

# INTRODUCTION

Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo

This year, we open our new issue with critical essays, and in particular, with essays which comment on film, an art form which we have devoted as much time to in our previous issues.

Jose Mojica's "The Aesthetics of Grief in Joseph Laban's *Baconaua*" studies how the film maker has used cinematic techniques, like setting, negative space, pace, repetition, silence, and underexposure, to depict the experience of loss and grief felt by characters. Mojica discusses how these techniques reflect the cyclical, inescapable nature of these emotions.

Paul Alcoseba Castillo's "Dostoevsky Hanggang Lav Diaz: ang Utang at Kamatayan ng *Crime and Punishment* sa Norte, Hangganan ng Kasaysayan," demonstrates how, in referencing Dostoevsky's novel, Diaz has created what Linda Hutcheon has referred to as "historiographic metafiction." Castillo believes that the auteur seems to be drawing a parallel between St. Petersburg in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Manila under Marcos, and he sees Diaz's film as an attempt to produce "a further iteration of the crime-redemption arc," in an effort to "subjugate and subvert" the original narrative.

"Thinking nude" is a term coined by Julie Lluch to challenge the conventional portrayal of woman as a passive object. In "I, the thinking nude," Amanda Juico Dela Cruz reflects on John Berger's ideas about

nudity and the gaze, highlighting the importance of self-recognition and empowerment. Through a personal and introspective narrative, the author shares her journey of self-discovery, reclaiming her body and emotions from societal expectations.

**“Sangkap Sanaysay: Isang Sanaysay Tungkol sa Pagkain ng Retaso o Leftovers sa Panahon ng Pandemya at Kagutuman”** by John Paulo Sarce attempts to define a subgenre of Creative Nonfiction—which the authors translated as “Ingredient Essay”—as a form of food writing. There is more to it than just recipes or instructions on cooking. The writer of a Sangkap Sanaysay must take into account such matters as: the conditions that give rise to “retaso” cooking, where this type of cooking is to be found, the ingredients which might be available to the people in locations where it is available, and which needs are met by retaso cooking.

Our literary section opens with a translation of **“The Death of Arnulfo Canelo: an Excerpt from Amado Anthony G. Mendoza III’s *Materyales sa Komplisidad*”** (Materials on Complicity, 2023), the second novel in his “Trilohiyang Reaksionario” (Reactionary Trilogy). In this excerpt, we have what could be considered a “metatext” of the author’s own dictator novel, *Aklat ng Mga Naiwan* (The Book of the Damned, 2018). This novel consists of supplementary material of *Materyales*, intended to, as translator Caroline Hau puts it, “re-materialize the overarching themes of *Aklat*,” which deal with the different ways in which literature is complicit with oppressive political regimes, and the interconnection among literature, history and politics. In this excerpt, the mestizo industrialist Andres Soriano, leader of the Juntas Nacionales Española, and close colleague of the president of the Philippine Commonwealth, Manuel L. Quezon, is writing to Arnulfo Canelo’s brother, about the details of Arnulfo’s career as a secret agent during the Spanish Civil War.

This is followed by another work of translation, **Ralph Galan's** "Trigger Warning and Other Translations," which takes on four poems in Filipino by **Allan Popa**. For Galan, these poems are meditations on the twin forces of Eros and Thanatos, life and death, pleasure and pain. And his translations seek to capture, both the precision of meaning and the delicacy and melody of the language of the original.

**Shane Carreon** warns us, in her Synopsis, that her suite of poems, "White Night Lying Supine," is inspired by "dark tales suggestive of the generative power of ambiguity." Thus, individual words sound like warning bells: "shapeshifting," "guttural," "festering," "perilous," "discord." And then there are the images which startle: "a cacophony of still wind and frogs" . . . the woman who is trapped "inside the pink-painted house/amorphous/behind the draperies . . ." or "clawing deep/ the belly of darkness she/split open . . ." or "eyes with no irises/her tongue tolling/beginnings of foam/ in her mouth . . ." and he who "would/come for her/silent on fours, thick brows/a shadow god . . ." And there's the closing poem, which, in a sense, is the most provocative. It is about a pose, in a photo, which "could be anywhere . . ." and which the personae have agreed to/label it as otherwise—"

**Radney Ranario's** suite of five poems portrays life at sea as a constant battle with the elements. All hopes and dreams are like tracings in the sand. They vanish like foam, the minute they are touched by wind or wave. And, when the isolated fisherman is rowing his boat in the dark, perhaps he might do better if he wished on a star.

The suite of poems by **Jovito Carino**, "Beatitude at Iba Pang Tula," consists of musings on the nature of goodness (and evil), beauty, art, and is inspired by the philosophers St. Thomas Aquinas, Hannah Arendt, and Theodore Adorno.

In **Cris Lazanderas'** short story **“Pagoda,”** the protagonist, Siony, is a devotee of the Holy Cross, and each year she joins the procession its honor. She goes to the extent of standing on the pagoda itself, which carries the icon to the church. Her faith remains unshaken, despite the tragedies that her own family has experienced in connection with this ritual. Time is fragmented in this narrative, so it is unclear when each tragedy took place. This obfuscation might be intentional on the author's part, since it could be seen as read as reflecting Siony's complete trust in the God on the Cross, regardless of what her family has endured, and what might still befall it.

Our other fiction piece is actually three flash fiction pieces: **“Silang mga Maria dela Cruz sa Europa: Mga Dagling Alaala ng Pakikitagpo sa Kababaihang Pinoy”** by **Nonon Villaluz Carandang**. These are tales we may have heard before. But presented here, they offer quick, disturbing glimpses into life as lived by our women kababayhan in Europe. And the absence of authorial comment invests them with the sadness, and the poignancy, of real life.

Childhood traumas often find their way into the creative nonfiction of mature writers. **Augusto Antonio Aguila's** **“Miss M”** revisits one such traumatic experience, made sharper by its having been so unexpected for the boy that he was—raised by a protective mother and grandmother. What catches the reader by surprise, and what constitutes the story's twist, is the boy's reaction to his teacher's actions.

The short memoir, **“Ang Bike, ang Kloseta at Ako”** by **John Toledo**, is a coming-of-age narrative, a tale of self-discovery. It also includes Toledo's account of his learning an all-important physical skill, which leads him to an exploration of his environment, a confrontation with his own sexuality, and a realization of the strength of family ties... It is a journey which the reader

will find both disarming and deeply moving, in its candor, its humor, and its clear-sighted acceptance of the identity of “baklang kloseta.”

When we send out the first copies of each new issue of *Tomas*, our peer-reviewed literary journal, they are always accompanied by a wish. The wish is that, despite the way the noisy presence of the new media and how they have changed the way we communicate with one another, there is still room out there for the old media... like the daily newspaper, and the bi-annual literary journal. Our wish is that there is still a place in reader’s hearts for carefully crafted literary pieces—for short stories and poems and plays... and for critical commentaries on short stories, and poems and plays. Because it is literature—and the other arts—which represent our shared humanity.