

INTRODUCTION

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The last three issues of our journal, *Tomás*, were monographs. Volume 4, Issue 1 2023-2324 was *Pagpakò ang Pangako: Isang Kalipunan ng Tula* by Paul Alcosoba Castillo. Volume 2, Issue 2 2023-2024 was *Tropical Psycho: Tales of Darkness and Terror* by George Gonzaga Deoso. Volume 5, Issue 1, 2024-2025 is *Pag-alagwa sa Hawla: Pagkatha ng Makabagong Kuwentong Hayop* by Kisha Aleena H. Abuda.

With Volume 5, Issue 2, 2024-2025 we return to a regular issue, featuring both critical essays and creative works. We have eight critical essays three poetry suites, one short story and one creative nonfiction piece.

We begin this Introduction with the critical works.

“Archive on Fire: Spectral Memories and Digital Phantoms” by Ramon Guillermo is an insightful and original reflection on loss and recuperation. Recalling the burning down of the UP Faculty Center in 2016, the author describes his personal experience in terms of the so-called “spectrality of archives.” He recalls that, when UP faculty members and staff were allowed to enter what remained of FC, he declined to do so. “I feared finding something which would be the final and unequivocal evidence of my personal archive’s total destruction.” He preferred, instead, to recall the last time he had been in his office, the evening before the fire. His incinerated library had thus become for him, a ghost archive, a spectral archive, a

reminder that “what is now left is not everything that *was*.” Guillermo then draws an analogy between the spectrality of physical archives, and the increasing digitization of information storage (taking off from Walter Benjamin’s thoughts on the difference between the informational and the experiential relationship with the world), and speculates on what happens when our emerging experiential relationship with digital objects also enters into spectrality.

In “Modernismo and the Dream of a National Language in Recto’s *Bajo de los Cocoteros*, Joselito Zulueta situates Recto’s *Modernismo* poetics “within the broader discourse of national formation, aligning with Benedict Anderson’s argument that nations emerge through shared linguistic and cultural identity.” Referencing Roman Jakobson’s distinctions between metaphor and metonymy in the analysis of “Recto’s poetic language, he demonstrates how Recto’s poetic language bridges abstract nationalism with practical nation-building.” His poetry is both a “critique of colonial linguistic hegemony and a prophetic call for a national language,” thus an “intellectual architect of Philippine nationhood” decades before the 1935 Constitution.

Isaiah Garcia’s “Of Cross and Circles: A Catholic Reading of FH Batacan’s *Smaller and Smaller Circles*” seeks to contribute to the studies on the presence of a Philippine Catholic literary tradition.” As the author notes, the great influence of the Catholic Church in Philippine life and society is undeniable. Yet very few literary scholars and critics have explored the possibility of a Philippine Catholic literary tradition. Taking off from Joshua Hren and Dana Goia, he offers a definition of the “Catholic imagination,” and proceeds to analyze Batacan’s crime novel focusing on the concepts of incarnationism and sacramentality, and how these are embodied by both the novel’s characters and its themes.

“On the Inferno Intertext: The Challenges and Rigors of Translating Augusto Antonio Aguila’s Short Fiction, ‘Carnival of Hate’” by Jan Raen

Carlo M. Ledesma and Aldrin E. Manalastas discusses the difficulties of translating into Filipino a work whose agenda itself was quite ambitious. Aguila took off from Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, and imagined a modernized Virgil taking the story's protagonist on a tour of the circles of hell, using contemporary casual, bawdy, vulgar English prose, to create a short story which might be described as dark comedy.

Roland Tolentino's "Ang Pag-akda ng Katha, Pagkatha ng Akda ni Ricky Lee" surveys the National Artist's contribution to Philippine literature. According to Tolentino, Lee drew on the traditions he had inherited from the writers who preceded him, made them his own, and enriched them. His focus was on the downtrodden and oppressed masses. But his style was never over-emotional or heavy. Tolentino sees Lee's work as having possibly been influenced by new journalism of the sort that Jose Lacaba produced in *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage: the First Quarter Storm and Related Events*. It presents its subject matter as evidence and representation of the nation's numerous problems. And yet, the stories contain a note of hope and triumph.

Soledad Reyes' "Ang Pambansang Gunita sa Nobela (1907-1975)" revisits some Filipino novels published in the 20th century, to demonstrate how their plots play out against a backdrop of national events, like the two wars in the 19th century, the establishment of American rule over the country, its socio-political effects on the life of Filipinos, the struggles of the modern age, the protest movements of the 60s and the 70s. Thus, they serve as examples of how literary texts reflect and enable a national memory that unites and strengthens the nation."

Merdeka D. Morales' "Markado ng Tunggalian: Ang Konsepto ng Umuusbong na Panitikan sa Kathang Filipino at ang Ugat Nito sa Politikal na Proyekto at Kasaysayan ng mga Kilusang Pampanitikan" makes a case for emerging or emergent literature (umuusbong na panitikan). The neglect of such literary works he attributes to the lack of critical discussion regarding

the nature of these works. Academic literature courses tend to foreground formalism, as though it were a perfectly natural phenomenon; while discussions of forms which challenge traditional literary forms are looked down on and marginalized. He urges the recognition of discourses regarding emerging literary forms (as well as feminist fiction and gay fiction) as a vital force for the continued development of the national literature. It is through such discourses that transformation is achieved, not just for the growth of individual writers, but for the collective good.

In his “Ang Hiyò ng Sampaloc, Quezon: Kalikasan at Kontinuum,” Vijae O. Alquisola traces the significance of the *hiyò*, a local *hele* or lullaby, which originated in Sampaloc, Quezon. His study of the various elements of its form, such as rhyme and structure, underlines the importance of bringing to the center, literary materials and traditions from the regions. This is a gap in our literary studies, including academic courses, which is finally being acknowledged. “Ang *hiyò* ay masasabing ekspresyon ng mga Sampalukin ng nagpapakita sa kanilang pagkaunawa, kung hindi man, ay pagkadama sa kung paanong ang kondisyon ng pag-iral ay idinuduyan ng kasaysayan, kultura, heograpiya at politika.”

We move on now to the creative works.

The economy, elegance and limpid clarity in Vince Agcaoili’s suite of poems are a source of joy. They make other poems which are may not be as fine, as disciplined, seem extravagant, even garrulous. Images from nature abound... dark forests, trees, a thicket... “a leaf dangles from a branch, the river sings to pebbles/the wind heaves through branches...” But these images are rendered without adjectives. Such simplicity can only be attained through great discipline.

There is an undercurrent of sadness here. “Somewhere there is a phone ringing/ And I am elsewhere strolling,/ Trying not to look at the names of the streets.” There is perhaps love... “As in the dream/ I had last

night when your bare hands/Reached out to me, so brightly,/They could have been filled with light." There is passion... "Tonight, I entered a cathedral/of desire. I prayed for the teeth of God/To break me apart. For his mouth to tremble/Like a beast whose throat is trampled/By another and who wins nonetheless..." There is death, of course. And there is fierceness "... Night, I'm awake./I bind my feet to where they belong./ I stand stiller than a tree now,/ Saying a little prayer, waiting for the shove./ Do you want me on my knees?/Shake the earth a little more."

The clue to the meaning of Lawdenmarc's suite of poems lies in the title, "The Universe after Sengai Gibon's bokuseki painting, 'Circle, Triangle, Square.'" Sengai Gibon was a Japanese monk, who lived 175-1837, and was also a painter, calligrapher and a poet whose paintings have been described.

Or perhaps it's in this word which recurs in the poems: *Katsu!* Which is a name, that means "victorious." Or it could be a "fried cutlet" (a piece of breaded fried meat). Which perhaps means that these poems are playful. Perhaps the poet is playing a game. It would seem to be an apt illustration of Merdeka Morales' "umuusbong na panitikan."

Andyleen Feje's suite of poems, "Pagtatahip at Iba Pang Tula," which includes prose poetry, is protest poetry, effectively employing images from farming as metaphors for the endless struggle of those who must work the land they do not own. It commences on what would seem to be a bucolic note, but rapidly turns into a bleak documentary of the travails of peasant farmers. And the final poem is cathartic in its savage violence.

Maria Amparo N. Warren's "Gray Area" story is unusual, first, in its being addressed, by an unidentified narrator, to a "you" who never actually appears in the story—the subject of the "content" the female protagonist has to produce for client of the company she works for. The protagonist is a young, single mother, who has to accept this job in order to support her small son. The "you" that the narrator addresses had gone to the same university

as the protagonist, and had risen to become a top executive in an un-named company.

This sophisticated handling of point of view is sustained to the narrative's end, managing to convey, both the contradictions that the protagonist confronts, as well as the ambiguities the imagined "you" would say to convince the protagonist that being successful at her job does not translate into loss of personal integrity. It also adds power to the story's quietly ironic ending.

Finally, Hannah Adtoon Leceña's creative nonfiction, "Kung Paano Ko Isinuka ang Lahat sa Bawat Biyahe" records, in vivid detail, the narrator's tribulations stemming from the medical condition called "motion sickness." It is a condition which the author describes succinctly as "Hindi lang nakakadiri. Nakakahiya pa." She narrates what must have been harrowing episodes with humor and self-mockery which are endearing. And she manages to turn her coping with the condition into a metaphor of endurance: "Alam kong hindi ako ang una at huling tao na masusuka sa bawat biyahe ng buhay. Pero susuka lang, hindi susuko."

It is, thus, with some elation that we, as editors, offer to you, our readers, this issue of *TOMÁS*. We strongly feel that the future of the country's literature and literary scholarship is in capable hands.