise intelligent conversation
with lawyers and doctors, policemen
and legislators. Even cavemen
grunt with more resolve they so hurt the ear,
just like swinging a club of grace notes.

Dream of the Next Half (for D.)

On this last day of the fifth year
since your life crossed with mine
I try to count the skies and moons
we've frolicked under, the flowers
that have changed beautiful hands
to make peace with unthinking words.

I walk around our streets at cool near-dusk
when we're apart with a semblance of peace
across city distance. And imagine you mayhaps
doing the same, pacing under the quiet of trees,
their boughs untouched by breeze or wind
in this apparent idyll of split-season —

that intersecting moment of gentle corners,
from lakes to seas, kitchens to bedrooms,
lanais to beaches, tears to rapture,
from year to year, with the wild circle
of hope alone as the roundabout
that may lead us to new roads

we still have to track together, whether
in emerald isles or landscapes of temples,
deserts of ancient ruins or towering rocks,
parks with hungry deer that make us embrace
laughter while our hands are sealed in prayer
for the next blessed half of a dream's decade.

Kinds of Happiness

I am happy for the millions
of countrymen made happy
by the Pope's sweet visit.

One cannot begrudge
the happiness of others,
especially that of a multitude.

There must be a word, however,
for that other kind of happiness —
for not being part of a mob.

Not being among the millions
who saw him in the moving flesh
on his Popemobile out on the streets,

clicked cameras as he breezed by,
and can then claim that we were there,
we actually saw the Vicar of Christ,

next thing to God, even just from behind.
Why, we still saw him wave. Or better yet,
smile, since he faced us where we were, as throng.

Or were actually with him — again, by the millions —
at an open Mass on a field of collective faith.
Or the thousands who can say they kissed his ring,

or brought his hand to their foreheads, in the rain.
Or the hundreds of children and aged and disabled
whom he bussed or patted on the side of our heads,

accepted or exchanged gifts with us.
Why, I was only part of tens of millions
who watched constant proceedings on TV,

but thrilled as well to the happiness of sight,
of being in the moment, one with the moment
historic for serving such happiness to so many.

Ah, that word in the void must be irony,
neither black nor white, neither presence
nor absence of sentiment born of tradition

and our parents' obeisance. Ah, that word
in the void must be acceptance, of a flux
of sentiments awhirl with rationality.

Ah, that word in the void must be simultaneity,
the bilocation of heart merged with mind.
Happy for the happiness of a crowd.

Happy for the unique heathen happiness
of being out of it, but only to a blessed extent.
Happy both ways, all ways. Thanks to the Pope,

and all the cameras capturing a continuum
of rites songs prayers tears love frenzy and
happy faces. Faithless, I too was made happy.

What Else But Such

What else can I say that hasn't been said
on these reckless killings and the recent dead?

Too many, yes, beyond measure of great dread.
An eye for an eye, cry those who are hungry

for more lives to waste, pay for lives already lost —
voices irredeemably angry at greater cost.

While there are those who call for further strength
to eke out at length the process of calm resolve,

still hopeful that a final peace can absolve
the piecemeal quiet of individual graves.

Such slaves to family now only honor memory
of martyrs felled by an odd, sorrowful sorcery.

How else may I grieve in the wake of blame
or the spite drawn deeper in whose name

we share or dispute the rage of the game?
Such realities of our sad, mad republic

must yet undergo more fission before fusion
with faltering dreams of unity. So tragic

the terror must remain for centuries infernal —
to mourn such hate, such loss, such shame.

Some days we approach a grief so familiar
it beckons us closer by our errant nickname.

Johnny! Not Juan. But of the same imperial
thence fratricidal fate. Of the same cross.

And now the lunar anguish of the crescent.
To claim it's heaven-sent repeats the sorry dross.

What else can be said when so many have spoken,
so quickly beholden to the heat of the moment?

Such and so. Such and so. Here and there we go.
Yet stay at the crosshairs of so much we don't know.

Performance Artist (for Trix)

Scissors shearing her lush hair
or disembowelling a teddy bear.

Why, it's a performance lady
getting a rise from viewers' comforts.
She's in a zone between zigzag and zymurgy,
afflicting the calm and collected
stances of staid or curious watchers.

Woe woe to their ways of semblance
to lives conflicted as in the stop and go,
cum distilled pauses, of the everyday.

White ash, black ash rain on her slow
seductive parade of senses visual, aural,
tactile, textural — as gestures drawn
from the known world past frontiers of grace.

Why, she's a performance artist
betrotted to contours of edgework,
straightening up everyone's expectations
till they turn jejune, jagged beyond naiveté.

Cans of paint dye pour onto her pate
and bodice, raising questions as to distance
from chaste observance of the powder room.

She's a lady of signal performances,
waving semaphore pennants spelling penance
for what is common and ordinary.

For only in measured, token grotesquerie
may an audience find the pulse of cautionary
excitement once again. This time, this moment
reprise the throbbing concern for malaise,
as if we wake from diurnal disaffection
and arch eyebrows at fantasy's march
or is it procession, tapestry? Of the yet
undeciphered fragments of dour dreams,
idyllic nightmares? Lo and behold!

The performance lady is accepted
through our own gates of turmoil,
having given pretense of peace
a new if wayward grammar —
that of the unseen in daily,
hidden duress. Until she changes dress
and we sleep and snore again.

Guitar at Sea

Joey Ayala had a guitar
donated to our soldiers
stationed on the rusting
hulk of a ship that had run
aground on Panatag Shoal
in what is our musical territory
in the South China Sea, that
we now call West Philippine Sea.

The guitar made it safely
past a Chinese communist
ship seeking to harass
and block off smaller
Philippine democratic vessels
that venture to resupply
the incredible stationary hulk.

Democracy has its elusive
harmonious notes that can evade
the bleat of large trombones, when
frets and strings reach the shallows.

The communists could only
watch across the weary waters
as the wrapped guitar was handed
to our detachment of marines.

Our flag was raised on deck
while suppliers and supplied
stood erect if besieged, snappily
saluting the serene sky, as
the bullyboy mainlanders
peered through binocs
Made in China, possibly
in sweatshops, while
picking their rude noses.

Then our soldiers with
browner and flatter ones
snorted and grinned
as they broke the boxes
open, to revel in revelation
of fresh packets of noodles
Made in Malabon, off Manila,
and sardine cans that simulated
the old tight divide between
Portugal and Mother Spain.

The guitar was also released
from its packaging that came
with the hearts of tuneful
friends of Joey Ayala, he who
had dared play our anthem
a better way than how our
hand-me-down democratic laws
mandated. And got away with it,

Joey did, for he was idol and icon
of generations that love his music —
folk rock ethnic, thumping with love
of country, forests, rivers, monkey-eating
eagles. Or ballads redolent with the sweet-
sour spices of passion, absence, longing.

One soldier picked up the guitar
and strummed in the noonday sun.
He sang and his fellow uniforms
out so long at sea sang along with him.
They became very joyous, knowing
their circle of fifths with six strings
had pulled a fast one on a nine-dash line
of not-so-inscrutable imagination.

On the larger, modern ship
that refused to run aground,
the watchers grew bored, failing
to hear any pentatonic scale,
only tiresome orders from Beijing.

South or west of whichever sea,
music with the gift of guitar
should sometime heal
the siege of silence between
sometime friends and ships.

Sa mga Pagitan ng Buhay at Iba pang Salin

Ralph Semino Galán

Sa mga Pagitan ng Buhay

Kapag nagmamahal tayo ng gala,
Mag-aantay tayo ng mga yabag
Na maaaring, o di maaaring, dumating.
Lilipas ang mga oras, tapos mga araw,
Tapos mga taon, hanggang hindi na talaga.
Ngunit laging alam natin
Kung ano ang ating inaabangan:
Langitngit ng tarangkahan
Mga yapak sa hagdanan
At sa pintuan ang matatag na titig;
Inaantay natin ang mga palatandaang ito
Na umuwi na sa tahanan ang gala.

Pinagyayabang natin ang kakayahang
Magpayabong at susuyuin ang mga tangkay:
Gumamela, santan, ang dalisay
Na rosal romano; at magbibigay puwang
Para sa mga gardenia, liryo at waling-waling
(Matapos kaskasin ang mga pulgon),
At baka sakali, malapit na o malayo pa,
Lilitaw ang mga bulaklak;
Ngunit laging alam natin
Kung ano ang ating hinihintay:
Ang pulot-pukyutan at mga halimuyak,
At ang mga hinangin na nagliliyab na kulay.

Kaya ang espasyo sa mga pagitan
Ng pagnanais at katuparan
Ang siyang tunay na walang nakakaalam:
Ang pag-aantay ng malawak na mundo
At ang ating mabilis na pagdaloy
Na hindi nakikihalubilo.

At tayo ay mag-aaalala,
At tayo ay mabubuhay
Hindi para sa tiyak na katuparan
(Dahil hindi iyan ang tunay na di natin alam),
Kundi ang paghihintay, malikhain,
Buhay at pag-ibig lubos:
Di tapos, di sigurado, di alam,
Ngunit kinukutya ang tiyak na katuparan
Na dumadating malapit na,
Malayo pa, o hindi na talaga.

(Malayang salin ng "Between-Living" ni Edith L. Tiempo)

Tanawing Walang Hadlang

Dahil nasunog ang aking kamalig
Wala nang humahadlang sa tanawin
Ng pinakamaliwanag na buwan.

-Masahide

oo, ngayon kitang-kita ko na
ang pangkalahatan ng kalangitan;
walang mga punong umuusbong,
walang nagtataasang hadlang
na pumipigil sa kaniyang pagdaloy.

ang lahat inaangkin ko, gaya ng
pag-angkin nito ng buo kong pagkatao,
malinaw ang mga mata at walang abala.

parang bang tinitingnan ko ang mundo
sa kagandahan ng kaniyang kawalan,
gamit ang mga bagong mata, bagong kaluluwa.
lahat ng mga linggal at mga pagbabawal
ng mga nakaraan kong buhay nalipol,
kasing linis ng kumot na ikinula.

wala nang natira pa.

tila isa akong tabula rasa,
walang balakid na nakatingala
sa langit na hindi kumikinang,
ang buwan di natitigatig, buong-buo,
walang palawit kaya walang
sabit... bukod-tanging nag-iisa,
at ako na walang buhay na nakaraan;
at ang bukas ko ay kailangan pang
isulat muli para sa bagong pagkabuhay.

walang kapansin-pansing mga palatandaan
ng dating ako dito habang nakatingala
sa isang malayang dumadaloy na langit
at sa nag-iisang buwang walang palamuti,
ngayon ako'y magsisimula muli sa pagtatatag
ng mga kawing, makikisama, tututok,
habang kinakatha ko sa gabing ito ang akda
ng mga bagong araw na paparating, dito
mula sa isang tanawing walang hadlang.

(Malayang salin ng "An Unobstructed View" ni Ophelia A. Dimalanta)

Pagbibitbit ng mga Manika

(Para kay Anya)

Dalawang gulanit na manika na punit ang damit,
putol ang bisig at binti ng isa,
bulag naman ang isa pa—
hinablot ko sila sa kaniyang mga kamay.
“Hindi,” sabi ko, “hindi sila maaaring sumama.”

Ang bawat siksik na maleta
inimpake at pinuno ko
ng mga pinakakailanganin lamang,
walang puwang para sa damdamin o alaala
upang guluhin ng mga bagay na walang kuwenta
ang aking matatag na pasya.
Ani ko sa sarili, dapat matutuhan
kahit ng musmos na hindi puwedeng bitbitin
ang mga gamit na dapat iwanan.

Kaya sakay ng bapor na papalaot
pinapatuyo ng hanging mahapdi
mga lihim na luhanang di ko maaaring punasan.
At bigla kong nakita— gulanit, punit na damit
katabi ng maaayos at malilinis na maleta,
ang mga manikang pinagbawalan kong sumama.

Dapat naging babala sa akin kaniyang katahimikan
tulad ko, alam niya rin
ang bigat ng kaniyang mga pasanin:
Ang kaniyang dalisay na buhay wala pang batik—
at pinagbayaran ko ang maling hakahaka.

Umasa siya sa katotohanang
alam niyang pinaniniwalaan ko rin:
na kapag ang nakasalalay
ay katapatan o pag-ibig
siya ang may tunay na karapatan.
Sundin ang kaniyang pananampalataya, hindi ako.

(Malayang salin ng "Bringing the Dolls" ni Merlie M. Alunan)

Elemental

May tamang panahon sa paghihinog na ito,
paano umaakyat ang dagta ng puno para punuin
ng katas ang prutas ng pinakamataas na sanga,
o ang pangungunyapit ng hasmin sa trellis
para ipagyabang ang nag-iisang bulaklak
sa tuwing sasapit ang taog ng bagong buwan.

Sa aking hardin, yumuyungyong ang kawayan
sa itaas ng kapirasong damuhan, mga ilog-bato,
binungkal na lupa. Nag-iisa sa kung saan
umuusbong ang talahiban, napaisip ako:

Kung paano pinilas ng iyong mga ngipin
ang ginintuang balat ng mangga: paano mo
nilamon ang napakalawak na langit
ng Siquijor, ang iyong katawan nagiging
isang buong lupain na nagpapahiwatig sa akin
ng maiitim na buwan, lasa ng lupa,
buhos ng mga awit ng ilog, simoy ng hangin
bago bumagsak ang ulan, pumpon ng bulaklak
na kakaiba ang mga pangalan. Oo,

May dahilan ang paghihinog na ito.
Tinutubog ka sa ginto ng aking dila.

(Malayang salin ng "Elemental" ni Marjorie M. Evasco)

Sumpa

Sa isang lamayan,
Gumitgit si Tiya bitbit ang tsaa
At ang kalansay ng isang lumang kuwento.
Iniikot niya ang maraming singsing
Sa mga daliri niyang naging mabuko
Sa mahabang taon ng paghahabi
At panghuhula
Sa ibabaw ng malanday na lalim
Ng kaniyang batong almires.

Puno ang kaniyang bahay ng mga anito
At mga babasagin na mas matanda pa sa aming lahat.
Ang kaniyang mga mata, na hindi pa sanay
Sa dalamhati, ay nagtatangkang buhayin sa akin
Ang kilabot ng isang lumang sumpa: na ang mga iho
Ay magpupunla lamang ng mga iha
Na magpapakasal sa pagkalimot,
Hanggang ang aming mga pangalan ay maglalaho
Sa ihip ng hangin.

Sa kabilang silid nakahiga ang kaniyang unico hijo
Binabalutan ng kumot para sa mga nasawi.
Nilalangaw ang mga puno sa hardin
Na pasan ang mga prutas at alay sa patay,
Ang kanilang higing nangingibabaw
Sa ugong ng mga nagdadasal.

Sa baha ng bumubulong na mga boses,
Lumingon at nasulyapan ko ang maliwanag na eksena
Ng tatlo kong anak na babae sa may bintana.
Malakas at makisig ang mga bisig
Mga mukha na dalisay,
Walang kasalanan,
Na magbibigay pangalan
Sa mga kasapi ng angkan
Ng mga lilikhain nilang kasasayan.

(Malayang salin ng "Curse" ni Luisa A. Igloria)

Poems from *Tilt Me and I Bend*

Ned Parfan

HYPNOS BLUE

To you I surrender my body,
with the crashing of overripe mangoes
bursting upon impact with earth. I offer

my shattered heart, my skin revised
by tongues, my fingers on edge
like they've always been and waiting.

Shackle my restless feet, stop them
from wandering. Arrest my stubborn
hiccups, collect the empty envelopes

of my memory and fill them
with jungle dreams. Gather me from
your midnight brew of man-musk

and the wreck of storms. Make me forget
how we weaponize our tongues
into engines of ecstasy, the way

Renoir allegedly painted his women
with his phallus, the way my eyes undress
someone else's lover. The way touch

can kill. Summon my circadian rhythm
back from its night shifts, abduct me
from the lure of these white pages

in all their welcoming vacancies. Shush me,
shush me good. I need to stop
feeling wrong. I need to unlearn

this resistance to abandon. End the tentative,
please; now I'm all yours.
Tonight, to you, I surrender my body.

AGENDA

I will be spared from all this,
I will have lost my wits.
drooling on my crotch.
pursue passers-by. Very likely
I will fall silent, or burst
of pimple-red expletives.
interval to realize
all over, all the way down.
The reception will be mutual.
do nothing. Say nothing
I want to get married,
wearing nothing but post-its.
imagine a levitating spoon
I, old child of the rain, the lost
with neglected
I will endure to wait for
those nights all the strangers

grow old without knowing it.
Sitting at a bus stop,
I will blabber to the wind,
will nuns trigger something,
into tears, or run with a trail
I will be granted one lucid
how my hair had gone white,
Old friends won't recognize me.
They will see it coming,
when I announce
and show up at the altar
I will open my mouth,
coming aboard the spaceship.
rivulet. I, plucking nose hair
fingernails. I, the unclaimed.
the prophecy from the Moon
will leave me alone.

THE WIFE

And when you are gone, I am
body again.

The man in white
or the man in red
comes over, and I am just body
again.

It takes place twice a month,
before I change the sheets.

This morning:
sweat of another man
in the laundry.

Last night:
we flapped together
like a pair of wings.

Roses stolen at a party remain
stiff black
under the leaking faucet
the landlord hasn't fixed.

The man in white
or the man in red
can't fix me.

Men I cannot love
leave me alone with the lamps on.
They vanish somewhere else.

I ask them anyway
and they don't ask about the roses.
They don't ask about you,

but I ask them anyway.

And baby I could swallow a pillow.
I do not have to beg.

BY THE FISHERMAN'S GRIEF

You might think he has fallen asleep
standing, or hypnotized by the pendulum
of waves. But he doesn't have to move his eyes

to catch the line of glimmer on the horizon,
to note the direction of his boat drifting
abandoned. Daylight is certain of the absence

of two fingers from his right hand. On his left,
a gas lamp, which minutes ago made his shadow
dance to the urging sound of water.

He has been waiting for that sound to come,
any sound, waiting for his hearing to surface
above the silence that drowned him deaf

when the dam of his eardrums gave way
to the ocean. His wife whispers, or shouts,
whatever it is that makes his knees heavy

enough to strike the sand with a thud
only one of them can hear. She points to
the returning fishermen, or their boats loaded

with heavy catch, and before he knows it
she is gone. He starts recalling, one by one,
the mermaid stories he had once forsaken

altogether. His was no longer a generation
of faith, or superstitions. But before dawn,
after pushing his boat out to the waves,

he submerged his head underwater,
for he heard voices from beneath him,
calling, the first sound he believed

in years. He knows where he must go.
The legends have it all mapped out for him.
He drops his lamp and walks into the sea.

BLACK DOG

I am an old woman opening
the fridge, asking my husband,
What would you like to have for dinner.

He doesn't answer because he is dead.
Heart attack, cancer, stroke,
one early morning accident involving cars

and amputations, or a plane crash,
where he wakes up just in time
to be fully alive inside the bright heat

exploding—the black thoughts keep coming back,
sneaking up, because they are addicted
to my consciousness.

I am waiting for his answer,
or else walking around our bungalow
in this dark suburb, calling his name

because the gutters need replacing,
the toilet won't flush,
and we need more dog food

for the dog long dead.

Paglasa sa Pansamantala

Vijae Orquia Alquisola

Araling Panlipunan

Parang mga hiwa ng karne
ang mga kontinente sa mapa.
Dahil makulay, inisip ko ring
sapin-sapin tulad ng niluluto
ni lola kung pista. Puwede ring
sambuong pizza, tingnan mo
ang mga laylayan, parang kinagat-
kagat. Pambihirang gutom,
kay raming nasubo sa paglalayag.
Napadpad sa kung saang kabisera
tulad ng aking magulang.

Mapamapa o mapaglobo, madalas kong
mapagkamalang nilaga ang Hilaga,
sabaw na pinaglalawayan sa panlalamig.
Pakirinig ko’y hinog, hindi Timog, tulad ng
manggang namimintog sa pagkadurog.
Pakiwari sa Kanluran, kudkuran na sumusugat
sa kalamnan ng niyog; ang bao, araw na napagod.
Pero ang Silangan— Silangan pa rin.
Sinasangag sa liwanag ng araw—
binababad sa baha.

Hindi ako nalilipasan ng gutom,
sapat na sapat ang aking baon.
Talagang pagkain lang ang nalalasp ko
sa mga talakayan— lalo pa't bilog ang mundo
parang platong minamanibela ni lola
sa tuwing may aalis pagkatapos ng salusalo.

Sa mga paglalakbay na pinag-aralan,
may mga pangalang pinaparangalan
ang bawat panahon, ang bawat lugar.
Ibinabansag para masariwa ang alaala.
Dito, mula sa pagkain hanggang sa kalsada.
Ultimo posporo sa pagsisindi ng kalan.
Kung pagpapangala'y pagdakila sa bayani,
sibuyas pa ba ang sibuyas natin?
Patola ang patola? Ang sangkalan?
May kawa pa bang natitira?

At kung itatala ang aming buhay,
tatawagin ko itong lasaysayan.
Umiinog na parang plato,
hindi malinaw ang simula—
patutunguhan ng takam.

Hugas-bigas

Kanina pa sana nakatikim ng tadyak
ang tv kundi lang bagong bili.
High blood na naman si tatay.
Parang batang inasar-talo ng SONA:
Tuwid, tuwid. Baka tuwad!
Natigil nang mapatingin sa orasan.
Magsaing na. Huwag mong
itatapon ang ikalawang hugas.
Muling nag-init sa pagtaas ng piso.
Tumaas pa ang bores
sa palakpak sa mga OFW.
Mabuhay? Mabubuhay
ka ba sa bugbog o bitay?

Malabo, talagang malabo

kahit sa ikatlong ulit
parang ulap ang kupas ng bigas.
Kakulay na kakulay ng ikalawa.
Kung ganito nga ang ulap sa alamat:
nadakot, nakatagong gaspang ng langit.
Kaya pala napapangiwi ako
sa paghigop ng sinigang.
Namnam na namnam—
bugtong ng sampalok.

Bago kumain, lahat naghuhugas
ng kamay— hindi ng bigas.

Pagbabalat

Pahambugan kami sa Mauban
na mabuo ang balat ng daranghita.
Pagalingan sa Lucena
na mabuo ang balat ng dalanghita.
Paangasan sa Maynila
na masolid ang balat ng dalandan.

Tinititigan ng talunan ang pagpiga
sa punit na balat. Hindi ko masabi
na malas lang talaga.
O naninibago. Sa mga kaklase
natutunan ko: maaaring tumawa
sa pagluha ng iba.

Isang prutas, hitik sa bigkas—

baklas.

Halika na sa Kusina

Ano ka ba, luho lamang ang paglalamas ng asin sa ampalaya. Sa pait nakakabit ang sustansiya. Hindi ako maselan sa hiwa. Abala lamang ang nispis ng gayat. Mas makapal, mas lasap na lasap ang takam sa tikim. Gaya ng kaniyang pagpikit-pikit habang sumisirit ang ginisang pait sa dila at ngalan-gala. Laway na laway sa kalinga ng aking kusina.

Masarap din daw magluto ang kaniyang asawa. (Mabilaukan ka sana.) Pero bawi niya, mas malasa ang aking timpla. Napasasarap, maging sinumpang gulay. (Naku naman, paborito ko rin ang bola-bola.)

Gusto mong malaman ang aking sikreto? Halika. Tumuloy ka. Ang totoo: wala. Wala namang sikretong hindi nalalaman. Walang binabad na ugat o halaman o dasal na inihahalo sa kawali. Ang kaibahan lang: kung anong mayroon, e di iyon. Hindi naman laging ampalaya. May panahong mustasa. Patola. Kalabasa. Talong. Tahong.

Bakit nga ba mapait ang ampalaya? lagi niyang tanong. Kasi nakakunot, lagi kong sagot, hindi isinali sa bahay-kubo.

Ang totoo— walang ampat ang pait sa paglalaway sa laya.

Apat na Hiwa ng Quezo de Bola

sa palad ninyo
solidong-solido
namumukol na tukso

mundong walang sulok
inapat naging tatsulok
palasong tutusok

bombang nakatanim
sa lamig ng hangin
sumabog sa ngipin

pulang-pulang sarap
nang mahubdan ng balat
naninilaw na alat

Manila, 1970's and other Poems

Deedle Rodriguez-Tomlinson

Manila, 1970's

I grew up at a time
when the men and women of Manila
paid three pesos to see movies.
They smoked in the theaters,
tendrils of smoke rising
into the light of projectors
showing gritty Tagalog films
like the ones where a *probinsyano*
searches for his hometown sweetheart
turned prostitute in the city,
pining for love lost on the corner of
Ongpin and Misericordia.

I grew up at a time
when the men and women of Manila
shared sodas in pre-war ice cream parlors
walked hand in hand along Manila Bay at night,
sat on the sea wall by Roxas Boulevard, watching lights from
Laguna fishing boats bobbing in the distance,
wishing the night would never end.

I grew up at a time
when the men and women of Manila
married in ancient churches,
took 7-hour bus rides to Baguio City
where they breathed cold mountain air
craved each other's warmth
when the fog rolled in at night,
their faces glowing in the heat of the hearth.

I grew up at a time
when the men and women of Manila
made love to music that
opened with pops and crackles
on mammoth speakers
the moment the needle touched the
shiny black surface of 45's like
Minnie Ripperton's "Lovin' You."

And when I look back,
I wish I was all grown up then,
a woman in love with a man
once upon a time in Manila.

Haunted

after Amiri Baraka

Lately I've been reading about dead people
trapped on earth, unable to walk into the Light.
Makes me wonder if the woman standing
next to me on the cold subway platform is really alive
or just one of the many New Yorkers walking
the city with haunted faces.

Who will set us free?

At night after I cook and eat dinner and wash
up and put away the dishes, I like to curl up
in front of the TV to watch the news.
But then it's all about the little girl murdered in Queens,
a rape on the Upper East Side, an elderly lady
burned to death in her apartment in Brooklyn.

How can anyone sleep?

And yet last night as I lay in bed with my face buried deep in my pillow,
unable to shut out images of haunted faces, people who walk the city
at night, dead and alive and half-dead, frightened by the darkness in the room,
my husband slipped in between the sheets and lay his leg over mine
till his warmth enveloped me completely

and I fell asleep, smiling.

Brad's Cafe on Waverly

I'm sitting at a table near the window
watching a hard rain fall.
NYU students clamber for shelter—
Girls squealing, boys laughing,
Shaking the wet from their hair.
I count chocolate raisins
Put them in my mouth
And wonder how many I'll have
Before you arrive.

I lose count when you walk in
And quickly put them away
Since you don't like chocolate
And you don't like raisins
And I wonder if you'll taste them
When you kiss me.

But you don't kiss me.
You only mutter hi
and curse the rain,
the streets, the city.
You're not happy
you're sick of this place
you're thinking you need a change
a change that might
lead you out west
and there's nothing that suggests
you'll take me with you.

So while you're talking to the table
hands deep in your pants pockets
forgetting that I am there
I take out my chocolate raisins
put them in my mouth and

watch kids shake the rain from their hair.

Lola's Backyard in Taal

was a small quadrangle—
hemmed on all sides
by four stone walls.

So simple, really.
A pig pen in one corner
a chicken coop in another

and in the center
a cement chopping block
covered in blood.

I fed the pigs mango skins
and banana peels
and leftover rice from lunch.

Once, I watched the *kusinera*
chop off the chicken's head
and I stared at the chicken

running, headless, flapping
wildly 'round the block
till it plopped down dead.

I looked up at the square of
blue sky and as the clouds
raced above me,

imagined the backyard in flight.

*Creative
Nonfiction*

SIGNPOSTS ON THE EMOTIONAL ROAD OF LIFE

Fr. Angel Aparicio, O.P.

Platero and I

One of the most famous Spanish poets of the XXth Century, Nobel Prize winner for Literature in 1956, Juan Ramon Jimenez wrote a charming story titled *Platero y Yo*.

Platero is the poet's donkey and "I," obviously refers to the poet himself, born in a country village in the southern part of Spain.

There are no donkeys in the Philippines and it may not be easy to capture all the nuances of this story. The book can be found in our library in Spanish and in the English translation *Platero and I*.

Allow me to read the first chapter.

Platero.

Platero is small, downy, smooth – so soft to the touch that one would think he were all cotton, that he had no bones. Only the jet mirrors of his eyes are hard as the beetles of dark crystal.

I let him run loose and he goes off to the meadow; softly, scarcely touching them he brushes his nose against the tiny flowers of pink, sky-blue and golden yellow.

I call him gently, “Platero” and he comes to me at a gay little trot as though he were laughing, lost in a clatter of fancy.

He eats everything I give him.

He likes tangerines, muscatel grapes, all amber-colored, and purple figs with their crystal paint of honey.

He is tender and loving as a little boy, as a little girl, but strong and firm as a stone.

When I ride him on Sunday through the lanes at the edge of the town, the men from the country-side, clean-dressed and slow moving, stand still to watch him.

“He is made of steel.”

He is made of steel. Both steel and quick silver.

I belong to a very large family.

At the time I am trying to recover now... there were only three of us: Alfonso, the eldest, was ten years old. I was seven, and my sister Esther, four. Six more brothers and sisters came afterwards, but by that time I was already away from home.

Esther did not really count that much then.

My point of reference was Alfonso, my idol and my adversary. I was always the loser, but it did not matter, for as long as he allowed me to join in his game.

In our little town there were only two schools, one for boys and one for girls, and though I was one of the smallest boys, this did not bother me. My brother’s presence was like a shield. Only his shadow gave me assurance.

At midday, we joined our grandparents for lunch at their home. My grandfather, already retired from farming, kept an old donkey who carried him whenever he visited his honey-bees far away in the woods.

To ride that creature was one of the greatest pleasures for me in those days, and I would try to outrun my brother to be given the privilege to bring our little Platero to his watering place. It made my day if I did, or rather if he permitted me to.

When I was eight, a Dominican priest visited our school and recruited the best students, among them my brother Alfonso, for the Dominican minor seminary in Valladolid, a couple of days away from our place. This constituted a big event in the family and Alfonso became a true hero for me, especially at the end of every month, when my father would open the letter containing his news and his grades, in the presence of the whole family.

I admired him, yes, but I missed him too.

And I was longing for the day I would be old enough to join him.

This happened when I turned 11 years old myself. I entered the Dominican seminary away from home, but close to my older brother. Of course, I missed Father and Mother and I would cry in moments of sadness, but now I could emulate my brother.

We were allowed to see each other only once a month. I would tell him all my troubles and listened to his advice. These shorts visits energized me and I looked up to him as a model seminarian.

I had always dreamed of becoming a priest myself. This desire might be traced back to my earliest memories. I can make my own the expression of Isaiah (49:1) :

Listen to me, you islands;
hear this, you distant nations;
Before I was born the Lord called me;
from my birth he has made
mention of my name...

But it was never my intention to become a Dominican. I did not like the sound of the word “Dominicos” in Spanish, and the white habit

gave the impression of distance. To my humble origins the brown color of the Capuchins, their beard, their sandals, their homely demeanor seemed much more appropriate.

My father had entered the Capuchins, but he was compelled to leave their seminary to heal from a festering wound. We loved listening to his stories about brother Primitivo who dressed his wound, or Father Antonio who carried him on his shoulders when he could not walk.

But the Capuchins would recede into the realm of dreams, like my grandfather's old donkey.

After finishing Minor Seminary studies, Alfonso entered the Novitiate and then proceeded to College Seminary (what we call the study of Philosophy). I continued in the Minor Seminary. I was fifteen by then.

One day, Father Tomás Pinto, a venerable missionary from Vietnam who was very good friends with my brother, called on me to deliver the sad news that Alfonso had abandoned his vocation and returned home. This was a shock!

My reaction came immediately. Next day I would pack and go home too. The old priest looked at me from his towering two meters and just said this: "Angel, be a man. Your brother is not you. Make your own choice." These few words restored me to my senses.

My brother was intelligent, handsome, the friend of all the priests. He would soon find a girlfriend. He does not need me. Why should I always depend on him?

It was not easy, especially when our mentors would remind me of the abandonment of my brother. Would I also desert the seminary? But at least there was old Fr. Tomas Pinto. He understood. He cared. He was like Platero, willing to carry me on his shoulders.

UST and Jerusalem

It is now 50 years since I first left home at 11. My parents are still alive, blessed be God. I feel a knot in my throat at the moment of saying goodbye on my way back to the Philippines: my father, whom I never saw crying when I was small, now will quietly sob; my mother, the silent type, only asks me one question, "Son, when are you coming back?" It is hard, I guess, for a mother to let her children leave one after another.

My brothers and sisters visit them frequently. I do not feel guilty, though. They have been amply rewarded by God and, at present, I am grateful to the Dominican Order and to the community of Sto. Tomas for allowing me a yearly visit.

But there was a time when things were a little harder. Upon my arrival in UST almost everything seemed to be the opposite of what I had expected.

I don't need to enter into details here. Suffice it to say that I seriously thought of abandoning the place. Had I had enough money to buy a plane ticket, I would have vanished from this accursed place. Even what I most appreciate in life, that is, my priesthood, was in danger.

Was this what I had prepared for?

As a seminarian, I had experienced to the full the Vatican II Council, when a current of fresh air seemed to change old patterns in seminaries and in the church.

Those were also the last days of Franco's dictatorship in Spain. We young people dreamt of a new social order and were eager to assume responsibilities in the new country we would build.

After my ordination as a priest, I was given the opportunity for further studies in Rome, Jerusalem and Oxford. This endowed me with a very liberal attitude, a kind of cosmopolitanism! But most of all, I was young and full of illusions.

Upon my arrival at UST I did not like the walls that surround the campus; I was not prepared for living in a community that resembled the Sanhedrin. The conflicts arising from the Filipinization of UST, as they called it at the time, had a deep effect on me.

Was I to endure all this?

Thirty years later, I still remember it vividly. It was June 6, 1979, at night. My former classmates, Fr. Mario Javares and Fr. Paulino Gonzalez, picked me up at the Manila Airport. As we reached Luneta, Fr. Javares pointed to the horizon and showed me the blue cross of UST floating in the distance. I was delighted to finally reach my destination after a long trip and a longer wait of eight years. That cross, though, would loom large all throughout those years. But its meaning would only be disclosed to me slowly.

In 1995, fifteen years after my arrival, I got a scholarship from my old school in Jerusalem, the Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Francaise. I spent four most beautiful and productive months in the Holy Land.

Almost everyday after lunch, I would wander through the streets of Jerusalem, and most times I would end at the Church of Holy Sepulcher to say a prayer or to watch the pilgrims coming from the whole world to worship at the place of Jesus' death and resurrection.

As Fr. J. Murphy O'Connor said:

One expects the central shrine of Christendom to stand out in majestic isolation, but there everything is mixed up. One comes to pray for numinous light, but darkness waits for him there. One hopes for peace, but the ear is assailed by a cacophony of worrying chants. One desires holiness, only to encounter a jealous possessiveness: six different groups of occupants (Latin Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Syrians, Copts, Ethiopians) watch one another suspiciously for any infringement of rights. The frailty of humanity is nowhere more apparent than there; it epitomizes the human condition. The empty who comes to be filled, will leave desolate; those who permit the church to question them, may begin to understand why hundreds of thousands thought it worthwhile to risk death or slavery in order to pray there.

One day while sitting there looking at the place on which Jesus had been executed I could not stop my tears. I don't cry easily, not even when I say goodbye to my parents. That day, as I came out of the Holy Sepulcher Church, I felt relieved of so much anger and frustration which had clung to my heart through many years of struggles, silences and humiliations in UST. While watching the bare rock of Calvary I could not believe that the man Jesus of Nazareth agonizing there was the Son of God. Like Paul of Tarsus I wanted to cling to my old insecurities and convictions and knowledge, and fears.

One wonders why it takes us so long to see light. One wonders how the young and brilliant student of Holy Scriptures, Paul of Tarsus, was unable to discern the true meaning of Holy Scriptures.

Until he was touched on the way to Damascus.

He called it grace, pure grace, only grace.

And that is what grace is all about, a gentle touch, a momentary vision, a lasting state of friendship with the divine.

“Burnt Norton”

“Burnt Norton” is the first poem in T.S. Eliot’s Four Quartets.

The poem’s title refers to a manor house Eliot visited. The manor’s garden served as an important image within the poem. It contains five stanzas. And it begins thus:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation ...

Last May 25, while in Spain, I received an invitation to a gathering of classmates in Avila.

Avila is far from my place and it was not particularly exciting to attend a sort of nostalgic reunion with people I had last heard of forty years ago. I didn’t know what they were, and they didn’t know where or what I had become. There was so little we had in common!

But my mother gently convinced me. Then my brother Alfonso facilitated things by making his car available for me to drive there. There were no more excuses to keep me from joining the reunion.

Needless to say, we hardly recognized each other: Tomas, Felipe, Paco, Juan... up to 30 or so, plus their respective wives. It was a kind of discovery through guess work, until images started to fit in my mind ...

Isaac Arroyo had replaced me in my job as conductor of the semi-annual choir. Here he was with his wife, telling me the sad story of their adopted daughter... But in spite of everything, they are happy, satisfied. Life has been good to them. Blessed be God!

Juan and his lovely wife Tita. Juan was one of the best persons I had ever met. Now he could not speak. He has been operated on for a tumor in his throat. But still he is that marvelous kid I used to know.

Paco and sweet Dory. I had introduced them in Oxford. They have two daughters now.

Tirso never had a vocation. He had entered the seminary through his mother's urgent desires. Now he is a successful broker. He still feels some bitterness toward priests.

Terron, Jose Luis, who was cute and had never seen snow in his life, since he came from the warm south Spain... Those of us who came from the north could not understand how anybody could feel surprised at this phenomenon. Nothing of his innocence seems to be left.

Why is it that out of forty classmates at the Novitiate, only eight of us made it to the priesthood? Were they, thirty of them, naughtier or less capable? Not necessarily. Were we holier and less adventurous? Not necessarily. Perhaps one, two, half a dozen from the whole batch were not meant for the priesthood and were in the seminary only by accident or due to different circumstances. But what about the rest?

This is still a dilemma for me. I find some points of references in the Bible. But I have no time to pursue them here. I leave them for another occasion.

On my way back home, alone, I was driving fast, very fast. The road was smooth. The day had been more than what I expected. I was glad to have joined the group.

Through the back mirror, I could see thick clouds of an incoming storm. I was not flying away from the past. I just wanted to share with my parents the joy of encountering these old friends of mine. I just wanted to thank my mother and my brother for being the instruments of a beautiful experience.

Back home I reflected on these verses of T.S. Eliot:

Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to an end, which is always present.
Time and the bell have buried the day.
The black cloud carried the sun away.

Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
stray down, bend to us; tendrils and sprays clutch and cling?

The Home of a Friar

My parents' home, the place where I was born, is now a beautiful place. When I am there all memories are good. Everybody tries to make my sojourn a happy and memorable one. All my brothers, nine of them, will visit with their families.

Our little school is now closed for lack of children. Manuel, the only boy, goes to the next village. Again, I remember that:

... Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus in your mind.
(T.S. Eliot)

The little donkeys and horses, and cows and oxen have been replaced by tractors and harvesters. Fields that before needed 100 farmers are now cultivated by half a dozen.

On Sundays, our big church is filled with just 50 old people.

Here, in the Philippines, in UST, people usually ask questions like: How long have you been here? When will you return to Spain? Do you love the Philippines? Don't you miss your loved ones?

A missionary does not have a choice, or a home. But he is totally free and he feels at home wherever he is at the moment.

This is how these questions would be answered by my favorite saint:

When shall I leave this place?
It seems to me that it may just as well
Be now or later, for two thousand years
Are no more than thirty in God's sight – or than a single day.
(St. Therese of Lisieux)

But you must not think – my dear friends – that this little friar wishes to leave UST. He never asked for a time. What matters, is being done day after day in the service of God and neighbor.

What I value most now is to do God’s will and my heart rejoices in whatever good comes on my account, for I know and now understand that God needs no one. – me, less than anybody else –to do good on earth, the Philippines or Spain.

And to end these reflections on a melancholic note, let me read the last verses from *Platero y Yo*. Platero is dead, and has been buried. The poet is at the tomb with some children who had grown to love the old donkey.

“Platero, my friend!” I said to the earth.

“If you are now in a field in heaven, as I think you are, carrying youthful angels on you soft, furry back, I wonder if perhaps you have forgotten me. Tell me, Platero, do you still remember me?”

As if an answer to my question. A delicate white butterfly which I had not seen before flew insistently from iris to iris like a soul.

The labyrinth of writing a novel

Gina Apostol

I love the indeterminacy of the novel. You have an idea, but your job is to allow the idea to play out. You have to have a frame, a glimmer of an end; but at the same time the entire seemingly well-constructed book is also a product of a very alert kind of improvisation. I love the puzzling of novel writing, the sense that there's a solution, and if you are patient, you'll find the key. The daily thinking about structure and about characters. The Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges goes on about labyrinths in his very short stories, and I guess I like the labyrinth of working on a very long story. You are both the maker of the labyrinth and wandering around in it. It is very satisfying. I enjoy it very much.

For instance, the labyrinth of writing *Gun Dealers' Daughter*. Its first draft was begun in 1997. But I figured out its current form only years later, in 2009. Twelve years. The first draft was around 400 pages; the current book is 259. The first draft was chronological, beginning with the back-story of the protagonist Sol's parents, the extremely wealthy gun dealers. The final draft, the one I sent to my agent, is in a circular form, but within the circle is an inverse time structure. In my mind, it is a V-form—or a chiasmus.

A chiasmus is most commonly described so: A-B-B-A. That is, it is composed of two halves, each of which is the inverse of the other. A chiasmus is a mirror structure. My novel went from being a straight, chronological line, going from A to B, to an unstable, anachronological, chiasmic circle. In my view, that instability of time and memory most clearly inscribed in

the novel's structure my notion of postcoloniality, trauma, nightmare, self, illusion—the things that make us up. For me, it solved both an ethical and existential dilemma that I struggled with in this book—what is the structure of guilt?

In short, I took a lot of things out.

The novel in first draft included tales about Sol's great-grandmother Lola Felma, a lowly rose-seller, killed by benign neglect when her provincial manners obviously diminished the gilded image of the gun dealers' newly glamorous lives—I had this long story about how Lola Felma the great-grandmother died:

...I mix up memories of the rose seller Felma Querulf-Kierulf, ancient changeling, with the concrete and sandstone of our newly built house in Makati. I conflate the Makati house's groundbreaking with the final rites for my great-grandmother. She had become as shriveled and as distractingly material as the reptile they dug a hole for, the men carefully working around the mound so that the pit became indistinct from the earth around it, while the sight of the crocodile was open to all: absurd, monstrous and pathetic—all the candidate qualities of madness.

As for Lola Felma, it was I who found her. She was bent over in the wing built for her in the new mansion. Her straw men, odd little projects of her madness, were spread on the floor, loose-limbed and looking only abstractly like humans. The mystery of her obsession remained disheveled in the room: what was this domestic derangement, the houses and men she kept cobbling? A mad carpentering old woman. I made a sound, a broken-off scream, when I saw her.

In her room she sat, legs spread out, facing an old mirror. Already, the outlines of her reflection were blurred, her body practicing its future.

My great-grandmother looked milky and scary in her mirror. I halted by the door. Her white hair was undone—grimy clumps on her scalp. The strap of her chemise was awkward on her bony shoulders. I wanted to fix her blouse, but I couldn't move. Her face was horrifying. She wore no teeth, and her face had caved into a hollow jaw.

Her mirror told me she was dead before I saw her sad grin. ...

A few days ago, I searched the name Lola Felma in the pdf I have of the novel as I had sent it in final draft to my editor at W.W. Norton. Here's what I found:

“... *Lola Felma Kierulf, rose-seller and devout believer.*”

That is the only appearance of the name in the book.

To illustrate further, here's an early version of the novel on my computer. It is how the novel starts.

“...1. When I'm homesick

When I'm homesick, I watch *Apocalypse Now*. I could care less about politics, anti-war spleen, postcolonial angst—cultural hegemonies and prehensile remorse. Crap. Who cares who trumped what in these late deluvian times: the world at this rate is already lost.

I watch the light.

A mad, indecent world is drenched in the light I know—the murky heat of a far off clime, ‘in the latitude of Palermo,’ so many degrees between Madras and Moldova: a nightmarish whorish gleam, relentless and intense. It comforts me: the far-fetched hell of the Philippine sun.

When Francis Ford Coppola was looking for the asshole of the world, he found it in my hometown. Or at least a few miles from it, inland beyond the reeky Bay. Any number of films about monsoon war games or Vietnam gore get staged in the picturesque patterns of the ricefields beyond Manila: *Platoon*, *Year of Living Dangerously*, et cetera et cetera. Humdrum holocausts, celluloid clichés. It's one of our main tourist attractions—we're the choice location shoot for stupid acts of imperial imbeciles. ...”

So I looked up the words *Apocalypse Now* in the current version. I found it on page 137: a conversation between the gun dealers' daughter and one of her fellow student radicals at the university:

... Francis Kiko Not-Coppola, a shy kid, traded a bootleg copy of his favorite movie, *Apocalypse Now*, for a copy of Conrad's ‘Secret

Sharer' (he had many bootleg Betamaxes of the film in his bedroom anyhow).

"When you are homesick,' Kiko told me helpfully, giving me his gift, 'you can watch *Apocalypse Now*. It's the best movie about our country.'

"I will,' I said. 'When I'm homesick for Manila, I'll watch *Apocalypse Now*.' ... "

Finally, here is the denouement of the earliest complete version of the novel, finished in 1998:

...Uncle Gianni met the girl at Nice airport. He held her hand as light bulbs flashed. Revise that: not hand. By the sleeve. He held her by the sleeve, gently. On closer inspection, one might note the slight discordance in her figure. Something awkward about her arms. Bandaged, gauzed lump of hands. The girl does not raise her head. ...

The paragraph above appears at the end of that draft, some 400 pages in.

And here's how the current novel begins, the one published in 2012. This is page 1.

...Uncle Gianni met the girl at Nice airport. He held her by the hand as light bulbs flashed. Revise that: not hand. By the sleeve. He held her by the sleeve, gently. On closer inspection, one might note the slight discordance in her figure. Something awkward about her arms. Bandaged, gauzed lump of hands. The girl does not raise her head. ...

A circling—an amphisbaena, in which the end is the beginning. Such it seems is another way to think about the act of writing—one is always beginning. After all, after one novel is done, here you are, back at the drawing board. With that blank sheet, that void again.

As for the content—the history, the character, the times the novel covers—I can talk about that, too, of course. Certainly, research and history and concept and character all matter to me. But it seems what occupies my time most forcefully as a writer is my work's form—form, in the end, is what engages me. Form is the labyrinth of the Minotaur—writing—that entraps and enchants.

Aestemasu: Japan Japan Sagot sa Kahirapan

Romulo P. Baquiran, Jr.

Noong 1994 ako unang nangarap at gumawa ng paraan na makarating sa Japan nang mag-aplay sa Mombusho scholarship. Subok lang. Umabot ako hanggang interview sa embahada sa Makati. Tungkol sa buhay ng Japayuki ang gusto kong pag-aralan noon. Sabi ko sa konklusyon ng presentasyon, “Mahalagang makilala ang kontribusyon ng mga Japayuki sa literaturang Filipino.” Balak ko kasi busisiin ang mga diary ng mga entertainer bilang creative nonfiction. Narinig kong sabi ng isang reviewer: “Ano daw?” Ayun, awa ng lelong mong panot, tsugi ang proposal. Hindi yata magandang kombinasyon ang literatura at prostitusyon. Sabi kasi ng isang tagapayo ko ay baka makuha sa awa ang panel. Hindi ko alam kung kanino maaawa, sa Japayuki o sa akin. Twenty years later, nag-aplay naman ako ng pagiging titser ng Filipino. Aba, hindi akalain, natanggap. Tukso tuloy ng mga kakilala, ikaw na ang Japayuki. Japan, Japan sagot sa kahirapan. Makaipon lang ng kaunti sa retirement, masaya na ako. Biglang naging OCW. Ngayon ko lang naranasan na totoo pala ang stereotype. Inaasahang tatakbo kang madalas sa Western Union (WU) para sa pera-padala kapag sa abrod ka nagtatrabaho, kapag abrodista ka.

Iyon nga ang una kong misyon sa pagpunta sa Umeda, ang downtown area ng Osaka na nadestinuhan ko: Ang hanapin ang opisina ng WU. Kailangang magpadala ako ng remittance sa Pilipinas hindi pa man natanggap ang unang suweldo at hindi pa ako nakakaisang linggo sa Land of the Rising Sun. Mabuti at mabait ang sinundan kong guro at pinahiram

ako ng badyet na pandalawang buwan. Banzai sa WU! Noong una ko itong hagilapin, hindi ko nakita dahil medyo gabi na ako nag-umpisa ng misyon. Kailangan ko pang magbalik. Ayaw ko kasing magtanong noong una at parang abentura ang tingin ko sa ginagawa. Gusto kong makita ang hinahanap sa sariling nabigasyon gamit ang Google map. Nasa Lucua Building daw malapit sa JR Station. Simple. Pero iba ang mapa sa aktuwal. Hindi ko makita ang WU. Ginawa ko din ang tumawag muna sa numero nilang +81663591990 sa hinulugang Iphone 5c. Kakatwa ang automated answering phone. Nasa Nihongo. Sabagay nasa Japan nga pala ako. Hindi naman pinipik-ap ng nasa kabilang linya. Kung ano-ano ang sinasabi. Hindi ko mamura ng *Shine!* Hindi Ingles iyan gaya sa “Rise and shine!” Nihongo ito ng “Go to hell!” Pero siyempre hindi ko nasabi dahil hindi ko pa alam noon. At kung alam ko man at itinili sa phone, wala ring makakarinig. Kaya sa ikalawang subok ng paghahanap, nagtanong na ako. Akala ko makakatulong ito nang malaki. Susmaryosep, walang marunong ng Ingles sa mga napagtatanungan ko. Nakakaisang oras na ako at walang makapagsabi kung nasaan ang hinayupak na WU. Naging desperado tuloy ako. Ayaw kong mahilong-talilong sa siyudad. Nakatiyempo ako ng isang TOEFL office sa unang palapag ng building na iyon na sinimulan kong pasikot-sikutan mula sa ika-anim na palapag. Ayun sa wakas may marunong ng Ingles. Hindi masyadong matatas si Soei Egawa na nagbabantay ng opisina pero kuha niya ang ibig kong sabihin. Tinawagan pa niya ang WU gamit ang personal na cellphone at pagkaraan binigyan ako ng napakalinaw na direksiyon kung paano pumunta doon. Liko sa kanan, liko sa kaliwa, deretso. Nasa JR Central station lang pala ang hanap ko, dalawang bloke mula sa nasungangan kong bilding. Sa loob ng limang minuto, kausap ko na ang teller ng Travelex na kinalalagyan ng WU na maliit pa pala sa bahay ng kalapati. In minutes, sabi nga sa ad nila, online na ang pera-padala ko para kubrahin ng mga nasa Pilipinas. (May ibinibigay na code halimbawa 845-913-9085 at amount P1,000,000 na itetext mo naman sa mahal mo sa buhay.) Iyon nga, mabait naman ang mga Hapon sa mga naliligaw na dayuhan pero humanda ka nang mag-charade at muwestra. Hindi naman kasi kailangang matuto ng Ingles, lalo na ang wala naming transaksyon sa taga-labas gaya ng mga nasa bilding na iyon. Hindi katulad ng karaniwang Filipino na may alam kahit paano sa Ingles at handang ubusin ang naipong bokabularyo sa natiyempuhang Caucasian na naliligaw sa Maynila. Nag-aaral naman ng Ingles mula elementarya ang mga Hapon pero puro pasulat lang at walang pabigkas na

praktis. Nakakatawa itong mga Hapon. Kung mag-adap ng English term parang Lola ko. Sabihin mo, truck o trak at ang mabibigkas ay “tarak.” Ang mga taga-Kansai ang bigkas sa McDo ay “Makudo.” May problema sa consonant cluster ang mga ito.

Sa pang-araw-araw na buhay sa Hapon at lalo na sa pakikipagtransaksiyon, napakaeksakto nila sa oras. Sa Filipino, hindi leyt ang limang minuto. Mapapatawad pa nga hanggang kinse minutos o higit pa. Mapagbigay daw kasi tayo. Baka naman may nangyaring kung ano sa kausap. Hindi puwede sa Hapon iyan. Eksakto dapat. Ang una kong negosasyon sa kanila, ang pagpirma ng kontrata, de-numero. Bawat hakbang kalkulado ang oras. Sa loob ng trenta minutos, pirmado na ang lahat ng dokumento. Ganoon din sa transportasyong publiko. Napraning ako sa kaeksaktuhan ng oras. Hindi katulad sa Commonwealth na tuloy-tuloy ang dating ng bus at dyip, sa mga suburb ng Osaka, kada beinte minutos ang dating ng espesyal na bus. (Ayaw ko magtaxi dahil sobrang mahal. P250 ang flagdown rate at aabot sa P750 ang babayaran kahit malapit lang ang destinasyon.) Kapag sinabing 10:07 n.u. ang dating ng bus, ganoon ito darating. Kapag nasa anunsiyo na aalis nang 9:22 n.g. aalis ang tren, ganoon talaga ang alis nito. Ngayon ko lang talaga napatunayan ang kalkuladong kilos. Saan naman kaya nakuha ng mga Hapon itong kostumbre? Ayon sa saliksik ng Rusong si Alexander Prasol sa kaniyang librong *Modern Japan*, panahon pa ng mga shogun ito. Kapag dumalaw ang mga shogun sa kapitolyo ng imperyo, abante ang iskediyul. Ang bawat madaang bayan, lalo na ang hihintuan para matulugan at mapagkunan ng probisyon ay kailangang handang-handa. Dahil tradisyon na itong paglalakbay ng mahalagang tao, at dahil na rin sukat na sukat ang distansiya at tagal ng lakbay, naitatakda kung aling mga sityo ang hihintuan sa ganito at ganoong oras. Nakapaghahanda ang mga tao sa mga sityo sa pagdating ng shogun. Planado ang lahat ng kilos. Hindi inaasahan ang anumang aberya. Sa loob ng dantaon, naisaloob ng mga Hapon itong katumpakan sa oras sa pagtupad sa mga tungkulin. Naging tradisyon na. Nakakainggit lang. Nakakapagod na rin sa Pilipinas na maaga kang dumating tapos wala naman ang mga kausap mo. Bakit naman daw ganoon ang mga Filipino? Kesyo daw orasan ng pagsasaka ang sinusunod, na mabagal ang oras na nakaugat pa sa siklo ng pagtatanim at paghihintay ng ani. Ano ba iyan! Puwede bang putulin ang transhistorikong palusot? Puwede bang ieksakto na sa oras ang mga gawaing kontrolado naman ng indibidwal na gawi? At sana pati sa serbisyo publiko na rin. Sana may obsesyon rin tayo

sa pagtupad sa gawain at serbisyo. Mangyari sa kalye ko sa Vasra, Quezon City, minsan isang linggo na nga lang ang koleksiyon ng basura, hindi pa maipirme sa prediktableng oras. Madalas alas-onse pero puwedeng maagang-maaga, tanghali, o bandang hapon na. Kapag hindi ka nakapagtapon, magiging pugad ng uod at langaw ang basura mo. Sa distritong Mino na tinitirhan ko, at ganito rin daw sa buong Japan, tuwing Martes at Biyernes ang koleksiyon. Halinhinang Miyerkules naman ang pagtatapon ng lata at bote, at ng malalaking gamit gaya ng muwebles at appliances. Appliances itinatapon? Totoo nga dito ang pagtatapon ng mga hindi pa naman sirang kagamitan. Sabi nga ng katotong Roland Tolentino na nagturo rin dito, maliit kasi ang bahay ng Hapon at hindi praktikal na magtambak ng lumang gamit. Sabi ng Amerikanang colleague, pinulot niya minsan ang isang magandang mesita. Oops, Amerikanang namumulot? Siya nga namumulot, bakit hindi ako? Masubukan nga. Wala naman akong nakikitang telebisyon o stereo component na gusto kong mapulot kaya nang minsang makakita ako ng magandang alpombra, naakit akong kunin. Nilabhan ko na lang at hayun, nasa sala ko na ngayon.

Tamang-tamang tagsibol ng 2014 (Marso) ang dating ko sa Japan at lansakang pagbubukas ng sakura agad ang sumalubong sa akin. Ang lahat ng punong seresa ay namimigat sa mga kulay-rosas at puting talulot. *Hanami* ang tawag sa pamamasyal sa ilalim ng mga puno at pagpipiknik kasama ang mga kaibigan. Event talaga sa kanila ito. Naaalala ko tuloy ang pagkagusto ko sa mga kakawate at fuego del arbol (fire tree) sa Pilipinas. Kasinganda ng mga ito ang sakura pero malayong sambahin tulad ng ginagawa ng mga Hapon sa sakura, halimbawa na lang sa distritong Yoshino sa Nara prefecture. Dito hanggang orisonte ay may makikita kang mga punong namimigat sa bulaklak. Dinadayo ito ng mahigit sa 30,000 turista araw-araw sa kasagsagan ng pamumukadkad ng mga puno. Nakakabighani talaga. Higit pa sa ipinakita sa *Dreams* (1990) ni Akira Kurosawa ang mararanasan sa harapang pakikipagniig sa mga puno. Sabi ng kaibigang Hapon, higit na malapit sa kanila ang *ume* o plum trees na may bulaklak na natatangi ang malaming na halimuyak, higit na malaki ang talulot, at nagtatagal ang pamumulaklak. Hindi katulad ng sakura na nalalagas pagkatapos nang ilang araw. Naglalaho nang gayon-gayon lamang. Pero ito nga ang pang-akit ng sakura, ang maikling-maikling pagtatanghal ng alindog. May kinukuwerdas na lungkot sa pusong Budista kapag minasdan ang sakura na naiuugnay nila sa panandaliang ganda, kaiklian ng buhay, at kawalan ng permanensiya

ng lahat ng bagay. Bulaklak lang naman, ang daming arte ha, loob-loob ko. Kung titingnang mabuti ang pinigtas na nag-iisang talulot ng sakura, hindi naman nakakabighani. Napakaordinaryo pa nga. Pero kapag namukadkad nang sabay-sabay at sama-sama sa tangkay, kapag tiningnan nang angaw-angaw sa mga puno, kapag natunghayan nang patong-patong sa mga gulod-Yoshino; nang umaalimbukay ang sari-saring pusyaw at tingkad ng mga talulot sa napakalinis at malamig-lamig na hangin ng tagsibol, walang kaparis ang katiwasayan at pagpapahalaga sa kagandahang bubukad sa iyong mata at kaluluwa. Maibubulong mong “Narito na ako sa paraiso.”

Ilan lamang ang kilala kong Filipino sa Osaka. Dalawa sa mga ito—sina Ralph at Annie—mga dating estudyante sa U.P. ang nagsilbing *tour guide* at kaibigan ng bagong saltang Filipinong gaya ko. Tulad ng inaasahan, madrama ang buhay ng mga ito, lalo na si Annie, na batang-bata sa gulang na trenta y singko. Kumikislap na parang sakura ang mga mata, mahaba ang buhok, at malaming. Linguistics major siya, inaasahang makatapos ng MA sa Osaka University noong 2011, dapat na bumalik sa U.P. at doon magtrabaho. Pero matapos kuwentahin ang kikitain niya sa Pilipinas (maliit siyempre) kumpara sa Japan, nakumbinsi siya ni Ralph na huwag nang tapusin ang pag-aaral at maging OCW na lang. Masama ang loob ng coordinator ng programa sa pagkalagas ng isang scholar sa katauhan ni Annie pero wala nang magagawa sa pinal na desisyon niya. Naging coordinator at Nihongo teacher sa isang language company si Annie. Naka-assign siya sa mga bagong dating na *caregiver* o iba pang propesyonal na galing Pilipinas na sinuwerteng matanggap sa Japan. Dahil marunong ng Ingles, tinuturuan din niya ng Nihongo ang iba pang foreigner na naempleyo sa Japan. Sa pitong taong pamamalagi niya dito, dagdag pa ang ilang taong pagsisilbing interpreter ng Nihongo sa Japanese embassy sa Maynila, nakuha na ni Annie ang tatas at accent ng Kansai Nihongo. Para na siyang local. Masigla siyang tao, mataas ang enerhiya, napapatawa ang lahat sa kaniyang mga hirit, magiliw sa lahat, at galit sa tulog. Mababa lamang siya at pear-shaped ang katawan, ibig sabihin malaki ang balakang, maumbok ang puwet. Iyon daw ang gusto ng mga lalaki. Pero wala namang boyfriend sa ngayon. Laging hawak niya ang Sony smartphone at naka-online palagi; halos oras-oras ay may naka-post na istatus sa Facebook o Instagram. Kung hindi food porn, lakwatsa sa mga parke, studio, bowling alley at iba pang tourist magnet ang gawain niya. Madalas ding may mga aporismo at kung minsan, mga patama

sa mga nakakagalit na kaibigan (may istatus siyang “Ipinagpalit mo ang friendship natin sa lalaki. Lalaki lang iyan. *Shine!*”) Kapag linggo, nag-attend siya sa service ng kinabibilangang congregation ng Christian fellowship. Isinasama niya ako sa kung saan-saang destinasyon. Sabi tuloy ng hinalinhan kong colleague, narating ko sa loob ng kalahating taon ang narating niya sa loob ng limang taon. Pero hindi ako nagpahatak sa kaniyang imbitasyon sa Christian renewal. Mas gusto ko na lang magpahinga kapag Linggo. Parang may foundation lang itong si Annie. Halos lahat ng kita niya, naipapadala sa Pilipinas. Pinaaral niya ang isang dosenang pamangkin. Binubuhay ang tatay at mga kapatid. Pinautang ang mga kamag-anak na madalas kaysa hindi ay hindi na nagbabayad. At dahil true-blue OCW, madalas nadedenggoy ng kapamilya. Nadiskubre niya, hindi responsable ang ate niyang tagapag-alaga ng tatay niyang may edad at hindi na kayang magtrabaho. Pinatigil na niya ito sa pagmamaneho ng dyip nang minsang makabangga at pinatawan ng malaking halaga ng mga pulis. Para maiwasan na lang ang gulo, nagpadala siya ng P10K para panagutan ang danyos. Mahina na rin ang tatay niya bukod sa sakitin pa. Medyo nahihilig lang itong maglibang-libang nang kaunti. Dumadayo sa sugalan nina Chua sa kabilang kanto sa Payatas. Dinadaya naman siya ng mga istambay na tuso sa laro. Nauubos ang allowance ng tatay ni Annie na dapat pambili ng gamot. Ano pa nga ba ang dapat gawin kundi magpadala na naman ng dagdag na pera. May tagamanman sa kaniyang pamilya si Annie—ang kapitbahay. Nagrereport ito sa mga nangyayari sa kaniyang pamilya. Nagsumbong kasi ang tatay niya na kulang sa pagkain palagi sa bahay. Sumasala din sa pag-inom ng gamot. Dumating ang oras na nakarating kay Annie na hindi maayos ang pagbabadyet ng kapatid sa mga pangangailangan ng tatay, maliliit na kapatid, at mga pamangkin. Bakit daw? Hindi niya inaasahan ang nangyayari sa kapatid. Iba naman pala ang inaalagaan ng ate niya: Bagets na boyfriend na kasama nito sa paghithit ng shabu. Doon pala napupunta ang malaking bahagi ng pinaghirapan ni Annie. Kaya ora mismo noong kalagitnaan ng 2014, umuwi siya para komprontahin ang kapatid at sabihan na mula sa araw na iyon, hindi na ito magiging tagapag-alaga ng pamilya. Pinalayas sa madaling sabi. Tatlong araw lamang ang pagbisita ni Annie at agad bumalik sa Japan para ipagpatuloy ang kayod. Ni hindi man lang siya nakapunta sa anumang pasyalan o nakabili ng pasalubong sa mga kaibigang Hapones. Samantala, napatango siya na pauutangin ang bagong tagapag-alaga ng

pamilya ng halagang P100,000. Nangako ang nangutang na kapatid na magbabayad sa susunod na taon. Naisip kong nalaglag ang kislap sa mala-sakura niyang mata.

Masuwerte nang maituturing ang katulad ni Annie. Hindi hamak na mataas ang suweldo sa Japan kung susuwertihin kang mapadpad dito. Napakahirap lamang mapunta dito sa higit ng pagtasa sa mga dayuhang manggagawa. Marami ditong Filipina na teacher sa Ingles. Pero walang kasiguraduhan sa permanenteng residency at posisyon. Kailangang ipasa ang National Examination para sa mga professional at ang taunang eksaminasyong balidasyon sa sityo ng trabaho para makapagpatuloy. Kung kukuwentahin ang kita ng propesyonal na empleyadong Hapon, matutukoy ang dahilan ng kanilang kaginhawahan sa buhay. Ang bayad sa nag-aarubaito o working student ay Y1000 kada oras o mga P500. Katumbas na ito ng minimum wage sa Pilipinas ng karaniwang manggagawang kailangang magbuwis-buhay pa sa pabrika o mga mall nang walong oras. Kung propesyonal na, makukuwenta ang rate kada oras nang doble o higit pa at malaki talaga (mababa ang P120,000 kada buwan). Kaya nga ang average na savings ng pamilyang Hapones ay P43 milyon. Malayong-malayo sa buhay ng Filipino. Kahit ako na propesyonal hindi ko maabot ang halagang iyan kahit anong tambling ang gawin sa sariling bayan. Kahit isama pa ang kita ng buong pamilya. Naabot ko ang una kong milyon pagkaraan ng isang dekada ng pagtatrabaho sa opisina, edad 34. Nakakaiyak ang diperensiya. Gugustuhin mo na talagang makasingit ng trabaho dito kung may pagkakataon. Hindi nakakapagtaka na sa paglilibot ko sa lungsod at suburban area ng Osaka, wala akong nakitang kahit isang barongbarong. Marami ang itinatayong bagong condominium complex at maayos na pagmamantini ng magagandang bahay.

Nakakadepress naman ito. Kaya kailangang magrelaks nang kaunti. Sugod muna ako sa *onsen*. Nang mabalitaan ng mga kaibigan na nasa Japan ako, ang unang tanong ay kung nakapasok na ako sa public bath. Kapag naliligo sa Pilipinas, sining ang paliligo sa poso o kahit beach nang hindi naghuhubo at hubad. Lalo na sa mga babae. Nakakapagtaka kung paano nakakapaligo nang nakadamit ang mga Filipino. Kahit nga beach na dapat sige lang sa pagbibikini, may tuwalyang ga-billboard na pantakip. Kahit lalaki naka-shorts pa sa pool sa halip na trunks (wala lang pambili siguro.) Ayaw ibilad ang katawan. Kapag wala kang kiyeme sa paglalantad ng

singit, exhibitionist ang tingin sa iyo. May kaugnayan yata ito sa Kristiyang konserbatismo. Templo ang katawan na ayaw namang ipakita. Tuloy isang malaking fetish ang paninilip. O pagnanakaw ng mga panty kasi nga ay isang malaking pantasya ang hubad na katawan ng kapuwa. (Dito sa Japan, maoorder sa eBay ang gamit na panty ng dalagita.) Nakausap ko ang matagal na dito at natural nga lang daw ang maligo nang hubo at hubad. Sa madaling sabi, kita ang kaluluwa. Kahit magkakaopisina daw ay naliligo nang sama-sama at hubadero at hubadera ang drama nila. Magkakahiwalay naman ang lalaki at babae. Napaisip ako, kayahin ko kaya na maligo kasama ang kaibigang Hapon nang nakalawit ang family jewels? Sabi ng tagapayo ko, “Kung nahihiya ka, maghiwalay kayo ng sulok.” Nang may magyaya sa akin sa onsen, curious ang drama ko. Aha, may laglagan kaya ng sabon? “Wala,” sabi ng kasama ko. So ayun. napunta ako sa isang day time onsen. Naku po paano kaya ito? Ang guide ko parang wala lang. Relaxed siya. Nakakahiya namang magpaka-demure at ang tanda-tanda ko na. Kaya sige na nga. Malinis na malinis ang onsen. Parang maliit na glorietta pero walang fountain sa gitna. Naroon ang isang maliit na kuwadradong pool. Bundok ang kaligiran. Ang ganda. Sinilip ko ang mga tao sa labas. Hubo at hubad nga. Paano ba ito? Maliligo muna pala bago lumusong. Mga labinlimang minuto akong nagbanlaw. Ayaw kong lumabas. Ang daming tao. Nang umalis ang isang grupo ay saka lamang ako mahiyaing nagpakita. Tatlo lang ang tao. So ayun, parang si Adan ang itsura kong lumusong sa tubig. Hindi naman ako pinansin ng mga ibang naliligo. Ni hindi ako sinulyapan. Bakit naman ay kita ang mga buto at patpatin kaya ako. Mukha ring Hapon kaya hindi pansinin. Nawala ang self-consciousness ko. Dere-deretsong lusong sa tubig. Ito ang walang nagsabi sa akin--sobrang init ng tubig! Nagulantang ang katawan ko. Pero hindi ako nakasigaw. Inabot ng hiya sa mga Hapon na naghuhuntahan dalawang metro lang ang layo sa akin. Kunyari yakang-yaka. Kaya hayun, nakahilata sa 40 degrees na tubig at nagzezen-zen kunyari. Maya-maya may bagong dating. Tiningnan ko ang gagawin nila. Ang dapat pala, dahan-dahan ang lusong. Paa muna, tapos may parang tabo na ibubuhos sa katawan. O kaya magdadala ka ng labakarang maisawsaw sa mainit na tubig sa tabo at maipupunas sa katawan para ihanda ito sa init. Wala ngang naaasiwa sa kahubaran ng lahat. Sige ang pendulum ng mga sandatang tulog, at relaxed na bola at hindi ikinahihiya ang bilbil at nakatinghas na bulbol. Markado lang ako dahil wala na akong lambi. Ang mga kalubluban ko ay protektado natural (supot ang mga walanghiya). Ayun

ganun lang naman pala. Kaya umahon na ako pagkaraan ng labinlimang minuto na may bagong kamalayan sa pagpapakita ng kaluluwa at templong hindi dapat pinagkakaabalahan sa onsen.

Para makatapos sa unibersidad, isa sa mga rekisito ng mga Filipino major ang magpunta sa Pilipinas para makaranas ng buhay-Filipino. Kailangan nilang mag-enrol sa anumang kurso sa U.P. Hindi sa Filipino language course sila pumapasok kundi sa Ingles. Pinapayagan naman sila basta mahalaga na makipamuhay sa adoptive family na Filipino at magkaroon ng Philippine realities immersion. Unang payo sa kanila na manamit ng simple at huwag ipahalatang Hapon sila. Na-eejoy ng marami ang mamuhay sa Pilipinas. Parang artista sila kung tratuhin ng mga kaklaseng Filipino. Kayang-kaya kasi nila ang anime look o ala-Kattun member (sikat na boy band). Marami ang lumiligaw sa kanila tuloy. Nagkakaroon ng nobyo o nobyang Filipino ang ilan. Isang seryosong estudyanteng nagka-girlfriend sa Pilipinas ang humingi ng payo kung paano ba mahal ang Filipina. Lagi daw kasi sila nag-aaway kahit totoong mahal na mahal niya ang babae. Nakatakda na nga ang kasal nila sa 2018. Mag-iipon nang kaunti ang Hapon. Ang Filipina ang pupunta dito sa Japan. Nagtulong kami ni Annie sa pagrerebyu sa kanya ng Filipino Love 101. Tanong namin, paano mo sagutin ang “I love you” ng girlfriend. Ang sabi niya “Salamat.” Naku mali iyon, sabi namin. Dapat “I love you too.” Next na tanong, ilang beses ka mag-I love you. Minsan isang buwan. Mali na naman, dapat araw-araw. Nabaliw ang Hapon. Ganoon pala iyon? Sabi namin, Oo. (Nakausap ko ang isang Haponesang ayaw na mag-asawa ng Hapon matapos makaranas ng pag-ibig ng Filipino. Malamig daw ang lalaking Hapon. Madalas nga raw na ang babae ang nanliligaw sa lalaki. Unthinkable ito sa Pilipinas, pero sabi ng kausap naming siya ang hinabol ng Filipina.) Pinagpayuhan din namin ang binatang Hapon na tawagan ang girlfriend, kung kaya niya, nang tatlong beses isang araw. Paggising sa umaga para sabihin na kagigising lang niya at papasok na sa trabaho. Dapat tapusin ang isang minutong usapan ng “I love you.” Tatawag ulit sa tanghali para sabihin na kakain na siya ng tanghalian. Dapat tapusin ang maikling usapan ng “I love you.” Tapos, bago matulog sa gabi, tatawag ulit para sabihin na inaantok na siya at malapit nang matulog. Dapat matapos ang mahaba-habang usapan tungkol sa ginawa sa maghapon ng “I love you very much” at sasabayan ng isang dosenang “I love you I miss you” icons. Kung hindi kayang gawin itong three times a day na call, puwedeng dalawa na lang, sa umaga at sa gabi. Pero krimen

ang hindi tumawag ng kahit minsan. Nakakapagod naman sabi ng Hapon. Sagot namin, “Kaya nga may Viber.” O kaya Line na mas kilala sa Japan. Kumanta na lang kami pagkaraan sa videoke ng “Pusong Bato,” “As Long As You Love Me” at nakakagulat, kabisado ng Hapon ang “Bebot” ng Black Eyed Peas na ipinagwagwagan sa mikropono at kinunan ni Annie ng video at dali-daling ipinost sa Facebook. Umani ang istatus ng maraming likes at komentaryo. Isa marahil doon ang girlfriend ng binatang Hapon na sumulat ng “Aestemasu!!!!” kasabay ang sandosenang I miss you icons.

Claiming Our Inheritance

Jhoanna Lynn B. Cruz

On July 28, 2014, a military van bearing forty civilians on the way to a masjid in Jolo to celebrate the end of Ramadan was ambushed by Abu Sayyaf terrorists. Twenty-three civilians were killed. To this day, reports are uncertain about the reason behind the ambush: were the Abu Sayyaf only after the ten militia officers in the van? were they punishing the villagers for cooperating with government forces in the peace process? was this a rido attack? was it inherited from Sulu's history of violence? Whatever the reason, the massacre was deplorable and senseless. How do we make sense of events like this? The news left me stunned.

Yet in the light of this massacre, I continued to obsess about my own struggle to give up my marriage once again, and once and for all. It seemed trivial really. But there are lives at stake here too. And I wondered if I am committing a terrorist act on my family in the name of a-Jihad-of-a-kind. Are my children going to be collateral damage—a sacrifice—for what I perceive as a greater cause? Am I ambushing innocent civilians for the sake of my happiness? But I am in the van too, and we are traveling together. We are all vulnerable to this attack—an attack made by pure Grace. So what must die in order for the journey of faith to go on?

Rainer Maria Rilke urges us to “Believe in a love being stored up for you like an inheritance.” And I have believed it ever since I heard it, at least twenty years ago. Each time I entered into a relationship, I had hoped this was the one, especially my marriage. Yet each one failed to give me what I

really wanted. I finally figured that the only time we can receive an inheritance is when there is a death. What had to die? What was holding me back from receiving my promised inheritance?

Illusions must die. Illusions about the self, about love, about family.

I came out unceremoniously to my children when my daughter Sachi was 11, and my son Raz was 8, on board a *Maligaya* taxi on the way home. Sachi had chanced upon a (bad) review online of my book of lesbian-themed stories, *Women Loving* (2010) and asked, “Nanay, are you really a lesbian?”

“Umm, I guess, in practice, I am more of a bisexual.”

“What’s a bisexual?”

“Someone who can love either a man or a woman.”

“Ah, so that’s what Lady Gaga means!”

And that was the end of it. They had never seen me in a relationship with a woman since I broke up with their father, so maybe the declaration was enough.

Later, Sachi would randomly ask, “Is Tita F. a lesbian?” Yes. “Is Tita T. a lesbian?” Yes. But she would never ask if I had had romantic relationships with them, who seemed only to be passing through in our lives. The truth is, both “Titas” had wanted more serious relationships with me but I chickened out. On different occasions, and years apart, I wrote both of them similar letters saying I did not see myself raising my children in a “rainbow family.” That I did not have the heart. I knew it was my own internalized homophobia telling me it would ruin my kids, or worse, it would turn them gay. So instead, I stayed in an abusive relationship with a man (not my husband) for six years, on and off, harboring the illusion that this was better for the kids than a loving lesbian relationship.

In the meantime, my daughter turned thirteen and decided she was a lesbian.

As usual, the mother is the last to be told. But I *knew*. I just didn’t realize the extent and the seriousness of their relationship. I mean, she was only thirteen, and her girlfriend, fifteen. I thought it was just a girl-crush. The way I had my first girl-crush, when I was fifteen, on a beautiful classmate named Bettina. But I caught Sachi in her first big lie when she went to this girl’s Junior-Senior prom in a hotel downtown even though I had told

her not to. I guessed this girl was more important to her than her mother's trust. So I knew. Like my own mother used to intone, "*Papunta ka pa lang, pabalik na ako.*" Sachi wasn't doing anything I hadn't already done myself.

When she finally came out to me on August 23, 2014, they were on their tenth month together. She said, "*Nay, uyab nako si Bettina.*"

I asked her why she didn't tell me sooner. And she said, as expected, "I was afraid you might get mad." Of all mothers in the Philippines, she would be afraid to tell ME she had a girlfriend? But then again, I figured a little fear-of-mother's-wrath never hurt anyone growing up. But how would we tell her father? (We posted it on *Facebook*.)

So I was forced to disabuse myself of the idea that I could turn my children gay in a rainbow family. Perhaps my daughter was—gasp!—born this way?

In Cebuano, the word "ginikanan" is used to mean parents. When I first moved to Davao and learned it, I marveled at how different it was from my own native language, Filipino. In Filipino, the word is "magulang," which suggests that a parent is one who has "gulang," or age; one who has the wisdom of age. On the other hand, "ginikanan" comes from the root word "gikan," which means "from." Thus, one's parents are literally "where one came from." It makes me uncomfortable, the same way the saying that intones that "the fruit does not fall far from the tree," makes me uncomfortable. Am I really their "ginikanan"? Are my children my fruits? Should I be congratulated for their achievements? Or blamed for their failings?

I have always believed that my children came through me, not from me, as Gibran puts it. Yet, if we believe the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that our first language determines the way we think, I must believe deep inside that as a parent, I am "magulang," wiser than my children because I am older. But I don't. Most of the time, I know I am just guessing, not any wiser just because I'm older. Except in Math. Some of the time, my children have known better than I did, perhaps because they see more clearly in their "radical innocence," as Yeats puts it.

When I asked my children what they thought about my getting back with their father, Sachi replied, "It doesn't matter, as long as you two get along." Which could mean indifference to her parents, who have both failed her, but also assured me that my daughter knew that families come in different forms. Raz, on the other hand, was positively excited about it,

“as long as Daddy lives with us,” which showed me how important it is that both parents are present to each other and to the family. If Daddy were not going to be there anyway (which he wasn’t, because he is a seafarer), what is the point of getting back together? Romantic happy endings aside, what does it really mean for two people to stay together in a marriage?

Then, at the height of my desperation at growing old alone, on my 40th birthday, I loudly lamented that I was single. Sachi immediately replied, “Nanay, you’re not single. You have us!”

Touché.

In the meantime, in the midst of my illusion that the only way to have my “happy ending” was to get back with my husband, who offered me a love that was true and had history, a love that I thought would make my children happy, I started dating a woman who shook me out of my despair-induced stupor. Mags Z. Maglana seemed to me everything I had been waiting for: intellectual, tender, attentive, generous, beautiful. She terrified me. I thought, here, at last, is the love “stored up for me like an inheritance.” But was I equal to it?

Two years before, I had entered every open door even though I knew they would lead nowhere—just because there might be something to find in there—something I wanted—a little joy, a little insight into what I really wanted. I was exhausted by the search and the hoping. In 2014, it seemed as if my reconciliation with my husband was a *fait accompli*, but when I met Mags, I was compelled to find out how far we could go with our ardor. My heart was inflamed and enflamed. I wanted to risk it; to have a chance to dance again with what I do not know. I wanted to find out what it was like to lose control and thus, fall in joy. Here was the woman I could raise my rainbow family with.

When I introduced her to the kids and we started spending time together, my daughter had only one thing to say to me: “Ayaw’g bulag ha?” These words were the sweetest assurance that she accepted my choice, that she trusted me. “Don’t break up, ok?” I recognized it as a plea too; for she had seen one too many person walk away from our lives, no matter how sweet their promises had once been.

My son Raz, on the other hand, was open heart central from the beginning. He was both playful and affectionate with Tita Mags, who loved him back in equal measure. One morning, when Mags had started sleeping

over, Raz came to our room as usual to say goodbye. We were still asleep, cuddling. He came over and hugged us, then he whispered, “I love you. Both.” He even paused before saying “both.” I was half-asleep but I heard it distinctly. I replied, “I love you, too.” And then he left for school. When I asked Mags if she had heard it, she said she hadn’t. I felt sorry. It was a precious moment. We knew he loved Tita Mags—but it was important even for him—to articulate it.

I knew he had been feeling sad about how his dad would feel if he “found out.” He even had a dream about it, from which he had woken up crying. Maybe part of him somehow felt guilty about loving Tita Mags (like me)—but with his heart always open, how could he help it? And what’s not to love?

Maybe they would be happier if their father and I got back together, but I can see they are happy now in the life we have created for ourselves. In this life I have chosen, Daddy has become a visitor, an idea, a wish.

I need to realize that despite my failings, I am enough. That my family isn’t broken—that I didn’t break it—it is whole in itself as we struggle with each day’s challenges, particularly in how to be present to each other and to attend to each other’s needs. This is not a massacre. This is the end of the fast; this is the feast celebrating the resurrection of hope. My children’s wounds will not be healed by my getting back with their father; they will be healed by forgiveness. Knowing that we fail each other in myriad ways every day, and that we are given myriad chances to make it up to each other. The grand design is formed by the many bits of loving we can show each other as we create our version of a whole family. Like a rainbow mosaic, our broken pieces come together through our shared life. And it is growing every day in texture and hue.

Unlike the Sulu massacre, which runs the risk of disappearing in the statistics of unsolved incidents of terrorist acts of violence, it has become clear to me that my decision to raise my children with a lesbian partner is not a massacre of the family. What my children have inherited from me is the freedom to be who they are and to love whom they love without shame. That was my rough plan when I first learned I was to have a child, and every day we are all learning how to honor this freedom.

On their 11th “monthsary,” we all decided it was time to meet Bettina. So Mags and I hosted lunch for them at a quaint restaurant that served

organic food. The two girls barely ate anything. Ok, they ate only the ice cream. I tried to make light of the monumental situation by talking too much. I thought they were cute together. But I worried too about what would happen to their love when Bettina leaves for college in Manila the following year. I worried about my daughter's first heartbreak, which I knew was forthcoming.

When Sachi got home, she told me that Bettina said, "Your mom is cool."

And that's good enough for us for now.

Someday

Arnie Q. Mejia

My brother Arnel is impressed that I am able to convince his five-year-old son, Tonyboy, to sing the Philippine National Anthem without threats or cajoling, as we drive in the middle of the night from the airport to my two-bedroom apartment on Decatur. Arnel and his wife Cookie have decided to move to Las Vegas to build their life since their son is now of school age. The move to the USA is also possible for Arnel and his family since he is just a few steps away from securing a green card, his wife being a naturalized citizen, and their son, a US-born citizen. After my adorable nephew, who at some angles looks like a miniature version of my brother, sings his heart out, we drive on in silence.

I smile as I get a glimpse of my sister-in-law from the rearview mirror. She is petite with shoulder length, straight, brown hair, looks smart in her glasses and is enviably slim considering she is a mother of a young child. I am not at all surprised how pretty she is since Arnel, whom I haven't seen in seven years, has grown up to be as handsome as a movie star.

I break the silence by asking Cookie how she ended up with my brother. Her face lights up despite how tired they all must be from the long flight from Manila. She tells me how they kind of knew each other already since the university they attended wasn't that big. Cookie and Arnel had both attended high school in the USA and most of the students that spent time there belonged to the same social circle. Cookie then tells me how they started talking about music and discovered that they both

adored Morrissey. She says that she asked Arnel to make her some copies, but was turned off when he asked her to provide him with blank cassette tapes. I laugh and tell her that Arnel was also a cheapskate even when we were growing up. Arnel looks half amused as we arrive at my apartment complex.

Taking care of one's own is a value shared by most Filipinos. But I wasn't sure at first about how to respond to my brother's email asking if they could stay with me. Arnel was not my favorite person growing up since he always tormented me. I was also not used to living with family since my parents had left me behind when they returned to Manila.

But the loneliness of being separated from Ansel made me long for the company of people who loved me. I finally responded after seeing the picture of my nephew that Arnel emailed a few days after his request. It showed a little boy with big dimples. This made me open my home to my brother and his family.

Arnel grabs their baggage from the back of my Jeep and I help Cookie climb down by carrying Tonyboy who has fallen asleep. I wanted to give them a quick tour of the lights along the strip, but the long flight has exhausted them. The casinos and their free shows along the strip will have to wait. I manage to open the door with one hand and am greeted by Eartha's meows. She rubs up against my legs as I lead Arnel and Cookie inside my small apartment, which I found using the Penny Saver.

I gently lay my nephew on my gray sofa. Eartha plops herself on the other side of the sofa and looks at Tonyboy suspiciously. I help Arnel with their luggage into the extra bedroom with the inflatable mattress I bought just days ago in preparation for their arrival. I give Arnel and Cookie a quick tour of their new home by pointing towards the kitchen and the bathroom door. I tell them that Eartha's an indoor cat and to please make sure she doesn't get out. Cookie asks me where she pees and I tell her I have a litter box under the bathroom sink. I assure them that the apartment never smells a long as I clean the litter box twice a day.

Eartha has now inched closer to Tonyboy and both are sleeping. Cookie and Arnel are in their room unpacking as I make three cape cods with the citron vodka I store in the freezer and the cranberry juice from the fridge which I recently filled with milk, eggs, bacon, bread, and butter for my new housemates I ask Cookie and Arnel to join me for a night cap

in the kitchen. We sit around the folding table that came from our house in Moreno Valley where Arnel and I went to high school. Cookie takes a sip of the drink and comments on how strong it is. I apologize and offer her cranberry juice.

Although he has seen the pictures of myself which I sent to our parents in the Philippines, Arnel comments on how different I look now. He says he's not used to seeing me slim. He chuckles as he tells Cookie that my nickname was "Fatsuto" and how I used to devour quarter pounders, layering them with french fries in between the buns and patty. I let out a huge laugh and realize that I haven't laughed quite that heartily since Ansel and I split.

The effects of the vodka are beginning to show. Cookie observes how Arnel and I both suffer from the *Asian Flush*. She is more relaxed now that she has taken her glasses off. I see where my nephew gets his deep dimples when she smiles and laughs as Arnel and I continue to tease each other. I feel at home with my brother even though I haven't seen him since he moved back to the Philippines, after graduating from high school in Moreno Valley seven years ago. He never seemed truly happy with his life in California even though he eventually made some friends. Our constant moving must have made it hard for him to feel settled. He decided to return to the Philippines to attend university. But now he's back here. I guess he was truly meant to be in the USA.

My heart is filled with joy as I look at my brother, his wife, and child, but part of me also feels jealous. How I wish I could be just like my brother and fall in love with a woman and have children. Their life seems so much happier than mine. I thought I had found a life with Ansel. It was with him that I felt settled. It's a shame that two people who love each other are not able to marry even after living under the same roof for five years.

I ask my brother how our parents are doing and if it had been hard for them to see him leave. He tells me they should be able to visit us soon since they were applying again for tourist visas for the USA. They were denied it a few years back. I panic a little since I haven't officially "come out" to my parents whom I haven't seen in almost six years. I ask Arnel how he thinks our parents would react when they find out I'm... different. He tells me it's a known secret to everyone, especially since Armand hinted my being gay to my parents when he last visited them.

He tells me not to worry, and that our parents love me no matter what. I believe him, of course.

The next morning, Cookie and I are at the laundromat while Arnel continues to unpack and Tonyboy plays with Eartha. I feel an instant connection with my sister-in-law when she tells me how doing laundry was also one of her chores when she grew up in New York. I tell her how much I loved my trip to New York last summer. She listens attentively to a wash cycle worth of my city adventures and the shows I got to see. She shares with me how her parents are still in New York. Initially, she and Arnel were supposed to move in with them, but my brother wanted for them to try and make it on their own without any parental support. I tell her that I dream of moving there once I finish culinary school.

Although Cookie doesn't ask me any questions regarding my personal life, I feel comfortable enough to tell her stories of my life with Ansel and the loneliness I feel from our split. Even though I have a deep connection and closeness with my brothers, I can never truly share my emotions with them. I suppose that is why my closest friends are mostly women. They understand the complexity and angst that is part of loving men.

The energy and warmth I get from women put me at ease. Growing up in a family of six boys and no girls made us treasure Mama. We competed for her attention by showering her with compliments and affection. I learned to respect and regard women through Papa's example.

Cookie and I place the last of our laundered shirts and delicates in the basket and head back to our apartment.

Tonyboy is sitting in a corner pouting. There's a small scratch on his face and Eartha is nowhere to be seen. Arnel tells us that he scolded Tonyboy for playing rough with Eartha. I go over to Tonyboy and give him a hug. I tell him Eartha doesn't like to be teased and that I will show him where I keep her toys so that he could play with her properly. Arnel and Cookie ask if they could borrow the Jeep to pick up some supplies at the nearby store. I hand them the keys and offer to watch Tonyboy. My nephew refuses to be left behind, but changes his mind when I point to the playground across our apartment.

I lift Tonyboy so that he straddles my shoulders and tell him that he is the tallest boy in the world. He laughs with his whole body. I can't help but laugh along as I feel his bony body digging into me. I place my feather-

light nephew on the swing and start to push him gently with one hand. He squeals and urges me to push harder. I tell him to hold on tightly to the chains, as I use both hands to push him farther up. He laughs and giggles and tells me he can see the tall buildings from afar. I tell him that he is seeing the Las Vegas strip, and that we will go there later tonight to see the shows along the boulevard. A small part of me is scared that my nephew might fall off, but I see his little face beam with sheer joy and I continue to push.

How is it possible that a child so young can contain so much happiness in his tiny body? Eventually, my arms grow tired from pushing and I take a break, and Tonyboy uses the momentum of his body to keep swinging. He is humming now and then he breaks into song. I don't recognize the song at first, but I am certain it's not a children's song. I listen to the song's hook and realize in amazement that this five-year-old knows the lyrics to *Someday* by Sugar Ray.

We spend the afternoon at the park singing and playing. I feel as if I were a kid again running around with my skinny brother. I am transported to a simpler time when affairs of the heart didn't exist and my only goal seemed to be to laugh as much as possible.

Tonyboy sees his parents return with bags of groceries and runs to them. I chase after him, but I stop myself just before I get to them. I watch them—my brother and his family together. And suddenly, I don't feel so alone anymore.

TANGKE

Ferdinand Pisigan Jarin

Gusto kong maging mataas. Tumangkad. Lumaking tao. Lahat ng uri ng pag-angat na magsisilbing daan para tingalain din ako. Na hangaan din ako ng mga tao.

Paulit-ulit ko itong mantra noon nang nag-aaral pa ako ng elementarya sa Candelaria Central Elementary School sa Candelaria, Zambales.

Ako kasi ang laging nasa unahan ng pila tuwing Flag Ceremony. Ako ang madalas utusang pumulot ng bola. Ang madalas pag-tripang hubuan ng salawal. Ang madalas sigain at takutin ng malalaki. Ang kaltukan pasimple ng mas matatandang estudyanteng nakukulitan sa akin dahil sumasabat daw ako sa kanilang usapan. Ang dami ko raw kasing tanong.

Kaya noong panahong 'yon, bata pa lang, sawa na ako sa pagiging maliit. Naitanim ko sa isipan noon na ang maliit ay laging tinitingnang mababa di lang sa pisikal na aspekto kundi maging sa lahat ng gagawin n'ya.

Gusto ko na agad tumanda. Lumaki.

Ipinanganak ako sa Maynila. Sa Cembo, Makati. Nang maghiwalay sina Mama at Papa, napadpad kami ng aking ina at nag-iisang kapatid sa tahanan ng aking Lolo at Lola sa Sitio Quinabuangan na bahagi pa rin ng pinaka-Poblacion ng Candelaria. Ganoon kadrarna ang pagkakapadpad namin sa probinsiya. Lalo pang naging madrama nang kailangan kaming iwan ng aming ina sa lugar na 'yon para magtrabaho sa isang patahian sa Mandaluyong. Saklap.

Sa eskwelahan ko sa Candelaria Central Elementary School, walang epekto ng popularidad ang sabihing ipinanganak ka sa Maynila. Isa ako sa mga estudyanteng mahirap at di anak ng mga pulitiko ng bayan o mga may-kayang pamilya na nakapag-abroad ang mga magulang. Kaya madalas na walang barkada agad. Di sikat sa klase. Idagdag pa dito ang pagka-dehado lalo na sa pakikipag-usap sa mga kaklase na nagsasalitan ng *Sambal* na katutubo nilang wika at Tagalog lang kapag Tagalog ang kausap tulad ko. Siyempre gusto ko rin namang maintindihan sila dahil ayaw kong maulit ang dating sitwasyon na titingnan muna nila ako, mag-uusap sa kanilang wika kasunod ay malumanay akong sasabihan na: *lupa kang bako*. Mangingiti ako. Para akong pinuri e. May lambing ang pagsasabi. Pagkangiti ko, malakas silang magtatawanan at bigla akong iiwan na nagtataka. Huli ko nang malalaman na ang salin pala nito sa Tagalog ay “mukha kang unggoy.”

Pero sigurado akong di ako mukhang unggoy. Dahil “bubuwit” ako.

Matatagpuan sa likurang bahagi ng aming eskuwelahan ang Industrial Arts Building gayundin ang malaking lote na nagsisilbi naming taniman sa asignaturang Agriculture. Barbwire ang nagsisilbing bakod ng eskuwelahan sa bahaging ito. At malapit ang bahaging ito sa Quinabuangan. Maraming araw mula grade 5 hanggang grade 6, lalo na’t hindi Lunes na kailangang dumalo sa Flag Ceremony, nilulusot ko ang bubuwit kong katawan sa pagitan ng bakod na ito. Hahawakan ko ng kaliwang kamay ang bahaging itaas ng barbwire (iiwasan siyempre ang matutulis na bahagi) at iaangat ito ng mataas para maipasok agad ang aking kaliwang paa kasunod ang aking ulo. Itutulak naman ng aking kanang kamay ang ibabang bahagi ng barbwire para maisunod ang bandang kanan ng aking katawan hangang mailusot ko ang kanang paa at presto! Nasa loob na ako ng eskuwelahan. Mabilis akong maglalakad para mahabol ang lumalakad nang pila ng aking mga kaklase at saka ako sisingit na parang nanggaling din mula sa assembly bago pumasok sa mga classrooms. Pero na-master ko lang ang paglusot na ganito matapos ang mangilan-ngilan ding pagkasugat muna sa barbwire. Darating din ang isang araw na maninigas at mamumutla ako bago lumusot. Nagmamadali ako noong pumasok dahil huli na akong nagising. At dahil nga saulo na, di ko na tiningnan ang barbwire at bigla ko na lang hinawakan para maiangat na agad. Doon ko mapapansing di bakal ang nahawakan ko. Madulas. Malamig. Ahas! Nagising ang nakapulupot na ahas. Tumitig at naglabas ng dila. Naninigas ako sa takot. Halos madapa-

dapa ako sa panlalambot ng tuhod nang tumakbo na patungo sa gate ng paaralan. Hanggang makapasok ng classroom, namumutla pa rin ako habang pinagtatawanan ng mga kaklase ang itsura ng takot kong mukha. Kahit kailan, ahas ang kinatatakutan ng bubuwit.

Gusto ko ang kumanta ng Lupang Hinirang at bigkasin ang Panatang Makabayan. Sumama sa ehersisyo sa saliw ng kantang “Mag-exercise Tayo Tuwing Umaga” ni Yoyoy Villame. Kaya tuwing Lunes ko lang gustong dumaan sa main gate ng eskuwelahan para makiisa sa Flag Ceremony. Pero ang tunay na dahilan, tuwing Lunes lang din kasi maayos, mabango at malinis ang damit ko. Ang mga susunod kong isusuot ay tiyak na ipinambahay ko na muna. Pinambahay ko, ipinampasok ko. Wala kasi akong kadamit-damit noon. Madalas pang mabilis ngumiti ang sapatos ko kaya iniiwasan kong masita ng guro ang tsinelas na pinampasok ko. Wala rin naman kasi kaming uniporme sa eskuwelahan noon. Hayskul na ako nang mabalitaan kong may uniporme na ang pinanggalingan kong eskuwelahan noong elementarya. Kaya malaking solusyon talaga ang pagsuot sa barbwire na bakod sa likod ng eskuwelahan tuwing Martes hanggang Biyernes mula sa problema kong mapagtawanan, iwasan at pag-usapan ng mga kaklase. Naiiwasan kong lumiit nang lumiit sa paningin nila sa pamamagitan ng pag-aastang “bubuwit.”

Pero ang solusyon lang talaga sa lahat ng diskriminasyong ito, alam ko, ay ang pagiging mataas. At gagawin ko ito noon sa araw na walang pasok.

Tuwing Sabado ng hapon pupunta ako sa eskuwelahan. Susuot muli sa bakod na barbwire. Mabilis kong tutunguhin ang bahaging playground ng eskuwelahan. Sa gilid ng playground, may isang mataba at mataas na punong mangga na ordinaryong makikita sa maraming bahagi ng Candelaria. Sa ilalim ng puno, minsa’y masusuwertehan kong makapulot ng pwede pang makaing bunga. Pero hindi ang pamumulot ng mangga ang talagang sadya ko. Pambaon ko lang ito na mangunguya sa lugar na talagang gusto kong puntahan: Ang tangke ng tubig sa tabi ng punong mangga. Partikular ang tuktok nito. Titingalain ko muna lagi ang taas ng tangke at matapos huminga ng malalim at humugot ng lakas ng loob ay matatag na kakapit at aapak paakyat sa mga bakal na nakabaon sa poste ng tangke na nagsisilbi nitong hagdan. Pagdating sa itaas nito, dahan-dahan muli na uupo ako sa gilid ng bunganga ng tangke na laging walang takip. Mas pipiliin kong tunghayan agad ang lamang tubig ng tangke at masdan ang mga namumuong lumot sa

paligid ng kalooban nito kesa sa tumingin agad sa lupa sa ibaba ng tangke. Tiyak kasing mararamdaman ko ang pagkalula at takot kapag ito agad ang tiningnan ko. At sa oras na alam kong matatag na ang pagkakaupo ko at di na hinahabol ang aking hininga, dahan-dahan kong ililibot ang pananaw ko mula sa pinakamalapit hanggang sa pinakamalayo na maabot ng aking paningin. At sa puntong ito, mararamdaman ko na ang pagiging mataas ko. Kitang kita ko mula sa tuktok ang kabuuan ng Poblacion ng Candelaria. Sa bandang gitna ang simbahan ng San Vicente Ferrer katabi ng palengke. Sa kaliwa ang munisipyo, sa kanan ang public library at ekstensyon ng eskuwelahan at pinagigitnaan sila ng aming malaking plaza. Pati ang mga monumento ni Rizal at isang agila na alaala naman ng mga sundalo ng bayan na nagpakabayani sa mga nakaraang digmaan. Sa likod ng simbahan matatanaw ko ang mga magagandang kabahayan ng Sitio Tambo pati na ang mga nakabilad na palay sa mga daan nito. Sa kanan ang mga kabahayan ng Barangay Panayunan kasama na ang mga daan patungo sa Barangay Libertador na katatagpuan ng karagatan ng Candelaria. At siyempre pa, sa kaliwa, ang malaking bahagi ng Quinabuangan pati na ang bukid nito.

Sa mga ganitong pagkakataon, akin ang lahat ng matanaw ko. Akin ang maganda at malaking bahay na 'yon. Akin ang mga sasakyan na 'yon. Akin ang mga nakabilad na palay na 'yon pati na ang mga kalabaw sa bukid. Akin ang buong bayan. Ako ang kanyang panginoon. Kaya kong pasukin ang isip ng mga taong naglalakad at nag-uusap na nakikita ko. Di nila alam, pinakikialaman ko na ang kanilang mga buhay mula sa tuktok ng tangke. Ginagawan ko na sila ng kuwento.

Sa tuktok ng tangke, natatakasan ko ang kahirapan. Ang diskriminasyon sa pagiging maliit. Dahil nasa itaas na ako. Mataas na ako.

Pero ang pinakagustong-gusto kong gawin, ang tanawin ang mga di-abot ng aking paningin. Lubos kong dadamahin ang malakas-lakas na hangin na humahaplos sa akin sa tuktok ng tangke. Diretso kong tatanawin ang dulong imahen ng lugar na aking nakikita. Matapos ay pipikit. Unti-unti, makikita ko na sa imahinasyon ko ang itsura ng isang lugar na puro kongkreto, nagsasalubungan ang madaming sasakyan at mga tao. Walang bukid, kalabaw at palay. Makikita ko sa lugar ang kutitap ng maraming ilaw tuwing gabi at maririnig ang maiingay na tugtugin kumpara sa maiingay na kuliglig tuwing gabing sobrang tahimik at dilim. Sa lugar na tinanaw ng aking imahinasyon, isa na akong Piloto, Inhinyero, Doktor, Propesor,

Abogado, mayaman, marangal, kilala. Isa na akong mataas na tao.

Kapag pumipikit na ako sa tuktok ng tangke, nangangarap na akong bumalik na sa Maynila. Iniiwan ko na ang Candelaria. Nangangarap na akong kapiling na namin ni Michael ang aming ina. Sa tuktok ng tangke, natatakasan ko rin ang lungkot ng pagiging dayuhan.

Matapos ang isang oras, mapapagod din ako sa pagtanaw at pangangarap. Mararamdaman ko na ang pagkalula. Siyempre pa, mararamdaman ko rin na talagang malungkot ang pag-iisa sa tuktok. Di masaya ang walang kausap. Nakakatakot din isipin na baka malimutan kong nasa itaas ako habang nakapikit, mahipan ng malakas-lakas na hangin at makabitaw sa pagkakapit. Tiyak, hulog!

Dahan-dahan akong bababa sa katotohanan. Na maliit talaga ako at di titingnan na mataas. Magmamadali na akong lulusot muli sa barbwire pabalik sa bahay namin sa Quinabuangan dahil ako ang nakatokang magsaing para sa hapunan. Mamumulot pa ako ng mga kahoy na ipampaparingas sa kalan. Pero patuloy din naman akong aasam habang lumalakad pauwi na sana dumating agad ang araw na kilalanin at tanggapin din ako ng mga kklase na di ko na kailangan pang umakyat ng tangke at mangarap makabalik ng Maynila.

Dumating ang araw na ito dahil matutuklasan ng klase na marunong pala akong kumanta at tumula. Sa loob ng klase, dala ng paghahangad na makilala, ilalabas ko ang mga dati'y kinahihiyang ilabas na mga talentong ito. May mga pagkakataong pipiliin ako ng ilang guro para ilaban sa kantahan at declamation contest. Magkakaroon ako ng matatalik na kaibigan na nahilig makinig sa mga gawa-gawa kong kuwento habang kami'y nagbubunot ng damo sa gilid ng mga tanim naming kamote o petsay. Isang araw, dahil sa magiging palasagot ako sa mga tanong tungkol sa kasaysayan ng bansa, pipiliin ako ng aking guro sa Araling Panlipunan na lumaban naman sa isang pang-distritong Quiz Bee. Makukuha ko ang pagiging unang puwesto dito. Lalong dadami ang mga kaklaseng kakausap at magiging kaibigan ko. Higit sa lahat, madalas na silang mag-uusap ng Tagalog at lubos ko nang maiintindihan ang wikang *Sambal* dahil may pagkakataong makikipag-usap na rin ako, kahit pasundot-sundot lang, gamit ang wikang ito. Sila na ang sasabihan ko na *Lupa kamong bako halban!* (Mukha kayong unggoy lahat!) matapos ay tatawa ako nang malakas. Gaganti sila ng *Paltak mo!* (Bayag mo!) at halos di na kami matitigil sa pagtatawanan.

Nang dumating ang araw na inaasam kong makilala at wag maliitin, huli ko na ring mapapansin na di na pala ako umaakyat sa tangke. Ang mga pangarap ko balang-araw ay naikukuwento ko na sa ibaba ng tangke. Sa piling ng aking mga kaklase. Di na ako mag-isang nakakaalam lamang nito. At sila rin, magkukuwento naman ng kanilang mga pangarap ng pagiging mataas at kilala balang araw. Sa loob man o labas ng Candelaria.

Isang hapon, nagtapos kaming lahat sa elementarya. May karangalan man ang iba at marami ang wala, nagdesisyon kaming bago maghiwa-hiwalay ay sasakyan namin ang lahat ng rides ng peryahan na nakapuwesto sa plaza bilang selebrasyon. Despedida na rin ito ng mga lilipat na ng eskuwelahan sa High School. Ang iba ay sa Olongapo mag-aaral, ang iba naman ay sa kalapit lalawigan. Ako naman ay babalik na at mag-aaral na sa Maynila.

Habang sakay kami ng paikot-ikot na Caterpillar, natanaw ko ang tuktok ng tangke ng tubig ng aming paaralan. Mabilis at mahigpit kong hinawakan ang medalya na nakasabit sa aking leeg. Napangiti. Alam kong sa oras na 'yon, mas kailangan ko ng ibayong pangangarap para magtagumpay sa Maynila. Higit sa lahat, mas lalakas ang pangangarap na ito kung lagi kong aalalahanin ang mga karanasan ko sa Candelaria, mapait man o matamis. Wala ng tuktok ng tangke akong mauupuan pagdating ng Maynila, alam ko. Pero ayos lang. Kahit maliit pa rin ako nang umalis sa Candelaria, nasa kalooban ko na ang tangke na alam kong patuloy kong aakyatin at uupuan ang tuktok para makatanaw ng mas malayo at malawak para ako tumaas.

THE STUDIO AT 57 GUANCO STREET

Alice M. Sun-Cua

It was the long concrete staircase that I remember most. It led to the second-storey portion of a large building that had the sign “Elite Studio,” at its side, a curving font that was familiar to almost everyone living in Iloilo City during the 60’s. Below, at street level, were a gun store, a small watch repair shop, and a restaurant named Japsie’s. My parents brought me, when I was one-and-a-half years old, to live in that southern city when my father, an Accounting graduate, followed his heart and opened a photographic studio. He was a painter (oil, tempera, watercolor), an essayist (having some of his written works published in local Chinese newspapers), and most of all, a photography enthusiast. He was born in Iloilo City but went back to Xiamen, China for his secondary schooling. Coming back to the Philippines for his college degree, he worked as an accountant for a while in a company in Pulpandan, Negros Occidental, where he met my mother, who had also just finished her BSE studies.

My first memories of that house were navigating those concrete stairs, about 22 of them, each 8 inches high, on my short legs. There was a small landing at the top. Below was a vacant strip of land on which grew tall guava and tamarind trees, and a garlic vine that curled and flowered around the wire mesh that separated the property from the next-door PLDT building. The receiving areas for the studio had upholstered chairs for clients, and two large glass-enclosed store windows containing 11 x 14 colored photographs of lovely women, which we changed from time to time.

Behind the shop counter which we entered through a swinging, waist-high wooden door were corner-to-corner cabinets, with numerous drawers for negatives of the customers' pictures. Each of these negatives was enclosed in thin, glassine envelopes, the clients' names handwritten by my mother at the top center, with their corresponding code numbers. On top of the cabinets were long cardboard boxes of printed photographs, safely tucked into brown paper envelopes, ready to be claimed by customers.

A few steps away, hidden by the store windows, was the studio itself. The center piece was an elevated area at one end, with green damask curtains that could be drawn, and a light blue plywood background. A rectangular seat with curved armrests was at the center, and a few benches (for group pictures) were lined up at the side. At the center too was a Leica camera mounted on sturdy legs, with its pleated, accordion box for focusing. The negatives for this were the 5 x 7 types, inserted into a slot by plastic panels with sliding parts. Standing lights with their spindly, adjustable legs were ready for use, and at one side, attached to the wall was a panel of around fifteen black switches. These controlled the huge array of ceiling lights at the furthest end of the room facing the elevated platform, around three panels of long, white fluorescent lamps, about twenty for each panel. When fully switched on, the lights mimicked sunlight, so that the photos came out looking very natural.

At one end too was a huge wall mirror, about 8 x 10 feet, for the customers to see themselves full length. On each side were two changing rooms, with woven rattan chairs and large, rectangular mirrors. Just off to one side was the make-up room. My father had enrolled in a correspondence course for photography make-up, and he provided the service for free to customers who wished to avail of it. In this room was a stool with adjustable height. I remember my brother and me sitting on it and whirling ourselves around as the threads of the base went around and around.

Beyond the studio were the "dark rooms" where the photographs were processed. These were all done by hand by two employees, Alejandro (who had thirteen children by his first wife) and Vencio (the older one who never stopped coughing). Because the photographic papers were light-sensitive (the silver coat immediately reacted and became useless when hit by light). Alejandro and Vencio worked in semi-darkness, the only illumination coming from a muted red bulb hanging from the ceiling.

The papers were first “exposed” to a mounted machine that projected the negative’s picture into the paper by the flick of a switch. These machines could enlarge and reduce the photos, as one wished. The exposed papers were first dipped in the “Developer Tray” where pictures slowly appeared before my eyes on the previously-blank papers. The dark/light tint of the photographs was manually controlled. A “Stop Bath Tray” came next, where the developing solutions were washed off; then the “Fixer Tray” where the photos were dipped for a while to stabilize the layer of the just-formed photo. The solutions had acetic acid which my father usually made them himself.

There was a basement area in the house where I would accompany him to make all the solutions. We had a ceramic-coated tin pail of distilled water, where we put in the chemicals, often in crystals, the amount of which he first carefully weighed on a small weighing scale with minute iron weights as counterbalance. Upon mixing, the water suddenly turned cold, and beads of condensation would form on the outside layer of the pail. I would be the stirrer, and felt thrilled to be with my father, as he concocted the needed solutions for the studio. The aroma of the solutions differed. But what I can still smell is the acidic whiff, as I slowly stirred the batch with a large, wooden salad spoon.

Our lives revolved around the studio. We lived in quarters just behind it. I studied my lessons on the dining table, and heard our photographers (Ulysses, Mars, and Romulo) shouting, “Ready! One, two, three!” as they squeezed the rubber ball attached to the shutter of the Leica camera. I could hear babies fussing and wailing, as older members of the family cajoled and shushed.

Christmas and graduation were peak times for the studio, and I remember father being up till 3AM helping out in the dark room, a lighted cigarette in his hand. Weddings, too, were happy occasions, as I silently stood to one side and observed the beautiful beaded gowns, colorful ensembles of the entourage, the laughter and the general gaiety. I would later collect the sequins and beads that fell from the gowns, and put them in a special clean Gerber bottle kept especially for these gems.

Because colored pictures were not yet in vogue then, my father used oil pigments to color the large photographs. He would first dip the pictures in a solution to turn them into sepia brown (more akin to skin tones, he

said). When dried, he would first lightly brush the surface with linseed oil, and start his art work. Even today, the smell of linseed oil transports me to those days when I saw him bent over the photos, carefully adding on colors, using brushes, thick and delicate ones, and even cotton balls twirled into pinpoint ends to color the reflections on the eyes.

This was no different from my memory of him in his lighted work bench with so many tools. One time he carefully emptied some fresh eggs, cleaned the shells, and transformed them into “Put-To-Ongs.” (literally, Non-Falling Dolls). Inside the base of the shells he glued round lead washers to stabilize the standing eggs. He then painted faces on the shells’ surfaces, in some he put goatees or beards; and to cover the open ends, he attached magician hats or fluffy cotton hair. One of the most elaborate he had done were those of Chinese Peking Opera faces/masks. These were lined up in my bedroom, and because of the heavy base, they would, when lightly tipped to one side, wobble a bit as if nodding, then return to the center.

Childhood memories then always returned to that photographic studio along Guanco St. just a corner away from J.M. Basa, the main street, which we called Calle Real. In front of us were the Tan-Guzman Jewelry Shop, Agencia de Empeños, I remember the sign, and a small alley that led to the second floor apartment of a Chinese music teacher, Mr. Ng. He played the violin beautifully, and when my mother and I were seated on one of the balconies that looked out into the street, we would hear him play, and the music melded softly into that quiet, tranquil street.

Beside us was a movie theater, the Ever Theater. Our water pump was on the ground level, and accessible only by opening a large trap door on the floor in the studio, hidden at daytime by a green and white linoleum. There was a door near the water pump that led to the Ever Movie Theater next door. Often, maintenance people whom we knew by first names, and had become friends with, would say hello when we opened the door. Although we seldom went, we had *carte blanche* of the theater because we knew the ladies who took the tickets, especially when the movie theater was not yet air-conditioned, and there was only a thick, cloth curtain separating the movie house from the street.

When we transferred to Manila, the studio became a small department store, which eventually was razed to the ground.

A few years back, I returned to our old home, and only the façade and the balcony where we used to sit remained. The whole building had become an empty hulk. The long concrete stairs were still there though, and I could almost smell the ripe guavas and the flowers of the garlic vine, and see myself as a child, slowly climbing up the stairs after school, clutching my school bag. I would enter the studio and my mother would be there at the counter attending to the customers, and she would tell me to have merienda before studying my lessons.

Remembering the details of growing up in Iloilo City not only brings nostalgia, but also a swift pang of sadness. Both my father and mother are gone now, including my younger brother, and I couldn't reminisce about the house in Guanco St. without remembering them. Those were long, beautiful days when we were all together, and I feel grateful for those memories, when getting up in the morning meant a ready breakfast of hot bread, freshly-fried eggs, and barako coffee (my parents never believed children should only drink milk). Somehow by writing them down I relive those days all over, bask in their remembered warmth, listen to the flurry of their voices when family pictures meant bawling babies, teasing laughter.

I finally realize that I've never really left 57 Guanco St. at all—I continually live in it, day by day, climbing its long concrete stairs, greeting my mother from school, collecting the colorful beads left after a wedding shoot. I see my father seated at his lighted drawing board, hunching over a large sepia portrait, coloring in the details. My five-year-old brother laughs aloud as he crosses my path, showing me his new red and white bicycle.

The Contributors

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Romulo Baquiran, Jr. teaches literature and creative writing at the College of Arts and Letters of UP Diliman. He has published three poetry collections – *Mga Tula ng Paglusong* (1992), *Onyx* (2003), and *Kung Nainaisin* (2012), a book of personal essays – *Sagad sa Buto: Hospital Diary at Iba Pang Sanaysay* (UST, 2010), and a book of critical essays and reviews – *Hiwatig: Pagsipat sa mga Tekstong Poetiko at Popular* (UST Publishing House, 2014). He was awarded the SEAWrite Award in 2011 and is a Resident Fellow of the UP institute of Creative Writing.

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Ninotchka Rosca is a transnational Filipina writer, journalist, feminist organizer and political analyst. She has seven books published, including the classic novels *State of War* and *Twice Blessed*, which was given the American Book Award. She has been the recipient of numerous literary and journalism awards, as well as honors for her activism. She is credited with having opened up mainstream publishing in the West to writers of Philippine ancestry. She is based in New York City but travels constantly. She works with the women's organization AF3IRM and helps with a number of other organizations.

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The Editors

Prof. Emeritus **Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo, Ph.D.** is the director of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies. Her latest book, *To Remember to Remember: Reflections on the Literary Memoirs of Filipino Women*, was released by the UST Publishing House in October 2015. The author describes it as a mongrel – part creative nonfiction and part literary commentary. She has published more than 33 books and won numerous literary awards. She has also served as Vice President for Public Affairs of the University of the Philippines System, Director of the UST Publishing House, Director of the UP Press and Director of the UP Institute of Creative Writing. She continues to teach graduate creative writing courses in UST and UP.

Associate Professor John Jack G. Wigley, Ph.D. is the author of two memoirs, *Home of the Ashfall* (UST Publishing House, 2014) and *Falling into the Manhole* (UST Publishing House, 2012), winner of the Best Book (Gawad San Alberto Magno) in the 15th *Dangal ng UST*, and a finalist in the 13th Madrigal-Gonzalez Best First Book Award. He is also the co-author of *In Synch: Edith Tiempo Made Easy* (UST Varsitarian, 2009) and *Philippine Literatures: Texts, Themes, Approaches* (UST Publishing House, 2008). He is the Director of the University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, a literature professor at UST Graduate School, College of Rehabilitation Sciences, and the UST Faculty of Arts and Letters. He is also a Resident Fellow of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies. He has an AB English (Holy Angel University, 1989), an MA Literature (UST, 2004) and a PhD Literature *Cum Laude* (UST, 2012). He served as panelist in the 2013 and 2014 Silliman National Writers and the UST National Writing workshops, and was a writing fellow of the 2013 UP National Writers Workshop. His third book is forthcoming.