



# THE CENTER WILL HOLD

TEN YEARS OF THE REVIVED UST CENTER  
FOR CREATIVE WRITING AND LITERARY STUDIES

TOMÁS

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

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***TOMÁS***  
The Journal of the  
UST Center for Creative Writing  
And Literary Studies

*Special 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue*  
**The Center Will Hold:**  
Ten Years of the Revived  
UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies

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Joselito D. De Los Reyes	John Jack G. Wigley
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# 10 THE CENTER WILL HOLD

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Director of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies

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# INTRODUCTION

by Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo

Director, UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies

The idea for this book came from Ned Parfan.

We had realized that 2022 was the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of our revival as the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies (CCWLS). Ten years is a milestone. It is also a time for revisiting our goals, a time for assessment, a time for taking stock. How far have we come? Have we come far enough, or have we fallen short? What—if anything—should we have done differently? What new directions do we wish to explore?

The general feeling was: while, of course, we may have stumbled a couple of times, for the most part, we had stayed the course. So, a small celebration might be justified. But, given that health protocols were still in place in the university, a party was not an option.

Ned Parfan, who had also come up with the idea for our 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary year celebration—the 5-issue anniversary edition of our literary journal, *Tomás*, to come out on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month in the 5<sup>th</sup> year—once again came up with something new. Why not a book? An anthology to showcase new work by the Resident Fellows of the CCWLS. Each new work, or excerpt thereof, would be accompanied by a short introductory essay explaining the author's artistic process or his/her poetics – which readers who are writers just starting out on their careers might find useful, Jowie De Los Reyes added. The anthology would be edited by the Center's director, who would also write an Introduction, which would include a short history of the Center's 10-year story. And so it came to be.

The idea for the book's title came from Jenny Ortuoste. The "Center" is, of course, our Center, and "will hold" is our promise to hold steady, to stay the course, despite setbacks, the most ominous of which was the deadly pandemic. Since we were short of time and since there was no budget allotted for this project, we decided to make the anthology a special issue of *Tomás*.

I've been looking forward to writing this Introduction, not just because of my confidence in the quality of the works submitted, but because the authors—the CCWLS' Resident Fellows—are an interesting bunch to write about.

The most senior among the Fellows has just turned 60; the youngest is in his 20s. Like many artists, they are eccentrics. Some are super-extroverted, and others are almost reclusive. A couple are competitive workaholics, and more than a couple are laid-back bohemians. All are collectors of books, but one has so many that he has had to move some of them into the office to make room for himself in his home. One has practically memorized the Bible "from Genesis to the Apocalypse." Another is an ardent follower of astrology. And a third has been visited by creatures of lower mythology. Almost all can sing and dance. Three have been in theater. Two play the guitar. One makes films. Two are so steeped in pop culture, both local and foreign, that when you mention the title of a film they can tell you the names of the actors who played the main roles, the awards it won, and when. But their closest friend is interested only in Shakespearean drama. And there is this Resident Fellow who, I am convinced, is a "one of." She has two degrees from the University of the Philippines (UP) and one from the Ateneo. But before she turned to teaching she was a "gonzo journalist." She was also the country's first apprentice jockey, married a professional jockey, got her marriage annulled, is a single parent, a cancer survivor, and won the Palanca gold on her first try. Fortunately, all these folks are tolerant of each other, perhaps because they

also all have a sharp sense of humor. And, even more important, they pull together as a team!

We open this Special Anniversary Issue with the poets—"the Cavalry," as Krip Yuson calls them (and with whom, I must admit I agree, albeit somewhat grudgingly).

There is, first, **Paul Alcosoba Castillo**, the youngest of the Center's poets, with his "Ang Pagtula sa mga Larawan, Ang Paglarawan sa mga Tula." Paul has incorporated the introductory essay required by our project with the project excerpt, which is a lyrical and philosophical meditation on photography and poetry written from the point of view of a poet/photographer under the quarantine imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Paul credits the Australian photographer Aaron Chapman for the initial idea behind his own project. Chapman's subjects were simple, mundane objects and familiar places, and the photographs were accompanied by short prose captions. It occurred to Paul that he could do the same thing, but instead of prose captions, he would use poems. Ironically, it was the pandemic which opened this door for Paul. Trapped by the lockdown and its many permutations, he became the poet/photographer.

**Joel M. Toledo** joined the Center only this year, but I have known him from the time when he was an undergraduate student in one of my classes in UP. In those days, he was writing prose. Like Paul, Joel combines his introductory essay with his work-in-progress, which, of course, is a poetry collection. His describes the whole as a "little rumination" on the writing of poetry. It also touches on the reading of poetry. And his point is: "the idea of reading the lines before reading between the lines." In his writing about how he wrote the poem "Muon," which is part of his forthcoming book *Planet Nine*, he describes his poetic intentions and the ways in which he crafted his lines to achieve those intentions. This returns us "to care for craft, a mindfulness

of poetic devices, and a high regard for the oft-underestimated need for claims and images to feed off one another.” This consummate craftsmanship accounts for the precision and elegance of Joel’s own work.

Besides being, like the rest of the Center’s Resident Fellows, both a teacher and a professional writer, **Ned Parfan** is also an administrator. And as deputy director of the UST Publishing House, marketing is part of his job. The wonder of it is that he finds time and space to accommodate poetry. This may account for the nostalgia with which he looks back on the time which he describes, in his introductory essay, “as the happiest days of my life.” His “Shadowboxing in Polyester” is a lyric sequence. And it is a kind of tribute—a “humble homage” is his term for it—to his mentors and fellow-writers who were UST undergraduates with him when he was “a curious and awkward *promdi* determined to learn more about this darned thing called poetry, and surrounded by brilliant friends and eccentric mentors whom I’m still trying to subconsciously impress to this day.” There are certainly no traces of any awkwardness in “Tyger Tyger in the burning bush/Motion-sensor punctuation unclear...” Or in “The skull a cathedral of cantilever and slope/choreographed to spin around the year 1997...” This, surely, is most sophisticated poetizing. I might add that Ned is also a breeder of gumamelas. To date he has already produced more than 30 hybrids

Poet/performance artist **Nerisa del Carmen Guevara**’s contribution to our book is a lyrical poem that is a performance. The poem is titled “Island.” It is divided into stanzas like many poems are, but it is also cut up into sections marked by QR codes. The reader who clicks on them is taken to other pages, or places, which become part of the poem. The “island” of the poem is a picture (or possibly a painting) that “sits on the edge of the page of a brochure/ on the table...” It is also the first step the reader takes when he/she embarks on the magical adventure that is the poem, the latest creation of this woman whose every gesture is transformed into art. Ricci cooks using



vegetables and herbs which she grows herself, brews tea, bakes, and gives some of her concoctions, some of her tea, and exquisite teapots and tea cups as gifts to persons she cherishes.

Fiction is represented, first, by **Augusto Antonio A. Aguila**.

Tots has been a teacher from the moment he began to earn his keep. And he has been connected with a number of schools on different levels. Which perhaps explains why his work-in-progress is a collection of stories set in a college or university. The stories are designed “to give voice to the silenced and oppressed, shed light on matters that often plague academe, examine the dynamics that define the different types of relations that exist in learning institutions,” says Tots in his introductory essay. His chosen method is satire, and in the story he has selected for this anthology, the satire is pretty savage. Another story, which he mentions, the one about the person who “becomes famous (or infamous) for playing the maracas to entertain his audience whenever he delivers a lecture at international conferences” must be even more devastating. But in comparison with some of the stories in his earlier collections, *The Heart of Need* and *Carnival of Hate*, the world of this book does not seem as dark. I recall that, in my Introduction to the latter book, I said that this writer “is able to face the monster without flinching... determined to stare it down.” There is a monster in this new story too, but it is comic/pathetic rather than terrifying. Tots is a collector of books and a compulsive reader who favors the dire and the depressing in fiction. He also has an enormous collection of CDs—pop, jazz, rock, alternative, New Age... you name it!

Our second fictionist, **Jose P. Mojica**, is the youngest of the Center’s Resident Fellows. In his introductory essay, Jose references Arnold van Gennep’s *Rites of Passage* (1909), a seminal work on how we move through life, marking key turning points, and Victor Turner’s *Betwixt and Between: the*

*Liminal Period in Rites of Passage* (1967), which built on Gennepe's book. "The term 'liminality' is used today to describe physical and non-physical spaces," Jose writes. And it is in those spaces that he sets his stories. He is interested in examining how liminality affects character. A staircase figures prominently in the story included in our anthology: "Music at the Hospital." It is probably being also a filmmaker that draws Jose to spaces like stairways, hallways, bridges, etc., and enables him to see in them metaphoric possibilities and potential for drama. This is a quiet little story whose music, like the "faint violin melody coming" from the newborn baby in his protagonist's arms, belies the impact of what is actually happening to the protagonist. Jose also composes music and plays guitar and keyboard.

Our book's largest section is the Creative Nonfiction/Sanaysay Section.

**Mark Anthony Angeles** may well be our most versatile Resident Fellow. He is a writer of short stories, poems, and essays, a literary scholar (e.g., a study on the *dagli*), a translator (e.g., Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* into Filipino), a columnist, an editor... and bilingual to boot. When we first discussed plans for our project, and I went around the table asking everyone about their current writing projects, Mark announced, sheepishly, that what he was working on at present was not a literary project at all but a creative writing textbook. And I said: That's fine. We professional writers write many things. In his "Teteksbuk-Teksbuk": O, "Mag-Textbook Ay Di Biro," Mark describes the process of how he somehow became part of the country's enormous textbook industry. The essay is both extremely informative and disarmingly humorous. I must add that I did not expect it to end as it did. But spoilers are not allowed, so we'll leave it at that.

**John Jack G. Wigley's** work-in-progress is a collection of travel pieces set in 15 different countries. His introductory essay is almost an overview of contemporary Philippine nonfiction, from Jimmy Abad to Jessica Zafra.

And in the title of his essay, “Liwaliw: Mga Lakbay-Sanaysay at Lakbay-Alaala” he tips his hat to my distinction between “travel essays” and “travel memoirs” (in some of my later travel writings). Jack’s “Arriba, Viva Mexico!” is a splendid example of his brand of travel writing. The persona has such disarming candor and self-deprecating humor that the reader is immediately won over and readily accompanies him from adventure to adventure to misadventure. The persona is charmed by things Mexican (the colorful pink, blue, and orange buildings, such a happy contrast to the dull greys and white on the other side of the border); with Mexican music, dances, food; and with the Mexican people, whom he finds to be as cheerful, noisy, and open about their emotions as Pinoys are, and whose history of colonization by Spaniards he strongly empathizes with. The narrative’s ending is a remarkable *tour de force* and one which I didn’t expect. Jack manages to turn a really distressing situation into a hilarious one while sustaining its narrative pace and the narrative voice of his optimistic, enthusiastic, slightly naïve narrator.

Joselito D. De Los Reyes’ provocative essay, “Nakakatawa Dapat Si Rizal,” is both a lesson in how humor works in fiction—in effect, a description of his own poetics—and a humorous essay on Jose Rizal’s humor as manifested in his *Noli Me Tangere*. The essay opens with an example of Jowie’s trademark jokes—his giving up on his dream of becoming Rizal because it was obviously impossible, in the absence of a brother who could pay for a trip to Spain; and deciding instead to become Piolo Pascual, “at mukhang natupad ko naman ito kahit papaano.” There are other instances of his comedic perspective in the essay, such as the predilection of teachers in high school for giving their pupils lists of difficult words to use in sentences, and the bias teachers, both in high school and in college, have for “*pagtatanghal*,” during which students have to act out scenes from Rizal’s novels, with hilarious results wholly unintended by both students and teachers. But the substance of Jowie’s essay is a serious matter. He takes off

from Virgilio Almario's *Rizal: Nobelista*, which claims that there is abundant humor in Rizal's novels (Almario's lecture notes the numerous "*siste*" or "*chiste*" in the two novels). Jowie makes a strong case for the need to teach Rizal's novels from this perspective in order to humanize the National Hero even more, if one hopes to prevent the further diminution in the number of his readers today.

**Dawn Marfil Burris'** essay is a departure from the mold—a literal departure since it is not about literature but about ceramic pottery. She takes us through her first "Pottery Night," her awkward attempts to work the wheel, and her attempts to "center." Her husband Ben, who suffers from anxiety and agoraphobia, has no trouble at all and successfully produces a plate. "Something unfurls in him when he works with his hands," writes Dawn. She, on the other hand, produces an assortment of little figures, including an owl and a pussycat. And, instead of sending them into the kiln, she wraps up her greenware (raw clay newly formed by hand or the turning of the wheel) in plastic and puts them on her shelf. In the middle of this memory is another one from further back, about another pottery workshop in Sagada, a magical place "where broken hearts go." She writes about learning to "wedge and shape the clay into a ball" and to do "slab work." And, while ruminating on bisque firing, glaze firing, and "surviving the fire without any lingering cracks," and the differences between this art and the art she is more familiar with (writing, of course), Dawn gets an epiphany: "Clay may be more forgiving than language, but in the end, clay has a god and its name is fire." The whole process, then—the making of pottery—is a metaphor for her life so far. This is a tale of searching and finding, a tale about love, surrender, and marriage. Quite simply, creative nonfiction at its best.

"My creative process stems from my poetics in that it must be honest and genuine to the way I live my life. As someone with children to raise and a household to run on my own, most of my time is spent working at things that

have remunerative compensation—teaching, churning out content for the internet, editing documents and psychological case studies. I have very little leisure to write literary or creative works. It happens when it happens.” That is **Jenny Ortuoste** speaking in the essay which introduces her contribution, which is an excerpt from her work-in-progress *Kulturang Karera: the Culture and Communication of Horseracing*. The said work was her Ph.D. dissertation. And her present project is to convert “an academic work into something that will be of interest to others who are not as geeky or nerdy” as she is, and that will “allow me to share as accurately and faithfully as possible the vibrancy and sheer excitement of the world I lived in for over 20 years.” I think it would be no exaggeration to say that Jenny Ortuoste is unique in today’s literary landscape. She comes from a background of writing sports articles and sports broadcasting. “Gonzo journalism” is how she describes her writing style, which is straightforward and tough, but influenced by the likes of Stephen King (who is perhaps best known for his horror fiction) and Jack Kerouac, who “writes the way jazz sounds.”

My own contribution to our anthology belongs to this section. I think both the introductory essay (“The Journal or Diary Excerpt as Literature”) and the excerpt itself (“Re-entry and Renewal: Pages from My Journal”) have self-explanatory titles, so I shall say nothing more about them.

Both Chuckberry Pascual and Ralph Semino Galán have been involved in translation projects of late.

**Chuckberry J. Pascual** first worked on his translation into Filipino of the award-winning first novel by Miguel Syjuco, *Ilustrado*. This was a project which Miguel (whose nickname, coincidentally is also Chuck) endorsed wholeheartedly since he had been hoping from the start that a Filipino translation would come out before the numerous translations into other languages. Then, Chuck went to work on two of my short story

collections, *Ballad of a Lost Season* and *Where Only the Moon Rages*, which he translated as *Kundiman ng Panahong Naiwan* and *Sa Bayan ng Nagngangalit na Buwan*. All three books were published by the UST Publishing House. He followed these up with his translation of my *Catch a Falling Star*, whose English title he decided to retain. This was published by Lampara Books. His present project is my *Tales for a Rainy Night*, which he has translated as *Mga Kuwentong Bayan sa Gabing Maulan*. And the tale he has elected to translate is “The Birthday Gift,” rendered as “Ang Regalo.” In my view, the distinctive quality of Chuck’s work as a translator is his efforts not just to render the work into another language but to situate it in the context of the original writer’s body of work and in the context of Philippine literature in English. The essay accompanying his contribution to this anthology is a fine example of this. He mentions that this book is my first collection of modern fairy tales and that it marked my shift to a non-realist mode which I was to sustain for many years and which he believes anticipated the later growth of speculative fiction. On top of all that, Chuck continues to write fiction (crime and horror, including zombies) and cultural criticism.

**Ralph Semino Galán** is best known for his poetry and criticism in English. He has also written poems in Filipino. But lately, he has turned to translation, first translating poems from Filipino into English and vice versa. For now, he is focusing on translating poems from Cebuano into English. His current project is translating poetry in Cebuano by poets from Mindanao into English. Ralph’s occupation, or preoccupation, with translating literatures from the regions in order to make them accessible to the rest of the country and, eventually, to the rest of the world, has become an advocacy. He is passionate about this advocacy. And from his introductory essay, it would seem that this passion has its roots in his feeling that the language which was his birthright was somehow stolen from him. He grew up hearing it referred to as a “dialect” or “the vernacular,” both of which, he



later realized, were derogatory terms. His own mother, an English teacher educated by the last of the Thomasites, spoke to her children mainly in English. Thus, his focus now is not only on poetry written in Cebuano, but poetry from Mindanao written in Cebuano, which is marginalized even by Cebuanos from Cebu.

The critical essays bring our anthology to a close.

**Ma. Ailil B. Alvarez** is the present director of the UST Publishing House. And her contribution to our anthology is unique. In fact, I know of no other Filipino critic in English today who is working in the field of Catholic criticism. And one wonders why this should be so in a country still predominantly Catholic. I remember taking a class in Modern Catholic Literature in graduate school in UST. Our professor was Clemencia Colayco, a small, frail-looking, white-haired woman. With her, we read the novelists Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, George Bernanos, and the poets Gerald Manley Hopkins, Francis Thompson, Alice Meynell... And we marveled at how she was transformed when she read passages out loud for us, particularly from the poets. She became passionate, she became luminous! Which is why I remember that class to this day. But I don't recall any classes in Catholic literary criticism.

But now there is Ailil Alvarez. As Ailil explains in her introductory essay, her work-in-progress posits "a theory of the sacred as reflected in contemporary women's poetry, and through comparative analysis—paying close attention to the poet's choice of imagery—(her) intention is to show how silence, in its many forms, has helped shape the concerns of the spirituality of the female lyric persona." The excerpt she submitted is a study of the poet Dinah Roma's poetry collection, *Naming the Ruins* (2014), from this perspective. Building on the work of St. Tomas Aquinas, Hugh Pope, Andrew Greely, Joseph Pearce, and others, she focuses on Roma's choice of

subjects, her imagery, even her enjambments, to reveal how “the exploration of the spiritual can only be fulfilled by treading the path of silence,” by which means we might all might “inch closer to the Eternal and to the divine.” I imagine Ailil’s eyes shining as she writes these words.

**Lito B. Zulueta’s** ongoing project is an ambitious one. “The project is more or less to trace the European roots of Philippine literature and culture—the roots being Latin in general, and Spanish in particular.” He is aware that “postcolonial academics... may decry this as Eurocentric and even anti-Filipino.” But he asserts that focusing on the European roots of Philippine culture is a “corrective to the Anglo-American bias of much of our literary taste and scholarship.” His essay, “Romance and its Invention in the Philippines,” ranges over a broad field. It begins with *Florante at Laura*, which he identifies as a “*korido*,” derived from the Mexican “*corrido*,” a ballad that tells a story. It discusses the medieval metrical romances/chivalric romances: “Love and romance are inventions of the medievals...inventions or constructions brought about, at least based on Foucauldian terms, ‘discourses’ or knowledge production about them.” It then looks backward to the ancient folk songs about love, to love in pre-Hispanic times, to ancient sex toys... Then it segues into the arrival of “*amor cortes*” or courtly love, which was the chief influence on *Florante at Laura*, along with the “sentimental novel” of 15<sup>th</sup>-century Spain, which antedated the 18<sup>th</sup>-century sentimental novels like Richardson’s *Pamela* and Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*. And finally, it takes up Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere*—which Lito describes as “a modern evolution in prose of the metrical romances”—and offers a stirring defense of Maria Clara, the woman loved by Crisostomo Ibarra, and derided by many modern critics as weak, clinging, cloistered, shrinking, etc. Lito stands with Nick Joaquin, who believed Maria Clara to be “a very strong girl,” compassionate, courageous, loyal, possessing a mind of her own, and the will to carry out her decisions against all opposition. In short, a fit mate for her lover.

Lito too becomes almost incandescent when speaking of these things.

Hopefully, some of the pages of this special 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of *Tomás*—which the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies offers with our greetings for the season—will light up your holidays too!





*TULA / POETRY*





# KUWADRO'T KONDENADO: ANG PAGTULA SA MGA LARAWAN, ANG PAGLALARAWAN SA MGA TULA

ni Paul Alcoseba Castillo



*Si Paul Alcoseba Castillo ay nagtuturo ng panitikan at malikhaing pagsulat sa UST. Nagtapos siya ng MA Creative Writing at kasalukuyang tinatapos ang doktorado sa Panitikan sa UST. Siya'y mananaliksik ng UST Research Center for Culture, Arts and Humanities (RCCAH). Kinilala na ang mga tula niya sa Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature (2018), Makata ng Taon: Talaang Ginto ng Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (2017, 2018), at Maningning Miclat Poetry Awards (2013). Kasapi siya ng Linangan sa Imahen, Retorika, at Anyo (LIRA) at ng Society of Filipino Film Reviewers. Siya ang awtor ng Walang Iisang Salita na nagwagi sa National Book Awards (2019) at ang Lunas Sa Nabubuong Lubos na parehong inilathala ng UST Publishing House (2018, 2021).*

Nang manalasa ang COVID-19, naging parusa itong ipinataw sa mga mamamayang pinilit makaluwas ngunit naipit sa kani-kanilang mga lugar at maging sa mga nakatira sa lungsod, lalo na nang unang ipatupad ang Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) sa Kalakhang Maynila. Dito nanggagaling ang *Kondenado*, ang kalipunan ng mga tulang aking isinulat batay sa mga larawang kuha sa unang bugso ng kuwarantena. Maaaring may

dalawang kahulugan ang salitang piniling pamagat. Gayunman, bagaman masasabing pareho lang ang pinatutungkulan. ‘Kondenado’ bilang pagpapataw ng sentensiya, at ‘kondenado’ bilang pinabayaan o iniwan. Sa madaling sabi, negatibo ang parehong denotasyon at konotasyon nito: pagpapataw ng parusang pagkakakulong at kawalan ng aksiyon, na maituturing ding pawang parusa na rin sa mga táong makikitang mahuhuling palaboy-laboy libot-libot sa lungsod.

Hindi mapaghihiwalay ang ugnayan ng kambal na kahulugang ito sa konteksto ng pandemya maging sa tema’t paksa ng pagtanaw. Ang pagtanaw ay nagaganap mula sa punto de bista ng isang tila nakakulong (ang potograpo) sa loob ng tahanan sa mga inabandona (mga pinabayaan) sa labas. Dahil dalawahan ang prosesong ito, may posibilidad ding natatanaw ang nasa loob ng mga táong nasa labas, katulad ng binanggit ni John Berger sa kaniyang *Ways of Seeing* na “Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen.” (9) Ang nabubuong larawan at mga tula rito ng retratista at makata ay maaaring may katapat na pananaw mula sa tinututukan ng kamera. Ito ang ilan sa binibigyang boses ng mga tulang isinulat sa koleksiyon ng mga tula.

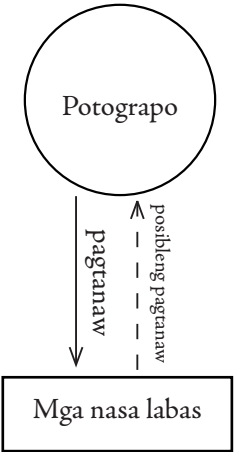


Fig. 1. Mapapansin dito na ang natatanaw gamit ang kamera’y may kakayahan ding ibalik ang pagtanaw hanggang walang balakid sa punto de vista.

Ang idea sa bagong koleksiyon ng mga tulang nakabatay sa mga retratong kuha ko'y naitanim nang mapakinggang magsalita si Aaron Chapman, Australianong potograpo, noong Asia Pacific Writers and Translators conference na ginanap sa Macau, China noong Oktubre 2019. Sa kaniyang panayam, binanggit niya kung paanong sa dami ng kaniyang mga napupuntahang mga lugar dahil sa kaniyang propesyon, nakakukuha siya ng mga larawan ng mga bagay na karaniwan at ng mga paboritong lugar na kaniyang nararating. Sa madaling sabi, mga payak na bagay, at ang mga ito ang tatambalan niya ng mga salita na kalaunan ay naging isang book project na. Bagaman Ingles ang kanyang pagtula sa mga larawan niya, napuna kong nananatiling pagtatangka lang ang ganitong uri ng proyekto. Sa wari ko, mababa ang antas ng panulat. Marahil may kinalaman ito sa pangunahing gawain niya; higit siyang potograpo kaysa manunulat. Baka maituturing pang caption lang ang mga ikinabit niyang mga salita.

Dahil sa panayam na ito, sumagi sa isip ko na maaari ko ring gawin ito, dahil bukod sa pagtula, matagal-tagal na rin akong kumukuha ng mga retrato, bagaman mga landscape at mga bagay lang ang mga subject na pinipili ko. Sa halip na mga simpleng pangungusap o mga caption, tula ang itatambal sa mga larawan. Naiba rin ang konteksto nito pansamantala dahil sa napahabang kalagayang panlipunan dama hanggang ngayon ng bansa. Sa halip na nakapagretrato ano mang sandali at sa kung saan-saan, naging dagdag na elemento ang restriksiyon na dala ng kuwarentena (ECQ) at ng 'new normal' sa paggalaw ng mga tao at serbisyo. Ang pananatili sa iisang lunan at pagtingin sa malayo ang tanging anyo ng pagpasyal na naiwan sa akin.

Sa paraang ito, nagkaroon ng limitasyon sa mga natanaw ko bílang potograpo at ito ang pumilit sa akin na gamitin ang kinaroroonan para hanapin ang anggulo ng mga bagay, tao, at pangyayari sa paligid. Ang ganitong limitasyon ay tinutugunan at pinupunan naman ng pagtula sa

naunang likha ng sining, ang retrato, na nagbibigay liwanag sa detalye at/o konteksto nito. Kumbaga, walang kalayaan ang bawat kuha at ang kalayaang magharaya ng tula ay napagsama rito para makabuo ng bagong kahulugan na hindi maibibigay kung mag-iisa ang magkaibang anyo ng sining.

## **Mga Kuha-rantine: Ang Maynila Bilang Kuwadro**

Sa loob ng unang pagsasara ng Maynila at ng buong bansa nagsimula ang photo project na una kong tinawag na “Kuha-rantine.” Nagkataong isang linggo bago tuluyang ipatupad ang lockdown, habang abala ang lahat sa paglikas para makalabas ng lungsod at makauwi sa kani-kanilang pamilya, sa mga lalawigan, naipagawa ko ang nasira kong DSLR. Isang Nikon D90 model na mahigit isang taong nakatengga sa bahay. May ilang tumugon sa pagtatanong ko sa social media kung ano ang posibleng sira at kanino ito puwedeng dalhin para maipaayos. Lunes iyon, Marso 9, 2020 noong dinala ko ang kamera sa repair shop na suhestiyon ng mga kakilala. Nasaktuhang sinuspinde ng UST ang mga klase kaya maaga akong nakapunta sa may Santa Cruz, Maynila. Iniwan ko ang unit para ipa-diagnose at umuwi na ako.

Lingid sa akin na ang tuwa ko sa isang linggong suspensiyon nang Marsong iyon ang kahuli-hulihang beses na hahakbang ako papasok-palabas ng silid-aralan. Sa araw ding iyon, ipinabatid ng Malacañan na ipapatupad nito ang community quarantine, ang unang bersiyon nito, na tatagal ng isang buwan. Pero sa kulang pitong araw pang palugit para iwan ang lungsod, mula noong Lunes na ianunsiyo ang community quarantine at para paghandaan ang pagsasara ng Maynila, apat na araw lang ang inabot para magparamdam ang mekaniko at sabihing tapos na ang pagkompone sa nasirang piyesa. Kaya agad akong pumunta sa shop para kunin ang kamera.

Mula sa pagawaan, dumayo kami ng misis ko sandali sa isang mall sa Balintawak at doon, tumambad sa amin ang mahahabang pila ng mga namimili sa grocery habang umaalingawngaw ang tinig ng paalalang

huwag kukuha o maghahakot ng sobrang alkohol at tissue sa sound system. Naghapunan lang kami at agad nang sumakay para umuwi sa tinutuluyang paupahang condominium unit ngunit inabot na rin ng dilim. Kinabukasan, kahit tinanghali ng gising, labis na rin ang liwanag pero nagsimula akong pumitik ng ilang eksena sa España na tanaw sa aming palapag, para itala ang mga huling araw ng malubhang trapiko sa lungsod. Ito ang nagsilbing mga test shot ng bagong ayos na kamera. Gayundin, kinukunan ko ang Manila Bay tuwing dapithapon lalo pa’t kasagsagan iyon ng tinatawag na “the best sunset” dahil tag-init na halos noon. Kaya nang magtuloy-tuloy ang mga araw



na walang pasok, para na ring naging napaagang bakasyon ang lockdown. Narito ang “Manila Bay, 2020,” ang unang tula sa koleksiyon:

Sakit ang dilim na kumakalat  
sa mga kalsada sa panig na ito  
ng lungsod. At ganoon lang, guwang  
ang mga gusaling nilisan ang loob  
ng mga kaluluwang nagluwasan. Sa hanggahan  
ng hapunan, nanghihiram tayo  
sa naghihingalong liwanag sa langit,  
sa kabila ng laot, lupa nang makapaghain  
sa gabing sandali lang,  
hindi na panandalian lang.

Gaya ng karamihan sa panahong iyon, na walang mapagkakaabalahan, lalo para sa amin ng misis kong naipit sa lungsod dahil piniling huwag munang umuwi sa takot na baka kami ang maging tagapagdala ng virus, ang pagbubukas ng bintana at pagpapahangin sa balkonahe para kumuha ng larawan ang isang naging libangan ko. Malaking tulong din na ang Manila Bay at bawat dapithapon dito ang view ng aming silid; kumbaga, picture-worthy ang natatanaw namin. Gayunman, ang mga naganap sa street-level ang higit na pumukaw sa sipat at lente ko dahil nagbago ang landscape ng lungsod sa paglipas ng mga araw.

Mula kalagitnaan ng Marso hanggang Hunyo ng taóng iyon, mahigit isang libong retrato ang nakunan mula sa iisang gusali ng studio unit na tinutuluyan namin habang pinahuhupa ang mga kaso ng nagkakasakit. Ang maliit na bahagi ng mga kuhang ito ang ipinaskil sa social media account ko sa ilalim ng album ng “Kuha-rantine,” na sa unang plano’y isang larawan bawat araw lang ang magiging post. Kung minsan pa nga’y wala akong mapiling matinong larawan para sa ibang mga araw. Ngunit dahil may mga araw na talagang extraordinary ang mga natatanaw at nakukunan, may mga araw na higit sa isa ang inilagay ko sa sariling social media account. Sa kabila nito, umabot lang sa 37 ang larawan sa nasabing album na nagsimula lang sa mga takipsilim, na kalaunan, nadagdagan na ng mga retrato ng mga gabi



sa Maynila, mga taong napilitang mamasukang nagbibisikleta papasok at pauwi, mga nagpapalipas ng hapon sa ibabaw ng kani-kanilang mga bubong, at iba pa. Lahat, sinikap na may kinalaman sa sitwasyon ng lungsod at ng mga taong nananatili at mga naglalabas-masok sa Maynila.

Nahinto lang ang pagkuha ko dahil kinailangan na naming iwan ang inuupahan kahit nakakonstrata pa, at bumalik na muna sa bahay ng mga magulang ng asawa ko. Itinaon namin ito sa pagluluwag ng ECQ na naging General Community Quarantine (GCQ) kaya, sinamantala namin ang pag-eempake ng mga mahahalagang gamit, kabilang ang kamerang naglalaman pa ng mga files ng mga kuha at ang mga journal at panulat, upang simulan na sana ang pagtula. Sa kasamaang palad, nabura ang mga larawang nasa Facebook at pitong buwan ang hihintayin bago mahinog ang sentral na idea, bago puluting muli ang panulat habang pinagninilayan ang una sa mga retratong magiging bahagi ng proseso ng *ekphrasis* (ang pagtula sa isang anyo ng sining na biswal). Mula nang iwan namin ang Maynila, Enero 2021 ko na sinimulang tulaan ang mga kuha kong retrato at natapos lang nang Abril ng taong iyon, bagaman may ilan pang kuhang dapat balikan at pinag-iisipan kung paanong tutulaan.

Sa mahabang panahong namagitan sa dalawang gawaing ito, waring nagkaroon ng bagong mga matang tumitingin sa mga imaheng nilikha. Nagsilbing pagbabalik-tanaw din ang pagharap sa bawat larawan at sa blangkong papel sa sandali ng pagtatangkang tumula. Napanumbalik ang mga danas na nadagdagan din ng mga mga impormasyong natutuhan ko at dapat sanay nabatid ko noong mga panahong napiit at naipit kami sa Maynila. Ngunit kahit ako ang potograpo at ang tutula sa mga iyon, hindi naging mabilis ang pagpapalit ng moda ko mula biswal patungong pasulat. Alam kong may ibang anyo ng pagtingin na hihingin sa akin ang pagtula kung ninanais kong magkaroon ng kahawig at kakaibang pagtutumbas sa mga larawan.

## **Paglalarawan ng Tula, Pagtula ng Larawan**

Sa tulong ng pagsasama ng sining biswal, ang mga larawan, at ng panitikan, ang mga tula, ninais na makunan ang lunan na kinalagyan ko sa panahon ng ECQ at ang mga tao roon at pagkatapos ay makapagsulat ng mga tula batay sa nilalaman ng mga ito nang mailahad ang pangkalahatang kondisyon ng tao at ng lungsod habang hinaharap ang lumaganap na pandemya mula sa nakaraang taon. Sa ganang ito, ninais ng pagtula kong harapin ang ilang mga suliranin:

1. Paano maisasalin ang biswal, ang mga retratong naglalaman ng mga tao, mga lugar, at mga pangyayari sa panahon ng pandemya, bílang panitikan, ang mga salita sa loob ng tula at lalo bílang isang kalipunan ng tula?
2. Paano magtatagumpay ang pagdistansiya o paglayo, na ipinatutupad din naman sa panahon ng kuwarentena sa marami pang lugar, bílang proseso ng paglikha nang hindi lumalapit sa subheto ng larawan at ang dalawang beses na nakalayong proseso ng pagtula?
3. Paano makatutulong ang pinagsamang bisa ng dalawang anyo ng sining upang ilahad ang kondisyong ng lipunang Filipino sa pakikipaglaban sa paraan ng pag-iwas, pananatili sa loob ng kani-kanilang lunan, at paglayo sa iba, habang kabilang na dito ang potograpo/makata sa nagtatangkang maging ligtas?

## **Pagtanaw sa Naunang mga Panitikan**

Isa sa mga naunang panitikang posibleng balikan at maituring na tradisyon ng tinangkang pagtula sa mga nakuhang mga retrato ang ilang koleksiyon ng mga tula.

Sa coffeetable book na *Mga Retrato at Rekwerdo* (1984) ni Rio Alma, Pambansang Alagad ng Sining para sa Panitikan, naging katuwang niya ang potograpong si Romeo Gacad. Tinulaan niya ang mga kuha ng buhay-pastoral na black and white upang mahúli ang esensiya ng mga ito sa sariling pagtula. Nakasalansan ang mga ito nang magkatabi sa pahina nang ilathala ito upang ipakita ang matalik na relasyon ng biswal at panitikan.

Ganito rin ang ginawa ng aklat na *Pictures as Poems & Other (Re) Visions* (2012) ni Marne Kilates. Nauna na at napagbalingan ng pansin ng makata ang mga likha ng sining na magkahalong retrato at pinta, saka niya tutulaan. Bukod sa aklat na ito, patuloy pa ring tumutula si Kilates hinggil sa mga larawan sa kasalukuyan, lalo na't isa rin siya sa mga masugid na tagahanga ng sining biswal at mahilig din kumuha ng retrato.

Ang susunod na koleksiyon ay hindi pa nailalathala bílang isang buong aklat pero ang paunang bersiyon ng *Manansala* (2014) ni Enrique Villasis, na mababasa sa website ng Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, at sa chapbook niyang *Pagsasala Kay Manansala* (2022), ay may katulad na paraan ng pagtula, bagaman mga ipinintang obra ng Pambansang Alagad ng Sining sa Pintura para na si Vicente Manansala, noong siya ay nabubuhay pa, ang paksa ng binubuo niyang koleksiyon ng mga tula.

Sa mga sarili kong akda, nagkaroon na ako ng ilang mga indibidwal na tula na gumagamit ng katulad na teknik. Sa aklat ko ng mga tula na *Walang Iisang Salita* (2018), tinulaan ko ang pamosong larawan na *The Vulture and The Little Girl* ni Kevin Carter na nagwagi sa Pulitzer Prize. Kasama rin sa aklat na ito ang akda kong *Pasensiya* na isang ekprastikong tula tungkol sa tatlong retrato ni Arlyn Romualdo na nakasama sa isang eksibit sa Conspiracy Bar. Ang tulang *Retratista* naman ay halaw sa sarili kong kuha noong panahon ng bagyong Pablo sa Hilagang Luzon.

Ngunit kahit nagagabayan ng estilo ng mga naunang pagtulang ekprastiko ang *Kondenado*, naging problematiko pa rin ang pagsusulat dahil baka nalalambungan ako ng prehuwiso ko bilang retratista ng mga tutulaang mga larawan. Nagkaroon ako ng pag-aalinlangan na hindi ko mabigyan ng hustisya ang bawat retrato o di naman kaya'y manatili ang pagkiling ko sa mga kuha.

## Pagkukuwadro sa Sariling Pagtula

Kinailangang ko munang hanapin ang ugnayan ng retrato at ng wika para malapatan ng wastong lente ang pagtutumbas ng tula sa bawat larawan. Isa si Roland Barthes sa may pinakamalawak na paliwanag ukol sa sining ng potograpiya at sa kaniyang *Photographic Image* (1977), ang larawan bilang isang sining na gumagaya'y may dalawang taglay na mensahe: ang denotasyon, ang nilalaman nito, at ang konotasyon, ang paraan kung paanong ang naipapahayag ng lipunan ang naiisip nito hinggil sa nasabing sining. (17)

Bagaman likas nang taglay ng larawan ang konotasyon nito, ang paglalapat ng salita dito ay may natatanging relasyon. Maaaring dati, ang larawan ang nagbibigay-liwanag sa teksto, ngunit nagbabago ito, ani ni Barthes: "Sometimes, however, the text produces (invents) an entirely new signified which is retroactively projected into the image, so much so as to appear denoted there." (27)

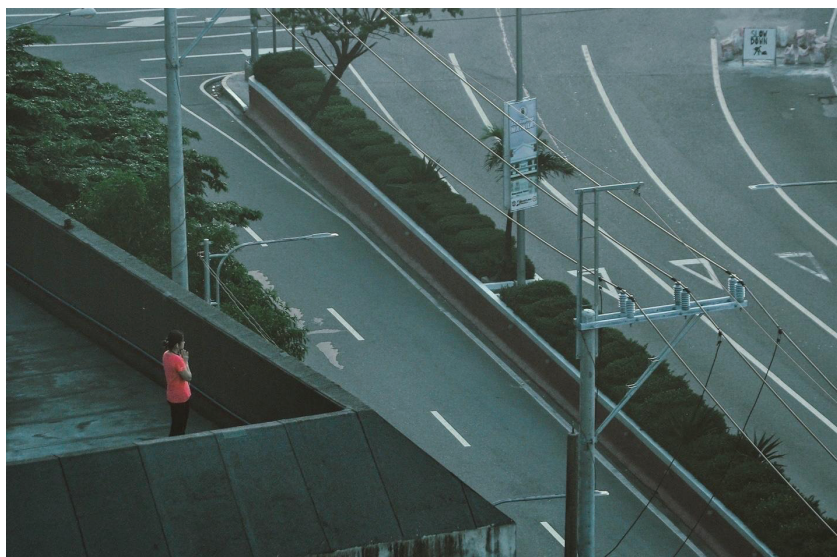
Kung gayon, sa ekphrasis naglalapat ng ibang kahulugan ang wika sa nilalamang denotasyon at lalo sa konotasyon ng larawan. Ganito rin ang paliwanag ni Heffernan nang linawin niya ang modernong depinisyon ng ekphrasis at ang silbi ng wika sa prosesong ito. Sa kaniyang *Ekphrasis and Representation* (1991), may pagkukuwentong nagaganap dito na hindi nahihinto lang sa paglalarawan sa espasyo sa loob ng naturang sining.

Bagkus, pinapalaya ng wika ang mga restriksyon ng tinatawag na graphic art at nagtataglay ang nauna ng naratibo upang pagalawin ang huli. Dagdag niya:

I want to consider one other strand in the ekphrastic tradition: prosopopoeia, or the rhetoric technique of envoicing a silent object. Etymologically, ekphrasis means simply “speaking out” or “telling in full.” (302)

Dahil sa prosesong ito, nagkakaroon ng boses ang walang kakayahang magsalita, iniaatang din sa tula, isang anyo ng paggamit ng wika sa masining at matalinghagang paraan, ang paglalahad ng hindi tuwirang ibinibigay ng mga larawang katumbas.

Gayunman, dahil ang mga kuhanang larawan sa proyekto ay malalayong pagtanaw at mga representasyon ng mga bagay na lumipas na, at ang mga tula ay dalawang ulit nang malayo sa espasyo at panahon ng mga pangyayari sa lungsod noong ECQ, ibinabatay ng pagtula ko rito ang mga pahayag ni Barthes sa *Camera Lucida* (1981) hinggil sa *studium* at *punctum*. Ang *studium*, ayon sa Pranses, ay hiniram niya sa wikang Latin upang ipakahulugan sa interes sa maraming retrato bilang mga patunay ng tinataglay na politika, mga tala ng kasaysayan, o mga bahagi ng kultura para makisálo sa nilalaman ng mga ito. (26) Samakatuwid, ito ang dahilan ng pakikisangkot, ng pagnanasa o paglayo sa piniling ipatatanaw na imahen ng potograpo at sa kaniyang layunin sa pagtala sa sandaling iyon. Sa kabilang panig, ang *punctum* nama’y isang detalyeng sapat ang laki upang mapansin na humihimok para makisimpatiya. (43) Ganito ang nilalaman ng tulang “Meditasyon” hinggil sa larawan ng natanaw kong nagme-meditate sa isang umaga sa katabing gusali malapit sa Welcome Rotonda:



Taimtim siyang nagninilay  
sa pagitan ng Maynila at hinaharap  
ang paglanghap-pagbuga  
sa natitirang hamog ng umaga.  
Dahil dadaloy nang muli  
ang trapiko ng mga inaalala  
sa lansangan ng isip na lagi  
at lagi lang ding binubungkal  
ng bagabag sa tuwing may binabaryl  
sa gabi, ang bulungan ng inip  
sa pilang papalapit sa ayudang  
pinapalitan ng duda, kaluskos  
ng suwelas ng kinakaladkad na  
mga paa ng walang masakyan.  
Bababa siya mulang ibabaw at magbababad  
sa bumagal nang panahong inaabala  
ng bala't panlalabag. Ngunit imumulat  
muna niya ang magkalapat na mga palad  
at mahahanap ang ilahas na landas  
ng mga sandaling nagsasanga-sanga  
ngunit hindi maaari.

Ang “paglayo,” kung gayon, ay pumapasok pagkatapos lumipas ng sandaling itinala ng kamera, ng potograpo, sapagkat nailalahad lang ang punctum kapag wala na ang larawan. Ani Barthes, “the punctum should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it.” (53) Bahagya itong katulad ng estetikong paglayo ng isang manunulat sa paksang kaniyang sinusulat. Ngunit dito, dahil iisa ang makata at retratista, magkakambal ang paghakbang papalayo sa nakunang imahen bago humakbang naman pabalik para magsusulat ng tula. Ang muling pagpasok ng retratista-makata ay ipinaliwanag naman ni Heffernan. Giit niya, sa halip na panandaliang huminto at magnilay malayo sa imahen, ang makata’y binabasa ang biswal na larawan bilang teksto. (299) Dahil ang retrato ay produkto ng mekanikasyon, hinihingi nito ang pagpapalipas sa sandali (maigsi man o mahaba), kaya ang “pagbásang” pinatutungkulan ay may distansiya na rin sa panahon.

Kahit ang paglayo sa espasyo at panahon ang punto ng mga imahen at salita, may kakayahan ang tambalang ito na maipaarok sa tumatanaw at nagbabasá sa larawan at tula ang buong larawang higit pa sa mga kuwadro nito. Kung babalikan si Barthes, ang punctum ang gumagambala sa studium dahil may kakayanan iyon para umangat sa larawan at antigin ang sino mang nakatingin. (27) Gaya sa paglilinaw ni Heffernan sa halimbawa niyang *Ode to a Grecian Urn* ni John Keats, hindi maihihiwalay sa tula ang pagsusuri ng makata sa tinutulaang representasyon. Para sa modernong pagpapakahulugan ng ekphrasis, sa ganitong uri ng tula, nagiging aktuwal ang kakayahan na kuwestiyunin at hamunin ang sining na bibigyang-pugay nito. (309) Sa ganito, bagaman naihiwalay na ng retratista-makata at maging ng tumatanaw-nagbabasá ang kanilang sarili sa sandaling nakunan, may tumitimo sa diwa matapos makita’t mabasa ang dalawang anyo ng sining. Kaugnay nito ang muling-pagpapatanaw sa kalagayang iniwasan, iniwan, o

pinalilipas upang magkaroon ng sariwang pananaw sa kondisyong maaaring ayaw nang balikan at alalahanin pang muli.

## Mga Kuha ng ‘Kondenado’

Naging batayan ng pagbuo ng koleksiyong ito ang mga sinabi patungkol sa potograpiya ni Susan Sontag sa “In Plato’s Cave”, ang isa sa mga matibay na pag-aaral at obserbasyon sa nasabi sa sining na ito. Ayon sa kaniya, “Photography is a new visual code,” (1) kaya ang mga kuha na basehan ng mga tula ay kakailanganing basahin ding maigi para magkaroon ng susi sa pag-unawa bago ito tulaan kahit pa iisang tao lámang ang kukuha ng retrato at ang makata.

Dahil naitatala nga ng kamera ang kahit ano, lalo pa sa panahon na digital na ito, dapat ding balikan ang sinabi niya hinggil sa pagiging ebidensiya ng larawan— na *maire-record* ng may hawak ng kamera ang tala ng kasaysayan at bahagi nito ang pag-aabang sa pagtatapos ng nakatatakot na giyera sa isang sakit na hindi nakikita o naoobserbahan. At ito rin ang ninanais na makunan, ang imbisibol na kalaban, sa maliit na puwang ng viewfinder o ng iskrin ng kamera.

Sa dami ng naghihirap at pinahihirapan pang lalo sa panahong ito, mahalagang pagbatayan din ang kakayahan ng kamera na huwag makialam sa mga nagaganap sa paligid. At ang kataga ni Sontag na “photography is essentially an act of non-intervention and an act of participation” (8) ay dobleng talim na punyal na kakayahan ng retratista at ng makata sa panahong ito ng pagdistansiya sa iba. Mula sa pangangailangang mapanatili ang *focal distance* – ang sapat na layo ng kamera para makunan ang imahen ng maayos – hanggang sa pagsusulat hinggil sa naging retrato sa isang silid malayo’t pagkatapos ng pangyayari, maari talagang maparatangan ang retratista-makata ng kawalang-pakialam. Gayunman, sinisikap pa rin ng mga produkto



ng dalawang sining na ito ang makapagsilbi at makapagpakintal sa isip at puso ng makatatatanaw-babasa.

Kaya sa huli, pinag-iisipan nang malalim ang posibilidad na makunan ang kalungkutan ng tao sa gitna ng krisis na ito dahil, ayon muli kay Sontag, “photography is an elegiac art,” (11) at sa anyo ng sining na ito, mailalahad ang yumayao, tao man o ibang nilalang o pangyayari at nagkakaroon ng dulot ang mga retrato upang mapanatili ang anumang nawala sa piling ng mga táong naiwang nabubuhay sa daigdig.



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# TRYING TO PRAY: NOTES ON CRAFTING POETRY

by Joel M. Toledo



*Joel M. Toledo has authored five books of poetry. His works have appeared in The Iowa Review, The Prairie Schooner, The Washington Square, Quarterly Literary Review Singapore, and Cordite Poetry Review. Toledo was a winner of The Bridport Prize for Poetry and the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards, a recipient of the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Italy Creative Arts Residency in 2011 and 2023, and a fellow for Poetry to the International Writers Program in Iowa. His new collection of poems will come out in 2023.*

*This piece talks about my process in writing a poem, which goes without saying that the thoughts and ideas I'm putting down here are not meant to be prescriptive. There are many approaches to and schools of thought in writing poetry, this simply being a little rumination and my own personal take.*

The poet James Wright once wrote a piece called "Trying to Pray," which struck me as *Ars Poetica* of some sorts about the kind of place one should strive to be in when contemplating poetry. Hereunder is that poem:

## Trying to Pray

This time, I have left my body behind me, crying  
In its dark thorns.  
Still,  
There are good things in this world.  
It is dusk.  
It is the good darkness  
Of women's hands that touch loaves.  
The spirit of a tree begins to move.  
I touch leaves.  
I close my eyes and think of water.

Terse as the poem may be, there are many powerful images conjured therein. The lines read as a meditation on the title and an elaboration on the subject. But there is an attempt to be random in the choice of images that makes them not necessarily align with (nor connect directly with, in a formalistic way) those that come before and those that follow.

It begins with a presentation of an instance, the phrase “this time” connoting a ritualistic repetition of the act and making the reader feel that there is something different about this particular attempt at praying. Interestingly, the initial idea of leaving the body crying and thorns is quickly followed by what one can perceive as an early turn, maneuvering the poem toward the claim of “good things” left in the world. It’s an unusual placement of the poetic turn, which is usually seen toward the end of poems. The images then proceed to the poet’s take on this goodness, beginning with dusk and the hands of women touching loaves to a tree’s spirit, touching leaves, and the last image of thinking of water with the persona’s eyes closed.

Craft-wise, there is a clear attempt to steer away from tired ideas related to the subject matter (thus avoiding the curse of the cliché). The enjambments and line cuts are likewise devoid of symmetry, punctuated by

a plenitude of end-stopped lines. This decision on Wright's part makes the poem dissimilar to the chant-like expectation one may have of a prayer, as though the poet is careful to pause longer between each presented idea and elaboration on the poem's subject. It may also reflect a feeling of hesitation, of uncertainty in the tone, with each difficult imagining and incarnation of this attempt at praying.

The digression above is important because it reminds me that in trying to decipher poetry, I must not impatiently jump into what the poem means. The power of this poem is in its hauntedness, which I believe to be a function of its unpredictability. A predictable poem often fails because the reader anticipates common associations. In other words, this poem succeeds because it is well-crafted, not because of the canopy assault of insight.

In my literature and workshop classes, I always champion the idea of reading the lines before reading between the lines. Many students and other beginning-readers of poetry are daunted enough by poems because they have been lulled into this idea that what matters most in poetry is "getting it." There's an expectation that poetry is by default elusive, that it hides behind its veil some grand epiphany. Many students believe that the only reward of reading poetry is arriving at this insight, and there are those who perpetuate this notion.

As a result, most readers fail to appreciate the crucial role crafting plays in poetry. It is a scholarly approach to dissect poetry line by line or with each train of thought as it progresses, to be sure. But without considering the primacy of language (the poet's only tool), a discussion of a poem becomes no more than a guessing game, nothing but approximations of the poet's intentions. Instead of aspiring for eureka moments, we can focus more on and test the beauty of diction, syntax, utterances, the use or non-use of figurative language, etc. Meaning can wait.

This care for words, this heightening of language, is key to any poet's labor, even as they likewise hope to provide a glimpse of "the good things in the world," or the real (National Artist Dr. G  mino H. Abad often says that the poem is the real).

Of course, it is also important to cultivate a healthy envy of other people's poems. Writing poetry without reading the work of fellow poets leads only to complacency and a sedentary style. Reading James Wright's poem above, I did feel pushed to study it more closely. At some point, "Trying to Pray" has morphed, for me, into both an analogy and a meditation on how difficult it can be to contemplate writing a poem. On both occasions, it's hard to find the words. To break away from prescribed conventions. To not just go through the motion but sound sincere.

The new book I'm hoping to get published soon is called *Planet Nine*, a collection of 50-something poems. The title is taken from a suite I submitted to the *Likhaan Journal* of the University of the Philippines Institute of Creative Writing (ICW) a few years ago, which contained a poem of the same title. After the suite had been (thankfully) accepted, I began turning it into a collection that aligned with this poem's ambition.

The composition of this collection is not exactly random, in that I've been drawn to writing poems about history, science, and the phenomenal of late. The title poem, for example, is about the debate and heated theorizing of recent years in the scientific community about the possibility of a ninth planet orbiting our solar system. The persona in the poem meditates on this presence or lack thereof, while using allusions to Zen principles side by side with concepts from math and science. It's an effort to question the importance of being and being *there*. And, I guess, as a fictitious version of Pablo Neruda in the movie *Il Postino* said, man's obsession with "the simplicity and complexity of things." I've placed the poem at the end of this essay.

The poem I want to talk more about is called “Muon.” This came about after a science documentary I recently saw on a still understudied force that might exist and answer interesting questions we have about how the universe works.

I wrote “Muon” as one longish stanza, reflecting the possible wholeness of it as not just a concept but also a *thing*. It follows the rumination of a persona in some fog-hugged countryside setting. Throughout the poem, Muon becomes a persistent presence and companion for the persona, at times a spirit-like being in the firmament, in other instances alluded to, personified.

I wanted to locate the poem in a pastoral setting and progress the poem’s plot, as it were, by having the persona encounter and “react” to the scenery with musings on the concept of Muon. I also juxtaposed pastoral images with science-related terms that align with the idea. While not really intended as a poetic turn, the poem eventually becomes a plea for an answer relating to the death of the persona’s mother, that maybe “science is needed to move on.” And the futility of such a request. “Muon” ultimately becomes a way to deal with this emotional turmoil, a promising idea that itself doesn’t promise any real recompense.

In trying to craft the poem, I wanted to work with words that half-rhyme, to add musicality to the seeming randomness of images and utterances as the poem moved on. I hoped that this aspiration for rhythm and cadence would guide the reader as they are confronted with the speaker’s thoughts and his own “reading” of his encounters as he hikes up the mountain and comes back to the villa in the poem. In the end, the whisperings of Muon seem to grow faint as the persona finally closes the door. Perhaps this act signified a quiet acceptance. Perhaps this, too, was my own way of trying to pray, for closure.

While the poem could, of course, be read in many other ways, I thought that this is a good occasion to hear about intentions. Were “Muon”

to be discussed somewhere else, I'm sure it would generate various other interpretations. But I also believe that such "meanings" will more or less be proximate if any poem's situation is clear. And that harkens back to care for craft, a mindfulness of poetic devices, and a high regard for the oft-underestimated need for claims and images to feed off one another. In the house that is the poem, whose many rooms I hope the reader would explore. Whose lines I wish they would first read before exiting.



# MUON

*A fifth fundamental force might help explain some of the big puzzles about the Universe that have exercised scientists in recent decades. ~ BBC*

The key to how the world works: Muon.  
After the fog had withdrawn one morning,  
I hiked up the mountain trail to see  
what lay beyond the sentry of cypresses,  
lured onward by the constant cawing  
of crows. And Muon. Happened upon  
an altar in the forest, the Mary's face  
almost gone, as though the cold marble  
gave out from being smashed by atoms,  
the resulting shadows forming Muon.  
Perhaps we are spinning faster  
than we should, too. Round a bend  
and another opening in the earth,  
trapped wind whispering *Muon*  
from within. Again, the mist rolled in,  
shooing the swans into the lake's mouth.  
Perhaps it was gravity that took their voices?  
Nah, it was Muon. How do you hold a moon-  
beam in your arms? Active Muon  
raises his hand, declaring science is needed  
to move on. He began to roll on the ground,  
faster and faster, an orbit unto itself.  
I returned to the villa clutching  
stones. Or were they moon fragments?  
Rhetoric only ruins the discovery.  
There is faint music from the common  
room. Muon's doing. My heart, the voice  
by which my dead mom would call me,  
a shoestring. Any phenomenon to explain  
why I'm here and she's gone. Strange  
Muon sounds coming from the hall  
but that was just me closing the door.

# PLANET NINE

*"In 2016, a pair of astronomers made an exciting announcement: There might be a hidden planet about ten times the size of Earth lurking somewhere in the most distant part of our solar system, waiting to be discovered. They dubbed this hypothetical world 'Planet Nine' and have been looking for it ever since."*

~ Popular Mechanics, 2019

do we hear it or not  
when a tree falls  
in a forest with  
no one to notice it  
did it really fall  
was it even a tree  
an insect flapping  
its wings some bloom

beetles upon beetles  
in a Rorschach test  
in the Mandelbrot set  
randomize all you want  
perhaps we can't see into  
what things mean  
the math behind  
the self's insistence

on replicating itself  
in the arteries dunes  
clouds the howling  
inside a conch shell  
doesn't matter collapsing  
into a black hole  
the pull of an orbit  
if we can't locate it

order chaos  
the loop  
like dreaming of your mother  
years dead  
straight nights  
for no good reason  
other than it's complex  
other than it's simple



# ON THE WRITING OF 'SHADOWBOXING IN POLYESTER'

by Ned Parfan



*Ned Parfan is the author of two collections of poetry, *The Murmur Asylum* (2014) and *Tilt Me and I Bend* (2017), both published by the University of the Philippines Press. He currently serves as the deputy director of the UST Publishing House.*

Because it is a structure of interlinked poems or fragments, the lyric sequence is a form tailor-made for obsessions and obsessive tendencies. It affords the writer the form to mull over the same subject or write, essentially, varieties of the same poem into exhaustion.

I became obsessed with lyric sequences while studying at the UST, as a member of the now-defunct Thomasian Writers Guild (an organization that did not survive the dearth of enrollees during the K-12 transition). Very active student writers and mentors from the original Creative Writing Center headed by Ophelia Alcantara Dimalanta were my immediate influences, and key to the stimuli were the first volumes of *Dapitan*, the annual literary folio of *The Flame*. Back then, submissions were solicited from the best writers we could reach out to, regardless of affiliation. But it was the Thomasian

writers—from Cirilo Bautista to Eric Gamalinda to Nerisa del Carmen Guevara—who wrote the kind of poetry I knew I wanted to write, and I believed many of my contemporaries on campus felt the same.

When the anthology *Crowns and Oranges: Works by Young Philippine Poets* (co-edited by Bautista) came out in 2009, the critic Adam David posited that what set the Thomasians apart from the rest was an excess of imagery. And it wasn't hard to imagine why. Bautista's labyrinthine epics tumbled from one mesh of images to the next, Dimalanta and J. Neil Garcia's elegant collections sprawled out feasts of visual metaphors, and Lourde de Veyra's often hectic verses marched towards the Beat and its anaphoric, bombastic catalogs. This brings me to the excerpts of the sequence I'm presenting here, an attempt at an *homage* to this tradition.

The project is titled "Shadowboxing in Polyester," where all first lines are from de Veyra's *Shadowboxing in Headphones* (2001) and all the last lines are from Dimalanta's *Lady Polyester: Poems Past & Present* (1993). I browsed the two books side by side, picked a line from each to match, and filled in the middle with lines that I thought sounded right. There's also one line in each part dedicated to allusions. Writing my own lines was the easiest thing to not think about. The energy had always been there, and I just had to tap into it. What others refer to as inspiration, I call a state of porosity, and working on this sequence meant picking and choosing from whatever the mind had absorbed at that time.

Younger readers might ask, is there plagiarism involved because of the borrowed lines? No. In fact, there is an entire tradition of poems composed completely of borrowed lines called the *cento*, tracing its origins back to Virgil and Homer. The most comprehensive contemporary example I know of is Simone Muench's *Wolf Centos* (2014) where you can find, in two full pages at the end of the book, the names of the poets she borrowed all her lines from.

I sometimes write poems out of a single word I'm obsessing about, and the seed of this whole thing was the word 'cantilever,' which was not new to me, but it piqued my interest while listening to an architect on Netflix. It grew into the phrase "cathedral of cantilever and slope" which I frankly didn't know where to use. So I decided to write a sequence around it to get rid of the line in my head and free myself from the obsession. If I didn't, it would be haunting me every day. I'd be mouthing the phrase while watering the plants or scribbling it in yet another notebook. "Cathedral of cantilever and slope" as a sound, in the voice of Tom Sturridge or Emma D'Arcy reciting to me late at night while I'm schedule-sending emails for the morning. "Cathedral of cantilever and slope," neither as literal or figurative image, but as a marquee of five words flashing neon above the NLEX trees on my way home.

Aside from scratching an obsessive itch and attempting a humble homage, I also started this project to indulge my unabashed nostalgia for the happiest days of my life, as a Thomasian undergrad. After all, my imaginary audience has always been my younger self—a curious and awkward *promdi* determined to learn more about this darned thing called poetry, and surrounded by brilliant friends and eccentric mentors whom I'm still trying to subconsciously impress to this day.

# SHADOWBOXING IN POLYESTER

1.

Crazy heart humming to the infinite beat  
A bird flapping within the beast  
Static in the wide wild wetlands  
These long longitudinal landscapes  
Traversed by the elected weight  
Of statistical anomalies garnering praises  
For creature feature and lack of lisp  
Tyger Tyger in the burning bush  
Motion-sensor punctuation unclear  
The interminable tapeworm of time unreels

2.

The verdant decibel pounding on God's door  
Eden's exiles shedding original skin  
For secondhand shirts and sexy socks  
Spun from the silk of spiny punks  
Lord you are not worthy to receive me  
In your overpriced parking building  
But only say the word in Spanish for milk  
And the snake will bite the apple crushed  
Butter my heart O three-headed seraphim  
Breaking from the womb of night

3.

Digital display in a desperate dance  
Of cymbals dumbbells dolls and doldrums  
My sensitive splendor suspense surreal  
For the starry frappe slash dildo expert  
Vibrating visibly in the devil's cabinet  
Wearing cowboy boots to twirl in trance  
Hideous daydream I suffered enough  
My little red robin hoodwinked far

Far beyond long and out of control  
Above this cosmic swirl of hands

4.

Knock on me and you will hear a hollow ringing  
The skull a cathedral of cantilever and slope  
Choreographed to spin around the year 1997  
And voice crystal-clear in the voracious void  
Found pestilence to be harbinger of prayer  
You the sweet-talk and the all-too-human poke  
You who knew I skipped lunch for weeks  
To complete my Dragonball action figure set  
Non-vaedictorian foreboding and mourning  
The greatest, saddest songs of our lives

5.

Then you arrive, agitating the curtains  
With a series of sounds only trains can make  
What happens to lotion thrown to the fire  
Oh the unsustainability of it all  
Ate the T-Rex from Noah's ark, medium rare  
Its mate spared for another day  
Calloused promise every ounce a chirp  
Washing machining the pages to hell  
Until the angel's anchored in naked sight  
For dear makeshift life, and scrambling

6.

It covered my nostrils, my throat, my lungs  
Baygon used for bouffant hairspray  
On TV she was on stage she loves the stage  
And apparently there's a blessed hole in the sky  
Where 3,000 more pairs of shoes are waiting  
Cancerous snake who snacks on the cosmos  
Dynastic pageantry over his grave  
Attacking poverty with stationery glitter



And the narrow vote to the steep north  
Her cold macabre way of striking back

7.

Is that blood on your mouthpiece  
You there spitting with volley and heft  
Biblically splitting my brain in two  
What happened to your mother, Jacob and Esau  
Do camels in your desert drink blood now  
Fascist Maria in a parallel apogee  
Bequeathed vernacular at the foot of the false god  
Touch me not you sinkhole feely buster  
And when the parade ends we will all be there  
To bring you roses, bleak black roses

8.

Frequencies of fear getting louder and louder  
Misshapen screams pulled from a whisper  
Do you know they take pictures of our students  
Do you know they use it to threaten the parents  
No wonder little fireflies would rather burn  
No wonder the lessons never seemed moral  
Snap assault paid for by taxpayer's money  
What do you pray for when you're angry  
Rage, rage, against the snuffing out the light  
And no more dark and no more night

(All first lines are from Lourd Ernest H. de Veyra's *Shadowboxing in Headphones* and all last lines are from Ophelia Alcantara Dimalanta's *Lady Polyester: Poems Past & Present*.)



# THE ISLAND

by Nerisa del Carmen Guevara



*Nerisa del Carmen Guevara is an associate professor at UST, where she teaches creative writing. She is the author of *Reaching Destination: Poems and the Search for Home* (UST Publishing House, 2004). She was the recipient of the Carlos Palanca Award for Poetry. Her poetry has been featured in various international publications and anthologies, including *Cha Asian Journal* (Hong Kong, 2018), *The Achieve Of, The Mastery: Filipino Poetry and Verse from English mid-90s to 2016* (Manila, 2018), *The Comstock Review* (New York, 2018), *Tomás literary journal* (Manila, 2018, 2019), and *Voice & Verse Poetry Magazine* (Hong Kong, 2020), among others. Her performance art “Elegies” and “Infinite Gestures,” which she presents as poetry in space, have been exhibited in PERFORMATURA (Manila), SIPA International Art Festival (Philippines), Biennale Jogja Equator V (Indonesia), LAPSody (Helsinki), and Grace Exhibition Space (New York), among others. She was the early career researcher of GlobalGRACE WP4 and the director of an LGBTQIA Virtual Artistic Residency GlobalGRACE Ph AiR for 2021.*



## THE PACIFIC OCEAN

The island sits on the edge of the page of the brochure on the table. The rest of the page is water, the deep end of the shore. The island is only this: coconut tree, shore, woman. The rest is table, vase, and files against the laminate, padded cubicle, and shelf.

The island shimmers under fluorescent (was it just the gloss?). It shimmers on the shore, over the legs of the woman whose toes are perfectly manicured but hidden in the froth. One knee bent, foot pushing against the sand, or else she would be lost to the tide, the undercurrent on the other side of the fold. The front page is everything.

There is a hut on the other side of the fold, made of dried fronds and bamboo. A window blinks its one eye at the world. The world is flat. It says: TAKE A TRIP ABROAD in Sans Serif. The roses in the vase beside the files are as dry as cinnamon and have the lost smell of paper boats. When the brochure opens, the island rises. When it closes, night and a few stars. Crickets are called *kuliglig*. Their improvised trikes are called by the same name.



#### INFINITE GESTURES: DAGAT

The island loves no one but itself but it wants to be loved. For a few dollars a night, some place called Station Three has a long-stay homestay and a dog named Magaling. The dog is not on the brochure. No dogs are allowed on the beach. The woman stretches her body in an infinite manner. Her hair slicked back runs a black river into the waves. Her navel is a salt pool. Tequila body shots available. A contest on Saturdays.

YOUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME. Fan with a chain of ethnic beads dangles its precious history over the room. All rooms with hot and cold shower, mini fridge, and Wi-Fi. Free breakfast of eggs, toast, and local jams.

The woman might come and have breakfast one morning. She might stay for the night; the staff would not mind a guest. When it turns serious, that is another matter. Swim in the salt pool of her navel, the dunes of her buttocks, the coconuts that are her breasts. Her accent is as hard as cowrie shells. Her laugh frightens the dog.

MASSAGE THERAPIST  
AVAILABLE SPECIAL DEAL FOR  
LOVERS. The indigenous Hilot for  
Two uses local volcanic stones and  
runo reeds for feet.



## UNFOLDING THE OCEAN DURING THE PANDEMIC

On the inner fold of the brochure, she sits in a sarong looking through the window of the hut into the beach. The red hyacinth tucked into her hair is as ruddy as her lips. She looks happy to be in the room with you. Maybe this can go somewhere.

### GRILL WEDNESDAYS. MEET BACKPACKERS LIKE YOURSELF:

The world says on the other side of the brochure with a girl with brown hair and blue eyes who gets squeamish about the blood dish that comes with the roasted lemongrass stuffed pig and you like that. After the party, the rough drunk tumble of want, the twang of a state far from any shore. Her navel is clear of sand, her skin burns as red as yours in the sun for too long. You belong. She kicks the dog. Spent, you dream. The city creeps in. Siren sounds swoop like moths over the soft creaking of the kuliglig. The cubicle throbs like a broken heart. A cuboid monster with an ergonomic tongue licks your face.

The cubicle is safe every day.

The fluorescent bulb is warm to the touch but does not burn and shines a steady white light enough to get the job done. The city hums with progress and the same sentiments. The vase casts a long shadow. (the gloss is blinding). The island sits on the edge of the page of the brochure on the table. The number at the back is over the water so blue you can almost hear it.





*KATHA / FICTION*





# THE ACADEME AND ITS WILD THINGS

by Augusto Antonio A. Aguila



*Augusto Antonio A. Aguila is a full professor at UST. He is currently the co-director of the UST CCWLS. He was the executive secretary of the Rector of UST from 2012-2022. He received his Ph.D. in Literature from the UST Graduate School.*

*He teaches English-American Literature, Nobel Prize Winners, European Literature, Philippine Literature in English, Literary Theory & Criticism, and African Literature at the UST Graduate School, and Fiction, Poetics, Literatures of Africa & Middle East, Literatures of Europe, and Writing Television & Online Series at the UST Faculty of Arts and Letters, as well as The Great Books (Classical Literature) at UST Ecclesiastical Faculties.*

*His book *The Heart of Need and Other Stories* was published in 2013. His second book, *Carnival of Hate: Stories* was published in 2016 and won Best Book at the 2017 Dangal ng UST Awards. Both were published by the UST Publishing House. His short stories and literary essays have been published in *Esquire* magazine, *Fast Food Fiction 2* (Anvil), *Mercy and Compassion: Pope Francis Blesses the Philippines* (Anvil), *Philippiniana Sacra*, and *Leap Plus Magazine*.*

*He was awarded Outstanding Alumnus for Humanities by the UST Graduate School. He has also served as a consultant of PS Bank, ABS-CBN, and the Office of the President (2021-2022).*

My first two short story collections, *The Heart of Need and Other Stories* and *Carnival of Hate: Stories* feature stories set in the academe, such as “The Lost Season,” which examines the shallow preoccupations of university professors as seen through the eyes of a young and idealistic academic. Another is “The Shadows or Sorrow” which talks about the oppressive situation found in an educational institution. In “Smokescreen,” a trashy, sex-obsessed teacher who is also known for maligning his colleagues gets what he truly deserves when he is booed on graduation day.

I started teaching when I was only twenty years old. I had the audacity to apply for a teaching position in a school near my place even though I didn’t have a degree in education and hadn’t taken the licensure examination for teachers. I was just brave and daring. I was enrolled in the Master of Arts in English program at UST the year before I applied for this teaching position, so I already had a total of eighteen masteral units at that time. The school directress told me that I did well in my teaching demonstration, but she asked me how I could possibly handle high school students when I didn’t have any background in education. I replied, “Well, ma’am, I’ve always believed that whatever the mind can conceive, the body can achieve,” a quote I read from *Reader’s Digest*. I also firmly believe that you don’t need a degree in education to be able to teach well. Fortunately, I was hired right away after the interview. I taught in that school for six years. I left in 1996 and tried my luck at UST, and fortunately I got hired to teach English and Literature courses at the tertiary level, and there I’ve stayed.

I have been teaching for thirty-two years now, and I can say that the academe is a very interesting space peopled with various types. A colleague once told me that we meet the kindest and the nastiest people in the academe. I totally agree with her. In any educational institution there will always be well-meaning colleagues, good Samaritans, friends for life, fair-weather friends, supportive bosses, power-trippers, slave drivers, megalomaniacs, hypocrites,

predators, stalkers, backbiters, brilliant minds, mediocre minds, poor minds, lazy people, boring people, mean people, the discontented lot, the crazy lot, the strange lot, the rebel with or without a cause lot, the puritanical lot, the immoral lot, and the tired and unhappy lot whose stories – the real and the heavily edited or embellished ones – are the subject of gossip and idle talk among the faculty, administrators, non-academic employees, students, and the alumni.

These are stories I would like to write about in my next collection of short stories, which hopefully will give voice to the silenced and the oppressed, shed light on matters that often plague the academe, examine the dynamics that define the different types of relationships that exist, and satirize the various ironic situations that occur.

Below is the story “Delusion” which examines hubris in the academe. I plan to make this project a collection of ten short stories. The other stories are tentatively titled “Woke Convention,” a story set in the future which tackles the fate of wokes during very uncertain times. Another is “Much Ado About Nothing,” which examines the extreme desire to adopt a system that looks good on paper but in reality does not actually work. The story “Maracas” is about a ridiculous and kitschy teacher who becomes famous (or infamous) for playing maracas to entertain his audience whenever he delivers a lecture at national conferences. “The Mumbler” talks about a quiet non-academic employee who, for some reason, dislikes his new boss. “Resurrection” is speculative fiction about young people, a generation after the Chemical World War, who have to deal with a variety of genitalia, both common and rare, among their age group. “Proof” is about a guidance counselor who learns from a troubled student that she has witnessed a different kind of incest. “The Gatherer” depicts sexual harassment in a school organization, but it’s not the usual story of a teacher/organization adviser preying on a student; it’s the other way around. “Diva” is about a pig-headed and slave-

driving administrator who throws her weight around until she finally meets her match in one big showdown, and the last story is called “Tropes” which is a funny take on teachers embodying different fairy tale archetypes.

# DELUSION

## a short story

“Ladies and gentlemen, let us all welcome the star of the literature department of St. Peter University, Ms. Mely Bakkang.”

Mely could not get out of her mind what Dr. Fonseca, the Chair of the English Department, said when she introduced her as the star of the literature cluster when she called her to deliver her paper on what tissue and toilet paper meant to a woman’s loneliness and solitude.

“I have finally arrived,” she thought, feeling very proud of herself. She just hoped that Dr. Fonseca emphasized where she was earning her degree more instead of where she was teaching because she felt that she was bigger than St. Peter University.

The audience, which was composed of academics and scholars from universities all over the country, looked at Mely. They were clueless about who she was — the star of the literature department of St. Peter University? Many were either looking at or whispering to each other wondering who Mely was and why they had no idea who she was and if she were really the star of some discipline. The other members of the audience just looked at Mely for a few seconds and continued to do what they were doing — reading the conference program or the books they brought with them in case they got bored with what the presenters were going to talk about, chatting with their seatmates about how ridiculous it was to be referred to as “the star” especially if no one in the audience recognized you, and there were those who laughed silently about the silliness of the topic Mely would be presenting. One middle-aged woman uttered the words, “affirmative action.”

But Mely was on cloud nine. For Dr. Fonseca to introduce her that way surprised Mely, but deep inside she knew she deserved it. Dr. Fonseca,

whom Mely fondly called Ma'am Gigi, was, to a certain extent, her mentor. It also helped that she was at Dr. Fonseca's beck and call because Mely regularly did some errands for her such as photocopying pages of books, having reading materials bound at nearby book-binding shops, and buying her snacks from the cafeteria.

After the introduction, the audience applauded perfunctorily. Mely, who was seated in the last row, stood up and walked slowly towards the stage. She went up and made her way to the podium. She loved how the people were looking at her.

"This is my moment!" Mely thought.

When she looked at the audience, she saw a number of her colleagues who secretly made fun of her seated in the front row. Mely knew that they hated her because she was extremely brilliant. They all finished their Ph.Ds at St. Peter University, unlike her who decided to enroll in one of the country's top state universities for her Ph.D.

Dr. Fonseca told her on one occasion that she heard Mely's colleagues refer to her as "Bakekang," a character found in old comic books who was a cross between a simian and a Cro-Magnon man. Mely cried so hard that time when she learned that they were making fun of her. She couldn't tell her husband why she was crying very hard at that time. She was embarrassed to tell him that they called her Bakekang in school and that her husband's surname was very close to the name of the hideous-looking character. She was afraid that he might realize that she indeed looked like Bakekang and would decide to leave her for someone prettier. Was it her big eyes or her bushy eyebrows or her flaring nostrils that resembled two huge caves upfront or her pear-shaped head or her thick and pouty lips that led them to liken her to Bakekang, or was it just her husband's surname, Bakkang, that did it? Her husband always told her that she was beautiful, and she knew that he

had good taste in everything as he prided himself on being a connoisseur of women and wine. He loved to get drunk every now and then.

"They are just envious of me, because they know I'm better than all of them," Mely once said to herself, and she believed it.

"A pleasant morning to everyone; I'm here to present my paper titled "Of Tissues and Toilet Paper: Interrogating a Woman's Loneliness and Solitude." It was during those times when Mely sobbed about being called Bakekang that she saw how important tissue paper and toilet paper were not only in her life but also to women in general. When she mentioned the idea of writing a paper about it to her brother, he said that men used tissues and toilet paper too. He asked Mely what the point of her paper was. "You will never understand because you're a man!" Mely told her brother.

"Well, I use both tissue paper and toilet paper to wipe my ass! What's so intellectual about that? You literature majors make simple things so complicated! Thank God, we engineers build houses and bridges. We don't care about the cultural importance of toilet paper!"

But tissue paper and toilet paper became Mely's only friends when she thought about being called Bakekang. It was during these crying sessions that she realized how dear tissue paper and toilet paper were to her.

"You might not be aware, but there is a reason why most of the time the tissue box is placed in the bedroom, usually on top of a woman's dresser, and why toilet paper is usually placed in the bathroom or restroom. This is why these objects were culturally significant in the past, are in the present, and will continue to be significant in the future – unless, of course, a new kind of wiper gets invented that will replace the ultra-important tissue and toilet paper." Mely began her presentation.

"What!" someone from the audience shouted.

Mely saw her hateful colleagues giggling in their seats. She had always known that new ideas were always frowned upon. She knew she was a trailblazer. Mely was confident that it would take some time for the same audience to realize how important her study was.

"This study is anchored on the fact that women turn to either tissues or toilet paper in times of sorrow and solitude..." Mely continued. Her slide showed a photo of girls using tissues and toilet paper in different ways.

"What about handkerchiefs?" someone from the audience jokingly said.

"I will go to that later..." Mely said to the audience.

"Really now?" the person who asked about handkerchiefs said.

Mely just ignored them. For her, they were nothing but hecklers. She had been christened the "star," and she should behave like one.

"I will be using semiotics and feminism for my theoretical framework. Tissue paper like toilet paper is usually either white or pink, or at times yellow. These are pastel colors often attributed to femininity because they are light colors and soft to the eyes. Manufacturers carefully choose these colors because they think women are generally associated with fragility and weakness. This idea, of course, is opposed by feminists who believe that colors have no gender and that gender also has no color..."

"What the hell is she talking about," a male faculty whispered to his seatmate.

"I actually have no idea. I thought this was a conference. This woman is a joke," his seatmate said.

The people in the mini auditorium started to leave one by one. Mely didn't want them to miss the important parts of her talk, particularly the section where she makes the pronouncement that wipers are actually women's



weapons. It was the high point of her lecture. In her mind, Mely would never be like other paper presenters with nothing to contribute. She remembered the many times she reduced many paper presenters to tears because to her they were stupid. Mely didn't like it when a concerned colleague told her that what she was doing was grandstanding, to draw attention to herself. Mely was deeply offended by this, so she decided not to talk to this colleague anymore.

"Women long for a place of their own, a life of their own, and tissue paper and toilet paper serve not only as companions but as silent confidantes. Though they do not speak, they provide comfort, genuine comfort for women who, in their hours or days of loneliness and solitude, become bearers or witnesses of pain," Mely continued. She looked at the audience and saw that half of the audience had already left.

"The nerve of these people to walk out on my lecture!" Mely thought. She wanted to walk out but she didn't because she knew that real stars do not walk out.

"I end my paper by saying that no matter how insignificant tissue paper and toilet paper may be for many people – sad to say, even for many women – as a feminist and a semiotician, it is my goal to situate both tissue paper and toilet paper as articles that connect women to their pain and suffering, even though they are disposable. In that short period of time when a woman wipes her tears or her splattered mascara, or when she blows her nose using these often neglected objects, she is unable to free herself from the clutches of society's expectations, but also from the shackles that bind her to limitations attributed to her gender. That ends my lecture. Thank you very much." Mely smiled and went to sit on a chair designated for speakers.

"Thank you, Ms.Bakkang. Let's give her a warm round of applause," Dr. Fonseca said. No one in the audience applauded. Mely was sure that the audience who sat through her lecture was blown away.

"We have time for a few questions...maybe two or three before we break for lunch," Dr. Fonseca told the audience.

A man seated in the third row, wearing a navy blue blazer over a white shirt, raised his hand.

"Yes, Dr. Avila. Please approach the microphone."

"Thank you, Dr. Fonseca. Hello, Ms. Bakkang. I was just wondering what was running through your mind when you wrote this paper?"

Mely picked up the microphone from the table and began to answer Mr. Avila's question. "Since I'm studying in the state university and have been handled by the best teachers, I was..."

"I don't care about where you're attempting to earn your degree or who your teachers are!" Dr. Avila snapped. "I'm interested in your state of mind when you wrote this paper!"

"Oh! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! What I mean is...is that..I was actually appalled by the uses of tissue and toilet paper and it is..." Mely stuttered.

"Appalled? Are you sure you're using the right word, because it is very obvious in your presentation that you are putting tissue paper and toilet paper on some sort of pedestal?" Dr. Avila said sarcastically.

"What I mean is...you know...wait, I'm sorry... mean is...was...is that I was...what's the word? Uhh...it's right at the tip of my tongue...what I'm trying to say is that..."

"That you don't know the meaning of 'appalled!' Dr. Avila was savagely reducing Mely to tears.

"Oh! Maybe what Ms. Bakkang is trying to say..." Dr. Fonseca interjected

"I'm not talking to you, Gigi! Okay, let's put it this way, Mely. You have the guts to write a paper that's not only grossly silly, but also pointless!

And you have the nerve to insult our intelligence with your trashy paper!" Dr. Avila continued.

Mely could not believe what she was hearing. She was trying to control herself from crying. Stars don't cry, they shine. Why is this middle-aged man putting her on the spot and hell-bent on humiliating her? Who the hell did he think he was when he only earned his doctorate at St. Peter University? Who was he to challenge her?

"Uh...uh..." Mely didn't know what to say anymore.

"What's this 'uh, uh' you're saying? Next time you present a paper, make sure it's worth our while!" Dr. Avila didn't show any sign of stopping.

"Excuse me...I need to go..." Mely did not finish what she was going to say anymore. She was now openly crying.

The audience's eyes followed her as she rushed to the ladies' room.

Mely turned on the faucet and washed her face. She started to hear the sound of approaching voices and footsteps getting louder. Mely immediately went inside a cubicle and sat on the toilet bowl. She didn't want them to see her in such a sorry state.

"So that's the star!"

"And she actually believed it!"

"It's Dr. Fonseca's fault! She flattered her!"

"Of course she would. She was her errand girl!"

"You're so cruel! Hahaha!"

"Bakekang actually thinks she's better than everyone else!"

"Huh?"

"Oh yes, she does!"

"Avila was so..."

“He did the right thing. That woman is delusional!”

“Serves her right!”

“Sobra naman kayo!”

“I pity her!”

Mely heard all the things they were saying. She covered her mouth with her handkerchief. She didn’t want any of them to know she was there hearing all the cruel words from her colleagues. Mely couldn’t stop crying. She quietly unrolled the toilet paper from its holder, tore off a handful, and wiped her tears that seemed to be falling endlessly.



# BETWIXT: STORIES OF IN-BETWEEN

by Jose P. Mojica



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In his 1909 work *The Rites of Passage*, Arnold van Gennep coined the term *liminality*. Here the idea is explored in the context of ceremonies and argued that an individual or culture passages through life in a three-fold sequential structure: separation, liminality, and incorporation. Building from this, Victor Turner in “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*” (1967) focuses on the rites of transition. According to him, participants are on the “threshold” for they just moved from their community

with fixed structures and are transitioning to a newly formed identity. Turner also noted that people in the liminal space are free from laws, norms, and other rules of behavior, which makes their status ambivalent.

The term “liminality” is used today to describe physical and non-physical spaces. Some examples of physical liminal spaces are airports, hallways, doorways, bridges, and roads since they are not themselves the destination, but rather a space for someone to get to where they wish to be. Non-physical liminal spaces, on the other hand, are more metaphorical, such as loss, divorce, being in a new place, having to start again, ending something, and choosing between decisions; but they operate on the same idea of vacillating between modes.

Due to the powerful and suggestive nature of liminal space, this has interested a lot of creative people, including myself. In fact, it gave me the idea for a short story collection. The short stories will explore liminal space and focus on the question: how does liminality affect characters?

Since the short story collection deals with space, the first thing considered in conceptualizing the sample story, “Music at the Hospital,” was the setting. There were many options in thinking of spaces that refer to in-betweens, but the staircase had the most appeal because it is simple yet evocative. The person taking the stairs is neither on the first floor nor the second floor. When he isn’t moving, he is neither going up nor going down. The space itself has tension.

“Music at the Hospital” opens with Dennis sitting alone on the staircase. Instead of trying to describe and slowly reveal the image of the setting, my attempt is to establish the atmosphere of the place and the uncertainty of the character. The description also intends to show that the space is where the character can have an intimate moment for pondering and feeling—a chance to linger and escape.

As the story progresses, the characters are in different liminal spaces, such as a road, river, tunnel, hallway, or riding a car, bicycle, and motorcycle. Situating the characters in these spaces is important because it can indicate how liminality can have a significant impact on them.

In one of the scenes, Dennis and his wife are on an out-of-town trip. As Dennis drives, his wife tells him about her ideas for their soon-to-be child. They almost get into an accident because it is a conversation he is not ready to have. Another scene to note is when Dennis and his father Nilo are pushing the broken motorcycle on their way home. As they walk along the rugged path, a seemingly endless vacuum, Dennis feels an immense need to confront his father about how he feels about the loss of his mother. It is a quiet scene. The exchange between the characters is short but sincere.

It is argued that liminality sets possibility. If not for the chance of being in those spaces, the confrontation and conversation between characters might not happen. When I was writing the story, the encounters in liminal spaces seemed to flow naturally; whereas if situated in a different place, I might need to write a good setup for the scene to look organic.

My understanding is when the characters are in liminal space, they have no agenda. Liminal space is free, unlike when they are in an actual place where there's often a set task or set action they need to perform. Another lesson I learned as I worked on this project is that characters (or people) in liminal spaces are more emotionally vulnerable because the spaces are ambivalent. That's why when I plot the dramatic scenes in these spaces. They seem to have more weight.

Dealing with the concept of liminal space in this short collection does not only mean dealing with the setting of the story. It means understanding how non-physical liminal space affects the life and behavior of the characters.

The central conflict in the story is the choice Dennis has to make about his father's life – whether he should let him fight for his life or end his suffering caused by the unfortunate accident. The entire time, Dennis thinks it is as if he were suspended in the air, waiting to fall, heavy like a rock or light like a feather. Similar to being in a physical liminal space, Dennis is neither here nor there. And whatever choice he makes, there will certainly be a consequence.

Another non-physical liminal space in the story is Dennis' and Nilo's grief. At a young age, Dennis lost his mother, and Nilo, his wife. The space they are in makes it difficult for both of them to connect, which has affected their relationship as father and son. Who they were as individuals and as a family is now lost. The formation of a new identity (or lack of it), as Turner notes, is a common occurrence when someone enters this threshold.

Being in these kinds of non-physical liminal spaces is never easy. It's like living in darkness. These spaces can feel both empty and full since the possibilities are endless. And this lack of boundaries can be more disorienting. When one enters the threshold, there is heightened affectivity that gives a different kind of suffering and distress since there's no certainty, no assurance. It is a total destabilization of the secure familiar life.

In a traditional narrative structure, the inciting incident is the event that changes the ordinary life of the character. Once the inciting incident happens, the character enters an unfamiliar territory—the threshold—that he must deal with. In the case of Dennis, it is when the doctor tells him about the condition of his father and the decision he has to make.

My attempt in writing this story is to see how these liminal spaces greatly influence the behavior and the situation of the characters. At the end of the story, though Dennis' decision takes him out of his dilemma, it does not take him to a secure place. Instead, he enters a new phase, a new liminal space. This shows that being in a liminal space is not just a single transition in



the participant's life. Rather, it shows how living life is a continuous encounter with liminality.

As mentioned, the short story collection will focus on the question, "How does liminality affect characters?" Although this question is central to the development of the collection, it is not my intention to provide a definite answer. The short stories will be written to continue to investigate and explore the ideas about liminality and liminal space to reach some clarity.

With that said, the act of writing is, in itself, also being in liminal space. When in the process of creating and questioning and testing and revising, the writer is in a constant state of doubt, but also in a constant state of hope that, in the end, things will fall into place.

# MUSIC AT THE HOSPITAL

Dennis sits on the staircase of the fire exit at the hospital. Feeling the coldness of the damp air, he unfurls the jacket on his lap and puts it on. He wishes to hide for a while and find solace. It is during quiet times like this that he hears the music playing from his breath—layers of lulling chords in mid-tempo rhythm.

Above him, on the fourth floor, his wife Mina is in the delivery room about to give birth to their first child. From the day the couple met on a boat headed for one of the islands in Central Visayas, Dennis and Mina have been together for seven years. It took them long to decide to have a child. They wanted to prioritize their business and career. They also wanted to enjoy just being a couple.

At least once a month, they make it a point to set one weekend for travel. Sometimes, they return to the same place, to the same hotel. It's his way of reclaiming feelings or inculcating them deep into every part of himself.

During one of their long drives, on the speedy highway, their pickup truck drove straight into the bushes after Dennis zoned out as Mina detailed her idea for their future child's room. He stepped hard on the brake to avoid hitting a tree.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

Dennis didn't say a word, also shocked by what had happened. He wanted to tell her a joke to make things light, but in that situation, he could only apologize.

"I'm sorry. Let's get coffee at the next stop." He held her arm and gave her a smile so as not to make her feel his doubts. There was pain in him knowing there was a wound still waiting to turn into a scar.

Just a floor below where Dennis is staying, his father, Nilo, is in critical condition in the ICU. A tube punctures his throat, and only the oxygen tank helps him breathe. Hours before Dennis had finally convinced himself that he would tell his father about Mina's pregnancy, Nilo got into an almost fatal motorcycle accident. A truck coming from the opposite direction swerved to overtake a car and side-swept him. He flew away from his motorcycle and when he dropped, snapped a few of his bones. Without a helmet, he wouldn't have survived.

Dennis cannot remember how long it has been since he and his father last had a conversation. But to recall a time isn't his concern now. What he must decide is if he should pull the plug to end his father's suffering.

When the doctor told him the decision he should make, he felt biting coldness under his feet. It was so cold that it numbed his soles until he couldn't stand. It's not always easy to make a choice. And he never has had to decide for his father. Yet now, the life of his father is in his hands.

Dennis, in his solitude on the staircase, continues to hear the ambient waves and pulsating tones from his breath. The sound starts to resonate throughout his entire body. He sits there like a music box. He breathes in deeper, and the trickling harmonies that echo as he heaves begin to change into a rumble.

One dry summer morning during Dennis' childhood, Nilo arranged a trip to explore an area two barangays away from where they reside. The motorcycle sound was already reverberating in their front yard when Dennis was wakened and told to get dressed. He rushed out of bed, and grabbed a bag full of pandesal and a thermos containing coffee to make sure they would have something to eat. From the door rack, he picked the ocean blue cap his father got him on one of his travels. Only then did he realize that it was the first time they were going out on a trip since his mother's passing.

Dennis didn't know much about his father aside from what he observed. Nilo traveled a lot with his dual-sport motorcycle. At home, he had piles of boxes containing papers. Their house was adorned with rocks, pressed leaves, ethnic patterned cloth, pots, bottles, and many other things from his travels. Dennis also didn't know much about his mother. But he often saw her working in front of an old computer, sometimes transcribing Nilo's notes. Although he saw them work, he never heard them talk about their jobs. His parents would rather ask him about his day or the things he learned in school.

When Dennis and Nilo arrived at the area, they stopped near a marking with an unreadable inscription. They passed through thick leaves and went down the steep hill. Nilo was leading the way, making sure they only stepped on large rocks or protruding roots to avoid slipping. When they reached the river, they followed the sound to where the water was gushing out. They found a sizeable concrete opening with its sides crowded with moss and ferns. While taking out things from his bag, Nilo told Dennis to eat some bread. After eating, Nilo handed Dennis the notebook and pen.

"Listen," Nilo said. "Go near the opening of that tunnel. Look around it and see if you will find marks or anything unusual. Anything new. Even if there's nothing, just write your observation in this notebook."

Dennis took off his shoes and walked into the shallow part of the river. The water was cold and clear; he could see the pebbles he was stepping on. Inside the tunnel, he followed his father's orders. After every glance, Dennis scribbled notes.

When Dennis was done, Nilo instructed him to stand on the large rock near the tunnel. Dennis climbed the rock and sat on top. Peeking through an old Kodak camera, Nilo took a snap. The photograph now continues to age quietly between the pages of Dennis' journal, waiting for a glance from anyone.

The sun was almost setting when they agreed to head home. As they traversed the uncemented road, the tire hit a stone and it recoiled on the sprocket that split the chain of the motorcycle. Nilo tried to connect the links, but there was no way to fix it. He asked Dennis to walk a few kilometers ahead and see if there were people in the neighborhood who could lend them some tools.

As Dennis walked in search of help, he saw a dog staring and whining at a lifeless dog on the ground. He thought it would bark at him, but when he kept walking, the dog remained still as though waiting for the other dog to stand up.

Dennis returned from his search and saw his father still trying to fix the chain.

"There's no one," Dennis said.

Nilo stood up and wiped the grease from his hands on his jeans. They had no choice but to push the motorcycle until they found a repair shop.

Nilo was in front, Dennis was pushing from behind. When Dennis looked to the side, almost blinded by the sunlight, he saw the silhouette of a group of bikers floating in the air. His eyes gleamed at the sight of them. The bikers were moving up and down as if riding on tiny hills. He wanted to wave at them but was afraid the motorcycle would drop if he lifted his hand and let his father carry the weight alone. Instead, he continued to watch them while pushing along.

A few kilometers later, Dennis stopped. Nilo looked back at him and asked if he was tired. Dennis said no, then he looked back at the bikers afloat and they were gone. Eyes fixed in the air, Dennis asked his father, "Do you miss Nanay?"

Nilo put down the side stand of the motorcycle, went near Dennis, and crouched down. He said, looking straight at him, “Palagi.” He rubbed Dennis’ earlobes like he used to do to him when he was a kid.

Months after this trip, Dennis noticed his father drifting away from him. The conversations between them became fewer and Nilo stopped going out of the house. Dennis understood that his father was grieving, but he never understood his father’s grief. He felt abandoned, as though he lost not only his mother but also his father. Anger slowly rose in his heart like a wildfire until it consumed him. He decided that his father was weak, and without second thoughts, Dennis left home.

There were no clothes or food in his bag, but he carried a lot of weight. It was pain he bore throughout his adulthood. When the memory of the day he left home would arise in Dennis’ mind, he would think of how his father felt during that time. Remorse would stifle him.

From the staircase, Dennis hears rattling wheels and hurrying footsteps on the hallway. The music from his breath halts and he rises to see what’s happening. Before he opens the door, the sound from the hallway fades out. The quietness is broken by the sob of a child on the floor. When Dennis stands near her, the child looks at him and hugs his leg. He squats down and rubs her earlobes. The nurse, panting, runs to them and picks her up. He returns to the fire exit and takes the stairs up to the fourth floor to check on his wife.

The doctor sees Dennis walking towards the nurses’ station. “You’re just in time. Come, she’s ready.” The doctor hands him the PPEs he must wear before entering the delivery room.

Dennis watches as the nurse wipes off the blood from the plump baby boy. Still perspiring, Mina looks at him and greets him with a great

smile, unaware of the condition of Dennis' father. The nurse hands Mina the baby. With a glimmer in her eye, she says, "We're entering a new life."

The image of the baby's room Mina had described during their long drive returns to Dennis. The walls are painted powder blue and the ceiling is white, adorned with glow-in-the-dark stickers. A large wooden crib stands in the room's center. On one side of the wall are maps and photos of different places. On another side are the alphabet letters and numbers. Feeling the tears wetting his eyelids, Dennis replies, "We are."

Mina lets Dennis have the baby and when he carries him closer to his cheeks, he hears a faint violin melody coming from the baby's breath.

Dennis steps out of the delivery room, his vision suddenly hazy. That's when he remembers the day he hasn't thought about in a while.

The house was quiet when they arrived back from school. No typing, no sound of the printer. Nilo entered their room, and the silence was shattered by his scream. It sounded like a howl. His cries for help were slurred but they sounded painful. Nilo went out of the house carrying his wife and ran to the neighbor. Dennis was left alone at home. When he entered the room, the blood from his mother's mouth was already a stain on the white keyboard.

He stands near the window to catch fresh air and when he looks out, he sees a bicycle floating in the air. It gives him a sense of familiarity, even nostalgia. He climbs out the window and carefully mounts the bike. From a cautious ride, his legs start building up momentum until, without him noticing it, he's already riding fast. He looks to his side, and he sees a group of bikers waving at him. For a while, he keeps spinning, as though he's riding with certainty, as though he's riding to a place of clarity.

Still elated from his ride, Dennis goes down to the second floor where his father stays. The doctor assigned to Nilo is waiting for him.

"How's your wife?" the elderly doctor asks.

"She already gave birth, Doc."

"That's great. Congratulations! A boy?"

"A boy."

The doctor nods, and his face turns serious. He moves closer to Dennis. "I know it's a difficult position to be in," the doctor says as he rests his fingers on Dennis' forearm, "but we really need your decision right now."

Dennis sighs and no music comes out his breath, only a large sound of air. "Can I see him?"

The doctor stands behind, holding the records, but keeps a generous distance. Dennis slowly slides the ICU door open, avoiding making a sound. There's a different weight in his shoes, he almost has to drag his feet across the room. Dennis holds his father's hands and feels those rigid fingers that rubbed his earlobes on the afternoon of their trip. He doesn't say a word, but the music continues to come out of his breath—and from his father's breath too.

People in the hospital begin to hear absorbing mystical chord patterns filling the hallway. But no one speaks to validate if they hear anything, and instead enjoy the music. Between Dennis and his father, finally, there's peace.





*SANAYSAY /  
CREATIVE NONFICTION*



# TETEKSBUK-TEKSBUK: O, MAG-TEXTBOOK AY DI BIRO

ni Mark Anthony Angeles



*Si Mark Anthony Angeles ay isang full-time instructor sa Departamento ng Filipino, Kolehiyo ng Edukasyon ng UST. Natanggap niya ang kaniyang master's degree sa Filipino: Malikhaing Pagsulat mula sa Unibersidad ng Pilipinas-Diliman. Noong 2013, naging writer-in-residence siya ng International Writing Program sa University of Iowa, USA. Isang multi-awarded na makata, kuwentista, at mananaysay, kasama sa mga aklat niya ang Kuwento ng Dalawang Lungsod, isang salin sa Filipino ng A Tale of Two Cities ni Charles Dickens, na inilathala ng Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino at National Commission for Culture and the Arts noong 2018. Kolumnista siya ng Pinoy Weekly, literary editor ng bulatlat.com, at features contributor ng GMA News Online. Noong 2021, inilathala ng University of the Philippines Press ang kaniyang aklat na Ang Huling Emotero, isang koleksiyon ng 144 dagli at isang kritikal na papel na tumalunton sa kasaysayan ng nasabing katutubong anyo sa bansa.*

Mga akdang pampanitikan ang WIP (work-in-progress) ko ATM (at the moment). Pero, at kahit na pinalad na malathala sa ilang academic journal ang aking mga tula, dagli, at sanaysay ngayong taon—nakasungkit pa ng gantimpala sa Makata ng Taon 2022 ng Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino—

wala akong pinagsusunugan ng kilay na alinmang manuskrito ng sariling koleksiyon.

Sabagay, kakalabas lang noong 2021 ng tatlo kong aklat: isang koleksiyon ng mga dagli (*Ang Huling Emotero*) mula sa University of the Philippines Press at dalawang aklat pambata (*Kamot nang Kamot nang Kamot* at *Mga Tsinelas ni Yasher*) mula naman sa Chikiting Books. Hindi rin sinasadyang magkasabay-sabay ang launching ng mga ito sa parehong buwan. Nagkaroon lang talaga ng planetary alignment. Ibang kaso na ang balitang hindi muna inilabas ng Chikiting Books ang printed copies ng batch na kasama ang dalawang aklat pambata ko.

Ang totoo, tumanggap ako ng santambak na labada. Ibig sabihin, tumanggap ako ng maraming raket. Lahat ng ito ay tungkol sa pagsulat ng teksbuk.

Naging bahagi ako ng textbook industry noong 2013. Nagsimula ako sa pagsusulat ng mga literary selection para sa Filipino at English grade school textbook ng isa sa nangungunang kompanya sa kapuluan. Pinagsulat na rin ako ng feature articles para sa Agham Panlipunan at quarterly supplement sa Filipino. Hanggang sa mag-debut ako bilang author nang solo kong ilabas ang *Creative Nonfiction* (CNF) noong 2017. Noong isang taon lumabas ang dalawa kong teksbuk sa Filipino. Co-author ko roon ang subject consultant sa teksbuk ng Filipino 5. Solo author naman ako sa Filipino 6.

Nakursunadahan ata ng mga editor ang content and style ko. Ako na ang sumasalo sa mga proyektong iniinwan ng iba, tinatanggihan ng iba, at inaalas sa kamay ng iba. Naging co-author ako ng teksbuk sa Filipino 10. Ako ang natokahan sa paghabi ng retelling ng mga akdang pampanitikan sa dulo ng junior high school Filipino (*Ibong Adarna*, *Florante at Laura*, *Noli Me Tangere*, at *El Filibusterismo*). Sinalo ko na rin ang ilang gabay para sa guro.

Hindi biro ang magsulat ng teksbuk. Kaming mga umaastang progresibong guro ay binato ng putik ng mga umaastang mas progresibong guro kaysa sa amin. Bakit daw kami nagsusulat ng mga teksbuk para sa K-12 curriculum habang nagtataas ng kamao laban dito. Kulang na lang ay sabihin nilang mga Orocan kami at mga mukhang ₱. Hindi na ako nakapagpigil at sinagot ko sa Facebook ang paratang na iyon noong 2015. Mas malinaw pa sa sikat ng araw ang rason. Hindi kami nagsusulat- para sa K-12. Nagsusulat kami para sa mga estudyanteng naka-enrol sa K-12. Hanapin na lang kako iyong sinabi ni Brecht kung ano ang gagawin sa mga cultural apparatus. Maisip din sana ng nagpasaring na hindi porke textbook writers kami ay ligtas na kami sa mga pasakit na pang-ekonomiya at pampolitika. May mga awtor na inabot na ng isang taon ay hindi pa rin nakukuha ang tseke nila. Buti na lang hindi ko naranasan iyon sa kompanyang nagkomisyon sa akin.

May puntos ang pagteteksbuk para maayudahan ang status ko bilang guro...ngayon. Ngayon na nagtuturo na ako sa kolehiyo. Pero hindi bago sumapit ang 2016, nang unang ni-roll out ang senior high school at nakabalik ako sa pagtuturo. Pumasok ako sa pribado, Katolikong paaralan kung saan ako nagtapos ng hayskul. Pero para sa aking isang malikhaing manunulat, hindi hayag ang gintong ani nito. Walang gantimpala para sa pinakamahusay na teksbuk kada taon. Wala ni readers' choice awards. Ni hindi rin ibinebenta sa mainstream bookstores ang mga kopya ng mga teksbuk na inilalabas ng kompanya ko. Prinsipyo raw ito ng may-ari. Siguro para hindi magmukhang komersiyal/isado ang teksbuk. Wala rin kaming booth sa Manila International Book Fair, kaya walang mahawakang kopya maski ang mga gustong sumilip ng mga pinagpaguran ko.

Bago matapos ang taong ito, ilalabas na ang dalawang teksbuk ko: ang *Pagbasa at Pagsusuri ng Iba't Ibang Teksto Tungo sa Pananaliksik* na solo kong binuno at ang *Essentials of Media and Information Literacy* na sinalo ko ang kalahati. Itinuro ko na sa klase ang una. Muntik namang hindi ko

napirmahan ang kontrata ng ikalawa. May nag-urirat, hindi naman daw ako guro ng IT (Information Technology). Hindi pinansin na Journalism ang kursong tinapos ko sa kolehiyo. Hindi man iyon IT, may component iyong multimedia na hinihingi ng subject. Buti na lang at may tiwala sa kakayahan ko ang editor. At nairaos ko naman nang maayos at wasto.

May mga mabibigat akong natutuhan mula sa dalawang iyon. Una, hindi dapat idepensa ang fair use para sa hindi paghingi ng permiso sa mga kina-copy-paste sa manuskrito. Kailangang humingi ng copyright permission kahit pa nalathala online ang mga akda nila at kahit pa below 20% na bahagi ang kinuha mo. Ikalawa, kahit i-paraphrase mo ang sinipi mong teksto, at kahit may proper citation pa, maaari ka pa ring siluin ng kasong plagiarism sa kategoryang patchwriting. Ito ang pinakamahirap lusutan, lalo na kapag definition of terms, dahil paano mo pa tatalupan at sasangkutsain ang teksto kung itinira mo na ang pinakabatayang rekado?

Noong Marso, kinontak ako ng editor. Pumalakpak ang tenga ko. May iskedyul na ng meeting para sa pagbubuo ko ng *Malikhaing Pagsulat* (MP). Ako ang gumawa ng second edition ng pinakahuling kopya niyon. May mga hindi ako marebisa dahil nakatali sa balangkas ng awtor na gumawa ang gusto kong baguhin. Ngayon, malaya na akong gumawa ng sarili kong balangkas para sa sarili kong content. Isa pa, ilang taon ko nang naituro ang MP bago ako lumipat sa pagtuturo sa kolehiyo.

Pero napatda ako. Sa akin din iaatang ang pagbubuo ng *Creative Writing* (CW). Bukod pa rito, mauuna pa iyong gawin kaysa sa MP.

Tinanggap ko na rin ang proyekto, tatal halos iisa lang ang curriculum guide ng MP at CW. Alin man sa dalawa ay pre-requisite ng CNF para sa Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand ng senior high school.

Ginawa ko ang plano para sa dalawang teksbuk. Sa yugtong ito ng proseso ng paggawa, malaya ang awtor na hatiin sa kung ilang yunit at aralin ang kaniyang teksbuk. Siya rin ang bahalang humati sa mga paksa sa curriculum guide at mag-distribute ng mga iyon sa mga aralin. Ibig sabihin, kung walang lohika ang awtor, babagsak ang kaniyang pundasyon. Hindi pa siya nakakapagsimula sa pagsulat sa Yunit 1, nakaamba nang maligwak ang mga susunod na yunit.

Tinapos ko ang halos kalahati ng CW habang nakabakasyon nang isang buwan sa Baguio. Habang isinusulat ito, tinatapos ko ang unang bahagi ng Yunit 1 ng MP habang nakabakasyon muli nang isang buwan sa Summer Capital.

Maraming isinukli sa akin ang pagsusulat ng teksbuk. Pagtuturo ang naging unang trabaho ko pagkalabas ko sa unibersidad. Nag-handle agad ako ng advisory class at student publication ng grade school department. Hindi ako nakapag-Educ, pero, dahil sa pagteteksbuk, kaya kong ipaliwanag ang revised Bloom's taxonomy, 4Cs of 21st Century Learning, Five Teaching Approaches, Differentiated Instruction, at Six Facets of Understanding. Natuto akong mag-unpack. Natuto akong gumawa ng formative at summative assessments. Naging mas madali na sa akin ang pagkuha at pagtatapos ng Certification in Professional Education ngayong taon.

Naipasok ko rin sa pagteteksbuk ang mga adbokasiya ko. Naigiit kong kailangang ituro ang social media responsibility, e-commerce, at paglaban sa fake news kahit sa mga estudyante sa elementarya. Hindi dapat iniismol ang mga bata, lalo na't digital natives sila. Naigiit kong hindi lang personal essays ang CNF. Sa pagsulat ng CW at pagsusulat ng MP ngayon, naigiit ko ang mga akdang pampanitikan ng mga kababayan nating intelektuwal, lalo na iyong mga hindi binibigyan ng espasyo ng akademya o ineetsapuwera.

Mag-iisang dekada na ako sa pagteteksbuk sa susunod na taon. Gusto ko sanang magsulat ng katumbas ng *On Literature* ni Umberto Eco

o maski *On Literature and Art* ni Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, pero nakatali pa rin ako sa kurikulum. Sabi nga sa industriya, “Pwedeng sumobra, h’wag lang kulang.” Ideolohikal pa rin sa akin ang pagteteksbuk. Mula sa mismong pagkakalas at pagre-rearrange ng curriculum guide, lalo’t maraming bahaging wala sa lohika, hanggang sa pagpili ng tema at paksa. Pana-panahon, may mga estudyante at magulang na nagpapadala ng mensahe sa akin sa social media. Ginamit daw nila o ng anak nila ang tekstbuk ko o nabasa ang literary selection na ako ang nagsulat. Hinihikayat ko silang maging kritikal din, dahil gaya ko, baka maatangan sila ng kaparehong responsabilidad ng paggiya sa mga batang utak ng susunod na henerasyon.





# INTO THE FIRE YOU GO: A TECHNICAL INTRODUCTION

by Dawn Marfil Burris



*Dawn Marfil Burris is the author of Looking for Polaris: A Memoir of Losing and Finding, her first book. Some of her creative nonfiction pieces were included in Tomás, Vol. 2, Issue 1 and Tomás Vol 3, Issue 4. She was a fellow of the 3rd J. Elizalde Navarro National Workshop for Arts Criticism in 2011, UST Creative Writing Workshop in 2012, and 58th University of the Philippines National Writers' Workshop in 2019. She now lives in Virginia, USA, and is currently exploring the art of ceramics.*

There was no project, no plans for a second book. In fact, I think the point of my life for the last two years was to figure out who I could be if I couldn't do what I had been doing for most of my adult life—teach and write.

When I got married in 2021, pandemic notwithstanding, I finally understood the dilemma of older Filipino women writers. How can I still find the time and space to write when I now must learn to share all the time and space with a husband? How can I still maintain who I am when parts of me were already changing? This predicament was exacerbated by the fact

that I married an American and moved to his country, therefore rendering everything about me and all that I had done in my life completely irrelevant.

Every Filipino who has moved to the United States knows this—we go back to zero. This might be a comforting thought for those who sought a better life outside the Philippines, but I was quite happy with mine in Manila. Except for this one tiny detail—I had no one to love who would love me in equal measure.

So, when I found that love, I did what all foolish women have done before me—I gave it all up to be with him. I regret nothing, of course.

And now, I had to rebuild.

I still hated all chores that had to do with cleaning, but I found that I quite liked doing laundry and was actually adept at folding clothes. I learned how to cook beyond the standard adobo and rice. I learned how to bake. I got back into yoga when all that cooking and baking went a little too well. I learned how to start flowers and herbs from seeds during spring but couldn't quite figure out how to keep them alive during the colder months. I learned how to share a desk and a closet. I learned how to feed a cat and clean her litter box. I tried to learn how to like country music. I learned how to adjust to the twelve-hour difference between Virginia and Manila. I studied to get a learner's permit for driving and failed the exam. I bemoaned the loss of jeepneys and tricycles, but I had no time to really dwell on it. I had to relearn how to write a resume and cover letter. I had to speak in English all the time now, too. I learned how to listen to the wind when autumn came, and I learned how to miss the sun in winter.

Through all of this, I couldn't really write. There was too much of life going on, and I couldn't sit still long enough to create something good. Besides, that was the old me. I doubted if anyone would even consider publishing me in the US, so maybe it was time to explore other ways to craft and shape things.

So, I learned pottery.

It was a quiet, solitary art. There was nothing else except clay, fire, water, air, and my imagination. And, of course, my hands.

I spent spring and summer immersed in clay, hand-building one thing after another. When autumn came, I looked at all the ceramic figures on my shelf. I saw an owl that reminded me of my best friend; a witch cat that was modeled after Spooky, our cat; and things made from one of my favorite books, *The Little Prince*, and an old familiar poem, “The Owl and the Pussycat.” Each figure was tied to a memory. I didn’t make some outlandish imagined creature and instead chose to create what I knew. Apparently, I did pottery in the same way I wrote.

For all my efforts to leave everything of me behind, some things managed to stay. I am still a writer. So, I found time to write.

“Into the Fire You Go” was a result of that.

This is a creative nonfiction piece that uses the structure of the process of pottery from greenware, bisque firing, to glaze firing in an effort to present the parallel narratives of my exploration of the world of ceramics and the transformation of my solitary life in Manila to married life in Virginia, USA.

This piece is also a chance to create a crossover between creative nonfiction and hand-building in pottery. My practice in both crafts shows a longing for structure and the inescapable matter of memory.

It also shows a deviation from my previous works that rested greatly on metaphors of space—stars, moons, planets, and black holes. With this, I switched to the four elements of air, water, fire, and earth.

# INTO THE FIRE YOU GO

## I. Greenware

The trouble with centering is that I can never hold my arms and hands steady enough to force the ball of clay into a singular, even structure in the middle of the wheel.

I do well enough with wedging, as the act of smooshing a shapeless lump of clay and later slapping it to form a ball is vaguely similar to making pie dough. I have made blueberry pies, triple berry hand pies, apple pies, and even an imitation of the Filipino Red Ribbon chicken pie. So, when Kim Clarke, a ceramic artist from California with hippie blonde hair who taught at the Academy Center of the Arts in Lynchburg, told us to lift, press, and roll the clay on the table for her class on the basics of pottery in early May of 2022, I felt pretty optimistic about my chances of learning how to throw bowls, plates, mugs, and vases on the pottery wheel.

So, I wedged. My clay was solid, devoid of air bubbles that could make it explode in the kiln if latent moisture ever seeped into them. I slapped it onto the middle of the pottery wheel and smoothed down the sides with my wet hands to make sure it hugged the surface of the wheel flat.

It is when the wheel starts turning that my trouble begins.

Kim reassured us that all potters have their own way of centering and proceeded to show us several different ways. I struggled with all of them. This came as no surprise to me.

A month earlier, Bosco Bae, the mild-mannered ceramic artist-in-residence at the Academy Center of Arts, had shown us how to center for Pottery Night Out in mid-April. My right arm and hand, anchored on my thigh and on the splash pan, should push the clay, while my left hand on top bears down on it. Two forces – horizontal and vertical – ought to command

the clay to where it should be: the center. The turning of the wheel should get rid of protrusions and inconsistencies until the clay, as Bosco says in all his quiet intensity, “looks as if it isn’t moving at all.” Patiently, he guided every single one of us as we centered. Then he talked about its importance.

Before creating anything out of clay, the pottery wheel demands consistency in shape first. What happens on one side must happen on all sides; everything else, all manners of deviations and creations, should flow easier after that. When things aren’t centered, the side that sticks out catches on your fingers, resulting in a misshapen mess that can’t even be passed off as an artful accident. Or worse, the clay could simply fly off your wheel.

So, we center. But for some reason, my hands can never stay where they’re supposed to. It is the clay that puts me in my place. It rocks my arms and elbows in a rhythm that follows the clay’s dips and rises, refusing to conform to the shape of my unreliable hands.

Once, I said to hell with it and proceeded to dip a finger in the middle of the clay to create a cylinder to finally embark on the masterpiece of a ramen bowl in my head. I got as far as making a water pipe before it splattered all over my hands.

But Ben, my husband, has no trouble with centering at all.

He breezed through it on Pottery Night Out and went right on to making a plate while the rest of us struggled with our centers and semi-cylinders. He produced two things that night in April: a plate and a bowl. I made an ugly



Wheel-thrown bowls and plates, glazed in cone 10 by Ben Burris

oversized teacup that was the most angular rounded object I had ever seen. The only reason I was able to get that done was that Bosco had coaxed it a little bit more toward the center for me. The next time we saw projects, they would already be in their finished state – fired twice, colored glaze and all. It was too bad we couldn't be the ones to usher our pieces through the whole process ourselves. Pottery Night Out was designed to be just that, one night only.

It had been our attempt at a date night. With Ben's anxiety and agoraphobia, it was impossible for us to go on typical dates to restaurants and the movies. In fact, it was difficult for him to even leave the house at



Ben and Dawn at the May Carter Pottery Studio, Academy Center of the Arts, Lynchburg, VA

all when we first met in 2018. But the Academy Center of the Arts in Lynchburg, Virginia was a five-minute drive from our house and it had a calm, relaxed air about it that assured him he could step out of the class any time he needed to. We had been vaccinated three times by then and felt safe enough to venture out, especially with a mask policy in place. And with fewer than ten of us there, including the instructor, we were hopeful he could power through his social anxiety and make it through a three-hour pottery workshop.

Well, he did. And so much more. This is why we continue to study pottery well after Pottery Night Out, attending once-a-week classes all through spring, summer, and now through fall.

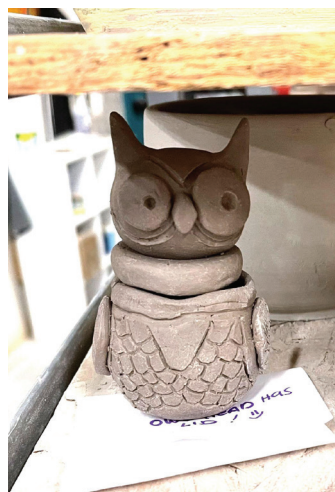
Watching Ben work with clay is like seeing Sisyphus unburden himself of that boulder. Instead of climbing up the hill with it in a thankless task, he takes that massive ball of nerves, uncertainty, fear, and self-doubt, throws it onto a wheel, and turns it into poetry in a manner that Horace would approve of: *dulce et utile*, beautiful and useful. So, something unfurls in him when he works with his hands. I see it when he hacks away at a wall in our house to build me a bookcase and a large desk made from scraps of old wooden floors. I see the same thing in him when he's at the wheel with a lump of clay. There is an innate intelligence in his hands that allows him to shape both wood and clay into whatever he asks them to be – a plate, pot, mug, bowl, flower vase, even a candle holder straight out of *Beauty and the Beast*.

Sometimes I like to imagine that when he's at the wheel, every single tragedy, all the turns in his life that drew him further and further away from who he could have been, simply fades away. He can just be himself, here and now, and he's okay. It's a fantasy I like to indulge in. One of the hardest things I have ever learned about loving someone with anxiety and bouts of depression is that nothing can fix it. Nothing – not pills, not therapy, not even my love – can fix it and make it go away completely. The most they can do is keep it at bay.

And with every turn of his wheel, Ben becomes Ben, uninterrupted, as his clay follows only the shape of his hands.

Meanwhile, I make owls by hand.

The first time I made a wonky owl, I thought of Pat, my perpetually stressed-out best friend back in Manila (who had once sent her boss pictures of angry owls when asked how her work was going), and Spooky, Ben's cantankerous 16-year-old black cat. Every



Stressed Owl (greenware, jewelry holder)  
by Dawn



night, Spooky squeezes herself into the cave of Ben's arm and chest and stares lovingly at either Ben or the wall. On one autumn night in 2021, with her back to me as she stared at the wall, the little triangle of her ears that flanked the fluff on top of her head fascinated me because she looked like an owl. I reached out and gently traced the soft outline of Spooky's head and ears, and said, "Woot! Woot!"

I offered no explanation, of course. Ben, my husband of about eight months by then and wholly unprepared for my plethora of sound effects, laughed until he choked on his own breath as he struggled to find a reason for my sudden "Woot! Woot!" When I told him that's what an owl sounds like, he argued it was inaccurate. It remains a contentious topic in our house, but that was a good night.

So, when Kim, who was in the middle of making sunflowers, taught us the basics of hand-building with coils and pinch pots, I thought it would be a good idea to make a little owl.

I started with its rotund body, hollowing out a space no more than two fingers wide. I squeezed its walls to around a quarter of an inch in thickness and gently hit the bottom of it against the table to make sure the owl could stand on a flat surface. Next, I made its tiny wings by rolling two small balls of clay, flattening them, and cutting a teardrop shape with the pointed tip swooped out.

The whole process of hand-building seemed vaguely similar to making jimmy jam cookies for me, only this time, instead of using lemon custard or frosting to stick two pieces together, I had to use slip – a muddy combination of water and clay that acts like glue. Kim showed us how to make and use it.

To attach the wings to the body, I used a scoring tool that looked like a witch's miniature metal broom to scour the area of the owl's body where the wings would go and the part of the wings that would be attached



to it. I applied slip to both areas before pressing the wings to the owl's sides. It wouldn't be able to fly, but at least it could easily hold a pair of earrings and two rings inside it.

Then I carved little v's all over the owl's body for its feathers and moved on to make its head for the top cover. It was the part I was most excited about. I thought of Spooky's little triangle ears and spaced them just right on either side of the slightly squished burger bun shape that I had made for the owl's head. Then I thought of Pat's stressed-out owls and flattened two mismatched discs for eyes, one smaller and squintier than the other for an unhinged look. I topped it off with a diamond nose and gouged deep eyebags under its eyes, simultaneously thankful that Pat was no longer as sleepless as her owls since the pandemic had gotten rid of her six-hour commutes from her house to her work.

Carefully cradling it like a new hatchling, I brought my owl over to my shelf marked for greenware. Raw clay, newly formed from hands or the turn of the wheel, is called greenware and they are fragile, soluble things. Time and space have to do their thing to ensure they are bone dry before they are bisque-fired.

Giddy with my first creature, I looked at the twenty-five pounds of clay I had left and wondered what else I could do. As spring rolled into summer, I racked up a greenware menagerie on my shelf at the academy.

I made a mug with the Little Prince on it with his sad little planet with the 44 sunsets and his rose encased in glass. I made bookends designed



The Little Prince, His Rose, and the Planet of 44 Sunsets  
(greenware, mug) by Dawn



The Owl and the Pussycat (greenware, bookends)  
by Dawn

to be the owl and the pussycat who went to sea in a beautiful pea-green boat. I gave the cat its honey and the rings they got married with and placed a guitar on the owl's wings. "The Owl and The Pussycat," a poem by Edward Lear, was a declamation piece I had memorized for English class in grade school. Until now, I still pronounce the first four lines in the same way I was taught to, like a wildly rocking boat above the ocean waves. Then, out of three failed attempts at a flowerpot on the wheel, I made a witch cat and named it Spooky. I used the lumpiest

wedge of clay for the body, the flat one for the head, and the crooked one at the top to catch the wizard hat I made from a slab.

If I hadn't run out of space on my shelf, I could have easily hand-built a clay narrative of my entire life. So, I stopped.



Witch Spooky (greenware, stackable cups) by Dawn

But instead of sending them all into the kiln, I wrapped all my greenware in plastic, spritzing ever so often with water the thinner parts that were drying out faster. Conscious that moisture, burning at 100 degrees Celsius, could so very easily turn to steam and worm its way through air pockets I might have overlooked and explode in the kiln, I was careful to let them all dry slowly. I had no problem with waiting for

them to get bone dry; I could wait a little longer to see my menagerie in its final, mature form.

So, I waited. And waited.

But their wonky eyes staring down at me from my shelf made me feel a little guilty. It almost felt as if they were the ones waiting.

I just didn't want them to explode, that's all.

## II. Bisque Firing

Ruefully, I sometimes attribute Ben's talent at the wheel to his male upper body strength. But I know that even if I did 50 pushups every day for an entire year, I still wouldn't have his capacity for steady stillness at the wheel. And I guess it also doesn't hurt that he had spent a significant amount of time in detention with his high school ceramics teacher.

My only other experience with clay was a one-day workshop with Mansy Abesamis in Sagada, Philippines, famous among mountain climbers for its peaks above a sea of clouds at dawn and also known among karaoke veterans as the place where broken hearts go. Maybe, once upon a broken heart, I had gone there, but by May of 2019, I was already 37 years old, and my heart was most definitely whole and less prone to breakage. In fact, it was so very full.

I had a home in my name at the midpoint between Manila and Quezon City. After moving in and out of 25 apartments in my entire lifetime, it was glorious to finally have a permanent address. I was a tenured university professor. I was halfway through a Ph.D. I had a small group of amazing and talented friends. I was published thrice and riding high on the second reprint of *Looking for Polaris*. I was in a sound and secure two-year relationship with Ben. Oh, and I had yoga, salad, and wine on weekends with Pat to make up for all the Jollibee, McDonald's, the Oomori with Ned, and Romantic Baboy

with Tin during the week! My life was mine and I had filled it with literature and love.

And yet something was still amiss. My hands were filled to the brim but they felt empty. Writing and literature may find form in print, but I couldn't hold them. Not really. Ben was flesh and blood, but he was 12 hours behind and continents away on the east coast of the United States. My hands itched to hold something more real, more concrete, more there, and I thought Mansy's pottery workshop in Sagada could give that to me.

It was 16 hours away from Manila by bus, and I had chosen to travel by night to sleep through the zigzag roads that hugged the mountain on one side and ignore the steep drop into the canyon that lay in wait on the other side. I woke up to a quiet, cold 22-degree Celsius sunrise in Sagada, a welcome change from the sweltering heat of 36-degree mornings in Manila that were rung in by a symphony of jeepneys, tricycles, cars, buses, and trucks.

After a breakfast of garlic rice, eggs, and longganisa, I spent the rest of the morning out on the porch behind Inandako's Bed and Breakfast. I had a book with me, Sandra Martz's *When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple*, but I couldn't take my eyes off the green and silver of the mountain range before me. It was the kind of beauty that quieted the sounds of the city that seemed to be a permanent trill in my head, but it wasn't something I could hold in my hand.

I've had enough of that, I thought. So, I waited for Mansy.

With her full bangs, elf-like features, and slender body in a simple shirt, jeans, and rubber slippers, Mansy took me on a short hike from the Sagada town proper to a long, wooden house that stretched along the side of the mountain. With its flat rooftop overran by moss, Sagada Pottery, which was run by Manang Siegrid, Manang Ardeth, and Mansy's mentor, Manang Tessie, looked like it was getting ready to disappear into the thick

forest of pine trees that towered above and behind it. From a corner of the roof, a soft column of smoke billowed and faded into the mist that settled in the wake of a drizzle. It seemed otherworldly to me, having known only the concrete and smog of the city for most of my life.

Mansy led me to the stone kiln while explaining that the only way they could tell if the temperature had gone high enough to turn bone-dry clay to bisqueware was to place small ceramic cones inside the kiln. Then, they would wait for the small, pointed tip of the cones to bend under the intense heat. Mansy let me peek into a tiny opening in the kiln and sure enough, there the cones were, midway through a curve from the constant, blistering heat.

Over a bottle of bugnay, a sweet fruity wine made from the deep red berries of the Mountain Province of the Philippines, Mansy taught me two things – how to build from a slab and how to pinch a pot. We stayed away from the wooden wheel because I was sure I didn't have the coordination to work the clay with my hands while my feet were in charge of turning the wheel.



Mansy Abesamis in Sagada, 2019



Sagada Pottery and Bugnay with Mansy, 2019

The gray clay was cool and clammy to the touch, but solid. I liked taking its heft and slamming it onto the table, the sound rattling the wooden surface before it was absorbed by the ground and the forest. Mansy then taught me how to wedge and shape the clay into a ball. She showed me how to press my thumb into the middle of that ball and pinch a wall of clay between my thumb and four other fingers. Slowly, I worked my way around the clay, widening the opening and stretching the walls without breaking it. I held it up to the light, then down to eye level, ensuring the rim was smooth and level. It was too big to be a mug and too small to be a bowl, but it was solid enough to hold a mini Nissin cup of seafood instant ramen and I was determined to make it perfect.

It was the walls that concerned me. So, some areas felt too thin, while others felt too thick. Mansy had warned me earlier that thin walls were prone to cracking in the kiln while thick walls prevented the clay from drying evenly, which could lead to an explosion. I asked Mansy if there was a way to make sure the walls were even.

By touch, she had answered simply. If it felt wrong, it was probably wrong. If it looked wrong, it was probably wrong. It was pretty much the same way I handled language when writing; if it sounded wrong, it was probably wrong.

So, I prodded, pinched, and smoothed the clay in the same way I revised my first drafts – obsessively. Mansy laughed and told me to relax a little bit. Clay was forgiving, and unlike language, it was the imperfections that lent it beauty.

I fell a little bit more in love with it because of that.

And so I let it go with a quick prayer to the pottery gods and moved on to pinch a smaller version of it the size of a teacup. After that, we went on to slab work, which felt a lot like origami but without the unbending rules of



geometry. The half-inch thick clay was paper and the breadth of the things you could do with it was as wide as your imagination. Or at least, the amount of time and clay you had at hand.

I made four small jewelry dishes, first in the basic oblong and rectangle shapes, and later, with more confidence, I moved on to a flower and a leaf design. There was still some clay left, but the rain and the night fell early on the mountain, so we had to pack up and head back down to Sagada town proper.

Mansy would take care of the rest. She would let my pieces dry for a few weeks before bisque-firing it to as high as 1,000 degrees Celsius, driving out moisture and turning clay into ceramic. Once out of the kiln, it would have been sintered – the process of transforming greenware into something harder, thicker, insoluble, more mature, and less fragile. It would become bisqueware, with a more porous surface that glazes can adhere to. Mansy would then dip them in the deep blue hue of the glaze that was processed from the soil in Sagada. They would have to go through a second firing before she could send them to me in Manila.

But before we finished off the bugnay and called it a day, Mansy asked me if I wanted to forage for a leaf or flower nearby to press onto the surface of the jewelry dishes I had made, or onto the two cups. She offered me various tools I could use to draw some sort of decoration on the pieces I had made. I refused both. For some reason, the thought of scouring the surfaces I had painstakingly smoothed out and flattened felt wrong.

Maybe one day I would do it, when I felt more adventurous. But right then, I felt content with what I had in my hands. They were solid. They were simple. They were alright. The most I could hope for was that they would survive the heat of the first firing and come out whole bisqueware without any lingering cracks.

Maybe this was what I had come to Sagada for: to learn contentment.

But months later, when I got my finished pieces, pottery taught me one last thing. Everything had survived the kiln, except for the first piece I worked on. The one I had spent so much time on, obsessing over getting just the right thickness of the walls, the one I felt I had perfected, was the very thing that exploded.

Clay may be more forgiving than language, but in the end, clay has a god and its name is fire.



Wishing Well (greenware, garden decoration) by Dawn

### III. Glaze Firing

At summer's end, my greenware menagerie finally found their way to the fire. All of them survived and my two seasons' worth of lollygagging felt justified. I placed them all back on my shelf, safe, sound, and sintered.

I now had a ceramic menagerie, all waiting to be painted or glazed.

But instead of painting them, I ran a wire through my fresh bag of clay and cut out a chunk from it. I

slammed it over the linen-covered table over and over again, flattening it like a jiggly Japanese pancake. Then I ran it through the slab roller, which looks like a giant pasta maker, and used the new slab to make a prototype of a wishing well, so Ben could see what I was planning on asking him to do with the well we have out in the garden. It sorely needed a makeover. Then, I took



a small jar from Ben's greenware and asked him if I could put branches of jasmine on it and a small sparrow.

He didn't say no, but he did warn me about overcrowding my shelf with a bunch of unfinished bisqueware.

"Why won't you paint them with the underglaze?" Ben asked me, probably bewildered by my lack of enthusiasm for this process in pottery. Despite being good at two different types of this art, we had always been in step with each other. He made things by wheel while I did it by hand. He experimented with surfaces, textures, and forms, while I tried to see if I could make clay flowers in the same way I make ones from icing.

But as Ben moved on to glazing, dreaming up patterns and combinations of Joyce's White with Coco Purple, or Blue Spodumene with Strontium Turquoise, or finding a way to use the temperamental but brilliant Multi Blue that was prone to running too thick and fusing the bisqueware to the kiln, I simply continued to add to my ceramic menagerie.

As the sintered pieces on my shelf multiplied, I watched Ben devote himself to the glazes. I wondered how someone with anxiety could be so comfortable with a process that is mercurial at best.

At the back end of the pottery studio, above the tubs of glazes, there was a chart made of samples of all the possible combinations of the glazes. While it can be used as a guide, it wasn't a guarantee.

When the liquid glass inside a glaze burns inside the kiln during the second firing, its color is determined by so many variables like temperature, time, and texture. It's determined by the manner of application, the number of dips, the type of brush, the brushstroke, not to mention the million other combinations of one color's properties with another. Once the glaze's liquid glass runs through every single equation, it moves into the molecular gaps left

during the sintering process. When the heat abates, the liquid glass vitrifies. It turns hard, fusing to the surface of the bisqueware and creating a glass-like layer on top. In this form, it is now stronger than it ever was. It can hold water. But you won't know what color you'll get until it comes out of the kiln.

It terrified me how, after all that careful planning and attention to detail from greenware to bisqueware, anyone can just surrender it all to the fire, all for the sake of adding color.

In theory, underglazes should be easier than glazes. They work like crayons. They are the color that they are and don't change under fire. But I had never painted anything in my life, and I didn't want to touch my ceramic creatures with a paintbrush in an inept hand.

My wonky animals and other things were fine. They came through the fire very much intact, perfectly sintered to wholeness. Besides, the underglaze wouldn't really do anything to it, unlike glaze, which makes bisqueware impervious to time and water. Underglazes are merely decorative. Why would I make them go through another firing process, at the risk of an explosion, so that I could subject them to something I was absolutely unprepared for?

But one by one, Ben's glazed pieces came out of the kiln to an assortment of pleased sighs and frustrated grunts. He got a bowl in the color of terracotta pots and burnt caramel while the pot he glazed came out like a bowl of oatmeal and milk with a little bit of blueberry swirled in. He also got a bottleneck vase that came wrapped in an aurora borealis trapped beneath the earth's crust. Another bowl carried the cerulean sea at its widest and tapered off to a deep blue starry night towards the base.

I watched him take it all in, the horrid with the brilliant, the cracks and fused bottoms, all the happy accidents and plans that went awry. Nothing

dissuaded him. Not even himself and that little voice in his head that made him doubt and overthink every decision he made. In fact, he looked like he could throw and turn the wheel and glaze for a lifetime and never tire of it.



Jars, bottles, vases, goblet, and mug, glazed in cone 10 by Ben Burris

I knew that look.

Three years ago, at the close of 2019, over cups of hot chocolate and tea and under a blanket of softly falling snow, Ben handed me a ring and asked me if I could hold on to it forever. I said yes, of course. And when I did, I immediately felt the life I had so carefully constructed around me implode.

Clay has a god. Its name is fire, and it consumed my home, my tenureship, my wine and yoga with Pat, *Polaris*, Jollibee, Ned's Oomori, Tin's Romantic Baboy, and Manila.

But clay is forgiving, clay is resilient. And when I looked, plenty of clay was still left in the bag. I could start again. Wedge, then center. Give it time. Then, go through the fire.

I emerged intact.

And yet here I was creating a menagerie of ceramic blandness, afraid of a second firing because it feels safer to remain whole than to risk a splintering for a splash of color. As if I had never known how it is to give it all up to the fire just for a chance to drown in the yellow of roses that grow in our garden, the red of the cardinal in spring, the orange of Lynchburg's autumn, or the blue in Ben's eyes.

It didn't feel right. To rectify the situation, I sent a quick prayer to the fire gods and picked up a brush.



The Owl and the Pussycat, this time with color, by Dawn



# “BIRUIN MO ‘YUN!” MALA-HANDBOOK NG PINOY HUMOR

ni Joselito D. De Los Reyes, PhD



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Noong una kong naisip ang katagang “seryosong usapin ang humor,” akala ko ako ang nakauna sa oxymoron na ito. Only to find out na marami nang bersiyon, as in, sobrang dami to the point of cliché. Isa ito sa pinakagusto

ko: “The Science of Humor Is No Laughing Matter.” Isang artikulo sa journal ng sikolohiya. Hindi ka talaga makakatawa dahil sa dami ng konsepto at terminolohiya para bigyang saysay ang humor sa lens ng sikolohiya at agham. May nagsasabi rin na “comedy is a serious matter” lalo na’t gagawin mong bahagi ng iyong pag-aaral. O gagawin mong kabuhayan ang pagpapatawa. Seryosong usapin lagi kapag involved na ang kabuhayan. Kaya nang sinuong ko ang paksang ito, nalaman ko kaagad na hindi ito nakakatawa, at — napatunayan ko during the ever-recurring cramming para maitawid ang anxiety-charged deadline — nakakaiyak, nakakatakot.

Hindi nakakatawa ang mag-ambisyong ikahon sa aklat ang tungkol sa katatawanan, o itong pagtawa, itong non-verbal primal emotional expression na sumasalakay sa atin kapag may pambihirang kabig ng emosyon. Bakit pa? Puwede mo namang danasin nang hindi na hanapan pa ng paliwanag, o kung ano ito sa lipunan. Bakit pa? Alam naman nating nakakatulong ito sa atin. Gaya nga ng sabi ng kaibigang kong pari, gift din daw ni Lord ang kakayahang tumawa at magpatawa, ang sinaunang pagpapahayag ng ating older brain system kasama ng pag-iyak, pagpapakita ng galit, at kalungkutan.

Bakit pa hahanapan ng katwiran? Tama naman. Pero, ‘di ba, itinuro din sa atin ang digestive system noong elementary, kung paanong mula sa pagnguya, paglulon, paghalo ng enzymes sa tsibog, pagkuha ng nutrisyon sa pagkain, kung paanong sumasama sa ating blood stream ang sustansiya (thereby lilipat na sa circulatory system ang paksa) at kung paano nagiging involved ang excretory system pagkatapos. Lahat ng iyan, kumpleto ng quiz at recitation namin kay Miss Pascual noong grade four, iyang mga pag-aaral na iyan sa different parts of the digestive system ay ikinonsiderang essential learning noong bata pa tayo. Hindi naman tayo tumutol, hindi naman natin sinabing “Bakit pa po natin aaralin ‘yan, Miss Pascual, alam naman po nating lahat na masarap kumain, na kailangan ng katawan natin ang sustansiya kaya mag-recess na po tayo.” Hindi ko sinabi iyon. Hindi mo rin sinabi iyon sa

teacher mo. Hindi ako tumutol kay Miss Pascual sa lecture niya tungkol sa pagkakaiba ng stomach, at small at large intestines. Walang tumutol sa ating guro. Kaya hindi man essential na karunungan ang malaman natin ang humor, palagay ko, malaking bagay na malaman mo ang dahilan ng pagtawa, kung ano ang pagpapapatawa, at baka sakaling kailanganin mo, kung paano ba ang maayos na pagpapatawa. Thereby making it an essential learning because, to be philosophical, about this, hindi essential ang kahit anong karunungan hangga't hindi mo kinailangan.

Hindi ko kayang bigyang-diin kung gaano kahalaga ang malaman natin ang anatomiya ng pagpapatawa at pagtawa, ang siste, ang humor, ang sarcasm, ang parody, ang joke. Maraming katawa-tawa sa nangyayari sa atin. Maraming politiko ang umaastang payaso. Some are effortless, seamless transition. Maaari, sa mga sandaling ito, kaisa ka at binabasa mo ito dahil naniniwala kang dapat mong malaman ang mga bagay-bagay tungkol sa humor. Dahil essential na sa buhay mo ang humor. O marami ka nang alam sa humor kaya gusto mong masegurong may sustansya ang sasabihin ko dito. O kaya maaaring binili mo na ang libro ko dati at dahil loyal ka sa mga isinulat ko, bumili ka uli kaya napipilitan ka nang basahin para masulit ang ilang daang pisong ipinambili mo. O kaya dahil nababasa mo ako sa Facebook, tapos may book pala ako kaya napa-order ka, kaya ka napilitang basahin ito ngayon para masulit ang ilang daang pisong ipinambili mo. Alin man diyan, umaasa akong may mapupulot ka, na sana magamit mo sa kung saang usapan. Sana magamit mo sa team building ng kompanya ninyo, o kaya sa job interview, o para tsikahin mo ang kliyente at makapagsara ka ng transaksyon. Puwede ring idaan sa humor ang thesis defense mo o kapag hihingi ka ng umento sa boss mo. Puwede rin sa pagtatalumpati kung kakandidato ka, o sa panliligaw. Puwede rin namang gusto mo lang mag-develop ng kompiyansa sa pamamagitan ng maayos na rendering ng joke. Lahat iyan, at para na rin siyempre masulit ang ilang daang pisong ipinambili mo sa aklat na ito.

You see, walang halong biro, may preference daw sa humor ang kahit sino sa atin kesa sa hitsura. Oo. Mas pipiliin daw ng mayorya ng mga Filipino ang ka-partner o karelasyong may humor kahit hindi masyadong maayos ang hitsura kesa sa, hmmm, gwapo o maganda pero tagtuyot ang sense of humor. Oo, may statistics dito ang Social Weather Stations. Pwede ninyong makita sa website nila, pwede ninyong i-download ang mismong resulta ng survey na may pamagat na: “Fourth Quarter 2013 Social Weather Survey: 90% of adult Filipinos choose Sense of Humor over Good Looks.” Inilabas nila ang resulta in time for Valentine’s Day noong 2014. Download na. And make yourself feel better.

Hindi tayong natatangi. Ganoon din ang findings ng isang pananaliksik sa bansang Austria na nalathala sa World Economic Forum at sa diplomatic magazine na *The Conversation* hinggil sa desirability ng isang taong may malakas na sense of humor. Bukod daw kasi sa katalinuhan, may mataas na emotional intelligence ang isang taong may magaling na kakayahang magpatawa:

“Not only are funny people smart, they’re nice to be around. Evidence suggests that having a good sense of humour is linked to high emotional intelligence and is a highly desirable quality in a partner. Evolutionary psychologists describe humour as a “heritable trait” that signals mental fitness and intellectual agility to prospective mates. In studies of attractiveness, both men and women rate funny people as more attractive and cite having a good sense of humour as being one of the most important traits in a long-term partner.” (<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/10/funny-people-are-also-more-intelligent-according-to-new-research/>)

Puwede ninyong kabisaduhin at iukilil sa pagkatao ninyo ang mga pananaliksik na iyan na nagsasaad na may pag-asa ka pa sa mundo sa tulong



ng humor. O kaya, gaya ng ginawa ko sa misis ko, itinanong ko kung ano ba ang mas nagustuhan niya sa akin. Kung good looks ba o humor? “Charming ka, Tatay. Charming ka.” Iyan ang sagot niya sa akin sabay balik niya sa inabala kong pagtuturo online.

Bueno, medyo magiging mahaba ito kumpara sa binabasa mong Facebook status o mga meme post ng mga kaibigan at kamaritesan mo sa social media. In most cases, madaldal. And, I must warn you, kahit tungkol dapat ito sa katatawan, hindi nakakatawa ang kahabaan ng narasyon. Well, sana nga nakakatawa. Sisikapin ko. Iyon naman ang misyon ko sa aklat na bubuuin ko – turuan kayo ng tungkol sa pagtawa at pagpapatawa sa paraang sana ay nakakatawa. Iyong hindi ninyo namamalayan na natapos na ninyong basahin ang kung ilampung libong salita na bumubuo sa libro.

Ganito ko kasi iminungkahi noon ang proyektong ito tungkol sa katatawanan. Suggestion ko, dapat may attempt at being humorous din. Oo, marami kasing hindi. May scholarly na scholarly. Dry na scholarly. Sobrang exhaustive scholarly, hindi na talaga nakakatawa, as in effort na suyurin ang teksto lalo na ang nagliliparang teorya at jargons ng sikolohiya at pragmatics at discourse analysis at marketing communications (more on these later) at iba pang naglipanang karunungan nakasabit sa pag-unawa natin ng katatawanan. Pero hindi maiiwasang maging scholarly lalo’t scholar naman talaga ang target na magbabasa. At wala din namang masama kung scholarly. Iyon nga lang, dahil may espesyalisadong jargon at sociolect, hindi maiiwasang hindi accessible sa marami ang pag-aaral.

Kaya ganito kasidhi ang pagtalakay ng ibang aklat at pag-aaral dahil marami naman talagang aspekto ng ating pagkatao, kultura, lipunan, at damdamin ang involved sa pagtawa at katatawanan. Hindi lang ito tungkol sa interpretasyon mo ng narinig na tunog, o nabasang salita, o napanood na eksena, o nakitang graphics sa social media, o kung napabili ka ng produkto’t tumangkilik ng binayarang serbisyo dahil sa katatawanan ng patalastas na

ginamit sa iyo para ka gumastos. Involved din dito ang panahon, ang pag-unawa mo sa lipunan, ang pagiging bahagi mo sa isa o higit pang kolektiba, ang pagiging bahagi mo sa pagbuo ng kultura, o hindi rin maitatangi, ang pagwasak... wait, too strong a term ang pagwasak, sa pag-reshape mo sa isang kultura gaano man ito kalaki. Ang pagtawa mo ay produkto ng maraming proseso, kombinasyon ng proseso na microsecond lang halos ang itinatagal kapag gets mo agad ang biro. Gets?

Gets? Kaya may pagkakataong hindi natin nage-gets ang joke o katatawanan dahil may mga hindi tayo nakukuha agad. Kulang ang clue, ang pahiwatig, o ang mismong paraan ng pagsasalaysay.

“Hindi mo na-gets,” sasabihin sa iyo ng bumitaw ng biro o iyong mga naka-gets agad ng biro. Alinman dito ang maaaring dahilan: hindi tayo pamilyar sa konteksto o wala sa ating schema ang sitwasyon, hindi ito ang ating kinasanayang wika, o sadyang wala sa ating panahon ang mga sign posts. Kaya nga “gets” o kuha mo. Hindi mo gets kung hindi mo naintindihan o hindi mo nakuha ang ibig sabihin. Kaya ipapa-explain natin ang joke. O kaya may magmamalasakit na ipaliwanag sa iyo dahil sa pangambang maging isolated o out-of-place ka. Tulad nitong dapat ay katatawanan na ito na nahugot ko sa internet:

Q: How many general-relativity theorists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Two. One to hold the bulb and one to rotate space.

O kaya ito:

A rugby player goes to the physio and says, “It hurts when I touch my arm, my chest, or my leg.” The physio says, “You’ve broken your finger.”

Gets? Hindi? Malay ko rin ba d'yan kung ano ang ibig sabihin niyan. Kaya kailangan ng *schema* o pag-unawa sa katatawanan. Hindi kayang ipaliwanag ng aandap-andap na pag-unawa ko sa physics o sa larong rugby ang nabanggit na jokes sa itaas. Sa mga pamilyar sa dalawang saray ng karunungan na iyan, physics at rugby, lalo kung sabay naunawaan at tinawanan, ay nagma-manifest din ng mas malalim na kaalaman, hindi lamang basta familiarity. Mas maraming schema, mas matalino ka. Kaya sinasabing ang mga taong may heightened sense of humor—iyong bumibitaw ng katatawanan o madaling tumawa sa mga biro o madaling maka-gets sa biro at katatawanan—ay sinasabing mas matalino kumpara sa ibang gaya namin na may good looks lang.

Sabi ng isang pag-aaral sa Turkey na nalathala sa phys.org:

Both humor and intelligence are shaped by cultural norms, beliefs and values. A joke considered hilarious in one culture may not be funny in another. Likewise, a particular behavior may be considered a sign of high intelligence in one culture, but other cultures may find such behavior inappropriate. Thus, the influence of intelligence on humorous behaviors should be evaluated in specific cultures. (<https://phys.org/news/2021-10-ability-humor-linked-higher-intelligence.html>)

Kung alam mo ang katawa-tawa sa hindi, kung alam mo kung kailan dapat o hindi dapat tawanan, kung alam mo ang konteksto ng katatawanan, ay walang dudang palatandaan ng karunungan. Ganito rin halos ang sinabi ng isang artikulo sa Newsweek batay naman sa isang pananaliksik sa Austria: “(It takes) both cognitive and emotional ability to process and produce humor. Their analysis shows that funny people have higher verbal and nonverbal intelligence, and they score lower in mood disturbance and aggressiveness.” Bukod pa raw dito, ang pagkakaroon daw ng “humorous outlook on life” ay mabuting “coping strategy.” Mas madali raw masosolusyonan ng isang taong

may heightened humor ang mga stress at adversity sa buhay. Not only are funny people smart, they're nice to be around.

Pero puwede rin namang hindi ipaliwanag. Hahayaan kang nakatulala habang tawa nang tawa ang mga kasama mo lalo na iyong magagaling sa physics as in the case of the joke above. May mga katatawanan din na confined sa mas eksklusibong collective. Hindi mo kailangang maging physicist. Puwede sa tropa ninyo. O sa samahan. Puwedeng sa klase o sa workplace. "Inside jokes" ang tawag sa ganito. Iyong lubhang kakaunti ang nakakaintindi at pinananatili ang exclusivity kaya hindi ipinaliliwanag sa iba ang joke o ang sanhi ng katatawanan.

"Inside joke kasi naming magkakabarkada 'yun," depensa ng iyong kaibigang putik. Meaning, hindi ka kasama sa barkada. O hindi ka pa nila tanggap na barkada para pagkatiwalaan ng katatawanan na, chances are, tungkol sa ibang tao, o dahil gusto ko ng away, maaaring tungkol sa iyo. Maghinala ka na. Tsk ts. Kinuha mo pa namang kumare sa kumpil ng iyong pamangkin.

Bakit ba kasi underrated ang usapin ng katatawanan sa bansa nating handang magmahal ang karaniwan ng taong may malakas na sense of humor kahit na mukhang ingrown? Bakit bihira ang nag-uukol ng seryosong atensyon at pag-aaral? Gusto ko na tuloy paniwalaan ang behavioral economist na si Peter McGraw sa pagsasabing "Humor research is seen as a non-serious topic, scientists always want to make sure their work is respectable, and to be doing research on humor is seen as not respectable enough. People think there are a lot of other, really pressing problems we have to try to solve." Hindi respectable lalo na sa lubhang seryosong mundo ng akademya. Idinagdag pa ng editor ng Encyclopedia of Humor Studies, "Humor appears to be so simple, so easy." Dahil kung ganito nga naman mistulang simple at napakadali, bakit pa pag-uukulan ng mahalagang resources, pera, panahon, dunong, love life, at kape para lamang palawigin at maging accessible?

Puwede tuloy isipin na, oo nga, baka nga walang biruan sa mga seryosong usapin ng buhay at kasaysayan? Alangan namang pinapaulanan ka na ng bala ng mga guardia civil, o niraratrat ng mga sundalong Hapones, o nililikida ng mga kawal na Amerikano, magbibiro ka pa? Siyempre hindi biro ang magbiro sa mga ganoong pagkakataon. Kung paanong hindi dapat unahin o hindi mo na lang talaga maiisip ang biro sa isang adrenalin-pumping na sitwasyon ng karahasan at peligro. Sige nga, matanong ko, may katatawanan ba sa karahasang dinaranas mo? Habang nasa peligro, sumagi ba sa isip mo ang tumawa o magpatawa? O after the event na lang?

Ambisyoso ang proyektong ito. Dahil gaya ng karamihan sa kahit na anong academic research proposal, nag-overpromise ako. Huh. Sa isip-isip ko noon, gagawa na nga lang ng proyekto, maliitan pa. Handbook kung handbook. Definitive study kung definitive study. Eh natanggap. Napondohan. Nalintikan na. Kailangang panindigan. Kailangang umastang malaman ang bawat pahina without sounding trite.

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# NAKAKATAWA DAPAT SI RIZAL

ni Joselito D. De Los Reyes

Hindi kailanman itinuro si/ang Rizal bilang isang katatawanan. Marahil dahil Pambansang Bayani kaya dapat laging umaapaw ang admirasyon sa kaniya at sa kaniyang ginawa. Seryoso dapat. Hindi dapat siya mapabilang sa Bonifacio atapang-atao-aputol-akamay-hindi-atakbo o kung-sino-ang-pumatay-kay-Lapu-lapu joke. Merong palang isang popular na joke: Sino si Huling sa tulang “Huling Paalam” ni Rizal? O kung kanino naka-dedicate ang huli niyang tula? Pero ito man ay gasgas na at dapat nang malimot ng nakararaming nabiktima nang una itong mapakinggan noong elementarya o high school sila.

Sinimulan kong basahin ang isa sa napakaraming bersiyon ng aklat hinggil sa buhay at panulat ni Rizal noong high school ako. Hiniram ko sa ate ko ang kopya ng aklat. Natapos ko nang mabilis. Kaya sa pag-igib ko ng inumin noon, mga dalawang kilometro ang layo sa bahay namin, habang tulak ang kariton, iniisip ko ang pagka-lover-boy ni Rizal dahil sa dami ng kaniyang minahal at nakamit at nalakbay at naranasan at nagawa para sa bayan. At marami ring na-link sa kaniyang babae na akala ko noon, napaka-trivial. Humanga ako sa lahat. Humanga ako sa paraan kung paano binalangkas ang aklat (only to find out na ganoon pala ang pagkakabalangkas ng halos lahat ng aklat na isinulat, pinag-aaralan, at pinagkakitaan sa subject na Rizal sa college). Noong panahong iyon, third year high school, naglihim ako ng isang pangarap. Gusto ko ring maging Rizal. Gusto kong marating ang kaniyang narating. Gawin ang kaniyang nagawa. Obvious namang hindi ito natupad. College ako nang isuko ko ang pangarap na maging Rizal. Mas

masarap uminom kesa mag-aral ng kung ano-ano gaya ng ginawa ni Rizal. Besides, wala akong kuyang malalapitan para magbigay sa akin ng pamasahang patungong España. Kaya nangarap na lang akong maging Piolo Pascual. Mukhang natupad ko naman ito kahit papaano.

Gusto kong magpakadalubhasa at makatakas sa paraan kung paano tradisyonal na itinuturo ng guro ang *Noli Me Tangere* at *El Filibusterismo*. Nagbasa ng ilang mga aklat lalo na iyong mula kay Ambeth Ocampo na *Rizal Without the Overcoat* na koleksiyon ng mga isinulat niyang kolum hinggil sa ating Pambansang Bayani para ipakilala ang mas tao na bahagi ni Rizal, thus the title 'without the overcoat' na nakasanayan na nating tingnan bilang rebulto sa mga plaza at paaralan. Nabasa ko ang *The First Filipino* ni Leon Maria Guerrero, *A Question of Heroes* ni Nick Joaquin, *Veneration Without Understanding* ni Renato Constantino. At ngayon, habang ine-edit ko ito, binabasa ko ang pagsusuri ni Jun Cruz Reyes sa akda at buhay ni Rizal, ang *Hu U Rizal?* na ang paraan ng narasyon ay masasabing conversational din. Pagtatangka ito ni Reyes na ilapit pang lalo ang buhay ng bayani (anuman itong buhay ng bayani nating ito) sa mga mambabasang papakaunti na nang papakaunti.

Pero natuklasan ko noong kolehiyo ako na mahirap palang ang pokus lamang ng pag-aaral sa kasaysayan ay si Rizal. Dapat lumabas sa naratibo ni Rizal kung nais maunawaan ang kahulugan niya sa maraming pangyayari sa ating kasaysayan hanggang sa kasalukuyan. May conscious effort to humanize Rizal at tama lamang ito para gawing karaniwan ang ilusyon natin ng pagiging dakila at magaling ni Rizal. No doubt, magaling si Rizal. Magsulat ka ba naman ng nobela sa edad na beinte singko, noong panahong walang kuryente at MS Word, walang delete at backspace, walang Google, paanong hindi ka magiging magaling?

Bukod pa talaga sa pagiging manunulat, makata, siyentipiko, linguist, at sa maraming tungkulin at pagkatao pa ni Rizal, dapat ilapat siya



sa kasaysayan. Mas bayan at lipunan higit sa tao. O, sa pananaw ni Renato Constantino, sa rebolusyon. Kaya nga para kay Constantino, “They have treated Rizal’s condemnation of the Katipunan as a skeleton in his closet and have been responsible for the ‘silent treatment’ on his unequivocal position against the Revolution” (1970:3). Kaya mas lalong lumaki ang pagnanais kong ilapat si Rizal. Mas kilalanin pa ang iba’t ibang personahe ng kasaysayan, maningning man ang pangalan gaya ni Rizal, Mabini, o Bonifacio, o ang mga walang pangalang kasapi ng Cofradia De San Jose na pinamumunuan ni Hermano Puli.

Lahat ay may ambag kaya tayo nakarating dito sa yugtong ito ng ating kasaysayan. May mas maningning lang ang pangalan pero lahat ay may ambag at marami pang nangangailangang matuklasan at maipakilala sa madla. Kaya nga dapat masikhay pa rin ang pagtuklas. Pero kung marubdob naman ang pagtuklas, sana ay may conscious effort din na maging accessible ang mga natutuklasang ito. Oo, hindi ako nagbibiro kapag sinabi kong gawing meme o GIF o maiikling video ang leksiyon sa buhay at akda ni Rizal at ang mismong kasaysayan. Huwag lang isapelikula at kukuhanin ang isang bata pa’y sellout nang direktor. Ilunsad sa internet at social media ang kasaysayan. Gawin ang approach ng nagpapakalat ng disinformation. Oo, huwag kaliligtaan ang mga tradisyonal na paraan gaya ng mga aklat at kumperensiya para matalakay ang pananaliksik sa kasaysayan, pero huwag din sanang magpatali na lamang sa nakasanayang platform. Dapat sumabay din tayo sa panahon. Gawing viral, gawing games, o rap. Lumunsad sa humor. Dahil ito ang aking agenda. Bakit ba kasi ganito na lang ang pagkilala natin sa kasaysayan? Oo nga’t may rebolusyon, pagtataksil, karahasan, pagdanak ng dugo, ligawan. Pero bakit bihira ang naghahanap sa humor?

Meron naman. Si Vic Torres, propesor ng kasaysayan sa De La Salle University. Partikular ang kaniyang lecture hinggil sa humor noong panahon ng Rebolusyon lalo na ang *Dasalan at Tocsohan* ni Plaridel. Oo,

meron daw nito. Nakatutuwang malamang may katuwang ako sa paghanap sa nakatutuwa't nakakatawa sa panahong walang mag-aakalang may nakatutuwa't nakatatawang bahagi ng ating pag-iral bilang bansa. Nabanggit ko na rin si Dr. Ancheta ng UP [University of the Philippines] na nagbigay ng sampling sa kaniyang aklat hinggil sa lunsaran ng katatawanan at satire sa bawat mahahalagang bahagi ng ating kasaysayan.

Samantala, binanggit din ni Torres sa kaniyang presentasyon ang American psychologist at humor studies pioneer na si Jacob Levine tungkol sa mahalagang gampanin ng humor sa anumang tunggaling pang-estado at iba pang panlipunang power-relationships: "Where cultures fear freedom of expression and rigidly demand conformity, humor is repressed, and the role of the humorist is dangerous." Nagiging sandata ang humor sa represiyon. Nagiging kanlungan at daluyan ang humor ng mga hindi masabi ng sambayanan. Kinakatawan ng humor ang saloobin ng marami kung kaya nga hindi maikakaila ang gampanin nito sa ating bayan. At sa lahat ng ito, sa kagalingan at kadakilaang taglay, bakit tila walang bahid ng humor si Rizal?

Mayroon. Batay sa pagsisiyasat sa *Noli Me Tangere* at *El Filibusterismo* ng Pambansang Alagad ng Sining sa Panitikan na si Virgilio S. Almario, mayroon. Nakasingit sa pagi-pagitan ng nobela ni Rizal ang humor ni Rizal. Katunayan, tinawag niya ang isang kabanata ng kaniyang aklat na *Rizal: Nobelist* na "Ang Siste ni Rizal."

Masinop ang naging pagbasa ni Almario sa mga nobela ng ating Pambansang Bayani. Pinuna niya ang naunang pangangalakal na "salin" at pati na ang mga naunang pagbasa ng ilang dalubhasa ng kasaysayan sa mga nobelang *Noli Me Tangere* at *El Filibusterismo*. Masasabing ito ang poetica ni Almario sa isinagawa niyang pagsasalin ng dalawang dakilang nobela na kagyat binuo bilang hiwalay na produkto ng ginawang pagsasalin. May humor daw si Rizal. O "siste" na mula sa Español na "chiste" o joke o biro at masayahing diwa.

Itong siste ang palagi ko nang naririnig noon sa aking mga Bulakenyong magulang kapag inilalarawan nila ang isang taong masayahin at maraming kuwentong nakakatawa. “Masiste ‘yang si Maritess,” sasabihin ng aking nanay. Bagamat hindi ko maunawaan pa dati na masayahing diwa o palabiro rin ang ibig sabihin nito. Sa akin noon, sa mura at walang muwang kong pag-unawa, makuwento at tsismosa o tsismoso ang ibig sabihin ng ‘masiste.’ Na puwede ngang mangyari lalo’t makuwento naman talaga at masayahin ang nagsasalita.

Ayon kay Almario, naiiba raw ang akda ni Rizal sa mga naunang “didaktiko’t melodramatiko na pinalayaw sa panitikang Kristiyanot kolonyalista sa loob ng 300 taon” (2017). Kung may taglay na masayahing diwa nga ang mga nobela, nakatitiyak akong hindi ito ang naging “pagbasa” ng mga guro natin noong high school na nasanay sa paghahanap ng mga hindi pamilyar na salita at ipagamit sa atin bilang pangungusap alang-alang sa grade natin sa recitation. Bagamat katawa-tawa ang kinalabasan ng aming dula dahil mali-mali at puro harutan ang mga nagsiganap tungkol sa hapunan sa unang kabanata ng *Noli* noong third year high school, ang katatawanang taglay mismo ng nobela, palagay ko, ay wala sa gunam-gunam ng aming guro. Hindi rin ganito kasiste ang naging talakayan namin sa kursong Rizal sa kolehiyo. Muli, nagkaroon kami ng pagtatanghal sa kung anong kabanatang nalimot ko na. Basta magagaling ang nagsiganap na Rizal at frayle.

Kung naging daan sana ang humor para sa pagtuturo ng *Noli* at *El Fili*, baka mas maraming naka-appreciate. Nasaan ba kasi sa mga nobela ang masayahing diwa o siste ni Rizal? Nasa satire o pang-uuyam, ang sabi ni Almario. Ito raw ang kinasangkapan ng mga gaya ni Plaridel sa *Dasalan at Tocsohan* at ni Graciano Lopez Jaena sa *Fray Botod*.

“Ang masayáhing diwa ni Rizal ay tigib sa masiglang pang-uuyam.” Igigiit ni Almario sa kaniyang mambabasa. Bagamat sa katunayan, kaiba sa pagsulat ng sanaysay o persona ng isang tula, sa nobela, pinagsasalita ni

Rizal ang mga tauhan. Maaaring itanggi ng isang nobelista na sila mismo ang nasasalita pero hindi mapasusubaliang ideya nila ang mga salitang ginamit ng tauhang ito.

Ikakatuwiran ng iba, eh paano kung hango sa tunay na buhay ang mga lugar, pangyayari at tauhan sa nobela? Napakarami nang imbestigador at mananaliksik sa buhay at katha ng ating pambansang bayani ang nagtumbas sa mga tauhan at lunan ng kaniyang dalawang nobela.

Ganito mismo ang sipat ng historyador at Dominikong paring si Fidel Villaroel: “[The *Fili*] appears to take roots in historical events sometimes easy to detect, sometimes difficult to place in time and space,” at “[*El Filibusterismo*] is a novel rooted in historical situations, however vague or distorted the novelistic stories may be,”(1984:210 at 242). Si Paciano diumano si Elias, si Segunda Katigbak o Leonor Rivera si Maria Clara, si Rizal mismo si Ibarra at Simoun (kung hindi man Filipinong Edmund Dantes at Konde ng Monte Cristo ni Alexandre Dumas), mga guro niya sa Unibersidad ng Santo Tomas ang mga padre sa nobela bagamat dadalawang prominenteng Dominiko lamang ang naroroon, ang Bise-Rektor na si Padre Sybila at ang malupit na guro ng pisikang si Padre Millon, at pawang Pransiskano na sina Padre Damaso, Padre Camorra, at Padre Salvi, mga kaklase niya sa Unibersidad kung hindi ma’y kasambahay sa Casa Tomasino ang mga mag-aaral sa *El Fili*, ang Calamba ang San Diego at/o Tiani dahil gaya ng nangyari sa buhay ni Rizal, kinamkam ang lupa ng parehong pamilya ni Rizal at ni Kabesang Tales, atbp. Gayunman, lutang ang pagtangi ni Rizal kina Padre Florentino at Isagani na pawang nakatira sa “tabing dagat sa ibayong pampang ng lawa” (*El Filibusterismo*: 14). Ayon pa rin kay Padre Villaroel, “Unquestionably, Rizal, the student leader, poet, ex-Atenean, and now Thomasian, mirrors himself in many of the actuations of Isagani.”

Maaari nga. Pero dahil nobela ang *Noli Me Tangere* at *El Filibusterismo*, at hindi creative nonfiction na dapat nakabatay sa katotohanan,

ang lahat ng pagtutumbas kung sino ang kinakatawan ng ganitong tauhan ay mananatiling sapantaha dahil katha. Unless, may tahasang pag-amin mismo si Rizal sa kung saang panulat o talumpati niya.

Mapang-uyam thereby masiste raw ang maraming bahagi ng mga nobela, ayon kay Almario. Iyon ay kung alam mo ang hahanapin. At kung ipaliliwanag sa iyo ang dahilan kung bakit iyon masiste, biro, mapang-uyam, o sarcasm. Karamihan kasi ay nakatago sa karunungan ng may akda ang mismong katatawanan kung kaya mahirap makita ng sinumang magbabasa lalo't ang pagbabasa ay ni-require lang para makapasa sa isang subject at hindi ginabayan ng tiyak ay hindi rin nagabayang guro o propesor. Daskol ang pagbasa dahil requirement. Wala ang linamnam ng isang 'at your own pace, at your own time' na pagbasa na nasa antas ng paglilibang, excitement, o thought provoking. Relegated sa assignment, quiz, recitation, at mali-maling pagsasadula si Rizal. At least sa karamihan ng mag-aaral na sumailalim sa mandato ng DepEd [Department of Education] at CHed [Commission on Higher Education].

Nakakatawa dapat si Rizal gaya na lang daw ng tanyag na pananalita buhat kay Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-46 B.C.) na ginamit at binaluktot ni Rizal sa bungad ng nobela. Si Cicero na foundation daw ni Rizal hindi lamang sa dunong kung hindi sa paggamit ng siste. Isinulat ni Cicero sa kaniyang pahayag na *De Officiis* (On Duties or On Obligations) na naglalaman ng mga treatises hinggil sa moral obligations ang katagang "*Cedant arma togae*" o sa Ingles ay "Let arms yield to the toga" na nangangahulugan ng pagpapailalim ng militar sa kapangyarihang sibil o ng taumbayan. Mas makapangyarihan dapat ang sibilyan kesa mga kawal. Pero dahil nagpapatawa, pinalitan ng tagapagsalaysay ng Noli ang kasabihang ito bilang "*Cedant arma cottae*" o sa salin ni Almario "Dapat sumunod ang sandata sa sutana" upang i-justify ng mga pari ang kanilang kapangyarihan sa isang matandang tinyente na panauhin din ni Kapitan Tiago. Nakatulong din sa bisa ng joke na ito ni

Rizal ang magkatugmang “toga” buhat sa orihinal at “cotta” na pagbibiro ni Rizal sa nobela.

Dapat nakakatawa ang ganitong pagpapalit sa kasabihan kung paanong sa unang beses na mapapakinggan, maaaring nakakatawa ang minaling kasabihang “ang naglalakad nang matulin, sa simbahan din ang tuloy” na paglalaro sa kasabihang “ang naglalakad ng matulin, kung matinik ay malalim” at “sa hinaba-haba ng prusisyon, sa simbahan din ang tuloy.” Ganito ring pagmamali ang uri ng pagpapatawang ginagawa natin kapag magpapalit tayo ng lyrics ng popular na kanta. Noong bata pa kami at wala pang muwang sa Heraldic Law ng mga pambansang sagisag, pinapalitan namin ang lyrics ng ating pambansang awit para lamang maging source ng katatawanan, to wit (sa tono ng simula ng pambansang awit): “Bayang inutang, di na binayaran, sa Mandaluyong doon ikukulong, sa dalawang bundok nakatira si Tarzan at Barok, may banana cue, camote cue...” Hayun ang mga kaklase naming seryosong-seryoso samantalang kaming nasalikod ng pila ay nagpipigil ng tawa. Masayang-masaya. Lalo’t may isang hindi nakapagpigil at nahuli ng titser.

So, bakit hindi tayo natatawa sa joke na ito ni Rizal sa loob ng kaniyang mga nobela? Tandaan natin na may schema dapat tayo para maging epektibo ang pasasalaysay ng joke at katatawanan. Nagiging epektibo ang patawa kapag may shared knowledge ang magpapahayag at tatanggap ng mensahe. Kung wala ang shared knowledge na ito, wala ang schema, hindi tayo matatawa. Natatandaan ba ninyo ang hinugot kong joke sa unang kabanata na nakakatawa dapat kung hindi lang tayo bopol sa physics at sa larong rugby? Ito rin ang dahilan kung bakit hindi tayo natatawa sa pagmamali kay Cicero. Dito papasok ang pagpapaliwanag ng joke gaya ng ginawa ni Almario sa kaniyang libro. At ito rin ang dahilan kung paano lulunsad ang ilan pang paliwanag kung bakit nakakatawa dapat si Rizal. And come to think of it, totoo nga ang sapantaha ng mga psychologist, na ang may

mataas ng talino ang malakas ang humor. Will this make Rizal a bit more human? O mas lalo lang natin siyang hahangaan dahil sa kabila ng kaniyang dunong, aba, nagpapatawa din pala siya, iyon nga lang, kailangang matalino ka para maunawaan. Kaya heto, magpakatalino pa tayó.

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Nakakatawa naman talaga ang mapagsilbihan ng maraming upo at sabaw ng tinola kasama ang hubad na leeg at makunat na pakpak sa isang marangal at bonggang-bonggang hapunan. I mean, walang masama kung sa bahay natin ito i-serve. Puwedeng-puwede nating himayin o kainin nang buo ang piraso ng manok at ibuga ang mga nasimot na buto-buto lalo kung walang nakakakita sa atin. Malasa ang leeg at pakpak kumpara sa malamang hita at petso. Kaya ganoon na lamang ang panlalait ni Rizal na siyang may likha sa mga tauhang ito. Sinadya pa niyang magdabog si Padre Damaso. At ang nakakatawa sa pagdarabog na ito para umagaw ng atensyon, walang nakapansin.

Hindi ko na marahil kailangan pang sabihin dahil kung nakatunghay man lang kayo sa *Noli Me Tangere* o *El Filibusterismo*, nakatunghay o nakapanood man lang ng malaganap na dula sa klase o iyong sapilitang ipinapanood sa inyo noong high school, o kaya ay iyong ipinabasa sa inyong komiks, o sige, kahit na buod na buod na report ng inyong bibong kaklase noon, alam mo na sigurong nakatatawa ang pagkatao at mga hirit ni Doña Victorina.

Impeccable ang timing ng ale. Iba ang bagsak ng pananalita—o kahit na dated ang kaniyang sociolect na mababasa sa mga seryosong salin (which leads me, baka kasi makalimutan kong sabihin sa kahabaan ng narasyong ito, baka kailangan nang isalin sa pangkasalukuyang kolokyal na wika ang mga dakilang nobela ni Rizal, which begs another round of protracted research,

I guess). Kaya naman sa tuwing gagawing dula ang mga unang kabanata ng *Noli Me Tangere* at *El Filibusterismo*, isa sa pinakatampok na tauhan ay ang Doña na nagpipilit maging Kastila; ang Doña na pinandirihan ang mga Indio gayong siya man ay isang Indio. Ang Doña na kung magsalita ay akala mong pinakamaalam sa lahat.

Ang tauhan ng isang nobela ay singgaling lamang ng may katha sa kaniya. Kaya ang atribusyon ng siste, dapat lang, ay kay Rizal. At sa ilang pagkakataong hindi natin kailangang maalam sa mga kauri ni Cicero, maitatanghal sa atin ang paglalaro sa sitwasyon na hindi natalakay ni Almario sa kaniyang aklat.

Kung бага sa pagbibitaw ng joke patungo sa punchline, narito ang masasabi kong galing ni Rizal. Naaalala ba ninyo ang Bapor Tabo at ang pagtatalo-talo ng mga nasa pang-itaas ng kubyerta, nalililiman ng kubol ang mga fraile at empleyado habang humihit ng tabako at nagninilay sa tanawin ng ilog habang patungo ang Bapor Tabo sa Laguna? At ano ang pinagtatalunan ng mga fraile, ni Don Custodio at Ben Zayb, at ni Simoun? Kung paano palalawakin ang ilog. Nagtatalo-talo sila kung kaninong mungkahi ang pinakamabuti, ang pinakamaayos. Naiwang nagpuputok ng butse si Don Custodio dahil nakahirir kay Simoun na matapos sabihin ang kaniyang mungkahing pagtrabahuin ang mga Indio para humukay ng parallel at higit na tuwid na ilog ay sukat umalis sa umpukan.

Sa pagkakatong ito, inilabas ni Don Custodio ang kaniyang mungkahing gumamit ng maraming pato upang kainin ang mga susong nasa gilid ng pampang ng ilog upang lumapad at tumuwid ang pampang nang sa gayon ay hindi mahirapan ang paglalakbay ng mga bapor sa ilog. Ilalarawan sa atin kung paano tinapos ni Don Custodio ang pagpapahayag sa kaniyang mungkahi: “At ibinukas ni Don Custodio ang dalawang bisig at tuwang-tuwang minasdan ang pagkamangha ng kaniyang mga tagapakinig. Walang nakaisip ng gayong ideyang kaibang-kaiba.” Na gagatungan pa ng



peryodistang si Ben Zayb na equally full of himself gaya ni Don Custodio: “Ipahihintulot ba ninyong sumulat ako ng isang artikulo tungkol dyan?... sa bayang ito bihira ang nag-iisip.”

Tapos na sana. Kung бага sa ngangayuning aksyon, drop mic moment na sa sana si Don Custodio lalo’t pinag-ibayo pa ni Ben Zayb ang kagalingan ng kaniyang mungkahi. Pero gaya ng masayahing disenyo ni Rizal sa unang kabanata ng *El Filibusterismo*, pinahirit niya ang nagpapanggap na Kastilang si Doña Victorina na nakikinig pala sa lahat ng ito:

“Pero, Don Custodio...kapag nag-alaga ng itik ang lahat, sasagana ang itlog na balut. Ay, nakakadiri! Pabayaang magsara ang mga balaho!”

Hindi ko gustong ipaliwanag pero sadyang nakakatawa ito. Ang timing, ang nagsasalitang si Doña Victorina (lalo kung mai-imagine mo ang kaniyang kakatwang hitsura at kung paano siya nagpipilit magsalita sa Español), pati na ang mismong paksa—balut at balaho ng ilog—para hindi talakayin nang husto. Ang galing ng disenyo na nang-upstage ang isang masasabing social climber sa isang nagmamagaling na don.

Noon pa pala kadiri (at least sa mata ng dayuhan at nagpapanggap na dayuhan gaya ni Doña Victorina) ang balut. Staple na sa mga travel guides at travel shows sa iba’t ibang bansa ang balut. Nagsisilbi itong challenge sa mga dayuhan at hindi dadalawang beses ko itong naialok sa mga nakilala at nakasamang dayuhan dito sa ating bansa. Matigas ang kanilang pagtangga sa malinamnam na balut. Bakit nga naman hindi, naliligo sa sabaw ang isang patay na sisiw. Hindi rin nakatulong na kulay abo na ang laman ng balut na parang bulok. Ang magaling sa pagbuo ng sitwasyon ni Rizal ay ang anti-climactic ending ng kabanata. Na ang isang nagpapanggap na alta sociedad ang babasag nang walang ganti dahil natapos na ang kabanata sa isang don na nag-aakalang napakahusay ng kaniyang mungkahi. Kung бага sa tong-its, two-hits ang tama kay Don Custodio ng sitwasyon. Una mula kay Simoun

na nang-iwan sa pagtatalo-talo, at ang mas masakit, mula sa isang Doña Victorinang pinag-ibayo ni Rizal ang katatawanan.

Ganito rin halos ang ginawa ni Rizal sa Kabanata 20 ng *Noli Me Tangere*, “Ang Pulong sa Tribunal.” Ano ba ang nangyari dito? Isang mapaglarong eksena tungkol sa kung anong pangkat ang masusunod para sa palabas bago at hanggang kapistahan ng San Diego de Alcalá.

Nangyari ang Kabanata 20 labing-isang araw bago ang kapistahan sa Nobyembre 12. Nagpupulong ang mga kabataan at mga may gulang ng bayan. Dahil magkaiba ang prinsipyo—liberal at konserbatibo—hindi sila nagpapadaig sa mga panukala kung ano ang palabas, sino ang gaganap, gaano karami ang pailaw at paputok para masigurong matatandaan hanggang kabilang bayan ang mangyayaring kapistahan. Pero wala sa buod na ito ang saya ng kabanata. Nasa detalye na, ayon nga kay Almario, ay hindi na naisama sa mas popular na salin kung hindi na nalaman ng marami lalo na ang galing ni Rizal sa humor.

Makulay ang naging parunggitan, may mga diskarte pa upang mas manaig ang mungkahi ng isang pangkat. May yabangan. Naroon din ang hindi maitatangging pagalingan sa pagtatalumpati—pagalingan sa pagpapaligoy talaga ang pakiramdam ko habang binabasa—upang pagandahin ang pakiramdam ng katunggali sa mas magandang mungkahi. May isang pagkakataon pa nga na hindi kakilala ng mga may edad sa pulong ang alusyong binanggit ng mga kabataan hinggil kay Lucius Cornelius Sulla na nabuhay isang siglo bago pa ipanganak si Kristo. Binanggit ito bilang sa mabuting pagkakaibigan. Sumagot ang nakatatanda:

“Ano ang pakialam natin kay Sulla at kahit sa mga Romano? Bakit, inanyayahan ba nila tayo kahit sa isa man lang sa nilang pista? Ako na lamang, wala pa akong natatanggap na anumang paanyaya, at matanda na ako!” (127)

Iyong pagmamalaki dulot ng kamangmangan ang masaya sa tagpong nabanggit. Pero hindi pa doon nagwawakas ang kabanata. Gaya ng nangyari sa Bapor Tabo, ihihilera ni Rizal ang kaayusan—ang set-up ng joke—tungo sa masaya pero nakaiinis na pagwawakas ng kabanata. Nang sa wakas ay maayos na, mistulang nagkasundo na ang magkabilang panig, nang mabalangkas na ang plano para sa kapistahan, na maganda at makabuluhang plano sa totoo lang, saka naman hihirit ang gobernadorsilyo na nakikinig lang sa kahabaan ng pagtatalo-talo. Taglay na pala ng gobernadorsilyong hindi makapagsalita dahil may sakit ang desisyon ng kura ng parokya kung ano ang mangyayari sa kapistahan: “Anim na prusisyon, tatlong sermon, tatlong grandeng misa, at kung may salapi pa, komedyang Tondo at awitan sa pagitan.” (130) Ipinatawag lamang pala ang pulong sa tribunal upang sabihin ang naging desisyon ng padre kura ng San Diego. Kung ngayon nangyari ang ganitong tagpo, siguro baka isang memo lang sa email o group chat ang ipinadala ng gobernadorsilyo para hindi na dumalo ang mga maginoo ng bayan. Wala tuloy nagawa ang magigiting nating maginoo. Tumutol man sila, nanaig ang kanilang pagsuko sa kapangyarihan ng kura ng parokya. Walang naging saysay ang yabangan at pag-name drop ng mga dakilang tao ng lumang Griyego bilang palatandaan na pangmatalino ang mga alusyon ng ating dakilang nobelista.

## §

Eksperto si Rizal sa alusyon. Sa aking klase ng malikhaing pagsulat, lagi nang makakatikim sa akin ng papuri ang isang manunulat na mahusay sa pagbibigay ng alusyon. May fine balance between obscurity at cliché ang isang alusyon. On the one hand, kung palasak na, cliché. Kung lubhang malalim ang hugot ng alusyon, obscure. Sa larang ng pagpapahayag gamit ang pagsulat, kung hindi makararating ang mensahe sa intended audience dahil sa obscurity ng allusion, sablay ito. Kaya dapat may fine balance.

Kaya nga kung alusyon at alusyon din lang, mahihinuhang hindi pangkaraniwan ang iniisip na mambabasa ni Rizal. Ang iniisip marahil niya ay ang kapwa niya nakapag-aral, mga dumaan sa klasiko (iilan lang naman din ang subject noon kaya, well, learned sila sa mga Greek at Roman Classics). Iniisip marahil na kapwa niya siyentipiko o scholar ang babasa. Kaya nga kung hindi pa ipaliliwanag sa atin ang siste ng mga ginagamit niyang alusyon, hindi nga natin makukuha ang galing ni Rizal sa humor.

Pero gaya ng kuwento ni Rizal tungkol kay Doña Victorina, marami din siyang iniwan para sa ating karaniwang mambabasang mas matagal pa ngayon sa Tiktok at Youtube kaysa tunay na nagbabasa matapos ang mahigit sansiglo buhat nang malathala ang kaniyang nobela.

Sa lahat ng iniwan ni Rizal na source ng katatawanan, wala na yatang mas hihigit pa sa ika-29 na kabanata ng *El Filibusterismo*, ang “Mga Huling Salita Tungkol kay Kapitan Tiago.” Ang maikling kabanata kung saan inilarawan sa pinakakomikal na paraan ni Rizal ang uri ng burol at libing ni Don Santiago Delos Santos.

Sa mga hindi na matandaan ang kanilang *El Filibusterismo*, sa kabanatang ito namatay si Kapitan Tiago. Namatay nang hindi nakapangungumpisal. Kagyat pagtatalunan ng dalawang pari ang kung ano ang dapat gawin sa isang taong simbahan na hindi nabigyan ng sakramento. Sasabihin ni Padre Irene: “Ang mga paghihigpit, tulad ng alam na alam ninyo, ay ginagamit lamang kapag ang hindi nagsisi ay hindi rin nagbayad!”

Dadagsa ang mga Maritess/tsismosa noong panahong iyon. May lulutang na tsismis na diumano’y nagpapakita ang kaluluwa ni Kapitan Tiago sa mga mongha habang naghihingalo pa lamang ang matanda. Maraming lalabas na saksi. Lulumain ang mga magasin, tabloid, at awayan ng mga basurang vloggers sa kasalukuyan sa tinahi-tahing kuwento ng namatay.

Hahatiin ang mana ni Kapitan Tiago. Si Padre Irene ang magsisilbing tagapag-ingat nito. Dadamitan ang Kapitan Tiago. Pagtatalunan kung alin ang mas nararapat: gutay-gutay na abito ng Pransiskano (sa halagang 32 piso) o isang magarang frock (sa halagang 37 piso).

Naroon din natural ang mga kapwa tahir ni Kapitan Tiago, o ang mga kinikilalang malalakas na sugarol ng bayan. Pinagtatalunan kung sino ang mananalo sa sabong sa langit kapag naglaban ang manok ni Kapitan Tiago at manok ni San Pedro. Sa puntong ito, iigting ang humor ni Rizal nang gumamit ng Latin si Don Primitivo: “*An gallus talisainus, acuto tari armatus, an gallus beati Petri bulikus sasabungus sit.*” Na isinalin ni Almario bilang: “Kung may manok na talisain, armado sa matalas na tari, kung ang manok ng banal na Pedro ay bulik na sasabungin.”

Bagamat busog sa alusyon ang dalawang nobela, hindi natin kailangan maging maalam sa Latin para mahawatig na ang binanggit ni Don Primitivo ay katatawanan (maliban pa sa erehe dahil ang Latin ay wika ng simbahan, bagay na ipinaalala sa kaniya ng kausap niyang si Martin Aristorenas). Naroon din ang Tsinong si Quiroga (sa ibang salin ay tinatawag sa pejorative na Intsik Quiroga) na sumali sa usapan ngunit ang pagsasalita ay sa paraang alam na alam nating Tsino: “Sigulo, puwele kontalata pala isang sabungan ke Kilisto, ha? Pag matay na ako, akyen kontalata, ha?” (247)

Gaya ng isang elaborate joke, talagang inirereserba ni Rizal ang pinakatampok na bahagi ng pagpapatawa sa dulo, sa mismong libing, habang dinadala ang bangkay tungo sa libingan.

“Pinakamataas na uri, siyempre, ang libing. May mga responso sa bahay, sa daan, at pinangungunahan ng tatlong fraile sapagkat tila hindi sapat ang isa sa gayong kaluluwa, ginawa ang lahat ng mga ritwal at seremonyang maaari, at balitang-balita na dinagdagan ang pagsasagawa ng iba katulad ng pagkuha ng mga extra sa palabas pandulaan. Nakaaaliw ang libing. Maraming sinunog na insenso, maraming awit sa Latin, gumamit ng maraming agwa

bendita, bilang alay sa kaniyang kaibigan ay inawit nang sintunado ni Padre Irene ang *Dies irae* mula sa koro, at talagang sumakit ang ulo ng mga kapitbahay sa katakot-takot na kalembang para sa namatay.” (248)

Kung eksena sa pelikula ito, punong-puno ng nakatatawang pangyayari. Sagana sa kulay at aksyon. Nakatutulig ang ingay pati na ang sintunadong boses ng pari. Makikita natin ang wide camera angle, puno ng tao ang daan. Hindi magkamayaw. Makikita nating nangunguna ang tatlong pari kasunod ang maraming responso. At kung inaakala nating sa sintunadong boses isasara ni Rizal ang kabanata, hindi. Itinira niya ang, sa palagay ko, pinakanakakatawa sa lahat. Isang talatang hindi na kailangan pang ipaliwanag ang humor upang magdulot sa atin ng schema dahil as it is, bilang nakauunawa sa Tagalog, matatawa tayo:

“Taimtim na hiniling ni Doña Patrocinio, ang dating karibal ni Kapitan Tiago sa relihiyoseriya, na mamatay na sana siya kinabukasan upang magkaroon ng libing na higit pang pambihira. Hindi matanggap ng matandang banal na si Kapitan Tiago, na inaakala niyang ganap na niyang nadaig, ngayong namatay ay muling nabuhay nang napakarangya. Oo, lunggati na rin niyang mamatay at waring naririnig na niya ang mga bulalas ng mga magsisidalo sa kaniyang responso: ‘Ito, ito talaga ang libing! Ito, ito talaga ang marunong mamatay, si Doña Patrocinio!’”

Ang kulit ni Rizal.



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# THE JOURNAL OR DIARY EXCERPT AS LITERATURE

By Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo



*Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo, Ph.D. is a writer of fiction and nonfiction, and a literary scholar and critic, with more than 40 published books. The latest of these is *Collected Stories and Tales* (UST, 2019), a compendium of her short fiction over the years; and *What I Wanted to Be When I Grew Up: Early Apprenticeship of a Writer* (UP, 2021). Among the distinctions she has received are the Carlos Palanca Grand Prize for the Novel, the Gawad Balagtas from the Unyon ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas, and the Gawad Dangal ng Lahi from the Carlos Palanca Foundation. She has served as director of the University of the Philippines Press and the UST Publishing House, vice president for public affairs of the UP System, and director of the UP Institute of Creative Writing. At present, she is director of the UST CCWLS and professor emeritus of UP.*

I have kept a diary or journal (I use the terms interchangeably) since I was eight years old. I think it started out simply as an exercise notebook, an opportunity to practice my writing. Its earliest inspiration was Rebecca Randall's "Thought Book" in the childhood novel *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*.



Later, I came to regard it as a companion, a friend, much like Anne Frank's diary. I even gave her a name. As Anne Frank called her diary Kitty, I called mine Toni. She was a record of my days, a witness to my changing moods. As I grew older, Toni mirrored my growth, from girl to woman, to wife and mother, to professional writer and teacher. At some point, she acquired a different name: Tania. Written with my guard down, Tania is perhaps the most honest testimony of my tallest dreams, as of my deepest heartaches; of the things I fear, and the things I truly cherish.

"Tania has served me well—as bosom friend and confidante; as traveling companion; as exercise notebook or sketchbook; as sounding board for thoughts, both sacred and profane; as repository for memories, both trivial and momentous; as escape hatch, as hedge against depression and despair."<sup>1</sup>

In 2009, I published a collection of travel memoirs, of the trips I took after Tony, my husband, retired from his job with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and we returned to the Philippines. I gave this book the title *Travels with Tania* (UST Publishing House). I decided on that title because the book drew heavily on my journal entries for the accounts of those trips... to Canberra and Cambridge, to Indonesia, to Singapore; to New York City and Washington D.C., to L.A. and Norfolk in Virginia, to Sonoma and back to L.A.

But the journal itself I have never allowed people to read, not even my closest friends or members of my family. It was written with my guard down. I have several times entertained the thought of destroying it. However, when several volumes did, in fact, go up in smoke, in the fire that gutted the old University of the Philippines (UP) Faculty Center in 2016, I felt like I

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<sup>1</sup> Hidalgo, Cristina Pantoja. *What I Wanted to Be When I Grew Up: a Writer's Early Apprenticeship*. University of the Philippines Press, 2021. Tania was the name I gave my diary when we returned home to the Philippines after 15 years of living overseas. Before that, she was called Toni.

had lost a limb. And now, here I am, submitting an excerpt from my journal as my contribution to this book. Does this give the lie to my claim never to have wanted strangers to read it?

Why do writers publish their diaries? I think for the same reason that they sometimes write the same material in different forms—as a novel, or a poem, or an essay, or a play—and then publish it.

Over the years, many writers have published their diaries. This suggests that diaries, for some time now, have been deemed worthy of being published alongside those writers' fiction or poetry or nonfiction. But diaries are personal documents, written, one assumes—at least originally—purely for the author's own eyes. Does this mean that they were published in their original form? I shall leave this question for now and return to it later.

Even a cursory reading of the published diaries/journals/notebooks of writers will reveal them to vary widely in both content and form. Off the top of my head, I can think of: Fyodor Dostoevsky, George Orwell, George Sand, Dorothy Wordsworth, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Andre Gide, Graham Green, Mary Sarton, Susan Sontag, Anais Nin, Sylvia Plath, Allen Ginsberg... Just looking at those names, one can imagine how their diaries must have differed from each other.

I might also mention the earliest published diaries that I know of, the diaries of those court ladies of 11<sup>th</sup> century Japan, like the *Diary of Lady Murasaki Shikibu*, *The Diary of Izumi Shikibu*, and *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*. These books are unlike any diaries that came before or after them. They are not even like each other. Each is truly unique. The label “diary” seems to have been a decision by their modern editors/translators, who did not know what name to give them.<sup>2</sup>

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2 [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Diaries\\_of\\_Court\\_Ladies\\_of\\_Old\\_Japan/Introduction](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Diaries_of_Court_Ladies_of_Old_Japan/Introduction)

It becomes obvious that there is no point in speaking about what a diary or a journal *should be*, the way those “how-to-write” manuals might endeavor to guide beginning writers on how to produce a work of fiction or nonfiction. A diary or journal will be whatever kind of book the diarist wants it to be. Hence, some diaries consist of brief daily logs; others contain reflections or meditations on a variety of topics; some serve as a form of confessional; and still others might be like practice exercises in different kinds of writing.

They differ from other forms of creative nonfiction (the genre under which they are today classified), in that they were not originally written as literary pieces but as personal documents. Which brings me to this essay’s title, which may strike the reader as a bit of a paradox. If a diary is a private document, written spontaneously, without thought of readers, how could it also be artistic? Does not the modifier “artistic” imply artifice?

Personally, I believe that when the diarist is a writer—would-be writer, or professional writer—she cannot help but try to write artistically. No more than a professional singer can help singing *well*, and in her own particular style, whether she be doing it before an audience, or in the privacy of her home.

This brings me back to that other point. If the diary—or diary excerpt—is being offered to the reader as a literary piece, one would assume that, like all other literary pieces, it has been edited. But does not a diary or diary excerpt, which has been edited, cease to be an authentic diary? My answer to that is: it very much depends on what kind of editing it has undergone. I think it would be safe to say that all published diaries or journals have been edited. In their original form, there is much about a diary or journal which might be totally boring, or even unintelligible, to the reader who does not know the diarist personally.

There would be references to persons that the reader would not be able to identify; to events that would not be familiar to the reader. There might be certain phrases or expressions which are a private joke between the diarist and her family members or close friends. The editor (be she the diarist herself or someone else) would need to decide whether to omit all such references or private codes, or to provide some form of clarification or explanation. The clarification might be as simple as providing the full name of the person referred to, instead of just his childhood nickname; or as complicated as adding a digression into a historical event or a public controversy, to supply the context for the material the reader needs to understand and appreciate the text properly. It may also be necessary to prune some unnecessary or irrelevant bits.

On the other hand, the diarist needs to take care that these revisions, or additions or excisions, fit into the texture of her narrative without calling attention to themselves. They have to be all of a piece within the work of art.

In deciding to publish her diary or journal—or excerpts thereof—as *a literary work*, the diarist does so knowing that the work must meet demands similar to those that all other forms of creative nonfiction are expected to meet. The most important has to do with craftsmanship. Like the memoir, or the personal essay, the diarist should be aware that readers will regard her as the “persona” or narrator, and expect this narrator to be capable of engaging them in her routine activities, as was in her conflicts or crises. On the other hand, the narratives will be expected to recreate the narrator’s milieu (what in fiction is referred to as “setting” and “atmosphere,” albeit not as fully). The reader will also expect the narratives to include other persons besides the diarist, and that these “characters” also be interesting in their own right. The diarist’s tone and style, and her insight into the significance of the experiences that the narrative recounts, would evoke a response from the reader, perhaps emotional, perhaps intellectual, perhaps both. But, and

perhaps most importantly, the narrative must retain the honesty which is at the core of all effective nonfiction.

The journal excerpt which I chose for this book project is focused on just one year in my life—the year when our family returned to the Philippines, after living overseas for 15 years. The story that emerges, not surprisingly, is a narrative of re-entry. I was trying to resume my career as a teacher and writer. I was also trying to pick up my unfinished PhD. And all that, while trying to adjust to the present realities of the country, which seemed extremely unstable. My husband, for his part, was also attempting to carve a place for himself, having given up his career with the United Nations agency that he had been working for. (Buying the old house which became Casa Hidalgo, and setting up Magiting Gamecock Farm in its backyard was part of efforts to do this.) I decided to exclude those passages which didn't deal with those four themes.

A diary or journal is a kind of narrative, with passages of reflection or meditation scattered about. It is a combination of scene, summary, and description. It may be livened up with action and dialogue, with sensory images, with vivid and concrete details. Reflective passages may be lightened up with humor. But it is important not to overdo all this. Revision, yes, but within limits. To alter a phrase here and there, to introduce a bit of dialogue, to add an image or two, to exclude some paragraphs—these are different from writing new material and passing it off as original entries. Nor should characters and incidents be invented. This, in my mind, would be cheating.

In any case, as a literary form, the diary has its own advantages. By its very nature, it creates an impression of authenticity and intimacy. It has a built-in narrative arc. It allows for flexibility of structure, for digressions. It also allows for personal advocacy—if one is that way inclined—without the danger of preachiness.

That said, the form has its disadvantages. One is that it runs the risk of compromising the privacy of people who were involved in the diarist's life, and who appear in her life narrative as characters. In my case, these were my children. I solved this problem by simply not going there. The girls are mentioned, of course, but their personal experiences are not part of the substance of the book.

Another disadvantage is that one sometimes gets into the habit of writing in a diary when one is in a particular frame of mind; say, when one is feeling gloomy or pessimistic, as opposed to when things are going well, and one is feeling cheerful. So, the picture of the diarist that emerges is lopsided. But this may just be a peculiarity of mine, and not shared by other diarists.

In the end, I guess a journal excerpt is no more problematic than any other literary form. The problems concerned are simply different. And, for me, the job was probably easier since I didn't have to agonize over a first draft. The first draft was already written: it was the journal itself.

# RE-ENTRY AND RENEWAL: PAGES FROM MY JOURNAL

by Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo

21 October 1990

We have been home since October 2, but I have not written a word in this journal. I tell myself that I have only now acquired this notebook. But that's an excuse.

I think I just didn't feel like writing anything, anywhere. Is it possible that I do not consider the business of resettling here as important as settling in a new country? No, there is no doubt in my mind about the significance of this move for me, for our family. Perhaps I simply do not want to document my feelings just yet. For what would the journal entries be, but a list of my fears and anxieties, a record of all the misfortunes that seem to be falling on this country—a flood, an earthquake, yet another *coup d'état*, fuel shortage, jobless overseas workers returning from the Middle East, the sinking peso...

Tony is at loose ends. He tells me he can't get started on his projects while the peso-dollar exchange rate does not stabilize. He has bought us a second-hand Sentra, but is very disappointed at the quality control and service at the Nissan casa, even as he tells himself that disappointment and anger over what doesn't work is a waste of time. None of it is going to change. I tell him he should call up a couple of his old friends, play golf, play tennis—he spends most of his time by himself. But he says that, for him, this is not a good time for socializing.

For my part, I have been given a teaching schedule at UP, though I still have no appointment, nor an office. Classes start on Nov. 12. Both Tatti Licuanan and Shayne Lumbera—to whom I spoke some days ago—are

encouraging me to apply for a teaching post at the Ateneo. But I'd rather stay in UP. I want to finish the PhD I left behind when we moved to Bangkok; and those three years that I taught there were among the best in my life.

I wish I had a clear idea of what is to come. How does one make plans when everything is so unstable, so unpredictable? Tony suggests that I look at it another way: facing the unexpected is also exciting.

While I was waiting for Anna to finish her UPCAT [University of the Philippines College Admission Test] test, I spent some time with Carmel Almendrala (wife to the Philippine Ambassador in Burma when we lived there), whose Jenny—one of Anna's best chums in the Rangoon International High School—was taking the same exam. Carmel was expansive, optimistic, happy about Fred's new posting to San Francisco. I tried not to envy her. Maybe this is what Tony meant about this not being the right time to socialize.

I've decided to send my finished MS, "I Remember... Travel Essays," to Gloria Rodriguez of New Day after all, instead of to Anvil Publishing, which was what I had earlier planned to do. I owe Gloria my loyalty. This will be my third book that she will have published.

### 23 October

The president of Pasang Masda, Oscar Lazano, was shot to death yesterday. Classes have been canceled—even at ISM<sup>3</sup>—because of the scheduled *welga ng bayan*. Tony is becoming less optimistic about the country's future. When renegade army officers (who usually belong to the far right) join forces with the NPA [New People's Army] (who, of course, are far left), how can the center hold?

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<sup>3</sup> International School of Manila, where we had put Anna, to enable her to finish high school with her former classmates



5 November 1990

Today we spent the whole day in Makati. Tony wanted to get the Sentra in good working order, to dress it up, to iron out all the kinks. At the end of the day, he still wasn't done. The car stereo wasn't ready. The new car clock is a lemon.

Yesterday we went to Ermita, to check on the exchange rate. The official peso-dollar rate has dropped from P25.75 to P28. (The black market rate is, of course, higher.) Gas rationing is about to be imposed. Everyone is expecting a tougher time.

Tony said to me, "Why don't we just take a look at the antiques in Intramuros?" But the shops apparently close by 5:00 p.m. We settled for *merienda* at the Fundar Coffee Shop. The *tokwa at baboy* and *dinuguan at puto* tasted terrific. The grins were back on our faces. We walked around Plaza San Luis a bit, enjoying the restored Intramuros (a credit to Chitang Nakpil) [writer Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil]. We were home, and suddenly, all was right with the world!

We recalled that we had gone together to Vere's and Jess' wedding at San Agustin Church. It was a rainy June morning. And the flowers, candles, organ music, incense... the magnificent church itself... and Vere's trailing white gown, were as romantic as a fairy tale!

Was Vere the first in our group to get married? We girls were all in our early twenties, full of dreams about graduate school and glamorous jobs abroad... Within two years or so, we all got married and became housewives (though of course, we did not give up our jobs). In another year, we became mothers! Danner had been Rita's classmate in UST. Tony was only a year older than me. We were children!

And Linda, who had always said that she only ever wanted to find a good man to marry and raise a family with, left for Madrid to get an MA. The irony of it was not lost on us.

### 7 November

I decided to have my hair cut at this place that my sis-in-law, Marie, goes to, and they did a good job of camouflaging the way it has thinned out. Because of the stress, I think. Now it looks fluffy, which effectively disguises its real condition. I have also been shopping for more casual clothes—skirts, slacks, blouses—for work. The wardrobe of a diplomat's life will not be cool in the UP campus.

Having no room of my own (in the UP FC) [Faculty Center] is discouraging. My old friend, Connie Alaras (now our department chair), who approved my appointment, is on leave. And her OIC doesn't seem able to ask faculty members who have retired to vacate their offices to make room for new faculty members, and returning faculty members, like myself.

### 8 November

The prospect of war looms over the Middle East. Had Tony chosen to stay on with UNICEF, he would be out there in Jordan (this was mentioned to him as a possibility after his term as chief of the Asia desk in New York was over). The children and I would probably have been evacuated to Manila. And he would be much closer to ruining his health with excessive smoking and resentment over glass ceilings in the aid agencies of the United Nations. In that sense, we're better off here.

18 November 1990

The bus began its slow climb up the slope of the mountain, Then, suddenly, it came to an abrupt stop. The driver gunned the engine. Nothing happened. The bus refused to move.

No, wait... I should begin at the beginning.

I took along a small notebook to Mount Makiling, hoping to write down my “impressions.” Didn’t have time for writing, though. Looking back on it now, I feel a kind of gentle amusement at my own eagerness to attend this out-of-town UP English Department seminar. Surely I was no stranger to academic seminars? I had been teaching off and on, in different countries, for at least ten years altogether.

Maybe what excited me was the idea of it—being part of a forum of professional people, being among colleagues, being taken seriously, having something to contribute, having an identity distinct from what it has been all these years. (And, quite honestly, doing it away from the responsibilities of the home and family.)

Why do I feel deprived of a professional life? Is it that my work—as columnist, editor, teacher—in all those different countries where we lived, were just jobs, not a career? Of course, I was hired because of my credentials and accepted as a professional. But in the circles to which Tony and I belonged as a couple, and where we spent most of our time, I was, at best, a gifted amateur.

But to return now to our department seminar. The faculty of all four programs—Comparative Literature, Anglo-American Literature, Creative Writing, and English Language—were all in attendance. The topic was the new critical theories--postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, etc.—which to me seemed to be more connected to philosophy, epistemology, linguistics, political science, and other disciplines, than to literature. My own

background is still firmly New Criticism (which is anything but “new” these days).

In the bus, I sat with close friends from my early UP days—Helen Lopez, Preachy Legasto, Thelma Arambulo and Connie Alaras. (Helen and I had manned the freshman registration table during our first sem in the department; and, coming from UST which used a block-system registration for freshmen, I was totally overwhelmed by the chaos. But we were all old hands now.) Our seats were up front, close to the driver. Everyone seemed to be in high spirits. It felt good to get away from the city.

The bus began its slow climb up the slope of the mountain and suddenly came to an abrupt stop. The driver gunned the engine. Nothing happened.

“*May problema po ba?*” Connie asked the driver.

“*Ayaw pong umabante,*” the driver replied. He gestured to his foot, which was pressing on the gas pedal.

“Maybe his emergency brake is on,” Thelma said.

The driver shook his head. “*Hindi po. Tignan nyo.*”

Several of our companions, who had heard the exchange, promptly slid their windows open, leaned out, and cried: “*Tabi tabi po!*” or “*Makikiraan po!*” People in the back rows heard, and followed suit.

After a few minutes, the driver stepped on the gas once more, and the bus resumed its slow ascent. And everyone simply picked up their conversations from where they had left off.

“What just happened?” I said to Preachy.

She gave me an incredulous look. “We asked permission from the spirits to be allowed to pass,” she replied. “This is Mt. Makiling, remember? Mariang Makiling lives here.”

I must have looked as puzzled as I felt. "This is a sacred place," Preachy said.

"You're serious?"

"How else do you explain what just happened?"

"I don't know... maybe an underground magnetic field?"

"A magnetic field that suddenly vanished?" she smiled. "Anyway, be careful. This is THEIR place. We're intruders here. Everybody knows that." She gave me a small nudge. "You've been living *sa abroad* too long."

Preachy herself has just returned from a post-doctoral Fulbright fellowship in Cornell University. Our department is composed of urban, middle class scholars and writers, many of them with advanced degrees from foreign universities. Was our bus an example of what one critic has called "cultural simultaneity"?

Our seminar was held at the National Arts Center, which is also where the Philippine High School for the Arts is located. It's a mountain reserve. We stayed in cottages nestled among the trees, five to a cottage, sleeping in a row, like in a dorm. The conference room was sunny and large, with walls which were actually glass doors that slid open to let in sun and breeze, and balconies overlooking the bay.

For three days, Preachy and a couple of other colleagues held forth on Saussure and Althusser and Derrida and Foucault; on Said, and Bhaba, and Spivak. The rest of us took copious notes. We had discussions that stretched through lunch, and spilled over into *merienda*. Before supper each day, we took off, alone or in pairs, to have a smoke, to stretch our legs, making sure we begged leave from the resident sprites, before wandering down wooded paths, and taking care not to point carelessly at anything, lest we give offense to whoever was ensconced in the tangled branches of the trees.

And after dinner, we gathered around in small groups, with our ice-cold bottles of beer, and exchanged tales about encounters with *encantos* or *encantas*, on this very mountain... and about what befell mortal men with whom the goddess of the mountain fell in love...While in another part of the room, Caloy Aureus strummed on his guitar and sang, in his Elvis Presley baritone, “Are you lonesome tonight? Do you miss me tonight? Are you sorry we drifted apart? Does your memory stray, to that bright summer day...”

And those evenings were the best part of the seminar.

### 19 November

Work on the house is ongoing. We are having our lanai roofed in, to make it a kind of extension of our living room. This will enable us to make room for the stuff we have shipped over, like Carmen’s piano. The lofts for the girls’ rooms is also ongoing, so Lara is staying with her Lola while the two younger girls camp in her room. That works out fine for her, since she is back to working in her Tita Marie’s shop.

My course—Autobiographical Writing by Women—is going well. First time such a course is offered. Under Special Topics. My students are mainly upperclassmen, Lit and Communications majors. The other three classes I haven’t met yet.

Had pleasant conversations with Edel Garcellano, Lydia Arcellana, John Blanco (a Filipino-American who’s trying to get an immigration visa for the Philippines!). Ran into Tet Maceda (who now heads UP’s Institute of Filipino Language) and Pepe Miranda who was surprised to hear that Tony has left UNICEF. Congenial company. I’m in the right place, and never mind that they all outrank me.

I wish Tony would find where he can belong. He is still withdrawn, still in retreat from the world. I guess he does not plan to seek out anyone until he has settled this for himself—what he will be and do.

Olga McGrath called to let me know that Kevin is to be the new UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] Representative in Manila. They will all be here by January next year. Will friendship between our families still be possible? I hope it will, but we shall see.

### 24 November

Our shipment still hasn't arrived. It has been two months since we packed the stuff. Yesterday, Tony and I went to Makati to catch a movie, *Goodfellas*, and have dinner, much as we used to do. It struck us how far away New York seems now, how it has receded from our consciousness. Life is going on in Westchester County. The trees have put on their autumn finery—that glorious display of flame and gold—which by now must be turning brown. I miss the evanescent beauty of the changing seasons, and the charm of our lovely house, and the availability of most everything that we needed. But not much else.

I've never seen Tony so withdrawn. It is clearly a trauma that he has suffered, the depths of which maybe he hasn't even begun to measure. I wonder if he sometimes feels desolate, at the thought of everything he has lost. Even if he chose this. If he does, he has not spoken about it. He often tells me that he is content. And, if his pleasantness is proof of this, then he is content.

He has more or less decided that he wants to push through with his plan to set up a gamecock farm. It isn't just a boyhood dream. He is very familiar with the sport. He has the experience, having raised a couple of gamecocks even in our first home (the duplex on East Avenue). And he

actually set up a small farm in the backyard of our house in Teacher's Village, which even then he called Magiting Gamecock Farm. (He even taught me how to hold a cock so that it couldn't flap its wings when he had to tend to its wounds or feed it vitamins.) He has estimated the cost for a farm that would be big enough to be able to earn him a livelihood. And he thinks it is doable.

I hope for his sake that he's right. I know nothing about the breeding of fighting cocks, or about running any kind of business, and won't be able to help him.

"Operation Desert Shield" is going on in the Gulf. The papers say this is the largest overseas deployment by the US since the Korean War—240,000 troops in the Gulf, and 200,000 more on the way. The UK has sent 50,000 troops, and other allies have either sent troops or committed to do so. The effect of all this on us is inflation so bad that the prices of even groceries change by the week.

Edel and Elmer invited me for coffee at the new Faculty Center canteen, and introduced me to Godi Calleja, who owns Kalikasan Press, a new outfit committed to giving emerging writers a chance. Godi teaches in UP as well. He asked me to send him any new MS I have. I took this as a compliment and was really pleased.

Nonetheless... I do miss our old life sometimes. Thelma Kintanar had to cancel our lunch date because Sylvia Guerrero, who was supposed to join us, left suddenly for Bali with Tatti Licuanan—a conference on women's issues I think. And they have all just returned from China. This was my Bangkok group—Tatti, Thelma, Sylvia.

But I know I must let this go. I haven't yet, not totally. It's happening. But slowly.

A thought: how will I keep on writing travel essays if I stop traveling?



30 November

We have been looking at land for a potential farm. A couple of days ago, we went to Tanauan to look at something, and Tony thought we may have found what he needs. A hilly place, one-and-a half hectares, planted to coconuts, mangoes, and other fruit trees. But the access road was in terrible condition.

12 December 1990

The UN Security Council has passed Resolution 678 sanctioning the use of force if Iraq does not leave Kuwait by Jan. 15. Only Cuba and Yemen voted against it and China abstained. This is the first time that the UN has authorized armed intervention since the Korean War in 1950.

Are we on the brink of war now?

I push that question to the back of my mind and think of Book No. 5. This book I shall offer today to Godi of Kalikasan.

18 December

My office now has a desk, a chair, and a bookcase. And, though they are all a bit timeworn and clearly mismatched, they will do for now. When our shipment is finally released from the Manila pier, I hope to find some pieces of furniture that I can use in their place.

Sylvia Ventura, the head of the UP Press, has asked me to give her something. I may give her the Burma book, if it ever gets finished. Have been rereading my diaries to get myself back into the groove. (When my classes get underway in UP, I know there will be little time to spare. Particularly when I am myself enrolled for my PhD.) Once again, I am stumped by the

form which will suit this new book. I am not satisfied with the one I used for my *Korean Sketchbook*.

The girls were distressed over there being no Christmas decorations in the house, save for a simple white star lantern hanging from the eaves outside, and a wreath made from pine cones sent by my mom. So I concocted some decorations from the odds and ends I found in our little stockroom under the stairs, and stuff which I borrowed from Mom; and have managed to come up with a “tree.” There were these bare branches painted white, which used to stand in a big blue vase on the landing. I trimmed them with little gold balls, and propped them inside an old Burmese jar. So now our dining room has a tree!

Drove to the *Times* to collect what they owed me for my last articles, took Carmen to buy some clothes, and bought stuff needed for the party which it seems we will be having at home. But I am not done with buying presents...

25 December (2:00 a.m.)

Tony decided he wanted to play *pater familias* to his clan, and to what remains in Manila of my family. After I had phoned everyone, I realized that they had all committed to coming, but at different times! What to do?

I consulted Bet Montecillo, my SPCQ [St. Paul College Quezon] classmate who gave Carmen cooking lessons long ago. And she did me the favor of preparing a complete menu for a buffet which would, she promised, be perfect. So my *handa* was a buffet consisting of platters of cold food—different kind of sausages (she specified which kind), different kinds of cheese (these I could manage for myself), a bowl of potato salad, a bowl of fruit salad, one hot dish, of course *jamon de china* (which may now be bought in Unimart, she said), and punch (for which she gave me her recipe).

Tony's brothers, Quinito and Doy, brought their families. Ce begged off, but all her kids came, including Angela (Skookums, the oldest, who was a baby when I was pregnant with Lara, and consulting Ce about baby care), and her new French husband. Manoling, husband to Carmeling (Tony's oldest sister) was sick, so the Villanueva children couldn't make it. Pa and Ma came, and Boy with Marie and Mikey and Michelle. And our girls (dressed in very sophisticated browns and blacks) got to know their cousins again. And the party turned out nicely enough.

By ten minutes after midnight, the last guests had left. Tony put on the only Christmas carols CD we have in the house (an old one with Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, which we had left behind for some reason). The girls brought down their presents, and got our presents from our room, and spread them around our exotic tree. We then opened them amid much hilarity. Lara and Carmen are now sound asleep. And Anna is stretched out on our Chinese divan in the living room, talking on the phone with a boy, who is supposed to be "just a good friend."

Not bad for a first Christmas Eve at home in a long, long time.

Today, we go to Tony's Tita Ata (his dad's sister) in Urdaneta Village for the traditional Hidalgo clan reunion. And on Christmas night, to my family in Broadway.

#### 4 January 1991

"You want to buy a what? An ancestral mansion?" I asked.

"I wasn't planning to," Tony replied. "We've been looking for a place to set up Magiting, right? I saw this ad in the *Manila Bulletin*: 'Ancestral Mansion for Sale, San Miguel, Bulacan.' I got curious. So I drove up there to see it."

He said the place is about half a hectare, planted to coconut trees. Perfect for his planned Magiting Gamecock Farm. But it also comes with a mansion. The mansion is worn down and shabby, but fixable. And the selling price is unbelievably low--the land alone is worth much more. Plus it's right in the center of town.

"But what will we do with the mansion?" I demanded.

"You'll love it!" he said. "It's a beautiful house. I'll show it to you this weekend. Actually, I'd like to show it to your mom too—it was built in the '30s, her time. I'd like her opinion. Can you invite her?"

His plan—which took shape in his mind right after he had inspected the place—is to set up Magiting Game Farm first, in the mansion's sprawling backyard. Then he will repair and restore the house, furnish and decorate it with our own things (which are part of our shipment), much of which we were planning to sell anyway, since there's no way everything will fit into our townhouse. And then he hopes to resell the place, fully furnished with authentic antiquities. If the idea works, maybe we can turn it into another business.

The repair and restoration will take some time. And more time will be needed to advertise the place—to push the idea of buying a restored, fully furnished vintage house. In the meantime, we will use it ourselves, as a kind of country home. By the time the right buyer comes along, he hopes to have also found a more modest place to move Magiting to.

Tony says the town itself is interesting. It has an old church with its little plaza, and many other old houses, some still in use, others in various stages of neglect. And woodcarvers. And pastillas makers. And it has a history: Biak-na-bato is in San Miguel!

He is totally enthused. I have not seen him so animated in a long time. He's already thinking of maybe setting up a corporation. Maybe he

can find some people interested in investing in a corporation, which will purchase, repair, restore, and resell old houses. And he hasn't even been inside this Bulacan house yet!

"Oh, I've called the number in the ad," he told me. "The owner is called Lagandaon. I've made an appointment for us to see her."

### 7 January

We have made the first payment on the ancestral mansion. It belongs to an old San Miguel family. The street it is on is named after their family, the Tecson family.

The owner, Mrs. Celia Tecson-Lagandaon, told us that her ancestral house was built by her father, Don Mariano Tecson. He designed and supervised its construction, "picking out every plank of wood himself." She called it a "labor of love." When he died, none of her siblings were interested in caring for the house, so she offered to buy them out. However, she now can no longer maintain it either. Her family lives in Manila, and neither Mr. Lagandaon nor his children care about the house. They've been urging her to sell it, so the money can go into something more useful.

We could see that she felt bad about having to let go of it. But she told us that she had a good feeling about us, and believed we would take good care of the house. Which I took as a good sign.

### 12 January

I have been too overwhelmed to do much more than just make it through each day.

After New Year's Day, Mom had to undergo surgery, which gave me a scare. She is 81 years old. The operation was a success, thank God. But on

the exact same day that she entered the hospital, the brokers delivered the shipment that we have been waiting for since October of last year. Then Lara came down with what turned out to be pneumonitis. Then the Lagandaons phoned to say that the house was ready to be moved into; that, actually, we urgently needed to take over as soon as possible, since Simon Tecson and his family (Celia Tecson-Lagandaon's brother, who had been occupying the house in a sort of caretaker's capacity) had moved out.

In the meantime, classes have resumed in UP, but I wasn't able to attend mine. Our household has to be kept running with some semblance of normalcy.

And over all this looms the threat of war and its repercussions, like panic buying in markets, grocery stores, supermarkets. War may still break out. The deadline set by US Pres. Bush for Iraq to move out of Kuwait is January 15, which is two days away.

I'm assuming that this partly caused my killer headache, the likes of which I can't recall having since 1980. Everyone seems to feel the need to make some frantic preparations. But how does one prepare for a world war? By buying more groceries?

"Don't look that far," Tony says. "Just assume there might be shortages."

So I bought a sack of rice and double the groceries I usually get. And I registered our two cars with our barangay. In fact, it was the barangay that sent a couple of people to our little village, to register the residents' vehicles, instead of requiring us to go to their office. I asked them what the purpose for this registration was, and they said that it would make us eligible to obtain gasoline coupons, should rationing take place.

Tony, for his part, has tried to secure all the construction materials he will require for the repairs on the old mansion, in anticipation of a steep

rise in prices, war or no war. Repairs on the house have begun, as has the construction of cages for the gamecock farm.

Mama did come with me and Tony to have a look at the old Tecson mansion. We drove past Baliwag, Pulilan, San Rafael, and San Ildefonso, and then came to Barangay San Vicente in the town of San Miguel. Tony pointed out other old houses, some still in use; others in different stages of disrepair. Still others converted into something else, like a post office.

Then we turned into Tecson Street—it is not wide, but it is paved—and pulled up in front of this astonishing, two-story house. I wouldn't call a mansion. But it certainly is large. And, despite its state of shabby neglect, the old-fashioned elegance and grace of its structure are striking.

Mama was delighted. "Yes, it's of that time," she said, picking up instantly on some details, and pointing them out to us—the vestibule, the window grills, the fretwork under the canopies... and the sign up there, under the central eave. "That's the year of construction," Mama said. "Look, it says '1930.'"

She also told me there was a lot I could do with the garden. But she said I shouldn't have it landscaped in the modern way. She offered to help me with some ideas, when the time comes. This may have helped us decide.

### 18 January

War broke out yesterday. "Operation Desert Shield" is now "Operation Desert Storm." Local TV stations are covering the war, mostly with footage from CNN, which is focused on the war 24 hours a day. Thirty nine nations are part of the coalition headed by the US. This is the largest military alliance since World War II. Allied nations which are not sending troops, like Germany and Japan, have contributed financial support. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have provided the largest financial contribution.

Mama says that, according to Lola Mariquita, news of World War I would come to Manila by boat, which, of course, took months! World War II was covered by radio. The Vietnam War was the first war to be covered by television, and watched by people all over the world from their living rooms. Today, we are getting this war live via satellite! All these changes within one lifetime! Stupefying, Mama says.

Is this progress? Where information and knowledge are concerned, I suppose it is. But there is something chilling about it as well. Might this constant barrage not also lead to a desensitizing?

While we were living in Burma, Lara came home to Manila to start college in my old alma mater, St. Paul QC. She lived with her Lola, using my Dad's old room, which Mama has kept pretty much as it had been in his lifetime. A year later, Anna decided the Rangoon International High School was too tiny. She was going to enter her sophomore year, and decided she wanted to do it in the International School in Manila. So Lara and Anna lived in the townhouse we had bought so the family would have a place to stay when we were on home leaves. Luckily, Delia, who had been the townhouse's caretaker, (her husband Rodrigo was driver for my brother, Boy, and his wife Marie), was happy to become their full time housekeeper.

So only Carmen was left with us in Rangoon, and she missed her "Ti-Anna" badly. This is not how families are supposed to be, I said to myself, fighting tears. I had forgotten how many Filipino families break up early, and for more painful reasons. We were in Beirut when the first wave of OFWs swept into the Middle East. We heard their grim stories, firsthand.

When Tony was posted to UNICEF HQ in New York, both Lara and Anna decided to come with us. Delia came along too. So we were all together again. But had we stayed on in New York, Anna would have left home again by now, to go to university in another state.

This return to Manila has offered us a reprieve.



## 19 January

King Hussein of Jordan is giving a televised press conference. He's not saying anything new. But he sounds extremely sad. He is suggesting a ceasefire, actually. America and its allies are winning – why should they agree to a ceasefire? And Saddam Hussein of Iraq has always seemed intractable. Will he suddenly change? Perhaps this is the reason for the sadness of Jordan's king. He knows that his is a futile call.

## 22 January

Meanwhile, Tony is absorbed by his two San Miguel projects. He also has an eye out for other old houses that might be restored.

When Mama came with us to San Miguel, one of the houses that Tony pointed out to her was an enormous one, all of three stories, with a large garden. The garden has a grotto, and little stone angels standing on what look like stone baskets, and a little footbridge, and to one side, a stage, with "Celia Club" engraved on a fan-like structure behind the stage, like a backdrop.

Mama exclaimed that she recognized the house. This was the Sevilla house, she said, built by Don Catalino Sevilla, whose wife was a De Leon. "That house used to have a big ballroom on the third floor," Mama said. "We would drive up from Manila with friends (properly accompanied by chaperones, of course) to attend balls there. The Celia Club was San Miguel's Social Club, founded by the First Lady, Dona Trining, President Roxas' wife."

Later, Tony was able to gain permission from the caretaker to enter the house. At first the caretaker was hesitant. But when Tony introduced himself as the new owner of the Tecson house, the man willingly let him in, having indeed heard that *Ingkong* Nano's house had been bought by a *taga-*

Maynila. He says the house is truly grand, but has been poorly maintained, and looks like it's on the brink of collapse. A real pity.

"But how," I asked Mama, "did people manage to care for houses this big—three floors, with a large ballroom, an azotea, a huge garden..."

"Oh, it was easy to get help in those days, especially if one lived in the province."

I have had no word from Gloria Rodriguez about the MS I gave her – "I Remember." I tell myself to forget about that now, and focus on doing the last chapter for my book on Burma. Now that our shipment has arrived, I have my books, notes, and diaries. I can get back to serious work. The problem is fitting it all in.

A bit of good news: I have received my appointment papers from UP.

I did not think I would derive this much satisfaction from getting my old job back. I think it's the joy of doing work I know I am good at; and delight in simple things, like having friends knock on the door of my FC office, and stay for a short (or long) chat, or invite me to have Selecta coffee crumble ice cream at Katag. ("Katag" is the name of the new faculty canteen in the FC basement, short for Kapihan at Tagpuan.) Sometimes, after my classes, as I walk to the FC parking lot, and there's a light breeze blowing, I catch myself smiling, at nothing and no one in particular.

### 30 January

While we were watching the usual TV coverage of the Gulf War, Tony said to me, "UNICEF has started an emergency airlift of humanitarian supplies to Baghdad." And then he added, "I would have been charge of it,

had I accepted the post in Jordan they were offering me. The airlift could only be conducted from Jordan.” The note of regret in his voice was clear. He was admitting for the first time feeling bad about the career he threw away.

### 7 February

Julie Daza has reprinted my introduction to *Korean Sketchbook* in this magazine she edits, *Lifestyle Asia*. And today I received a letter from the editor of *Quest* magazine (which has just been bought by the Hofer Group, who publish the APA/Insight Travel Guides) inviting me to contribute. Norma Miraflor had given them my name. They pay 15 cents per word. It’s a bi-monthly “consumer -oriented travel and entertainment publication.”

The opportunities are opening up. My problem is finding the time to squeeze everything in.

I do wish Tony would find something that will enable him to use his formidable talents again.

### 17 March 1991

One afternoon, I had an unexpected visitor to the San Miguel house. Delia and I had started unpacking and sorting things out. But the cardboard boxes were still piled high in all the rooms, and the floors were covered with dust.

This stranger came into the room where I was, perched on one of the boxes, sorting out the contents of another box. He was a middle-aged man, very neat—even dapper—in a long-sleeved polo shirt and slacks, and he carried an old-fashioned wooden cane.

He paused at the door to the room where I was working, gave me a small bow, and said, “*Magandang hapon po sa inyo. Maari po bang pumasok?*”

Startled, I didn't reply immediately.

The man apologized for bursting in without an appointment. He was a neighbor, he said, and he hoped I wouldn't mind the intrusion. The gate was open, but there was no one around, so he had let himself in. His manner was very courteous.

I apologized, in turn, for not being able to shake his hand, mine being grimy. Nor could I offer him a seat, since there weren't any. I gestured awkwardly toward a large cardboard box, which was still sealed. He accepted as graciously as if it had been a throne, composed himself, and proceeded to explain the purpose of his visit.

*"Nabalitaan ko po na kayo ay isang manunulat,"* he began. He had come to tell me a story that he thought I would find interesting, since my husband and I were going to be citizens of this town. He gave me his name, and told me he was actually a writer himself. I recognized the name vaguely. He added that he used to have a column, and named the newspaper where it used to appear. But he was retired now, and no longer wrote. He had a strong, pleasant baritone, and his Tagalog was as elegant as it was precise.

This was the story he told me.

This was the first time he was stepping into the second floor of this house, he said. He and all his clan were not welcome here. It was one of those family feuds, the beginnings of which no one remembers any more, but which everyone continues to cling to.

Once upon a time, there was a young lady—it was said that she was very beautiful—an ancestress of the owners of the house we had just bought. She had fallen in love with a bright, dashing young man, who was my visitor's own ancestor.

Because of the long feud, both families had naturally disapproved of the match. The young man's parents packed him off to the States to study—they wanted him to become a dentist, for the town needed one.

The young woman's parents intercepted all his letters to her, and all her letters to him, and eventually told her that news had reached them of the young man's having married another woman.

(At this point in my visitor's tale, I thought to myself: Wait, I've heard this story before. Wasn't this what happened to Jose Rizal and Leonor Rivera? Or was it to Crisostomo Ibarra and Maria Clara?)

But there was more to the gentleman's tale. After his graduation, the young man returned with his diploma. His parents showed him the brand new clinic they had already prepared for him. He was not interested. He asked only after the woman he loved, from whom he had not heard in all the years that it took him to obtain his degree.

When his mother told him that she was married to someone else, he went a little crazy, and hit out blindly, wrecking the clinic, and its shiny new equipment. Why had she done this? he demanded. What happened? Did she not receive his letters? Why had she not answered them? Why did she betray him?

His parents were forced to admit the truth—that the girl had been deceived, and that in her despair, she seemed not to care what happened to her, and had just accepted the husband her parents had chosen for her.

The young man was determined to see his beloved again. He decided that the only honorable way to do this was to go to her husband and humbly beg his permission to talk to his wife, one last time, just to say good bye. His parents tried to stop him. They were afraid that a fight might ensue. Someone – their son, most likely – might get hurt.

But the young woman's husband, had a good heart. Moreover, having known the other man since their boyhood, he felt pity, and gave his consent. So, the thwarted lovers saw each other one last time.

Not long afterwards, the young woman died.

I stared at my guest. "She died?" I repeated.

"Yes," he replied. "She died of a broken heart. It has been known to happen... sometimes." After a few moments, during which I groped for an appropriate response, he asked me what I thought of his little story.

I was having some trouble gathering my thoughts. So he continued, "It reminds one of the novel 'Wuthering Heights,' does it not? But this is a true story, I assure you. Everyone in this town knows about it, and about the feud between our families."

Then he resumed his story. "After the young woman died, a great composer and musician, her lover's best friend—I'm sure you know his name, Nicanor Abelardo—wrote a song for her. It is a very famous song—'*Nasaan Ka Irog*.'"

Still speechless, I nodded. Of course I was familiar with the song.

"As I said, I am retired, and no longer write," my visitor said. "But perhaps, someday, you will find some use for the story I have just told you."

He had risen, and, after giving me another small bow, he moved toward the door, walking a bit stiffly—perhaps sitting on a cardboard box, without a proper back rest, had been hard on his knees—leaning on his old-fashioned cane.

I accompanied him to the top of the staircase, apologizing for not having been able to offer him any refreshments. He waved the apology away. I thanked him for his visit, and for his... strange story. He requested me, very politely, to return to my chores. He had interrupted me, and did not wish to

take up more of my time. He had just come to tell me the story, he repeated. It needed to be told.

“Our families did the lovers a great wrong,” he said. “Since the house is yours now, I thought you should know their story.”

It was a long time before I understood what he meant.

### 5 April 1991

Connie has recommended me for tenure, with the endorsement of the department and the college. In the meantime, Shayne Lumbera tells me Ateneo is offering me a Creative Writing Chair! A shower of blessings!

Work proceeds apace in San Miguel. Magiting Game Farm is now operational. Tony is going tomorrow to a cockfighting derby in the San Miguel cockpit, on the invitation of a Tecson, who has become his friend. He is enormously pleased at this invitation.

The house has been completely rewired. The new water tank and pump are working now. The farmhands' bunkhouse is almost done. There was a room that had been built over the azotea, which was an eyesore. Tony decided to tear it down and restore the azotea, which is truly lovely. The grills from the windows of that dismantled room were used to fashion the fence and front gate. The owner of the hardware store in our street corner, who is Tony's suki, referred him to the town ironmonger, who took care of this. The brick driveway in front of the house is finished. The kitchen floor and the kitchen counter are almost done. The bathrooms require major repairs, and these are ongoing. Tony is elated about having found large black and white tiles for the upstairs bathroom, as well as a huge, fan-shaped Art Deco mirror and lighting fixtures to complement it.

When materials are available locally, Tony buys them here. What is not available, he gets from shops in Manila (Mama has been invaluable where

sourcing certain things are concerned), and carts them back to San Miguel in the boot of his car. It is tiring work, but Tony is enjoying himself hugely.

“This is the Year of the Goat. My year!” Tony reminded me. “And, look, my luck has turned again. This is the beginning of a new cycle. And who knows, it might be the best one yet!”

For me, the summer break began on March 23. At last, some breathing space! I have taken Delia a number of times with me to San Miguel, to help me begin opening the boxes, sorting out their contents, and moving what things can be transferred to the rooms.

I have also started working on the front garden, with the help of Jo Mari, one of Tony’s farmhands (Delia’s brother). Mama told me that if I wanted to retain the authenticity of the place, I should not have the garden landscaped. (“And no Bermuda grass; stick with carabao grass.”) In the 1930s, housewives were more concerned with practicality than with aesthetics, she told me. They grew trees and plants for the fruits they would provide, or the shade they would offer, or for other useful purposes, such as medicinal qualities (like the eucalyptus and the guava and the chico); or seeds that could be used for food coloring (like the achuete), or flowers whose fragrance made them suitable as ornaments for the hair of the daughters of the house, or for stringing into garlands to be draped on the saints in the family altar (like the champaca and the sampaguita). When they did think of beauty, it was balance and harmony that they took into consideration. An aratiles growing to the left of the front steps was balanced by another tree of more or less the same size on the right. Jasmine bushes had to border both sides of the driveway, not just one.

I pointed out a kalachuchi tree that had grown dry and scrawny. “Is it dying?” I asked her. She shook her head. “No, it’s just sick. You might plant a bush under it—a flowering one, like gumamela or camia, and maybe some small pretty mayanas. Trees like company.”



Pete Daroy and Connie Alaras are among the first of our friends to visit the house, which we are now calling Casa Hidalgo. When we had finished unpacking the furniture that came with our shipment, we realized that we still needed a few essential pieces, if we plan to advertise the house as “fully furnished.” So we asked Pete to take us to his farm in Bustos (where he stores his antiques before bringing them to his house in the UP campus to sell). We did find a long, plain, wooden altar table that will serve as dining table, and 12 mismatched wooden chairs.

And we witnessed how the house—even while not yet fully restored—worked its charm on our guests. “Don’t sell it!” Pete said. “Turn it into a haven for artists.”

I reminded him that we do not have the resources to maintain such a place. Whereupon Connie suggested that we apply to the NCAA for a grant. The NCAA is the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, which was established by President Cory in 1987. Connie says she thinks it has a division that takes care of heritage conservation.

When I had lunch, separately, with two other old friends—Letty Magsanoc and Jullie Daza—they made similar suggestions before even seeing the house. “You could establish a foundation, and raise funds for the arts,” Letty said. “You could offer residencies to writers and artists,” Jullie said.

### 9 May

Our San Miguel schedule has become pretty regular. We spend weekends there, sometimes with, and sometimes without the kids. And Tony goes once more during the week, usually on Wednesday morning. He stays overnight, and comes home on Thursday evening. When he is there by himself, he doesn’t use the master’s bedroom, which is close to front of the house. He sleeps in Anna’s bedroom, which is the last in the row, and is closer

to the bathroom.

Over breakfast today, he told me something really weird had happened to him last night.

He had been asleep for a while when he suddenly woke up. A mosquito must have bitten him, he said. He checked his watch, which he always keeps on the bedside table—it was 2:00 a.m. Then he got up to use the bathroom and pour himself a shot of his favorite cognac, which he brought back with him to the bed.

He was lying on his left side, facing the window, and was just about to fall asleep, when he felt someone sit on the bed beside him. He believed he heard a small creak, and figured it was me. Then he suddenly realized that it couldn't have been me, since I hadn't come with him to San Miguel. Wide awake now, but lying perfectly still, he was completely certain that what had happened was real, and not a dream. After about a second, he told himself sharply: all right, turn around and face it, whatever it is! He turned quickly around.

There was no one there.

But he felt—very strongly—that there was someone in the room with him. It was not an evil presence, just a strange one. He felt that it was a woman. It was a woman, and she was looking at him. She did not mean him any harm, he felt. She seemed... “Curious,” Tony said. “She seemed curious about me... like she was wondering who I might be.”

After about five minutes, he stretched out again. And he must have dozed off, and slept undisturbed. Because when he woke up again, it was to bright sunlight.

If this had happened to anyone else but Tony, I would simply dismiss it as a dream, or a case of the imagination running a bit wild. But Tony, being

an agnostic, does not believe in the supernatural, let alone ghosts. Now that he is older, he has become more open to the idea that there are things that happen on this earth for which there are no scientific or rational explanations. But he does not bother much with these unexplained phenomena, and is not likely to have been thinking about a lady ghost, even subconsciously, when his mind had been filled all day with poultry supplies, wood varnish, and a missing hammer.

Part of me believes in ghosts, though. And now I'm intrigued: does Casa Hidalgo have a resident ghost?



# LIWALIW: MGA LAKBAY-SANAYSAY AT LAKBAY-ALAALA

ni John Jack G. Wigley



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Ang proyektong ito ay kalipunan ng mga lakbay-sanaysay ng manunulat na naglalayong makabuo ng isang koleksiyon tungkol sa paglalakbay sa iba't ibang panig ng mundo. Iginigiit ng proyektong ito na

ang paglalakbay ay hindi lang paglibot sa iba't ibang parte ng daigdig kung hindi isang pagliliwaliw rin patungo sa kaibuturan ng sarili. Layon din ng proyektong ito na makapag-ambag ng akdang *travel memoir* na kakaunti pa at hindi gaanong nabibigyan ng kaukulang pansin at diin sa panitikang Filipino.

Ang pagsusulat ng mga piling kuwento at naratibo ang pangunahing layunin ng proyektong ito. Sa pagtatapos ng malikhaing proyektong ito, inaasahan ko ring masagot ang mga sumusunod na katanungan:

1. Ano ang mga pangkalahatan at espisipikong hamon ang kinakaharap ng isang manunulat ng mga personal na sanaysay? May matindi o pino ba itong pagkakaiba sa pagsusulat ng katha o tula?
2. Pagkatapos ng pagsulat ng mga naratibong ito, saan ko ngayon ilulugar o ihahanay ang aking mga akda sa pangkalahatang tradisyon ng panulat ng sanaysay sa panitikang Filipino?
3. Anong poetika o politika ang nabuo sa akin bilang manunulat ng mga personal na sanaysay?
4. Paano mahahanap ang sarili sa mga lugar na pinupuntahan, malayo man o karatig sa bansang pinanggalingan ko?
5. Anu-ano ang mga impresyon, kaalaman, at kabatiran tungkol sa buhay at sa lipunan ang mga nabubuo sa isip at puso ng persona base sa mga lugar na napupuntahan?
6. Anu-anong repleksiyon at malinaw o maliwanag na pagkaunawa sa sarili ang mahuhugot mula sa mga lakbay-sanaysay na naisulat?

Ang memoir o personal na sanaysay ay isang natatanging uri ng creative nonfiction. Ito ay naka-focus sa mga partikular na *episode* o

karanasan ng isang tao. Hindi nito sinusunod ang detalyadong pagsasalaysay ng talambuhay ng isang tao mula sa pagkabata hanggang sa pagtanda. Isang halimbawa nito ay ang *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1975) ni Maxine Hong Kingston na hindi maituturing na autobiography dahil, kahit pinapaksa nito ang mga kuwentong karanasan ng manunulat, hindi nito sinusunod ang eksaktong kronolohiya ng nabanggit na karanasan at pangyayari. Idinagdag pa ng awtor ang mga palaisipan (musings), alaala (memories), stream of consciousness, at ang pagbabago ng lunan at panahon (constant shifting of time and space) ng manunulat.

Ang pagsikat ng memoir bilang isang kaibang literary genre ang nagpakinabang sa personal at pribadong buhay ng mga manunulat. Naging tulay ang memoir para maikuwento ng mga manunulat ang mga karanasan nila at maiparating sa mga mambabasa. Isang bagay na hindi magagawa sa biography o autobiography dahil ang tuon nito ay maisulat ang buong buhay ng isang kilalang tao mula simula hanggang katapusan.

Sa aking pananaliksik, nabasa ko ang ilang mga autobiography ng mga kilalang Filipinong manunulat na mala-memoir. Ito ang daan na gusto kong puntahan bilang manunulat ng mga sariling personal na sanaysay.

Inamin ni Bienvenido Santos sa panimula ng kaniyang libro na *Memory's Fiction* (1993) na nagkaroon siya ng pangamba na isulat ang kaniyang buhay dahil malaking parte ng kung sino siya ay nakapaloob na sa kaniyang mga naisulat na katha at tula. Ngunit nang tumuntong siya sa edad na sitenta, nagdesisyon siyang sumulat ng memoir para tagpi-tagpiin ang mga kalat na piraso ng kaniyang buhay. Ang resulta ay isang personal na koleksiyon ng mga kuwento tungkol sa kaniyang pagkabata, sa pagpupunyagi niya bilang isang batang asawa at ama, at sa mga hamon ng pagiging isang manunulat at guro sa ibang bansa. Ang kaniyang “memory’s fictions” ay kasingganda at kasingkulay ng kaniyang maiikling kuwento, nobela, at mga tula.

Karamihan sa mga personal na sanaysay at memoir na nabasa ko ay unang inilimbag bilang kolum sa mga pahayagan. Ito ay masasabing fragments, hindi buo, dahil na rin sa anyo ng mga kolum at artikulo, na isinusulat linggu-linggo at may deadline sa patnugot.

Ang *The Best of Barfly* (1997) ni Butch Dalisay ay kaniyang unang koleksiyon ng mga sanaysay na hango sa kaniyang lingguhang kolum sa *Style* section ng *Today*. Sa librong ito, pinagsama ni Dalisay ang kaniyang mga obserbasyon at palaisipan tungkol sa maraming bagay at mga personal na karanasan gaya ng pagkilala niya at ng kaniyang pamilya sa *Ash Wednesday* at mga alaala bilang batang mag-aaral sa La Salle Greenhills. Ang paglalalahad niya ng maraming aspeto ng kaniyang buhay ang siyang kalakasan ng koleksiyong ito. May ilan pang sumunod na libro ng personal na sanaysay si Dalisay pagkatapos nito.

Ang *House of Memory* (1997) ng Pambansang Alagad ng Sining na si Resil Mojares ay isa ring aklat ng mga personal na sanaysay hango sa kaniyang “Footnotes to an Absent Text,” isang regular niyang kolum sa *Weekend*, ang lingguhang magazine ng *Sun\*Star Daily* na isang kilalang pahayagan sa Cebu. Ito ay kalipunan ng mga totoo at inimbentong pag-uusap ng manunulat at kaniyang mambabasa. Bawat sanaysay, na nagsilbing *construction tool*, ay itinuturing na mahalagang bahagi sa konstruksyon ng bahay. Ang bahay, ayon na rin kay Mojares, ay maaring maging pisikal o metaporikal na espasyo ng mga alaala at gunita.

Sinulat naman ng Pambansang Alagad ng Sining na si Gemino H. Abad ang *State of Play-Letters, Essays and Parables* (1990) bilang koleksiyon ng mga sanaysay na gamit ang ibang paraan: liham bilang sanaysay para sa mga kaibigan. Ganito rin ang orihinal na pormat na ginamit ni Abad noong inilimbag niya ang mga sanaysay na ito sa *The Manila Chronicle on Sunday* sa isang kolum na pinangalanan niyang “Exchange.” Sa nasabing kolum, nakipagpalitan ng liham at mga kuro-kuro si Abad kina N.V.M. Gonzalez,

Luning Bonifacio Ira, Sylvia Ventura, at ilang piling kaibigan tungkol sa samu't saring paksa sa politika at kultura ng Pilipinas.

Sa kasalukuyang panahon, ang pagsulat ng memoir at personal na sanaysay ay walang takda. Ito marahil ay bunga ng pagsisikap ng kasalukuyang mga manunulat na ilahad ang mga personal na karanasan alinsunod sa mga komentong panlipunan na nangyayari sa kapaligiran. Sa ganitong pamamaraan, napapasadahan nilang pareho ang pagkuwento ng personal na pagpupursigi at panlipunang problema sa kanilang mga akda.

Sinulat ni Clinton Palanca ang ilan sa mga natatanging personal na sanaysay na may kinalaman sa pagkain sa kaniyang lingguhang kolum sa *Philippine Daily Inquirer* at inilimbag ito bilang libro na tinawag niyang *The Mad Tea Party: The Pleasures of Taste* (2001). Ang mga siping kuwento sa librong ito ay nagpripisinta ng pagkain bilang kodigo ng memorya.

*Wala Lang: Files (Funny and Serious) on Youthful Being and Nothingness* (2004) naman ang pamagat ng koleksiyon ni Bud Thomas na hango sa isang online na kolum. Nagsimula ito bilang serye ng mga akda na kaniyang ipinapadala sa email para sa kaniyang mga matalik na kaibigan noong siya ay nag-aaral pa lang ng abogasya. Ang mga nabanggit na sanaysay ay pumapaksa sa mga buhay-buhay niya bilang estudyante ng high school at ng law.

Ang koleksiyon naman na lipon ng tinatawag na *humorous narratives* ay ang *King of Nothing to Do-Essays on Nothing and Everything* (2006) ni Luis Joaquin Katigbak na una niyang koleksiyon ng mga personal na sanaysay. Ito ay hango sa isang online magazine na *LegManila*, sa pahayagang *The Manila Bulletin*, at mga print magazines gaya ng *Mega* at *Cosmo*. Ang mga siping kuwento sa librong ito ay maiikli at pumpon ng mga kontemporaryong *conflict* na pinagdadaanan ng mga batang *urbanites* na nananahan sa lungsod.

Ipinapakita naman ni Carljoe Javier sa kaniyang *And the Geek Shall Inherit the Earth* (2009) ang mga nakatutuwa at nakakatawang sanaysay na



pinagdadaan ng isang geek o nerd. Mga kuwento tungkol sa dating, reality TV, mga babaing nasa pabalat ng mga kilalang men's magazines, atbp. ang karaniwang mga paksa sa librong ito Sinundan niya ito ng *The Kobayashi Maru of Love* (2010) na may ganun ding tema at paksa.

Ang *Istatus Nation* (2014) ni Joselito De Los Reyes ay isa ring seminal na libro na nagpapahalaga sa genre ng personal na sanaysay. Mula ito sa compendium ng mga obserbasyon, paglilimi, at personal na danas at siste ng may-akda na nagsimula bilang mga status post sa Facebook ng kilala at premyadong manunulat ng creative nonfiction.

Dahil ang ilan sa mga isusulat kong sanaysay ay may kinalaman sa identidad at sekswalidad, hinalughog ko rin ang mga akdang nagpapaksa ng mga ito gaya ng *Closet Queeries* (1997) ni J. Neil Garcia at *Brusko Pink, King Kong Barbies, and Other Files* (2005) ni Luis Cano. Magkaiba ang boses ng dalawang libro. Ang una ay isang intelektwal na paglalahad ng kaniyang karanasan bilang baklang propesor na nagtuturo ng gay literature sa Unibersidad ng Pilipinas (UP). Hango din ang ilan sa mga kuwentong ito sa kaniyang regular na kolum sa *Evening Paper*. Ang ikalawa naman ay koleksiyon ng mga self-deprecating na sanaysay na naglalarawan ng kaniyang pagiging macho gay sa iba't ibang espasyo at lulan ng buhay.

Sa koleksiyong *Twisted Travels*, ipinamamalas ni Jessica Zafra ang irony at sarcastic wit ng isang manlalakbay na ginagawang katatawanan ang sarili sa mga bayan o bansang pinuntahan gaya ng Indonesia, Australia, at New York. Mababaw ngunit may lalim na paggiit sa sarili at sa kaniyang limitasyon bilang turista sa mga dinayong lugar ang paksa ng koleksiyon.

Ang *Big Little Man: In Search of My Asian Self* ni Alex Tizon ay kalipunan ng mga personal na sanaysay at nakatutulig na mga critique sa kontemporaryong kultural ng Amerika. Inimbestigahan ni Tizon ang mga sanga-sangang paksa ng sarili mula sa mga websites, teksto ng kasaysayan, saliksik mula sa mga unibersidad, at social media, lakip ang marubdob na

pagsusuri sa sarili. Ito ay hybrid ng memoir, travel essay, at cultural study na nagpapamalas ng iba't ibang patong ng tinatawag na identidad.

Ang koleksiyon naman ni Myrna Peña Reyes na *Almost Home: Poems* ay mga tula na nagpapamalas ng konsepto ng identidad, sarili, at bayan. Bagama't tula ang porma at anyo na ginamit ng makata sa librong ito, naibabahagi pa rin ang samu't saring suson ng isang Pilipinong manunulat sa paggamit ng distansiya ng memorya at lugar bilang lulan ng imahinasyon. Idagdag pa dito na ang makata ay ipinanganak at lumaki sa Pilipinas ngunit nanirahan nang matagal sa ibayong lugar.

Ipinapaksa naman ng antolohiyang *Connecting Flights: Filipinos Write from Elsewhere* na ang paglisan ang nagtatakda kung ano at nasaan ang sarili, ang tahanan, at ang bayan. Ipinakikita sa antolohiyang ito ang akda ng mga manunulat gaya nina Butch Dalisay, Ambeth Ocampo, Charlson Ong, Krip Yuson, atbp, ang lalim, rurok, at lawak ng alaala habang dumadayo sa mga lugar na kilala at di kilala.

Binanggit ng editor na si Ruel De Vera sa antolohiyang *Writing Home: Nineteen Writers Remember Their Hometowns* na "Filipinos are almost incapable of being purely transient. Whenever they travel, they are either leaving home or racing home, ready to lay down roots to return to them." Sa antolohiyang ito, binigyang buhay ng mga kilalang manunulat ang kanilang lugar ng kapanganakan habang sumasabay at sumasaliw sa mga alaalang binubuo kung nasaan ang mga nasabing manunulat sa kasalukuyan.

Sinabi ni Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo sa kaniyang mga akdang *Looking for the Philippines* (2009) at *I Remember: Travel Essays* (1992) na ang pagsulat tungkol sa mga ibayong lugar na pinupuntahan ay makabuluhang paraan para makita ang sarili at mabigyang saysay ang mga espasyong kasalukuyang pinananahanan. Dagdag pa niya, ang "home" ay hindi lamang bansa ng kaniyang kapanganakan at kinalakihan kundi ang bahay kung saan siya nagkamalay. Bilang asawa ng isang international civil servant, dinanas

niya ang mamuhay sa ibang bansa ng isa't kalahating dekada habang patuloy na nagssusulat tungkol sa memorya, sa bansa, at sa identidad. Ang mga piyesa sa librong ito ay manipestasyon ng pagsasalibatbat ng nagtutunggaling konsepto ng "travel," "memory," at "home."

Ayon naman kay Alice Sun-Cua sa *Riding towards the Sunrise and Other Travels* (2001), walang nakatigil o nakahimpil. Araw-araw, may mga daang kailangang tahakin, mga biyaheng nakapaloob sa mas malaking biyahe, dahil ang buhay ay nasa permanentong estado ng paggalaw. Sinang-ayunan ni Cua na ang ang paglalakbay ay hindi nangangahulugang pisikal sapagkat may mga distansiya na binabagtas ang puso at isip. Inilalarawan ng librong ito ang mga karanasan ng manunulat sa paglakbay sa iba't ibang lugar dala ang kaniyang iba't ibang sarili – bilang makata, obstetrician-gynecologist, maybahay, kaibigan, at scientist.

Binubuo ang koleksiyong ito ng mga lakbay-sanaysay na akda mula sa mga lugar na napuntahan at magsisilbing hiwa-hiwalay na sinulid na magtatahi para mabuo ang sarili bilang manlalakbay patungo sa kaloob-loobang katotohanan.

Sa kabuuan, labing limang sanaysay ang gusto kong isulat base sa mga piling lugar / bansang napuntahan:

- |              |                        |
|--------------|------------------------|
| 1. Mexico    | 9. Canada              |
| 2. USA       | 10. Netherlands        |
| 3. France    | 11. Macau              |
| 4. Thailand  | 12. Switzerland        |
| 5. Belgium   | 13. Puerto Rico        |
| 6. Germany   | 14. Dominican Republic |
| 7. Hong Kong | 15. Bahamas            |
| 8. China     |                        |

Naisulat ko na ang unang dalawang sanaysay: “Ariba, Viva Mexico!” at “Pinoy New Yorker.” Mababasa ninyo sa susunod na pahina ang una sa mga ito.

# ARRIBA, VIVA MEXICO!

ni John Jack G. Wigley

Bata pa lang ako, in-lab na ako sa bansang Mexico. Hindi ko alam kung bakit.

Noong nasa unang baitang pa lang ako ng hayskul, ang watawat na nito ang naisipan kong gawing proyekto para ipasa sa Araling Panlipunan sa United Nations Week ng Oktubre ng taong iyon. Takang-taka ako noon sa kakaibang bandila ng bansang ito. Imbes na ordinaryong kulay at disenyo ng bilog, o tatsulok, o mga tala ang makikita tulad sa karamihan ng bandila ng ibang bansa, ang Mexico lang ang may disenyo na agila na nakikipagbunuan sa isang nagpupumiglas na ahas habang nakatuntong ito sa isang cactus. Panalo ito at kakaiba, bulong ko sa sarili. Kaya kahit mahirap gawin, pinilit kong tapusin ito para makakuha ng mataas na marka sa sabjek na iyon.

Mahilig din akong manood ng Miss Universe noong kabataan ko. Inaabangan ko palagi ang mga kandidata ng Pilipinas at Mexico taon-taon. Hindi ko paborito ang Miss USA dahil mayayabang at hara-hara sila kung kumilos. Feeling winner palagi. Hindi ko rin gusto ang Miss Venezuela dahil palagi na lang sila pumapasok sa semi-finals at nananalo. Nakakasawa na. Mas gusto ko iyong mga underdog na magaganda, gaya ng mga Pinay at Mehikana. Kaya noong 2010 na pumasok si Venus Raj sa top five pagkatapos ng mahigit labing-isang taong hindi pagkakapasok ng Pilipinas sa Miss Universe, sa wakas, natuwa ang sambayanang Pilipino. Pero mas natuwa ako noong taong iyon kasi kahit hindi nanalo si Venus sa kaniyang “major, major” na sagot, isang Mehikana ang hinirang na Miss Universe, si Ximena Navarette.

Noong nasa kolehiyo na ako, nagkaroon ako ng masinsing interes sa pagbasa ng ating kasaysayan. Noon ko nalaman na malaki at malakas pala ang naging ugnayan ng Pilipinas at Mexico noon sa pamamagitan ng matagumpay na Manila-Acapulco trade. Noon ko rin lubos na naintindihan na ang pagkolonisa ng Espanya sa ating bansa ay nakaangkla sa pamamagitan ng pagsakop din nito sa Mexico.

Isang araw, kapag mayaman at makapangyarihan na ako, mapupuntahan ko rin ang bansang ito, hamon ko sa sarili.

Nang makapag-US Navy at naging US citizen na ang kapatid kong si Kuya Manuel, iminungkahi niyang mag-apply kami ni Mama ng tourist visa para naman makapasyal din kami sa kaniya sa Estados Unidos. Siya na raw ang bahala sa lahat ng gagastusin namin sa biyahe. Laking tuwa ko nang makita sa mapa na ang lugar niya sa Amerika, ang San Diego, ay ilang milya lang ang layo sa US-Mexican border. Ang San Diego ang huling bayan ng Amerika sa timog-kanlurang bahagi ng California. Pag nakapagbakasyon na kami sa US, imumungkahi ko kay Kuya na pumasyal kami sa Mexico kahit ilang araw lang. Nanalangin ako nang taimtim na sana matupad ang pangarap kong ito.

“Bakit ka interesadong pumunta sa Mexico? Wala ka namang makikita doon,” giit ni Kuya sa akin nung nakarating na kami sa kaniya sa Amerika.

“Maganda raw doon. Ibang-iba dito sa States,” naghanap ako ng tamang isasagot sa diretsong tanong niya.

“Parang Pilipinas lang d’un. Marumi, mabaho, mapanghi.”

“Ganoon ba?” tanong ko na hindi kumbinsido.

“Oo, at saka, andaming holdaper at snatcher dun. Ako nga, antagal ko na dito, pero hindi pa rin ako nagagawi d’un. Iniwasan ko talaga. Sabi kasi ng mga kaibigan ko, hindi raw maganda d’un.”

Wala na akong nagawa. Inilibing ko na lang sa kaloob-looban ko ang kagustuhang makarating doon. Hindi ko na ito binanggit uli sa kapatid ko. Kaya laking tuwa ko nang isang araw na bumalik siya galing sa duty ay dala-dala ang mga papeles at ilang brochure.

“O ayan, nag-book na ako. Pupunta tayo sa tatlong bayan sa Mexico – sa Tijuana, Rosarito, at Ensenada. Malalapit lang ito sa US-Mexico border. Isang sakay lang ng bus,” masayang kuwento ni Kuya.

Halos maiyak ako sa tuwa. Hindi maipinta ang mukha sa sobrang kagalakan. Pero siyempre, hindi ako nagpahalata sa kaniya. Baka bawiin pa niya ang biyaheng ito. Hindi kasi sanay sa drama ang kapatid ko. Ibang-iba siya sa akin na ipinaglihi sa dramarama tuwing hapon. Hindi ko na mabilang ang ilang gabling hindi naging sapat ang aking tulog sa kaiisip sa magiging biyahe namin papuntang Mexico.

Nang dumating ang araw na iyon, madaling araw pa lang ay gising na ako. Nakaligo’t nakaimpake na. Naging tampulan pa ako ng mga biro nina Mama at Kuya. Pero hindi ko sila pinansin. Hindi ninyo maiintindihan ang nararamdaman ko, bulong ko sa sarili.

Noong binagtas na namin ang kahabaan ng border ng US at Mexico, namangha ako sa tanawing nasaksihan sa labas. Meron palang ganito sa Amerika. Milya-milyang disyerto at halos walang makita liban sa ilang mga halaman na lanta at tuyo na at hinihintay na lamang ang muling pagbuhos ng ulan.

“Maraming nahuhuling mga Mehikano sa lugar na ito. Tumatakas at gustong lumusot sa border para makapasok sa States,” esprika ni Kuya. “Maraming US border patrols na beinte-kuwatro oras na rumoronda sa lugar na ito. ‘Yung ibang nakakalusot na Mehikano, hindi nakakayanan ang init at pagod kaya namamatay na lang dito.”

Napahawak na lang ako sa aking leeg. Naisip ko ang daan-daang buhay na nabuwis para lang makamit at malasap ang Great American Dream. Ang hirap sigurong maging kapitbahay na bansa ang Amerika lalo na kung Third World kang gaya ng Mexico. Sa larangan ng lahat ng bagay, daig ka. Mas maunlad ang kabuhayan, mas matutupad ang mga pangarap na mahango sa kahirapan, mas malakas ang impluwensiya, mas magaganda ang mga tao. Kaya kahit bawal at mapanganib ang umakyat-bakod, hindi siguro napigilan ng maraming Chicano ang makipagsapalaran dahil sadyang mahirap ang buhay sa kanilang lugar. Kung ang Pilipinas nga, nasa kabilang ibayo na ng mundo, marami pa rin ang pumupuslit nang ilegal sa Amerika, mga taga-Mexico pa kaya?

Pagkalabas namin ng border, ramdam ko na nasa ibang bansa na talaga ako. Medyo asiwa lang ako kasi alam kong walang ganito sa Pilipinas. Walang kapitbahay na ibang bansa. Naliligiran ang buong Pilipinas ng tubig. Dito, makalabas ka lang sa isang checkpoint, nasa ibang bansa ka na. Pero kahit na tinatahak namin ang parehong kalambakan ng Baja, California, ibang-iba ang tanawing nakikita namin ngayon kaysa nung nasa Amerika pa kami. Ilang minuto lang ang pagitan kung tutuusin. Sa Mexico lang ako nakakita ng mga gusali na kulay rosas, asul, at kahel. Sa Amerika, kulay abo at puti lahat ang mga gusali. Walang karakter. Dito, sumisigaw at naglulupasay sa galak ang mga kulay nila. Baklang-bakla. Punumpuno at nakapalumpon ng banderitas na may sari-saring hugis at kulay ang nakasabit sa kahabaan ng mga kalsada ng Tijuana kahit hindi pista. Habang nasa bus pa kami, namataan ko ang isang buriko na pininturahan ng berde, pula, at puti ang katawan, buhok, at buntot nito, alinsunod sa kulay ng bandila ng Mexico. Nakatali ito sa isang sulok at mayroong isang malaking backdrop ng disyerto sa likod. May nakadibuho rin na cactus sa sulok ng backdrop. Ang kaniyang may-ari na may nakasabit na kamera sa leeg ay naglalako ng mga dekoradong



poncho sa mga dumadaan. “Want to get some pictures with donkey?” sigaw niya.

Sa mga iskaparate ng mga tindahan ay makikita ang iba’t ibang paninda: mga makikining na tela at abubot ng mga Aztec at Mayan, mga palakang ginawang ashtray at jewelry box, mga marakas na iba-iba ang kulay at nakasulat ang “Mexico,” mga bungo at kalansay na naka-gown at naka-tuxedo na nagsasayawan, mga pigurin at litrato nina Hesukristo at Birheng Marya ng Guadalupe. May mga batang walang salawal at walang takot na tumatakbo at tumatawid sa kalsada.

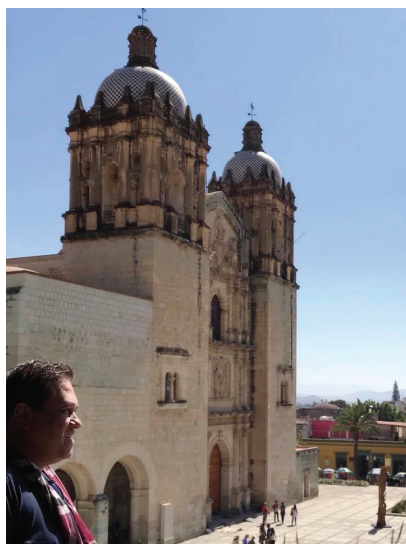
“O ‘di ba, parang palengke lang sa Pilipinas ito?” buyo ni Kuya sa akin.

Tumango-tango lang ako.

Pagbaba namin, bumili ako ng pigurin ng agila, ang simbolo na drinowing ko nung nasa hayksul ako maraming taon na ang nakalilipas. Napag-alaman ko sa nagtitinda na ang agila palang ito ang naging simbolo ng mga Aztec, ang tawag sa mga sinaunang tao sa Mexico, sa pagtatatag ng kanilang lupa. Tinawag nila itong Tenochtitlan, ang sentro ng kanilang imperyo. Sinasabi ng marami sa kanila na ang Mexico City ngayon ang kanilang Tenochtitlan noon. Sa aking pag-aaral, pinilit gibain at sirain ng mga Kastilang kongkistadores ang lahat ng mga natitirang debosyon ng mga tao sa sinaunang kaugalian at pamumuhay. Nakialam din ang bansang Amerika sa kanila at kinamkam ang ilan sa kanilang mga lupain. Binanggit ni Kuya na ang California, Arizona, New Mexico, at ang kalakhang Texas ay dating pag-aari ng Mexico. Hanggang ngayon, ipinaglalaban pa rin nila ito. Napag-isip-isip ko na marami palang pagkakatulad ang kasaysayan ng mga Mehikano sa ating mga Pilipino. Parehong pinagpiyestahan ng mga mananakop ang ating buhay at mga pamana. Pero pareho ring pilit tumatayo sa sariling mga paa. Naitago ko ang agilang nabili. Hanggang ngayon, nasa akin pa rin ito.

Nang mga sumunod na taon na pagbisita ko sa Amerika, inugali ko nang pasyalan at daanan ang Mexico. Hanga ako sa taas ng antas ng pamumuhay sa Amerika, ang paggalang ng mga Amerikano sa kalayaan at pagkakaiba ng bawat isa, ang masusing pagsunod sa kanilang batas, ang rangya ng kanilang pag-unlad. Pero iba ang pakiramdam ko kapag nasa Mexico. Ramdam ko na kauri ko ang mga tao dito. Kalipi. Mahirap man sila na bansa kung ikukumpara sa Amerika, mas may kalidad naman ang kanilang pamumuhay.

Masasayang tao ang mga Mehikano. Labas ang emosyon tulad ng mga Pilipino. Hindi gaya ng mga Kano na tago at mataas ang tingin sa mga sarili. Napuntahan ko na rin ang ilang mga lugar sa Mexico: sa Cabo San Lucas kung saan mistulang nawawalang Eden ang lugar na ito sa ganda at rikit ng dagat, ng isla, at ng luntiang lupain; sa Puerto Vallarta na isang paraiso para sa mga turista. Dito ko rin nakita ang mansiyon ng kilalang Hollywood couple na sina Richard Burton at Elizabeth Taylor. Nabisita ko na rin ang ilan nilang magagandang simbahang Katoliko na kasingganda ng sa atin. Naging paborito ko na ring kainin ang kanilang burrito na maraming guacamole, ang



Isang magarang simbahan sa Oaxaca, Mexico.

kanilang sari-saring enchiladas at mga piling quesadilla. Palagi kong sinasabi sa mga kaibigan at katrabaho ko na kung hindi ako Pilipino at bibigyan ako ng pagkakataong makapili ng ibang lahi, isa akong Mehikano.

Marami ring mga puna at kritisismo tungkol sa mga Mehikano ang mga nalaman ko kalaunan sa mga naging biyahe ko dito. Mandaraya, mayayabang, at korap daw sila. Taga-suplay ng mga ilegal na gawain gaya ng

droga, problema sa imigrasyon, at ang pamosong kartel. Baduy, overacting, at maiingay na tao. Tamad, mapusok, at mareklamo sa trabaho. Mababa ang pagtingin sa karapatang pantao o human rights. Inutil ang gobyerno. Hindi nga ba ito rin ang karaniwang mga paglalarawan ng iba sa ating mga Pinoy?

Ang pagbisita ko sa Cancun, Playa Del Carmen, at ang mga arkeolohiya ng Chichén Itzá at Tulum noong taong 2018 ang isang pangyayari na hinding-hindi ko makakalimutan. Halos dalawang linggo ako sa biyaheng ito, ang pinakamatagal ko nang pagpunta sa Mexico, kaya hindi makahanap ng sisidlan ang aking kaligayahan. Kulang na lang hilahin ko ang petsa ng aking pagpunta dito. Kasama ko sa biyaheng ito sina Greg, ang matalik kong kaibigan mula pa noong Grade 1 na ngayon ay nakatira na sa Las Vegas; ang asawa niyang si Kiko; at si Dan, ang kaibigan kong sampung taon pa lang sa Amerika at sa San Francisco naman nananahan. Lahat sila ay US citizen na. Ako lang ang tourist US visa holder na mapangahas gumala papuntang Mexico.

Sa immigration office sa Amerika, nagbabala sa amin ng mga kaibigan ko ang officer. “Be careful down there in Mexico.”

“Why?” tanong ko.

“A lot of things are going on there. Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” pabirong bigkas ng officer.

Nagkatinginan na lang kaming magkakaibigan. Magkahalong tuwa at pangamba ang naramdaman namin sa tinuran ng opisyal.

Walang kahirap-hirap ang mga turistang makapasok sa bansang Mexico. Lalo na kung galing ng Amerika. Nakangiti at yumuyuko ang mga Mehikano sa airport tuwing dadaan kami. Malayo pa lang, punit na ang mga mukha nila sa kangingiti at kakabati ng “Hola” at “Bienvenidos a Mexico,” sa amin. Mayroon pang mga naka-Mayan costume sa tabi ng malaking karosel, sumasayaw sa saliw ng katutubong tugtugin. Napapalamutian ng

mga balahibo ng hayop, tingga, at kung ano-ano pang kolorete ang suot ng mga mananayaw. Sa kabilang karosel naman ay isang bandang Mariachi na binubuo ng mga gitarista at trumpetistang naka-sumbrero at nakasuot ng makinang na tsaleko at pantalon na kulay itim at lila. Tinutugtog nila ang sikat na “La Cucaracha.” “Señor” ang tawag sa amin ng mga tao sa airport. Para kaming mga ilustrado noong panahon ni Rizal. Ang sarap tuloy magpanggap. Habang nakatingin sa mga ito, naalala ko ang mga katutubong Igorot pati na rin ang ilang mananayaw ng tinikling na sumasayaw sa NAIA noon para dagdag-atraksyon sa mga turistang paparating sa Maynila.

Pagka-check-in sa hotel, lumibot na kami agad sa kahabaan ng Playa Del Carmen. Nagkalat ang mga turista. Iba’t ibang lahi. Ang ilan sa mga babae ay bikini lang ang suot at pinatungan lang ng ginantsilyong poncho o alampay. Ang mga lalaki naman ay naka-beach shorts lang. Walang pantaas. Ang iba nga’y walang sapatos o tsinelas. Gustong samantalain ang busilak na sikat ng araw na ipinagkait sa kanilang lugar. Pumasok kami sa isang bar na puno ng mga litrato at gawa nina Octavio Paz, Diego Rivera, at Frida Kahlo, mga pamosong Mehikanong alagad ng sining.

“Kailan kaya tayo magkakaroon ng mga bantog na manunulat at pintor sa Pilipinas gaya nina Paz, Rivera, at Kahlo?” tanong-mungkahi ko sa aking mga kaibigan.

“Marami naman tayong mga world class artists sa ‘Pinas, ah!’ dagdag ni Greg.

“Sige nga, sino-sino ang pinakasikat na mga Pilipino sa buong mundo?” tukso ko.

Nag-isip ang tatlo. Matagal.

“Oo nga, ang hirap mag-isip ano?” bulalas ni Dan. “Ah! Siyempre, si Manny Pacquiao.”

“Boksingero naman ‘yun,” sabad ko. “Pero sige, puwede na rin.”

“Si Lea Salonga. Sikat din ‘yun, ah. Broadway at West End pa,” hirit ni Kiko.

“Wala na akong maisip,” sabi ni Greg. “Imelda Marcos na lang. At least sumikat siya sa buong mundo dahil sa sapatos.”

Nagtawanan kaming lahat.

Ang arkeolohiya ng Chichén Itzá at Tulum ang lubhang nagpabilib sa akin. Ilang daang milya ang layo nito sa Cancun at Playa Del Carmen sa probinsiya ng Yucatan. Dito, makikita ang ilang natitirang banal na alaala ng mga Maya at Aztec. Libo-libong taon na ang nakalipas nang panahan ng mga katutubong ito ang bansang Mexico. Ito ay bago pa man nagkaroon ng ekspedisyon ang mga Briton sa Bagong Mundo. Bago pa man din dumating ang mga Kastila, sibilisado na ang mga Mehikano, matagal na matagal na. Hindi nila kailangang masakop ng mga kongkistadores. Mas kinailangan sila ng mga mananakop kaysa kailangan nila ang mga ito. Ang piramide ng Chichén Itzá ang naging piping saksi ng mayamang pamana ng mga Mayans para sa mga kontemporanyong tao ng Mexico. Para sa mga tao ng buong mundo.

Bumili ako ng keychains, ref magnets, at ilang souvenir items ng pamosong lugar na ito bilang panregalo sa mga kaibigan ko sa Pilipinas. Uuwi akong may galak at saya sa aking puso.

Kung gaano kadali ang paglabas sa immigration sa airport ng Mexico galing ng Amerika, ganoon naman ang dusang sinapit



Isang piramide sa Teotihuacan, ilang minuto ang layo mula sa Ciudad de Mexico.

ko nang ako'y papasok sa immigration pabalik sa Amerika. Dahil US citizen ang tatlong kaibigan ko, iba ang pila nila sa akin. Mabilis na gumagalaw ang pila nila sa gitna, at mas maraming immigration officers ang nag-aasikaso ng kanilang muling pagpasok sa Amerika. Kaming mga kalunos-lunos at kahabag-habag na hindi mga anak ni Uncle Sam ay nasa pinakahuling pila sa isang sulok. Humigit-kumulang na isandaan kaming mga turistang nakaabang. Ang nasa harap ko ay Croatian na nasa wheelchair at ang nasa likod ko naman ay taga-Vietnam na hula ko'y hindi marunong mag-Ingles dahil hindi ko narinig magsalita mula noong nag-umpisa kaming pumila.

Kinabahan ako dahil isang oras at kalahati lang ang lay-over namin sa Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. May connecting flight pa kami papuntang Las Vegas. Doon nakatira sina Greg at Kiko at kung saan ako pansamantalang nagbabakasyon. Sa haba ng pilang ito at sa tagal ng inspeksyon ng mga opisyal sa bawat foreigner na pumapasok, siguradong hindi ako aabot. Kinausap ni Greg ang isang volunteer na nagpa-patrol kung puwede na akong mauna.

“He’s with us, and we have a connecting flight to catch,” giit ni Greg.

“He’ll be all right,” walang emosyong paliwanag ng volunteer. “Your plane does not leave in more than an hour yet.”

Pero mabagal talaga ang pag-usad ng pila. Nakapasok na sina Greg sa loob at naiwan ako kasama ang mga singkit, bural, at balbong mga turista. Bumilis ang tibok ng aking puso. Bahagyang kumirok ang sentido. Paano kung maiwan ako ng eroplano? Paano kung hindi ako papasukin sa immigration? Paano ako makakabalik sa Pilipinas? Naalala ko ang sabi ni Kiko kanina na iisang biyahe lang ang Minneapolis/St.Paul-Las Vegas kada araw, kaya kailangang makasakay kami ngayon, Kung hindi, bukas na uli kami makakapagbiyahe at kailangan naming magtsek-in sa isang hotel dito. Mahal pa naman at mahirap maghanap dahil Disyembre na. Marahil puno na ang mga hotel at ang daan ay siguradong natabunan na ng ilang dipang

niyebe at yelo. Ito pa naman yata ang pinakamalamig na bayan sa buong Amerika. Bakit ba dito nag-book papuntang Mexico si Greg?

Labindalawang minuto na lang ang nalalabi nang makarating ako sa immigration officer. Katakot-takot pa ang mga tinanong niya.

“What did you do in Mexico?” usisa niya.

Gusto ko sanang sabihin na “I love Mexico more than your country,” pero umaatikabong interbyu na naman ang naiisip kong magaganap kapag iyon ang itinugon ko, kaya sumagot na lang ako ng, “Just visiting.”

“Did you purchase anything there?”

“A few souvenir items.”

“Nothing illegal?”

“Absolutely.” Gusto ko sanang hiritan ng, “Mukha ba akong bibili ng ilegal sa Mexico? Hoy, mas mataas ang pinag-aralan ko sa iyo. May PhD ako. Ikaw, ano’ng natapos mo? Trabaho mo lang ang manakot ng turista. Ako, apat na ang librong naisulat. Masuwerte ka lang kasi ‘Kano ka. Pero wala kang binatbat sa akin, hindot ka!”

Siyempre, wala akong sinabi.

Bandang huli, tinatakan din niya ang passport ko. Nagmadali akong lumabas para makarating agad sa mahabang linya naman ng inspection. Tinabig ni Greg ang kamay ko at bahagya akong napangiti. Nagulat ako na nandoon pa pala siya.

“Hinintay kita. Pinauna ko na sina Kiko at Dan para makasakay na sa eroplano. Sabi ko sa kanila, i-inform na lang ang mga crew na hintayin tayo.”

Natuwa ako sa ginawang paghintay sa akin ni Greg. Iba talaga ang tunay na kaibigan. Naghihintay at inuuna ang kapakanan ng kaibigan bago ang sarili. Sa tagal na ni Greg sa Amerika, pakiramdam ko’y hindi pa rin siya

nabago ng sistema nito. Pinoy na Pinoy pa rin siya. Hindi gaya ng mga robot na 'Kano sa airport na ito. Walang buhay. Walang pakiramdam.

“Paano kung hindi tayo umabot?” tanong ko. “Walong minuto na lang at magsasara na ang eroplano natin. Ang haba pa ng pila dito sa inspection.”

“Ako’ng bahala,” iminuwestra niya na lumakad kami sa unahan ng mga tao. “Excuse me, we only have about eight minutes before our plane takes off. May we be allowed to go first?” Malakas at buo ang boses ni Greg. Nasa likod niya ako. Parang batang takot na nakahawak sa palda ng isang mataray na ina.

“Sure, go ahead, come here,” paanyaya ng isang inspection officer. “Remove your hat and your belt.”

Tuliro akong nakatingin sa kaniya. Blangko ang isip.

“Your hat, mister,” giit niya. “And your belt.”

“Oh, sorry.” Halos maduwal na ako sa sobrang sakit ng ulo. Naramdaman ko ang pagtaas ng presyon ko. Wala pa naman akong dalang gamot. Grabe talaga ang stress sa airport. Ito lang ang nakakainis na parte ng pagbibiyahe sa ibang bansa. Lalo na sa Amerika. Huhubarin halos lahat ng nakadikit sa katawan: medyas, sapatos, sinturon, mga barya, at iba pang kumakalansing sa bulsa, mga susi, alahas, lahat ng nakapaloob sa bulsa ng damit. Parang lahat ng nagbibiyahe, terorista ang tingin ng mga opisyales. Kailangang patunayan mo na hindi ka katulad ng iniisip nila. Pakiramdam ko, ganoon ang tingin ng Amerika sa lahat ng bumibisita dito. Lahat tagalabas. Lahat mababa. Lahat kaaway.

Paglabas namin sa inspection area, nakita namin sa departure electronic board na nasa Gate 23 pa ang aming eroplano. Nasa pagitan pa lang ng Gate 2 at Gate 3 ang inspection area na pinanggalingan namin. Kailangan naming tumakbo ni Greg. Tiningnan namin ang orasan. May limang minuto pa bago magsara ang eroplano. Kailangan naming habulin ang oras.



Halos mabuwal ako sa katatakbo. Buhat-buhat ang napakabigat na bagahe na walang gulong. Tuyo at nangangatal ang bibig. Nahirapan akong lulunin ang laway na natuyo sa loob ng bibig kaya inilabas ko na lang ang dila ko para basain ang mga labi. Gusto ko sanang uminom at umihi pero wala nang oras para gawin ito. Nang maramdaman kong hirap na ako sa paghinga, hingal na hingal na binagalan ko ang pagtakbo at naglakad na lang.

“Greg, hindi ko na kaya,” sambit ko na sapu-sapo ang dibdib habang bumibilis at lumalalim ang aking paghinga. “Mamamatay na ako.”

“Sige, Jack. Mauna na ako para ipaalam sa mga attendant na kailangang sunduin ka,” hapung-hapong banggit ni Greg. “Hang in there. We’ll call for help.” Tumakbo na siya nang mabilis, papalayo sa akin.

Lagpas na ako ng Gate 20 nang mamataan ko ang dalawang attendant na humahangos na papalapit sa akin. Hinila ng isa ang bagahe ko at ang isa naman ay kinuha ang aking jacket. Hindi ko na inalam kung sino sila. Ipinaubaya ko na sa kanila ang lahat ng mga gamit ko. Nakita ko si Greg na kausap ang nasa front desk, humihingi ng paumanhin na late kami dahil sa naging problema ko sa immigration. Hindi ko na inalam kung sino ang kausap niya at kung ano pa ang napag-usapan nila. Nang mga oras na yun, pakiramdam ko ay lulukso palabas ang puso ko sa katawan ko sa matinding hingal at pagal. Pagpasok namin sa eroplano, nakita namin ang pagkaway nina Kiko at Dan sa may bandang likuran. May ilang mukha akong naaninag na masama ang tingin sa amin ni Greg. Naramdaman ko na nabuwisit ang ilan sa kanila dahil kami ang naging dahilan kung bakit na-delay ang flight nang dalawang minuto. Ang mga tao sa Amerika ay partikular sa oras. Hindi nila gustong ma-delay ang kanilang paglipad dahil lang late dumating ang dalawang baklang Pinoy na nagliwaliw sa Mexico. Kung alam lang nila ang pinagdaanan ko na halos ikamatay ko ang pagsakay sa eroplanong ito.

Pag-upo ko, naramdaman ko ang matinding pagod at awa sa sarili. Napaiyak ako. Hindi ko napigilan. Atubiling dinamayan ako ni Dan. Hindi

niya alam kung hahawakan ako o sasabihan ng magandang salita. Hindi rin niya siguro alam kung paano ako tutulungan.

Narinig ko si Kiko sa unahan ng upuan namin ni Dan, kausap si Greg. “Dan and I were getting on and off the plane because we didn’t know if you and Jack could make it. Nagtaka siguro ang mga pasahero kung bakit kami pabalik-balik. Just in case, hindi kayo umabot, we’ll get off. Buti na lang, nakahabol kayo.”

Lalong bumuhos ang mga luha ko. Awang-awa ako sa sarili. Para akong inapi. Hinding-hindi ito mangyayari sa akin sa Pilipinas. Dahil hindang-hindi ko rin ito papayagan. Pero sino ba ako dito sa Amerika? Nahiya rin ako para sa mga kaibigan ko. Para rin silang naapi. Ngunit naisip ko, wala ito. Wala ito kumpara sa ilang siglong pang-aapi na naranasan ng mga Pinoy sa kamay ng mga mananakop. Ng mga Mehikano sa mga lumapastangan sa kanilang pamumuhay at kultura. Ngayon ko napagtanto kung bakit ayokong manirahan sa Amerika kahit masarap ang buhay doon. Ayokong maging puti kahit ang kalahati ko ay Amerikano. Mas gusto kong maging Pinoy kasi kahit kawawa, mas totoo. Mas tao. Mas may puso. Nagdadamay. Nagtutulungan. Kahit pare-parehong wala o salat sa maraming bagay. Gaya rin ng mga taga-Mexico. Kailanman ay hindi magkakaroon ng simpatiya ang mga nanakop. Makikita at mararamdaman lang ito sa mga kawawang sinakop.

Sa susunod na taon, plano ko ulit bumalik ng Mexico. Pupunta ako sa Guadalajara at Ciudad de Mexico, sa Oaxaca at Zacatecas, at sa probinsiya ng Campeche at Chihuahua. Sisiguraduhin ko lang na mas mahaba ang lay-over para wala nang aberya. Para walang Amerikanong sisira ng araw at biyahe ko. Mga apat na oras na lay-over, puwede na siguro iyon.

# PINOY NEW YORKER

ni John Jack G. Wigley

Sabi sa isang pamosong kanta, “If I can make it there, I’ll make it anywhere. It’s up to you, New York, New York.” Bagaman hindi ako artista na nakipagsapalaran sa tinaguriang The Big Apple, masasabi ko nang nakarating na ako sa lungsod na ito na naging laman ng mga babasahin at isipan ng lahat ng taong gustong maranasan ang makapunta rito.

Una kong napuntahan ang New York noong 2005. Kasama ako sa kauna-unahang theater group sa bansa—ang UST Graduate School Academic Theater. Dahil itatanghal namin ang “Portrait of the Artist as Filipino” na dula ni Nick Joaquin sa ilang siyudad sa US, isa sa mga lugar na ipalalabas namin ang New York. Sapagkat dalawang araw lang kami dito at hindi ko nagawang lumibot sa sobrang pagod, minabuti ko na lang na magpahinga at bumawi ng tulog sa simbahan kung saan kami nakapisan. Ito ay malapit sa distrito ng Little Italy sa Manhattan at si Father Erno Diaz ang kura paroko ng nasabing simbahan. Wala akong alaala ng New York noong unang beses na pagpunta ko doon.

Taong 2017 nang magkaroon uli ako ng pagkakataon na mabisita ito. Taun-taon akong nagpupunta sa US para bisitahin ang aking kapatid at mga matatalik na kaibigan. Ito na rin ang pinakabakasyon ko sa dami nang ginagawa sa Pilipinas bilang administrador at guro sa UST. Laking tuwa ko nang sinabi ni Kuya na dahil birthday ko sa darating na Pasko, regalo niya sa akin ang mag-tour sa New York at sa ilang lugar sa norteng Canada. Sampung araw kaming mawawala at mag-uumpisa ang aming tour sa New York. Aakyat ang aming bus tour patungong Niagara Falls, at dadaan sa mga lungsod ng Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, at Quebec. Sa ikasampung araw,

babalik kami ng US at dadaan sa Boston, Massachusetts, tapos babalik uli sa New York. Sa pagitan ng mga araw na iyon, matutulog kami sa mga hotel na kasapi sa bus tour na iyon.

Dahil Disyembre 'yun, napag-alaman ko na hindi paboritong bisitahin ang New York ng mga turista. Superlamig daw doon at mas mabuti daw na pasyalan ang mga lugar gaya ng Los Angeles para makaiwas sa hampas ng snow at wind chill. Pero baligtad ang aming pananaw ni Kuya. Mas gusto naming suungin ang panganib. Isa pa, alam ni Kuya na paborito kong panahon ang winter. At dahil walang ganito sa Pilipinas, ngayon siya nag-book. Habang nasa San Diego pa kami kung saan nakatira ang aking kapatid, pinanood namin sa balita na below zero ngayon ang klima sa New York. Ilang araw na lang ay lilipad na kami.

“Kaya mo talaga ang lamig, ha?” tanong ni Kuya sa akin. “Wag kang magrereklamo pag nasa New York na tayo at dumudugo na ang ilong mo sa sobrang lamig,” babala niya sa akin.

“Kaya ko ‘yan,” pabiro kong paniniguro sa kanya. Pero sa kaloob-looban ko, may naramdaman akong bakas ng pangamba.

“Hindi ko muna kinontak si Millie. Pagbalik na lang natin galing sa tour, d’un ko siya kokontakin. Nag-book ako ng overnight sa isang hotel sa Chinatown. Malapit lang d’un ang bus na sasakyan natin papuntang Canada,” mahabang paliwanag ni Kuya. Si Millie ay pinsan namin na halos dalawang dekada nang nakatira sa New York. Nalaman ko na bago ko pinuntahan si Kuya sa US, matagal na pala silang nag-uusap ni Millie. At matagal na ring nagyayaya na bisitahin siya sa New York. Sa Queens siya nakatira.

Napangiti ako. Bukod sa pagkakataong mabisita ang pamosong siyudad na ito, makikita ko rin ang pinsan kong matagal ko nang hindi nasisilayan. High school pa lang ako nang huli ko siyang nakausap.

Red eye ang flight na kinuha ni Kuya patungong New York. Ito ang tawag sa mga biyaheng hatinggabi o madaling araw para mas mabilis at iwas-gulo sa airport na pinamumugaran ng mga taong nagdudumaling umuwi sa kani-kanilang lugar. Magpa-Pasko pa naman. Siguradong maraming uuwi. Kami naman ay magliliwaliw lang kaya okey na ito, sabi ko sa kanya.

Lumapag kami sa La Guardia Airport ng ala-una ng madaling araw. Ang halos limang oras naming biyahe mula sa California ang nakapagpangawit sa aking leeg at likod pero hindi ko ito alintana dahil New York nga ang destinasyon ko. Hindi ko kayang matulog sa eroplano. Lalo na baka may ma-miss ako sa biyahe.

“Two degrees daw ang temperatura sa labas,” mahinahong bigkas ni Kuya. “Isuot mo na ang windbreaker at ilabas mo na ang gloves at shawl mo. Hindi birong lamig ito.”

Hindi ko masyadong pinansin ang sinabi niya pero sinunod ko ang kanyang bilin. Pagkatapos naming makuha ang aming mga bagahe sa Carousel 3, nagmadali kaming lumabas para kumuha ng taxi na maghahatid sa amin sa hotel.

Hindi ko pa naisasampay ang shawl ko sa leeg nang bumukas ang automatic exit door ng airport na nagpasok ng umuusok na lamig na hindi ko pa nararanasan sa tanang buhay ko. Umuusok din ang hanging lumalabas sa aking hininga at parang maninigas ang aking mukha.

“Kaya mo ‘to, sabi mo ha?” tanong-kutya ni Kuya sa akin.

Hindi ko na nagawang sagutin ang tanong niya. Pakiramdam ko malalaglag ang dila ko sakaling bumigkas pa ako ng salita. Nanunuot ang lamig at pumapasok ang ginaw sa kaloob-looban ng aking suot na windbreaker. Ilang minuto pa lang ang nakakaraan ngunit pakiramdam ko ay magkaka-nose bleed ako. Ang lakas pa ng loob kong sabihin na kaya ko ang lamig pero gusto ko nang bumalik sa loob ng airport at huwag nang lumabas

uli. Iba ang hagupit ng lamig na 'yun. Iginala ko ang paningin ko sa paligid. Ang lahat ay nababalutan ng makapal na niyebe. May mga nagwawalis at nagmumuwestra para gumalaw ang trapiko. Hindi ko makita ang kanilang mga mukha dahil nakabalumbon sila ng malalaki at makakapal na kasuotan. Hindi ito ang inaasahan kong magiging pakiramdam sakaling nasa New York na ako. Romantiko ang kaisipan ko tungkol sa snow. Masarap magyakapan at maghalikan sa labas habang umuulan ng niyebe. Ito ang alaala ko sa mga pelikulang napanood ko na shinooting sa New York. Hindi ganito.

Nagpunta kami sa pila ng nga taxi cab at nung kami na, hindi nagawa ng drayber na lumabas sa kotse para tulungan kaming buhatin ang mga багаhe at ilagay sa likod. Automatic lang niyang binuksan ang likuran para kami na ang gumawa n'un. Walang-wala sa mga taxi driver sa Pilipinas, buntung-hininga ko. Kinatwiran ko na lang sa isip ko na superlamig kaya siguro hindi na siya lumabas para tulungan kami.

Sa loob ng taxi, pinagmasdan ko ang siyudad. Madilim at malamig. Malayo sa impresyon ko nung hindi ko pa ito nakikita nang personal. May mga tao akong nakikita sa labas pero ang lahat ay nagmamadaling maglakad na parang mga nakabalot na zombie sa panahon ng apocalypse. Nakasuot ng mga sumbrero o head gear at hindi mo maaaninag ang mga mukha kaya hindi mo alam kung masaya o malungkot sila. Siguro nga, sa ganitong taglamig na panahon, bawal ang tumawa o umiyak. Isang kubit na ekspresyon sa iyong mukha, baka matuklap ang iyong labi o dumugo ang ilong. Panlaban sa ganitong panahon ang manatiling tahimik na lang.

Binaba kami ng taxi sa gitna ng Flushing sa Manhattan Chinatown. Hindi nakipag-usap sa amin ang drayber. Ni-ha ni-ho, wala. Walang ganitong drayber sa Pilipinas. Malamang, sisante ka na sa trabaho kung hindi ka magiliw sa mga pasahero mo, isip ko. Pero naisip ko rin na sa Amerika, hindi nila kailangang maging mabait at palakaibigan sa ibang tao. Ito ay isang

First World attitude, 'ika ko sa sarili. Doon ko napagtanto na may matindi palang kaugnayan ang kahirapan at kabutihan.

Sa harap ng hotel na tutulugan namin ngayong gabi, tumambad sa akin ang napakaraming Tsino. Hindi ko alam kung lahat sila ay Tsino pero lahat sila'y mukhang Asyano. Kahit madaling-araw na, nagkalat sila dito. Kanya-kanyang gawa. Parang hindi winter. Pakiramdam ko, wala ako sa New York. Nasa Hong Kong lang. May mga nagbubuhay ng mga karga mula sa mga nakaparadang trak. May mga nasa labas, nag-aabang. May mga nagkukuwentuhan sa isang sulok ng kanto. Maiingay at maliliksi sila kumilos.

Mabilis na inutusan ako ni Kuya na hilahin na ang багаhe ko at papasok na kami sa lobby. Hindi na kami nakahanap ng puwesto na puwedeng panigarilyuhan dahil sa sobrang lamig. Pagkatapos ibigay ng Tsinong front desk man ang susi namin, mabilis naming natunton ang aming kuwarto.

"Alas otso ang alis ng ating bus mamaya kaya siguro dapat alas saits pa lang, gising na tayo," mabilis na esprika ni Kuya. "Hahanapin pa natin ang istasyon ng bus."

Nagawa ko nang matulog sa sobrang pagod at puyat. Hindi ko na nasagot si Kuya sa mga sumunod niyang tanong at kuwento. Nakatulugan ko na ang aking suot na damit.

Kinabukasan, nang magising si Kuya ng alas singko ng umaga, nakaligo na ako at nagbibihis. Wala kaming imik pero bakas sa aming mga mukha ang kasiyahan na ito ang unang araw ng aming pakikipagsapalaran sa New York at Canada. Sa labas, sa kasagsagan pa rin ng grabeng lamig, hila-hila namin ang aming mga багаhe papunta sa bus station. Binusinahan pa ako ng isang kotseng mabilis na umarangkada dahil siguro sa mabagal kong paghila sa багаhe sa mabatong daan.

"Walang pasensya ang mga tao dito. Kung babagal-bagal ka, bubusinahan ka talaga!" paliwanag ni Kuya.

“Hindi naman ako mabagal ah,” mahinang katwiran ko.

Nangangatog ang mga tuhod kong tinahak ang mahabang linya patungong istasyon. Basa ang daan, tanda na umulan nang nakaraang gabi. Sa mga alulod ng mga tindahan, makikita na nagyelo na ang mga tulo ng tubig-ulan. Hindi mo na kailangan ang freezer dito, sambit ko sa sarili. Tumitigas at yumeyelo lahat. Wala sigurong pagkaing napapanis dito, bulong ko ulit sa sarili. Nakita ko na lang na kinakayawan na ako ni Kuya dahil nakatawid na pala siya sa kabilang daan nang hindi ko namamalayan.

Nang makasakay na kami ng bus, nagsimula na ang paggaluggad ko sa lugar na ‘yun sa puso at isipan ko.

Anim na araw din kaming nawala sa New York ni Kuya dahil binisita namin ang ilang siyudad sa Canada.

Pagbalik namin sa istasyon sa New York, naghihintay na si Millie sa amin at mahigpit kaming nagyakapan sa harapan ng ilang mga turista na nakikipagyakapan sa mga kaanak nilang sumusundo sa kanila.



Isa sa mga pinakaabalang kalsada sa New York ang Madison Avenue.

“Ang tagal ko na kayong hindi nakikita, mga ‘insan. Dito pa pala sa New York tayo magkikita-kita,” habul-habol na salita ni Millie.

“O ‘di ba, ang sosyal na natin? Hindi sa mga mababahong istasyon ng tren o Pantranco sa Pilipinas. We’re in New York,” pabiro kong bigkas na feeling New Yorker.

“Di ka pa rin nagbabago, Jack. Baliw ka pa rin,” mabilis niyang ganti.



Nagtawanan kami nang malakas. Wala kaming pakialam. Si Kuya naman ay tahimik na nakangiti sa tabi, matimtim na nakatingin sa aming dalawa. Iniisip niya siguro kung ano ang karma niya at binigyan siya ng baliw na kapatid at may topak na pinsan.

“Pasensiya na kayo, wala akong dalang sasakyan. Mahirap ang may kotse dito sa New York. Talo ka sa trapik at gasolina,” katuwiran ni Millie. “Mag-bus na lang tayo. Derecho na ‘yun hanggang sa bahay. Mabigat ba ang mga dala niyo?”

“Hindi naman. Pero ‘yung kay Jack, bumigat na. Kabibili ng kung anu-anong abubot sa Canada. Pati yata tubig galing sa Niagara Falls, nilagay niya sa garapon.”

Nagulat ako sa sinabi ni Kuya. Marunong palang magbiro ang mokong. Sumakay na lang ako. “Pag-uwi ko sa ‘Pinas, ilalagay ko sa plastic para ibenta sa mga bibili ng yelo. Sasabihin kong galing pa sa Canada ang tubig na ‘yan. Tingnan ko lang pag hindi naubos agad ‘yan.”

Siyempre, nagtawanan na naman kami. Nasa loob na kami ng bus ay pinagtitinginan pa rin ng ilang pasahero.

“Ano ba ang gusto niyong gawin? Saan niyo gustong magpunta? Bakit ba tatlong araw lang kayo dito? Bakit hindi ninyo gawing isang linggo na para sulit?” rumarapidong mga tanong ng aming pinsan.

“Basta ako gusto kong makita si Statue of Liberty. At saka Brooklyn Bridge,” mabilis kong tugon. Medyo nahiya ako nung tumingin sa akin si Kuya na parang sinasabi na huwag akong atrebido.

“Okay, Statue of Liberty tayo. Pero bukas na doon kasi hapon na. Masyadong malamig na ngayon doon at maalon. Minsan nga ‘pag December o January, nagsasara sila dahil winter. Tingnan natin. Pero Brooklyn Bridge? Ba’t gusto mong pasyalan ‘yun e malaking tulay lang ‘yun?” usisa ni Millie.

“Eh kasi naalala ko ‘yun sa pelikula ni Meryl Streep na ‘Sophie’s Choice.’ Umakyat si Kevin Kline, ang kapareha niya sa tuktok ng tulay at sumigaw. Gusto kong makita ‘yun,” dere-deretsong paliwanag ko. Hindi na ako nahiya kahit panlisikan pa ako ng mata ni Kuya.

“Paborito niya kasi si Meryl Streep,” walang kagatul-gatol na dagdag ni Kuya. May kirot sa puso akong naramdaman nang marinig ko ito kay Kuya. Naalala pala niya.

“Ikaw naman, Jun, sa’n mo gustong pumunta?” muling tanong ng aming pinsan.

“Pangatlong beses ko na dito, Mil. Napuntahan ko na yata lahat. Bahala ka na. ‘Yang baliw na pinsan mo ang ipasyal mo. Damay lang ako dito.”

“Naku, kahapon ko pa iniisip kung saan niyo gustong pumunta. Kumuha na nga ako ng ilang mga brochure.” Isa-isang nilabas ni Millie ang mga nakolektang papel mula sa kanyang bag. “Meron ditong MOMA, Metropolitan Museum of Art, pero gusto niyo ba sa mga museum?” balik-tanong niya sa amin.

Hindi kami pareho kumibo.

“Pag museum kasi, magtatagal tayo. Kulang ang oras. Talong araw lang kayo dito. Wala tayong ibang mapupuntahan. D’un lang.”

“Wag na d’un. Maglakad-lakad na lang tayo. Pasyal-pasyal, gan’un,” walang kuwenta kong dagdag.

“Sige, maglakad tayo sa Broadway Street, Madison Avenue, Wall Street, at Times Square, makikita mo na lahat ng mga kilalang building sa New York. Sasaglit din tayo sa Central Park kasi...”

Hindi na natapos ni Millie ang sinasabi dahil pumalakpak ako. “Ay, Central Park!”

“Bakit ka pumalakpak? Park lang ‘yun. Mas malaki lang sa Luneta,” prangkang patutsada ni Millie.

“Hindi, kasi sa Central Park naman ginawa ang “Angels in America,” katwiran ko.

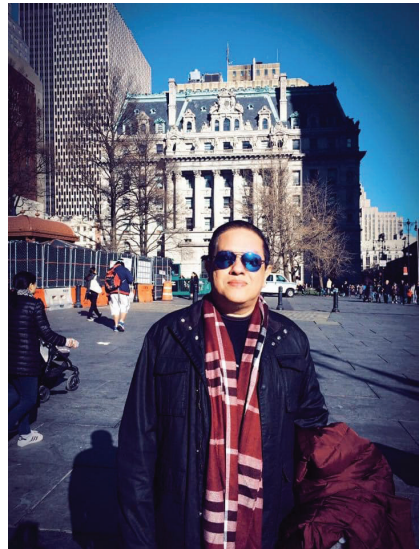
“Pelikula din ‘yan ni Meryl Streep?” mabalasang tanong ng pinsan ko.

Tahimik na tumango na lang ako. “May malaking anghel na nasa tuktok ng fountain na ‘yun. Ang ganda!”

“Ang laki ng Central Park, saan natin hahanapin ‘yun? Pero sige, i-Google na lang natin,” sabi ni Millie. Manghang-mangha sa akin ang pinsan ko kasi ang dami kong alam tungkol sa lugar na ‘yun. Ang lugar na pinanahan na niya ng ilang dekada. “Mas alam mo pa ang New York kaysa sa akin. Ay teka, nakalimutan kong tawagan si Ricardo. Sabi ko, tatawagan ko siya ‘pag nagkita na tayo. Nakalimutan kong may asawa ako,” natatawag sambit ni Millie.

Sa tatlong araw ko sa New York, marami akong nalaman tungkol sa naging buhay ng pinsan ko. Tungkol sa kapatid ko na hindi niya nakukuwento ‘pag kami lang dalawa ang nag-uusap. Tungkol sa misteryosa, malamig, maingay, at masalimuot na siyudad na ito.

Sa paglilibot namin, bukod sa mga lugar na nabanggit, napasyalan din namin ang Grand Central Terminal, ang Rockefeller Center, ang Trump Tower na hindi mo madaanan ang bangketa dahil off limits sa mga dumadaan at naroon daw ang Presidente sa itaas at doon magpa-Pasko. Napuntahan din namin sa Central Park ang sinasabi



If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere. New York, New York!

kong fountain na may anghel. Ito ang Bethesda Fountain at ang Bethesda Terrace.

Sa pag-iikot namin sa parkeng 'yun, nakapulot pa ako ng piso. Naging palaisipan sa aming lahat ito na sa dinami-dami ng tao sa New York, isang Pilipino pa ang nakawala ng kanyang barya. At sa dinami-dami rin ng makakapulot nito sa New York, isang Pilipino rin ang nakapulot n'un. May ibig sabihin ba 'yun, tanong ko sa sarili. Sinabi ko sa kanila na marahil suwerte ang hatid ng baryang ito sa akin at sa aming biyahe. Bukas-loob ko itong itinago sa aking bulsa. Bigla akong nakaramdam ng kakaibang lungkot. Naalala na kailangan ko nang bumalik sa Pilipinas.



*Ang lahat ng mga larawan ay mula sa awtor.*

# KUWENTONG KARERA: WRITING ABOUT HORSERACING

By Jenny Ortuoste



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*So it must have been after the birth of the simple light  
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm  
Out of the whinnying green stable  
On to the fields of praise.*

~ Dylan Thomas, from "Fern Hill" (1945)

I first became involved with the Philippine horseracing industry when I was in my early 20s. I was fresh out of the University of the Philippines

with a journalism degree, raring to prove myself as a writer, when I received the opportunity to write sports feature articles for the now-defunct news broadsheet *Manila Chronicle*.

This is how that happened: My first job out of college was as public relations officer of the Games and Amusements Board (GAB). This government agency supervises and regulates professional sports except horseracing. The agency's chairman, Jose Macachor, was an advertising guy and pulled my resume from a pile sent to J. Walter Thompson. It is this seemingly small action, perhaps even a whim on his part, that changed the course of my life. If he hadn't done that, and if I hadn't responded, I wouldn't have had all the adventures that followed.

While at GAB, my duties included writing press releases and liaising with print and TV reporters. It was at a press conference at the office that I met someone who said he could get me a gig as a freelance contributor writing features. "It's perfect for you," he urged. "Your work at GAB gives you access to sports personalities and events."

Knowing nothing about sports did not deter me from writing sports articles. If anything, I was full of confidence and sure that whatever it was, I could figure it out. I was eager to practice Hunter S. Thompson's concept of 'gonzo journalism,' which eschews the strict objectivity we were taught in j-school in favor of the personal, lived experience, and the use of an unapologetically subjective lens upon a subject. To be clear, it wasn't in the classroom that I learned about this concept; it was probably from a book in the stacks of the UP Main Library that I read about it. (The stacks area was my personal *tambayan* and comfort space until I joined the UP Journalism Club in my third year and made friends.)

While at *Chronicle*, I wrote about basketball, boxing, windsurfing, and jetskiing events assigned to me by editor Fort Yerro, who ran a sports supplement for *Chronicle* called *Sporting Life*. While covering a windsurfing

event, one of the competitors (who wasn't that much taller than me) remarked breezily (and, in hindsight, rather cheekily): "*Ang liit mo. Puwede kang hinete.*"

"*Ano ang hinete?*" I asked, and that question precipitated me down the rabbit hole that was the rest of my life and career for two decades. Writing about Philippine horseracing from the emic perspective of gonzo journalism, I became the sport's first female apprentice jockey. I married a professional jockey (and after 12 years had our marriage annulled). I had two children who I raised in a home just behind the racetrack in Makati. (I wrote about this experience in my Palanca-winning essay "The Turn for Home: Memories of Santa Ana Park.")

## My poetics

My poetics, then, counts lived experience as a necessary impetus for the creation of literary and other artistic works. It is from involvement and participation in the daily grind of working to put food on the table, contact with people from various backgrounds, interaction with them for various purposes, exposure to the new and unfamiliar (both bad and good), an awareness of the stories of others, and a conversance with the ways that people negotiate their existence and interactions that provide me with understanding about human nature and the human condition.

This is where I gain the traction to write about what matters most to me, which are narratives of real people. This is why I write primarily creative nonfiction—to bring to others' awareness the stories of others as well as my own. This sharing of perspectives allows us to gain deeper insights into what it is to live, exist, be human. It also allows me to operate from a place of authenticity, which is very important to me as this is aligned with my personal core value of truth.

I find gonzo journalism a perfect style for the way I write – nonfiction that is written creatively, steeped in lived experience, brimming with authentic truths. The term ‘gonzo’ was coined by the late journalist Bill Cardoso after he read Thompson’s article about the Kentucky Derby in *Scanlon’s Monthly* in June 1970 (Martin, 2006). The article caused waves through the establishment, in part because the accompanying illustrations by British artist Ralph Steadman were distorted, frenzied, grotesque.

“The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved,” Cardoso wrote to Thompson in a letter, was a breakthrough that was “pure Gonzo,” written with a capital G (Martin, 2006). The word has two dictionary meanings: the original one being “bizarre or crazy,” and the second one, that became attached to it because of Cardoso, refers to “journalistic writing of an exaggerated, subjective, and fictionalized style.” The word is rooted perhaps in the Italian *gonzo*, “foolish,” or Spanish *ganso*, “goose, fool” (Oxford Languages Dictionary) -- in Filipino, *gansa*, an animal not known in our culture for being particularly clever.

In the case of Thompson’s seminal article that shattered the staid standards of coverage that prevailed up to that day, ‘gonzo’ leans rather more toward ‘bizarre and crazy.’ This is how the article is bylined: “Written under duress by Hunter S. Thompson. Sketched with eyebrow pencil and lipstick by Ralph Steadman” (Thompson, 1970). And that’s just for starters.

The work sounds like much of the drink-fueled, drug-addled writing of the ‘60s and 70s. It wasn’t the first of its kind to appear, in terms of subjective essays, but “Derby” struck a chord in readers for its sheer audacity and raw honesty. Thompson describes his and Steadman’s adventures in obsessive, stark detail, pulling no punches no matter how unflattering to themselves and others. Describing the anticipated scene to Steadman, Thompson writes:



“Sure,” I said. “We’ll just have to be careful not to step on anybody’s stomach and start a fight.” I shrugged. “Hell, this clubhouse scene right below us will be almost as bad as the infield. Thousands of raving, stumbling drunks, getting angrier and angrier as they lose more and more money. By midafternoon they’ll be guzzling mint juleps with both hands and vomiting on each other between races. The whole place will be jammed with bodies, shoulder to shoulder. It’s hard to move around. The aisles will be slick with vomit; people falling down and grabbing at your legs to keep from being stomped. Drunks pissing on themselves in the betting lines. Dropping handfuls of money and fighting to stoop over and pick it up.”

He looked so nervous that I laughed. “I’m just kidding,” I said.

This is how I strive to write, with the same kind of unflinching and direct storytelling that is like someone conversing with you. Stephen King has mastered this technique. In his novella *The Mist* (1980), he starts this way: “This is what happened.” Simple, right? But very effective, at least it was for me. It was like he was seated right beside me, a good ole boy from Maine, spinning a yarn about the “worst heat wave in northern New England history” and the monsters that emerge from the mist referred to in the title. And this simple opening phrase has stuck with me all these years from when I first read *The Mist* as a teenager, and I have used it as a literary go-to technique since then, to create a “warm open,” as it were. In fact, rereading the earlier part of this essay, I find that I have used a variation in paragraph two.

Another writer whose straightforwardness I admire is Jack Kerouac. His personality aside (he was after all a man of his times, patriarchal and sexist), his technique of writing CNF also delivers the same directness and “warts and all” kind of honesty. His sense of rhythm and that of King’s is also what I try to emulate – King for his mastery of language, and the way it flows from sentence to sentence (this is what makes his works ‘unputdownable,’ as

countless fans have described), and Kerouac for writing the way jazz sounds. His works like *On the Road* contain the vibrant, bluesy notes of hard bop and cool jazz, mentioning by name musicians Charlie Parker, Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray, and Miles Davis, among others. Like the improvisational chords of jazz, his sentences run on for long, lung-busting riffs, punctuated by the staccato pops of phrases.

## My process

My creative process stems from my poetics in that it must be honest and genuine to the way I live my life. As someone with children to raise and a household to run on my own, most of my time is spent working at things that have remunerative compensation – teaching, churning out content for the internet, editing documents and psychological case studies. I have very little leisure to write literary or creative works. It happens when it happens.

In other words, mine is a *laissez-faire* approach. The term is French and literally means “let you do,” and is pronounced “lay-zay fair” – in my case, with emphasis on the “lazy.” I will write when I feel like it, when I want to, or have to, usually when there is a deadline for me to contribute to an anthology or generate output that will add to my accomplishments toward a promotion at work. Lazy? Yeah, fair enough. Why aren’t I more productive? Because time and energy are limited and there is no payoff for creative writing. It won’t put food on the table. One does it for the clout, for the right to say, “I am a serious writer, I am someone who contributes to the country’s literature.”

I personally do it for the headstone, for the chance to someday become immortal. Having been treated for two cancers, I feel my mortality very much. I do not know how much longer I have left on this earth, or how much time I have left to write. But I am so busy living and making a living that what I have written so far will have to do.

## My current project

My current writing project is to turn my PhD dissertation into a book that the average educated reader will enjoy. True to my lazy-fair attitude, my manuscript was approved for publication in 2018, subject to minor edits that I have not yet accomplished.

Tentatively titled *Kulturang Karera: The Culture and Communication of Horseracing*, my book in progress is a description of the culture, commerce, and communication of Philippine horseracing. Interspersed with facts and figures are anecdotes that bring this subculture to light, that foreground the personal experiences of racetrack folk as they continually construct, maintain, destroy, and re-construct their social order.

What I am struggling with is how to turn an academic work into something that will be of interest to others who are not as geeky or nerdy as I am, and that will allow me to share as accurately and faithfully as possible the vibrancy, urgency, and sheer excitement of the world I lived in for over 20 years. How do I make others feel what I do as I watch horses thunder down the homestretch toward the wire, fans screaming themselves hoarse, betting tickets clenched in their fists, eyes bulging at the sight of men and beasts running toward victory or defeat?

Another reason I procrastinated on this project (aside from life happening to me) is that I do not think I write well enough – I don't have the vocabulary, the mastery of language, the ability to pluck the thoughts and memories out of my head and spread them on paper in such a way that the narrative is as alive to others as it is to me.

All I can do is try my best. I hope I can do justice to the people and horses, and to the stories they lived.

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# EXCERPTS FROM *KULTURANG KARERA: THE CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION OF HORSERACING*

by Jenny Ortuoste

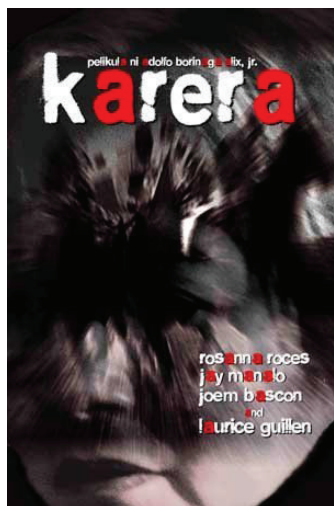
## Horseracing in Film and Television

In addition to various print formats, the narratives of racing also appear in popular culture through the media of film and television. In film, among the most famous that center on racing are *National Velvet* (1944) starring Elizabeth Taylor and Mickey Rooney. Taylor defies convention and rides her horse in the dangerous and highly intense Grand National Steeplechase. Mickey Rooney plays a trainer in *The Black Stallion* (1979). The most well-known racing movies in the Philippines are *Seabiscuit* (2003) and *Secretariat* (2010), both based on the stories of famous champion racehorses and their people - owners, trainers, jockeys - who overcame large obstacles to win big.

On television, Animal Planet has aired *Jockeys* (2009), a twelve-episode reality TV series on riders, while *Luck* (2011), a series about racetrack life, was canceled after three horses died during production.

There have been several Philippine movies with scenes set at the racetrack, with most of the early ones Fernando Poe Jr. and Chiquito starrers. Both actors were noted horseowners and operated racing stables at the old Santa Ana Park in Makati. Chiquito (whose real name was Augusto Pangan) was also a professional jockey and often rode his own horses in races.

The subject remains interesting to filmmakers. *Ging Gang Gooly Giddyap: I Love You Daddy* (1994) was a comedy that starred Nova Villa, Jimmy Santos, Manilyn Reynes, and Romnick Sarmenta, who played a jockey and Manilyn's love interest, with a talking horse possessed by the spirit of the girl's dead father. In *Kabayo Kids* (1990) comedians Vic played a jockey, Tito a coachman (*kutsero*), and Joey a blacksmith (*panday*), but the equine element was confined to the background as the nominal occupations of the three *bidas*, who were costumed superheroes fighting against a formulaic villain.



Poster for the film *Karera* (2009)

The indie film *Karera* (2009) starred Rosanna Roces and Jay Manalo (both *kareristas* in real life, they used to ask me for racing tips via text message); it tells of a family involved in illegal horserace betting as “bookies”. The Vice Ganda movie *Petrang Kabayo* (2010), a remake of the Roderick Paulate starrer *Petrang Kabayo at ang Pilyang Kuting* (1988), starred the flamboyant comedian as a wealthy and cruel employer (“Peter/Petra”) who was magically turned into a horse to learn an important life lesson. Some scenes were shot at San Lazaro

Leisure Park (SLLP); one scene was a contrived horse race that had Petra, transformed into a *kalesa* horse, winning over the much larger Thoroughbreds for racing by talking to them and convincing them to let her win.

Perhaps the movie with the most verisimilitude to racing, however slight, was the comedy *Isang Platitong Mani* (1985), starring, among others, comedian Bert “Tawa” Marcelo, singer Rico J. Puno, billiards king Amang Parica, and star jockey Eduardo “Boboc” C. Domingo Jr.

At the time, Boboc was a minor celebrity in the sports world. As a good-looking “gentleman jockey” (he had taken master’s degree units at De La Salle University and came from a prominent Ilonggo family, the Coscolluelas, on his mother’s side), he was a rarity in the sport where the jockeys at the time were mostly only high-school graduates. In *Isang Platito...*, he played a kalesa driver and used *salitang karera* some of his lines - *labas* to urge his *pangkalesa* horse to do well, *pengko* and *panis* to refer disparagingly to a billiards player—and wore a full *panlaban* (actual race) outfit of his own—helmet, silks, whip, pristine *pandemontar* (riding pants) and boots in a scene where he drives a kalesa.

In these films, the use of horses, racing, or racing-related subjects is merely to provide a setting for the narratives, in the sense of, “Where would you usually find a horse? At a racetrack.” These films lean heavily on the popular trope of “pride cometh before a fall,” and use the devices of the supernatural and fantasy - a talking horse (*Ging Gang Gooly...*), a ghost horse (*Petra...* 2010), and, in both *Petras*, a goddess and god of horses (“*Diokabayo*”) and humans temporarily transformed into horses to expiate transgressions and learn important values. In these films there is no delving into the world of *karera*, but rather a subversion of its material culture - horses, racetrack, races, stables, *diviza* (racing skills)—to accommodate storylines written along mainstream myths and stereotypes. The unfamiliarity of the racing environment interests and titillates, and that is the purpose for its use. To date, there are no productions, whether film or television, that deliver an accurate and authentic portrayal of *karera*.

In sum, horses have a special role in the narratives of films. Horses are held in awe and respect, and they are often the creature chosen to be endowed with magical properties; they are perceived as good and patient, *kawawa* (as a beast of burden, as in *Petra...*, 1988) and *kinakawawa* (as seen in the horse abused by the main character’s father in *Petra...* 1988, and by

the main character in Petra...2010). Horses are perceived to accept, in dumb acquiescence, human impositions and demands for labor, and display defiance only when experiencing unkindness and cruelty. Thus the horse, particularly in the films mentioned, is a metaphor for the ordinary Filipino, who bears all things with patience, but struggles when it is all too much and has become an injustice.

This theme also illustrates the folk wisdom “be kind to others,” valorizing character traits of helpfulness and kindness to animals, while *pagamalupit* is punished, if not by human means, then by supernatural.

The literature implies that the racing community has its own interesting narratives, the stories of people and horses that reflect the ups and downs of life in the mainstream, while offering a touch of the exotic and unfamiliar through the depiction of the community’s own mores, values, norms, language, structure, hierarchy, and way of life. It is evident that racing has an entire and complete culture of its own, impenetrable to outsiders unless explained, while remaining embedded in the mainstream culture of society and reflecting to a varying extent the cultural attributes of that society.

There in the dichotomy of belonging/otherness lies the glamor and attraction as well as the continuing fascination of the public with the racing world.

## On Norms and Values

The members of a community hold certain values and norms in common, valorizing some above others. A “value” considers “good” and “bad,” and what is important and what is not; it is more abstract and general than a norm, which provides rules of behavior in specific situations; it is “the way we do things around here,” and is not necessarily connected to ethical practices or ideas.





Horses racing down the stretch in one of the races of the MARHO Founders' Cup, an event I managed. The festival was held at Metroturf Racecourse in Malvar, Batangas, March 28, 2015.

#### A. Pagpapahalaga sa pamilya

One value prevalent in horseracing that of familism (also familialism), that places a priority on the family and family values. In *karera*, being “a family man” is a value, although the cultural norm tolerates infidelity - having a “girlfriend” or mistress is accepted, part of manhood rites of passage - “*Lalaki kasi ako, ganoon talaga,*” under the Filipino machismo mentality.

In such cases, the girlfriend or mistress should not supplant the role of the wife for the sake of family harmony. Leaving the wife for the mistress is frowned upon - “*Hindi baleng magdagdag, huwag lang magbawas.*” Marital separations that occur under violent or tragic circumstances are considered *malas* -- unlucky. A jockey who abandoned his wife and children for “the other woman” and refused to give his family financial support earned the negative opinion of the community, and he was dropped by some of his horseowners at the time - “*Mali ang ginawa niya sa pamilya niya. Malas ‘yun sa kabayo.*”

Another of his horseowners, learning later on from the wife that the jockey was not supporting his children, told her, "*Bakit hindi mo sinabi sa akin agad? Sana nakatulong ako na kausapin siya.*" This horseowner did speak to the jockey, who was compelled to give his family support, at least for some time. This once more shows the interconnectivity of the personal with the professional life in racing, and the responsibility that horseowners feel towards their employees and other racing folk lower down the hierarchy.

This is a reflection of a common perception that karera folk are a family - "*Isang pamilya lang tayo.*" Racing folk seem to know everyone else's business; there are hardly any secrets in this world - everyone knows who has a mistress, that the wife became angry, that his child dropped out of school, and so on. It is not a violation of privacy for someone to ask another personal questions, because they are not *ibang tao*, they are *pamilya*. In this sense, responsibility for fellow racing folk is an extension of one's responsibilities to their own families.

Because of this sense of family, it is often assumed that everyone else possesses the same knowledge of racing matters. A veteran jockey tells of the time he asked directions to Jun Almeda's farm in Batangas, which he had never visited. He was told, "*Sa tabi iyon ng farm ni Eric Tagle.*" When Mr. Almeda himself was for directions, he said, "*Alam na niya [veteran jockey] kung saan ang farm ko - tabi lang nung kay Eric Tagle.*" It was assumed that everyone knows where Eric Tagle's farm is, as a sort of landmark. The veteran jockey ended up having to meet up with trailer drivers near the area, where he was finally given exact directions after reiterating that he really did not know the location of Eric Tagle's farm.

## B. Pagiging mapagkukop

This feeling of social responsibility is the manifestation of another racing value that requires community members to help each other. It's been described as "we protect our own." Again referring to the previous case, horseowners and other industry top honchos helped the abandoned jockey's wife by giving her work - first as a writer, then, as she learned more about the industry, by giving her other, bigger roles. A then-Philracom [Philippine Racing Commission] official said of her, "*Kawawa naman siya, kailangan tulungan. Hindi sila dapat iniwang mag-iina.*"

In the same manner, groups within the industry develop ways to benefit their members. The jockeys regularly stage charity events to raise money for the Disabled Jockeys Fund every year on Jockeys Day, a racing festival held sometime in the summer. In 2015, they kicked off the first annual Jockeys Footrace, a brainchild of veteran rider Antonio "Oyet" B. Alcasid Jr. He had seen videos of American jockeys breaking from gates sans horses and running a few meters on the track to raise money for charity. That year, I pitched in to help by soliciting sponsors who donated P5,000 per jockey; they could name the jockey they wanted to race and have him wear a shirt that they supplied (most sent shirts with company logos). We filled a gate at Metroturf with jockeys who were raring to run, the shy ones looking down at their feet and not making eye contact with the crowd, the zanier ones – Patricio "Patty" Dilema the foremost among them – pretending to be horses and kicking at their "sotas" guiding them to the gate. "*E di wow!*" the crowd roared at Patty's antics; he preened at the use of his catchphrase. It was one of the younger jockeys who won that first footrace; he'd been a track star in high school. For his efforts he received a motorcycle donated by Metroturf. A good time was had by all, and the second footrace this year (2016) at Santa Ana Park was just as successful.

Horseowners, for their part, help each other by siding with their fellows to convince other groups to take a particular policy stand. In line with this, racing folk feel comfortable approaching other *taga-karera* or *kareristas* in influential positions in politics, government, or business to ask for favors on the basis of the community relationship - "*Taga-karera din po ako. Ako 'yung teller noon sa Santa Ana sa Makati, naalala niyo? Tulungan niyo naman ako.*" The belongingness to the group extends itself, as a passport, as it were, into in-group members' lives outside racing.

### C. Pagkakapantay-pantay ng mga kasarian

In terms of gender, the majority of horseowners are male, from 95 to 99 percent in any given year (horseowner registrations with Philracom are accomplished yearly, thus the names on the roster change). Some of the registered women horseowners are not owners in their own right but fronts for their male relatives wanting to spread ownership around to skirt rules on coupled entries. There are very few women owners genuinely involved in the sport on their own account - among them former congresswomen Maria Consuelo "Baby" Puyat-Reyes who was active during the 1980s and '90s, and Melaine Habla at present, all the more a rarity because she is young, in her 20s. This gender disparity is reflected in all professions at the track. There are no female exercise riders or jockeys at the present. In the modern history of the sport, there have been only three female apprentices of the Philippine Jockeys Academy - I was the first, in 1991 - and of the three, only one finished the course and graduated to journeyman, Analyn Reloto. She was not successful in her local career and is now an exercise rider in Japan.

I was also the first and only in two racing-related occupations: female assistant racing manager of a racing club (Manila Jockey Club, in 2005 to 2007) and racing writer (from early 2000s to present). I was the second female broadcaster after Jay Rodriguez in the 1990s, although she was more

of an on-camera talent rather than an expert in racing, the same with the lone female racecaster at present, Lea Forbes at SLLP. This situation is linked to several factors: disinclination of women to enter what is perceived as “a man’s world,” the perceived shortage of career opportunities in racing, and the lack of awareness that this world even exists.

There are a few women *sotas* (grooms), who entered the profession within the past decade or so. One is Gigi Dacanay, who rose to become a stable manager. In terms of gender equality, opportunities within the community are given to those who identify as LGBTQ - there are a few gay male *sotas*, one who calls himself “Mayumi”; Dacanay and her partner are both lesbians. All three work for JAL Racing. Horseowner Jeci A. Lapus believes that women make efficient *sotas* and stable managers because they “are cleaner and take better care of things;” gay men, he says, are “*maayos at madetalye*,” adding, “*Wala akong pakialam sa kasarian, basta alagaan nila ng mabuti ang kabayo ko.*”

Taga-karera and kareristas themselves welcome women into the community, seeing them as novelties - “*Ang cute nila*,” and, in the case of broadcasters, “*Para maiba naman, hindi iyong puro lalaki ang nasa panel, nakakasawa.*” I myself had no idea that I could be a panelist; it took the encouragement of people in racing, primarily PRCI’s then-racing manager Fulton Su, to convince me I could learn the ropes, again, in hands-on fashion.

In the end, to the community, what matters is that the job gets done, and done well - “*Kahit sino ang nasa panel, basta malinaw ang boses at alam ang pinagsasabi niya*,” “*Kahit babae ang hinete, basta magaling magdala ng kabayo at maipapanalo niya.*”

#### D. Pagiging mapagkumbaba

With so many occasions and opportunities within karera to brag and show off, humility is deemed an important virtue to avoid being termed *mayabang* or *arogante*. Jockeys modestly shrug off praise for wins by saying “*Chamba lang*” or “*Sinuwerte lang ako, pare*,” even if the jockey himself believes that it was his skill and mastery that led to the victory. Even star jockeys congratulated at the awarding ceremony and showered with praise murmur similar phrases of self-deprecation. It might be false modesty, but displaying boastful behavior is a breach of racing etiquette and, in the case of jockeys who grandstand during a race or fail to salute racing stewards, penalized with a fine.

Among jockeys, the boastful ones are shunned. Says a veteran jockey:

“You remember [name of jockey]? He’s so young but he became *mayabang*. He said in an interview that he is the best jockey now riding! So now we just ignore him. Also two other guys [names omitted]. The automatic *pakain* I told you about, when one of us wins? We don’t do it when it’s them. We don’t congratulate them. We’re just silent. *Iba silang makisama, eh*.”

A humble demeanor is also expected of trainers and horseowners, especially in public. A trainer who struts too much “in your face” or makes disparaging remarks about his opponents is *mayabang*. A horseowner who displays excessive glee when hoisting a trophy is *mayabang*. As racing folk often advise, “*Renda-renda lang*” - do things in moderation. (The term means “reining in,” or controlling your mount with the reins.)

It is also considered *malas* to brag - it might jinx the next outing and lead to a loss. “*Mayabang kasi siya, eh*,” the community might say about

a boastful rider or trainer who suffers a loss. The concept is also linked to divine retribution - “*Ayan, kinarma sila tuloy.*”

Even among *kareristas*, winning a wager is ascribed to *suwerte* even if everyone is aware that it was *galing sa diskarte* (strategic ability) that led to the win; the fact is known, but it is considered appropriate behavior to say it was *chamba lang*, in a way also consoling others for their loss by implying that they too might win next time if they are as lucky, in this manner ensuring that relationships are not ruffled by behavior that might be misconstrued as unsportsmanlike or ungentlemanly.



Nemesis approaches the finish line in one of the races at the MARHO Ruby Festival, held Nov. 30, 2014 at Manila Jockey Club in Carmona, Cavite. I was the event manager and very proud of our beautiful event banner in the background.

## On Roles and Hierarchies

Roles within the racing community fall in either of two aspects – the manufacture of a product (the races), and the consumption of the product (watching the races and wagering on them). Those responsible for the conduct and management of the races are the *taga-karera*, and those who enjoy the races and bet on them are the *karerista*. Both together make up the racing community and belong to the in-group; the outgroup is called *hindi taga-karera* and *hindi karerista*.

## A. Taga-karera

Because they are intimately connected with the conduct of the sport, taga-karera have a slightly more prestigious status within the group as insiders, in the sense of being more on the inside than kareristas.

Identified as taga-karera by consensus are jockeys, trainers, grooms, helpers, stablehands, ranch hands, and their families - in other words, those who work as employees (*tauhan*). Many of them have been involved in these occupations for generations, in this way assuring their progeny of livelihoods, racing being the “family business” so to speak.

There are families that have produced jockeys and trainers for generations, the most prominent being the Guce family. The racing professions tend to run in families because the skills and knowledge are passed on within the families, and to some extent also because of genetics, in the case of jockeys.

The demands of the sport require jockeys to be as light as possible to ease the burden on the horse, which is an expensive animal to buy and maintain; a short person would be lighter, so racing folk who are short tend to become jockeys. They then marry short women and have short children, and this was often the pattern for generations in many families. On average jockeys are five feet two inches tall; star jockey Jonathan Hernandez, at five feet four inches, is considered too tall, but he has the gift of making weight without difficulty. This is the only role that has a physical requirement.

However, jockeys have the advantage of not being confined to that particular role for life; many jockeys, at the end of their riding career, transition to become trainers and stable managers, and are considered to be effective and knowledgeable trainers because they can ride, unlike many trainers - the tall ones - who cannot.





A group of jockeys posing just before they compete in the 43rd PCSO Presidential Gold Cup (2015) at SLLP. Jonathan Hernandez is on the right.

Others considered as *taga-karera* are exercise riders, grooms, and the helpers - jockey helpers and *sota* [groom] helpers. Most exercise riders are failed jockeys - those who became too tall or heavy to ride competitively, those who flunked their apprentice training, those who were not successful as journeymen, those who had personal concerns such as drug use and attitude problems. A few who love riding horses took up this job because they had no other means of livelihood.

The profession of groom tends to run in families as well but to a lesser extent compared to the other professions, because anyone who loves animals and has an aptitude for getting along with them can learn to be a groom.

Those who self-identify as *taga-karera* also call themselves *batang karera* (children of racing), to emphasize deeper their intimate connection with the community.

A *batang karera* is a person who is born into racing, whose father is a jockey, trainer, or other racetrack worker; the term is also used to refer to *karerista* who have been involved in racing for a long time - "*Bata pa ako,*

*sinasama na ako ng tatay ko sa karera, ako runner niya. Kaya masasabi mong batang karera ako, dahil ito na ang kinalakihan ko.”*

If there are those in the community who are considered employees, there are those who are the employers - the *amo* (literally, “master”) because of their financial and economic power; included, therefore, under this category are the “big bettors” who outlay comparatively large amounts.

Are horseowners *taga-karera*? In the sense that they are an essential component of the community, yes. There would be no races without horses, and there are no horses for racing without horseowners. They infuse large amounts of capital investment and effort into the sport, and many of them are actively involved in racing matters, such as policy direction and marketing through events.



Here I am with horseowners Vicente Go Bon and Antonio Tan at the MARHO Founders Cup event that I managed. March 28, 2015, Metroturf Racecourse, Batangas.

However, among racetrack employees, there is a clear divide. A veteran jockey described horseowners this way: “They are the *patrón*. The masters. The feudal lords. They are in a class of their own, I think.” It is a division based on economics rather than social class because while there are horseowners from socially prominent families, there are also those who

elevated themselves from “rags to riches,” and both have equal stature in the community. The only requirement to belong to this group is to own horses, and the more horses owned, the higher the prestige; owning and maintaining a breeding ranch confers bonus points.

Some horseowners operate from what a former star trainer described as a “feudal lord mentality” in their interactions with racetrack workers. Once, when discussing a looming jockey strike, several horseowners said: “*Kailangan sumakay sila, huwag na silang mag-iinarte,*” “*Mga empleyado natin sila, dapat i-compel sila na sumakay;*” they refused to validate the jockeys’ concerns and instead wanted to force them to ride so that they would not lose potential income.

Another horseowner told an employee of his horseowners’ group: “*Hindi ka puwedeng mag-resign hangga’t nariyan ako. Pag nag-resign ako, doon ka lang puwedeng mag-resign din.*” The same employee was told by another horseowner and former officer of that same group: “*Aalis na ako sa karera at bibitawan ko na itong [responsible role in the group]. Mag-resign ka na rin kasabay ko.*”

One horseowner who took his seigneurial privileges to the extreme was Fernando Poe Jr. The action star, who owned a large stable in Santa Ana Park, would often show up at his stable to watch the races. He enjoyed drinking, but when in his cups would sometimes behave erratically.

A former jockey told me that there was a time – it must have been in the ‘70s or early ‘80s - that FPJ took out his gun and started shooting at his jockey’s feet, exhorting him: “*Sayaw! Sayaw!*” The poor fellow did so to avoid the rain of bullets, but he was still shot in the foot. FPJ paid him off handsomely and gave financial support for the months that the jockey was recuperating. Similar incidents happened over the years, and that rider, it was said, amassed cash, furniture, and appliances from FPJ’s largesse. When

I asked the former jockey, “*E bakit pumayag iyong hinete niya na ganunin siya? Ano ngayon kung sikat si FPJ?*” he looked at me like I was as dumb as a bag of oats. “*Amo siya, e! Ganoon ‘yun!*”

In their role of patrón, horseowners may show their benevolent side, and it is a responsibility that many of them take seriously. When a racetrack worker is in need of a loan or handout for their child’s tuition or a hospital bill, or help in other matters, they can approach their horseowner, who will often oblige and make other efforts to assist them - use their connections to get financial assistance from government agencies for a hospital bill or find work for a newly graduated son or daughter. Many taga-karera sing the praises of one amo or another as having stood by them when needed.

Buying and keeping horses is expensive and horseowners are, without exception, those with money to burn - *mahaba ang pisi*. Financial capability is essential when your important pedigreed horse that cost a million pesos can fall down dead tomorrow. Many horseowners are the heads of their own businesses, executives in large corporations, or powerful politicians. They would not have risen to the top positions of their companies, established successful and lucrative businesses, or dominated their fields of endeavor unless they had certain character traits that drove them to achieve and accomplish.

It is these characteristics that also reinforce the patriarchal nature of karera culture - “*Boss kasi sila, eh.*” “When in doubt, ask your amo” is the watchword. Many horseowners are strongly opinionated and involved in the lives of their workers - giving advice, sometimes instructions, on life matters, not just racing. “*Hindi muna mag-aasawa iyang anak mo - patapusin mo muna ng pag-aaral!*” This is also one example of how the intimacy of track life results in an interweaving of the professional and personal, to the point sometimes where one is inextricable from the other.

## B. Karerista

People travel all the way to the racetracks and OTBs (off-track betting stations) for one reason, and that is to watch races and bet on them. Thus their activities at these venues are in line with this purpose. They may be seen studying racing programs, texting inside sources such as horseowners, trainers, jockeys, grooms, and tipsters for racing tips, and scribbling their *ruta* (betting combinations) on scraps of paper. From time to time they glance up at the many monitors that line the interior walls of the building to view the betting matrix (a grid of numbers that show estimated dividends for betting combinations).

When the bettors are ready, they line up in front of the betting windows to place their bets, then watch the race from the viewing area beside the track or on the monitors.

The exchange of money through betting is a significant activity in this sport; economics, therefore, is a key concept in this context, to a greater degree than in other sports that have no formal betting element. Racegoers communicate to each other, in words and actions, their excitement and anticipation upon placing their bets, suspense while watching the race, and elation upon winning or disappointment upon loss.

Since horseracing is not a mere game of chance that relies on the turn of the card or roll of the die, as in casino gambling, but a sport that requires knowledge about myriad factors, being able to apply analytical methods to come up with winners leads to a feeling of vindication and even smugness when one is proven right and goes to the betting window to collect dividends. Losing a bet is equated not only with the loss of money but also with being wrong, with error. Then the tendency is to try, try again.

At the track, there is a camaraderie among the patrons, of belonging to a particular, special group – *kami* (us) – *na taga-karera* or *karerista*, who

are not understood by *sila* (them) o *hindi taga-karera* and *hindi karerista*. But then that is one of the draws of the sport - the sense of participating in the arcane and mysterious, and tasting the flavor of the forbidden.



*PAGSASALIN / TRANSLATION*





# *MGA KUWENTONG BAYAN SA GABING MAULAN: SALIN NG TALES FOR A RAINY NIGHT* NI CRISTINA PANTOJA HIDALGO

ni Chuckberry J. Pascual



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Pangalawang koleksiyon na ng mga kuwento ni Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo ang *Tales for a Rainy Night* pero maituturing din ito bilang bagong simula. Ang kanyang unang koleksiyon na *Ballad of a Lost Season* ay produkto

ng panahon ng Batas Militar—binubuo ito ng mga realistang kuwento na may mga protagonistang babae na nakikipagbuno sa mga romantikong ugnayan na nakatuntong sa sala-salabid na isyung panlipunan. Ibang-iba ang moda ng *Tales for a Rainy Night*. Mula sa mga kuwentong realista, naging romantiko ang moda ng mga kuwento sa koleksiyon, at tinagurian itong “tales” ni Hidalgo. Sa kanyang paunang salita, inilarawan ni Hidalgo ang kanyang proyekto sa pagsulat ng mga bagong “tales” o kuwentong bayan. Basahin ang sipi:

Kaya mula sa pagsulat ng news copy at feature articles, realistikong katha, mga sanaysay tungkol sa paglalakbay at mga naratibong awtobayograpikal, naghahabi na ako ngayon ng mga kuwentong bayan. Sapagkat ang mundo ng kuwentong bayan ay lupain ng mga alamat at pangarap, kahit pa nagsasalita sa kasalukuyan ang mga tauhan rito. At kung minsan, para sa akin, tanging salamangka at gayuma lamang ang nakakahuli sa kataka-takang katangian ng “tunay na buhay.” (“Tales,” trans. Pascual, 5)

Malay si Hidalgo sa biglang kabig ng kanyang piniling moda sa pagkukuwento, at para sa kanya, may kakayahan itong ilarawan ang “tunay na buhay” tulad ng, kung hindi man higit pa, kaysa realismo. Kung tutuusin ay matapang ang pahayag na ito, dahil may pagbalikwas sa mahabang tradisyon ng realismo sa maikling kuwento sa Ingles. Kailangan lamang tingnan ang mga antolohiya ni Leopoldo Yabes (*Philippine Short Stories, 1925-1940* at *Philippine Short Stories, 1941-1955*) para makita ang dominasyon at tradisyon ng realismo bilang moda ng pagkukuwento sa Ingles. Ipagpapatuloy pa ito sa unang apat na volume na antolohiya ni Gemino Abad, ang *Upon Our Own Ground* at *Underground Spirit*. Iilan lamang ang mga kuwentong di-realista sa mga antolohiyang ito, tulad ng “The Traveling Salesman and the Split Woman” ni Nick Joaquin para sa unang volume (1973-1982) at “The

Walk” ni Joy Dayrit sa ikalawang volume (1983-1989). Maaasahan naman talaga kay Joaquin ang di-realistang pagsulat dahil kanyang imbensiyon ang “tropical gothic,” at si Dayrit naman ang isa sa mga unang kuwentista sa Ingles na nagsulat ng mga kuwentong di-realista at eksperimental. Isa sa mga maagang kuwentong di-realista na lumitaw sa mga antolohiya ay ang “The Dust Monster” ni Gilda Cordero Fernando na nag-iisa sa *Upon Our Own Ground Volume 1* (1956-1964). Sa katunayan, sinuri ni Hidalgo ang “The Walk” at “The Dust Monster” bilang mga akdang nasa pagitan ng realistikong kuwento at “fairy tale.” (“A Gentle Subversion,” 14-31)

Sa kanyang sanaysay na “Literary Influences and the Like,” sinabi ni Hidalgo na kabilang sina Joaquin at Cordero-Fernando sa kanyang mga impluwensiya sa pagsulat ng *Tales for a Rainy Night*. Basahin ang sipi:

By then, I had discovered A.S. Byatt, Doris Lessing, and other modern spinners of tales. I had also begun to read the writers of the great “Latin American Boom,” and was blown away by their “marvelous realism” and the other strategies they had devised to capture life as lived in their part of the world. It seemed to me even then—the mid-seventies—that our world was much closer to theirs than America or Europe. But I didn’t want to sound like them. My temperament was too different. I was drawn again to the tales of Gilda Cordero Fernando, many of whose stories, I now realized, were not realist stories, but tales. And I was drawn to Nick Joaquin, my true master, who was, I think, the first major Filipino writer in English to write non-realist fiction. (Hidalgo, “The Thing with Feathers” 278)

Noong 1993 inilimbag ang *Tales for a Rainy Night*, at ang pinakapopular na kuwentong mula rito, ang “The Painting,” ay kabilang sa unang volume ng *Hoard of Thunder* (1990 to 2000), ang ikatlong antolohiya

ni Abad ng mga kuwento sa Ingles. Mas marami na rin ang di-realistang akda sa dalawang volume ng *Hoard of Thunder*, kabilang ang mga akda ng mga itinuturing na tagapanguna ng speculative fiction na sina Dean Francis Alfara at Nikki Alfara.

Binanggit ko ang mga ito para ilugar ang eksperimentasyon ni Hidalgo sa *Tales for a Rainy Night* bilang intermediaryong teksto sa ebentwal na popularidad ng speculative fiction. Walang katulad na proyekto ang *Tales for a Rainy Night* noong taong lumabas ito—maliban nga siguro sa ilang mga kuwentong inilabas nina Joaquin, Cordero-Fernando, at Dayrit—at ginawaran ito ng National Book Award noong 1994. Sinundan pa ito ni Hidalgo ng isa pang koleksiyon ng mga modernong kuwentong bayan, ang *Where Only the Moon Rages*, na lumabas noon ding 1994. Aktibo nang manunulat si Hidalgo noon pang dekada '70, pero mas binabasa siya dahil sa kanyang mga sanaysay na tungkol sa paglalakbay at sa kanyang pamamahayag. At bagaman inilabas na niya ang *Ballad of a Lost Season* noong 1987, hindi na niya binalikan ang moda at estilong ito. Ang *Tales for a Rainy Night* at *Where Only the Moon Rages* ang nagsemento ng kanyang reputasyon bilang isang kuwentista na may natatanging estilo at anyo ng pagsulat: ang modernong kuwentong bayan. At dahil nakaposisyon na si Hidalgo bilang establisadong manunulat at may impluwensiya sa paghubog ng panitikan—nagtuturo siya sa UP Department of English and Comparative Literature, at bilang isa sa mga Fellows ng UP Creative Writing Center (UP Institute of Creative Writing na ngayon) ay nagsisilbing mentor sa mga kabataang manunulat na sumasali sa UP National Writers' Workshop—ang kanyang mga akda ay maaaring isiping nakatulong sa pagkakaroon ng mas malaking espasyo ng di-realistang panulat sa panitikan sa Ingles.

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# ANG REGALO

## NI CRISTINA PANTOJA HIDALGO

Salin ni Chuckberry J. Pascual

Maligalig ang panahong iyon. Isang malupit at tiwaling diktador ang naghahari sa naghihirap na bayan, at ang kanyang pag-iral ay sumasalanta sa lahat. Tila berdeng putik na umaagas mula sa kanyang palasyo ang kasamaan, para sirain ang pinakamalalayong burol, ang pinakatagong lambak. Sapagkat hindi kinikilala at pinahahalagahan, parang mga halamang nalalanta dahil walang init at malinis na hangin ang mabubuting kaisipan at gawain.

Ilang mabubuting tao na lamang ang naiwan sa bayan, nagtatangka silang mabuhay nang payak at tahimik. Ang kapayakan mismo ang kanilang pagtutol laban sa walang habas na karangyaan ng pamumuhay na gusto ng diktador, sa kanyang maluhong asawa, at sa kanyang hindi na mabilang na mga kalaguyo.

Isa sa mabubuting tao si Manuel.

### §

Nang mag-umpisang umulan, naramdaman ni Manuel ang unti-unting pagngiti ng kanyang mga labi. Ambon lang iyon, pero sinalubong niya ito tulad ng lagi niyang pagsalubong sa unang ulan ng Mayo. Sinalubong niya ito nang magaan ang puso.

Mas gusto sana niyang magtagal pa nang kaunti, tipong magkape o mag-beer sa isa sa maliliit na puwestong nakapila sa kalsada. Sa halip,

binilisan niyang maglakad. Naghihintay na si Paz. Dumarami na ang tao sa bahay. Ayaw niyang mahuli ulit sa sarili niyang birthday party.

Hindi na maalala ni Manuel kung kailan nila sinimulang ipagdiwang ni Paz ang kaarawan niya. Sa loob ng matagal na panahon, maliban sa kanyang sariling ina, walang nakakaalala ng kaarawan ni Manuel. Pero isang araw, pumunta na lang ang mga kaibigan niya nang walang pasabi, nagdala sila ng pagkain, isang case ng beer, isang bote ng scotch. At nang makarating ito sa iba, mas marami pang kaibigan ang inugaling dumalaw. Kaya ngayon, inaasahan na ni Paz na maraming pupunta, at inihahanda na agad ang bahay.

Laging nagugulat si Manuel kung gaano karaming taong kaibigan ang turing sa kanya.

Ni hindi nga niya maalala kung saan niya nakilala ang ilan sa mga ito. Pero natutuwa siyang gusto siya ng mga ito, sapat para makipagdiwang sila sa kanyang kaarawan.

Gayunman, mukhang puno ang lahat ng bus ngayong gabi. Kung gusto niyang makauwi, kailangan niyang sumakay ng taxi.

At noong sandaling iyon, may dumaang taxi sa kanto. Pinara ito ni Manuel, at habang inaabot niya ang bukasang pintong, may kung anong sumalpok sa kanya mula sa likod.

Ang una niyang naisip, baka may tumulak sa kanya para unahan siyang makasakay sa taxi. Pero nang lumigon siya, nakita niya na may lalaking tumama sa kanya, at ngayon ay namimilipit na sa lupa.

Nakalimutan na ni Manuel ang taxi. Agad siyang dumukwang para tulungan ang estranghero. Tila nahihilo pa ang lalaki, pero dahil inaalalayan ni Manuel, nakatayo itong muli. Nanginginig-nginig pa ang lalaki nang sumandal sa posteng may ilaw. Ilang sandali itong nanatili roon, panay ang bulong ng paumanhin at pasasalamat.

“Ayos lang kayo?” tanong ni Manuel. “Baka inaatake na ho kayo sa puso.”

Ngumiti ang lalaki kahit nanghihina. “Hindi naman ganyan katindi. Gutom lang yata ako.”

“May coffee shop diyan,” sabi ni Manuel. Itinuro niya ang isa sa mga bintanang may ilaw na matatanaw mula sa kalsada. “Halika ho, tulungan ko kayo.”

Nag-angat ng kamay ang lalaki. “Huwag na, salamat na lang. Okay lang ako. Mauna ka na, anak.”

Natigilan si Manuel sa salitang iyon, o marahil sa tono ng pagkakasabi ng salitang iyon, dahil bigla niyang naalala ang boses at mga mata ng kanyang ama, at kasabay nito, ang pagbabalik ng pakiramdam ng kahungkagan.

“Sige na ho,” sabi niya sa estranghero, “plano ko rin sanang mag-beer. Samahan niyo ho ako.”

Bantulot na pumayag ang lalaking sumama sa coffee shop at umupo sa isa sa mga mesa. Gayunman, nang dumating ang waitress para kunin ang kanilang mga order, isang tasa ng kape lang ang hiningi nito.

“Hindi ba dapat kang kumain?” tanong ni Manuel. At nang mahulaan niyang walang pambayad ang lalaki, idinagdag niya, “Payagan mo na akong ibili ka ng mami at siomai. Alam mo, birthday ko kasi ngayon.”

Mukhang nagdududa ang lalaki. “Birthday mo?”

“Oho. Ang totoo nga ho niyan, may mga inaasahan kaming bisita.”

“E di lalong hindi kita dapat abalihin.”

Nagkibit-balikat si Manuel. “Matatagal ko na hong kaibigan ang mga iyon, saka inaabot naman kami kadalasan ng magdamag.”

“Kung ganyan pala,” sabi ng estranghero, “sige, payag ako.”



Nang ihain sa mesa ang mami at siomai, mabagal at sistematikong kumain ang lalaki. Habang umiinom ng beer sa bote, napansin ni Manuel na bagaman luma at manipis na ang mga damit ng lalaki, napakalinis naman nito; at parang sa isang taong may pinag-aralan ang pananalita at kilos nito.

Ang hula ni Manuel, sisenta na ang edad ng lalaki. Marahil nawalan rin ito ng trabaho kamakailan lang, tulad ng marami. Hindi madaling makahanap ng bagong trabaho, lalo na sa edad nito. Nagretiro ang sarili niyang ama noong sumapit ito ng sisenta.

“May naisip ako,” sabi niya. “Bakit hindi ho kayo sumama sa akin? Mag-ilang bote ho tayo, kasama ng mga kaibigan ko.”

Bago sumagot, nilunok muna ng estranghero ang nginunguya, uminom ng maraming tubig, at saka maingat na pinunasan ng napkin ang bibig. Saka sinabi, “Salamat, anak, pero sapat na itong ginawa mo para sa akin ngayong gabi.”

“Wala naman hong problema, alam niyo. Inaasahan kasi ni Paz— asawa ko—na maraming darating.”

“Alam ko, Manuel. Salamat ulit.”

Magtatanong pa sana si Manuel, pero napagtanto niyang tinawag siya sa pangalan ng estranghero. Hindi niya maalalang binanggit ito sa kausap.

Bago pa siya makapagkomento, nagtanong ang lalaki, “Paano mo balak umuwi ngayong ginamit mo na ang pang-taxi mo sa hapunan ko?”

Tinitigan ni Manuel ang lalaki. Paano nito nalaman?

Nakangiti sa kanya ang estranghero. “Huwag kang matakot, Manuel,” sabi nito. “Kilala kita at alam ko ang lahat tungkol sa iyo. Sa katunayan, isinugo ako para bigyan ka ng regalo.”

“Isinugo?” ulit ni Manuel. “Nino ho?”

“Hindi na importante. Ang mahalaga, kailangan mo munang ipasa ang unang pagsubok.”

“Ano hong pagsubok?”

“Well, kahit anong pagsubok man ang naisipan ko. At masaya akong ibalita sa iyo na pumasa ka. Sa katunayan, nakakatuwa ka. Kaya ngayon, kailangan ko nang ibigay sa iyo ang regalo mo. Sabihin mo sa akin, ano ang gusto mo?”

Nakatitig pa rin sa kausap si Manuel, litong-lito. Hindi kaya nababaliw na ang lalaking ito? Pinaglalaruan kaya siya ng kung sinong kaibigan?

“Hindi, hindi ito biro,” sabi ng estranghero, tila nabasa ang isip ni Manuel. “Hindi rin ako baliw. Simple lang, katulad ng sinabi ko: nandito ako para bigyan ka ng regalo. At puwede mong sabihin kung ano iyon. Ano ba ang pinakagusto mo sa buong mundo?”

“Sinasabi niyo ho ba, para kayong...genie?” tanong ni Manuel. Napapaisip na rin siya kung kahangalan ba ang sinasabi niya, tulad ng kanyang nararamdaman.

Tila naaaliw ang lalaki. “Halo-halo na ang mga kultura mo,” sabi nito. “Sa ibang bahagi ng mundo matatagpuan ang mga genii.”

“Well, mukhang hindi naman ho kayo nakatira sa punso o sa puno,” sagot ni Manuel.

“Alam ko. At anu’t anuman, alam kong mahirap paniwalaan ang alinman sa mga iyan sa panahong ito. Pero walang kinalaman ang lahat ng ito at inaasahan ka sa isang birthday party. Sa katunayan, papunta ka na nga doon noong...ah, nakasalubong kita, kaya hindi ka nakasakay ng taxi. Hindi ka naman dapat magbi-beer.”

“Hindi ko maintindihan—”

“Hindi, pero ayos lang. Ganito na lang, Manuel. Hindi mo kailangang maintindihan. At hindi mo rin ako kailangang paniwalaan. Kung peke ako o manloloko o baliw, wala kang makukuha. Pero kung totoo ang sinasabi ko, makukuha mo ang inaasam-asam ng puso mo. O, ano ang mawawala sa iyo?”

Nakangiti muli ang estranghero, at parang nahahawa na si Manuel. “Pero... bakit ho ako?” tanong niya.

“Ang tingin ko, kaya mong tanggapin na may nagpasyang karapat-dapat ka.”

“Sino naman ho ang nagpasya?”

“Mahalaga pa ba ‘yon? Hindi pa ba sapat na binigyan ka ng ganitong pagkakataon? Sa panaginip lang ito nararanasan ng ibang tao!”

May punto ang estranghero, isip ni Manuel. Ano nga ba ang mawawala sa kanya kung sasakay siya? “Puwede ko ho bang pag-isipan?” tanong niya.

“Siyempre naman, basta ibili mo ako ng isang tasa ng kape. Gusto ko rin talaga, e.”

Pagkatapos um-order ni Manuel ng kape at isa pang beer para sa sarili, nagtanong ang estranghero, “Hindi ba dapat hinintay mo munang makauwi bago iyang pangalawang bote mo?”

“Para na ho kayong tatay ko ha,” sabi ni Manuel.

“Wala namang masamang makipag-inuman sa mga kaibigan,” mahinahong sabi ng estranghero. “Gayunman, hindi ka dapat napapasobra.”

“Iyan na iyan ho mismo ang sinasabi ng tatay ko dati,” may paghihinalang sabi ni Manuel. “Kilala niyo kaya siya?”

“Oo naman,” sagot ng lalaki. “Kilalang-kilala ko.”

Sinalakay si Manuel ng pakiramdam na hindi totoo ang mga nangyayari. Nagpalinga-linga siya sa kuwarto—sa plastik at berdeng ceiling

fans, sa imitasyong Amorsolo na nasa isang dingding, sa mga mesang formica, sa lumang cash register, sa kabataang magkasintahang magkahawak-kamay sa isang sulok—gusto niyang masigurong walang nagbago, na naroon nga siya sa lugar na inaakala niyang naroon siya.

“Ayos lang iyan,” sabi ng estranghero, kinakalma siya. “Hindi ka nananaginip, Manuel. Nakapagpasya ka na ba kung ano ang regalo mo?”

“Kailangan ho bang materyal? Ibig kong sabihin, parang bagay?”

“Hindi. Puwede ang kahit na anong gusto mo.”

Habang tahimik na hinahalo ng estranghero ang kanyang kape, hindi mapakali sa kaiisip si Manuel. Ang inaasam-asam ng kanyang puso... ah, madali lang! Pero hindi naman puwedeng iyon ang hilinging regalo.

Nang mapansin ang matamang panonood sa kanya ng estranghero, at maalalang tila nababasa nito ang kanyang isip, agad pinatahimik ni Manuel ang sarili.

Sinabi niya nang malakas, “Hindi naman ho yata ako desperado para sa kahit na anong bagay.”

“Sino naman ang may sabi tungkol sa pagiging desperado? Siguro naman, hindi perpekto ang buhay mo?”

“Siyempre, hindi,” pag-amin ni Manuel. Sumagi sa alaala niya ang mga pagkatalo, pagkasiphayo, pagkakamali, pagtangi.

Pero hindi na masama ang sitwasyon ngayon. Nariyan ang kanyang trabaho—hindi ito mapanghamon o kasiya-siya, pero pinapakain siya nito. Nariyan din ang kanyang bahay—hindi ito palasyo, pero pinananatiling ligtas at komportable ang pamilya niya. Nariyan din si Paz, ang kanyang asawa—hindi ito ang diyosa ng kanyang mga panaginip, pero hindi rin naman mukhang adonis si Manuel. Nariyan ang kanyang ina—laging nakaantabay kung kailan niya kailanganin, ang pinakamalakas, pinakamatatag na puwersa

sa kanyang buhay. Nariyan ang kanyang mga kaibigan—higit kaysa kaya niyang bilangin. Hindi naging madali ang buhay niya, pero sa panahong ito, kaninong buhay ba ang madali? Sa pangkalahatan, hindi naman masama. Malusog siya at malakas, at sa edad na tatlumpu, pihadong mas mapalad kaysa ibang tao.

Sinabi nang malakas ni Manuel, “Siguro wala talaga akong puwedeng ireklamo.”

“Masasabi mo bang masaya kang tao?”

“Kuntento ho ako.”

Patuloy siyang pinagmasdan ng estranghero. “Gusto mo bang pakawalan ang pagkakataong ito?”

“Well...” pag-aatubili ng nalilitong si Manuel. “Puwede ho bang sa susunod na lang?”

Ilang sandaling nag-isip ang estranghero. Pagkuwa’y sumagot ito nang mabilis, “Sige, puwede naman ‘yan, sa tingin ko. O, siya. Kung darating ang pagkakataon sa buhay mo na gusto mong matupad ang inaasam-asam mong hiling, tawagin mo lang ako. Pero tandaan mo ha, isang hiling lang ang puwedeng ibigay sa iyo.”

Tumayo ang estranghero habang nagsasalita, at tumayo na rin si Manuel. Pormal silang nagkamay.

“Pero, paano ko ho kayo... ‘tawagin?”

“Basta tumawag ka lang,” sabi ng estranghero. “Maririnig kita.”

## §

Hindi sinabi ni Manuel sa kanyang asawa o sa kanyang mga kaibigan ang tungkol sa estrangherong nakilala niya habang umuulan. Walang siyang

sinabihan kahit na sino, dahil hindi rin siya nakakasiguro na hindi lang guniguni ang lahat. At nang maglaon, unti-unting kumupas ang alaala niya sa nangyari.

Pero paminsan-minsan, lalo na kapag nalalapit ang kanyang kaarawan na laging sumasabay sa unang ulan ng Mayo, naaalala niya ang nangyari at nagtataka siya...

Nagtataka siya kung bakit wala siyang hiniling na kahit ano sa estranghero. At nagtataka siya kung ano ang nangyari kung sakaling humiling nga siya. Dahil siyempre, meron naman talaga siyang gusto, matagal nang gusto, at laging inaasam... ang inaasam-asam ng kanyang puso...

Ngunit paano nga ba niya sasabihin sa estranghero ang tungkol kay Cynthia?

Sa ibang buhay niya kabilang si Cynthia. Nakilala niya si Cynthia noong labingwalong taong gulang siya, at isang mag-aaral sa unibersidad.

Ah, hindi niya inasahan ang unibersidad, napakalayo nito sa kinalakhan niyang lugar na masikip at marumi. Amoy sariwang dahon at sikat ng araw ng paligid, hindi pinuputol ang mga puno, namumukadkad ang napakaraming bulaklak, patag at malinis ang daan, magkakalayo ang mga gusali at bahay, may tiwala ang mga tao sa isa't isa sa halip na may galit.

Sa kakatwang paraan, kahawig ito ng munting nayon kung saan siya ipinanganak, ang munting nayon na patuloy na buhay sa kanyang isip, isang alaala ng mga magsasakang nasa luntiang bukid na tila karagatang kumakaway, isang tulay na yari sa kawayan na tila isang babasaging panaginip sa ibabaw ng isang rumaragasang ilog na malalim; ang amoy ng mga nahihinog na bayabas at mga mangga at usok ng kahoy.

Kahit wala siyang klase, naglalagi si Manuel sa lilim ng mga acacia at kabalyero, pinupuno ang mga pahina ng kanyang lumang sketchbook ng pen and ink na drowing, habang walang tigil sa paninigarilyo. Minsan,

nalilimot niya ang oras sa pagbabasa ng mga inaalikabok na libro sa aklatan, manghang-manghang napakarami palang mga salitang naisulat na, at wala man lang siyang kamalay-malay sa mga ito. O kung minsan, umuupo siya sa isa sa mga bangko sa maliit na kapilyang may puting simboryo, nakatunghay sa Kristong Nabuhay na inukit sa itim na kahoy. O kung minsan, matagal siyang naglalakad sa mga landas na hinihipan ng hangin, habang nakikinig sa tunog ng mga kampana ng carillon, at ninanamnam ang pangarap na maaari siyang mabuhay nang ganito lamang, kung kanyang nanaisin.

At nakilala nga niya si Cynthia.

Labimpitong taong gulang si Cynthia, at tulad ni Manuel, isang mag-aaral sa unibersidad, isang prinsesa ng mga diwata sa kahariang engkantado. At bagaman pareho sila ng mga pasilyong nilalakaran, mga silid-aralang pinaglalagian, kuntento na si Manuel na panoorin at sambahin mula sa malayo si Cynthia. Ngunit may isang bituin na nahulog sa kung saan, may isang mapaglarong diwang ngumiti, at umibig sa kanya ang prinsesa.

Kaya sa loob ng ilang panahon, nagsalo sila sa lilim ng mga acacia at kabalyero, sa mga landas na hinihipan ng hangin at mga kampana ng carillon, sa aklatan at sa kapilya. Dinala ni Cynthia sa buhay ni Manuel ang lahat ng pino at marikit—ang hamog sa umaga at patak ng ulan, mga liryo at kinang ng bituin, ang lugod ng musika, ang mahika ng tula, ang natatanging biyaya ng pagtawa. Ipinakita niya kay Cynthia ang kanyang mga guhit, at sa pamamagitan ng mga mata ng babae, nakita niya ang pangako ng mga ito. Ikinuwento niya kay Cynthia ang kanyang mga pangarap, at sa pamamagitan ng mga tainga ng babae, narinig niyang malapit lang pala ang mga ito.

Kaibig-ibig ang panahong iyon, at mas sumidhi ang pagiging kaibig-ibig dahil lihim, at dahil nakatakdang magwakas. Kahit hindi nila ito pinag-uusapan, kapwa nila batid na hindi magtatagal ang lahat.

Hindi nagtagal, nawalan ng bisa ang gayumang sumasagka sa kalungkutan ng prinsesa. At unti-unting napalayo si Cynthia kay Manuel.

Mag-isang nagdusa si Manuel. Umikot ang paningin niya, dahil sa matinding sakit na naramdaman at dahil sa beer na iniinom niya para lunurin ang lungkot. Sa loob ng matagal na panahon, ang sakit na iyon ang kanyang buhay, binura nito ang lahat ng bagay—ang mga librong patuloy niyang binabasa, ang mga papel na patuloy niyang isinusulat, ang mga bibig, braso, hita, na ginamit niya sa pagtatangkang burahin ang alaala ni Cynthia.

Hanggang sa kusang natuyo ang sugat. At ang naiwan na lamang ay kawalan, at lampas rito, kirot.

Tatlong taon na ang nakalipas noon, at umalis na siya sa unibersidad. Natuklasan na niyang kaya pala siyang buhayin ng kanyang pagguhit, at nakakuha siya ng trabaho bilang ilustrador sa isang maliit na magazine. Hindi malaki ang bayad, pero binibigyan siya nito ng kaunting oras para sa sarili, kung kailan gumuguhit siya ng mababagsik, mapapanglaw na mukha, at madidilim, malulungkot na tanawin.

Makalipas ang maraming taon, kapag binabalikan ni Manuel ang panahong iyon, namamanghang nakatawid siya nang buo, naunawaan niya na ang lahat ng iyon ay dahil kay Cynthia. Dumadalaw sa kanya si Cynthia sa mga kakatwang sandali, mabilis at panandaliang ibinabalik ang buhay niyang mistulang isang tula noong kanyang ikalabingwalong taon, at binibiyayaan siya ng tahimik na pakikipagkaibigan, kasama ng lahat ng iba pang biyaya mula sa babae.

Si Cynthia ang lubid na kanyang kinakapitan para mabuhay, para makahigop ng hangin, para makalaya sa itim na uli-uli. Tila ba isang manipis na sinulid, binanat ng panahon ngunit hindi pa rin napuputol, ang nagtatali sa kanya kay Cynthia. At sa mga sandaling labis ang pangangailangan niya, nararamdaman ito ni Cynthia, at dumadalaw ito.



At nagpatuloy ito sa loob ng maraming taon. Kahit pa tumanda na sila at nagkalayo na, at kahit napadpad sa mga landas na hindi nagsasalubong, tulad ng mga kalsada sa lungsod.

Noong malapit nang ipanganak ang pangalawang anak na lalaki ni Manuel, wala siyang trabaho, walang pera, at tuluyang tinapakan ng pagkatalo. Habang tumatawid ng kalsada, bahagyang umaasang may isa sa mga humahaginit na sasakyan ang mawalan ng kontrol, sumadsad, sumalpok, at dumurog sa kanya sa pinakamalapit na pader, nag-angat si Manuel ng tingin at nakita niya... si Cynthia, palabas ng isang tindahan, nakahawi palayo sa mukha ang buhok, may kipkip na piano music. “Para sa anak kong babae,” sabi nito, saka ipinakita sa kanya ang *Nasaan ka Irog* ni Abelardo. “At kumusta ka na, Manuel?” tanong ni Cynthia, nakangiti tulad ng dati. “Ano ang pinipinta mo ngayon?”

Noong namatay ang kanyang ama, ninakaw na rin ang kabataan ni Manuel, ang panahon ng pagpapala at pangakong dalisay. Naglakad siya nang naglakad, hanggang muling natagpuan ang sarili sa ilalim ng mga punong acacia, at tumutunog ang mga kampana ng carillon, at hinihipan ng hangin ang mga tuyong dahon sa landas na bato. At bago pa niya nabuo ang iniisip na hiling, naroon si Cynthia, mukhang labimpitong taong gulang, nakasuot ng maong, may leather bag na naglalambitin sa balikat, at may librong hawak sa isang kamay. Iniabot ito ni Cynthia sa kanya at sinabi, “Naaalala mo ba ito, Manuel... ‘Keep a red heart of memories / Under the great grey rain sheds of sky / Under the open sun and the yellow gloaming embers. / Remember all paydays of lilacs and songbirds; / All starlights of cool memories on storm paths...’ Nagpunta ako sa library para hanapin ito.”

At paminsan-minsan, dumadalaw si Cynthia sa kanyang mga panaginip, at halos ganoon din ang lugod na dulot.

Katiyakan at lakas ang dulot ng kasiguruhang bahagi pa rin siya ng buhay ng babae, na para kay Cynthia, ang panahong pinagsaluhan nila ay hindi pa rin lubos na mabubura.

Magagawa ba niyang sabihin ang lahat ng ito sa estranghero? Mahihingi ba niya si Cynthia sa estranghero?

## §

At lumipas nga ang mga taon. Hindi naging madali ang buhay para kay Manuel, tulad ng hindi nito pagiging madali para sa lahat ng tao sa mapanglaw na bayang iyon. Pero hindi naman ganoon kasama. Pansamantala rin siyang nakapagtrabaho sa isang malaking kompanya na malaki ang pasuweldo. Pero may nakagalit na malapit sa diktador ang may-ari ng kompanya, at namalayan na lang niyang ipinasara ang kompanya, at walang natira sa kanya kahit ano, isang kapalarang hindi bihira noong mga araw na iyon. Bumalik si Manuel sa maliit na magazine na unang nagbigay sa kanya ng trabaho, at nagpatuloy sa pagpipinta.

Nagbinata ang mga anak ni Manuel. Ang ikalawang anak na lalaki, ang itinatangi sa lahat—iyong tinuruan ni Manuel na maglaro ng basketball at mamansing, iyong minsan niyang ginawan ng saranggola at minsang kinumpuni ang bisikleta—ay napasama sa isang grupo ng mga kabataang nagsisikap baguhin ang buhay ng mga pinakamaralita sa bansa. Nang maglaon, sinundan nito ang mga kasama sa bundok, kung saan nagaganap ang pakikipagtunggali laban sa diktador, gamit ang mas mararahas na armas. Mula roon nagpapadala ito ng mga mensahe ng pag-asa sa kanyang mga magulang, at higit itong humihipto sa puso nila dahil sa mga salitang hindi binibigkas.

Ang pagkawala ng anak ay payapang tinanggap ng asawa ni Manuel na si Paz, at kampante na lamang itong naghintay na ikasal ang iba pang anak na lalaki at bigyan siya ng mga apo. Naglalaban sa puso ang pagmamalaki at pighati, ipininta ni Manuel mula sa alaala ang larawan ng kanyang anak noong bata pa ito, nakatingalang pinapanood ang paglipad ng saranggola patungo sa araw. Ito ang kanyang pinakamahusay na likha.

Nagkasakit ang ina ni Manuel. Habang pinagmamasdan ang matandang nakaratay, tahimik na nagdasal si Manuel na sana, tulad ng naging buhay ng kanyang ina, maging payapa ang pagpanaw nito, at sana, magkita muli ang kanyang ama at ina sa kabilang buhay.

Ang mga birthday party ni Manuel ay naging institusyon, isang selebrasyon, isang kumpirmasyon—hindi binabanggit ngunit pinaninindigan—ng mabubuti at simpleng tao sa buong bayan. Umaapaw ang mga bisita hanggang sa ibang bahay. Madaling araw na umuuwi ang mga bisita at pinapalitan sila ng iba pang tao kinagabihan, iyong mga hindi nakadalo noong nakaraang gabi. At umaalingawngaw ang halakhakan at mabuting samahan ng munting komunidad.

Kung minsan, sa gitna ng pagdiriwang, biglang pumapatak ang ulan, ang unang ulan ng Mayo, at kahit ambon lamang, sapat na para salubungin ni Manuel nang magaang ang puso. At muli niyang maaalala ang estranghero. At si Cynthia.

## §

Sa kanyang ikalimampung kaarawan, habang naghahandang umalis ng kanyang munting opisina, biglang sumagi sa isip ni Manuel na malapit na siyang pumanaw. Hindi ito premonisyon, dahil ang premonisyon ay may kaakibat na pagkabalisa, at wala naman siyang naramdamang ganoon. Ang

mayroon lamang ay ang kasiguruhang malapit nang magwakas ang kanyang buhay. At wala siyang pangamba sa kasiguruhang ito.

Isinara ni Manuel ang kanyang desk drawer, ibinulsa ang kanyang susi, nagpaalam siya sa guwardiyang duling, ang tanging naiwan sa opisina sa oras na iyon, at saka naglakad patungo sa kalsada.

Walang gaanong trapik, at wala ring tao sa bangketa, dahil nalimutan ni Manuel ang oras sa pagtatrabaho, at pasado alas diyes na ng gabi. Ngunit hindi siya nagmadali. Napaisip siya sa napakalinaw na rebelasyon ng kanyang kamatayan. Hindi niya alam kung paano siyang papanaw, at wala rin siyang nadaramang kuryosidad tungkol rito, dahil naniniwala naman siyang mas mahalaga kung paano nabuhay ang isang tao, kaysa kung paano siya namatay. At ngayong iniisip niya kung paano siyang nabuhay, nadama ni Manuel nang buong pagpapakumbaba, na wala siyang dapat ipagsisi. Nagsikap siyang magtrabaho. Nagsikap siyang maging tapat. Nagsikap siyang maging mabuti. At bagaman hindi siya laging nagtatagumpay, lagi niyang ibinibigay ang lahat ng makakaya.

May isang bagay na hindi siya tumigil asamin. Gayunman, hindi niya ito maituturing bilang kasalanan. Ang totoo, naniniwala siyang ito ang tanging mabuting bagay sa kanyang buhay.

Noong umpisa, natatakot siyang isa itong kahinaan, at pilit niya itong nilaban. Pero nang magtagal, sumuko na siyang unawain ito. Tinanggap na niya ang pag-ibig kay Cynthia bilang bahagi ng kanyang sarili.

Nagsimula lamang ito bilang pagsuyo ng kabataan hanggang naging isang matindi at matatag na pagsinta, iyong hindi maihihiwalay sa kanyang pagkatao. At habang naipon ang mga taon, ang kanyang lakas at karunungan, napansin ni Manuel na lalo ring lumalakas ang kanyang kakayahang umibig. Naniniwala siyang ang pag-ibig niya kay Cynthia ang bukal ng kung anumang lakas at karunungan taglay niya. At nauunawaan niyang ang kanyang sining ang pagpapahayag ng pag-ibig na iyon.

Kahit maraming taon silang hindi nagkita, tila malapit pa rin sa kanya si Cynthia, tulad noong mga lumipas na panahon sa unibersidad. Kung minsan, ang pakiramdam ni Manuel, hindi niya mararamdaman ang ganitong pagkakalapit kung naging asawa niya si Cynthia. At binibigyan siya ng ginhawa ng isiping ito.

Ngunit ngayong batid niyang malapit nang magwakas ang kanyang buhay, biglang napagtanto ni Manuel na hindi na niya muling masisilayan si Cynthia. Halos mamahid siya sa kalungkutang dulot nito. Tila walang katotohanan ang kanyang buhay, maliban sa pag-ibig niya kay Cynthia. Ang kanyang kamatayan lamang ang huli at pinakamalupit na pagkakait.

Hindi napansin ni Manuel ang direksiyon niya sa paglakad, dahil masyado siyang abala sa mga iniisip. Pero nakilala na niya ngayon ang kalsada, at ang coffee shop, at naalala niya ang estranghero at ang pangako nito. Habang nabubuo sa isip niya ang hiling, napansin niya ang isang lalaking nakasandal sa isang posteng may ilaw.

“Kumusta, Manuel,” sabi ng lalaki.

“Kayo ho ba talaga iyan?” bulalas ni Manuel. Masigla niyang kinamayan ang lalaki.

“Oo naman. Hindi ba sinabi ko sa iyong darating ako kapag tinawag mo? Handa ka na ba talaga sa regalo mo?”

“Oho,” sabi ni Manuel. Umaapaw ang puso niya dahil batid ang matatanggap, wala siyang duda na kaya itong ibigay sa kanya ng estranghero.

Hinawakan ng estranghero sa braso si Manuel, at isinama siya sa isang walang taong waiting shed sa pagtawid ng kalsada, at pinaupo siya sa batong bangko sa loob nito. Halos hindi namalayan ni Manuel na umupo pala siya. Tahimik at sabik na naghihintay ang dilim na nakapalibot sa kanila.

“At ngayon, Manuel,” sabi ng lalaki, “ano ang inaasam-asam ng puso mo?”

Nang walang pagdadalawang-isip, sumagot si Manuel, “Gusto ko hong maging akin si Cynthia bago siya mawala sa akin habangbuhay.”

“Tingnan mo.” Itinuro ng estranghero ang isang maliwanag na bintana ng coffee shop sa harapan nila.

Habang pinagmamasdan ni Manuel ang bintana, bigla itong dumilim. Pagkuwa’y nagliwanag ito muli, mas mahina, mas dalisay na liwanag. May mga anino sa loob ng liwanag na umalon at kuminang, at saka humubog ng isang anyo. Panay ang pintig ng magkabilang sentido, namukhaan ni Manuel si Cynthia.

Halos walang ipinagkaiba si Cynthia sa batang babaeng naaalala ni Manuel, ganoon pa rin ang katawan nito, payat at matangkad, maitim pa rin ang buhok. Nakasuot ito ng bestidang light blue na bahagyang umaalon habang kumikilos ang babae, para bang hinihipan ng hangin.

At ngayon, ang bintana mismo—o ang larawan sa loob nito—ang tila lumalapit kay Manuel, hanggang tumapat ito sa kanya mismong harapan. Malinaw niyang nakita ang bawat detalye, at kung maaari lamang siyang kumilos, baka inabot na niya at hinaplos ang babae.

Nakita niya ang babae sa loob ng isang kuwarte, mukhang tulugan, at ang ilaw na humuhugas sa bestida ay mula sa isang lamparang nasa ibabaw ng isang maliit na mesa katabi ng kama. Natatakpan ng anino ang bahagi ng mukha ng babae, kaya hindi ito matitigan nang mabuti ni Manuel. Ngunit ngayon, lumayo na sa dilim ang babae, lumapit sa kama, at umupo sa may paanan nito. At nang gawin niya ito, tumama ang liwanag sa kanyang mukha. At ang tanawing iyon ay katulad na katulad ng panaginip ni Manuel, at tumaas ang isa niyang kamay nang hindi niya namamalayan, para bang kailangan niyang salagin ang lahat ng liwanag na iyon.

Pero may kung anong kakaiba, kung anong kakatwa kay Cynthia. Sinaklot ng pagbabagong ito ang puso ni Manuel. Iniunat niya ang leeg, pilit

na sinisipat ang nasa harapan. At saka niya napagtanto kung ano iyon. May lumbay sa mukha ni Cynthia.

Nadismaya si Manuel. Hindi pa niya nakikita nang ganito ang babae. Buong buhay niya, ang alaala ng ngiti ni Cynthia at ang kinang ng mga mata nito ang nagbibigay ng kahulugan sa kanyang kaligayahan. Hindi niya naisip kahit minsan na maaari itong masaktan.

Ngunit ang Cynthia na ito ay pinayuko ng lumbay. Nakaupo lamang sa kama, hindi kumikilos, nakayukod, halos mawalan ng dugo ang kamaong nakakuyom sa kandungan.

At saka niya napansin ang isa pang katawan sa kama. Isang batang babae, payapang nakahiga, nakapikit, namumutla ang mga pisngi. Patay na ba ito? Hindi, humihinga pa. Nahuli ni Manuel ang pag-angat at pagbaba ng kumot na nakatakip sa dibdib. Ngunit hindi ito regular at mahina lamang.

Inilipat ni Manuel ang kanyang tingin kay Cynthia. Hindi pa rin ito kumikilos. Hindi rin ito umiiyak. Masyadong malalim ang kanyang sugat para lumuha.

Nagsalita ang estranghero sa kanyang tabi. “Iyan ang anak niyang babae. Labimpitong taong gulang, at malapit nang mamatay.”

Biglang tumayo si Manuel, agad naging awa ang pagnanasa.

Muling nagsalita ang estranghero. “Maaari mo siyang tawagin, Manuel. Maririnig ka niya. At matutupad ang iyong hiling.”

“Tekang lang!” bulalas ni Manuel. Nakatitig siya sa eksena sa kuwarto: si Cynthia, buong hapis na nakayuko sa tabi ng kanyang anak.

Mahabang sandali ang lumipas na nakatayo lamang roon si Manuel, nakapako ang tingin sa mukha ni Cynthia. Wala pa siyang nararanasang ganito—kahit pa ang pagdurusa niya nang mahiwalay kay Cynthia mahigit tatlung taon na ang nakalilipas—wala pang ganito kasakit. Halos

mapunit ang kanyang kaluluwa habang pinag-iisipan ang kanyang gagawin. Sapagkat naghintay siya sa loob ng napakaraming taon, buong pait niyang naisip.

Dinaluyong siya ng desperasyon, halos lamunin siya, halos bulagin siya. Hinarap niya itong mag-isa, tiniis ang sakit, hinangad na niya ang kamatayan, nagmakaawa siya. At pagkuwa'y umatras ang daluyong, at iniwan siyang payapa.

“Ano iyon?” tanong ng estranghero.

Hindi inaalas ang kanyang tingin kay Cynthia, sumagot si Manuel, “Pakibawi ho ang una kong hiling at ibalik nyo na lang kay Cynthia ang kaligayahan.”

“Ah, pero tatlong hiling na iyan,” sabi ng estranghero.

“Hindi ho. Ang ikalawang hiling ko ay ang pagbawi sa una. Kaya isa lang talaga ang hinihingi ko: panatalihin nyong buhay ang anak niya.”

Ilang sandaling nag-atubili ang estranghero. May bahagyang ngiti sa mga labi, mabagal itong nagsalita, “Ang gusto mo lamang ay lumigaya si Cynthia.”

“Oho.”

“At nakasisiguro ka na?”

“Oho,” matatag na sagot ni Manuel.

Tumayo ang estranghero, at inilahad ang isang kamay. Habang nagsasalimbayan ang kanyang mga emosyon, napansin ni Manuel ang pagkakahawig nito sa isang taong kilala niya... o nakilala... Kinuha niya ang kamay ng lalaki, at kusang inilapit ito sa kanyang noo, sang-ayon sa tradisyonal na pagbibigay-galang at pagpupugay, tulad ng pagbati niya sa mga nakatatanda sa mas payak at mas masayang panahon.



At ang sabi ng estranghero, sa mahinahong boses, sa boses na bahagya rin niyang nakikilala, “O siya, Manuel. Tapos na.”

At noong sandaling iyon, naglaho ang liwanag. Nakatitig si Manuel sa dilim, dahil sarado na ang coffee shop sa pagtawid ng kalsada.

Wala na ang estranghero at mag-isa na lamang siya sa malamig na waiting shed.

Dahan-dahang tumayo si Manuel mula sa pagkakaupo sa batong bangko at nagsimulang maglakad sa madilim at tahimik na kalye. Kaarawan na niya at gabing-gabi na. Pero hindi siya nagmadali. Sa katahimikan, parang may narinig siyang musika sa malayo, iyong may nagpapaalala sa mga acacia at kabalyero, sa mga landas na hinihipan ng hangin at mga kampana ng kapilya...

Hindi ko nakita ang kanyang tuwa, isip ni Manuel. Ngunit wala siyang nadamang galit o hapis.

Nagsimula nang umambon, ang unang ulan ng Mayo, at payapa ang kanyang puso.



# LABAW SA BULAWAN: TRANSLATING MINDANAO POETRY FROM CEBUANO INTO ENGLISH (PRELIMINARY NOTES TOWARDS A THEORIA AND A PRAXIS)

by Ralph Semino Galán



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*From the Major Arcana [poems] (UST Publishing House, 2014), and *Sa mga Pagitan ng Buhay at Iba pang Pagtutulay [translations] (UST Publishing House, 2018). He is currently working on a research project sponsored by the UST Research Center for Culture, Arts, and Humanities (RCCA) titled “Labaw sa Bulawan: Translating 300 Mindanao Poems from Cebuano into English,” as well as a book of poetry written in Cebuano.**

In this day and age of rapidly increasing globalization and the concomitant rise of migration and cross-continental cosmopolitanism, literary translation plays an important role in the preservation and dissemination of regional literature. This is especially true for local languages whose literary productions are under the constant threat of being diminished, if not totally eradicated, due to the constant pressure being exerted by the dominant presence of Anglophone and European writings in world literature.

It is a sad fact that, although Cebuano has the second largest number of native speakers in the Philippine archipelago—approximately 18.5 million people, or roughly one-fifth of the Philippine population—and is the language being spoken not only on the island province of Cebu, but also in the rest of Central Visayas, parts of Eastern Visayas, and most of Mindanao, the translation work being done on its body of writing lacks sustained institutional support. Except for the Cebuano Studies Center of the University of San Carlos—established in 1975 by its founding director Resil B. Mojares (National Artist for Literature)—and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, with its intermittent grants given on a rotation basis to the different languages of the Philippines, institutional support for the literary translation of Cebuano writing is few and far between.

Even within the ambit of the Cebuano Studies Center, most of the translation book projects that have been done and published in Cebuano literature are focused on fiction (short stories and novels), seldom on poetry. And the few anthologies of poetry originally written in Cebuano translated into English contain, sadly, only a few Mindanao poets, despite Mindanao's geographical size as the second largest island of the Philippines, next to Luzon.

With this in mind, I have decided to undertake the task of translating Mindanao poetry from Cebuano into English, not only because of the fact that a good number of poets writing in Cebuano prefer to be

translated into English, “a neutral language, as far as the Bisaya is concerned” (Alunan, 2015, xvi), rather than into Filipino (Tagalog) with its perceived linguistic hegemony over the other indigenous tongues, but also because of my nearly impossible dream that key Mindanao poems written in my mother tongue should be made accessible to a wider readership, and thus become more significant to Philippine, if not world, literature.

### **“Matud Nili Ako Dili Angay”: Of Poetry and Song, Translation and Transfiguration**

When I first undertook this translation project, little did I know that it would open a lot of linguistic doors for me, not only as a literary translator but as a creative writer and a literary critic as well. My decision to focus on translating Mindanao poetry from Cebuano into English had proven to be both serendipitous and serviceable. It was the right time and place for me, initially, as a perpetual literary apprentice—my innate humility preventing me from ever considering myself as a potential master wordsmith—to explore the metal of another language, and to practice yet another aspect of what Dylan Thomas refers to as “my craft or sullen art,” which is literary translation.

I had previously worked in the English, Filipino, and Spanish languages both as a poet and as a translator, though my attempts to write poems in Spanish must remain unpublished forever. Translating poetry from my mother tongue (source language) to another idiom (target language) was the next logical step in my growth as a writer nearing his golden year. A return to one’s roots must surely trigger a new efflorescence that would yield more fulfilling fruits—hence my decision to translate Mindanao poems from Cebuano into English.

It was also imperative for someone like me, who has deep roots both in Cebu and Mindanao, to pay due attention to Mindanao poetry in Cebuano.

*Bisaya Magasin* is just a decade shy of celebrating its 100th anniversary; having been established in 1930, it is a surprisingly resilient publication, having survived World War II. Its literary section has been featuring Mindanao poets right from the beginning, and as a child and a preadolescent in my paternal grandfather's house in Cebu, I used to peruse its pages during the summer months. I felt that it was high time for an anthology of Cebuano poems by Mindanao poets, with my English translations, to be published, which would be contiguous to, but contradistinctive from, the mainstream poetry in Cebuano written by the poets in Cebu, and the poetry in Cebuano written elsewhere in the Visayas.

My attempt to establish the characteristics that distinguish Mindanao poetry in Cebuano from the Cebuano poetry of the Cebuano-speaking regions of the Visayas would free the former from the long shadow of the latter (especially of Cebuano poetry written on the island province of Cebu), and the tendency of literary critics to consider Mindanao poetry in Cebuano a mere branch of the sturdy tree of Cebuano poetry. Note, for instance, poet-translator Merlie M. Alunan's overview of Cebuano literature in her groundbreaking anthology *Sa Atong Dila: Introduction to Visayan Literature*:

Among the five major Visayan languages, Cebuano has the most fully developed body of literature with an unbroken history, despite the gaps and fissures resulting from colonizations, wars, and political upheavals...Cebuano literature is not confined only to the island of Cebu but covers all Cebuano-speaking areas in the Visayas and Mindanao. (Alunan, 2015, 135)

For some strange reason known only perhaps to magic and sorcery, I took inspiration for this endeavor from a well-loved Cebuano love song

titled “Matud Nila” (“They Say”) popularized by Pilita Corrales (dubbed in the 1970s as “Asia’s Queen of Song”) and Susan Fuentes (dubbed as “Queen of Visayan Song” also in the 1970s). “Labaw sa Bulawan” (“More than Gold”), a phrase from the song, struck me in particular as an apt alchemical metaphor to describe my translation project. I believe that the art of translation is a transformative act, for from the base metal of language emerges the elixir of life that is poetry, and the nuggets of wisdom about and insights into the human condition that might remain after everything seems lost in translation—the dross between languages having been extracted—are indeed more worthy than the purest gold.

### **Binisaya ang Pinulongan sa Akong Mga Katigulangan: Returning to My Mother Tongue**

I was born in Iligan City on February 21, 1972, exactly seven months before martial law was declared by the late President Ferdinand E. Marcos. Both of my parents were born and raised in Cebuano-speaking provinces: my dearly departed father Allan Lim Galán, Sr. in the island of Cebu, the heartland of Cebuano language and culture, and my vivacious mother Annette Zagado Semino in Bonifacio, a somnolent town in Misamis Occidental, in Northern Mindanao. Their ancestries were typical of the Central Visayas and the Northern and Western Mindanao regions: my father being of Spanish, Chinese, and Filipino descent; and my mother, having Spanish and Filipino roots, and I suspect the Mexican too, based on her melodramatic flair and unabashed sentimentality. Back then, her highly emotional and empathic everyday language was punctuated by figures of speech, which I found quite fascinating: “Murag gikumot ang akong kasingkasing!” (“It was as if my heart had been wrung/crushed/squeezed!”); “Gahuruhuro ang akong kalagot!” (“My anger was bellowing!”)

But since I was in school in the late 1970s to the middle 1980s, when the “English Only” policy was in full sway both in basic and higher education, I did not get to appreciate the beauty of the Cebuano language until much later, when I began studying regional literature on my own, particularly Mindanao poetry in Cebuano. In fact, when I was in kindergarten and in the elementary grades, I only spoke English inside the classroom, since speaking in what was then referred to derogatorily as the “vernacular” (“language of the marketplace, language of the home slave”) had a corresponding fine.

As a result, I associated the use of the Cebuano “dialect” (another demeaning term that at the time indicated not only regional linguistic origin but also social class and status) with the housemaids and the intellectually inferior. This was of course predicated by the fact that my mother, who was educated by the last of the Thomasites, taught English in primary school, and therefore addressed her children as much as possible in English at home, to further enhance our facility with the language.

### **Duhay Pasabot sa Pulong nga Balak: Cebuano Poetry and Its Intentionality**

In his chronicles, *Historias de las islas de Indios de Bisayas* (History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands), Rev. Fr. Francisco Ignacio Alcina, SJ, observes that the inhabitants of the Visayan islands have many poetic and verse forms: “*Sus modos de poesías varios, y según su variedad y las materias de que tratan, tienen sus nombres y calidades...* [They have several types of poetry which have their names and characteristics according to their variety and the subject-matter which they treat.] (Translation by Cantius J. Kobak, OFM and Lucio Gutierrez, O.P.)

He mentions and describes, in particular, the following verse forms: *ambahan* (unrhymed couplet with seven syllables per line), *bical*

(poetic jousting between two men or two women similar to the Tagalog *balagtasán*), *balac* (poetic debate about love between a man and a woman to the accompaniment of the two-stringed musical instruments known as *coriapi* and *curlong*), *siday* (poem of praise oftentimes about the heroic exploits of ancestors, the beauty of women, or the courage of men), *haya* (also known as *anugun* or *canugun*, dirge chanted during a wake interspersed with howling) and *awit* (boat song or sea chantey). Although Alcina does not mention it in his chronicles, there is also a Cebuano word that means “verse,” which is *garay*. (The term is included in the dictionaries of Juan Felix de la Encarnacion, Matheo Sanchez, and John Kauffman, among others, as pointed out by Erlinda K. Alburo in her *Dictionary of Bisayan Arts*.)

Fray Francisco Encina, in the chapter of his *Arte de la Lengua Zebuana* titled “*De la Poesía Zebuana*,” begins his discussion of Cebuano poetry by noting the difficulty of the Cebuano language due to its highly metaphorical nature: “*Pues en esta lengua Bisaya en que todo su hablar, és por Methaforas, hay muchísimos tropos y figuras, que solo en sus versos y enigmas se oyen.* (Encina, 2017, 454.)” [In the Visayan language, they all speak in metaphors, and there are a lot of tropes and figures that can only be heard in their verses and enigmas. (Translation mine.)] He then describes the *balac* and its related poetic forms of the *gabai* and the *cachorinon* as “*muy dificultosos, pero muy discretos, y enigmatico...*” (ibid.) [“very difficult, but very concrete, and enigmatic... (Translation mine)”. He also differentiates the *balac* from the *bagay* and the *garay*: the *balac* and the *bagay* are both metaphorical and enigmatic, but the *bagay* does not maintain the consonance of the last syllables of its versification; on the other hand, the *balac* and the *garay* have the same meter, but the *garay* is not enigmatic for it does not have any comparisons (metaphors).

Interestingly, the two poetic forms most associated with love and valor have become, through common usage, the generic terms to refer to



Cebuano poetry (balak) and Waray poetry (siday), respectively, perhaps indicating the romantic and heroic nature of the people of the Visayas, and by extension the settlers of Mindanao who migrated from Central, Eastern, and Western Visayas.

In the current usage of the Cebuano language, the words balak and garay mean “poetry” and “verse” respectively but are often deployed interchangeably. This is also true of other literary traditions, although technically speaking, “poetry” and “verse” do not exactly refer to the same linguistic entity. But the distinction is a very subtle one. As William Harmon asserts in the seventh edition of *A Handbook to Literature*, the term “poetry” can be “applied to the many forms in which human beings have given rhythmic expression to their most intense perceptions of the world, themselves, and the relation of the two” (Harmon, 1996). The term “verse,” on the other hand, has two possible meanings: (1) the metrical line as a basic unit of poetry, and (2) any form of metrical composition. The term “verse,” in the second sense, refers to a metrical composition, usually one with a regular rhyme and rhythm, but does not indicate its quality. In contrast, the term “poetry” or “poem” is “often being reserved for verse of high merit.”

In the context of the Cebuano language and literature, Mojares has this to say in his introduction to the anthology *Cebuano Poetry/Sugboanong Balak (Until 1940)*, which he co-edited with Erlinda K. Alburo, Vicente Bandillo, and Simeon Dumdung Jr.: “Balak is the term that has survived to this day to refer to poetry in general, although it is often reserved for the more elevated creations, with garay used for more informal, less accomplished ‘versifying’” (Mojares, 1988, 3). Mojares also elucidates on the word origin of the term balak and its dual meaning, but does not further elaborate on the implications of its secondary meaning: “It is intriguing to consider that, etymologically, the word (as in the Tagalog balak) refers to intention, plan, or design” (ibid.). This is where I would like to enter the conversation,

by positing that this very intentionality of design makes the conceptual framework of Cebuano poetry writing unique among the country's various literary traditions, especially after the advent of American New Criticism and its overwhelming influence on how Filipino creative writers and literary critics think of poetry.

As a formalist movement, the American New Critics emphasize that poetry is an autonomous and self-sufficient linguistic artifact, "a verbal icon" that has no function beyond its own existence as an aesthetic object. They also believe that this "verbal icon" must have organic unity for it to be artistically successful. William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley claim that authorial intention, along with the related fields of biography and history, does not really matter in literary criticism, since a good poem, like a "well-wrought urn" to use the term of Cleanth Brooks, will yield its meaning and/or meaningfulness through a close reading of the text.

The *balak*, therefore, challenges the prevailing ideological hegemony of Western-influenced literary criticism, by acknowledging the importance of intentionality right from its conception. The Cebuano *balak*, if allowed to flourish through private and public support, can also bring back poetry writing and reading to the larger society, so as not to limit the practice and appreciation of versifying and verses only to a cabal of fellow-minded writer friends, the so-called "literary barkadas" who have been edified in the country's top universities, which needless to say are patterned after the American educational system. And by bringing back the *balak* to the heart of the people like in precolonial times, when "poetry permeated local life; there were verses for practically every occasion and everyone was a poet" (*ibid.*), and by developing an indigenous set of literary aesthetics to determine the quality of each poem written in Cebuano, then there might be a true flowering of the Sugboanong *balak*, and the long-standing debate between

the camps of José García Villa (“art for art’s sake”) and Salvador P. Lopez (“art as social commitment”) might be one little step closer to resolution.

### **Dili Dali ang Pagpili: The Difficulty of the Selection Process**

The initial coverage of this research project is the translation of a hundred Mindanao poems from Cebuano to English that will showcase both the stylistic renditions and thematic concerns of the Cebuano-speaking people of Mindanao, the latter being of more importance since the Mindanao-specific issues are the ones that will make Mindanao poetry in Cebuano more distinct from its counterparts in Cebu, the rest of Central Visayas, and some parts of Eastern Visayas.

But after doing my initial spadework online and in the Cebuano Studies Center (CSC) of the University of San Carlos (Talamban Campus), I have realized that there is a plethora of materials available, especially if I take into consideration that *Bisaya Magasin*, the oldest extant magazine in Cebuano and perhaps the most widely circulated, has been consistently publishing poetry and fiction in its pages since its establishment in August 1930. Unfortunately, magazine copies of the first forty years can only be retrieved mostly through the Cebuano Studies Center, whose archive is not one hundred percent complete, after the flooding that occurred in the basement of the University of San Carlos Main Campus which destroyed a large number of the *Bisaya* issues of the early decades. Fortunately, the retrieval of the missing issues through private donors and other sources is currently being undertaken by the CSC under the leadership of its current director, my good friend Dr. Hope Sabanpan-Yu. Nonetheless, accessing the more recent issues is not much of a problem, although it requires a lot of work hours of actual retrieval.

Therefore, I have decided to work backward through time, especially since online journals and more recent literary anthologies and workshop proceedings featuring Mindanao poetry in Cebuano are more readily available, and can provide me with additional materials for translation. I am thus abiding by the following timeframe: “Labaw sa Bulawan” (1991-2020)—Most Recent Decades: Post-EDSA Euphoria, Contemporary Period; “Bili Ning Kinabuhì” (1961-1990) – Middle Decades: Martial Law Period, EDSA Revolution; and “Damgo Kog Pasalig” (1930-1960)—Early Decades: Prewar Period, World War II, Postwar Period.

I have also decided to group together the poems I have collected from the most recent decades, and their respective translations, according to the following thematic clusters, for the sake of facility: I. Himamat Kanako: Mindanao Ethnic Identities and Cultural Beliefs, Aesthetics and Poetics; II. Pagprotesta Panahon sa Pandemya: Mindanao Politics and Political Upheavals, War and Peace; III. Katong Nagbinahinay tag Saging: Poverty and Other Social Problems in Mindanao; IV. Bisan ang Pagkapulak sa Usa ka Dahon: Mother Nature and Environmental Disasters in Mindanao; and V. Kon Dunay Pako ang Kamingaw: Love, Desire and Passion in Mindanao.

### **“Ilad sa Dila”: The Limits of Literary Translation**

Almost all practitioners and theoreticians of translation and translation studies are in agreement that poetry is the most difficult of the literary genres to translate. This is because, unlike fiction and nonfiction whose main focus is on the narration of a plausible story, the essay whose main aim is explication and meaning-making, and drama whose main intention is scene-building through dialogue and action, the main purpose of poetry is the generation of sensuous pleasures through imagery and sound devices. Therefore, poetry is the literary genre that relies most on figures of speech and idiomatic expressions to achieve its desired effects and affects. And since

tropes (figures of thought) and rhetorical figures (figures of sound), as well as locutions and set phrases, are inherently language-bound, the translator of poetry has the extremely difficult task of ferrying across the shores of two different languages the sensory effects and emotional affects of any given poem, without completely losing the distinctive flavors of the source language, in terms of its particular turns of phrase and thought, in the target language.

Because of its built-in intransigence as a unique linguistic performance, one of the key issues in the translation of poetry is its basic translatability or untranslatability as a literary genre. As Alexandra X. Jacobs observes,

Questions of fidelity, issues of translatability, and the anxious calculus of loss and gain have freighted the translation of poetry, and its discourse, for centuries. On one side of the coin, we have Robert Frost's assertion, often taken out of context, that "poetry is what gets lost in translation," or, on the flip side, Joseph Brodsky's proclamation that "poetry is what is gained in translation." (479, 2014)

Translation studies scholars who proclaim that poetry is utterly untranslatable, it being the literary genre that is the most interpretatively challenging—even in the original—adhere consciously or unconsciously to the statement by Frost. They argue that accuracy and precision in the translation of poetry are impossible to achieve since the words that constitute any given source language do not necessarily have all the corresponding words in the target language.

But translators who believe that poetry is still translatable despite the difficulty of the genre, myself among them, attempt to find the proximate and approximate words as necessity dictates, without failing to recognize the limits of the act and the art of translation as applied to what Samuel Taylor Coleridge refers to as "the best words in the best order."

However, I encountered a complete translation impasse early on in this ongoing project when I read with much pleasure but with an equal amount of regret—because I could not translate it with the least level of acceptability in terms of fidelity to form and content, try hard as I may—the brief anagrammatic poem by Marianne Hazzale J. Bullos below:

### **ilad sa dila**

tagak nga katag  
piang nga aping  
wala nga lawa

nituo ang nauto

A quick inventory of the words in the poem and their probable meanings would yield the following: *ilad* (deception, swindle); *sa* (of); *dila* (tongue, language); *tagak* (fallen, autumn); *nga* (that); *katag* (disarray, mess); *piang* (crippled, lame, fractured); *nga* (that); *aping* (cheek); *wala* (nonexistent, left [the direction]); *nga* (that); *lawa* (spider, lake [in Tagalog]); *nituo* (believed); *ang* (the); *nauto* (fooled). Needless to say, the best approximation I can come up with does not only lack any anagrammatic resemblance, but it is also bordering on linguistic incoherence even on the level of meaning/fullness:

### **tongue's deception**

autumn's disarray  
crippled cheek  
nonexistent spider

the fool believed

## Ang Hubad nga Walay Paglubad: Translation as the Unchaining and Re-chaining of Signs

Like *balak*, the Cebuano word *hubad* has dual meanings: primarily, as a noun, it means “translation” and “version;” secondarily, as a verb, it means “to unchain, to unloosen, to untie,” and is most likely related to its Tagalog homonym, which means “naked, nude, bare, or devoid,” and by extension “bereft of clothes.” I have further explored this interesting interlingual connection to bring into the conversation the Spanish Nobel Prize laureate Juan Ramon Jimenez’s concept of “*la poesía desnuda*” (“naked poetry”), and, to a certain extent, the poem of Cuban poet Jose Martí (“The Opposite of Ornate and Rhetorical Poetry”) which has a similar trajectory. Also known as “*la poesía pura*” (“pure poetry”), “*la poesía desnuda*” recognizes that the essence of poetry is not found in its artifices and ornamentations, but in its innocence, something that is more elemental than the fripperies of wordplay and language games, like water.

Mojares further elaborates on the nature of the Cebuano word for translation: “*Hubad*... is used not only to signify the translation of written texts but the act of explaining an enigma or mystery (say, a riddle, conundrum, or “*tanghaga*”), or of untying a knot, or of undressing” (Mojares, 1990, 80). *Hubad*, the Cebuano act of translation, therefore, does not only signify the intention of “ferrying across” the meaning of a text from one language to another, like its English equivalent, which is derived from the Latin *translatus* (transference, carrying across, conveyance, handing over), but also, more importantly, the illumination of an insight into the human condition through revelation and exposure. Furthermore, Mojares emphasizes the pedagogical importance of *hubad* and “its consequence, of the beholder or listener becoming knowledge-filled, his learning increased... the sense of a sharing in knowledge, of mutual openness.”(ibid.)

Hubad is also etymologically related to the Cebuano words *huwad* (“to pour”), another watery connection, and *hulad* (“copy, duplicate, facsimile, replica, or reproduction”), which can be descriptive of how water mimics the shape of its receptacle. Interestingly, the Tagalog word for translation—*salin*—carries the same notion of pouring a liquid substance from one container to another. This suggests that in the conceptual framework of the translation process both in the Cebuano and Tagalog languages, there is recognition of a so-called essence, something elemental and substantive that can be transferred from one vessel to another, from one language to another, or from one medium to another, like water.

To further explore the possible linguistic and conceptual connections between Cebuano and Tagalog in their respective framing of the art and act of translation, the Cebuano homonym *salin* must also be mentioned, which means “leftover, remainder, or residue,” as well as “leftover food, crumb, or morsel” through a specifically gustatory expansion of the term. In this translation project, I am strategically recuperating the Cebuano term *salin* to refer, not to the dross or dregs that remain after the transference of a poem from source to target language, but to the alchemical gold that stays behind after it passes through the many alembics of the distillation process that have extracted the base metals, the unchaining of signs in one tongue so that it can be relinked and rekindled, and made to sing and glisten again in another tongue.

Here then are sample translations, one each from the five thematic clusters, which have been chosen either for their iconic or iconoclastic representation of Mindanao: “Nahabiling Kalibotan” (“Remaining Earth”) from *Himamat Kanako* tackles the loss of the ancestral domain of Mindanao’s indigenous people; “Pagprotesta Panahon sa Pandemya” (“Protesting During the Pandemic”) from *Pagprotesta Panahon sa Pandemya* belies the notion that the politics of Mindanao’s inhabitants are at best apolitical and



at worst extremely right-wing; “Sayal” (“Skirt”) from *Katong Nagbinahinay tag Saging* paints the sad portrait of a Mindanao female student who works at night as a streetwalker due to poverty; “Bisan ang Pagkapulak sa Usa ka Dahon” (“Even the Falling of One Leaf”) from *Bisan ang Pagkapulak sa Usa ka Dahon* harks back to a more harmonious time in Mindanao when man and nature still followed the order of things; and “Kun Unsaon Paghigugma ang Lalaking Straight” (“How to Love a Straight Man”) from *Kon Dunay Pako ang Kamingaw* countervails the prevailing image of Mindanao as a place brimming with macho men and machismo.

# NAHABILING KALIBOTAN

by John R. Saguban

Kabiling yuta, liboan ka ektarya:  
sulod na lang sa hanap nga handurawang  
lumad Subano, Higaonon, Manubo, Mandaya.

Ang nanganawkanawng' kayutaan,  
kalasangan, kabatoan, kabalasan, kasubaan,  
gihulagway sa lakon sa di matapos nga panghayhay,

ingog' makapakurat nga damgo  
sa lawom nga kagabhiong pintas ang katugnaw  
sulod sa mga gubaong' kamalig.

Sa lagyong dakbayan atua ang nindot  
nga mga talan-awong ikatandi sa madanihong bulan—  
mga tore sa kaugmaran, dangpanan sa kaalam,

balay nga bulawan... Giandom na lang kining tanan,  
ibabaw sa kanhi lapad nga kapatagang gilaktan  
sa hanap putling mga lapalapa sa ilang katigulangan.

# REMAINING EARTH

Ancestral land, thousands of acres:  
existing only in the hazy indigenous memory  
of Subanon, Higaonon, Manobo, Mandaya.

The loss of extensive lands,  
forests, ridges, littorals, rivers,  
are expressed in the coils of unending sighs,

like a shocking dream  
in the bitter cold of a dark night  
inside dilapidated warehouses.

In distant cities are the beautiful  
sceneries comparable to the alluring moon—  
towers of progress, sanctuary of learning,

house of gold... All these are but a memory,  
above the formerly vast plains traversed  
by the blurred pure soles of their ancestors.

# PAGPROTESTA PANAHON SA PANDEMYA

ni John Gilford Doquilla

Luyo sa nakatabon nga mga nawong  
ang mga baba nga andam mopadayag  
og kaguol, kasuko, ug paglaom  
nga ang moabotay nga ugma hayag na unta.

Sa pagpahid sa singot sa agtang  
sa pila ka oras og siniyagit sa kalsada,  
dili moundang ang pagtuo  
nga ang kainit sa mga panawagan ug pangamuyo  
mudalag alimuot nga moalisngaw  
sa bugnawng kalag sa gaharing buraot.

Mutulo man ang luha o  
mokurog man ang tingog sa kasuko,  
maski pa og tutokan og pusil ang baba  
arun muhilom,  
walay makapatay sa tawong  
kamatuoran ang anting-anting.

Murag aso nga bisag kapila pa taguon  
gamit ang kinumo,  
mangita gihapon ang kamatuoran og  
kagawasan.

# PROTESTING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Behind the masked faces  
are the mouths ready to express  
sorrow, anger, and hope  
that tomorrow would be brighter.

While wiping sweat from forehead  
after hours of shouting on the street,  
the conviction does not stop  
that the heat of clamor and entreaty  
would stifle and steam  
the cold soul of the ruling troublemaker.

Even if tears fall or  
voice trembles with anger,  
even if a gun is pointed at the mouth  
to silence it,  
no one could kill a person  
whose amulet is truth.

Like smoke many times concealed  
using the fist,  
the truth would still seek  
liberation.

# SAYAL

ni Ton Daposala

Matag Domingo suoton nimo  
ang bisteda nga ang palda mubo pa  
kon itandi sa kagabhion.

Ang takon sa imong estileto  
sama kahait sa bolpen  
nga gamiton nimo sa tingklase.

Imong mga tawo-tawo danaw  
sa dalang aspalto diin nasamin  
ang arko sa Bulan nga gakipat-kipat

ibabaw sa motel. Taliwa sa dulom  
mikidhat ang mata sa itom nga Altis.  
Ug ghipos nimo ang kasingkasing

ilawom sa pitaka aron mabakante  
ang mga kamot kansang hawid  
labaw kahugot sa imong blusang pula.

Samtang gakaduol ang sakyanan,  
gahinam-hinam pod imong pag-ampo  
nga makasul-ob pod unta ka

usa ka adlaw puhon og bisteda  
nga pang-Domingo nga dili  
sama kanihit sa damgo.

# SKIRT

Every Sunday you would wear  
the dress whose skirt is shorter  
when compared to the night.

The heel of your stiletto  
is sharp as the ballpoint pen  
that you use during class hours.

Your pupils dilate to lagoons  
on the asphalt road that mirrors  
the arc of the flickering Moon

above the motel. In the darkness  
the eye of a black Altis winks.  
And you stash away your heart

inside a purse to free  
the hands whose grasp  
are tighter than your red blouse.

While the vehicle approaches,  
you also hanker in prayer  
that you too would be able to wear

one day in the future  
a Sunday dress which is not  
as scanty as a dream.

# BISAN ANG PAGKAPULAK SA USA KA DAHON

ni Gumer M. Rafanan

Nganong mohilak ang bag-ong himugso  
inig sugat sa kahayag,

unya mokatawa bisag way mohadla?

Nganong ang dagat mohunas-motaob,  
ang adlaw mosubang mosalop,  
ang bangaw motadlas sa panganod?

Nganong ang panahon mohayag-modulom,  
usahay moulán, usahay mohulaw?

Nganong ang langgam ganahang moawit,  
ang bulak mobuklad, ang sanga  
manalingsing?

Daghang ngano ang buot tang tugkaron  
samas kalawom sa lawod, kahabog  
sa langit.

Kalipayg kasakit modangat kanato,  
bukas-palad tang gidawat,  
bukas-dughan tang gihangop  
kay nakulit na sa sabakan sa  
panahon nga anang panghitabo  
adunay HINUNG DAN...

Bisan ang pagkapulak  
sa usa ka  
dahon.



# EVEN THE FALLING OF ONE LEAF

Why does the newborn cry  
when it meets the light,  
then laughs even if no one amuses it?  
Why does the sea ebb and flow,  
the sun rise and set,  
the rainbow arch across the sky?  
Why does the weather brighten and darken,  
at times rainy, at times dry?  
Why does the bird like to sing,  
the flower unfurl, the branch  
produce shoots?  
Many whys that we desire to fathom  
like the depths of the sea, the height  
of the firmament.  
Joy and sorrow would reach us,  
with open palms we receive,  
with open hearts we embrace,  
since it is already engraved in  
the womb of time that each event  
has a REASON...  
Even the falling  
of one  
leaf.

# KUN UNSAON PAGHIGUGMA ANG LALAKING STRAIGHT

ni Alton Melvar Dapanas

Huna-hunaa ra god, auntie,  
nga usa lamang siya ka amigo.  
Kon wala siya gatan-aw,  
tutoki ang iyang lasangong bangas.  
Pugngi imong kaugalingon, dzai,  
nga maghunahuna kon unsa  
ang bati-on sa mga kamot mo  
kon laagon niini iyang buhok—  
kon asang buhok ikaw na'y makatubag.  
Kon sa imong kakiat,  
ma-imagine mo na gyod unsa  
siya nga pagka-amahan sa damlag,  
hinumdomi, imaginary sab imong matris.  
Kon mangutana na siya  
unsang tipo sa lalaki imong ma-bet,  
girl, ipatadlas ang kaluoy sa iyang mata.  
Kon mabutyag na kaniya  
ang imong tinuod nga pagbati—  
salamat sa barkada mong traydor—  
ayaw lang kaluya, bayot.  
Wala ra na sa iyaha. Kebs lang.  
Kon makig-shot na siya nianang gabhiona,  
ayaw intawon pag-expect og afterparty.  
Kon pagkabuntag, makita mo siya  
nga gahagok sa imong sopa,  
ter, andama ang humok mong kaunoran nga makuniskunis  
sama sa nabitas nga pink foam sa imong dughan.  
Bes, mata na. Dili siya maimo.

# HOW TO LOVE A STRAIGHT MAN

Just think of him, auntie,  
as no more than a male friend.  
If he is not looking,  
stare at his bushy beard.  
Stop yourself, missy,  
from thinking of how  
your fingers would feel  
if they comb his hair—  
which hair, only you could tell.  
If in your flirtatiousness,  
you could already imagine how  
he would be as a father in the future,  
remember, your womb is imaginary too.  
If he would then ask  
what kind of man you prefer,  
girl, let the pity in his eyes wash over you.  
If he would then discover  
your true feelings—  
thanks to your treacherous chums—  
do not be frazzled, faggot.  
It would be nothing to him. No big deal.  
If he would drink with you that very night,  
do not expect for an afterparty.  
If in the morning, you would see him  
snoring on your sofa,  
sis, prepare your soft flesh to be torn apart  
like the ripped pink foam on your chest.  
Bestie, wake up. He won't be yours.



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*LITERARY HISTORY  
AND CRITICISM*



# SEPARATE SPHERES, SHARED ORBIT: IN SEARCH OF THE WOMAN IN GOD AND POETRY

by Ma. Ailil B. Alvarez



*Ma. Ailil B. Alvarez has served as director of the UST Publishing House since 2017. She is also an assistant professor at the UST Department of Literature and a former faculty researcher at the UST Research Center for Culture, Arts, and the Humanities (RCCA). Her book of critical essays, *Slivers of the Sky: Catholic Literary Readings and Other Essays* (2016), was named a finalist at the 36th National Book Awards in the category Literary Criticism/Literary History in English.*

A confession: I am a practicing conservative Catholic who, in college, wrote about how God is like a woman.

To be more precise, I wrote an undergraduate thesis about “The Feminine Face of God” in selected prose works by Merlinda Bobis, borrowing the title from a book by Patricia Hopkins and Sherry Ruth Anderson (Bantam, 1992). I chose this subject because I wanted to work on

something that few student-researchers had done before, and spirituality has always been a point of interest to me, mostly because I identify as a ‘cradle Catholic,’ i.e., someone born and raised in the faith. (Even my early “academic output”—which really just meant my high school report for a social sciences class—had something to do with the issue of gender in the priesthood.) For my literary analysis, however, I applied a theoretical framework that, in hindsight, felt closer to New Age feminist philosophy than actual Catholic theology. I felt rather strongly about women’s studies at the time, and all my independent research pointed to non-Catholic sources, which, in the spirit of “reading against the grain” that is the trademark of postmodern literary theory, was highly encouraged by mentors who trained us in this brand of scholarship.

My thesis earned one of two “best thesis citations” for literature majors in the year I graduated (2004). It was a distinction I shared with a good friend and classmate but for which we never received any official certificate, so I suppose the measure of its “best-ness” was not exactly binding. It did, however, start me on the road to Catholic literary studies, which I honestly never heard about until I was asked to teach a Catholic literature course in 2013.

Granted, I did take up a Modern Catholic Writing course ten years prior under noted literary critic and editor Joselito B. Zulueta, who is himself a staunch defender of the Catholic faith and a respected Catholic scholar in his own right (his master’s thesis was on the Catholic Baroque Imagination in the fiction of Nick Joaquin). But until I had to design a course plan and come up with my reading list for my own classes, I had never considered the possibility that my faith and my chosen academic discipline could intersect. They had always felt like separate spheres that were never meant to share orbits, and meant to represent two halves of myself: one was an expression of spirituality I find beautiful, and the other, an academic discipline I found



fascinating (and one that allowed me to build a career on). What did they have to do with each other? Apparently, everything, but I did not know just how much until I read Mary Reichardt's *Exploring Catholic Literature* (Sheed & Ward, 2003) and realized there was an entire field dedicated to Catholic literary studies in universities abroad. Through her I was introduced to the writings of theologians and scholars Andrew Greeley, Joseph Pearce, and Michael Himes, whose inner lives are not at all separate from the literature and culture they study.

This pleasant discovery that resulted from my research solidified my decision to work on Catholic literature for my doctoral dissertation, and I wrote my first book, *Slivers of the Sky: Catholic Literary Readings and Other Essays* (UST Publishing House, 2016), with this exact purpose. In the Preface, I said:

[...] A sliver is a small slice or a slender section, and my critical practice provides a peek at the often overlooked aspects of greater texts (symbolized by the sky). This, to me, is consistent with the field of critical inquiry, where the gaps in the text are teased out rather than filled in, and where the overlooked subtleties and nuances are played up in order to highlight an important literary point. Often, then, because slivers are all we see of the sky, more questions are posed than answers, and problematization is valued over prescription.

The essays in this collection represent the myriad of interests I have dabbled in my academic career thus far, ranging from feminist readings of poetry to postcolonial analyses of novels to postmodern inquiry of unconventional texts—although the bulk of the work here reflects my primary research interest, Catholic writing. Some of these have been presented at conferences, while a few others have been published in an anthology here and a journal there. Many, however, are unpublished essays, and my only wish is that the reader will find some new insight to take away from my own

readings of the texts and, hopefully, fall in love with literature—which, I maintain, is still criticism's ultimate end. (iv)

The book became a finalist at the 36th National Book Awards in the category of Literary Criticism/Literary History in English. (It did not win, but it still felt nice to make it to the shortlist.)

I still feel as strongly about women's writing now as I did in my undergraduate years, and writing about spirituality in literature, specifically in poetry, has brought me a renewed purpose in an academic career I had thought about leaving behind.

The paper I appended here is actually part of a longer, unfinished project on Philippine female poets writing in English that have a distinct spiritual imprint in their verses. My project seeks to probe and posit a theory of the sacred as reflected in contemporary women's poetry, and through comparative analysis—paying close attention to the poet's choice of imagery—my intention is to show how silence, in its many forms, has helped shape the concerns of the spirituality of the female lyric persona.

I do not think I would have ever reached this point if I had not written that undergraduate thesis, *New Age Feminist* as it was, and so far, this has been a wonderful journey towards wholeness, an organic result of “things coming full circle.”

# THE SANCTITY OF SILENCE: THE LYRICAL ARTICULATION OF SPIRITUALITY IN DINAH ROMA'S *NAMING THE RUINS*

The term *sacred* implies a quality that is distinct from what is earthly, or profane. Sociologists and anthropologists (such as Emile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade) configure it as a category necessary for religion to thrive in society—that cultures constructed symbols designated to lead believers to a tangible encounter with the Divine (Anttonen 2000). The sacred is what is distinct from the ordinary, the everyday, the humdrum, and something that is elevated in worth and endowed with supernal importance.

On the other hand, Catholic theology teaches that what is sacred is what is offered to God, or pertains exclusively to God. St. Thomas Aquinas speaks about the two aspects of holiness, namely separation and firmness: “Sanctity, says the Angelic Doctor, is the term used for all that is dedicated to the Divine service [. . .] Such must be pure or separated from the world, for the mind needs to be withdrawn from the contemplation of inferior things if it is to be set upon the Supreme Truth—and this, too, with firmness or stability, since it is a question of attachment to that which is our ultimate end and primary principle, viz., God Himself” (Pope 1910). Thus the sacred can also be taken to mean a preoccupation with all things not of the world, but of a concern for what lies beyond the tangible as the path to what is divine.

Arguably, the art of poetry can be seen as an articulation of this path to the sacred and can be in itself a sanctified craft. In lyricism is found the motivation to speak about intertwined realities, concretized in imagery and metaphor, that language symbolically embodies. To take after priest-sociologist Andrew Greeley (2000) and theologian Joseph Pearce (2006), there is no better milieu to return to religion than today’s globally postmodern

era, because it serves a fundamental and pressing need to hearken back to Order in an age of the denial of Truth and Unity.

This short paper is part of a longer work on the articulation of spirituality among contemporary Philippine women-poets writing in English and focuses on just one collection of award-winning poet Dinah Roma, whose latest work, *We Shall Write Love Poems Again* (UST Publishing House [USTPH], 2020), was named the Best Book of Poetry in English at the 39th National Book Awards. She won the same award in 2004 with *A Feast of Origins* (USTPH), while her 2011 collection *Geographies of Light* (USTPH) contains the poems that earned her the 2007 Carlos Palanca Award for Poetry in English.

The particular work in focus, however, is one that the USTPH did not publish: Roma's third poetry collection, *Naming the Ruins*, published by Vagabond Press (an Australian press) in 2014. This choice is not only to project a semblance of impartiality but also because her verses in this work have a distinctly perceivable inclination towards the transcendental and the mystical.

In listening to Roma's poems, an articulation of the sacred that harnesses the power and privilege of silence as the path to the spiritual can be heard, and this brief analysis dissects how this quiet, this stillness, that pervade in her verses is the path towards an approximation of the sacred.

By championing the enduring power of poetry, it is hoped that this paper, and the longer work it is a part of, will be able to underscore that this form of literary utterance becomes the most fitting vehicle to affirm the necessity of faith.

## Transcendental Silence in Dinah Roma's *Naming the Ruins*

The pronouncements of silence in Roma's poems in *Naming the Ruins* are clearly brimming with transcendental wisdom—that is, they hint at concern for a life beyond this one.

Roma's verses lend themselves quite easily to Catholic reading because explicit allusions to Catholic spirituality can be found there. For example, the choice of Catholic vocabulary is found in poem titles such as "Rehearsing the Sacraments" (which is a poem warning a woman about the perils of marriage) and "The Liturgy," as well as in the lines of the opening poem "Coda" that speak about the immense and painful silence that pervades after a separation, as it is equated with the emotional and geographical distance that come with being liberated from a relationship: "The first call / after the pain exhausts— / the voice valiant / in the distance. [...] The words are uttered, / each syllable freed / for what it is. / The sound of heartbeat, / crisp on the verge / of song / not of misery, / nor of joy, / but the silence / of great cathedrals / as the last note / falls / in praise."

"The Liturgy" is written after Olena Kalytiak Davis' "Six Apologies, Lord," and Roma's version is a prayer enunciating the emotional pain the persona goes through in accepting God's will in her life, incremented by her failure to reach the promise of peace and mercy she has been seeking:

Don't say I haven't tried, Lord.  
Don't say I haven't bruised my knees  
pleading once more for mercy.

Have you not heard the gasping  
in the night as I pulled  
at my hair from the tearing

of flesh? I waited long for you  
to become Love Incarnate,  
Lord. Have I confused heaven

and hell again? Where are the lush fields  
of the Song of Songs? Its bliss,  
feasts? [...]

The poem is rich with Catholic imagery, that of the religion that teaches how suffering is the path to salvation, with the persona yearning for the reward of the resurrection that comes after the incomparable tragedy of being nailed on the cross: “Only prayer / tending my soul as the world pays / for its mortal heart—each day, Lord, / unknowing of the ascent / from the crucifixion.”

Key to the prayer is the speaker’s acknowledgment that she has exhausted all her efforts to comply with the demands of her spirituality by following the commands of her religion, and it is only in silence that she hears the answer of God: “I grit my teeth, Lord, until I knew. / ‘Be still,’ You said. ‘And know / I am God.’ I know. I am still. / To Know, and Be Still.”

The poem “Grace” recalls God’s ultimate outpouring of love (Himes 2001), rightly termed so in Catholic teaching, and the persona contemplates how nature opens up to the ultimate gift of self until everything circles back to where it began: “The green slender strains/ From its own flourishing, / The burden of sap: [...] The slow shedding back / To root, the gift / Giving to nothingness.”

In “The First Four,” dedicated to the Typhoon Haiyan (Ondoy) victims in 2013, revealing a persona who charged with an awareness of suffering around her:

[...] The sun will shine on them as  
everything else begins to move. Away from the

chaos, detritus. Back to life. Yet they shall remain,  
even if buried, tallied. Unto themselves, they  
remain. In gestures that forever teach us we are  
both of the dead and dying.

iv.

We are both of the dead and dying. What of the  
missing? Those that torment. The faces forever  
submerged in water. The cord that is not cut but  
pulls us back into the sea, where they might have  
gone.

Even the enjambments signal the forced splice of thought continuity, as if the persona's consciousness is jarred and seeks to reach out to the victims themselves—only, for whatever circumstances, she could only do so in poetry. Ultimately, the poet seems to say that spirituality implies a connectedness to the plight of others as the artist crafts in words her empathy for their unspeakable tragedy, of a loss for which words will not suffice.

In "Paralagra," the persona observes the mat weavers of Basey, Samar at work ("Untimed by history, keepers of the sea, / soothing sleep into threads / of stories eyes have no vision for. / What their fingers intimate / I feign in the meters of these lines"). This fascination for craft shows that, as with the view of God's immanence (cf. Aureus 2000 and Greeley 2000), everything is engraced, and artistic craftsmanship is an approximation of the creative power of God.

But the sense of the spiritual is also found in non-Catholic references, such as in "Angkor Wat: The Oracle of Stone," where the persona contemplates the philosophical implications of identity and history as chronicled in the architecture of the famed temple. It is a meditation on the eternal and the temporal, on social and inner conflict, and the means to transcend them—and what is spirituality if not a concern for what lies beyond this life? It ends

with a supplication to direct her course through rebirth: “Speak to me stone:  
Tell me / where I can lay down / and rise from my own ruins.”

Meanwhile, in the lyric sequence “Of Shapes,” the persona meditates on the laws of physics and the presence of divinity in humanity through interconnectedness. In “Of Shapes: One,” the poet uses the persona’s pondering over the laws of physical science—pertaining to “Motion that rules / seasons, returns—the rhythms / of longing”—to signify the origin and destination of all that exists, but that which direction is rejected: “Beings of compass, / we drill our ways against / its fulcrum unknown / to how the sight of heavens / finds its equal on earth.” It is an acknowledgment that man is one who innately seeks guidance (from a Higher Power, presumably) but who, because of free will, charts out a life contrary to it. It is inevitable, however, that the Self returns to a point where “the exultant / flesh [binds] spirit / in abandon.”

This is continued in “Of Shapes: Two,” where the persona declares that an Objective Strength beyond human comprehension will make things right again: “The center aligns. / Against all that may sunder. / Despite us, geometry governs.” The poem embodies the notion that science and mathematics as branches of higher knowledge approximate the Divine speak about the primacy of scientific inquiry in explaining everything—but, in listening to the silences, the poet says this is not possible. Rather, the mysteries are unraveled in the acknowledgment that all creation is fused and helixed, and the experience of the universe is inevitably found in each participant in the cosmos who carries another’s burden: “Nothing is not filled / by us in space. In the simplest shape, / the densest of relation. [...] By its axiom, nothing severs— / we rend to bear each other’s / precious jewel.”

The spiritual sense of finding oneself reflected in creation is found in “Reminiscing Rumi,” where the sequence “After ‘Say I Am You’” contain the lines “I am the husk before the seed. / I am tendril. / [...] I am chrysalis



at the tip of wings, / the wait between season and its blooms." In "Into the Plains of Bagan," the persona finds this same marriage of the tangible with the intangible, leading to a sense of tranquility. In its third sequence, "Old Bagan," a woman worshipping at the temple is "unfazed by the light pouring into the threshold," her face the image of "[serenity], her hands on chest / resting on the subtleties of breath. // At this hour the skies clear for prayers. / At this hour the skies ease into ballast. // In what colors do our eyes / catch the praise in clouds?" And in "Tak Bat," the reader senses an awareness of the transcendence of the here and now: "It used to be that not to look into their eyes / was to fall deep into the gesture, a welcome / into which hearts yield to a meditation / of depths, what overflows, what levels, / what lifts the gift beyond its height."

## Conclusion

Roma's poems show that feminine articulation of the sacred comes to rest on the transcendental aspect of silence, and demonstrate how the very nature of poetry also affirms the sense of silence on the level of form. The lyric persona speaks, but often not aloud, only in thought. The poet has shown that a heightened sensitivity to and awareness of the Truth, revealed upon contemplations of the greatness and wisdom of the ordinary, gives birth to truly spiritual poetry. The poems feature speakers who are pensive souls fascinated with realities beyond the physical and the temporal, and who recognize that it is only through careful attention to the silences of moments that can a path to the sacred can be architected.

To reiterate, among the issues dealt with by the poet are: how the intangible merges with the tangible in the choice of imagery and metaphor, often derived from nature; how the sacred can be seen even in the diurnal domestic activities; and that a soul who is in touch with sanctity is portrayed as operating in a unified and interconnected awareness of the needs of others,

as she views service and empathy as a positive response to the prodding of the Divine Voice in her conscience.

In Roma's poems, it can be seen how the exploration of the spiritual can only be fulfilled by treading the path of silence, into which all are urged to inch closer to the Eternal and to the Divine.



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# LATIN ROOTS OF PHILIPPINE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

by Lito B. Zulueta



*Lito B. Zulueta is a veteran journalist, editor, critic, and author who teaches journalism, literature, arts and culture writing, and cinema at the Faculty of Arts and Letters of the University of Santo Tomas.*

The essay that follows this piece is not part of a larger publication project, at least it wasn't conceived as such at first: it was written in January 2021 and has remained unpublished because it wasn't really meant to be published, not at once, perhaps. But I must confess that at that time, I was goaded by the prospect of the following month, February, being Valentine's Month, in writing the historical, philosophical, and literary moorings of love and romance, as Filipinos understand them at present.

Since then, I have written similar essays on Philippine literature, mainly term papers for my Ph.D. Literature classes at the Graduate School, which I hope to redact for publication as essays in popular journals, or to burnish and supply with more learned footnotes to heighten their pedantic

polish for publication in academic journals, preferably those internationally indexed. The latter reflects the breadth of the enterprise I have pursued: “research” or, in Spanish, “*investigación*,” into the Latin moorings of Philippine culture. The former reflects my “publicist’s” bias, and by that, I mean employing “publicism” (in the classic European term of the term as both polemic and consciousness-raising), or “popular journalism,” to better spread and make readers understand rather arcane, perhaps technical, or heretofore unknown, aspects of Philippine literature.

Therefore the project is more or less to trace the European roots of Philippine literature and culture—the roots being Latin in general and Spanish in particular. Postcolonial academics, of course, may decry this as Eurocentric and even anti-Filipino. Still, I focus on the European roots of Philippine culture as a corrective to the Anglo-American bias of much of our literary taste and scholarship. Moreover, whatever Eurocentrism may be is checked or balanced by some relevant recourse to transoceanic Hispanic studies (for example, the *korido* being a naturalization of the Mexican *corrido*, which in itself is an Americanization of the European metrical romance). These literary types and forms inherited from Spain and Europe were eventually naturalized into Philippine literary and cultural forms.

Admittedly, this project draws from my double role as a literary journalist and literature teacher.

# ROMANCE AND ITS INVENTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

by Lito B. Zulueta

The Philippines' *Romeo and Juliet* are by widespread acclaim and historic canonization *Florante at Laura*, the star-crossed lovers of the eponymously titled *corrido* by Balagtas. Like Shakespeare's tragedy which is set "in fair Verona," the magnum opus of the Tagalog bard is exotically set in the Middle Ages in the dark and dismal forest of Epirus off *Florante's* "luckless land" of Albania. The anachronism should at least indicate that "romance" in the Philippines is an import; it's not native to the Philippines. It's an "invention."

Let me explain. *Florante at Laura* (F&L) is a "*korido*," which is derived from the Mexican "*corrido*," a ballad that tells a story. The genre is another proof of the dynamic cultural exchanges between the two countries for 250 years from the 16th to the early 19th century when the Philippines was administered from the Spanish vice-royalty of Mexico. Tagalog scholars prefer to call F&L "*awit*" or song, but it is obvious that the *awit* is a Filipinized form of the *corrido*, which is the Mexican adaptation of the Spanish metrical romances. The Mexican *corrido* and the Filipino *awit* and *korido* are indigenized forms of the European romances; they're imports that have been naturalized.

Mexican *corridos* are, like F&L, in quatrains. But unlike Balagtas' work, which runs 402 lines (this does not include the famous dedications to "Celia" and the "Reader"), Mexican *corridos* run for only a couple of stanzas, a dozen or so at most. This is because, according to T.H. Pardo de Tavera, "*corrido*" is a Mexican corruption of the Spanish "*ocurrido*" (something that

occurred). Thus the corrido in Mexico has been transformed from a medieval Spanish metrical romance into a tale in verse about a current event. Corridos became especially prominent during the Mexican revolution in the early 19th century. They continue to be written today as shown by the merry cottage industry of “narcorridos,” ballads about drug trafficking and drug wars in the Mexican narco-state.

But while Mexico’s is about a current event, Philippine corridos have remained a body of fantastic and legendary tales, the materials and themes of which belong to Europe and which were introduced by the Spaniards, such as “Jaime del Prado,” “Doce Pares de Francia,” “Bernardo del Carpio.” (Nowadays to denote the naturalization of the Mexican corrido, literature scholars call the Philippine metrical tale “korido.”) Many of the Philippine corridos were written in octosyllabic verse, so that F&L, written in dodecasyllabic verse, is classified by some scholars today as an “awit” or song. But this is a later development introduced by Tagalog scholars. In the late 19th century, writers and scholars such as Pardo de Tavera, Vicente Barrantes, Wenceslao Retana, and Teodoro M. Kalaw classified F&L as a corrido. They would be closer to Balagtas’ time. Moreover, the Visayans also wrote metrical romances, which they called corridos. The Tagalog corrido as separate from the Tagalog awit would be a later distinction by Tagalog scholars in the 20th century.

In any case, whether corrido, korido, or awit, F&L is a tale in verse depicting a hero’s exploits and adventures. Better still, it is a metrical romance” brought to the country by Spain via “Nueva Espana”—Mexico. Metrical romances are not native to the Philippines: they are originally European forms “Filipinized” by Balagtas and other Philippine poets.

“Romance,” contrary to today’s popular notion, was not really about love and its wages, although it may include such subjects in the narrative: “romance” originally signified a work written in the French language, which



evolved from a dialect of Latin, the Roman language. Of course, Latin also gave birth to the other Romance languages, such as Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese, so that the metrical romances were written not only by the French but by other Europeans.

The metrical romance is a verse narrative form that developed in 12th century France and then spread to other European countries to displace the various epic and heroic forms of classic literature. Romance is distinguished from the epic, also a verse narrative, in that it represents not a heroic age of tribal wars, as in Homer's "Iliad," but a courtly and chivalric age—the age of knights and their adventures, of knights and their damsels. Its standard plot is the quest undertaken by a knight to gain a lady's favor; the main interest is courtly love, so the knight fights tournaments and slays dragons and monsters for the damsel's sake. It stresses the chivalric ideals of courage, loyalty, honor, mercy to an opponent, and highly developed and exquisite manners.

Chivalric romance emerged from the Christian lay knighthood. After the barbarian overrun of the Roman empire and during the ensuing "dark ages," the Church made inroads and converted the barbarian overlords and their peoples. The early Church rejected war and the military profession but had to seek a *modus vivendi* with the warlike ideals and standards of the Germanic hordes. By the 11th century, there was the lay knighthood, "which gives further development to the idea of the defense of the Church, the religious symbolism of the military life, and the important connection with the cult of saints," wrote the German historian Carl Erdmann. The Christian knights later took part in the Crusades in the late 11th century, and the knightly ethos characterized the French epics. Chivalric romances and courtly love poetry came later in the 12th century. Needless to say, like barbarian wars Christianized by the Church and rationalized into the theory of the just war, courtly love is desire sublimated as ideal love and spiritual

romance. The knight was sworn to chastity. His libido was, in Freudian dynamics, sublimated to serve a higher calling, his raging loins channeled from their base instincts to a higher calling; in short, sex was spiritualized.

Love and romance are the inventions of the medievals. Contrary to common opinion, love was foreign to the classical age of the Greeks and the Romans. “The literature of the ancients did not rank love very high on the whole,” said the German philologist and scholar Erich Auerbach in “Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature.” “It is a predominant subject neither in tragedy nor the great epic.” Love took a “central position” in medieval courtly romances as a spur for the knight to commit heroic deeds. “Love in the courtly romances is already not infrequently the immediate occasion for deeds of valor,” said Auerbach. “There is nothing surprising in this if we consider the complete absence of practical motivation through a political and historical context. Love, an essential and obligatory ingredient of knightly perfection, is a substitute for other possibilities of motivation that are otherwise lacking. This implies the fictitious order of events in which the most significant actions are performed primarily for a lady’s favor; it also implies the superior rank assigned to love as a poetic theme that became so important in European literature.”

Thus, love and romance are the inventions of the Middle Ages. They’re a European invention. Etymologically, “invention” comes from the Old French “*invencion*,” a medieval term meaning “finding” or “discovery.” The meaning survives in the Catholic Church feast every May 3, called the Invention of the Cross, commemorating the finding or discovery of the true cross by Empress Helen, Constantine’s mother. “Invention” here is related to the old understanding of the word “legend”; hence the title of the medieval best-seller by Blessed Jacobus da Voragine, OP, *The Golden Legend*, about the lives of saints. “Legend” here means “history” or “life” or “biography,” not myth or fiction as understood pejoratively in contemporary times. This is why I use

“Invention” in my title.

I use it also because it echoes the favorite word of the postmoderns, “construction.” Love and romance are inventions or constructions brought about by, at least based on Foucauldian terms, “discourses” or knowledge production about them. The chivalric songs and romances and other literary writings were discourses that constituted a body of knowledge about love and romance. During the Spanish period, the natives were fed a steady diet of metrical romances, such as “Amadis de Gaul,” “Bernardo del Carpio,” and “Infantes de Lara.” F&L was obviously written along the vein of metrical romances; they should therefore be a key discourse in Philippine knowledge about love and romance.

### **Ancient folk songs about love**

But wasn’t there any “indigenous” discourse on love in the Philippines before the Spanish arrival in the 16th century? The early Philippines mainly had oral literature “since these natives are not acquainted with the art of writing,” according to Miguel de Loarca. While the natives had scripts, they wrote only to send letters, not to commit their oral literature to texts. They also didn’t have paper; they wrote on bamboo or the bark of trees. In any case, if they had paper, it would have been destroyed by the tropical elements.

During the Spanish period, there were attempts to record oral literature: the missionaries cited excerpts from them in their *vocabularios*; the Bicol epic “Ibalong” was translated in part into Spanish by Fr. Jose Castanon and published in Spain in 1895. These oral literary forms were mainly ceremonial songs for the dead, rowing songs (especially the Visayans who were traveling interisland), and heroic songs, which Loarca wrote was about “the exploits of olden times ... (so that the natives) always possess a

knowledge of past events.” It is because these oral forms were committed to memory that many of them were recorded during the 20th century.

As for “romantic literature,” the early Filipinos may have songs of love and courtship. I said “may” because while the love between a man and a woman should always occasion exalted poetry, the friar-philologists were wont to censor them or to refuse to admit them as literary samples in their dictionaries for obvious reasons. Research in the 20th century managed to save some of them, notably the *ambahan* of the Hanunuo Mangyan of Mindoro and the *laji* of the Ivatan of Batanes.

The *ambahan* is a witty exchange between a man and a woman. The late Dutch anthropologist Antoon Postma who researched the Mangyans translated one *ambahan* in which a young man woos a young woman:

My dear girl I like so much,  
tomorrow when the sun shines,  
we will leave this place of yours.  
Let us go together then!  
Both of us to be on the way  
to my mother to propose.  
She will be so very glad.

She initially refuses but gives in in the end:

My boy, busy courting me,  
frankly, I will tell you then;  
I don't like to give you up.  
As long as you are with me,  
It will only be through death!  
It will only be through death!  
Or my father, let them try,  
all their prayers would not help!

Ivatan scholar Florentino Hornedo said the *laji* is the generic term for the lyric poetic tradition of Batanes, many of which would be poems about love or marriage. Unlike the *ambahan*, which is written in Mangyan script on bamboo, it is an “unwritten” or sung tradition. Here is one *laji* on how love overcomes all odds:

Where did you go yesterday? I have asked all  
the passers-by about you,  
but in vain. How could you find me?  
I was hidden by my father and my mother  
in the hollow of a bamboo; they stopped it  
with the husk of a young coconut; and I may not be opened  
with the hands, but I may be opened  
by love for you, my beloved.

However dainty and entertaining, these poems could hardly be called discourses on love. They’re folk songs that can be traced to the various aspects of the life and customs of the people of the age; as Jose Villa Panganiban wrote of them, “they are spontaneous and informal expressions indicating personal reactions to the experiences of daily life.” Love and its ceremonies came from the metrical romances of Spain and Europe.

### **Love in pre-Hispanic times**

Upon the Spanish contact, missionary accounts of the natives hardly mention courtship or wooing conventions; they mainly deal with betrothals, marriage practices, and divorce. Jesuit Fr. Pedro Chirino, in his *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas* (published in Valladolid, Spain in 1604), said he had stayed in the Philippines for 10 years “before I learned that there was any man who had married several wives.” He had not known a polygamous native—not in “Manila, Mindoro, Marinduque, and Panai”—until he got to “Ibabao and Leite” (the former is around today’s Mandaue in Cebu). Apparently, the early

native stuck to one wife: "It is certainly, however, not a general custom in the Filipinas to marry more than one wife; and even in districts where this is done the practice is by no means general." (But it seems some men had concubines.)

Chirino believed that "the practice of having several wives" belonged to the Muslims who introduced it to the Visayans of Mindanao: "I believe that this evil custom in the islands of Mindanao and Leite has been derived from this sect; they are increasing throughout the world, propagating their cursed doctrine with as much zeal and concern as we do our holy faith."

As for the women, there were reports the Visayans in Mindanao could have more than one husband. "I had, however, been once told by a Spaniard that in a certain part of Mindanao, toward Dapitan, it was the custom of the Bisayan women to marry two husbands," Chirino wrote. This would not have been due to the Muslim influence since Islam allows polygyny only to men.

While Visayans tried to procure marriage from among their class, the Tagalogs were more liberal: "they are satisfied if the wife is not of inferior rank." Marriage between relations on the first degree of consanguinity was allowed among Visayans and Tagalogs: "Uncle and niece marry as readily as do first cousins; but brother and sister, grandfather and granddaughter, or father and daughter, can in no case marry."

While there may be no "romantic conventions," there are "distinct formalities of betrothal, which are accompanied by conventional penalties, most rigorously executed." Betrothal was made even before the betrothed was born! "Here is an example: Si Apai promises to marry Cai Polosin; these married persons make an agreement with another married pair, while the wives are with child, that if the wombs of their respective wives should bear a male and a female these two children shall be joined in marriage, under penalty of 10 gold taels. This compact is solemnized by a feast, where they

eat, drink, and become intoxicated; and he who later is the occasion of breaking the contract must pay the penalty. This is betrothal.”

According to Chirino, the marriage dowry is paid by the husband, “an amount agreed upon, and fixed in accordance with his means.” In addition to the dowry, the man must give presents to the parents and relatives, “more or less according to his means.” The Jesuit father said that in Panay, he had witnessed a top Augustinian priest preside over the marriage of the son of the chief of the Tigbauan and the daughter of the chief of Oton. “I learned that besides the dowry (which was very large) and a generous offering sent to the convent, the husband bestowed, in his grandeur and munificence, presents upon the parents of the bride, her brothers and relations, and even upon the numerous slaves.”

As it turned out, this particular marriage between the children of two royal families didn’t last. According to Chirino, it appears that marriages in the early Philippines were revoked and ended in divorce “on the slightest occasion.” “If the cause of divorce is unjust, and the man parts from his wife, he loses the dowry; if it is she who leaves him, she must restore the dowry to him,” the Jesuit wrote. “But if the man has just cause for divorce and leaves her, his dowry must be restored to him; if in such a case the wife leaves him, she retains the dowry. For the husband, the adultery of his wife is sufficient ground for divorce; for the woman, just cause for divorce is more limited.” In divorce, the children would be divided equally between the spouses—ditto with enslaved people. If the couple had only one enslaved person, he would have to render one-half of his service to one and the other half to the other.

### **Ancient sex toy**

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of “romantic” practices in the pre-Hispanic Philippines is genital piercing or penal beading. Also known as “pearling,” the earliest account of it was by no less than Antonio Pigafetta, chronicler of the Magellan expedition (1519-1521). Nearly a century later,

the practice continued to thrive, as shown in Antonio Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (1609): "Men skillfully make a hole in their virile member near its head, and insert therein a serpent's head, either of metal or ivory, and fasten it with a peg of the same material passed through the hole, so that it cannot become unfastened." The practice was said to increase sexual pleasure, especially of women. The penile ring struck the first Spanish chroniclers that, nowadays, Philippine sailors are known worldwide to sport in their sex organs the "bolitas," the Spanish word for small balls or marbles.

Not surprisingly, Spanish missionary chroniclers condemned the practice, like Fr. Francisco Ignacio Alcina, a Jesuit missionary in the Eastern Visayas near the second half of the 17th century, calling it "vile and diabolic." But even secular authors condemned it. The anonymous author of the *Boxer Codex* called the practice "abominable and bestial." In the English translation of Morga's *Sucesos* by the Hakluyt Society of England in 1867, the passage about penile rings was not translated and was retained in its original Spanish; apparently, the translator found it too shocking for Victorian sensibilities.

Native women weren't as prudish or squeamish as the Victorians since men did the controversial practice to satisfy their partners. Pigafetta said the men of Cebu underwent terrible practices, which obviously involved much pain and agony because it was the wish of the "babai" (women). The missionary chroniclers said the women mocked those men who did not wear the ring, calling them sissies. The practice should show that women in the early Philippines weren't exactly docile or innocent or servile to males. Morga called native women "vicious and sensual." He noted perverseness in both early men and women for undertaking "lascivious methods" of intercourse.

To the profound shock, especially of the early missionaries, the penile ring was called by the Visayans "*sacra*." How could such a depraved and perverted practice be called "sacred"! But the word may be the Spanish



translation of “*chakra*,” the Sanskrit word for “wheel,” referring to the Hindu mystical wheel or “energy points” in the body. Obviously, what the early Filipinos called “*sacra*” was derived from “*chakra*”; in this case, it was the mystical source of sexual energy.

### **Arrival of ‘amor cortes’**

Betrothals, weddings, divorce, and kinky sex devices may give us some ideas about the “romantic practices” of the early Filipinos, but they do not constitute the love and romance we know now. Love and romance came from the European encounter starting in 1521 which was consolidated in 1565 with the return of the Spaniards. This is because the Spaniards brought with them their tales of “*amor cortes*,” or courtly love, to the Philippines.

Romantic literature and its later evolution constitute discourses that build up our knowledge and understanding of love and romance. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, “Today courtly love is practical shorthand for an understanding of love that, according to some scholars, came into being during the Middle Ages and that constituted a revolution in thought and feeling, the effects of which resonated throughout Western culture.” The Middle Ages evolved what is now known as the “philosophy of love” or what the Swiss writer Denis de Rougemont calls “love in the Western world.”

Before the Middle Ages, love poetry was pure and straightforward sensual material. According to German-American romance scholar Erich Auerbach, “...up to the time of the troubadours, love poetry in the strict sense had never expressed anything other than sensual desire in all its variants, never praised anything but the material qualities of the object; the poets of love had always been conscious of treating a light theme unrelated to man’s serious concerns and unfit for sublime poetry; they had regarded their love, real or feigned, as a mere pleasure that would soon pass, or else as a

pathological, unnatural state.” All that changed when the Middle Ages evolved a mimetic art different from that of the classical era, more or less summed up in a work by the art scholar Max Dvorak: *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art*. Pulling Europe out of the Dark Ages through its central and altogether radical teaching of the Incarnation, of God-becoming-man, and drawing from Neoplatonism with its reinterpretation of the Platonic ideas and forms from the Hellenic legacy of the collapsed Pax Romana, the Church naturalized the spirit and spiritualized earthly existence, as embodied in the literal English translation of Auerbach’s important work on Dante Alighieri—*Dante and the Earthly World*. This worldview was manifested in the literature of the Middle Ages, especially in courtly romances, by spiritualizing love and desire, reaching its apogee with *Dante’s Comedy*, now spiritualized as it were and called “divine.” Auerbach points out: “But here for the first time in Europe sensuous desire blended with the metaphysical foundations of a culture.”

This is the European-birther philosophy that governs *Florante at Laura* and continues to guide how Filipinos look at love and romance. Perhaps more than that, how they love and romance.

To be sure, in contrast to the representation of women in the early Philippines as “vicious and sensual,” these discourses consisting of courtly romances in which knights dedicate themselves to their lady loves to the point of death were largely built on the cult of the Virgin Mary, which formed a set of discourses in itself developed from early Christian times up to the Middle Ages; overall these discourses idealized, nay canonized, womanhood. Spanish missionaries introduced these discourses to the native converts, and they formed a strong part not only of their Catholic piety but of their daily life as well.

The story of F&L is by now permanently etched in our collective memory. *Florante* is tied to a tree in the dismal and dark forest of Epirus after falling into a trap by his rival Adolfo, who has taken over the Kingdom

of Albania by force. His beloved Laura has betrayed him, or so he thinks. She has indicated to Adolfo that she may yet say yes to him, but she's merely buying time to reunite with Florante or, if not, to commit suicide. But of course, Florante does not know this, so he laments her alleged perfidy while awaiting death. Two lions appear to devour him, but Aladdin slays them. The Muslim prince has been exiled from his kingdom and is nursing a broken heart since his lady love Flerida has chosen his father-king over him. Soon the two men overhear two women talking in the forest. They turn out to be Laura and Flerida. The latter says she sneaked out of the Persian kingdom dressed as a warrior to avoid marriage to Aladdin's tyrannical father. In the forest, she saw Laura about to be ravished by Adolfo. Flerida, a warrior princess if there was one, shot him down with an arrow. The two pairs of lovers are happily reunited. With Menander, Florante's friend, having overthrown the evil usurper, Florante and Laura return to Albania triumphantly while Aladdin and Flerida accept Christian baptism.

The anachronistic setting and historical background owing to the influence of chivalrous romances that were popular reading fare in the Philippines during the Spanish period, such as "Amadis de Gaula," "Las Serges de Espladian," and "Infantes de Lara." Balagtas' other known works, save perhaps for "La India Elegante y El Negrito Amante," have anachronistic settings: "Mahomet at Constanza," "Almanzor at Rosalina," and "Orosman at Zafira."

## Novel of sentiment

Another influence in F&L was the Spanish "sentimental novel," a very late medieval genre emphasizing the agonies of loving. To be distinguished from the British and Continental novels of sentiment in the 18th century (Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, Rousseau's *Julie, or the New*

*Heloise*, and Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*), the Spanish sentimental romances had come much ahead—in the late 15th century!—starting with Diego de San Pedro's *Carcel de Amor* (Prison of Love). Oddly enough, its plot is similar to F&L: it is about the youth Leriano, a prisoner in a mysterious castle, who tells the narrator that his sufferings are because of his lady love Laureola (very close to Laura!), who herself has been put in prison by her father, the king of Gaul, because of the false testimony by Leriano's rival, Persio. Leriano escapes, kills Persio, and rescues Laureola. But in a letter, she refuses to see him again. Dejected, Leriano slowly dies of melancholy, but not before praising women on his deathbed in true courtly-love fashion.

Aside from courtly romances, F&L may have been influenced heavily by Spanish sentimental romances. In fact, an English critic was impressed by “the deep and delicate melancholy of the race” that he purportedly felt from reading F&L. Of its passages, the most frequently quoted by generations of Filipinos are the lover's agony of Florante (here with the English translation by George St. Clair):

*Ay, Laurang poo'y bakit isinuyo*

*Sa iba ang sintang sa aki'y pangako,  
At pinagliluhan ang tapat na puso,  
Pinaggugulan mo ng luhan tumulo?*

*Di sinumpaan mo sa harap ng Langit  
Na di maglililo sa aking pag-ibig?  
Ipinabigay ko naman yaring dibdib,  
wala sa gunita itong masasapit.*

*Katiwala't ako't iyong kariktan  
Kapilas ng langit anaki'y matibay;  
tapat ang puso mo't di nagunamgunam  
na ang paglililo'y nasa kagandahan.*

O dear loved Laura, why let stray  
The love oft sworn to me alone?  
How this true heart could you betray  
Which oft with tears you called your own?

You swore by Heaven you'd ne'er betray  
This heart confided to your care.  
And I to give my heart away,  
Nor foresaw fortune so unfair!

Your beauty, part of heaven's own blue,  
I deemed eternal as the skies;  
As true your heart, nor then e'er knew  
That falseness dwells in beauty's eyes.

Just a while back, Florante has accepted with resignation his fate  
with Job-like resignation.

*Datapuwa't sino ang tatarok kaya  
sa mahal mong lihim, Diyos na dakila?  
Walang mangyayari sa balat ng lupa,  
di may kagalingang iyong ninanasa.*

*Ay, di saan ngayon ako mangangapit!  
Saan ipupukol ang tinangis-tangis,  
kung ayaw na ngayong dinggin ng langit  
ang sigaw ng aking malumbay na boses.*

But who, Omnipotent, dare scan  
Thy mysteries unspeakable?  
There's naught on earth that shows Thy plan,  
Design and will unbreakable.

Ah, where shall I, unhappy, cling?  
Where hurl my lamentations drear,

If heaven and earth deny this thing—  
My mournful cry of grief to hear?

Florante asks God to give him the consoling thought of his beloved  
Laura.

*Kung siya mong ibig na ako'y magdusa,  
Langit na mataas, aking mababata,  
isagi mo lamang sa puso ni Laura  
ako'y minsan-minsang mapag-alaala.*

*At dito sa laot ng dusa't hinagpis,  
malawak na luhang aking tinatawid,  
gunita ni Laura sa naabang ibig.  
siya ko na lamang ligaya sa dibdib.*

If that I suffer be thy will,  
Then may thy will, O Heaven, be done!  
But make my Laura's heart beat still,  
From time to time, for this sad one.

And on this vast and troubled sea,  
Whose waves of grief I have to best,  
This thought—"Laura thinks of me"—  
Shall be the sole joy of this breast.

Memories of Laura are a balm to his lamentable plight.

*Kung apuhapin ko sa sariling isip  
ang suyuan namin ng pili kong ibig,  
ang pagluha niya kung ako'y may hapis,  
nagiging ligaya yaring madlang sakit.*

If I think o'er, deep in my mind,  
Our loves, when she was still my love.  
Her grief, when fate was all unkind,  
My heart from grief to joy could move.

But like Leriano pining for Laureola in *Carcel de Amor*, the balm of her memory turns to the hateful thought of Laura in the arms of Adolfo. And like Leriano, Florante would rather fade away in lethal melancholy.

*Nguni, sa aba ko! sawing kapalaran!  
Ano pang halaga ng gayong suyuan,  
kung ang sing-ibig ko'y sa katahimikan  
ay humilig na sa ibang kandungan?*

*Sa sinapupunan ng Kondo Adolfo  
aking natatanaw si Laurang sinta ko;  
kamataya'y nahan ang dating bangis mo  
nang di ko damdamin ang hirap na ito?*

But, o unhappy! erring fate!  
What worth are love thoughts now to me,  
When in the lap of him I hate.  
Resting in peace my love I see?

In Count Adolph's own evil arms,  
My lovely Laura now I see;  
Death, where are now they grimmest charms,  
That I from torment freed may be?

Aladdin, the Persian prince, shares Florante's sentiment. His father put him in prison, blamed him for allegedly abandoning the Crotona campaign, making way for its retaking by the Christian armies of Florante and Menandro. But his father may be just looking for an excuse to snatch Flerida from his son. Pardoned by the king, on the pleading of Flerida who's promised to marry him, Aladdin has been banished instead. He roams the forest of Epirus, a dejected victim of love just like Florante. Muslim prince and Christian noble become comrades in heartbreak.

*Magsama na kitang sa luha'y maagnas,  
yamang pinag-isa ng masamang palad;  
sa gubat na ito'y hintayin ang wakas  
ng pagkabuhay tang nalipos na hirap.*

We two, whom tears annihilate,  
Are one, joined now in misery.  
Let's wait here for the final date  
Of lives by Fate shaped cruelly.

### **Muslims, women, and OFWs**

Modern critics and readers are hard-pressed to understand why F&L portrays the Muslim Aladdin sympathetically. But German Romance language scholar E.R. Curtius wrote that Islam had also “developed an ideal of knighthood, which exhibits ‘striking coincidences’ with that of the Christian West.” It likewise produced “a theory of courtly love.” Perhaps this explains why the Christian Florante and Laura have a parallel Muslim set of lovers in Aladdin and Flerida. In addition, at the height of the Reconquista in the 14th and 15th centuries, a new type of ballad arose, the “romance de Morisco” or Moorish ballad, which didn’t portray the Muslims as a fanatical, bloodthirsty people but as high-spirited and chivalrous, like Aladdin and Flerida.

But perhaps even more confounding is that Laura and Flerida save Florante and Aladdin. Prepared like Leriano to slink away to slow death by melancholy, the miserable pair of knights is stemmed from their pensive and somewhat suicidal sadness by the appearance in the forest of their lady loves, one of whom (Flerida) is attired as a warrior and in fact, has saved Laura from violation. Both women portray grim determination to maintain their dignity and stay faithful to their beloved. As Flerida reveals, she’s driven in her quest to be with her love:



*Isang hatinggabing kadilima'y lubha,  
Lihim na naghugos ako sa bintana;  
walang kinasama kundi nga ang nasa,  
matunton ang sinta kong nasaang lupa.*

One murky night, when all was still,  
I quietly climbed o'er the wall,  
Alone, but upheld by my will  
To find my love, my life, my all.

F&L closes predictably with a happy ending, but generations of Filipinos will always remember it as having the most passionate lines to express love's wages and the lover's agony. For example, overseas Filipino workers – “*mga bagong bayani*,” as the tired government propaganda calls them—could relate to the following passage, separated as they are from their families because of the diaspora:

*May sakit pa kayang lalalo ng tindi  
sa ang sumisinta'y mawalay na kasi?  
Guniguni lamang, di na ang mangyari,  
sukat ikalugmok ng pusong bayani.*

Is there on earth a fiercer pain  
Than absence from the one we love?  
Just thinking of it breaks again  
The brave heart that no tears could move.

“*Mga bagong bayani*,” indeed.

## **Love in *Noli Me Tangere***

*Florante at Laura* was published in 1838, so by the time Jose Rizal was born in 1861, it was considered a best seller and a classic. In fact, Rizal carried an edition of it during his travels in Europe and recommended it to

the Austrian Filipinologist Ferdinand Blumentritt. He even included excerpts of the Tagalog masterpiece in his celebrated *Noli Me Tangere* (NMT). The novel, of course, is not romantic but “romanticist,” that is, part of the Age of Romanticism, the literary, artistic, musical, and intellectual movement in Europe in the first half of the 19th century that exalted emotion and individualism, nature and the past, and the medieval rather than the classical, the last attribute linking it to the age of chivalry and courtly love. In fact, the novel is a modern evolution in prose of the metrical romances. The novel is called *roman* in France, Italy, and Germany. Not surprisingly, the first modern novel—and to many critics, the greatest novel of all time—Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), parodies the chivalric and courtly romances. It portrays in a farcical fashion in the first book (1605), and through philosophical discourse in the second (1615), the age-old dialectic between the ideal and the actual, dream and reality.

It would seem, in fact, that in Rizal’s novel, Ibarra’s lady love, Maria Clara, is straight out of a medieval romance. (At least they sound so in the English translation by Derbyshire.) Even before they meet after he returns from Europe, he’s filled with a magnificent vision of her beauty:

... he would have admired one of those fantastic visions, one of those magical apparitions that are sometimes seen in great theaters of Europe, in which to the muffled melodies of an orchestra, it was seen appearing amid a shower of light, a cascade of diamonds and gold, in an oriental decoration, wrapped in vaporous gauze, a deity, a sylph that advances without almost touching the ground, surrounded and accompanied by a luminous nimbus: in its presence flowers sprout, dance romps, harmonies awaken, and choruses of devils, nymphs, satyrs, geniuses, *zagalas*, angels and shepherds dance, wave tambourines, they make evolutions and deposit at the feet of the goddess each a tribute. Ibarra would have seen a very beautiful, slender

young woman, dressed in the picturesque costume of the daughters of the Philippines, in the center of a semicircle made up of all kinds of people, gesturing and moving with animation...

Maria Clara's beauty and purity are exalted:

Doña Victorina arranged in the young woman's magnificent hair a string of pearls and diamonds that reflected the most beautiful colors of the prism. She was white, too white perhaps; her eyes, which were almost always lowered, showed her most pure soul when she raised them, and when she smiled and revealed her small white teeth, one would say that a rose is simply a vegetable, and ivory, an elephant's tusk. Between the transparent tissue of the piña and around her white and shapely neck, the merry eyes of a necklace of brilliants winked, as the Tágalos say.

When the two finally meet after years of separation in Chapter 7 ("Idyll in the Azotea"), Maria Clara asks him chidingly, "Have you always thought of me? Have you never forgotten me on all your travels in the great cities among so many beautiful women?" And Ibarra replies:

Could I forget you? ... Could I be faithless to my oath, my sacred oath? Do you remember that stormy night when you saw me weeping alone by the side of my dead mother and, drawing near to me, you put your hand on my shoulder, that hand which for so long a time you had not allowed me to touch, saying to me, 'You have lost your mother while I never had one,' and you wept with me? You loved her and she looked upon you as a daughter. Outside it rained and the lightning flashed, but within I seemed to hear music and to see a smile on the pallid face of the dead. Oh, that

my parents were alive and might behold you now! I then caught your hand along with the hand of my mother and swore to love you and to make you happy, whatever fortune Heaven might have in store for me; and that oath, which has never weighed upon me as a burden, I now renew!

## **Maria Clara derided, defended**

Convent-bred and with old people describing her as looking “like the Virgin,” Maria Clara in the modern era has become an object of ridicule, a laughing stock, the epitome of everything that’s wrong and laughable about Philippine women. She’s been called a “weakling” prone to fainting, a “clinging vine,” a “cloistered” nun-type shrinking at the slightest contact with the outside world. Nick Joaquin called all of this “the blackening of Maria Clara,” quite similar to “*la leyenda negra*” or “the black legend” of Spain allegedly having mercilessly oppressed the Philippines throughout the four centuries of its colonization. Joaquin said that nowhere in the two novels of Rizal is Maria Clara described as having fainting spells; she, in fact is portrayed as a very strong girl who’s not repelled by the sight of a leper and, instead, so moved by compassion that, because she has no money with her, gives him the only possession she has with her, a jeweled reliquary given her by her father.

When Ibarra is excommunicated, she’s not afraid to be seen by his side. She stands by her man. In the penultimate part of the novel, when she discovers a friar sired her, she evinces strength of character. She does not faint. Nick Joaquin eloquently rises to her defense:

The Maria Clara of Rizal, a mere girl, is subjected to the most awful and brutal and staggering revelation imaginable—a revelation that could crush a mature man. She staggers, but she isn’t crushed; she stands up under the blow. Is that the ‘spineless’ woman she is now declared to be? ... To save her lover, and to save her mother’s name, she agrees to marry, in cold blood, a

man she does not love, even at the risk of inviting the contempt of the lover she's trying to save. This, remember, is the decision of a mere chit of a girl ... When she learns that her lover is dead, she defies even her real father: she will marry no one, she will enter a nunnery. You may question her decision, but you cannot question she has a mind of her own and that she seems capable of bending the will of others to her own. Where, then, is the slave and chattel of men in this proud, passionate girl?

### **Apotheosis of Maria Clara**

Earlier, in the azotea scene, Ibarra insists before Maria Clara that he had always thought of her in all his European peregrinations. That memory of her had served to check the sweet nectar of oblivion of the fatherland that became the fate of the Lotus eaters in Homer's "Odyssey."

Could I forget you? The thought of you has ever been with me, strengthening me amid the dangers of travel, and has been a comfort to my soul's loneliness in foreign lands. The thoughts of you have neutralized the lotus-effect of Europe, which erases from the memories of so many of our countrymen the hopes and misfortunes of our fatherland.

Ibarra said that in his travels, he saw her figure in his dreams standing by the shores of Manila, "a true daughter of the Philippines."

In dreams I saw you standing on the shore at Manila, gazing at the far horizon wrapped in the warm light of the early dawn. I heard the slow, sad song that awoke in me sleeping affections and called back to the memory of my heart the first years of our childhood, our joys, our pleasures, and all that happy past which you gave life to while you were in our town. It seemed to me that you were the fairy, the spirit, the

poetic incarnation of my fatherland, beautiful, unaffected, lovable, frank, a true daughter of the Philippines, that beautiful land that unites with the imposing virtues of the mother country, Spain, the admirable qualities of a young people, as you unite in your being all that is beautiful and lovely, the inheritance of both races, so indeed the love of you and that of my fatherland have become fused into one.

As the long passage shows, Maria Clara has assumed an apotheosis in the imaginings of Ibarra. The fatherland and the mother country Spain appear to meld in her person. She becomes a singular figure uniting past, present, and future, heritage, and history, desire and aspiration, faith and hope. As an object of exaltation in medieval romances, the lady love has become an icon of a bigger court, a larger arena. From the object of chivalry and gallantry, lady love has become the incarnation of country and nation.



# APPENDIX

## THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE WRITING AND LITERARY STUDIES: THE STORY SO FAR

by Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo

### **A Backward Glance**

*This history of the Center is reconstructed from files found in the original office of the CCWS in 2012.*

In July or August 1999, Dr. Ophelia A. Dimalanta was appointed director of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Studies (CCWS), and the following received appointments:

Joselito B. Zulueta – Deputy Director  
Erlita Mendoza – Administrative Secretary  
Ferdinand B. Lopez – Program Officer  
Francisco Sionil Jose – Senior Associate  
Cirilo F. Bautista – Senior Associate  
Rebecca Añonuevo – Junior Associate  
Michael Corroza – Junior Associate  
Lourd Ernest de Veyra – Junior Associate  
Ramil Digal Gulle – Junior Associate  
Ralph Semino Galán – Junior Associate

(There are no files covering the Center's manpower or activities from 2000-2004. Ms. Anna C. Nicolas, secretary of the Center, believes them to have been destroyed by flood waters during Typhoon Ondoy.)

In June 2005, the following were appointed for one year: Cirilo F. Bautista – Senior Consultant-Researcher; and Jose Victor Torres, Eros Atalia, Carlos Luz, Nerisa del Carmen Guevara, and Lourde De Veyra – Junior Consultant-Researchers; Paolo Eric Melendez – Program Officer, and Alfred Martin Dimalanta – PR and Marketing Officer.

In 2006, Mr. Melendez resigned. Lourde de Veyra was replaced by Manolito Sulit. Dr. Dimalanta restored the titles of Senior Associate and Junior Associate and dropped the Consultant-Researcher title. She added Igan D/Bayan and Carlomar Daoana to the list of Junior Associates. She also restored the post of Program Officer and appointed Irene Lising to the post. These persons were given one-year appointments.

In 2007, Dr. Bautista and Messrs. Atalia, Daoana, Sulit, and Dimalanta were renewed for one semester.

In May 2008, Dr. Bautista and Messrs. Atalia, Sulit, Daoana, and Dimalanta (whose appointments were on “hold-over status”) received letters from the Rector, Rev. Fr. Roland v. de la Rosa, O.P., thanking them for their services and informing them that all new appointments were being “held in abeyance.”

In July 2008, Dr. Dimalanta was appointed Writer-in-Residence.

(There are no further records about manpower appointments to the CCWS.)

## **Revival and Reorganization**

### Prelude

In the second term of AY 2011-2012, while I was still director of the UST Publishing House, I was informed by then-Rector, Rev. Fr. Rolando de la Rosa, O.P., of his intention to revive the CCWS, which had become



dormant, and to appoint me its director. I was instructed to choose from among the Center's former Associates those I felt should be re-appointed, and to select one from among them to serve as my assistant.

Accordingly, I named Ralph Galán as my assistant, and Lito B. Zulueta, Eros Atalia, and Nerisa Guevara as Associates. Dean Anthony Vasco of the Faculty of Arts and Letters (to which the old Center had belonged) promptly gave those faculty members ARA [academic and research activity] loads effective the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester, AY 2012-2013, so they could begin working even before I was myself appointed, and instructed me to hold a UST Writers' Workshop.

In the summer of 2012, we held a UST Writers' Workshop in Baguio sponsored by the Dean's Office. The Writing Fellows were selected by ourselves from among faculty members known to have an interest in writing.

#### Appointment of Director and Resident Fellows and Submission of Vision/ Mission Statement

On June 15, 2012, the new Rector, Rev. F. Herminio Dagohoy, O.P., appointed me director of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Studies and approved my proposal to change its name to UST CENTER FOR CREATIVE WRITING AND LITERARY STUDIES (CCWLS) and to change the title of the Associates to "Resident Fellows." He also informed me that the Center would be under his office.

On July 17, 2012, I wrote to the Rev. Fr. Rector recommending the appointments of Associate Prof. Nerisa Gevara, Asst. Prof. Eros Atalia, and Mr. Joselito Zulueta as Fellows (instead of Associates) and of Assoc. Prof. Ralph Galan as Assistant Director.

After our office's teambuilding activity in Tagaytay City, held on December 15-16, 2012, I again wrote to the Father Rector submitting my

Vision/Mission Statement and recommending a full complement of the officially re-established UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies, effective June 2013, as follows:

Assoc. Prof. Ralph Semino Galán – Assistant Director and Resident Fellow

Asst. Prof. Eros Atalia – Resident Fellow

Assoc. Prof. Nerisa del Carmen Guevara – Resident Fellow

Mr. Joselito B. Zulueta – Resident Fellow

Mr. Joselito D. De Los Reyes – Resident Fellow

Mr. Chuckberry J. Pascual – Resident Fellow

Assoc. Prof. Ferdinand Lopez – Resident Fellow

Ms. Jaymee Siao – Resident Fellow

Prof. Rebecca Añonuevo – Associate

Prof. Michael M. Coroza – Associate

Assoc. Prof. Oscar Campomanes – Associate

### New Offices at Benavides Building

The new offices of the UST CCWLS in the Benavides Building were selected by the Office of the Rector and blessed by the Rev. Fr. Herminio Dagohoy, O.P., UST Rector Magnificus, on January 22, 2019.

## **Vision/Mission**

**Vision:** The UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies (UST CCWLS) is an integral part of the University of Santo Tomas, and is committed to furthering the University's objectives as a globally recognized Catholic institution of higher learning. The UST CCWLS envisions itself

as an academy of letters, dedicated to the reaffirmation of the university's important role in the nation's literary history through the creation of a culture of literary excellence within the Thomasian community, and through the cultivation of an awareness of the University's rich literary traditions.

**Mission:** As an academy of letters, the UST CCWLS's specific mission is to gather within itself the best literary talents among the university's faculty members who will serve as a support group for each other while nurturing younger writers and literary scholars. It will also be a showcase of the University's gifted creative writers and literary scholars. The work done by the UST CCWLS will be the University's contribution to the continuing development of Philippine literature.

## Organizational Structure

[\*Note: The position of Co-Director, which was created by the Rev. Fr. Richard Ang, O.P., Rector Magnificus of UST in the third quarter of 2022, is not yet reflected in this profile of the Center.]

### Director

*Qualifications* - The Director must:

- ☪ be a nationally recognized writer whose accomplishments (as reflected in his/her published works and literary awards)\*, leadership, and dedication will serve as an inspiration to Thomasian writers, and will attract members of the larger literary community to collaborate with the Center;
- ☪ preferably have a Ph.D. in Creative Writing, Literature, or a related field, experience in running a creative writing center in an academic

setting, and experience in teaching creative writing and/or literature on the undergraduate and graduate levels;

- 💡 occupy a position of importance and play an active role in the larger literary community.

(\*The Director must have published at least three books and won at least two national awards.)

*Responsibilities* – The Director will:

- 💡 report to the Rector of the University;
- 💡 determine the objectives and goals of the UST CCWLS and ensure that they are in accordance with the University's vision/mission, and the Center's own vision/mission and mandate;
- 💡 be responsible for the overall administration and operation of the Center, including the preparation of its annual budget and approval of requisitions;
- 💡 conceptualize and supervise the implementation of all the Center's programs, projects, and activities;
- 💡 sit as a de-facto member of the UST Publishing House's Editorial Board and be responsible for selecting the reviewers/evaluators of literary or literary scholarship materials submitted for publication;
- 💡 hold regular office hours as required by University policies; and
- 💡 build linkages with organizations of writers and literary scholars, both national and international.

## Assistant Director

*Qualifications* – The Assistant Director must:

- ☞ be selected from among the UST CCWLS's Resident Fellows and have the required qualifications; in addition to which, he/she must
- ☞ have an M.A. in Creative Writing, Literature, or a related field; with some experience as Resident Fellow or Associate Fellow of a creative writing center in an academic setting; and some experience in teaching creative writing or literature on the undergraduate and/or graduate levels;
- ☞ preferably, have won literary awards; and
- ☞ be an active member of the larger literary community.

*Responsibilities* – The Assistant Director will:

- ☞ report to the Director;
- ☞ hold regular office hours as required by University policies;
- ☞ assist the Director in the administration and operation of the Center, particularly the preparation of its annual budget;
- ☞ coordinate the work of the Resident Fellows and Associate Fellows who are in charge of the Center's different programs, projects, and activities;
- ☞ liaise between the Center and other units/offices in the University with whom the Center has transactions;
- ☞ represent the Director in activities within and outside the University when the Director is unable to be present; and

- ☞ attend activities conducted by other creative writing centers and publishing houses, such as book launchings, literary readings, etc.

### Resident Fellows

*Qualifications:* The Resident Fellows must:

- ☞ be full-time regular faculty members of the University;
- ☞ have published at least one book, or have work(s) produced on stage or in film;
- ☞ preferably have won literary award(s); and
- ☞ be active members or be willing to become an active member of the larger literary community.

*Responsibilities* – The Resident Fellows will:

- ☞ report to the Director and Assistant Director;
- ☞ supervise the programs, projects, or activities assigned to them;
- ☞ serve as members of the teaching panel during the annual Writers' Workshop held in Baguio City each summer;
- ☞ serve as Issue Editor or Managing Editor for the literary journal *Tomás* when called upon;
- ☞ assist the Director and Assistant Director with other programs, projects, or activities as needed;
- ☞ report to the CCWLS office at least three times a week;
- ☞ submit a written self-evaluation (describing their literary accomplishments/activities) at the end of each academic year, which will serve as basis for the Director's recommendation of the renewal of his/her appointment.

### Associate Fellows

*Qualifications* – same as those of the Resident Fellows, except that the Associate Fellows must be part-time faculty members of the University.

*Responsibilities* – The Associate Fellows will:

- 🕯 attend regular and/or special meetings of the UST CCWLS;
- 🕯 be present at as many UST CCWLS-sponsored activities as possible;
- 🕯 serve on the teaching panel of the annual Writers' Workshop and as Issue Editor or Managing Editor of the literary journal if required.

## **Programs, Projects, and Activities**

### UST National Writers' Workshop

The UST National Writers' Workshop (UST NWW) is the oldest (dating to the term of the Center's founding director, Prof. Ophelia A. Dimalanta) and most important of the Center's regular programs. It is designed to improve the writing skills of Thomasian writers (faculty members, graduate students, and alumni) as well as qualified non-Thomasian writers. Each year, it accepts applications for 15 fellowships to the workshop and chooses the most deserving. The teaching panel consists of the Center's Director, Assistant Director, and Resident and Associate Fellows. In recent years, senior guest panelists have also been invited under the sponsorship of UST's school paper *The Varsitarian*. Pre-pandemic, the NWW was held in Ridgewood Residences, Baguio City. It also had an outreach component. Members of the teaching staff would take turns delivering lectures pro bono in an Outreach Seminar on Creative Writing and the Teaching of Literature in collaboration with a partner institution in Baguio City (e.g., UP

Baguio, University of Baguio, University of the Cordilleras, Benguet State University). Since 2020, the NWW has been held online via Zoom.

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

*Tomás* is the official, double-blind, peer-reviewed literary journal of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies. It publishes both local and international professional creative writers and literary critics. It comes out annually. Since the CCWLS was revived in 2012, it has published 16 issues. All 16 issues are available online. *Tomás* has both a print edition and an online edition. The positions of Issue Editor and Managing Editor are rotated among the Resident Fellows.

### Sulat Tomasino

Sulat Tomasino (previously, the UST Thomasian Undergraduate Writers' Workshop) is an annual program of the UST CCWLS designed to raise the standards of campus journalism. It invites editors-in-chief and literary editors of the undergraduate journals of the various faculties and colleges of the Pontifical University, as well as from other DOMNET academic institutions and the Dominican Studentate.

### USTinig CCWLS Podcasts: Reading Texts and Discussion Matters

This is the newest of the Center's programs, initiated when the pandemic hit the country, and there was a need for literary programs that did not require face-to-face engagement. It is a hybrid program consisting of literary readings ("Reading Texts") alternating with discussions ("Discussion Matters") featuring writers in the news. The most successful of these



episodes, in terms of audience, were the ones featuring National Artist Ricky Lee, historian Ambeth Ocampo, and musician and writer Lourd de Veyra. Younger writers and artists are a priority since the online audience profile is predominantly young. It is held monthly.

### USTingan Roundtable Discussions

USTingan is a bi-annual program consisting of informal forums or roundtable discussions on contemporary issues in Philippine literature and popular culture. It is designed to encourage exchanges between Thomasian writers, literary scholars, and students with writers and academics from outside the University. Invited guest speakers come from the top of their respective professions. Among the most successful of these were “Popular Song Writing as Literature” (featuring Ely Buendia, Lourd de Veyra, and Ebe Dancel), “Literary Journalism in the Age of Fake News” (featuring Howie Severino and Joel Pablo Salud), “The Graphic Novel, Graphic Fiction, and the Comics” (featuring Manix Abrera, Carlo Vergara, and Carljoe Javier).

For the last two years, Asst. Director Ralph Semino Galán, who handles this program, focused on literature from the regions. This became possible because everything was done online. These episodes enjoyed a much higher viewership, either because Zoom is more convenient for everyone, or because audiences in the regions are particularly gratified at seeing their own writers being featured.

### UST Authors Series

This program is the showcase for new work by the Resident Fellows and Associate Fellows of the UST CCWLS. Each episode consists of a book launch and either a lecture by or conversation with the author(s) featured.

This program is held in collaboration with the UST Publishing House. Since the Resident Fellows regularly publish books, we do not run out of material for this program.

### UST CCWLS International Writers and Scholars Series

This program consists of formal lectures by and informal conversations with visiting international writers as guests of the UST CCWLS. It was on hold for a while due to the pandemic. But it is on track again with the visit to UST of Professor Robin Hemley (sometimes referred to as the Godfather of Creative Nonfiction) on November 29, 2022.

### CCWLS Publicity Program

Prior to the pandemic, the Center kept clippings of all articles on its activities published in the national print media and in UST'S *Academia* and *The Varsitarian*. These were all filed in clear books for easy reference. This program relied on extensive media coverage through the connections with national media of some of the Resident Fellows, like Res. Fellow Lito Zulueta, Res. Fellow Joselito De Los Reyes, and Res. Fellow Jenny Ortuoste. The CCWLS also has a Facebook Page. Announcements about the Center's programs, projects, and activities are regularly posted. So are updates about the accomplishments of the Resident Fellows, alumni of the M.A. Creative Writing Program, and former Writing Fellows of the UST National Writers' Workshops. Res. Fellow Dawn Marfil Burris is in charge of this.

### Outreach Seminars on Creative Writing and the Teaching of Literature in Quezon Province

Aside from the annual outreach seminar in Baguio, annual outreach seminars have also been held in various learning institutions in Quezon Province. This is in conjunction with the annual team-building and planning seminar of the UST CCWLS, held at Batis Aramis Resort and Hotel in Lucban, Quezon Province. This was arranged every year by Res. Fellow Joselito De Los Reyes. This program is on hold since the pandemic.

### Auction for a Cause

This is a special project which we put in place when the pandemic affected some Thomasian writers. The idea is to hold an online auction of works of art or literary memorabilia donated by writers or artists to raise funds for Thomasian writers who need it. Thus far we have had five such auctions.

### **Collaborative Activities with Other UST Units and with Other Institutions**

Exigencies of time and space require that I merely enumerate these activities. And they are too many for me to mention all of them. So, these are some of them:

- 💡 UST The Varsitarian Scholarships for M.A. Creative Writing Students (ongoing)
- 💡 “Making Love in 14 Collaborative Acts: an Interdisciplinary Celebration of the Arts,” 2013

- 💡 The 4<sup>th</sup> Philippine International Literary Festival “Text and the City” organized by the National Book Development Board (NBDB), 2013
- 💡 National Artist Virgilio S. Almario Lecture and Book Launch, 2014
- 💡 “Pusong Walang Pag-ibig: Ang Pagtatatwa sa Wika”: Isang Panayam ni Dr. Soledad Reyes, 2014
- 💡 “Thomasians in Love: a post-Valentine Celebration of the Arts,” in collaboration with the Conservatory of Music, the College of Fine Arts and Design, The Varsitarian, the UST Publishing House, and the Faculty of Civil Law, 2015
- 💡 “Shakespeare in Today’s Japanese Pop Culture” lecture featuring Dr. Yukari Yosiahara of the University of Tsukuba, 2015
- 💡 Testimonial dinner to honor Thomasian National Artist Cirilo F. Bautista, 2015
- 💡 “Against the Grain: Dissidence, Dissonance, and Difference,” an international conference and literary festival organized by the Asia Pacific Writers and Translators Series (APWT) in collaboration with UST, UP [University of the Philippines] and DLSU [De La Sall University], 2015
- 💡 Nobel Laureate Mario Vargas Llosa Visit to UST, at the invitation of the UST CCWLS Director, with the support of the Rev. Fr. Rector, 2016
- 💡 “Banyuhay: Bagong Anyo, Bagong Buhay,” an exhibit of art works used as covers for books, and a performance night consisting of literary readings and musical performances in collaboration with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2017

- 💡 The 2019 Adrian Cristobal Lecture: “Will there be Space for the Practice and Study of Literature in the Near Future?,” delivered by the UST CCWLS Director, 2019
- 💡 “Weaving Words into Worlds,” 2019 Philippine Readers and Writers Festival (in collaboration with the National Book Development Board)
- 💡 Senior Visiting Fellows:
  - 💡 National Artist Geminio H. Abad, 2016 and 2017
  - 💡 Award-winning Filipino-American Poet Eugene Gloria and Fullbright Lecturer, 2017
  - 💡 Award-winning writer, actor, director of stage, film and TV Bernardo Bernardo, 2016

## The Resident Fellows

The Center’s Fellows are full-time faculty members who have published at least one book or written a play or film script that has been produced on stage or for the movies; are willing to take on the responsibilities of being part of the CCWLS; and are active members, or willing to become members, of the country’s larger literary community. Associate Fellows are part-time faculty members who have the same qualifications as the Resident Fellows.

The following are the Center’s current Resident Fellows:

Associate Prof. Ralph Semino Galán (Assistant Director);

Prof. Dr. John Jack G. Wigley;

Prof. Dr. Augusto Antonio A. Aguila;

Prof. Dr. Joyce L. Arriola;  
Prof. Dr. Ma. Luisa Torres Reyes;  
Associate Prof. Dr. Joselito D. De Los Reyes;  
Associate Prof. Dr. Chuckberry J. Pascual;  
Associate Prof. Joselito B. Zulueta;  
Associate Prof. Nerisa del Carmen Guevara;  
Asst. Prof. Jennifer Rebecca L. Ortuoste;  
Asst. Prof. Ma. Ailil B. Alvarez;  
Asst. Prof. Dawn Nicole Marfil Burris;  
Asst. Prof. Benedict Parfan;  
Asst. Prof. Paul A. Castillo;  
Mr. Jose P. Mojica;  
Mr. Mark Anthony S. Angeles;  
Mr. Joel M. Toledo.

The Resident Fellows are all very productive in terms of their own literary and scholarly/critical work – they regularly publish books and/or stories, creative nonfiction, poetry, or plays in literary journals, magazines, book anthologies, and scholarly papers in peer-reviewed journals. They are also very active and cooperative within the Center, being high-energy, self-motivated individuals who work well as a team, stepping up for each other when needed, and doing everything cheerfully and efficiently. My policy has been to rotate the different programs and projects among them so that all of them can manage all of these programs and projects. And I am pleased to report that all of them, even during these depressing times, have stayed the course.

## Senior Visiting Fellows

### National Artist for Literature Gemino H. Abad

Upon the invitation of the CCWLS, UP University Professor Emeritus Gémino H. Abad—now a National Artist for Literature—taught a Poetry Writing Workshop course in 2016 and 2017, as Senior Professorial Lecturer at the UST Graduate School. He also served as Senior Visiting Fellow at the CCWLS and has been a regular Senior Guest Panelist at the UST National Writers' Workshop for almost a decade.

### Eugene Gloria

Award-winning Filipino-American poet, Eugene Gloria, professor of English at DePauw University, received a Fulbright Lecturer Award to travel to Manila in 2017, where he was hosted by the CCWLS. He taught a Poetry Workshop course as Associate Professorial Lecturer of the UST Graduate School, and served as a CCWLS Senior Visiting Fellow. He also delivered a lecture on the craft of writing poetry at Benavides Building as part of the International Writers and Scholars Series, a regular program of the CCWLS.

### Bernardo Bernardo

At the invitation of the CCWLS, award-winning writer, actor, and director of stage, film, and television Bernardo Bernardo taught a course on Playwriting as Professorial Lecturer of the UST Graduate School while serving as Senior Visiting Fellow of the CCWLS. He also participated in various activities of the Center, including serving on the teaching panel of the National Writers' Workshop held in Baguio, mentoring pro bono the Teatro Tomasino, an undergraduate theatre group of the Faculty of Arts

and Letters, and directing the stage performance “Banyuhay: Bagong Anyo, Bagong Buhay.”

## Planning for the Next Decade

Shortly before the closing of the term, toward the end of October 2022, the Center held an in-person planning meeting in a seminar room at the Buenaventura Garcia Paredes, O.P. (BGPOP) Building at UST to discuss directions for the coming decade. It was an all-day meeting with meals served in the dining room of the University Hotel, 1611, sponsored by the Rector’s Office. A good way to end a year—no, almost three years—of not having been able to work face-to-face, at a time when the support of friends and colleagues was most needed.

We are deeply grateful for the University’s support of all our endeavors. We thank especially the Office of the Rector, the Office of the Vice-Rector, the Office of the Secretary-General, and the Office of the Vice-Rector for Finance. And we hope that we may continue to count on their guidance and support to enable us to fulfill our mandate to strengthen the literary culture not just of UST, but of the larger community, and thus contribute to the development of a national literature.

