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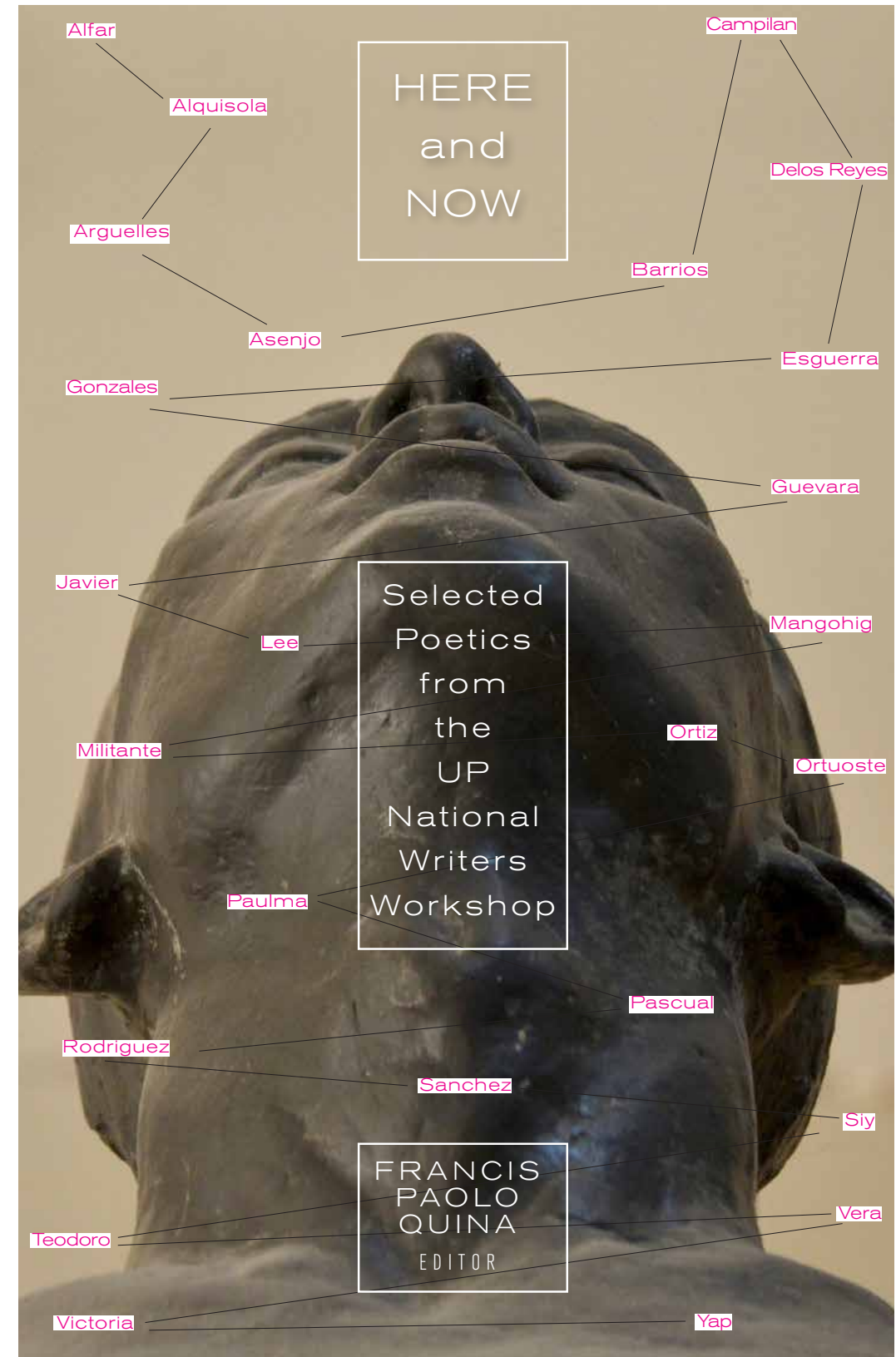
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The focus on the individual writer and their poetics in the reformatted UPNWW admits, not only to the impossibility of holding the creative work apart from the writer and their politics, however problematic it might turn out to be, but how essential articulating one's intent and process is in a creative practice. The poetics essays have become an opportunity for both writer and panelists to reflect not only the individual work, but one's own practice and creative corpus, thus far.

-FROM THE INTRODUCTION

HERE and NOW

Selected Poetics from the
UP National Writers Workshop



HERE

AND

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SELECTED

POETICS

FROM THE

UP

NATIONAL
WRITERS
WORKSHOP

FRANCIS PAOLO QUINA
EDITOR

HERE AND NOW:

Selected Poetics from the UP National Writers Workshop

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INTRODUCTION

FRANCIS PAOLO QUINA

FELLOW FOR FICTION, 58TH UPNWW

ONE OF THE essential differences of the mid-career focused UP National Writers Workshop (UPNWW), which began in 2006, was the inclusion of the poetics essay and presentation in its proceedings. Before then, the UPNWW operated like most writers workshop, with the creative work front and center.

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The focus on the individual writer and their poetics in the reformatted UPNWW admits, not only to the impossibility of holding the creative work apart from the writer and their politics, however problematic it might turn out to be, but also as to how essential articulating one's intent and process is in a creative practice. The poetics essays have become an opportunity for both writer and panelists to reflect not only on the individual work, but one's own practice and creative corpus, thus far.

Writing about one's own writing isn't something new. Many a poet have done their own take on the *ars poetica*. In creative writing programs all over the world, articulating one's poetics is an academic requirement. But outside of the halls of academia, however, poetics are usually reserved for writers of lofty stature and career longevity. After all, they've been writing for a while, and have already figured out why they write and why they write about the things they write about. They might even be set in stone.

But by requiring its mid-career fellows to pen their poetics, the UPNWW has opened a window into creative spaces still in flux. For some of the writers included here, what they have written down in these essays might no longer hold true now to who they are as an individual and as a writer. But that is the nature of growth—we shed skin, we leave behind only traces of who we are.

The poetics essays found here are windows a beginning writer might pass as they journey down the same street these writers have taken, still are taking, in their own careers. We are invited to look inside and see.

It was impossible to include all the poetics essays from all the UPNWW fellows since 2009. For readers who find the essays here fascinating and want to read more, the rest of the poetics essays in the individual blogs of each workshop. These can be found on the website, Panitikan.ph, which is maintained by the UP Institute of Creative Writing (UP ICW).

I would like to thank UP ICW director Dr. Roland B. Tolentino for entrusting me with this project.

WRITING: AN INCOMPLETE ABECEDARY

DEAN FRANCIS ALFAR

FELLOW FOR FICTION, 48TH UPNWW

A IS FOR APPETITE

WRITERS ARE CREATURES of appetite, needing to imbibe things in order to spew them out as words, transformed by imagination and covered in the spit of personal experience.

We drink and smoke and eat, sometimes to excess, often not enough times, to fill the vacuum within. It is not limited to oral gratification. Our eyes consume visual feasts of cinema, television, photography, drama, and dance, following the varied paths of words the books we read reveal, escaping into the brilliant world of comic books and other lurid black-and-white dimensions. Our ears devour conversations, the sound of tears and triumph, quiet etudes and rock music played at dizzying volumes. Our fingers explore nooks and crannies when we make love, trace history when we touch someone's face, and translate texts from texture.

We are denizens of many worlds. We exist in the mundane and simultaneously experience life and love and madness in other times and places, some safe and predictable, some secret and hidden because of shame and the refusal to submit to judgment, or because of the innate selfishness of keeping a wellspring of inspiration to one's self.

We are gluttons of experience, vicarious or otherwise, and we constantly hunger. Not necessarily for the new, not always for the familiar, but rather for everything, slaves of the constant need to assuage our appetites.

We live secret lives in our words, creating fiction from the raw materials we cannot help but seek and savor.

And then we need to expose ourselves.

B IS FOR BEGINNING

First, and always, a reader.

Then, a playwright.

Then, a comic book writer.

Then, a fictionist.

C IS FOR COMPANY

Growing up as a writer, I found myself writing in solitude. Don't get me wrong—of course all writing is done in solitude (yes, even a collaboration because you need to write your part yourself before you compare notes with your cowriter and go through the bloody process of integration). But having access to other writers, your peer group, well, this was just not the case for me.

I started to write seriously in college, and over at the University of the Philippines, the existence of cliques and the “in crowd” proved detrimental to a new writer like me, who did not want to engage in the politics of mutual admiration.

So I wrote on my own, ignoring and ignored by the established writers who were based in the University. I didn't know who was who because it really didn't matter to me. Until I met my first mentor, another writer who was somehow considered outcast because of several reasons—his advanced age, the nature of things he wrote about, his eccentricities. Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero and I hit it off. He found in me a young playwright with a thousand questions, and I found in him a willing teacher who was happy to share his experience. One of the biggest reasons we connected was our love for plays, and somehow, in the enclosed literary caste system of the time, I got the sense that playwriting was considered less “serious” than fiction.

It was Guerrero who encouraged me to write like I had never written before, to be unafraid and uncompromising in my developing style, to seek my voice and shout loud. He wanted both of us to compete in the Carlos Palanca Awards for Literature—because in all his years, he had never been recognized by that body. So we wrote a play each and I was astounded when we both were the only playwrights that won that year. Even more shocking to me was the fact that my play placed higher than his.

Our friendship was cut short by his death.

I picked myself up and continued to write, winning a few awards, getting my fiction published in magazines, and slowly, slowly, slowly learning about writing.

But apart from him, I had no one to talk to about writing, about the fantastic, weird and grotesque stories I was writing. At this point, I considered myself a playwright only, dabbling in fiction.

Then I was invited by Ed and Edith Tiempo to the Silliman Writers Workshop in Dumaguete.

The set of epiphanies I experienced there under their guidance, kindness, and tutelage was the equivalent to several cerebral and spiritual coronaries.

Invigorated, I wrote some more, won some more, then stopped writing. Ostensibly, to concentrate on my life: marriage, career, the real world.

That was 1995, when I turned my back on plays and fiction and the few writer friends I had made.

It was to be several years later, after my first daughter's birth, that I started writing again. I put together a comic book, "The Lost," which owes a tip of the hat to metatextual claptrap and Pirandello. This was followed by more comics projects.

Then I started writing speculative fiction, particularly a sequence of stories for *Hinirang*, a reimagined colonial-era Philippines with the fantastic thrown in.

In the following madcap years, I made my first international professional fiction sale to *Strange Horizons* with "The Kite of Stars." The same story later found a home in *The Year's Best Fantasy & Horror Seventeenth Annual Collection*, edited by Ellen Datlow, Kelly Link and Gavin Grant—rubbing elbows with stories from Neil Gaiman, Ursula Le Guin, and Stephen King. This was followed by a few more international sales in a couple of anthologies. My focus was getting published abroad—I wrote in English and felt that there was no market for the kind of stories I wrote in my own country. It would take a single question from a fellow writer, Ian Casocot, to get me publishing at home—"Don't you have a story in the *Free Press*?" I did not. But soon I did.

Along the way, more comics. "Siglo: Freedom" and "Siglo: Passion," a pair of comic book anthologies I put together and wrote for, won National Book Awards from the Manila Critics Circle. But I had decided to focus on fiction.

A few more awards came my way, followed by fertile period of fiction which produced both my first novel, *Salamanca*, as well as my first collection of speculative fiction, *The Kite of Stars and Other Stories*.

Several more of my stories have appeared or are slated to appear in international venues (*The Apex Book of World SF*, *Exotic Gothic 3*) and as well as local markets (*Story Philippines*, *Free Press*, *The Digest of Philippine Genre Stories*) and anthologies.

My wife Nikki and I coedit the annual *Philippine Speculative Fiction* anthology which we started in 2005. We are helping create space for the kind of stories we

love to read, the kind of stories we write, encouraging young writers to explore the unlimited landscape of imagination.

It's really hard to believe. It was like waking from a long sleep.

Other writers, complete strangers to me in all but name, made contact with me from across the ocean and digital divide and shared their stories, giving encouragement and giving me a sense of belonging to a greater whole.

And these are people I've never met, persons with whom I've had no previous correspondence. Writers whom I knew only by their writing. And yet they took it upon themselves to give a kind word.

And to share their stuff.

It may seem like a small thing, but to someone like me for whom encouragement was in short supply early in my writing life, it takes on a great significance.

Because part of me is always challenged to reach the high standards set forth by writers I respect. And their kindness makes it an even more worthwhile endeavor. Which is why I try to make it a point to encourage other writers who seek me out, or those whose paths intersect mine for an instant or even a lifetime.

Though by necessity I continue to write in solitude, it's good to know that the walls are porous.

The company of writers and readers is always welcome.

D IS FOR DEANIE

My mother claims that I wrote my first play in second grade. Since she is my mother, I must hold her words with suspicion, always asking if what she says is true or if, like all mothers, what she says is motivated by a surplus of love and pride. People tend to exaggerate when offspring is involved, and truth becomes malleable. Parents look to their children as extensions of their own lives, like annexes and wings added to an old house. There is no other home, that's the lesson repeatedly but gently inculcated into your soul, as ubiquitous as the smells of childhood.

When I try to think back to second grade, to see if my memory holds any recollection of actually writing a play, these are what I remember: a little boy in his grade school uniform, polo shirt, and khaki shorts; a wheeled stroller for his schoolbag; an electric pair of scissors in the form of Snoopy, that beagle with the most fertile imagination; the library with its low, low shelves; and the chapel of St. Benilde at De La Salle University along Taft Avenue in Manila, simultaneously dark and colorful, its stained glass straining the bright sunlight into subdued hues. I don't remember any names or faces, any teachers or classmates or bus drivers. And certainly no act of writing a play.

"Are you calling me a liar?" my mother asks, firing the first salvo in a question and answer that held the usual potential of swiftly escalating into full-blown combat. She's tall and ageless, still in command of her beauty queen looks, despite all the illnesses that plague her. "I can remember better than you. You were just a kid."

"I don't remember anything," I say, trying to keep my composure, though, as usual, I feel my control slipping. As I grew to adulthood, I realized that I was able to handle other people, falling into easy dialogue exchanges. But with my mother, I was always at the edge of losing it. Already I felt my temper rising. "Besides, it's my life."

"Your life?" my mother asks, slowly standing up with pained dignity.

"Well," I begin. "That's not how I meant it." After I say my lines, I realize what I have triggered and steel myself for melodrama. It is a scene we've played too many times to count.

"And just who paid for your education? Who sacrificed to send you to the best, the most expensive school? Who paid for your books, your uniform, your meal tickets, your school supplies? Who worked night and day to raise funds for your newspaper drives, your yearbook, all those terrible little papers you'd bring home requesting for money, donations, funding—as if we had it all to spare? Who worried about you? Who looked after you? Who fed you, clothed you, bought you books and toys—"

"Okay, okay," I interrupt her familiar litany, raising my hands in the air, signaling my surrender. It is a war that I cannot possibly win, unless I use the same tactics with my own daughter when I'm feeling old, unappreciated, and feisty.

"I did," she sniffs, tearful and imperious. "It was my life that made you life. Do not forget that."

"Ma! All I'm saying is that I don't remember writing a play when I was in Grade Two."

"Well, I do," she says, turning away from me. "And I can prove it. Imagine! Calling his own mother a liar."

She returns moments later, holding an old photograph the size of a large index card. Before she shows it to me, I sense her checking to see if I'm contrite. Amused by the never-ending parent-child game we play, I feign abasement and humbly ask for her evidence.

"It's your class picture when you were second grade, at De La Salle," she says, and flips the picture over before I register more than a blur of small smiling faces. "Look at the back. That's your handwriting."

It was. Written in my curly childish penmanship was a scene, brief but chockful of dialogue, featuring Captain Deanie, a spaceship captain returning from his sojourn in deep space. It was simple and garish and trite and wonderful beyond words.

And of course my mother cannot resist a final jab toward her flawless victory.

“See, I was right. You should listen to your mother more often. I know what I’m talking about.”

I look up toward her, torn between my rediscovered sense of wonder and exasperation, searching frantically for a comeback, a witty retort to the woman who always manages to subdue me in conversation. But she’s not quite finished.

“I always knew you were a writer.”

E IS FOR EGG

Sometimes, a story or a play or a poem comes to my mind like an egg, almost fully-formed—from the beginning to the end, with practically all the bells and whistles. All I have to do is break the shell and hatch it.

When this happens, it is simply a matter of typing fast enough before the vision flees, piling words upon scenes upon verses as my fingers struggle to catch up with the dictation from my brain. Then it becomes a matter of editing, judicious addition or subtraction of a little of this or that, a general spit-and-polish, and I’m done. A small percentage of my writing can be attributed to these circumstances, when inspiration arrives full-force and delivers a complete work.

Most of the time though, I begin (or end—because sometimes I write the endings first) something while in the rapture of a wonderful idea. I am excited, I am empowered, I am driven. Then the inspiration flees, and I am left to my own devices. During those circumstances, eking out every word is like painful bleeding, and it feels like I’m pounding my head against unyielding stone in a vain attempt to dislodge wonder. I resort to techniques and tricks I’ve learned from reading authors I admire or worked out on my own.

During these times, writing becomes less inspiration and more hard work. It becomes a matter of craft to be able to scale the white monitor wall imposed by fading inspiration, and filling up the black spaces with words that make sense, ring true and are aesthetically pleasing.

When I finish a piece of that sort, I am prouder of myself compared to how I feel when I put the finishing touches on something almost purely inspired—because I bled and trembled for every word on a work I had to build from scratch, rather than coasted on the inconsistent gifts on “talent.”

I write speculative fiction, and what guides me when I write my stories is the need to produce a well-written story. Yes, there needs to be speculative elements (or at the very least a speculative sensibility) but I am decidedly old-school when it comes to crafting a story. On my totem pole of priorities, techniques of characterization come

first (and not “the idea,” as some would expect of a writer of non-realist fiction). After that, anything goes: narrative structure, space, plot, dialogue, and other discourse elements. For me, what makes a story work is character, not conceit.

F IS FOR FANTASY

I am a fantasist at heart.

I love the literature of the extraordinary, tales of wonder and stories that break the all-too-tangible walls of reality. I love myths and legends, travelogues through uncharted territory, explorations into imagination and sorties beyond the known unknown. I like magic in all its forms, the possibility of the interference of gods, the intimation of things beyond stars, and denizens of trees and earth, wind and rain and fire. I enjoy best those stories that take me elsewhere, that speak in the language of dreams, that employ imagery both supernal and supernatural, that play etheric music or hint at cacophonous bazaar mutterings, that show me the possibilities in an empty wooden bowl or a dying mother’s wish.

These are the kinds of stories I love to write most. And to a great extent, these are the stories I do write. But in the past decade or so, I ended up questioning the value of the kind of stories I like—not their intrinsic value, because the value of the fantastic is beyond question, but rather why a greater audience has yet to be found. Reading preferences aside, I believe that exposure to new forms of literature always carries the opportunity for someone new to fall through the magical trapdoor.

In the past, if you looked for the literature of the fantastic here in the Philippines, you would be dismayed. Wonder tales and speculative fiction written for an adult audience existed but were few in number and difficult to find, seemingly looked down upon as inferior (as if the strides of the past years in international publishing washed over the country and left it untouched, snug under its invisible reflective/self-reflexive force field).

Fantasy and science fiction seemed the kiss of death back when I put together the first Philippine Speculative Fiction anthology. Mainstream Filipino publishers preferred almost anything else (something that will definitely sell or has the potential to sell). There seemed to be almost no market for spec fic (except for horror).

I am happy to note that there has been a degree of change since then.

G IS FOR GENRE

“Speculative Fiction” is the umbrella term I use to cover a range of genres that include fantasy, science fiction, horror, super/heroic fiction, magic realism, slipstream, and other non-realist writing.

The very term is problematic, but it is the term used in many other countries to describe genre fiction. It is only a label that helps differentiate this kind of fiction. Ultimately, all fiction is speculative, yes. But from a genre perspective (as well as a marketing category), the distinction has value.

My definition is by no means the “right” definition—but it is easier to say in discussions or in writing rather than enumerating all the different genres.

I love the fact that I am not alone in struggling with what speculative fiction is, and what makes Filipino speculative fiction, and where it is going or what it needs to be, and what it means to be a Filipino writer of speculative fiction, and what it all means. I’m glad that people feel strongly enough to write and to question and to try to parse out answers and positions.

It is vital that we keep speaking and listening to each other, that we ask difficult questions, that we wrestle as we write and produce stories, that we publish and read, that we communicate. Of course we will never all agree on everything, but that is the way of things—we grow because of differences in points-of-view, in our poetics and approaches and philosophies, and yes, how we define things.

Prior to putting out the first annual Philippine Speculative Fiction anthology in 2005, we barely spoke about these things in the context of the literature of the fantastic. Now we’re talking, and the arguments are fast and furious and heartfelt and off-the-cuff and fresh, thanks to the power of the internet which allows all of us to speak our minds in any way we please in our blogs (as opposed to having to wait for a letter of comment or a critical essay to be published somewhere in print). My stand in all this is to encourage discussion—but also to reiterate my focus—that all this talk is well and good, but at some point we all need to stop splitting hairs, stop talking, and get to writing stories, which, in turn, will provide us more things to talk about later.

Regardless of terminology, what is important to recognize is that these types of stories are being produced and read and enjoyed today in our country by a growing audience (small, yes, but certainly more than that of a decade ago). *The Digest of Philippine Genre Stories*, *Story Philippines*, *Philippines Free Press*, *Philippine Graphic*, and other periodicals, as well as university folios, provide venues for the literature of the fantastic. Publishers are producing single author collections of speculative fiction and are looking for novels. Writers are exploring the vistas of fantasy, science fiction, horror, and other non-realist genres with imagination as their only boundary, slowly articulating who they are as Filipino writers of the marvelous in their current socio/political/cultural milieu—wrestling, perhaps inevitably, with issues of personal/authorial and national/postcolonial identity as

they contribute texts and locate themselves (or define space for themselves) in Philippine literature.

With the growing acceptance of the elements of speculative fiction in various media, some even argue that speculative fiction has even gone mainstream. Has it? If by mainstream we mean a consistent powerful presence in bookstores, school shelves and bookshelves at home, the answer is no. Not yet. There is still a vast space to explore—notably absent, for example, is speculative fiction in the non-English languages of the archipelago.

The Big Dream? Spec fic anthologies and collections in different Philippine languages, new publications, organized workshops, a vibrant readership and champion publishers of these genres.

We should start working toward concrete answers to make this real, write the stories that we lack, and create the texts that will describe the map of our writing. We should market our works, get readers excited and reading, and hopefully inspire more people to write in this vein, understanding that business (publishing) and the market (the readers) are part of the literary landscape and the cycle of production.

TALA SA PAGLASA SA PANSAMANTALA

VIJAE ORQUIA ALQUISOLA

FELLOW PARA SA TULA, 55TH UPNWW

PANSAMANTALA ANG SAGOT na pinanghawakan naming magkakapatid sa matagal-tagal na pangingibang-bayan ng aming nanay. Kahit hindi ko alam kung ilang tulog o ilang gising ang pansamantala—at kahit hindi naman talaga naging malinaw kung anong buwan o petsa ito sa kalendaryo—wala kaming nagawa kundi magpaubaya. Kailangan daw mag-Hong Kong ng aming nanay para may makain. Kailangang may umalis para mabuhay, sa pansamantala.

Hanggang lumaki kaming magkakapatid at makapagtapos. Hanggang naisin kong mag-MA ng Malikhaing Pagsulat kahit HRM ang diplomang hawak ko. Hanggang masulat ko ang aking MFA tesis na isang kalipunan ng tula tungkol sa mga kapamilyang naiwan ng Overseas Contract Workers upang unawain ang hanggahan ng pansamantala. Hanggang may ilang naniwala sa aking tula. Hanggang naisin kong isaaklat ang tesis pero hindi na lamang nakatitig sa diasporikong danas, at hindi na lamang lasa/pagkain ang lunan sa pagdalumat sa espasyo ng “pansamantala.”

Samantala, nananatiling plano ang aklat na ito dahil sa mga personal na antala. Hindi makausad dahil sa patuloy na pagdududa sa mga tula at pagtula, idagdag pa ang walang-katapusang kahingian ng trabaho sa akademya.

Ito ang aking unang aklat, na sa pagdidiin ng makatang tagapayo: ang batayang paniniwala bilang manunulat, bilang tao. Lalo akong kinabahan at natakot sa pagsulat. Pero itinuturo rin pala ng pagdududa ang muling pagtitiwala sa sarili matapos marinig at mapag-isipan ang mga payo.

Bunsod ng *pressure* na kailangang makapaglimbag, naging tila mekanikal ang pagsulat ko sa ilang pagkakataon. Katulad lang din ng mensahe ng mga naunang nasulat, sa ibang sitwasyon nga lamang nailapat, ang mga karagdagang tula dahil manipis daw ang libro. Walang *friction* sa isa't isa ang mga tula, dagdag na puna ng tagapayo. Nakaka-palpitate ang puna dahil may *friction-friction* pa palang nalalaman ang pagbubuo ng koleksiyon. Bagaman nagdagdag ako, malinaw sa akin na dapat may butal ang bilang ng tula sa proyekto. Ayaw kong magsara ang numero dahil kahit sa bilang ng nilalaman—kailangang manatili ang pakiramdam ng pansamantala.

At nitong bakasyon, halos mapudpod na ang puwit ko dahil sa *friction* sa ilang oras na pag-upo para harapin ang proyekto. Gaya ng lagi at ng dapat, walang ibang daan sa pagbuno sa tula kundi humarap sa *notebook* o *screen* ng *computer*.

Mula sa orihinal na ayos ng koleksiyon: salit-salitan ang mga tula ukol sa pagkain/lasa at mga tulang hindi tungkol sa pagkain—nagpasya akong hatiin ito sa apat batay na rin sa mungkahi ng tagapayo. At sa patuloy pang pagdama sa “pansamantala,” ang kabuuang bigkis ng proyekto, natanto kong hindi na lamang dapat nakasentro sa pagkain—na oo nga’t pansamantala ito (napapanis, nauubos, dahilan ng salusalo at maging ng paglalayo). Na hindi na lamang dapat ito katulad ng estruktura ng tesis na nakakahon sa abstrak kaya nakapako lamang sa usapin ng mga kapamilyang naiwan ng mga OCW.

Sa bagong hubog, tinipon ko ang mga tula batay sa: kabataan (childhood), galaw ng pamilya sa loob at labas ng tahanan, pagkain (na nakadikit pa rin sa usapin ng pamilya), at mga bayan o lugar at mga arketipong tao sa bayan. Sa lahat ng hati, naroroon ang pansamantala. Sa pasya, naramdaman ko ang pagsulong ng materyal. Naramdaman ko ang sinasabing *friction* dahil totoo, maraming usapin ang bayan labas sa pandarayuhan. Mas naunawaan ko na ang aking unang aklat ay sabayang paglingon sa sariling karanasan at pagtitig sa mga puwersang humubog sa mga ito na humuhubog din sa danas at pakiramdam ng mga kababayan.

At sa pagsipat ng iba pang kalagayan, mas napaigting ang karanasan ng tao na araw-araw ay pilit tumatanggi sa pag-aagaw-buhay, mapanghawakan lang ang halaga nitong buhay, ang kabuluhan ng sandali, kahit pa ang totoo: ni daliri natin ay hindang-hindi dito darampi. At sa ganito ko natunghayan ang kagandahan ng pansamantala, na kahit alam kong imposibleng tanganan, heto ako’t nagtatangka—laging nababalisa. Hindi ba’t sa ganito rin nananahan ang tula? Laging nagtatangka sa kabila ng kakapusan ng mga salita.

Sa ngayon, kahit sa tingin ko’y sasapat na sa kahingian ng imprenta ang aking nasulat, hindi ko pa rin ito ibinabalik. Hindi lang naman usapin ng bilang ng pahina ang tula at pagtula. Ang tula ay isang pananaw-mundo kaya nais ko

pang pakiramdaman at pakinggan ang mga salitang aking binitawan. Nais ko pang kausapin tulad ng isang kaibigan at kaaway upang hindi mabulunan sa sariling mga salita. Nais ko pang kilalanin ang mga ito, na ilang ulit na ring sumagi sa isip ang pagpapalit ng mismong titulo. Pero sa patuloy na pagninilay, gusto kong panatilihin ang *Paglasa sa Pansamantala* (ang titulong ginamit ko sa isang patimplak), kahit hindi na pagkain ang sentro ng proyekto dahil ang “paglasa” ay nangangahulugan din ng pagdanas. At sa bawat pagdanas, mas makintal ang karanasan kung nalalasan ito ng mga pandama.

Maaaring sabihin na hindi bago ang aking koleksiyon. Ano’t anuman, kahit maraming manunulat na ang nagtangka sa pag-unawa ng mga bagay na inuunawa ko ngayon tulad ng mga hindi mapanghawakan, nananalig akong walang magkakatulad na pagdanas sa mga bagay o pangyayari. Ganito rin ang asersiyon ng mga makatang sina Wislawa Szymborska sa “Nothing Twice” at Kristian Cordero sa “Pag-uulit.”

Pansamantala ang aking kabataan gaya ng iyong kabataan. Maaaring bahagi rin ng iyong paglaki ang panghuhuli ng tutubi, o pananakot ng matatanda ukol sa sipay o mananako. Pero tiyak, may pag-iiba sa ating pakiramdam at kung paano rin natin ito ipararamdam sa iba. Maaaring mapagkamalang magkamukha ang danas natin sa loob ng sari-sarili nating mga tahanan o pagpunta sa isang bayan o lugar, at maaaring sabihin na magkahawig ang mga tao sa ating mga bayan pero sigurado—may iba tayong makikita, at mag-iiba tayo sa paraan ng pagsasabi. At sa ganito mas nagiging kapanapanabik ang pagtunghay sa buhay. Pinagyayaman ng ating mga pinanggagalingan ang pagdanas sa parehong tinititigan na naghahayin ng iba-ibang pagpapakahulugan.

Sa proseso ng aking pagsulat, mahalaga ang pagtitig. Nakatuon ang atensiyon sa mga detalye pero malay na kailangang may distansiya. Sa ganito umusbong at umuusbong ang aking mga tula at iba pang sinusulat na lalong nagkakahubog dahil sa saliksik. Sa muli kong pagtitig sa alaala ng aking kabataan, halimbawa, ang pagsakay sa “Horror Train,” naunawaan ko ang ibang mukha ng takot. Ganito rin ang nangyari sa “Sigaw,” na iniluwal matapos ang pagbisita sa Pambansang Museo at literal na makipagtutigan sa obra ni Isabelo L. Tampinco. Para bang naririnig ko ang batang inukit niyang sumisigaw. Kay tahimik pero nakaliligalig. Damang-dama ko ang bigat ng dumulas na laylayan ng damit sa balikat ng bata, hanggang makita ko na ang mismong kahirap ay ang batang ako.

Ekphrastiko rin ang tulang “Dalawang Ukit ng Araw-araw” na nakabatay sa mga obra nina Julie Lluch at Manolo Sicut. Sa proyekto, bilang hamon din sa sarili, gumamit ako ng mga hulma sa pagtula. Hindi upang magpakitang gilás sa anyo, kundi upang isulong pa ang nilalaman dahil sa kalikasan ng mismong anyo. Malay ang

paggamit ko sa paglilok dahil isa itong sining na pilit ding ikinukuwadro o ipinipirma ang pansamantala, isang kongkretisasyon ng lumipas (na maaaring nagpapatuloy) gaya ng tula, at ng sining sa pangakalahatan.

Gayundin, gumamit ako ng palindromo sa “Bagong Taon, Isang Palindromo” dahil ang anyong ito mismo ang galaw ng buong taon. Naririyang din ang mga eksperimental na mga tula gaya ng *recipe* sa “Mga Binalot Mula sa Sampaloc, Quezon,” na sa talababa, hindi na lang basta proseso ng pagluluto ang makikita. Minabuti kong pagsalitin ang mga nagluluto o silang naiwan sa bayang pinagmulan upang ipakita ang lawak ng diyalogo ng dramatikong sitwasyon. Isang *exam* naman ang porma ng tulang “Pagsubok,” na nagtataghal sa mga pinagdaraan ng bawat nananahan sa bahay. Isinama ko ang guhit bago ang linya upang salaminin ang mismong anyo ng *exam*, na sa isang banda, kung babasahin ang tula, maaaring bigkasin ang guhit bilang “patlang.” Kailangan ba laging tama o mali ang sagot? O maaari bang ang mismong patlang ay sapat na sagot (sa patlang) sa gitna ng kawalang-katiyakan?

Dahil ang isang koleksiyon ay magkakaugnay na mga tula na may sari-sariling tinig at tindig—pinahahalagahan ko ang laging paghamon maging sa anyo upang magkaroon ng iba’t ibang rehistro sa pahina at kakintalan sa mambabasa. Bagaman wala akong iniisip na mambabasa kapag tumutula, minamahalaga ko pa rin na dapat makipagdiyalogo ang teksto sa hahawak nito. Hindi kinakailangang may parehong karanasan ang mambabasa at persona sa tula—ang pananaw at pakiramdam ukol sa kalagayan ng tao sa akda ay sapat na bigkis upang mapag-isa ang hindi magkakilala.

Sa kabuuan, ang aking proyekto ay isang pagtatala ng aking panahon at pagdanas dito. Mahihiwatigan ito maging sa paggamit ng salita sa mga tulang nakapaloob sa aklat: Aegis, emoticons, Area of Responsibility, gaheto, at maging ang mga salitang Quezon o pagbaybay sa mga ito, na madalas ay kusang lumalabas.

Sa totoo lang, hindi ko bagahe ang wikang ginagamit ng isang manunulat, subalit kung kukulitin ako dahil puwede ko namang palitan ang salita para mas madaling maunawaan o umayon sa alam na ispelang ng nakararami—panghahawakan ko ang mga salita ng aking tula. Hindi lamang ito usapin ng madaling maintindihan—ang aking salita ang tunog ng aking katauhan na hinubog ng mga pananahan, ang ritmo ng aking pananaw, ang kaibahan ko sa mga nauna nang dumalumang at tumitig sa aking tinutulaan at tutulaan.

At mula sa palihang ito, tinatanaw ko ang mas lalong pagtalas at paglalim ng aking unang aklat, ng aking batayang pananaw sa mga *friction* ng buhay.

* Dalawang taon matapos ang workshop, malalathala ang koleksiyon na may pinal na pamagat na: *Sa Mga Pansamantala* (2017).

ALINSUNURANG AWIT

MESÁNDEL VIRTUSIO ARGUELLES

FELLOW PARA SA TULA, 48TH UPNWW

NAILATHALA ANG IKAAPAT kong aklat ng tula, ang *Parang*, noong Agosto 2008. Ang mga tulang bumubuo rito ay nasulat ko humigit-kumulang sa isang taon. Medyo kalat-kalat na pagsulat mula noong 2007 hanggang mga unang bahagi ng 2008. Ang sinundan nitong aklat na may pamagat na *Hindi man lang nakita* ay lumabas noong 2005. Pinakamabilis ang naging pagsulat ko ng mga tula sa aklat na ito, isa o dalawang buhos sa loob lamang ng tatlo o apat na buwan. Halos kasunod na kasunod naman ito ng *Ilahás*, ang ikalawa kong aklat na nalathala noong 2004 bagama't mga 2002 ko natapos ang manuskrito nito pagkaraang malathala ang aking unang aklat na *Menos Kuwarta* na binubuo ng mga tula mula 1996 hanggang 2000. Ito ang maikling suma ng aking pagtula mula nang magsimula akong dumalo sa palihan ng LIRA noong 1998 at makabilang sa UP Writers Workshop noong 2000.

Kung aking titingnan sa kalagayan ko ngayon, mabilis-bilis naman akong makasulat ng aklat ng tula. At mula sa aking ikalawa hanggang sa pinakahuling aklat, sa umpisa pa lamang ay pinili at sinikap ko nang bumuo ng isang siklo o serye na tutukoy sa isa o higit pang tiyak na paksa o suliranin kaysa magsulat nang paisa-isa o okasyonal na tula hinggil sa anuman (bagama't ginagawa ko pa rin ito kung minsan) hanggang makatipon ng ipapaaklat paglaon. Sa kabutihang palad, tila consistent naman ako sa aking output at bawat isang proyekto ay hindi naman lubhang matagal ang pagsulat. Maliban nga lamang dito sa *Alinsunurang Awit*.

Marso 2004 pa ang petsa ng pinakaunang tulang nasulat ko para sa proyektong

ito, at hanggang Disyembre, umabot sa tatlumpu't-tatlong tula ang nasulat ko. Nadagdagan ng tatlo pa noong pumasok ang Enero 2005. Halos nangalahati na sa inaambisyon ko noong pitumpu't-pitong tula—1977 kasi ako ipinanganak at gusto ko ring tumbasan sana ang bilang ng unang *Dream Songs* ni John Berryman. Ang pamagat noon ng proyektong ito ay *Pag Ibig*. Walang gitling ang aking pamagat kaya hindi ito ang pangngalang *pag-ibig*. Kundi mas makiling sa *gusto*. Sa *nasa*. Kaya tila susi sa koleksiyon ang mga epigrape na “Pag gusto may paraan / Pag ayaw may dahilan” at “*Love, and do what you will*” na tinuran ni San Agustin. “Ano nga ba ang pag-ibig kundi pagnanasa?” Ito ang paksa na waring ibig ligiran ng mga tula sa kabuuan ng proyekto ngunit hindi upang bigyan ng katiyakan. Maaaring gasgas na itong paksa ngunit nananatiling mailap ang mga kasagutan sa mga suliraning patuloy nitong inihaharap, kaya mas matindi ang hamon sa akin na tumugon. Ngunit paano? “*Song is neither discourse nor explanation*,” sabi ni Octavio Paz.

Sa plano ko noon, ang proyektong *Pag Ibig* ay bubuuin nga ng pitumpu't-pitong tula at bawat isang tula ay mayroong labingwalong linya alinsunod pa rin sa 77 *Dream Songs*. Ngunit sa halip na lumikha ng pangunahing tauhan gaya ni Henry Pussycat, gagamit ako sa kalakhan ng proyekto ng mga pares na magkasuyo, magkalaguyo, at iba pa, popular at di-popular mula sa iba't ibang umiiral nang teksto ng panitikan at kasaysayan at iba pang anyo ng sining kanluranin man o katutubo. Ang batayang prinsipyo ay pag-aalinsunod. Muling pagsasalaysay, sa kasong ito, ng pag-ibig at kapalaran ng bawat pares na tauhan ang pangunahing layunin at may tangkang makapaglahad ng bagong sipat o pihit. Pag-aaligid lamang, pagdukul-dukul sa laylayan ng paksa sapagkat tiyak namang hindi ko ito matutukoy nang tuwiran kahit kailan at anumang proyektong gayon ang simulain, sa palagay ko, ay nakatakdang mabigo.

Sa halip naman na *sestet* ang saknungan gaya ng kay Berryman, *tercet* ang gagamitin ko. Pakiramdam ko ay kalabisan na kung pareado pa rin ang gagamitin ko. Magiging overkill na ang pares-pares, kahit pa nga pabiro kong tinawag ang mga unang tulang nasulat ko na “couple poems.” Isa pa, sa paggamit ng *tercet*, tila gusto kong ligaligin ang koplá o *couplet*. Dagdagan ng isa pang linya ang timbang na pares o pareadong linya. Paraan marahil ng pagmumungkahi na may pambihirang bighani ang *threesome*, may nililikhang dagdag na tensiyon sa gitgitan at banggaan ng dalawang magkapires na taludtod. Sa isang banda, iniwasan ko rin ang tradisyonal na anyo ng awit, ang *quatrain*. Binabanggit ko ito, sapagkat mahalagang-mahalaga sa akin ang anyo na kakatawan sa nilalaman at maglalaman sa naturang katawan na alinsabay ring magdadala at dadalhin ng musika ng tula. Kaya mahalaga para sa akin ang paghawak sa tatluhang linya lalo pa nga't ang mga unang tulang nasulat ko sa

proyekting ito ay isang bloke lamang ng labingwalong linya, isang saknong na tula. Gayunman patuloy ko pa ring pinag-iisipan ang anyong ito hanggang sa kasalukuyan, hanggang hindi nakakamit ang katuparan ng itinakdang proyekto. Sa katunayan, nito lamang Pebrero, sinubukan kong ibalik sa dating anyong bloke ang ilang mga tula kasabay ng pagtatanggal ng halos lahat ng bantas maliban sa tuldok-kuwit. Ilang linggo ko rin itong paulit-ulit na sinubukan, pinakiramdaman, pinagmasdan ang porma, at pinakinggan ang nilikhang epekto sa himig at hagod ng mga tula upang pagkaraan ay abandonahing muli.

Dahil wala akong layuning lumikha ng isang pangunahing tauhan o personalidad o antihero gaya ni Henry Pussycat, walang pangkalahatang naratibo ang proyekto. Hindi ito isang mahabang tula gaya ng *The Dream Songs* na tila may tinatahing salaysay at maaaring umabot sa kasukdulan. Hindi rin ito isang siklo o serye na may sinusundan o nililikhang arko at sa kabuuan ay nagmimistulang isang mahabang tula gaya ng mga aklat kong *Hindi man lang nakita* at *Parang*. Gayunman, maaari rin itong ituring na isang mahabang akda, ang *Ang Alinsunurang Awit*, dahil nabubuklod at hinuhubog ito ng paksa. Isang kalipunan ng lirikong tula—ng mga awit. Sa ganito, mas hawig ang proyekto sa *Love & Fame* ni Berryman na natuklasan ko pagkabasa sa *77 Dream Songs* na pinagsundan ko nga ng lalabingwaluhing linya. Hawig, ngunit sa mga binanggit kong katangian lamang. Iba ang aking proyekto sa *Love & Fame* at *The Dream Songs* kung paanong ayon kay Berryman, ang kaniyang *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* ay “as unlike as *The Waste Land* as possible” pagkaraang sabihing modelo nga ng kaniyang aklat ang tula ni Eliot.

Pagkaraan ng unang tatlumpu’t anim na tulang nasulat ko, tila nawala ang aking momentum at kusang nasantabi ang proyekto. Marami rin kasing mga pangyayaring dumating sa buhay ko na medyo malaki ang epekto sa akin. Mahigit isang taon akong hindi nakapagsulat ng tula. Hanggang noong 2007/2008, nasulat ko ang mga tulang bumubuo nga sa librong *Parang*, na pumapaksa, sa kabuuan, sa Diyos at kamatayan.

Nitong sentenaryo ng UP, nagkaroon ng patimpalak ang Likhaan. Gusto kong sumali sapagkat malaki-laki ang premyo kung sakaling mananalò. Tapos ko na ang manuskrito ng *Parang*, ngunit ayaw ko pa itong pakawalan. Hindi ko ito maisasali sa timpalak. Alanganin na akong sumali ngunit nanaig ang pangangailangang tumaya. Inilabas ko ang folder ng tatlumpu’t anim na tula sa *Pag Ibig*. Mabilisan bagama’t masinop ding nirebisa ang mga ito, at sumulat ng apat pang tula, o mas tamang sabihing nagresiklo ng apat mula sa iba ko pang nakakalat na tula. Pinili ko yaong maaaring lumapat sa hulma ng *Pag Ibig*. Bagama’t parang pampuno lamang ang apat na ito, hindi ko kailangang pilitin kung hindi naman talaga aangkop. Nakatiyap naman ako ng apat. Mayroon na akong pangsali sa kontes: apatnapung

tula. Subalit ayaw ko na itong tawaging *Pag Ibig* sa kung anong dahilan. Nag-isip ako hanggang maalala ko muli ang *Dream Songs*. At naisip ko, *Apatnapung Awit*. Natuwa ako, mainam sa pandinig ko ang *Apatnapung Awit*. O kaya, *Kuwarentang Kanta*. Tamang-tama ang bagsak ng mga pantig, ang aliterasyon. Subalit hindi ako madaling makontento. Parang ang simple ng *Apatnapung Awit*, walang masyadong dating lalo pa kung pangkontes na piyesa. Baka hindi man lamang ako umabot sa short list. Sumagi sa isip ko ang pelikulang *Amores Perros* ni Alejandro Gonzales Iñárritu. *Love's a Bitch* ito sa Ingles, at napamura ako nang maisip ang aking pamagat: *Putang-inang Pag-ibig*. Nasiyahan na ako, ngunit hindi ko maiwan ang "40" sa pamagat. Naalala ko rin kasi ang *Veinte Poemas* ni Neruda. Kaya inihabol ko ang *40 Rebisyon at Rendisyon* bilang subtitulo sa *Putang-inang Pag-ibig*. Rebisyon at rendisyon upang ihimaton ang pag-aalinsunod. Pinalitan ko rin muna ang mga epigrape ng mga sipi mula sa *A Lover's Discourse* ni Roland Barthes na patuloy kong binabasa at mula sa *For Love* ng hinahangaan kong si Robert Creeley.

Nakahabol rin ako sa kontes sa huli. Ngunit natalo ang *Putang-ina*.

Pagkaraang mailabas ko ang *Parang*, ayokong mapahinga bagama't alam kong kinakailangan ang sapat na pahinga upang makapag-isip kung ano na ang susunod kong mga hakbang sa pagtula. Pagkalipas ng ilang buwan, nagkaroon na ako ng ideya kung ano ang susunod na susulatin. Naisip ko na rin ang magiging pamagat ng aklat. Nananabik akong naghanda sa pagbuo ng konsepto bagama't sa ganitong estado, borador pa lamang naman lahat. Gayunman, sinimulan ko na at ipinagpapatuloy hanggang ngayon ang pananaliksik at pagtitipon ng materyal para sa bubuuang proyekto. Ngunit habang nasa ganitong kalagayan, wala muna akong nasusulat na mga bagong tula sapagkat kailangang hintayin ko ang tamang pagkakataon na kusang mahinog sila sa aking isip bago ko mailapat sa pahina ang unang pagtatangka. At medyo kainip-inip sa akin ito, hinahanap-hanap ko ang tulang maaari nang masalat kumbaga bagama't hindi pa ganap ang kabuuang hubog.

Kaya sa isa pang pagkakataon, inilabas ko ang folder ng apatnapung tula sa *Apatnapung Awit: 40 Rebisyon at Rendisyon*. Ipinasiya kong rebisahin nang panibago ang proyekto. Agad kong tinanggal ang subtitulo. Ngunit maliban dito ay wala na akong magawa dahil pinangunahan ako ng isang malaking suliranin. Nakuro kong mas mahinang akda ito (bagama't hindi pa buo) kung itatabi sa *Parang* o kahit sa *Hindi man lang nakita*. Binagabag ako nang labis sa isiping ito. Sapagkat kahit aminado ako na mas madali kung hindi ko na lamang ipupursigi ang proyekto, mahirap naman itong tanggapin at gawin. Malayo-layo na rin ang nilakad ng proyekto at hindi ko ganu'n-gano'n na lamang matatalikuran. Kinaluluguran ko rin naman ang karamihan sa mga tula rito bagama't nababatid ko rin halos ang kahinaan ng mga ito kahit hindi pa

matukoy nang ganap. Nabanggit ko ang dilema sa isang kaibigan, at naunawaan niya ang pakiramdam ko. Nasabi niyang para sa kaniya, may sariling pangangailangan ang bawat libro, ang bawat proyekto. At iyon ang higit na dapat tugunan, ang pagtuunan ng pansin. Bagama't medyo may kalabuan pa rin sa akin, binigyan ako ng kaisipang ito ng panibagong sigla upang bigyan pa ng puwang ang proyekto.

Sa mga sumunod na panahon, pinag-isipan kong maigi kung ano ang dapat gawin upang makuha ang tamang timpla ng mga tula. Hanggang dumating sa akin ang realisasyon na kailangan kong palitan ang *point of view*. Mula sa dating nasa ikatlong panauhan, kailangan kong gamitin ang unang panauhan. Kung dati ay mistulang mga manikang nakatanghal lamang sa salamin ang mga pares na magkasuyo habang walang pangimi o panginig ng tinig na isinasaysay ang kanilang takda ng isang tagapagsalutang nababatid ang lahat, ngayon ay kailangang akuin na ng isa sa kanila ang tinig. Akuin muli ang “ako” ng persona. Hayaan ang panganib sa kaniyang pagsasalita.

Pagkaraan ng pagbabago ng panauhan, natumbok ko na rin sa wakas ang para sa akin ay tumpak na salitang maglalarawan sa mga awit: *alinsunuran*. Kaya *Alinsunurang Awit* na ang pamagat ng proyekto, at sa pakiramdam ko, pinal na ito. Hindi ko kasi maisasara sa apatnapu lamang ang mga tulang ito, may mga awit na kailangan ko pang sulatin. Kung noong una ay pitumpu't pito ang aking target, ngayon ay huhustuhin ko nang walumpu. Gawin nang *diptych* ang proyekto. Ang unang apatnapu na naisulat ko ay maaaring pag-alinsunuran nitong huling apatnapu. Maaari ring tugon sa naunang mga tula. Maaari rin namang hindi. Maaaring panibagong sasabihin o susog kaya. Basta't kinakailangang mabuo ang tambalang bahagi. Naaalala ko rito ang *Songs of Innocence* ni Blake, na pagkuwan ay sinundan niya ng *Songs of Experience*. Ano't anuman, marami akong maaaring gawin na hindi ko pa rin alam at maaari ko lamang malaman kung nasa proseso na ng paggawa nito, sa proseso ng pagtula. Kaunti lamang naman ang walumpu kung iisipin. Si Berryman ay nakulangan sa pitumpu't pito kaya dinagdagan pa niya ang *The Dream Songs* ng 308 sa buong obrang *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest*. Sa karanasan ni Berryman, aniya, lima hanggang sampung taon ang kailangan sa pagsulat ng isang mahabang tula. Sa kaso ng proyekto ko, hindi na rin naman ako nagmamadali yamang umabot na ito sa halos limang taon. Baka nga limang taon pa muli ang kailangan para matapos ko ito. Kung higit pa roon, ayos lang. “*Song is existence*,” sabi ni Rilke.

PAGPAPABITAY SA MATANDANG KAHOY NA INYAM SA ISLA BORACAY (SANAYSAY SA “ANO ANG AKING SINUSULAT, PAPAANO, AT BAKIT?”)

GENEVIEVE L. ASENJO

FELLOW PARA SA KUWENTO, 50TH UPNWW

PAGKATUTO SA UNANG NOBELA, SA *LUMBAY NG DILA*

UNA KONG NAPAGDESIYUNANG magsulat ng nobela minsang nasa coffee shop at muling nadalaw ng mga katanungang “Kung tatapusin ko ang Ph.D., ano ang isusulat ko sa panahon ng bird flu, terorismo, at palawak na divisyon ng mahihirap at mayayaman dala ng globalisasyon? Paano mas magiging makabuluhan bilang akademiko at manunulat?”

Pagkukuwento ang aking “energy field” at sinasabi ng mga iskolar at kritiko na nakakatulong sa “pag-aakda ng bansa” ang pagsusulat ng nobela. Gusto kong paniwalaan na nakaambag dito ang *Lumbay ng Dila* (C & E/DLSU, 2010). Sa wikang Filipino at sa tono na pagtatangka sa “literary blogging,” nakita ko ang potensiyal ng nobela sa hangarin kong maging pampublikong-intelektwal.

Makakalakad palabas ng ivory tower ng unibersidad ang nobela.

Nabasa ako, binabasa, babasahin, hindi lamang ng mga kapwa manunulat at estudyante, kundi ng mga kaibigan, kamag-anak, kababayan.

Sa pagsulputan ng mga social networking site, nakita ko rin ang maraming kabalintunaan, kontradiksiyon. Nasa panahon tayo na sumpa ng indibidwal ang patuloy na pagsusulat ng sarili sa limitadong espasyo na kanyang binabayaran sa iba't ibang porma ng komunikasyon na produkto ng kapital. Panahon rin ito na ang dikta ng kita ang siyang dominanteng nagdidisenyo sa lokal at nasyonal na mga komunidad bilang “customized cottages” na “locally produced” at “globally distributed.”

At ang unibersidad mismo, ang buong akademikong institusyon, sa mga programa nito sa panitikan at malikhaing pagsulat, ay isang pabrika. Isang produkto ang manunulat. Isang produkto ng manunulat ang nobela.

Isa pa. Gusto ko pang sumulat ng isa pang nobela. Baka, at bago pa, status update na lang at post shout ang aking mayari, malikha.

Multilinggualismo dahil ang bawat rehiyon ay bansa, ang bawat tao ay bansa ay kalibutan.

May isa akong naisulat na papel sa gradwadong paaralan: “Owning Hybridity: The Performative, Postcolonial Paramoedya Ananta Toer in *This Earth of Mankind*.” Nabanggit ko rito ang isa mismong sanaysay ng Indonesiong manunulat na ito na “My Apologies, in the Name of Experience.” Binatikos ni Toer ang tinatawag niyang kampung na kultura at sibilisasyon ng Java. Tinutuligsa niya ang mito ng kagalingan ng Java—na minsan man, hindi natalo ang mga ito—sa kanilang pakikipaglaban sa mga Dutch at Europeo. Ikinukuwento ito sa *wayang* at pinapalaganap sa Mahabharata, Ramayana, at Babad Tanah Jawi na para sa kanya mga akda ng “court poets” at kung gayon, mga alipin ng kapangyarihan.

Argumento ko sa papel na ito na kahanay ni Toer si Franz Fanon, ang rebolusyonaryong African at psychiatrist, sa kanyang konsepto ng nasyonalismo. Sa “On National Culture” sa *Wretched of the Earth*, diniskurso ni Fanon ang evolusyon ng rebolusyonaryong-intelektwal na mamamayan sa tinatawag niyang “national consciousness” na “which is not nationalism” at siyang pinaniniwalaan niyang “the only thing that will give us an international dimension.” Kasabay sa pagkilala ni Fanon sa kahalagahan ng nasyonalismo sa paggatong ng kontrakolonyal na pakikibaka, nagbabanta siya sa pag-usbong ng “national bourgeoisie” na sa proseso ng pagpapalawak at pagpapalakas ng kilos-nasyonalismo, pansariling interes at etnosentrismo ang maaari nito at tuluyang itatanghal.

Nakikita ko kina Toer at Fanon ang lapit ng aking poetika at politika kaugnay sa “pag-aakda ng bansa.” Higit pa dahil sumasang-ayon din ako kay J. Neil Garcia sa kanyang libro na *Postcolonialism and Filipino Poetics* sa kanyang kritisismo sa “katutubong kaakuhan”

nina Virgilio Almario at Gemino Abad at sa “pantayong pananaw” ni Zeus Salazar. Sa limitasyon ng mga pinag-aralang kritiko sa bansa, kumatig si Garcia sa posisyon ng Caribbean na kritikong si Stuart Hall sa paglalarawan nito ng postkolonyal na identidad bilang “split” sa aksis ng pagkaka-pareho at pagkakaiba, ng pagpapatuloy at pagbubuwag na kung saan ang identidad ay sabdyek sa patuloy na laro ng kasaysayan, kultura, at gahum. Becoming. Work-in-progress. Sa paglilimi ni Garcia, ito ay nangangahulugang pagtanggap sa “hybridity” ng identidad at buhay kung saan hindi dapat hinahanap ang “recovery” ng “glorious past” sa hangad nating madiskubre kung sino tayo.

Kinukumpira ni Fanon ang aking karanasan at reflexivity sa sarili kong edukasyon at evolusyon bilang manunulat. Tinatanguan ko, sa aking mga kontradiksiyon, ang argumento ni Garcia.

Ang nobelang Filipino, kaugnay sa kasaysayan bilang “sanaysay na may saysay,” ay ang pagtatanghal sa “noon” sa “ngayon”: sa mga sanhi at bunga; sa mga interbensyon at pagbabaklas; sa pag-alaala at paglimot. Ang paglikha ng kasalukuyang henerasyon sa sarili nitong mito: sa iba’t ibang wika sa bansa, sa pagiging bansa ng bawat rehiyon, at sa pagiging kalibutan ng bawat tao at bansa.

Kalibutan. Salitang Kinaray-a, Hiligaynon, at Sebuwano para sa mundo, daigdig, sanlibutan. Puna ng Lola ko noong bata tuwing pasaway ako o engot: “Ay, nga bata ’kaw, daw wara’t kalibutan” (“Ay, na bata ka, parang walang malay/walang alam.” O masasabi ring walang animo.) Ibig sabihin, para sa kamalayan ng mga Bisaya, ang kalibutan ay hindi lamang mundo/daigdig/sanlibutan na lumilibot sa aksis nito, o nalibot nina Magellan at Pigafetta tulad ng sinasabi ng mga teksbuk, kundi ang pagkakaroon ng wisyo, ng kamalayan, ng kaalaman tungkol dito, at kung gayon, ang paglibot dito at pag-angkin, na siyang dapat—ang moral na adhikain at pagsusumikap ng bawat indibidwal.

ANG KAMATAYON SA ISLA BORACAY

Nasulat ko sa Kinaray-a ang tinatangakang pangalawang nobela, ang *Kamatayon sa Isla Boracay*. Dumating ito sa akin sa Kinaray-a. Ito ang boses na aking naririnig, sa wikang ito ang daloy at ritmo ng mga salita sa aking isip. Isa na rin itong paglalakad palabas ng sarili sa mga kuwento ng komunidad na natatanghal dito, sa iba’t ibang boses at punto. Natagpuan ko ang sarili na sumusulat ng ganitong linya: “Gumaling na ako sa lumbay ng dila.” Sasabihin ito ng isang pangunahing tauhan, si Acay Amba, na nagpapakilalang 50% Ati (Aeta) at 50% Bisaya, na ang mga ninuno ay ilan sa mga sinaunang Ati ng isla Boracay.

Nadalaw ko ang komunidad ng mga Ati sa Boracay. Nagpabalik-balik ako simula 2010. Noon pa man, kilala ko ang mga Ati. Mga kalapit-baryo sila sa amin sa Antique. Baka isang Ati nga siguro ako, e. Nabanggit ko sila sa *Lumbay ng Dila* bilang mga ninuno. Ngayon, sila na mismo ang magiging mga bida.

Bakit kamatayan? Ang kanilang *kalibutan* dito, lalo na sa paglilibing. Lalo na nang madiskubre ko sa *Brujeras y los cuentos de fantasmas* ni Maria Pavon y Araguro ang tungkol sa pagpapabitay nila sa matandang kahoy na inyam at ang pagsalubong sa kanilang kaluluwa ng kanilang tinuturing na haring ibon.

Natuklasan ko rin mula sa sarili mismo, hanggang sa pakikipag-chat sa mga kaibigan at kakilala, na hindi lang stress ang inirereklamo at nararanasan ng karamihan, kundi pagkabagot. Ito ang nagpa-pop-out na icon sa utak ngunit hindi mapangalanan kung minsan. Marahil kapatid ng stress, depresyon, lungkot dahil sa fastfood, fast love, at marami pang uri ng pag-customize sa buhay at pagkatao sa siyudad.

Boredom: gusto rin kitang makilala pa, mabigyan ng lasa, ng amoy, ng kulay, ng galaw.

PAKIKIPAG-USAP SA IBANG SANGA NG KAALAMAN

Marahil dahil noong bata, Science naman talaga ang paborito ko na sabdyek. Siguro dahil mahilig akong manood ng *Travel Living*, *Animal Planet*, *National Geographic*; siguro dahil nabasa ko si Richard Dawkins at nagustuhan at hinalungkat na rin sina Charles Darwin at Stephen Hawking, siguro dahil gusto ko ang mga librong ito: *The Hopes of Snakes & Other Tales from the Urban Landscape* ni Lisa Couturier, *Dreaming Souls: Sleep, Dreams, and the Evolution of the Conscious Mind* at *The Problem of the Soul: Two Visions of Mind and How To Reconcile Them* ni Owen Flanagan, *The Botany of Desire* ni Michael Pollan, *The Astonishing Hypothesis* ni Francis Crick, lalo na ang *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder* ni Richard Dawkins, at marami pang iba.

Nakita ko sa mga librong ito ang tinatawag na “the society of mind” ng humanidades at ng siyensiya. Kaya sa level ng teorya, nakalagpas na rin ako sa isyu ng “hard science” laban sa “soft science,” at di ko maintindihan kung bakit kailangan silang ihiwalay o paglabanin, maliban na lamang sa pagiging sakim ng tao.

Ang *Kamatayon sa Isla Boracay* ang ninanais kong bersyon ng aking “human ecology.” Lumalakas sa aking isipan, lumilinaw, hindi lamang ang pagbanggit at pagsalarawan ng mga bulaklak, halaman, puno, ibon, hayop, bato—higit sa lahat, ang pag-evoke sa kanilang partikular na katangian, lalo na ang pagkakatatulad at kaibahan nito sa tao.

Naniniwala ako sa creative visualization, at sa pagsunod sa kutob. Dumating sa akin, mga biyaya ng mga kaibigan, ang ganitong mga libro: *Forest Faces: Hopes and Regrets in Philippine Forestry* na inilimbag ng Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific at ng Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC) noong 2008. Noong 2004, inilimbag din ng UNESCO ang *Handbook of Mangroves in the Philippines – Panay*, at nitong 2008, ng UP Press ang *Compendium of the Economically Important Seashells in Panay*, Philippines ni Liberato

Laureta ng UPV-Miag-ao. Napasakamay ko rin mula mismo kay Dr. Christine Muyco ang kanyang pag-aaral sa sayaw na binanog ng Sulod-Bukidnon ng Panay, sa porma ng documentary film, ang *Ga Sibod Dai-a!*

Mahalaga sa akin ang mga librong ito at proyekto dahil naisulat nila ito, naparating ang kaalaman, sa isang malikhaing pamamaraan. Apirmasyon ng naisip kong pakikipagkapwa sa ibang larangan. Tuwang-tuwa ako.

“Baka magiging cultural dictionary ng Panay flora at fauna ang nobela mo?” sabi ng kritiko sa aking isip. Agam-agam din ito ng makatang si Jerry Gracio nang isinusulat niya ang *Aves*. Hindi ako nag-iisa. Nagawa niya, magagawa ko rin. Isusulat ko ang mga ito: *ang katahimikan ng bato, ang paghihintay ng orkidyas sa perpektong pollinator, ang pasensiya ng ipis at ang sinasabing pagiging mapagmahal nitong ina, ang mga bulaklak at dahon ng bakawan na nagpapagaling ng sugat at sakit. Ang amoy at kulay ng gubat at dagat.*

ANG KALIBUTAN, SA DULO NG MGA DALIRI: MALIKHAING PROSESO

Paghahanda. Nara(r)anasan ko ito at nai(i)ntindihan bilang ang pag-iisip bilang trabaho, ang pag-e-emote bilang bisyo.

At ang pagsisimula bilang pinakamahirap na bahagi.

At ang pagsusulat mismo bilang paglulublob, pamamahinga, at pagtatapos.

Nagpapakatotoo ako: kung ano ang pitik ng isip, boses ng isip, siyang patik-patik ng mga daliri sa keyboard. “Show, don’t tell” oo, gayundin ang pasalaysay sa boses ng mga babaylan at binukot at ng mga matatandang kuwento ng Asya.

May napatunayan ako sa pamamahinga. Kaya hindi na ako nababahala o nagi-guilty sakaling natatagpuan ang sariling nakatunganga.

Sa *The Myths of Innovation*, tinutuligsa ni Scott Berkun ang pagsawalang bahala sa halos dalawampung taon na pag-aaral ni Isaac Newton ng matematika sa Cambridge bago niya madiskubre ang law of gravity. Para kay Berkun, nararapat itong ituring na kontribusyon ni Newton, hindi tuklas. Dahil nalaman na at nagawa ito ng mga taga-Ehipto sa kanilang piramid at ng mga Romano sa kanilang koliseyum. Sinasalungguhitan din niya ang realidad ng maraming oras na inilaan ni Archimedes sa paghahanap ng sagot sa iniutos ng hari: ang pag-alam kung ang regalo ay likha sa purong ginto o hindi. Kaya sa araw na iyon ng paliligo, sa kanyang pag-oberba sa lawak ng tubig pagpasok sa banyo, namalas niya ang paraan sa pagsagot sa problema: sa pag-alam sa volyum at bigat ng bagay, makokompyut niya ang densidad nito. Kaya ang pagtatakbo niya sa kalsada na nakahubad, nagsusumigaw na “Eureka!” (I have found it!)

Pinapatibay ni Berkun ang argumento ni Ayn Rand sa “Writing and the Subconscious” tungkol sa papel ng “subconscious” sa proseso ng paglikha kapwa sa sining at siyensiya. Walang misteryo: ang mistikal na elemento na niro-romanticize

ng mga manunulat at artist—ang Musa, ang “Divine Inspiration,”—ay produkto ng kaalaman at karanasan sa panahon na namamalas-danas sa pamamahinga.

Panahon ng pagpapahinog ang tinatawag na procrastination na ginagamot ng modernong sikolohiya, sa bentaha ng kapitalista, sa pagkakasakit ng manggagawa (stress, cancer) sa patuloy na lumalawak at umiigting na kompetisyon sa market.

Napakahalaga ng revisyon: ang pakikinig sa inner critic at paggalang-tiwala sa mambabasa. Mapalad ako sa aking pamilya, sila ang aking unang tagabasa. Mapalad din ako sa pagkakaroon ng mga girlfriends sa loob at labas ng bansa na kahit nasa ibang larangan, mahilig magbasa. Sa pamamagitan ng email at Notes sa Facebook, naipapadala ko sa kanila ang draft para sa kanilang puna. Sa mga postings ko rin sa Facebook, lalo na sa Kinaray-a, mabilis akong nakakakuha ng sagot mula sa mga kababayan—manunulat man o hindi—sa iba’t ibang sulok ng bansa at mundo. Nostalgia sa wika, lalo na sa mga salitang nariyan pa rin sa dila ngunit minsan, hindi na maibigkas, at ngayon, sa Kamatayon sa Isla Boracay, ano at dumadaloy—isang musika!

Wish ko lang maisalin ko ito, mailapat din sa Filipino.

Oras, oras. Kung aabutin man ng maraming taon bago lumabas ang bersyon sa Filipino, ang pagsusulat ay isang disiplina’t trabaho.

At, dahil, ang pagtatapos ay isang magpakailanman.

Sinasabi ko sa inyo: alam ko na, nakikita ko na ang katapusan ng *Kamatayon sa Isla Boracay*. Sasabihin ko na sa inyo: magpapatayo si Acay Amba ng bagong negosyo. Hindi ko pa sigurado kung isang bahay kubo, isang hardin, isang lawa, isang kailaliman ng mundo, ngunit ang alam ko, mula sa pagiging manugsugidanun, tagapagkuwento, magiging isa siyang manugpamati o tagapakinig. Naririnig ko na ang ganitong bulong ng isip: Hindi nakikinig ang tao dahil magulo ang kanyang isip. Kung hindi man magulo, blangko, kaya nababagot, naghahanap. Matututo lamang ang taong makinig kapag nakapagkuwento na siya.

Ano ang nangyayari sa katahimikan? Sa pagitan ng pag-iisip at pagbibigkas?

Hindi paglisan ang napakahirap gawin, o ang paglimot, kundi ang pananahimik. Ikuwento mo kay Acay Amba ang iyong lungkot, ang iyong kasalanan, at makikinig lamang siya.

Parang pagtatapos ng jigsaw puzzle ang pagtatapos ng nobela: nagiging makabuluhan lamang ang mga nadagdag na detalye dahil sa mga nauna nang naiposisyon. Sinusulat ko pa lamang itong nobela, sa Kinaray-a, at isinasalin, isasalin sa Filipino. Hindi ko pa alam talaga kung papaano ito tatapusin, magtatapos.

Ito, higit sa lahat, ang pangontra sa pagkabagot—ang pagpapabitay sa matandang kahoy na inyam para madagit ng haring ibon ang kaluluwa at madala malapit sa araw, sa kalawakan—sa muling pagkabuhay. Imortalidad

BAGO AT EKSPERIMENTAL NA SUGILANON: ISANG PAGMUMUNI-MUNI SA SARILING ESTETIKA

JOHN BARRIOS

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PRODUKTO AKO NG mga workshop ng manunulat na si Dr. Leoncio Deriada. Ang una kong koleksiyon ng sugilanon (anim lahat) na isinulat sa ilalim ng grant ng Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas ay makapagpatotoo nito. Kumpleto. Buo ang ang mga sugilanon. May umpisa. May katapusan. May klarong konflik. Realistiko ang mga karakter. May elaborasyon. Linyar at lohikal ang pagkakasulat.

Pero pagkadiskubre ko ng mga bago at eksperimental na mga sugilanon, na karamihan ay nabasa ko sa mga mapanghamong antolohiya at nakita ko sa mga pelikula, sinubukan ko itong gawin sa pagsulat ng sugilanon. Ang unang naging resulta ay ang sinulat kong “Txm8rs” na nilathala ng Ateneo de Manila University Press sa koleksiyon na *Kuwentong Siyudad* (2002). Kuwento ng tatlong magkaibigan na may iba-ibang gender—dalawang streyt at isang tibo. Ito ay kuwento sa loob ng isang kuwento sa loob pa ng isang kuwento. Tatlong lebel na kuwento. At walang puno, walang dulo. Sa sulat sa intro ng libro ay ganito ang isang pagbasa:

“Sa ‘Txm8rs’ ni John Barrios, sa isang modernong panahon at tulad ng marami ngayon, nahuhumaling ang tatlong magkakaibigang Estela, Michelle, at Frances sa texting na tila ba ang isang buong araw ay umiinog na lang sa pagpindot ng cellular phone. Lalo silang naiintriga sa taong nagpapadala ng mga green joke kay Estela na siya pa namang pinakakonserbatibo sa barkada. Hanggang sa ang mga biro ay pinaglaruan ng sandali, at magbaliktad ang pantasya sa realidad; ang kuwento ng isipan ay maging salaysay ng katotohanan; ang laman ay tuyain ang kabanalan.” (11)

Sa aking paningin, parehong mulat ang porma at laman ng sugilanon.

Wala pang nakakapagkuwento ng ganito mula sa aking rehiyon.

Ang tema ay nasa diskurso na ng bago—gender, mito, kulturang popular, at teknolohiya. Suportado ito ng klasifikasyon ni Raymond Williams bilang isang umuusbong (emerging) na literatura kung saan itong klase ng kuwento “ang nagbabadyang bago, direktang supling at papaslang sa namamayaning kaayusan; sa panitikan, ito ang panitikang. . . teknolohikal at kulturang popular; ito rin ang kumukontra sa namamayaning kalakaran sa pagsulat. . .” (Tolentino 2001, 116).

Ang kuwentong “Relasyon” (nalathala sa *Laglag-panty*, *Laglag-brief* ng Anvil Publishing Inc. 2010) ay pangalawa kong sinulat sa bago at eksperimental na porma. Ginamit ko ang pamagat para magtukoy ng literal na relasyon ng dalawang tao, relasyon ng mga karakter sa tatlong espasyo na kanilang inako sa mall, at relasyon ng tatlong episode ng sugilanon. Hindi buo ang kuwento—ito ay binubuo ng tatlong kuwento na may koneksiyon sa isa’t isa. Ang *absent* na lalaki sa dalawang naunang episode ng kuwento ay siyang “tumohog” ng kuwento nilang tatlo—literally at literarily. Diskursibo rin ang paggamit ng mall bilang tagpuan. Dito nadidiskas ang laro ng class (uri)—mayaman (o maykaya) at pobre (walang kakayahan). Hayagan itong ipinapagpasabi sa isang karakter, na hiniram lang naman sa kanyang propesor, na hiniram din ng awtor sa isa pang awtor:

At naalala niya na hindi siya dapat tumayo rito. Sabi ng prop niya sa Philo, ang mga taong nakatayo rito ay yaong mga walang pera o di kaya’y yaong mga mahihirap. Kahit na malungkot ay bahagya siyang napangiti. Hindi niya masabi kung nasaan siya sa dalawa. Ang mal daw kasi ay hindi itinayo bilang pamilihan lamang kundi parang isang mundo. Isang ilusyon ng mundo. Kaya kahit mahihirap ay may lugar dito. Isa sa mga lugar na binanggit ng kanyang prop ay ang kanyang kinatatayuan. Kahit kasi walang pera ay nagkakaroon ng kapangyarihan sa pagkakatatayo lang sa kanyang kinatatayuan dahil ginagawa nilang mga subject ang mga nakikita sa ibaba. Inaangkin nila ang mga artista at singer na umaawit sa temporaryong stage sa ibaba. Ito daw ang hindi nakikitang rason kung bakit puwedeng mag-cnrt sa isang mal kahit na maliit ang lugar at kakaunti lamang ang makakakita ng maayos. Ito ay dahil sa ang mga pangyayari tulad ng cnrt ay isang “idea” lamang. Hindi masyadong mahalaga ang panonood ngunit ang “idea” na ang isang tao ay Manonood. Ito raw ay ekstensiyon lamang ng ipinatayong arena ng mga Romano kung saan nililibang ang mga mata ng taumbayan hanggang sa makalimutan nila ang kanilang tunay na katayuan. Ang bilog at makapal na salamin naman sa itaas kung saan tumatagos ang liwanag ng araw ay ginaya sa estruktura ng altar ng simbahan kung saan ang liwanag na tumatagos ay nagkakaroon ng mistikal at mitikal na kahulugan. Ang liwanag na

ito ay hindi iba sa mga liwanag na iginuguhit sa pagsasalarawan kay Kristo sa Bibliya. Sa madaling salita, nagkakaroon ng bendisyon ng simbahan ang mga nangyayaring cnrct sa gitnang bahaging ito ng mal. Tama marahil ang kanyang prop dahil halos karaniwang humahawak sa pabilog na bakal ay mukhang mga walang pera. Halos lahat din ay nakatingin sa ibaba.

Ang pagpili ng pangalan ay ibinase sa popular na kanta na *Si Aida, si Lorna, o si Fe*, isang masokista at tsobinistang awit na nakapaloob sa patriyarkal na konstruksiyon ng pagkalalaki/pagkababae. Dala ang tatlong representasyon ng babae: tulog, gising, at mulat. Ayon kay Isagani Cruz, ang *tulog* na teksto ay teksto na hindi naimpluwensiyahan ng bagong kaalaman. Ang *gising* ay may alam pero walang ginagawa. Ang *mulat* ay teksto na nag-aaspirar na baguhin ang status quo.

Sa *tulog* na representasyon, ipinakita kung paano nalinlang ang isang katulong ng nagpakilalang kaponpal na si Richard.

Isang lalaki na nakapolo ng kulay asul at nagtatanong kung puwedeng maupo sa kanyang harapan. Luminga-linga siya at nakita niyang halos punuan na ang pinakailalim na bahaging ito ng mall. Marami ang kumakain at kakain pa. Napasagot siya ng “oo.” Inilapag ng lalaki ang tray at inilipat ang pinggan, platito, at bote ng coke sa mesa. Tinanong siya ng lalaki kung may hinihintay ba siya. Sinabi niya ang totoo. Napangiti ang lalaki at nagsimulang humigop ng sabaw. Katulad din siya ng iba, sa isip-isip niya. Hindi naman mahirap gawin na hindi tumunog ang paghigop ng sabaw. Natutuhan niya ito kaagad sa unang araw niya sa bahay ng kanyang amo. Napatingin sa kanyang relo ang lalaki. Baka hindi na darating ’yon, sabi nito. Pinagtakhan niya kung bakit sinabi ng ng lalaking kaharap ’yon. Matagal ka na bang naghihintay, tanong ulit nito. Sinabi niya ang totoo. Napangiti ulit ang lalaki. Bago ka ba rito sa Iloilo, tanong ulit ng lalaki. Sinabi niya rin ang totoo. Napangiti ulit ang lalaki. Parang hindi na niya gusto ang nangyayari. Sa kanyang isip, walang karapatang makipag-usap ang kanyang kaharap sa kanya. Hindi niya ito kilala at kahit medyo may kaguwapuhan at kakisigan ay hindi siya rito interesado. Hinahanap niya ang hugis ng bibig at mukha ng kanyang kaponpal. Sa tatlong buwan na pakikipag-usap niya kay Richard sa telepono ay naiguhit na niya sa kanyang isipan ang mukha nito—ang korte ng bibig, ang taas ng ilong, kulay ng mata, at kahit na ang amoy nito! Mag-iisang oras na ang kanyang paghihintay at wala pa ring dumarating na lalaking nakapolo ng pula. Nakangiting nagpaalam sa kanya ang lalaking nakapolo ng asul. . .

Sa kaso ni Lorna, ang *gising* na babae ay manipeestado sa kanyang gawain bilang liberal at may kalayaang gawin ang anumang gustong gawin sa kanyang katawan. Freelance prosti siya at kaya niyang ma-rasyunalays ang kanyang ginagawa. Isa siyang babae na may “fixation” sa ari ng lalaki. “Dick” ang tawag niya sa kanyang nobyo at

ang pangalang ito ay sina-substitute pa niya sa kanyang paboritong gadget na selpon. Si Dick at ang kanyang selpon ay iisa lang para sa kanya. Isang representasyon.

Mag 3 mths din marahil ang pagiging txtm8t nila hanggang sa yayain siya ni Rick na mg-eb sila sa Sm Ct. Ang gabi't araw na pagpapadala at pagtanggap ng iba't ibang txt msgs ay higit pang nagpaalab ng kanyang damdamin. Minsa'y naikuwento niya sa isang kaibigan kung paano niya ginawa ang pagmas2rb8t habang binabasa ang mga grn jks na pinapadala ni Rick. Naulit pa nga raw 'yon ng ilang beses. At sa panahong hindi si Rick nakikipagkita sa kanya ay ang cp na lang ang ginagamit niyang pamalit sa pns ni Rick. Pinapa-vbr8t niya raw ito sa ilalim ng kanyang pnty. Kahit ganoon lang nilalabasan na siya.

Mulat na pagkababae ang representasyon ni Fe. Kaya niyang mamuhay kahit walang lalaki. Isang beses na siyang naloko ng lalaki kung saan ay halos napapaniwala niya ang kanyang sarili na lalaki lang talaga ang makakapagbibigay sa kanya ng kaligayahan. Kaya lang, sa pagkakahuli sa kanila ng guwardiya na nagtsutsupaan sa loob ng sinehan ay muli siyang namulat at nagdesisyonang ibalik ang dating kinonstrak na pagkababae.

Sa loob ng CR ay muli niyang hinarap ang kanyang sarili sa salamin. Parang hindi niya ito matitigan. Ang kanyang refleksiyon ay hindi gumagalaw ngunit ang mga mata nito ay matalim na nakatitig sa kanya. Matagal niyang tinalikuran ang kanyang refleksiyon. Hanggang sa makapagdesisyon siyang kunin ang lipstick sa bag at harapin ang refleksiyon. Kahit masakit ang titig ng refleksiyon ay sinikap niyang titigan din ang mga mata nito habang nilalagyan ng pulang lipstick ang kanyang mga labi. Muling gumalaw ang refleksiyon at naging siya uli. Malaki ang kanyang ipinagtataka kung bakit ganoon ang nangyari. Naisip niya na marahil ay namamalikmata lang siya. Sinuri niyang muli ang kanyang refleksiyon. Namumula ang bibig nito sa bagong lagay na lipstick. Napangiti ang refleksiyon sa kanya. Salamat, sabi niya rito. Sa kanyang paglabas sa CR ay inumpisahan nang kainin ng mga kanibal na babae ang mga bihag na lalaki. Nandiri siya sa nakita. Pagkaupo nang pagkaupo ay agad niyang sinabi sa nobyo na uuwi na ito. Walang nagawa si Dick. Paglabas ng sinehan ay muli niyang nakita ang mga bituin ng gabi. Napangiti siya. Alam niyang niloloko lamang siya ng mga ito. Alam na niya ngayon na hindi totoo ang gabi sa loob ng sinehan. Sa isip niya, mamaya ay matutulog na naman siyang nakahubad at hindi nakasara ang bintana. Magiging maligaya siya kahit wala na namang lalaki sa kanyang buhay.

Ginamit din sa sugilanon ang diskurso ng teknolohiya, ang ginawa nitong eksploitasyon sa pisikal at virtual na relasyon. Sa kaso ng isang katulong, ang

paggamit ng telepono ay nagresulta sa isang realidad na kung saan ang isang hindi totoo ay nagiging mas totoo pa. Pareho rin sa kaso ng estudyante na ang identifikasyon ng selpon ay nailagay sa pagkalalaki (sa ari) ng kanyang nobyo. Dito nagiging totoo ang konsepto ni Charles Baudrillard na “simulacra.” Sa elaborasyon ni Raul Pertierra:

In a world of virtual realities, almost anything is possible. It is no wonder then that projections of personae and identities have become major features of these technologies. . . playfulness is a common mode of being in such a world. . . Trickster, sorcerers, seducers and other peddlers of multiple identities are among its most frequent characters. It is a true world of simulacra” (2002,11).

At ito ang katauhang inilantad ni Ritsard/Dick/Rick sa telepono at selpon. Ganoon din si Aida (telepono) at si Lorna (selpon). Ang wala sa dalawang babaeng ito ay nasa kay Fe. Naka-eb (aybol) niya ang lalaki. Masasabing ang “eyeball” ay kontra-diskurso ng virtual na realidad. Sa ganitong sitwasyon nawala na ang konsepto ng “paglalaro lang” (“playfulness”). Angpumalit ay ang “pagkonsumo” (“consummation”) ng pisikal na realidad.

Sa kabilang banda, ang kuwentong *Ending* (kasma sa koleksiyong *Engkant(aw)* at *iba pang Maikling Kuwento*, Igbaong Press 2009) ay isang eksperimentasyon sa perspektiba ng mambabasa. Pinapapili ang mambabasa ng katapusan ng sugilanon base sa tatlong posibilidad na ipinipresenta ng teksto:

1. Kung panalo ay ganito ang mangyayari.
2. Kung talo ay ganito ang mangyayari.
3. Sa pagitan ng panalo at pagkatalo.

Ang ganitong uri ng teksto ng sugilanon ay matatawag na “writerly text” (terminolohiya ni Roland Barthes) dahil ang sugilanon ay may pagkainteraktibo—nangangailangan ng partisipasyon ng mambabasa sa pagpili ng ending ng sugilanon. Sa tatlong posibilidad ng sugilanon may posibilidad naman na ang mambabasa ay may mapipili. Kung ano ang kanyang pipiliin, iyon ang kanyang sugilanon.

Ayon kay Soledad Reyes, ang mambabasa ay aktibo at dinamiko na nag-iinter-ak sa teksto. “Sa pagbasa ng isang tao sa mga salita sa pahina, marami-rami na siyang naunang nabasa na siyang magbibigay-hugis sa kasalukuyan niyang pakikipagtunggali sa mga salita” (1997, 21). Dagdag pa niya na “malinaw na kumikilos ang kanyang isipan upang balikan ang mga nakaraang kaisipan, upang

hanguin ang nakabaong mga imahen o emosyong nalikha/naantig sa pagbabasa ng naunang mga akda” (21–22).

Ang tanong, paano siya pipili? Dito na papasok ang diskursibong pagbasa at paghalungkat ng pag-iisip ng mambabasa. At sa ganitong proseso mapapalitaw ang ideolohiya na kanyang kinasasandigan.

Diskurso ng pagkababae ang nakabalot sa teksto. Kung bubuksan siguro ay ganito ang mababasa: Sa unang posibilidad ay makita ang klase ng babae na “lahat gagawin para sa bana.” Mahinang klaseng babae. Pareho rin sa ikalawang posibilidad. Iprenisenta ito sa dalawang ending:

Ending 1:

Pagkatapos inumin ni Guido ang tubig ay tumayo ito at hinawakan sa kanang kamay si Ima. At niyaya niya si Ima papasok sa nakurtinahan nilang kuwarto.

Doon lamang nalaman ni Ima ang kahulugan ng kanyang pagiging totoong asawa.

Ito ang kuwento ni Ima noong nanalo siya sa ending.

Ending 2:

Tumayo si Guido at lumapit sa kanya. Umatras siya at napahinto sa tabi ng pintuan pakusina. Nakita ni Guido ang mga bukas at walang lamang kaldero. Doon naintindihan ni Guido na wala na naman siyang makakain.

“Belaaat i nanang. . .” palingo-lingong sabi ni Guido kasabay ng paghablot ng buhok ni Ima. Napasigaw si Ima. Hinila siya ni Guido sa loob ng kuwarto.

At matapos na maubos ang galit ni Guido nalaman ni Ima ang kahulugan ng kanyang pagiging totoong asawa.

Ito ang kuwento ni Ima noong siya’y matalo sa ending. Kilala rin sa iba sa pangalang Santisima.

Pero sa ikatlong posibilidad ay makikita natin ang transpormasyon ng mahina papunta sa malakas na babae dahil napagdesisyonan ng tauhang patayin ang kanyang bana. Simbolikal na pagkapanalo ang pagpapakita ng pagpatay. Pero ano ang kanyang tinumba sa ginawang pagpatay sa kanyang bana? Tinumba niya ang ideological state apparatuses (termino ni Antonio Gramsci) na responsable sa pagkonstrak at pagposisyon ng kanyang identidad. Tinumba niya ang estado (institusyon ng batas) at ang simbahan (relihiyon) na absolute ang idea sa pag-asawa at pagpatay. Subersibo ang teksto ng pangatlong posibilidad at medyo may intensiyong guluhin ang status quo. Ganito ang karaniwang nangyayari sa postmodernong teksto. Sa bandang huli,

mananalò pa rin sa sugilanon ang dominante at hegemonikong ideolohiya at grupo. Kaya't si Ima ay ganito ang kahahantungan:

Sa pagbukas ng mata ng araw ay nakita na lang ni Ima ang asawang nakahiga sa sahig. May bula sa bibig. Hindi na gumagalaw. Napangiti si Ima. Napasigaw siya. Napasayaw siya. At ngayon ay makikita na namin si Ima na aming dating labandera na walang tigil na tumatakbo sa kalsada ng barangay.

Ito ang posibleng maging kuwento ni Ima habang hindi pa natatapos ang laro ng PBA at hindi pa natin alam kung anong numero ang lalabas sa ending.

Sa huli, ang mambabasa pa rin ang magdidikta kung ano ang “ending” ng sugilanon.

Ang bago at eksperimental na sugilanon at pag-sugilanon ay isang paraan para hindi magapos sa nakasanayang dominanteng pananaw sa literatura. Kahit sabihin pa nating magulo, at gulo lang ang posibleng maging resulta; ang punto na may kumukontra sa dominanteng porma ng literatura ay importante para mapanatili ang saya at buhay ng ating literatura. Sulat nga ni Tolentino:

Ang bago ay yaong kabaligtaran at hindi lamang kabaligtaran ng luma. Ang bago ay iniluwal mismo ng kalakaran ng luma. . . walang nalilikha na bago mula sa bula. Ang bago ay nililina ng isang mahabang experimentasyong makapagluwal ng hindi bago pero makabago. Ang makabago ay may stake na baguhin ang luma, hindi lamang magpresenta bilang katumbas ng luma. Samakatwid, ang bago ay may hangaring mabago ang luma sa pagtataya sa bagong karanasang sumasambulat at namamayani sa kasalukuyan” (1999, 1).

Ilan na rin ang aking naisulat na matatawag na bago at eksperimental na sugilanon. Ang mga sugilanong ito ay inaasahan kong magbibigay-definisyon sa aking istilo at adbokasiya sa pagsulat ng sugilanon alinsabay ang kritikal na pagbasa ng ating mga komunidad—rehiyonal man o nasyonal, tumutuligsa man sa mga kultural na diskurso o nagpapakita ng bagong pananaw sa panitikan.

Ang aking pagsandig sa kultura bilang basehan sa pagsasadiskurso ng uri, lahi, at seksuwalidad, kasama ang pananalig sa estetiko ng bago at eksperimental, ay isang proyekto na naghihintay ng kaganapan at katuturan sa parehong pangrehiyon at pambansang lunan na aking kinasasakupan.

Ano pa ang rason ng aking pagsusulat kung hindi ko haharapin ang realidad ng kasalukuyan kong henerasyon. Importante na masabi kong hindi ako lumalayo sa pang-araw-araw na karanasan ng aking mga mambabasa. Nagsusulat ako tungkol sa kanilang celpon, internet, sunod-sa-usong damit, at iba pang gawain na nagbibigay-kahulugan sa kanilang pagiging bago sa aking paningin.

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WRITING WHILE I STILL CAN, WRITING BECAUSE I MUST

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IT'S DIFFICULT TO live nowadays in a country such as this and not be compelled to write, if only to meditate upon the tragic course we are heading as a nation. A few years back, after winning a Palanca for my first novel, I thought that I could probably retire. *All My Lonely Islands* felt like the greatest and (possibly) sole work of my life, regardless of whether readers feel the same or not. As someone who had resisted the Call of the Write for nearly her entire life out of cowardice and overthinking, I feel that the most courageous feat that I will ever do in this life and beyond had to be writing that book, and exposing the overwrought innards of my soul. And if Arundhati Roy can release a second novel after twenty years and Harper Lee after half a century, I didn't see the particular need to hurry.

Until this year. Until today. Until this moment.

There is an urgency to write nowadays, while I still can, while it's still legal and within my rights. One day, I just sat in front of my computer and started typing without any particular direction or mandate, just with that harrowing sense of time running out. By the end of six months, I had a partial manuscript, and it is not what I had expected. I thought I was going to tackle the "war on drugs" in a very combative manner, befitting the rage and helplessness I feel on a daily basis. But what came out, as I should have expected from myself, is a meditation on an alternate reality. *This Is What I'll Remember* is shaping up as a reimagination of what the war would look like if we were an affluent nation and if we had won that war through scientific violence.

Contrary to all the blood and gore that I was anticipating, this manuscript had decided to zoom in on the aftermath of such a world, where addiction and violence had been weeded out from the gene pool but at great cost. In my mind, I saw the desolation of a country that thought it could win the war it had waged on its own humanity, and utterly failing. The story further zooms into the lives of two cousins living in this fallen reality, one a genetically edited “Construct,” and the other an accursed “Natural.” I should have known my story is going to be as intimate as this, because that’s the kind of stories I like reading and writing best, like a detective looking for clues under the microscope, scanning all the little particles and seeing what secrets they are willing to give up.

Character-centric stories resonate with me the most, because it always feels as if the characters are representing the entire world even in the confines of their personal struggles and triumphs. In hindsight, I realize that I had been heavily influenced by Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, although I had read it ages ago. And yet, the power of that novel stayed with me, not because of the harrowing science behind that world, but because the novel illustrated the slow erosion of hope through the lives of three clones. And in the end, the novel wasn’t even science fiction; it was a meditation on what it’s like to barely survive life.

Whenever I embark on a new writing project, I always try to set a vision for that project, which goes beyond brainstorming about the premise and characters. I try to establish early on what I want my novel to be and what I don’t want it to be. For this manuscript, I want to combine alternate history with psychological thriller and the good old ghost story. The tone and mood I’m aiming for is a mixture of the conflicted soul of *Never Let Me Go*, and the quiet dread of the *Turn of the Screw*. Most of all, I want something that will make readers think about our current situation as a nation. I want this manuscript to serve as a warning. What I don’t want is for people to read this novel and shrug it off as just another story. I’ve always thought that we need writers not primarily for entertainment, but for survival. When we are on the brink of losing our humanity is when we need our writers the most. We need to save each other.

Even now, while writing this, I feel the old anxiety that came with finally heeding the call to write years ago. I remember those first semesters in the MFA, when I was a late bloomer in the literary scene, an utter newbie sitting in class, getting lost in the sea of literary theories and heritage, and wondering how I could ever write something from all of that. The answer wasn’t really as complicated as I thought it would be. It had to start from a story that demanded from me to be written, a story that I had known all my life although it took years and years for me to recognize it.

There was already the seed, what I just really needed was the patience to tend to it, and the faith that it would grow.

When I wrote *All My Lonely Islands*, it was coming from thirty-one years of existence, four of them as a third-culture kid (TCK) in Bangladesh. At that time, I felt that there weren't enough stories to represent the disruption of identity that TCKs experience whenever they move from one country to the next. Most people look at TCKs and just see the good side such as exposure to different cultures and languages, constant travels, living the "expat" life, but what they don't see are the challenges; the struggles of being uprooted from everything these children had ever known, the fractured sense of Self and belongingness. That was the side of the story that I had the unique position to tell; it was the story that I felt could help represent all the thousands of TCKs out there looking for empathy or some semblance of stability or home.

When I returned to the Philippines for university, I felt as if the Philippines I knew had long been gone. I didn't understand most of the pop culture jokes and lingo, I wasn't aware about most of the country's issues. During that period of alienation, I found solace in Philippine literature. I remember finally reading *Noli Me Tangere* in the Filipiniana section of the UP library, in a dark corner, away from the table of students who were quietly giggling and bickering over group work. I realized then that what I was reading was an important period of my history as a Filipino, and therefore in the process I was getting to know myself all over again. That's when I realized that literature has the power to save a life.

That opportunity to represent and give voice is the privilege that comes with writing. It is why I do it in spite of the sleepless nights, the constant self-doubt that never goes away even when one has been published (or gets a national literary award), and the uncertainty of writing as a career. I've always known that writing is not for the faint of heart or for the halfhearted, so here I am again, attempting bravery just once more, realizing that if I have the capacity to write just once more, maybe it will change someone's life. Somehow, I never thought I was capable of writing an alternate history, let alone speculative fiction. I never thought I was going to ever be inspired to do so or tackle a national issue that doesn't seem to have an end and is beyond all my comprehension. I never thought I was ever going to be political, because politics had always left such a bitter taste in my mouth. It is an arena of the human existence that I had always detested, mostly because it is the same predictable story of power corrupting the soul. Yet here I am speculating about it, fermenting an idea in my head, writing a work-in-progress that is simmering with quiet rage and hopelessness. A confession; I only felt marginally

better after writing this story thus far. Nevertheless, I plan to persist and follow this trail, and maybe at the end of it, I will regain hope, too. Maybe this time, I can even save myself.

Just last week, I finished reading *1984*. I've always wanted to read that book but didn't feel the urgency to do so. Now, it seems like the most relevant book ever written by anyone. It's terrifying mostly because it proves the sheer foresight of writers and the great danger of bringing that future to life with something as potent as words. People tend to dismiss words as mere bluster. For politicians, perhaps. For writers, it's almost like dark magic. We are prophets, regardless of how much we are willing to accept that fate. For the present, we are sometimes misunderstood as troublemakers and warmongers, harbringers of doom. People might laugh at us in the wilderness, until the time comes when they don't.

ON THIS NEW

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As though light broke us apart.
As though light came with the rubble of words,
though we die among the husks of remembering.
— Ruth Stone, *Genesis*¹

the city of starched memory—
but the anxiety that drives wanderers,
and turns the wheels of bicycles, mills, and clocks,
won't leave me, it remains concealed
in my heart like a starving deserter
in an abandoned circus wagon.
— Adam Zagajewski, *Stolarska Street*²

SOME TIME AFTER I submitted the manuscript *Travelbook: Poems*, the first poem in this what I hope to be a second collection came around. It started to take shape while I walked my dog mornings and late afternoons toward dusk in my new neighborhood, in what felt like a new city because even though I grew up in it, I had been away so often, so long, it calls me stranger. The sense of tranquility and waiting that came after the weight of the manuscript was almost akin to a kind of emptiness; and possibly it is because of this sense that I seem to apprehend more catalogs of details: for instance, the weeds in the new neighborhood are gourd, the rain bows often, downpour is visible under lamppost light, dust swivels, lightning turns the night white, and chimes behind glass doors wait endlessly for a wind that may never come.

The more keen apprehension of details is possibly the impetus toward the kind of writing emphasized in these new poems, a kind of writing that differs quite markedly from the first collection. Whereas many pieces in *Travelbook* were borne out of, and thus inclined to present clearly, stories or contexts whence the speaker speaks, these new poems are meant to be catalogs³, especially intended to foreground

details and underplay, as much as possible, the contexts. The assumption being: when the cataloging is effective, the context inevitably unravels itself to the reader, who participates in the meaningfulness of the poem by threading all the details together into a whole according to her associations and her experiences, whether lived or imagined.

I have found that a predisposition for details do help make an adept catalogue of the unsaid, which otherwise would have remained unrevealed. Take, for instance, the poems, “Moon Forest” and “Love Poem” in *Travelbook*:

Moon Forest

At night, the grass is silver
and the blanket
left by lovers in the woods
Shines
quiet with pine
trees and fireflies
Phosphorescing
in the dark

Love Poem

There is always something
she can do
scrub the floors
crouch on fours to see
herself staring back
cold on the ground
waxed and wiped
dried with rag
wash off the water stains
from the countertop
the chipped tiles
to bleach
She can change
into bright and yellow
the windows' curtains
flowered
like the lost dress

she found in the closet
At the backyard
she can get a footstool
to stand on when she knots
the other end of the clothesline
where the sheet now hangs
limp under the sun

The setting in “Moon Forest” is the woods on a trysting night; and so there are the grass, the trees, the dark, the fireflies, the blanket that caught the moonlight. In “Love Poem,” the moment is set within a house and its backyard; the list of its details include, among others, chipped tiles, water stains on a countertop, windows’ curtains, a footstool, a clothesline. In both “Moon Forest” and “Love Poem,” the scope for all the details in the catalogue are found within the immediate physical space of the poem’s dramatic moment. I have found that choosing details within a constrained space deliberately tightens the work, so that, even though the catalogue was what was overtly presented, the dramatic moment remains that which takes center stage.

There is, however, the danger of predictability that needs to be recognized when the list in a catalogue is confined only within the poem’s immediate material space because the sublime, a word Pimone Triplett used to refer to the unsaid, resists habitations⁴. Instead, when crafted into poetry, the sublime, that is, the unsaid, which is what every poem really means to say, “imitates insight, or being, or consciousness without object”⁵. This being so, the unsaid cannot only have correlatives within a persona’s material surroundings, but also within her thoughts, among others, the accumulated experiences and memories, even the subconscious and the unknowable, that perhaps may even be the more powerful correlatives precisely because, as Louise Glück explains, by being unseen, they are more analogous to the unsaid. Like the images of tangible details more conventionally used in cataloging, these things unseen also “inevitably allude to [the] larger contexts”⁶ that is the poem.

In this new collection, I attempt to mostly do a cataloging, not cataloguing. To catalog is to intentionally widen the space to exhaust as many possible spheres in the search, consideration, and selection of details; to include not only the physical or material surroundings within the realm of the poem, but also its inherent metaphysical spheres such as, among others: the infinity and fluidity of time itself; thoughts, like observations and uncertain conclusions; also, the play of so-

called experiences that could be the speaker's memories, imagined and/or actual experiences; and even premonitions, future-events that are manifested, if not sensed, at present time. In a way, this space gives room for the "consciousness" in the poem to move and cull through more diverse details to finally orchestrate a catalog that can mean or gesture the unsaid.

In the poem "The Happening," for instance, the composition of the details becomes especially useful in presenting the anxiety caused by an indescribable foreboding:

It came. Wind fleeing

as did the birds, hundreds of them

amok to the south. Wings darkening the indigo sky—what does it mean

a thousand days ago? Burning wild bushes

and finding a thistle. Shard glass and pricked finger,

sound of siren

wailing elsewhere.

Nights, the geckoes calling

shadows on walls

and I keeping watch.

It can be surmised that the collage of things perceived by the persona is hardly collected from her immediate physical surroundings, but from her various experiences both real and imagined. There is the "[w]ind fleeing" after the birds "amok to the south"; also the mention of "a thousand days ago" which cannot help but cast doubt

on the actuality of her experiences, in the same way that the “sound of a siren/wailing elsewhere” implies that what was heard may probably have been something imagined.

I think that, like imagery, much of the effectiveness of cataloging lies on how it both reveals and hides. The many things it chooses to mention could well be clues or diversions; either way, the list serves to motion toward the unsaid that poems always mean to say. This unsaid has always been what drew me in to poetry. That which is irreducible into words because of its inherent complex nuances, but can only be hinted and, at most, gestured at. To me, poetry is a way of crafting words to make it speak silence so that it can say the unsaid. Thus, the cataloging and the austerity of words.

In these new poems I also continue to give special attention to lineation which, to me, is indispensable in the way it forces both writer and reader to be conscious of the working of the language. Among its other uses, lineation makes the otherwise subterranean tension surface. Tension, says Stephen Dobyns, is anxiety; it is what rises from lineation to become the reader’s fear that the whole structure of the work will collapse into chaos before the unsaid is even apprehended.⁷ Through attention at lineation, varied ways in breaking lines is explored and I found to be true that a poem is not only in words, but also in the structure of internal resistances.⁸ Through enjambments and annotated lines, for instance, as in the following poem “Beyond the City,” the reader is enabled to perceive tension and nuances in the poem’s context that conventional syntax may fail to do:

I come to see you. You are not

the least bit apologetic every thing is

bottle blue and green. Only the door in pastel;

in what must be an attempt. Your husband,

he says “I’ve made prawns.” Sautéed.

He receives the puppy I brought for your girl.

Does he know? Else, he does not say

or appear. Sitting outdoors, smoking menthols,

Notice how, in the first line, enjambment allows the juxtaposition of the actions of the “I” and the “you”. A strained civility is suggested as the “I”, implying a faithful fulfillment of what must have been an mutual agreement, takes the initiative to come and see the “you” in spite of the latter’s failure, having never visited the former. In yet another line, “in what must be an attempt. Your husband”, enjambment surfaces the tension of this underplayed love poem, the unarticulated context that is the beloved’s attempt to have another relationship at the cost of the previous one.

What James Longenbach calls the annotated line is a technique also used in the lineation of these new poems. The annotated line, according to Longenbach, is a way of ending a line, breaking it in a way that asserts stress in syllables not ordinarily stressed had the lines been allowed to stretch longer.⁹ The last lines in this same poem demonstrate how linebreak can both emphasize tension and reveal the context:

Your daughter shows me her art piece Crayolas.

I watch you pour water on the little dog basin.

Your husband tells me I must have a hell

of a view of a sunset like this

from my new house in the city.

By breaking the line at the precise moment when the beloved’s husband conversationally mentions “hell”, the state of the persona, having seen the beloved and the daughter together with the beloved’s husband, although carefully kept by decorum throughout the visit, is revealed. The continuation of the line into “of a

view of a sunset like this/from my new house in the city” closes the poem even as it opens, that is, make known, the unsaid in the poem.

Initially without a project in mind, these new poems were written as separate pieces, although not too long after, it became apparent how I seem to subconsciously return to a theme already explored in *Travelbook*, that of the loss of a beloved to another. However, whereas in the first collection, the loss was the fulcrum of the dramatic moment, in these new works, the loss appears to be the context referred to, if not the point of departure from where the poems move on; such as presented in “Notes through the City” and “My sister comes over for dinner.”

If I may say so in this early stage of what may be a new collection, the loss that is expressed in *Travelbook* has turned into Memory that is the ground for this new work. The project in these new poems, then, is really Memory, transmuted into details that are cataloged and transposed “twenty-eight and seven times / and a hundred in every corner of the city.”¹⁰

Noticeable, also, how the city, that figured only briefly in *Travelbook*, has slowly become more prominent in these new pieces. The city that, in the beginning, as it had been in the first collection, had no name and was an anyplace. As more of these new poems are being written, it is slowly being revealed, to me, that not only has the beloved become Memory, but also Memory has metamorphosed into the city. The city that I return to now, after having been away for so often, so long; the city I am, this time, trying to get to know; the city who, because of my previous abandonment, hurts and calls me stranger.

Although a considerable, if not easily the more significant, part of this collection is yet to be written, it seems that there is already a direction in the arch of these new poems: the beloved from *Travelbook* is a Memory, is a city, is a self lost to the city, is a stranger to its own city, and perhaps, a stranger to its own self.

NOTES

- [1] Ruth Stone, “Genesis,” *In the Next Galaxy*. (United States of America: Copper Canyon Press, 2002): 16.
- [2] Adam Zagajewski, “Stolarska Street,” *Eternal Enemies*; translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh. (18 West 18th Street, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008): 10.
- [3] In the Encarta Dictionary, catalog is differentiated from catalogue. Catalog is defined as a list of related items. Catalogue is a detailed catalog; thus, a more meticulous and particular list of the already-related items.

- [4] Pimone Triplett, "The 'Multi-Homelanded' Sublime," in *Poet's Work, Poet's Play: Essays on the Practice and the Art*. Ed. Daniel Tobin and Pimone Triplett. (United States of America: The University of Michigan Press, 2008): 61.
- [5] Robert Hass, "Tranströmer's 'Baltics': Making a Form of Time," in *Poet's Work, Poet's Play: Essays on the Practice and the Art*. Ed. Daniel Tobin and Pimone Triplett. (United States of America: The University of Michigan Press, 2008): 10.
- [6] Louise Glück, "Disruption, Hesitation, Silence," *Proofs & Theories*. (United States of America: The Ecco Press, 1994): 73.
- [7] Stephen Dobyns, "Notes on Free Verse," *Best Words, Best Order: Essays on Poetry*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996): 55.
- [8] Heather McHugh, "Moving Means, Meaning Moves: Notes on Lyric Destination," in *Poets Teaching Poets: Self and the World*. Ed. Gregory Orr and Ellen Bryant Voight. (United States of America: The University of Michigan Press, 1996): 208.
- [9] James Longenbach, "Ending the Line," *The Art of the Poetic Line*. (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2008): 55.
- [10] Charmaine Carreon, "The muse replies". 2012.

KUMA-CAMANAVA: MGA KUWENTO SA GAWI NAMIN

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Amoy lungsod din sa gawi namin: masangsang na buga ng usok ng makinang de-krudo, kumikiwal na aso ng nilulutong aspalto, rumiripekeng ingay ng sasakyang panlupa at makalupa. Lupang paulit-ulit na binubungkal, tinatabunan, binubungkal. Dagat na ginawang Dagat-dagatang binabawi na uli ng dagat. Ito ang Camanava o Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas, at Valenzuela, isang namumusargang kimpal ng Kalakhang Maynilang may tiyak na hugis, amoy, angas. At bait din. Paminsan-minsan.

Sa sulok-sulok ng gawi namin, may maeeskobang kuwento mula sa mga kinalas na muwelye ng trak, may maisasalbang kuwento mula sa inanod na diaper at baha, may matatapyas na kuwento mula sa mga instant milyonaryo sa isang pinagpapalang barangay, may mahahasang kuwento sa tari ng derby, may matitirang kuwento mula sa boundary ng taksi, may mahuhugasang kuwento mula sa sumalalak na kabayo sa wawang walang maliw sa kalungkutan at nakatatawang trahedya. Maraming kuwento sa gawi naming hindi na aabot etsetera, kung ano-ano, maski papaano, at pagpapaubaya sa salitang umasa sa kakayahan ng word count.

Hantungan ang Camanava ng mga hinapong paglalakbay sa EDSA, ng mga naligaw mula sa norte, ng mga nagliliwaliw—hawak-kamay—sa North Bay Boulevard, ng mga nagtatampisaw sa dagat at totoong lumilinab sa karumal-dumal na dagat ng Navotas, ng mga nakatulog sa tren.

Naitatali ang alinmang koleksiyon ng temang makapuso (o kawalan nito); ng mga saysay ng pakikihamok sa puwing at hila ng tear gas; sa mahahabang kuwento ng ligoy

tungkol sa ligoy at para sa ligoy. Tapatan tayo: sa KUMA-CAMANAVA, dederetsuhin kita.

Bakit kailangan ang mga kuwentong mula sa gawi namin?

Ipagpalagay nang Lonely Planet ito. Lonely Planet on steroids. Humihingang larawan kontra humihingang larawang kinakatawan ng mga kuwentong isinalya malapit sa tanyag na monumento ng maangas na Katipunero. Rumuruweda sa mismong Monumento. Paikot-ikot. Pabilis nang pabilis. Mabilis hanggang umigkas palayo gamit ang apat na maskuladong kalsada.

Dahil kailangan natin ng katalogo ng isang tiyak na lugar na kasusulputan ng mga kuwento. Wika nga'y maiba naman sa kinalakhang Maynila patungo sa pansining-diling norte ng Kalakhang Maynila. Maiba naman sa pagod na pagod na lalawigan.

Gusto mo bang pumunta pero ayaw mong pakislot sa dalisay na baha dahil sa takot mo sa ihi ng daga? Kailangan mo ang KUMA-CAMANAVA. Mamasyal sakay ng nanlilimahid na pedicab patungo sa nanlilimahid na barangay? Kailangan mo ang KUMA-CAMANAVA. Paano ka makikipagdayalogo sa beterano't burdadong pileges ng mga wanted na kapitan at korderong kagawad? KUMA-CAMANAVA.

Mas makulay ito sa alinmang travelogue. Humihinga ito. Nanyayakap o nandudura. Nangungutos at nanununtok.

Mas gagabayan ka nito papasok, lalo ang palabas, ng Camanava.

Mas mabenta ito kumpara sa polyetong pinapawalan ng Department of Tourism. Garantisado. More fun? Iyon, hindi ako sigurado.

Mas makakadiskarte ka kumpara sa mga self-help books o survival guide sa Kalakhang Maynila. Sa KUMA-CAMANAVA, ampon ka na agad ng lunang kinokolonya ng dagat. Ito ang pasaporte mo pagsuong sa naglulusak na buhay ng may buhay. Lugar ng may lugar.

Atin-atin lang. Pambalanse rin ito sa mga naglipanang bigat ng mga kuwento buhat sa kung kaninong pinagpastulang bukolikong bukid o nagpapanggap na bukid. Itong KUMA-CAMANAVA ay dapat markahan, hindi bilang bahagi ng gasgas na lungsod, kundi mismong tiyak na lunang, ehem, may sariling sustansiya at kulay. At angas. Gaya nu'ng mamang maangas, naiikot—as of the last count, partial and unofficial—ng dalawampu't tatlong nagmamakaawang rebulto, Monumento. At yung mamang armado nga ng pistola, hindi nag-aanyaya, hindi welcoming ang kara, kaya sabi nga ng matandang joke, umiwas ang LRT. Napaligaw sa Quezon City, na aminin natin, a city bereft of flavor. Sa kaniyang tansong kasupladuhan, narito, inihahalili ko ang, tsaraaaan! KUMA-CAMANAVA. Mula Recto, sakay ka lang ng biyaheng Gasak. Mula Trinoma, sakay ka lang ng bus na layak ng plywood at bakal na biyaheng Malanday. Mula Baclaran, sakay ka lang ng LRT. Siguraduhing makakababa ka ng Monumento. Pero kung gusto mong mahalughog ang Camanava? Ito ang para sa iyo: KUMA-CAMANAVA.

ROMANCE: BECAUSE I CAN, AND I SHOULD, AND WHY NOT

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My name is Mina V. Esguerra, and I write books with kissing.

That line was my bio on my social media profiles for some time, before I changed it to “author of romance novels.” It does remain the most accurate description of what I write, even though I’ve taken up several causes over the years, and have used my books to explore them.

My first book “with kissing” was published in 2009. It’s called *My Imaginary Ex*, and it was acquired and released by Summit Books under their chick lit line. “Chick Lit,” strictly speaking, is a different category of contemporary fiction, and is not necessarily romance. Chick Lit is associated with: first person POV, awkwardly adorable main characters, career trouble, hijinks, sudden travel, shopping sprees, margaritas with friends. Romance is associated with: third person POV, alternating hero/heroine chapters, two to three sex scenes, a big breakup, then happily ever after. The particular brand of romance that I write has been formed by what the Philippine publishing industry needed at the time. The accessibility and heart of chick lit’s unsure and flawed main characters in first person POV, but the grand gestures and swoony heroes of romance. All this, and in English, too.

I write romance because this is what I read. In 2015, a typical reading year for me, I read ninety-eight books, over eighty of them easily romance. I am also a publisher of my own romance novels. I started doing that in 2010, when I finished my second book, and it was something I willingly tried after discovering I could sell my work

on Amazon, and have it be easily downloaded and purchased by anyone with the means to do so. By that time I had already been published once, worked nearly ten years in corporate communications and online media, and earned a master's degree in development communication. I knew the operations side of publishing. I knew it required hiring an editor, a cover designer, and learning the business of publishing. I did all of that, in stages. A year, and thousands of downloads both free and paid later, I decided that I would keep doing it this way. My presence in Philippine bookstores is the result of a partnership with Anvil Publishing. I've been active on the Wattpad writer community for several years, and was tapped by Wattpad HQ in Canada to act as a mentor and answer their questions related to writing and publishing.

Romance, as it turns out, is huge, and global, and dynamic. A lot of books being written and published; over a hundred new releases, worldwide, per week. There are a lot of readers. Millions, by some estimates, and they are buying and reading books at a "power reader" level. Romance readers can read one book a week, easy, and buy even more. There are a lot of subgenres within romance. The competition, while fierce, is spread out, and there's a lot of room for authors to shine, and for readers to find new favorites.

When I entered this market six years ago with an English-language romance novel about Filipinos in the Philippines, I found the readers welcoming. I haven't felt ignored or shut out because I'm a Filipino author. But to have a career as a romance author you need repeat readers, those who will buy your next book whatever it happens to be about. I realized that I might have been a novelty read for some—a book they picked up because they wanted to learn about the Philippines. I decided that it wasn't enough for me. I first wanted to be a romance author, period, and not the romance author they chose when they wanted to "challenge themselves."

So I began writing romance novels set in the United States. So far, those books have sold more than my books set in the Philippines. It's an ongoing experiment, interesting to say the least given the discussion on diversity in publishing. For now I'm doing both, and learning to find the balance, which elements make a romance novel more accessible to certain audiences. I also posted some of my books free and complete on Wattpad, and because of that I get the most reliable analytics about reader engagement and demographics.

I am not the only Filipino romance writer doing this. We have a community on Facebook, over a hundred members right now, and many of us are authors who are trying to find the "global" path that works for us. Many of us are trying to transition into career authors, authors who can earn day-job-level income from romance writing. We're actively publishing our work because for the first time the

environment has all the elements in place so we can do this. We write and publish because we can, and why not.

My UPNWW application submission is the first two and a half chapters of my twenty-fourth book. *Iris After the Incident* is a romance novel. Twenty-something girl has a “meet cute” with a twenty-something guy in a modern condominium complex in Metro Manila, when they’re stuck in an elevator together during a routine test of the electrical system. They discover that they’re neighbors; he lives in Tower 3 Unit 9J, she lives in Tower 3 Unit 9M. They’re both attractive, they check each other out. After they survive that particular rom-com contrivance, he decides to ask her out, and she accepts. But they don’t trade names, and they refuse to do so even on their first date. Because when you have someone’s name you can Google them, and when you both have “scandalous” and sexual photos and videos on the internet, it might make dating more complicated.

I’ve said that writing stories set in the US got me more readers. I’ve written five of those, and had them published, and now they’re doing the work of introducing me to new readers, while I get to work now on what I really want to see from Filipino romance in English. What I want to see from Filipino romance is actually what I like reading in romance, period. I want to see women get what they want. I want to read about the lives of women who freely want things, and go get them.

So this is what I write. Filipino women, getting what they want. My books are safe spaces for women to want things. Higher pay, better jobs, nice clothes, safe streets, genuine friendships, healthy relationships.

Since 2011 I’ve been giving classes, most of them free, to authors who want to publish and write in the manner that I’ve chosen to do so. We usually have an average of over fifty active students per class. As of my writing this, over 120 new titles have been published by the participants of the various classes. You can probably imagine the kinds of interactions I have with young and new writers every day, every time I open a class, or when someone asks me a question on social media. Romance by Filipino authors could be critiqued more, yes. We readers should and are asking our authors to be more responsible about what we write. My heart breaks a little every time I encounter romance stories by young Filipino authors that involve relationships that involve coercion and abuse. Young Filipino authors are writing thousands of these stories, about loving the person who was chosen for them, or abducted them, bullied them, abused them.

I know that it’s a common romance trope, and it isn’t confined to our country. I know that it has societal and cultural roots in many countries. I know that this particular trope has many readers, and I emphasize that I also believe that people are free to read and enjoy what they want. Whatever floats your boat.

I'm not a psychologist, a therapist, or a teacher in the conventional sense. I am not your mother; I will not tell you what to do. I enjoy steamy romance novels myself, and read books that push the envelope and challenge even the accepted romance conventions. But as an author, and a woman, what I want to do is write about people who can admit that they want things and want each other.

I always write about women who kiss and want to be kissed. I write how good people can want sex, career advancement, ice cream, and still be good people. I write about people who can be the deceitful and evil even as they remain sexually "pure." I write about men who will respect a woman's decision to wait. I write about men who decide to wait. I write about men who want to give a woman pleasure. All these people exist, in real life. It's how I was able to write over twenty romance novels without feeling that I was telling the same old story.

Romance novels get a lot of flak for supposedly portraying an unrealistic, shiny view of life. They're fairy tales, they can't be real. In my first twenty-three books with kissing, I've presented a world where our main character can kiss and be kissed all she wants. In this, my twenty-fourth book, I challenge my character a little by having her wake up to a world where she is shamed for being that kind of person. That kind of girl. This world exists, and we live in it. But don't worry—I will get her through this. She'll find love. She'll find her strength. No one wants to read a romance novel where romance and love don't prevail.

I write romance, because this is what I read. This is what I want to read. And I will, because I can, and I should, and why not.

WALKING THROUGH TIME AND SPACE IN HIS SHOES: THE MARIKINA SHOE INDUSTRY, A RE-MEMBERING

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tangent |'tæn.dʒənt|

noun

1 a straight line or plane that touches a curve or curved surface at a point, but if extended does not cross it at that point.

• figurative a completely different line of thought or action : *she **went off on a tangent** about how she and her husband had driven past a department store window.*

2 Mathematics the trigonometric function that is equal to the ratio of the sides (other than the hypotenuse) opposite and adjacent to an angle in a right triangle.

adjective

(of a line or plane) touching, but not intersecting, a curve or curved surface.

DERIVATIVES

tangency | -jənsē | noun

ORIGIN late 16th cent. (in sense 2 and as an adjective): from Latin **tangent-** 'touching,' from the verb **tangere**.

(Oxford Dictionary)

MY ENTRY POINT is this act of holding a pair of my father's shoes. The tan smell of leather against my chest. The tips of my father's shoes against my chin. The passing of shoes to. . . (blind spot in memory). This is how the search begins.

I start from the last painful image of my father's death, take that and work my way back to many other painful images that make up not only my history, but also the history of my family and maybe ultimately a personal history of the city that is Marikina.

If I find my father I shall know my city. If I find my city, I shall know my country.

"Guevara means galleon. I knew your father. He was a doctor. Ang yaman ninyo." Dr. Perez of Perez Optical still stands behind the glass cases unchanged since my college years. The dust is just as thick as the vintage glass frames on sale. How he can sit there, his store jutting out like an appendix barely holding its seams together beneath the Gateway Complex, I do not know. These I will write about and many other stories yet.

These are a group of vignettes, tangents. They might not amount to the long Story. But these are my stories.

I will go around things, barely touching, barely saying. I will still set my pen on a point, points, but I will write away from the center. As a lyric poet, I write the moment in front of me. Now as an apprenticing nonfiction writer, I am easing myself into the act of seeing a larger vista, and write things into a larger frame. I am now trying to write the action, the ending, the death, and the resurrection.

But always, I will write as traveler, a reveler, a lover of tangents. I believe that everything is connected. The Virgin Mary, that chipped Lady of Lourdes statue that used to be on the wooden stairs of my Nanay's Cubao apartment is now beside the Lady of Manaoag in my Uncle Totoy's house. This is also the same Virgin that originally stood in the Grotto of my father's ancestral house in Parang when they co-owned Alex Shoes, the largest shoe factory in Marikina in The Good Old Days. I will make use of profile of people and places. The narrative strand is a journey/story from España to BalicBalic to Baguio to Marikina.

I believe that questioning the people on the periphery will lead me to a truer understanding of the center. It is easy to go straight to the top: The Shoe Museum, The Bahay na Bato, The Mayor of Marikina. But I am not after the contrived tour. I am waiting.

I am waiting for my father's ghost to lead me into the City.

I am waiting for Marikit to look up from the river and lead me into the City.

I am waiting for Mang Ely the Shoe Repair man to lead me into the City.

I am waiting for Mrs. Aida Chen to lead me into the City.

I am waiting for James Yango and many others to lead me into the City.

And just like in my poetry, I am waiting "for the one word that will lead me to the one line that will bring me back home."

That word now is Father.

POETICS

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EVERY ONE OF us must have had some apprehension while writing our poetics papers. Having to commit what one believes to be good writing to the page, and thus make something that your own work will be measured by is frightening. My own apprehensions about laying out my poetics are further compounded, first by an inherent lack of confidence in my writing in general (which I try not to betray in my work but I will admit to in a poetics paper), and second by the fact that I've been asked to represent and write about "that other literary genre."

When I told friends that I was coming out with a nonfiction book, one of the immediate reactions was, "Why not fiction?" This would be followed by, "Your first book will define how others see you. Don't you want to be known as a fictionist?" And much later would come the idea that I would greatly lessen my chances of winning a first book award if my firstie were nonfic, because no one would give the award to a nonfiction book over poetry and fiction.

I like to think of myself as a fictionist. Most of my literary publication has been fiction. My previous two workshop fellowships were for fiction. And my ongoing projects are in fiction. I see my nonfiction writing not as a lesser form but as what I turn to when there are things that I want to talk about or express which I cannot do in my fiction. I'm sure that with the large number of bloggers in attendance, we can all relate that the blog becomes our outlet for other things. I found myself writing in my blog about everyday things that weren't the stuff of fiction, but realizing that I

could stretch out those everyday things into something more fun and entertaining. I could not take, for example, my predicament with buying pirated Xbox 360 games and turn it into a compelling work of fiction. But I found that I could turn it into something that I would have fun writing and that I hoped people would have fun reading.

Fiction is what I work hard at. It's what I aspire to be great at. And yet, it is my nonfiction writing that has gotten me invited here. It's also my nonfiction that has gotten the attention of a publisher. I'll be publishing my own collection of short stories, hocking them from the trunk of my ex-girlfriend's car. If I've been focused primarily on the development of my fiction, my fiction poetics and the like, then it would be difficult to map out what nonfiction is for me, when honestly I think of my nonfiction as just me riffing on ideas.

Those of a more literary or erudite background might begin with some discussion of major nonfiction writers, how those writers inspired their own writing. I suppose then that it might seem crude and un-literary if I were to say that a lot of my nonfiction writing attempts to emulate Jerry Seinfeld's *Seinlanguage* or Tim Allen's *Don't Stand Too Close to a Naked Man*. And yet, as a young boy these were the things that I was reading for fun.

I had wanted to become a stand-up comedian for a time. Of course I had also wanted to become an astrophysicist and a member of the A-Team, but I did spend much time watching comedy on TV. As a youth I wasn't allowed to join Little League or any of the other after-school things that my classmates did. I was stuck at home with the TV and I wound up watching a lot of comedy, be it stand-up, sitcoms, or skit shows, and these all informed my sense of humor. My humor grew very far from that of my parents, who loved TVJ and Rene Requiestas. I will admit that I did love those things very much as well. When we watched those things as a family, we would all laugh together. But when I tried to get my family to watch the classic *SNL* reruns that had the likes of Bill Murray and Dan Aykroyd there, or even the then contemporary hijinks of Adam Sandler and Chris Farley, I would be left to watch alone. On a side note, this might explain why up to this day I wind up laughing by myself often.

I imagine a lot of my literary contemporaries, those with smashing new visions for literature, those that seem to straddle the worlds of writing and theory effortlessly, those who at such a young age are racking up awards and pushing the envelope of Philippine literature as youths; I think of them being exposed to literature early in their lives, I imagine their parents supporting their writing, I imagine the books around them, the teachers that encouraged their writing. While others get this, I spend the majority of my time watching Gallagher smash watermelons. That might

be something to help define my poetics: with others locked in various intellectual and aesthetic struggles, striving for beauty, pondering the art for art's sake vs. art for society debate, trying to question and transcend the limitations of form, forwarding new genres, I aspire for the same effect that Gallagher got when he put a watermelon on a table and smashed it with a mallet.

In my nonfiction I try to make people laugh. While I'm not above a cheap Three Stooges poke in the face, I can't really pull that off with words. And thus I find myself looking for material that would allow me to be funny, allow me to crack jokes. This search for material is greatly informed by the kind of comedy I have watched, as all these stand-up comedians, writers in their own right, find the funny in the mundane and everyday. They look at their own personal experiences, find the ironies, the neat incongruencies in society, and point them out.

I found that I had to look no further than myself to find something funny. I always wanted to be funny, but more often than not I was thinking of the smart funny thing to say well after the moment had passed. Maybe that's why I turned to writing instead of stand-up comedy. That and my extreme shyness at the time. I found that when put in certain situations, the weird things about me, the geekiness, the inability to navigate social situations, coupled with the quirky perspective that I had, allowed me to find the funny things in many situations. The overactive imagination and my insecurities also allowed me to throw things in that people normally wouldn't think.

One of the things that might set my nonfiction apart is my ability for self-deprecation. Usually people are concerned with what people think of them. In literary circles, you want people to admire your writing; in academic settings, you want to establish your authority; in workplaces, you want to establish respect. None of these things can be accomplished (or so people think) if people make fun of you and if you make fun of yourself. How many poets do we see poking fun at their creative process? Or fictionists making jokes about their striving for epiphanies? We want these higher standards, and we don't think that laughing can be a part of that. People aren't used to being made fun of. However, Filipino nonfiction writing has people making fun of other people, or putting other people down. I suppose that's why some of the nonfiction that's out doesn't appeal to more people; there are times when authors take condescending tones or don't win their readers over. Granted that their material is funny, but the tone in which it is presented throws people off; think of the stand-up comedian and how their persona is so crucial to the kinds of jokes that they make: Gilbert Gottfried's irritating voice makes way for his abrasive commentary and Steven Wright's almost monotone voice, hunched stance, and always seemingly uncomfortable demeanor onstage allows for offbeat observations. Filipino "stand-

up” comedy usually means gay hosts making fun of people in their audience. The comedians and the writers take aim at others, and it doesn’t make for a good stance. People will laugh in that bar, but then it’d be a cheap laugh making fun of how fat or ugly someone is. I think that it’s much easier, and much nicer to make fun of myself than other people. And I have no qualms about getting laughs at my own expense, because hey, sometimes the things that happen to me are funny and I guess that I’ve been making fun of myself for so long that self-deprecation comes easily.

Another point that I exploit in my writing is the intersect between geek and macho culture. I am a self-confessed geek and this does become a problem when say, I make a joke when I’m with my girlfriend and her friends and I’m the only one who gets it because it refers to *Star Trek* or *Star Wars* or *BSG*. But there’s this funny space that the geek inhabits in Filipino culture, especially when thrust against the everyday. I believe that tech geek writing has been explored, but with the proliferation of even more technology as well as new geekdoms to be explored, it seems very viable material. Mix in the expectations of being a macho Pinoy with geek culture and there’s some fun to be had. I still look forward to writing about my tech savvy vis-a-vis my inability to fix our toilet when it won’t flush. I believe that in the future my material will continue to explore the realms of the geek, and as I mature and have more experiences (I still look forward to getting married, having a family, and other things which I’ve put off because I’ve prioritized video games and playing in a band) then these will lend themselves to funny writing.

In terms of the style in which I write my nonfiction, as mentioned earlier, I attempt to capture the comic rhythm of the stand-up comedian. I know that I can say some things that aren’t too funny, or that are only moderately funny, but these have to build toward a punchline, and I have to string together a series of punchlines to keep the reader going. Often, it’s stand-up comedy mixed with the sit-com in terms of telling a story in my nonfiction pieces. I’ve got to find a situation that would lend itself to a series of jokes, and figure in how these jokes can be told so that they build. Unlike fiction, which allows you to build up towards one big climax, I find that the way that I’ve written my nonfiction attempts to keep the canned laughter going.

In much the same way that people who don’t normally read local fiction were out in droves fawning over Neil Gaiman, I found that people who don’t usually read local nonfiction were out to see and listen to David Sedaris. This guy had hit upon something; though he wrote about things that were, culturally, half a world away from our own culture, his personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts, had struck a chord in many Filipino readers. And at the reading, people were laughing, and laughing regularly at the right points. So it wasn’t material that Sedaris had an upper

hand with (though he does have great material) but it was in the presentation of his material, which developed a rhythm of regular jokes and punchlines. I found myself there wondering why we didn't write nonfiction in that way. There are many funny writers, and there are many nonfiction writers that can be funny, but I've seen no one read and get that kind of reaction. And that's where I found that it wouldn't be so bad to calibrate my nonfiction to provide regular laughs. It could also be compared to TV series like *Friends* where you've got regular jokes, regular laughs every few seconds. These things, after so many seasons of *Friends*, become predictable, but if applied to literature then perhaps the plotting out of laughs at regular intervals might spark more readership.

Now I'd like to consider some of the problems of nonfiction. First off is that my friend Adam David wrote a scathing review of the Milflores nonfic line, indicting it for pandering or for promoting the "Spectacle of Me." A denizen of the social networking sites, I am all too aware of this trend that is the Spectacle of Me, this self-centered glorification of the moment. And while I hope that I am not guilty of that, I suppose that my material can fall in with it because it does deal with my personal experiences. However, I believe that my work attempts to transcend the Spectacle of Me by doing what all good literature does, which is by trying to make the material relatable or universal, by presenting the material in such a matter that I don't come across as needy or wanting attention, but rather sharing an experience which many people will be familiar with but will find in my writing of it a certain level of novelty and insight. Indeed the Spectacle of Me is something to be avoided, but nonfiction isn't the only culprit as we find much poetry being read at readings subscribing to the same kind of affectations. It's probably just that the confessional nature of poetry is accepted, whereas nonfiction's parameters are still being established and thus, as a still developing form it is still unclear what nonfic can express and how it can express it. We also take into consideration that our own local nonfic writing covered such important topics as WWII, the Martial Law years, and many other momentous things that when we put the present content of nonfic, it has no way of measuring up. Nonfiction then has to perform doubly well, establishing itself in terms of quality as well as material.

Another problem is that nonfiction is usually considered a lesser genre, when put beside poetry. I remember in classes some professors would say, "There's poetry, and there's everything else." I will add on. "There's everything else. Then there's creative nonfiction." The everything else was fiction, drama, and the essay. Nonfic is a new form, and it combines elements of the other various forms. But at this point, it is seen as inferior to poetry and fiction because the act of creation is supposedly lesser.

This problem has been discussed by many others before, and discussed better. I just feel the need to mention it because it should be mentioned as an ongoing problem for the genre. I've been chosen to represent the genre, and I find myself favoring my fiction as more artistic than my nonfiction.

An advantage of this though, of not considering myself a poet, not considering myself someone concerned with producing high art, winning the Palanca (who would give the Palanca to an essay about wanting to look at women's panties?), etc., is that because I write nonfiction it gives me free space to write about things that aren't necessarily deep, philosophical, or socially relevant. This is not to say that I don't have politics, but rather to say that these things aren't expected from my writing or don't have to come out.

Another advantage of nonfiction is that people do prefer the true story for some reason. "Totoo ba 'yan?" or "Nangyari ba talaga?" becomes a question that, if answered with yes draws more people in. We see this in all the movies with the "Based on a True Story" or "Based on Actual Events" tagged on them.

This advantage leads to another problem, and a problem shared by all genres, which is the lack of publication venues. Nonfic is easily accessible, but it's hard to find a place for it. The length of nonfiction pieces varies greatly (my own pieces will range from two to twenty pages) and as such, it is difficult to place them in magazines or other publication venues. There are no regular anthologies to look forward to, and it seems that genre writing like speculative fiction has many more avenues for publication than nonfiction, even though Milflores does publish a lot of nonfiction books. Regular anthologies have yet to be established.

Nonfiction faces the same problems as the other genres when it comes to lack of readership, lack of marketing, and things like that. However I find that nonfiction has greater potential to develop a readership quickly. You don't have to educate readers to appreciate nonfiction in the way that you have to teach them how to read poetry or the short story. Further, people are intimidated by poetry and afraid that they'll feel dumb if they don't understand. We have to look no further than Bob Ong (and there is the necessary Bob Ong reference) to find people's willingness to read nonfiction writing as leisure, as fun.

In attempting to encapsulate my poetics, it becomes clear that I want to be funny. I want to make readers laugh, and by making readers laugh develop an audience. These laughs come from my personal experiences, but attempt to be relatable to the audience, as I believe that the experiences I have are similar to those of the readers.

I WRITE BECAUSE I WANT TO BE SANE

ROGENE A. GONZALES

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It's that simple to say.

IN THIS WORLD full of absurdities, my conscience dictates that writing is the only right thing left for me to do in order to feel “normal”. At the moment, I am caught up at a point when every year seems to be different; job choices change by the impulse and the monotony of the routine drains happiness out of everything I do.

Perhaps this is how it feels to be in the middle of everything.

I was once told that writing was only for expression, at times when memories were still vague to the luster of politics and economy. What would I be today when I never found that old essay my parents hid inside their cabinet? Who could I've been when I just stuck myself with a retake of integral calculus and inorganic chemistry? These are the questions I always ask myself.

Thanks to the K to 12 program, I've been teaching English Senior High in a Catholic institution for several months now, living a double life of trying to inculcate the value of reading and writing to teenagers, and traveling to Manila for higher learning, writing workshops, and spoken word events. It should be an easy, honest, and care-free life; yet each day, something from within me screams that I pursue a career in writing.

My love for literature began when I was in college (a rather late age). Being involved in activism, I had access to books from different sources: book-worm

friends who filled their apartments with various titles; union-offices littered with situationers; and chance encounters with fellow poets also struggling with their craft. I've always wondered why, no matter what I write about, my words always lead me back to the names and faces of those who have fallen. Those who've sacrificed their lives so that I can live and breathe the "writer life" that I've chosen.

And now, each day seems to be encased inside a glass container, viewing things in a retrospective manner, embracing the nostalgia of finally coming back to my hometown after almost a decade of trying to find out who I am (or what I should be). Nothing has changed much, actually, only me being estranged to the place.

I need to write, it always haunts me when I cannot. When I see or hear or feel something that disturbs me, I am compelled to write. I've already released three poetry collections, the latest being *Diskonektado* (which I believe is the other half of my current manuscript). I plan to do full-time writing soon, but I still lack the proper discipline, the techniques to effectively say what I mean, and the drive to take up the challenge and tell my story. And yet every time I try to write, there is always clutter, the distraction to strive for an honorable livelihood, the countless worries of playing various roles: of being a son for a cancer survivor, a teacher exemplifying good values, or someone who could at least contribute a piece of himself to everyone's grand attempt of waking our "national conscience."

I do not have much to tell, aside from my belief that I have an obligation to my generation to tell the stories I have seen through my own eyes, and give them at least a piece of advice during these troubling times of false information and mass slaughters. Somehow I am stuck in this driving hunger to recollect memories of being (and not being) in a middle-class life, in hoping that my story fits with the countless others who must be heard, in an era when nobody listens and everyone thinks we are all fools.

I wish it could be that easy, just to tell my story, but where do I begin? When my dad died in 2011, everything went downhill, my days remain mostly shattered and covered in an endless stream of preserving lost memories, and persevering in *his* memory. I am caught up in my own web of confusion and personal justifications. There are times that I wish I could bring back the vigor to inspire and be inspired by ordinary people. And somehow, each day I try to reassure myself:

"Perhaps through writing."

EVERY NEW BEGINNING: AN ESSAY ON MY POETICS

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LEAVE-TAKING

ALL STORIES START with an ending. There is an unwritten tale that ended just before the first word is set on the page. Even before the very first letter is inscribed on the sheet, the storyteller already knows what has happened before, and what happens within the story, and what will happen after the last word has been set in stone.

In my case, my story began with an ending as well. I was twenty-two, and had just had my heart broken by a boy whom I thought I was in love with; he did not love me back. For one reason or another, I was exhausted: with my job as a project manager at a small design firm, with a string of meaningless relationships that ultimately led nowhere, with the writing community in Manila that I was currently immersed in. Especially with the last one, I felt that there was too much tension, too many expectations, too much gossip and double-crossing and seething anger at everyone and everything. I couldn't hear myself. I couldn't process the emotions I was feeling, the thoughts I were thinking, the desires coursing through my body.

When I wanted to make sense of something, I always turned to writing. I had control of the world when I wrote. I knew my beginning, my middle, my end. I could explore the exposition, circumscribe the climax, deliberately pace the denouement. But for some reason, at this point in my life, when my world was slowly but surely spinning out of control, I couldn't find the words to describe what I was feeling. They were trapped inside my mind, unable to find shape or form in which to finally flow freely. Neither verse nor prose was coming to save me.

So I decided to leave. I applied for a master's degree in Singapore. I decided that I wanted to leave behind the world of advertising and enter teaching, and I knew that in order to do that, I needed a graduate degree. The literature program and its requirements seemed straightforward enough when I applied for a position as a master's student at the university. My decision to try my hand at literary studies instead of creative writing was because I knew that my undergraduate degree was severely lacking in terms of providing me with a background in the literary and critical traditions that dominated university English programs. This, I felt, was a gap in my education that I wanted to address. And it provided enough of a challenge for me to perhaps forget all the troubles that I had in Manila. Maybe if I was distracted enough, I wouldn't be so lonely and exhausted anymore. And then perhaps the words would come back.

When I received the acceptance call, I immediately began to cry. I remember sitting in my little cubicle in our little office along Ortigas Avenue, sobbing with joy. My friend Hiyas was hugging me, and my bosses were applauding. I remember feeling relief rush through my entire being. I had an exit. I had a way out. I was so relieved.

I carefully plotted out my next two years as a master's student in Singapore. I knew what I wanted to focus on. I knew what I wanted to do and what I had to achieve in order to be considered as an instructor when I came back. I had a map in my mind—I no longer wanted to be bothered by the petty problems that plagued me. They were flies buzzing around my ears. I didn't want to know about the writers who were winning Palancas or the latest chismis about who slept with whom. I didn't want to see the boy who broke my heart. I didn't want to go to work anymore. All I wanted was to begin again on a blank slate. *Tabula rasa*, so say the philosophers. I wanted to be a different person. I didn't want to be me anymore.

PAGE-TURNING

Nobody owes you anything abroad. This was something I realized when I moved away from home. There was nobody to take care of me, nobody to wonder where I was, nobody to come home to. My family was nonchalant at best about living abroad—sure, they were concerned and worried, but they had placed their faith in the universe, and in me, and they assumed that I wasn't an idiot and I could survive on my own.

Still, it was daunting. I had a room of my own for the first time: a bed that I had covered with Ikea sheets and a scarlet duvet and piled high with pillows, a desk against the large window that overlooked the park and a small pond behind the apartment block, a shelf for books, and a small TV set. I never had the luxury of such space. I was used to sharing a space with my siblings, with my family, with officemates and friends. Here, I barely saw my flatmates—they worked in an office

and I was a student, so we kept odd hours—and because I wasn't bound to report to anyone, the city was my playground.

It was the first time I was given an opportunity to explore my surroundings with such attention and detail. I had to know where the nearest bank was, the nearest hospital, the nearest grocery store. I needed to know even the smallest things like how to cross the road or flag down the bus or ride the escalator on the correct side. And yet, there was such freedom! I could map out my whole day without having to consult anyone but myself. I was beholden to no one, and after the confusion and cacophony of Manila, I felt an odd kind of peace settle over my bones. I no longer had to write with a deadline. I no longer had to write to please teachers, mentors, friends. I didn't have to submit to anyone if I didn't want to. And perhaps the most freeing for me was simply the idea that I did not have to answer to anyone. I could write what I wanted to write.

Prior to moving to Singapore, my training and experience was mostly in writing poetry. My undergraduate thesis collection was on confessional poetry. All my previous workshop experience was in writing poetry. Most of my publication history was in poetry. I wrote my poems to please the world.

But I wrote fiction to please myself. The stories that I thought nobody would want to read, I wrote for myself. I wrote about the feelings that I had that I couldn't seem to articulate in verse. I wrote about myself in my stories, trying to figure out how I felt about things and why. I grappled with loneliness, intense loneliness that made me feel breathless and empty. In Singapore, at night, I paced the four corners of my small room, the desk lamp my only illumination. Past my window and past the trees that bordered the park, I could see the tiny pinpricks of light from the ships docking at the harbor, searching for their berth. I wondered if they were coming home or if they, like me, were just visitors to an island that I did not belong to.

One of the earliest stories I wrote, which was published in the first volume of *Philippine Speculative Fiction*, was about a girl who turned into glass. This is me, I remember thinking as I frantically typed out the words to her story. This is what I'm becoming. I wrote this even before I left for Singapore, but I felt like I was still Susan, trying to disappear into her own skin, emptying herself, becoming a vessel for someone else. And even though I thought I had made a clean break when I left Manila, the story stayed with me. I felt like I was on the verge of disappearing, of becoming invisible. Singapore was nothing but a shadow to me. I had established a routine, explored the boundaries of the city, made friends. But in my attempt to leave everything behind, I had nothing to claim for myself anymore.

And so carefully, tentatively, I returned to the words that had left me so long ago, that I had abandoned in another country. I began to read once more; not

indiscriminately, not in accordance to what people around me told me to read, but what I wanted to read. I returned to the books that I had forgotten, books that wanted me to give them a chance, books that I remembered, vaguely, from my childhood, in the way that one remembers a dream. School afforded me the opportunity to read as well—to read from an academic standpoint, from a literary standpoint. Now, both my professional and personal lives contrived to run in parallel directions: reading that was good for the mind and good for the soul.

Although I thought I had found my niche in writing speculative fiction (a problematic term, but adequate enough to define what I wrote), I found myself being drawn, again and again, back toward the books I had loved as a high school student: I began to build my book collections around Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Earthsea Quartet*, and then Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Fionavar Tapestry*. And then I found myself following the bright, shining thread—like Theseus in the labyrinth—toward the young adult section of the bookstore. I picked up volumes by Alison Croggan and Maria Snyder, C. S. Lewis and Robin McKinley and Lloyd Alexander, and returned to my favorite worlds, my favorite shores, and explored new places and spaces within the pages of these books. Even now, I have to admit that I am not much of a literary reader—I would rather pick up John Green than Jeffrey Eugenides. And much like when I was thirteen and picked up a Sweet Valley Twins story and thought to myself, I could write this, too, I thought exactly the same thing while reading young adult fiction: I could write this, too.

But hubris aside, I've always felt close to young adult literature, and to young adults in general. Teenagers fascinate me: the most vivid memories I have was when I was in high school and college, and the way I saw the world was different and yet eerily similar to how I know teenagers now see the world and move in it. My best reading experiences was when I was a teenager: sneaking into my aunt's bedroom and grabbing her copy of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and reading it in the bathroom because I was forbidden to read "scary stories" for fear of nightmares. Before I was inundated with literary theory and canonical texts and standards of reading and writing, I remember the sheer pleasure of sinking into a story, of feeling the yellowed paper between my fingers crinkle slightly as I turn the page. I loved that feeling. I think that studying literature, to a certain extent, takes away the pleasure of a story, of the act of reading, simply because I am weighted down with the baggage of history and trends and the academic pursuit of reading.

And to a certain extent, that's the philosophy behind my writing. I want to write not to please the critics and the academics, but to reach that one person listening to the story I tell. Edward Hirsch describes this kind of reading as "speak[ing] out of a solitude to a solitude; it begins and ends with silence." Although Hirsch talks

about poetry in this manner, about the poem as a “message in a bottle” seeking the stranger in order to be read, I think that this can be applied to any kind of writing. As readers, we often speak of being affected by what we have read, of being able to relate to the words on the page, of feeling as though the text was written just for us. Stories bridge the gap between people, between strangers, between different points in time and space, between worlds. This is something I want to remember when I write: that my words have the potential to endure. And it’s not because of critics that it will survive; it will be because of the reader.

To me, my ideal reader is the young adult, the teenager setting forth on his or her own journey across the pages of a book, across the stage of the world. They are the ones in most need of the guidance of stories. I remember reading books and thinking, all right, if these characters are able to survive all of these experiences, then surely I can do it, too. They are still able to experience the pleasure and visceral pain of the written word without having to constantly analyze the text. The most passionate readers are those who have wept when their favorite characters died, or cheered aloud when their characters have survived. They are the ones who will carry the stories with them their entire lives.

And so, I also carried the stories I read during my time in Singapore. I was never as productive in terms of output there as I was before I had left, and while I was slightly worried about that, I also realized (at least in hindsight) that at least I was more careful of what I wrote as well, and more discerning of the stories I wanted to tell. Reading and writing go hand in hand, and to read is to know more about what is being written, and to see where I can fit in.

HOMEcoming

The decision to come home coincided with the decision that I wanted, finally, to start writing again. I felt like I was on a bit of a vacation in Singapore, to be quite honest, and that in returning to Manila, I was making the conscious decision that I really wanted to be a teacher and a writer. This decision was also affected by a significant break in my personal life, and once again, I felt like I was free to pursue what I really wanted instead of holding myself back.

But coming home, I realized that things had changed, and that people had changed. In my mind, the community had stayed the same, and the people had stayed the same. While in theory, I knew that things would have changed—and should have changed—I did not anticipate having to figure out where I was going to go once more, and how I was going to position myself. After all, although you write by yourself, at the back of your mind, there is always the consideration: who am I writing for? What is this for? Where is this going?

I also realized that I missed being part of a community of writers, of feeding off and giving back the energy that is produced in the process of creating something. To me, this was the missing piece of the puzzle: here were people who inherently understood the need to write, to desire to craft a story, the difficulties of having to balance work and writing and responsibilities and a million other things that needed to be done. And I found myself writing, and writing, and writing.

It was also when I came back home that I was able to consider the state of Philippine letters, and this also influenced my decision to write fiction rather than poetry. The genre lends its voice better to storytelling for my intended audience, it gives me space to play with language and ideas without necessarily getting dragged down by the terseness and tension of poetry. Furthermore, I also realized that what I wanted to write was something that was just starting out in the Philippines either: very few people had attempted to write specifically for young adults, and yet outside the Philippines, the genre has exploded with titles that were familiar to anyone growing up in the early and mid-2000s. It was something that sold, and sold well. Fortunes were made on the backs of these titles—anyone familiar with the layout of bookstores would have noticed that the display tables for young adult titles have appeared and have expanded from year to year. Clearly, there is an audience.

And so I asked myself: why haven't we tried writing for young adults?

I think the reason for this is twofold: first of all, we do not consider the Filipino youth as an independent being with his or her own set of concerns, separate from children. This may stem from a conservative Catholic upbringing, or from the desire to cling to a traditional set of values, but there is a very distinct difference between the young adults in the stories by Jerry Spinnelli or Laurie Halse Anderson and the young adults in the stories by Lin Acacio-Flores and Carla Pacis. And yet, to my mind, this is a disservice to the Filipino young adult reader. Why do we insist on treating them like children? Surely their concerns are more mature, and require more shades of gray than just a solid black/white dichotomy. This is also in conjunction with the other media that they are exposed to: television and music and the internet, which does not make such distinctions.

The other reason is simply because part of the popularity of young adult novels is the massive marketing and promotional machine that operates behind it, something that simply does not exist in the Philippines. This is more on the side of the publisher rather than the writer himself or herself, but I also consider that young adult writers are a lot more technologically-savvy than perhaps their more literary, adult counterparts. For instance, *New York Times*-bestselling author John Green's latest novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, reached the top of the list in terms of pre-order sales not because of the efforts of his publisher, but because Green was already an established

presence on YouTube as a vlogger, along with his brother Hank. Many young adult authors such as Scott Westerfeld, Maureen Johnson, and Cassandra Clare are also active on Twitter and Tumblr, social networking sites that reach directly to their target audience. Young adult authors (and their publishers) have attempted to reach out to their intended audience in a space where they are both on an equal footing. I think this level of engagement is unprecedented and should be considered as an avenue for stories to reach a larger audience, because as more and more people log on to the internet on a daily basis, the potential for words and stories to find their intended reader becomes higher. The message in the bottle has now gone digital.

ON CRAFTING

My project for *The Lumikha* series is, at its core, to write what I hope will become a trilogy of novels based on the world of the Lumikha. The world is based on various aspects of Philippine mythology, although for the most part, since we do not have a central pre-Hispanic mythology, these are basically aspects that I have appropriated in order to form the backdrop of the narrative. The story itself is set in contemporary Manila, and focuses on the protagonist Luisa, and her journey toward heroism.

The idea was inspired by two bodies of work: the first is the *Percy Jackson* series by Rick Riordan. The series followed Percy Jackson, the son of Poseidon, as he came to terms with his status as a demigod as well as the possibility that he is part of a prophecy that may spell the end of the world. The novels are written against the backdrop of Greek mythology—before he began writing the first book, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, Riordan was a high school English teacher — and appropriated the core concepts of Greek myths, including the gods and monsters, rituals and beliefs, and wove them within a contemporary setting. The novels themselves were quickly paced, and written simply enough that younger readers would have no difficulty with the reading level, and yet providing enough gravitas for older readers to be engaged.

The second novel that inspired me was another young adult novel, *Anna Dressed in Blood* by Kendare Blake. Unlike the sweeping narrative of Riordan's work that borrowed heavily from Greek mythology, Anna is a small, self-contained story that took place in a sleepy Canadian town that was being haunted by a violent ghost. Cas, the protagonist of the story, was tasked to kill Anna the ghost with his athame, a sacred knife used in pagan rituals. And yet, the more he learned of Anna and the context of her death, the more he was unable to kill her. Compared to other young adult novels, the story keeps to itself, providing depth rather than breadth within the narrative, and gives the story space to maneuver itself toward an earned ending.

If Riordan's series provides me with a template on how to pattern the pace and the appropriate of mythology for a young adult audience, Blake's novel provides me with the idea of a more nuanced way of writing a story without sacrificing the world-building that goes into it. To a certain extent, *Lumikha* comes from the trend of taking the Philippine myths and legends that we have, this rich heritage of stories that have been passed down to us, and extending it further. Many creators in recent memory have already tread this path—Budjette Tan and KaJo Baldesimo's *Trese* comics series are perhaps the most popular proof of this appropriation — and I would like to contribute to this continuation of our own tales.

I suppose a part of it is also of a nationalistic bent, of wanting to prove that we, too, can write our own stories for our own people. After all, as Filipinos, can we not use our own myths, talk about our own concerns and experiences, write about our own lives? If we have an audience—and this has been proven by a number of bestselling young adult titles that have been flying off the bookshelves in recent years—then why not capitalize on that audience of young readers? Surely there is space on the shelves for both Harry Potter and our own myths, our own stories of make-believe.

Because I feel that I stand between the boundaries of two worlds: of being able to shift from writing poetry to writing fiction and vice versa, of being a teacher while at the same time still be treated as a student, of being both reader and writer, this also influences the way I write. I find that I still have the tendency to pay special attention to the way I craft my words, to descend into a decidedly poetic bent when it comes to describing the world I inhabit, to play with pacing and spacing and narrative flow. And yet, because of my awareness that this story is meant for young adults—a specific age range with a specific set of reading skills and levels that one does not usually consider when writing for adults—there is a conscious effort to tone down these tendencies, and to focus more on the characters and dialogue and action. As such, there is that sense of tension that might be present in the writing, and is something I am aware of.

However, my central concern here is the story: it is important to me that the story is told well, and that it is told honestly. I want to write as honest a story as possible. If there is anything that frightens me with this project, it is that I might be dishonest to myself, to the reader, and to the story of Luisa. This particular story, the first book, is my ground zero, my starting point, and hopefully will be able to evolve and grow as the story that it is meant to be. I want my story to reach its intended reader, and I want it to be read by someone who will care for it, who will want to nurture it and pass it on. Because that's the nature of the story, isn't it? It always seeks a new beginning.

WHY I WRITE

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MY REASONS FOR writing may be changing. There is not one overarching philosophy or influence underlying these reasons. I can only cite specific occasions when I felt the need to acknowledge the question “why do I write?” When I’m deep into a novel—reading the work of others—I get convinced that I need to write too, as I realize that I make sense of the world and its chaos through fiction. I write because I am an avid reader of fiction. Fiction is the medium through which I understand histories, ideologies, philosophies, religions, etc. But I will contradict this faith in fiction by saying that it is only in accepting the limitations of literature that I am able to write.

I was in the midst of writing my novel *Different Countries* when the Greenbelt explosion in Makati happened, and I felt then the unreality and insignificance of writing if I would just continue with it, undisturbed by the horrible event. Yet it was another horrible news, that of the disappearance of activists, specifically of Jonas Burgos and Karen Empeno, both of whom I did not personally know, that would compel me to write the first scene of said novel, believing that it would be my first chapter. As it turned out, it would not be.

During several occasions while finishing the novel, I also entertained guilt as I doubted the power of my motivation to write or the validity of my objective when I began writing, especially about “giving voice” to the disappeared. But it was again only by writing that I was able to free myself from my desperation about what’s

happening in society. My writing saved me more than it saved Karen, Jonas, and other victims of enforced disappearance. This reality I am learning to live with.

I started writing short stories in Filipino when I was in college, having acquired the penchant for creative writing as a consequence of being in the literature program of La Salle; after college, my only published story was “Mira, Tanso, Baril” in the *National MidWeek*. I submitted short story entries to The Palancas a couple of times and did not win. But I cut short whatever writing career I imagined I would have. I was convinced at that time that my writing didn’t serve my political cause. I knew my endings then, but I didn’t know how to write the stories that would bring me to the endings. Now, I guess, I have the stories but I don’t know how to end them.

HOW I WRITE

I am convinced I couldn’t have written *Different Countries* if I hadn’t written my first manuscript, still unpublished and unready to be let out in this world. It was my rite of passage in coming back to fiction writing; at a more practical level, it was a dress rehearsal that set the stage for writing *Different Countries*. After I “parked” the earlier manuscript which I wrote for about five to six years, the story/stories that eventually went into the second novel “came” to me. It had become easier writing the stories. The first scene I wrote, as I said, was motivated by the anxiety I felt about news of enforced disappearances. Then I stopped. I read history and other political stuff, and came across this essay by Foucault on the connectedness/disconnectedness of historical events; the validity of believing that there are big historical causes that have big historical effects as if these effects were inherent in the causes. But I may even have misread him. If engaged, I could not even enter into an intellectual debate about this, but at that time something clicked in my mind and the idea connected with more personal scenes and thoughts, and the writing of the manuscript proceeded.

Sometimes I will observe scenes around me, and I would be motivated to write a story about what these different, unrelated scenes, like that time when I saw this group of three young boys loitering around UP, carrying a plastic bag which they used for the scraps and wastes they picked from the ground. The first time I saw them was on one late chilly afternoon, when they seemed to emerge from a cloud of mist. I had the urge to give them names, to create stories that would make me “know” them. Eventually, they were “transformed” by experiences of children that I picked from some memory of personal encounters with other children during my advocacy work with an NGO. But the same process I mentioned above would be repeated—I would need some “back up” idea, or what Ma’am Charie called issues, to get the

fictional world and character going. It's only when a scene in my mind connects with a question or dilemma that I could go on writing. It's not that I intentionally seek issues and imbue my stories with them—maybe it's more like my writing cannot happen without my social-political activism, and my activism will be less defined if I am not writing.

I am not able to explain to myself the meaning of scenes while I am still in the process of writing. As Arundhati Roy said, a writer is a medium through which stories are born, written. What I do with intent and planning is the mapping of the scenes after I've written them; they should have some kind of "logical" flow, not necessarily based on the chronology of the events in the stories or characters' lives. Now that I am rereading my novel, I find myself often asking myself why I wrote a certain scene; what did I mean by what I wrote. Was I expressing a personal belief or philosophy? I am amazed and amused by the meanings I discover, and the ones shared to me by those who've read the book. The two perspectives sometimes are in stark contrast with each other, but at some level I do accept that I am no longer the sole owner of my characters and stories now that the novel has been published into a book. There is this thought that the writing is mine, but the authoring—the book—is a necessary consequence of the act of writing. Writing is done in solitude, authoring is a more social/public act. The extreme result of merely writing is obscurity, making the act or process of becoming author necessary, but external to the writer.

A POETICS FOR THE LYRIC SEQUENCE: NOSTALGIA, CLAUSTROPHOBIA, AND THE NECESSARY ENGAGEMENT OF EVIL

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MY BOOK PROJECT is a lyric sequence about Martial Law.

I was born in 1976, believe it or not, by the time I was 7 years old in 1983, when Ninoy Aquino was assassinated, that cold-blooded murder served only to confirm my childhood fear: that there was something very wrong about Filipino Society—and I don't use caps lightly—that the big, bad world out there was really big and really bad.

The lyric sequence is built, stacked, layered. One can liken it to a novel or a marathon in terms of “chapters” and “pacing.” Those are very apt comparisons. But for the purposes of this poetics, I would like to use the concept of collocation. Someone has defined the lyric sequence as:

A collocation of lyrics, the l. s. is generally thought to have gained its vernacular identity in the Ren. and after from Francis Petrarch (1304-74), who wrote and arranged his s. tailed Rime sparse or, alternatively, Canzoniere over 40 years. Both titles (“Scattered Rhymes” and “Songbook”) ironically point away from the rigorous ordering of Petrarch's 366 amatory and devotional lyrics, which manifests several patterns at once

(formal, fictional, calendrical) to establish a continuum, or dis-continuum, considering the new-found structural importance of the white space between the lyrics, that greatly exceeds the unities of earlier lyric collections.¹

One of the merits of the lyric sequence is that, like the novel, it can transport its reader to its particular world. Worlding is one of the concerns of many sci-fi and fantasy writers: whether the world they build through description is effective enough to transport the reader through portals. One of my aims then was to transport, teleport back into Martial Law.

One of the themes of my lyric sequence then is nostalgia. In poems like “Julie Vega” and “Manunggal Street, 1985” I sought to rebuild my childhood world. After all, who does not remember exactly where they were when they heard that Julie Vega had died? Or who has not played tagged and eaten mangoes and duhat? But this nostalgia is one that is colored by death and fear: deaths of loved ones, fear of the world out there. But there is hope, because Voltes V and Daimos always defeat their enemies, no matter what family empire seeks to conquer theirs; because Julie Vega, at least in her films, had the moral compass to overcome any evil or temptation thrown at her; because in the end, the good always triumphs over evil.

Which leads me back to the Aquino assassination twenty-four years ago. I have always had that feeling that death was always near so I cried at Ninoy’s death just as much as I did when my own paternal grandfather died. Because it was a collective growing-up moment for many Filipino children. It was the moment they realized, in the pits of their stomach, that evil could very well triumph across the country, that good can actually be vanquished, and hope can disappear.

Aside then from this darkly colored nostalgia, one other theme of my lyric sequence is claustrophobia. In poems about burial, for example, “The Unborn” and “Hide and Seek,” I repeat this fear. This fear is complicated by the fear of dying anonymously: being buried without a name, or a gravestone, not even a marker. The claustrophobia of anonymous death—not being remembered because no one knows your name—is for artists, a far more terrible death. And so these echoes of burial reverberate across the poems, in earlier ones like “Film Center,” where the burial is literal and just as terrifying, while you’re still alive. To go back to the earlier definition of the lyric sequence, I want readers to collocate with those men who remain buried and anonymous under the Film Center.

1 “Lyric Sequence.” Preminger, Alex, and T. V. F. Brogan. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993.

I wish to end this poetics with a challenge to engage the evil that has surrounded us since the beginning of the Duterte administration. There are two kinds of evil:

Natural evil is evil for which “no non-divine agent can be held morally responsible for its occurrence.” By contrast, moral evil is “caused by human activity.”²

The moral evil that is extrajudicial killings that we have named it as today has its roots and reverberations in the killings during Martial Law. The challenge for many artists and writers is to engage that evil and make stand against such impunity. It can be said that the moral challenge now is whether or not we engage this evil, but rather how.

What words can we forge against weapons that treat human life so worthlessly? We must film films about it. We must sing songs about it. And yes, we must write lyric sequences about it. I hope you agree with me that this is the most needful thing to do.

2 “The Problem of Evil.” *Princeton.edu*. Princeton University, n.d. <http://www.princeton.edu/~grosen/puc/phi203/evil.html>.

POETICS

WILL P. ORTIZ

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I. SA KAKAHUYAN NG PANTASYA AT PAG-ASA

NAIS KONG ANYAYAHAN ka sa kakahuyan ng aking kuwento. Harinawang hindi ka lumabas hanggang nasa dilim.

Mulang pagkabata, mahilig na akong makinig ng kuwento at nang matutong magbasa, nilakad ko ang kakahuyan ng pantasya. Mga fairy tale ang unang naikuwento sa akin. Hindi ito ang mga kinalap na mga kuwento ng Grimm Brothers kundi yaong mga Disneyfied version. Maging ang mga fairy tales na tinapon ng *Reader's Digest*. Kanluranin man ang kultura, naipasok nito sa kamalayan ko ang laging masayang pagtatapos. Laging may umaga. Laging sumisikat ang araw. Makulay ang mga ulap.

Sa pagitan, ginalugad ko ang mga sulok at kuweba, iniiyakan ko ang kawalan ng katarungan sa istorya at kung bakit kailangang mamatay ng bida. Pero dahil fairy tale nga ng Disney at hindi ng malalagim na pagtatapos ng mga “totoong fairy tale,” nasasilip at nakikita ko ang liwanag sa dulo. Ayaw ko ng mga fairy tale na pinarusang magsayaw hanggang mamatay ang isang batang babae dahil masyado siyang nahumaling sa matingkad na pulang sapatos. Ayaw ko rin ng batang babaeng namatay sa niyebe habang nananaginip na kasama ang lola sa araw ng Pasko.

Kaya natutuwa ako sa mga fairy tale o kuwentong akda na may iba nang pagsasalaysay tulad ng *Virago fairy tales* na inedit ni Angela Carter, ng mga nirebisang kuwento ni Jane Yolen. Sa kanilang mga “bagong” kuwento, laging malalakas ang mga babae.

Kasama na sa aking pagtanda ang pagbasa ng mga young adult novel. Hindi ito ang mga usong dystopian novel ng kasalukuyan. Ayoko ng mga ito. Dinadala nila ako sa mga kuwebang iisa lamang ang pasukan, masyadong masikip, masyadong maraming nakaiipit ng hininga at katawan at wala ka pang lalabasan. Ito 'yung tipong *Hunger Games* na binasa na yata ng lahat ng taong kilala ko at ako na lamang ang naiwan. Pero ayoko ng mga uniberso ng walang katapusang dugo at pagdanak ng karahasan.

Narito na nga tayo sa Pilipinas, nanaisin ko pa bang magbasa ng dystopian novels?

Totoo naman na hindi maaaring pintasan ang mga ito hanggang hindi mo ito pangangahasaang basahin. Kailangang pasukin din ang kakahuyan ng kanilang kamalayan. Nabasa ko naman si Margaret Atwood, maging si Amy Tan, pawang mga babaeng manunulat, may babaeng kamalayan pero hindi ako nakarating sa liwanag. Totoong mahusay silang magsulat. Nasa kanila ang katanungan sa utak ng maraming mambabasa na “Ano ang susunod na mangyayari?” Pero sabi ko nga sa isang kaibigan kong manunulat rin nang mabasa ko ang *The Historian* ni Elizabeth Kostova na para akong kumain sa smorgasbord dahil gutom ako pero hanggang sa dulo, matapos kong kainin ang lahat ng handa, nananatiling laman-tiyan ang nakain ko. Walang luwalhati. Hindi man lang ako natunawan.

Pero may isang gustong-gusto ko kay Kostova na nais kong mangyari sa aking panulat—pinaghalo niya ang kasaysayan at mito/pantasya. Kaya nga siguro malapit sa aking puso ang mga akda ni Isabel Allende, malalakas ang kanyang mga babaeng tauhan, pinagsasanib niya ang kasaysayan/mito at pantasya sa kanyang panulat. Sabi ng ilang kaibigang lalaki, “derivative” ang kanyang mga akda. Gaya-gaya sa orihinal na si Marquez. Hindi ko naman ito nakikitang ganoon. Masyadong masakit ang matawag na “derivative” lalo’t may bagong sinasabi ang akda.

Pero nais ko pa ring makarating sa dulo ng mga lagusan at tuktok, minsan ayoko nang lumisan pa. Natutuwa ako kung tinulungan ang bida na maluwalhating makarating sa talagang dapat niyang kalagyan, sa dati man niyang tahanan o pagtatayo ng bago niyang kaharian. Natutuwa ako kung magkaroon ng bagong pamilya ang batang nangungulila. Nabubuhay ang dugo ko sa mga kuwentong may liwanag at may bughaw, pula, puti, at luntiang mga ulap.

Sa pagbasa iyan.

Pagdating sa pagsulat, hindi naman ako sa pantasya unang nagbabad. Napansin kong tumatalakay ito sa pagiging babae, matanda man o bata. May pagtalakay sa pag-ibig, mga personal na isyu at kasama na rito ang tunggalian sa lipunan. Kaya’t malapit sa akin ang historical fiction.

Nalulungkot ako na sa batang henerasyon nalilimutan na ang kasaysayan, ang saysay ng pagbabalik sa nakaraan. Nais kong magsulat ng mga kuwentong tumatalakay sa Martial Law, sa pananakop ng Kastila at Amerikano. Ayokong maniwala na mayroon tayong kolektibong amnesia.

Pero dahil may pag-asa ang kakahuyan ng aking mga kuwento, nais kong umulan rin ng tawa at tuwa sa pagitan ng mga madadawag na puno at kuweba.

II. KAILANGAN NATING MAGMAHAL NANG MAALAM (PAPAANO ANG PAGSULAT)

Kung may pag-ibig ka sa isang tao, hindi mo siya iiwan, laging inaalagaan at kinakalinga. Hindi mo hahayaang lamunin ka ng panibugho, lagi kang naghahangad ng mga bagong antas ng pagkilala at pagsuyo.

Gayon din naman sa pagsulat, hindi mo ito iniwan. Laging inaalagaan at kinakalinga. Tulad ni Gaiman, hindi ako naniniwala sa writer's block. Kaartehan lamang iyan ng mga manunulat na nagpapanggap na manunulat. Maaari kang i-block ng publisher o soplahin ng ibang tao ang iyong panulat pero hindi maaaring magkaroon ng writer's block ang isang manunulat. Disiplina kasi ang pagsusulat. May disiplina ka kaya ka may pagmamahal. Hindi ito uri ng mga romantikong pag-ibig na inaalayan ng buwan at mga bituin. Ito ang uri ng pag-ibig na kumikilala sa dawag at dilim, sa liwanag at ligaya ng paggagalugad sa kakahuyan ng utak, saan ka man nito dalhin.

Kung may tunay kang pag-ibig sa panulat, hindi mo ito iiwan dahil lamang may bago kang interes. Kasama mo ito sa paggising, kasiping sa pagtulog, magdamag mo itong inaaruga sa dawag ng kamalayan.

Kung may tunay kang pag-ibig, pinalalaya mo ito at hindi sinisikil dahil alam mong kung ito'y tunay babalik sa iyo ito nang buong-buo, walang tapyas, walang bawas. Aswangin man, iligaw man ng batibat, kaprehin man, tiktikin man, o isama ng nuno sa kanyang punso. Babalik at babalik ang tunay at hindi tanso.

Pag pumasok ka ng kakahuyan, kailangan mong tandaan na may tunay kang pag-ibig, hindi nalilimutan ang kamalayan, hindi nagpapatali sa mga simbuyo ng damdamin. Kasama na rito ang sinabi noon ni Sir Rene Villanueva, na lagi mong dapat na pangalagaan ang katawan, dahil dito nakasalalay ang utak at kamalayan. Kapag inalagaan ang katawan, makabubuo ka ng mga istoryang may malay na kakalingain ng mambabasa.

Umaamin kang naliligaw ng landas paminsan-minsan, pero lagi nang may magtuturo ng daan. Kung may tunay kang pag-ibig, imposibleng maligaw nang tuluyan. May liwanag kahit sa gubat na mapanglaw.

III. KUNG BAKIT KAILANGANG PUMASOK SA KAKAHUYAN

Bakit nga kailangang pumasok sa kakahuyan samantalang maaari ka namang manatili sa air-conditioned na mga bahay na semento at sumakay ng kotse at dyip sa mga sementadong daan? Dahil tinatawag ka ng iba't ibang tinig mula sa mahiwagang kakahuyan. Para itong isang espiritwal na karanasan na bumabalot sa katauhan. Hindi mo maaaring pigilan ang mga tinig na tumatawag. Mabubuang ka kung hindi mo ito pakikikingan. At kapag nilukob ka na ng mga tinig, isa itong karanasang sumasakop ng kaluluwa.

Ngunit hindi ito mananatiling isang personal na karanasan dahil lagi itong bumabalik sa kapwa. Wala tayo sa isang Kanluraning lipunan na ang kahulugan ng pagtungo sa kakahuyan ay isang dramatikong karanasan para sa personal na tagumpay.

Sumusulat tayo dahil mayroon tayong kapwa. Sumusulat tayo dahil may mga sulok at dawag na di naaabot ng liwanag. Sumusulat tayo dahil mayroong kapwa at tauhang malapit sa ating puso.

Sa kakahuyan ng pagsulat, laging pinagpapala ang may mabuti at busilak na puso, laging may mga nuno, pulubi at ermitanyong magbibigay ng galing at anting-anting sa sinumang may matapang na loob.

Nais kitang anyayahan sa kakahuyan ng aking kuwento. Harinawang makalabas tayong nasisilayan ng liwanag ng araw lalo na ng buwan.

I WRITE LIKE A GIRL

JENNY ORTUOSTE

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I HAD MY first creative writing workshop experience several months ago at the University of the Philippines-Diliman in a College of Arts and Letters graduate class taught by writer and professor emeritus Dr. Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo. It was a creative nonfiction (CNF) class and the major course requirement was a 5,000-word essay on a person, place, or social phenomena. PhD students like myself were expected to produce more, around 10,000 words—the length of a novella.

The process involved several steps. First, one had to produce an initial exploratory piece of 1,000 or so words which would then undergo a “workshop”—extensive critiques on content, craft, style, and technique—by my classmates and professor. Taking into account the comments given at the first workshop, a draft of the full-length essay would then be handed in for another workshop round prior to the submission of the final polished piece, the culmination of one semester’s work.

Before the first go-round, I had no idea what Dr. Hidalgo meant by “choosing our workshop slots” or what such a session would entail. I was nervous. Anxious. I have a published fiction novel to my name. But my professional background and the bulk of my body of work is in journalism, where there are no workshops nor critiques of style.

In newspaper work, as long as you get the “five w’s and one h” into your story, and it’s factually accurate, you’re fine. Your section editors will fix grammar and

usage—that's what they're there for. Creative writing is something else entirely, and criticizing someone else's work is something I am uncomfortable with.

Dr. Hidalgo must have picked up on my trepidation; before the workshop on my piece began she murmured, "Is this your first time? Try not to be sensitive. It's a learning experience."

As it turned out she—and quite a few of my classmates (the women)—enjoyed my piece (about the old Santa Ana Park racetrack). They were swept up in the narrative, interested in the sprinkling of *karera* terms, curious about the lifestyle of a little-known sport (horseracing) and way of life. The men had much to say, mostly on technique—construction, scene transition, and so on.

A male friend whose opinions I value highly told me some months ago, "Your 'Pop Goes the World' columns (opinion for the daily broadsheet *Manila Standard-Today*) are getting better. As for the other stuff—try not to write like a girl." I was stung. "You say that like it's a bad thing," I said.

What he meant was that he prefers my critical essays to the lyrical ones. I wanted to point out that he was expressing stereotypical notions of male = logical and female = emotional, but that wasn't his intention. However, these two incidents recalled to me studies that have found that the minds of men and women do work in different ways. Is it a sex-based wired-in-the-brain thing, therefore inevitable and a given? Is it a social-construction thing of stereotypes embedded in culture and reinforced by tradition and media?

My "Pop Goes. . ." columns come primarily from the brain. They are analyses of cultural phenomena in Philippine society, informed by social science and literary theory, and are social commentaries from my viewpoint as a communication practitioner and scholar and citizen.

But they are also infused with heart and soul. I use the tools of my art, weaving words and ideas and emotion into nets of fragile gossamer beauty or fabrics of wild or subtle color and texture and dimension, to craft with care works that are ephemeral, existing as they do on only as ink on paper or dancing electrons on a screen, but whose ideas and concepts will have their existence in your mind and remain there, alive, as long as you are, as long as you do not forget.

My heart is a girl's heart of sixteen summers, warmed by the sunshine of love and tenderness, battered by the storms of rejection and adversity, strong and resilient enough to go on beating with hope and still more glowing hope. It is from this heart that I offer the essays that get the most comments—the "popcorn manifesto," the column on my sisters and daughters. I write about home and horseracing, which are where my heart is rooted.

It is when I write from my girl's heart that I reach and touch more.

My male friend said, "Make them think." Yet do I accomplish more that is humanly significant when I also make readers *feel*?

My male friend said, "We are not teenagers anymore."

In my heart, I am—ever naïve and gullible, with a core of unshaken innocence that believes no matter how evil some people are, how they may hurt you and others, still good is out there, and life is a quest to look for it to preserve and protect our humanity in its purest form, the condition in which we shall exist—and prevail—in the face of advancing technology and much of world culture's seeming slide into barbarism and stupidity and cruelty.

Good is out there, and I keep searching. Sometimes I find it.

There will be other workshops. I will hear professors and peers critique my forthcoming essays, and I will hone my writing skills. Perhaps I will become more technically proficient, adept at the active opening, smooth transition, and insightful ending. My male friend might have more to say on why he prefers my cerebral pieces to the emotional.

But the cold steel of logic and reason, no matter how essential for the continued existence of society and the evolution of man, needs to be tempered with the warmth of love and affection. The technical finesse of craft requires blending with the spontaneous rush of impulse and the gypsy dance of madness and heart's desire. Otherwise we run the risk of losing our humanity, that which defines and encompasses us and makes it all worthwhile.

So I will always write like a girl. And that is a good thing.

WHERE I WRITE FROM

MA. ELENA PAULMA

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I WRITE FROM many places. I write from Butuan, divided by a river which is spanned by a bridge. It is not really my home as I am still on my way to that place where it is safe just to be. To understand where I come from and who I am, these I confess, are my very selfish reasons for writing, even as I continue to search for that room I can call not just my own, but from where I can call to many others.

I write from Tiniwisan where my grandparents settled as farmers, all the way from Pangasinan. They speak Ilocano, and we their grandchildren speak Cebuano, in a place whose native language is Butuanon. But I write in English because I had to pay a fine of one peso if I spoke the Ilonggo I learned while in Iloilo. Once caught, the only choice left for me was either to let go of a bag of Chippy or a ride home. Most of the time, I walked home. I have never really stopped walking.

I write from the dirt road my grandparents walked for eleven kilometres carrying baskets of mangoes to sell in the market so that the first three children could have an education and send the rest of the seven siblings to school. I write from beneath the mango trees where the women gather to talk about their husbands and children. I write from a solitary seat a short distance away from my cousins come home from their overseas jobs as waiters and ship deckhands, all of them married and waiting for me to make the same mistake.

I write from Pili Drive, the street of my childhood in Butuan City, from the pink house fronted by bougainvilleas, across a huge warehouse standing next to a

playground filled with twenty-five children from three households, spilling out onto the streets to frighten the tricycle drivers. I write from the kitchen of our house, washing a stack of dishes while my brothers played cards in the sala.

I write because my father worked in the Talacogon mountains, way down the Agusan River, as a manager of an Indian-owned logging company. He was found in the forests three days after he was shot down by NPA's, so they say. I write because my mother and aunts were teachers and when I eventually became one, a grade school classmate would look at me with pity because I have become "just" a teacher.

I write because in high school, I wore my sister's hand-me-down uniform. In the picture, my light blue skirt stands out amongst the new deep blue skirt of my classmates. I write from UP, that place where I had to speak in Tagalog or be scolded by a student leader for speaking in the English I had to pay for with my snack money in my younger years. I write because when I came to Manila, not everyone knew where Butuan was. I write from behind the walls of the convent I lived in for five years and finally left, after realizing this wasn't the room I had been looking for after all.

I write what I write because there are many, many ways of telling stories, and there are many stories to tell, as many as there are days in one life, and in one life, many persons, and for each person, many faces and spaces, for their many lives. There is never anything new in each story that I tell, for each thought and each word is built on other thoughts, other words, other stories. I come from all directions and there is pain in every leaving, for I know that whoever goes and whoever stays is not me anymore. There is no way I can ever always be, no way I can ever be fully known, nor shall I ever know anything with certainty, so I leave pieces of "me" on sheets of paper, hoping to be found. Being always neither here nor there is not a very pretty place to be, because one can never be sure about who one truly is, and therefore what one wants to say or how to say it. To be one of many voices, to be read—is this not why I write?

Pain. That's what this is all about, this reading of lives. It both binds and destroys, it gives birth. Any grief begins with paralyzing disbelief, soon rising as anger, firing the battle within. Fact becomes fiction, the real is transformed by the imaginary, reading is writing is reading, the telling of the story. They say the last stage of grief is acceptance—sometimes, it takes months, or maybe years, sometimes it takes a lifetime. Meanwhile, I tell stories, like a palm reader, I read my many lives.

I now live in Cagayan de Oro, another city divided by a river. I am forever crossing the bridge that links the two banks of this river. In between the places I want to escape from and those that I seek—this is where I write from.

Writing is a reading of where we come from, and most of the time, we come from middle spaces, where there will always be more than one thing, all at once, a revelation of what is not understood, a rediscovery of what we think has been lost and forgotten, merging and re-emerging the way water shifts through sand.

Writing always borrows from the realm of both imagination and truth. It is about both pleasure and pain, one unable to exist without the other. It draws from what was, what already is, and what will be. It causes the birth of words and thoughts and the death of the causes of these births. The effect results in a recreation of that which was only vaguely known. The act of writing hides even as it reveals things that we already know, yet do not know until they are written. The very act of putting words on paper destroys that which motivated the act. We have the words, however.

Sometimes, in the middle of the night or just before dawn, I wake up suddenly and must reach for pen and paper. Many times, I do not know what my pen will write, or where the words will lead me. All I know is that something needs to be written and the hand that is needed for the writing happens to be mine.

Perhaps what awakens me is the memory of the sleepless nights spent on rooftops with friends, or lying in bed with a favorite aunt feet propped against the wall, or on porches with a visiting cousin or two, as we watch the sun falling, and a hundred and one stories later, rising again.

"Ate, where are you from?" ask the children, smiling, their tattered shirts blowing in the slight breeze that stinks. I am a passing tourist come for a view of the mountain, a look at their shanties, a taste of lives lived within sheets of discarded iron roofs, plywood, and cardboard boxes tied or nailed together. Within, families sift through found "treasures" from the rich garden of garbage outside. Among these treasures are the clothes that they wear, and the food that they eat. Should I tell them I come from a place where lanes are wide and huge trees grow, where the skies show all the colors, where buildings are as tall as this mountain, where my room has concrete walls painted white? The fumes rise like incense from every crevice, every gap between and beneath the unnamable flood of waste that make up the mountain. It is to the smoking mountain that these people give their daily supplication, bent over its face, seeking.

My hands reach out for a tree of steel leafed with multi-colored skirts, blouses, and gowns on fragile hangers. They surround me, these tributes to womanhood, silently begging to be bought, the lines and layers of shoes crying out in their little high-heeled and strappy voices: me! me! me! The tired old black shoes on one side don't even bother to say anything, resigned to their roles as shelf-fillers, much like the bench-sitters clustered in little cushioned islands scattered all over the mall.

There are many of them here—a variety of uncles, dads, boyfriends, brothers sitting, waiting, as they might sit and play cards in the sala while you're up to your armpits in dishwater, and you ask for help and they say sure and go on playing and you wish you could just break the glasses and throw away the plates and run away forever.

Some children are running around, playing hide and seek, as a sprinkling of mothers and daughters wander through, carrying gowns for their JS prom, I suppose. If I was that teenager following her harassed Mom, I'd be carrying that short, wine colored gown without sequins or ruffles. Simple, classic, alluring. My ate would fuss over my hair, but she's in the US now, ran away forever.

A lady in high heels, mini skirt, and glittery black blouse begins to flip through the hangers bearing pastel colored suits made of banana cloth. The orange tags say 50%. Hmmm, will this fit? She holds the blouse against her body, and I stop myself from saying out loud, Nope. Hmm, the shocking green pants? Nope. Maybe the deep fuchsia pink blouse embroidered with flowers on the shoulders. . . and I realize it is the same brand of clothing I wore when I had my First Vows. I had exchanged the red orange dress bought for me by one Sister for the staid blue blouse and skirt with embroidered sleeves. If I had stuck with the orange dress, I would have kept it after I left the convent, but I was different then, or I was me stuck in a different image of myself. In my mind, there is this someone wearing a mini skirt, and that simple classic gown, in rubber shoes playing hide and seek.

I finally find what I'm looking for—a whole shelf-full of blue vases.

The rest of the blue vase fell to the floor one day. The beautiful blue glass lay in curious patterns on the floor. And I felt that I must write about it—the forgetting, the fall, the holding on, the remembrance of this beautiful vase, whose curves and color once belonged to my Mom, which I took, and kept, and broke. She didn't really give it to me. I sort of took it from her. That's the way I have always seen it—her reluctant giving, my guilty taking—shreds of love becoming shards in my heart, a never-ending ache for beautiful, curved, blue vases.

There was a little girl in the mall, her little voice ringing above the sea of clothes: “So where are we really going, Mom?! We've been going around for hours and now we're back again. See, this is where we came from. Is this what you're looking for? This is it, Mom. Can we stop now?”

One cannot say how or when one can go up to Boliney, a town high up in the mountains of Abra, as far away to the north of the Philippine archipelago as anyone from the south could reach. One is never certain what day or what time the lone jeepney will arrive or leave. Speed is irrelevant. One is not even sure if the destination will ever be reached. The whole world and your whole life lies within the patched up

walls of the creaking, bouncing, swaying jeepney, with ravines to the right, and a hard rock wall to the left. There is no other way to go but forward. Sometimes, the jeepney must back up a little so we can get over the really rough parts. The view is magnificent, but it is best to close one's eyes, and surrender.

Lira has not surrendered yet. She is a patient at the Spinal Ward of the Orthopedic Hospital. In a grocery holdup, she was shot by accident, and was paralyzed from the neck down. Rage consumes her waking hours and our daily conversations. For her, there can be no climbing of any mountain, nor swimming in any river, nor playing in the streets as I had done with the children of Boliney. For her, not the green trees nor the fresh air atop the magnificent mountains which my Tinguian friends, bent over the rice fields, hardly notice.

What difference between a broken back or a back bent from dawn till dusk? They look to their feet half-buried in mud as dull as the stained ceilings of the spinal ward, or the patched surface of a wasting mountain. Bent over the rice fields or the smoking mountain, or trapped in their beds for life, their next meal is the only future. Reduced to the everyday, life takes on its purest form. One patient offers a cup of noodles to another, a whole Tinguian community stops working to honor and help a bereaved family, and a gang of laughing children dance their way down a mountain of garbage. There is a way out, after all.

Just yesterday, my Mom tells me about a war story in Butuan, of the baby sister she had been carrying when she fell over a log as they ran away from the Japanese when she was four years old. I never knew I had an Aunt Patricia. Her head was crushed from the fall. I think about the altar I had created of the blue vase, and what color are the shards in my mother's heart.

I come from Butuan. The road to Boliney never ends.

SI MADONNA, ANG MALABON, AT ANG MANUNULAT BILANG MAMAMATAY-TAO

CHUCKBERRY J. PASCUAL

FELLOW PARA SA KUWENTO, 52ND UPNWW

1985. DAMPALIT, MALABON. Mga alas-singko y medya ng hapon, sa tapat ng bahay nina Mang Jay, kapitbahay ng Lolo ko. Narinig ko ang radyo ng isang nakaparadang traysikel. Hindi ko alam ang titulo ng kanta, pero nakiliti ang aking tainga. Lumapit ako sa traysikel, para mas marinig nang maigi ang tugtog: may babaeng may matinis na boses, paminsan-minsan parang umiiri, at may mga lalaking kumakanta nang sabay-sabay. Nag-umpisa akong igalaw ang balakang. Hanggang sa sumunod na ang buo kong katawan. Pahampas-hampas ang ulo sa hangin, pakampay-kampay ang mga kamay. Napansin kong lumapit ang ilan sa mga kalaro. Nadagdagan pa sila pagkatapos ng ilang sandali, at lalo lang akong naudyukang ipagpatuloy ang pagsasayaw. Pumapalakpak na rin kasi sila, may ilan-ilang tumatawa at sumisigaw. Natigil lang ang lahat nang dumating ang tatay ko. Piningot niya ako, binatukan, saka pinapasok sa bahay.

Nalaman ko na lang noong nasa kolehiyo na ako, mula pa sa tatay ko mismo, na “Material Girl” pala ang sinayaw ko. Nasa loob kami ng sasakyan noon at nakasalang ang kari-release lang na *Ray of Light* CD ni Madonna. (Hindi ko na binanggit ang pambabatok niya.)

Desidido na akong magsulat noon. Idol ko si Jullie Yap-Daza. Dahil sa kanya, Journalism ang kursong kinuha ko sa UPCAT, at pangarap kong magsulat sa *Manila Standard*. Pero sa kung anong misteryosong dahilan, naiwala ng UP Registrar ang aking reply slip, at napadpad ako sa Malikhaing Pagsulat. Pumayag na rin ako.

Plinano ko na lang na mag-shift. Hanggang noong huling semestre ko sa pagiging MP major, kung kailan naayos ko na ang mga papel para makalipat sa College of Mass Communications, naging guro ko si Vim Nadera sa pagsulat ng tula.

Bilang unang writing exercise, pinagawa kami ni Sir Vim ng pasyon. Para raw hindi kami mahirapan sa pagpili ng paksa, tumula raw kami tungkol sa idolo. Siyempre, si Madonna ang tinulaan ko. Acrostic ng pangalan niya, bawat saknong ay naglalarawan ng iba't ibang panahon niya bilang singer. Ang title, "Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone," pero unang pangalan lang ang ginamit ko sa acrostic. Ginawa ko iyon, isang Linggo ng hapon, habang nanonood ng *The Buzz*.

Noong isalang ang gawa ko para sa palihan, walang nagtataas ng kamay para magkomento. Napilitan tuloy si Sir Vim na agad magsalita (siya kasi parati ang huli) at ang naging hatol niya, "Yung mga ganitong, uh, tula, mababasa mo lang sa liner notes ng Greatest Hits album, e." Tapos, lumipat na kami sa susunod na tulang isasalang.

Tinanggap ko ang pahayag ni Sir Vim bilang napakataas na papuri. Nagdesisyon akong maging makata. Lalo pa akong nasilihan nang isama ako minsan ni Sir Vim sa kuwarto niya sa FC. Pinabasa niya sa akin ang "Siyam na Diwata ng Sine" at iba pang akda sa *Ladlad 1*. Hindi ko na-gets, binago ko na lang ang topic nu'ng nagtanong siya kung ano ang opinyon ko.

Ilang taon din akong nanindigan na marunong akong tumula. Sumulat ako ng kung ano-anong pasyon, awit, korido. (Nagtangka rin akong mag-villanelle, pero naisipan kong ipaubaya na lang ito sa iba.) Nag-malayang taludturan ako. Sumulat din sa Ingles. (Ang isa sa mga paborito kong naisulat na linya, *His name was Vulcan/so was I*.) Talagang dinibdib ko ang pagtula, hanggang nakabasa ako ng libro ni Cirilo Bautista. Nagdesisyon akong magkuwento na lang.

2002 ako unang na-publish. Lumabas ang kuwento kong "Mad Dino" sa folio ng *Manila Collegian*. Sa kuwentong iyon, lumalabas sa aparador si Madonna at nakikipagkuwentuhan sa bida. Ipinasa ko rin ang kuwento na iyon sa unang writers' workshop na nasalihan ko, ang UST Writers' Workshop noong 2003. (Doon ko rin nakilala nang personal si Cirilo Bautista.) Sa pagsulat naman ng kritikal na introduksiyon para sa aking undergraduate thesis, bahagi ng ginamit kong framework si Madonna.

Oo, isa akong Madonna fan.

Malay ako na sa simpleng deklarasyon pa lang ng pagiging "fan" ay may nalilikha na kaagad na relasyong herarkikal sa pagitan ko at ng taong hinahangaan. Pero walang kaso sa akin ito. Ipinagpapalagay kong bahagi naman ng pagsusulat ang negosyasyon sa herarkiya. Sa proseso ng pagsulat, kinikilala ng manunulat ang kanyang sarili

bilang mala-Diyos. Pero may pagkilala pa rin siya sa kapangyarihan ng mambabasa: mahalagang magkaroon ng ideal na mambabasa sa isip habang nagsusulat, kahit pa ang sarili lang din ang itinuturing na ideal. Litaw rin ang pagkakaroon ng herarkiya pagdating sa publikasyon. Sa estado pa lang ng produksiyon, mayroon nang relasyong editor at contributor. At siyempre, ang tanong ng publisher sa manunulat na supplier, sino ang bibili ng libro? Para naman sa mga tulad kong pormal na nag-aaral ng pagsulat, pumapasok ako sa mga herarkikal na relasyon ng guro at estudyante, adviser at advisee. Maging ang pagkilala sa mga impluwensiya ay maituturing na may bahid ng pagiging fan kahit paano.

Sa kaso ng pagiging fan ko ni Madonna, batid ko ang aming hindi pantay na relasyon: ako bilang taga-Pilipinas, bakla, gitnang-uri, tagakonsumo ng kulturang popular, at siya, bilang Amerikana, babae, bilyonaryo, at bahagi ng paglikha ng kulturang popular. At sa palagay ko, gaya ng mga relasyong nabanggit ko sa itaas, diyalektikal din ang relasyon namin, at produktibo.

Sinusulat ni Madonna ang karamihan sa mga kanta niya, at hindi siya kinikilala bilang isang wordsmith. Simple—at kung minsan nga, nasasabihan pang simplistiko—ang mga lyrics niya. Sa kantang “I Love New York” halimbawa, ang pinagtutugma niyang mga salita ay “mad” at “sad”, “New York” at “dork.” Maliban pa sa pagsulat ng mga kanta, tumutula rin siya. Narito ang isang tulang binigkas niya sa dokumentaryong *I’m Going to Tell You a Secret*:

I have a cage
It’s called the stage
When I’m let out
I run about
And sing and dance and sweat and yell
I have so many tales to tell
I like to push things to the edge
And inch my way along the ledge
I feel like God, I feel like shit
The paradox, an even split
It’s just a job, I always say
I should be grateful everyday
Sometimes I think I just can’t do it
But I persist and I get through it
And I console myself each night
At least my cage is filled with light.

Sigurado akong hindi mananalo ng kahit na anong contest ang tulang ito. Malabo rin itong mailimbag, at kung isasalang ito sa palihan, makakatay ito malamang. Pero madarama naman, kahit paano, na may pagtatangka siyang maging sinsero sa pagpapahayag ng damdamin. At iyon na nga ang pinakamabait at pinakamabuting puwedeng sabihin. Pero kung mapapanood kung paano niyang binigkas ang tula nang buong kaseryosohan sa harap ng kamera, iisipin ng manonood na para bang punumpuno ng gravitas ang binibigkas niyang mga salita, na para bang nagtataglay ang mga ito ng mga walang-maliw na katotohanan tungkol sa sangkatauhan.¹

Gaya ng maraming pangyayari sa buhay at karera niya (kung paniniwalaan ang iba't iba niyang biographer at kritiko, at siya mismo ay nagbiro sa katangian niyang ito sa pagpapangalan sa isang tour bilang *Blond Ambition*), dinadaan ni Madonna sa ambisyon ang maraming bagay.

Gayundin, sagana sa ambisyon ang boses ni Madonna. Alamat na nga yata ang pagiging limitado ng kakayahan niyang kumanta, mula sa pagiging tunog nakahithit ng helium sa "Like A Virgin" hanggang sa paggamit ng vocoder/autotune sa "Music." Pero hayun at panay pa rin ang concert tour. Inaasahan na ng lahat ang pangangarag niya sa pagkanta, kaya paulit-ulit na sorpresa ang hindi niya pagpanaw sa entablado sa tuwing may inaabot na mataas na nota.

Kung ilalarawan ko kung anong klase akong manunulat, para akong si Madonna. Puno ako ng ambisyon. Ang tingin ko sa mga kuwento ko, komplikado, malalim, at talaga namang ikatutuwa ni Barthes ang pagiging writerly. Pero hindi mapalis ang katotohanan na hindi naman ako ganoon kahusay (o katiyaga, kung magiging politically correct.) Limitado lang ang kakayahan ko. Ito na nga rin yata ang ipinagpapalagay kong dahilan kung bakit hindi ako makasulat ng sustenidong naratibo, gaya ng nobela. (Nang minsan akong magtangka, ang resulta: parang si Madonna na kumanta ng "Don't Cry for Me Argentina." Hindi naman sobrang sama sa tainga, pero maaalala bigla ng nakikinig kung gaano kahusay si Patti LuPone.)

Sa kabila ng pagiging malay sa sariling limitasyon, gaya ni Madonna, nag-aalaga pa rin ako ng delusions of grandeur: may mahalaga akong sasabihin, kaya nga ako nagsusulat. At may matindi rin yata akong paniniwala sa Kasaysayan: wala mang nakakakilala sa husay ng akda ko sa ngayon, hindi naman nakakalimot ang Kasaysayan, maitatama rin ang lahat, maaayos din ang lipunan, darating ang araw na babasahin ng maraming tao ang mga ito, at magsisisi silang madla kung bakit noon lamang nila nadiskubre ang hindi matatawarang talino ng aking perspektibo tungkol sa iba't ibang usaping panlipunan na buong husay kong isinalin sa aking maiikling kuwento. (Na isang malaking kagagahang isipin, pero paminsan-minsan, iniisip ko pa rin.) At kahit nanalo na si Madonna sa wakas sa Grammys noong 1999,

kinokondisyon ko ang sarili sa bawat pagsali at pagkatalo sa Palanca: si Madonna nga, kuwarentahin na noong nanalo. Sanggol pa lang ako in Madonna years.

Ang mga paboritong tema ni Madonna ay maaaring hatiin sa iilang grupo: romantikong pag-ibig, ligaya ng pagsasayaw, pagtuklas sa sarili, seksuwalidad, relihiyon. Ang nagbibigay ng pakiramdam ng pagiging bago sa mga paksa niya ay ang iba't ibang imahen na itinatanghal niya kasabay ng mga kanta (mayroon siyang iba't ibang persona sa bawat era, halimbawa, Dita para sa *Erotica* album, Veronica Electronica sa *Ray of Light*) at ang mismong musika o produksiyon (na nakadepende kung sino ang katrabaho niyang producer sa panahon na iyon).

Ngayong binabalikan ko sa isip ang mga nasulat ko, may tendensiya ring malusaw sila sa iilang paksa: ilang beses akong nagsulat tungkol sa coming out/pagtuklas sa sarili, romantikong pag-ibig, seksuwalidad, at relihiyon. Nagbabago rin ang estilo ko sa pagsulat sa paglipas ng panahon, at sa kung ano ang mga tekstong kinokonsumo ko sa mga panahon ng pagsusulat.

Sa katunayan, sa tuwing nagsusulat ako, madalas na mayroon akong ka-“collaborate” na mga teksto at manunulat, na direkta man o hindi, ay nakaapekto sa aking pagsusulat. Halimbawa, nagsimula akong mag-eksperimento sa mga pangungusap noong mabasa ko si Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Nakita ko naman sa unang nobela ni Luna Sicat Cleto ang iba't ibang posibilidad sa paglalarawan. May mga pagkakataon dati na binabalikan ko ang *Makinilyang Altar* para basahin muli ang mga paglalarawan. (Ang isa sa mga paborito ko, “babaeng malungkot ang mga mata na parang tinadyakang aso.”)

Nabanggit ko sa itaas ang pagiging sinsero ni Madonna. Ang ipinagpapalagay kong manipistasyon ng kanyang pagiging sinsero ay ang paglalapat niya ng mga unibersal na tema sa kanyang espesipikong sitwasyon. Hindi siya nagkukunwari na maging iba. Ang kantang “Drowned World/Substitute for Love,” halimbawa, ay tungkol sa paghahanap ng sarili. Dahil si Madonna si Madonna at inaamin niya ito, sumulat siya ng kanta na tungkol sa paghahanap ng sarili ng isang taong may obsesyon sa katanyagan. Marami pa siyang ibang kantang tungkol sa buhay celebrity na madalas, ang nagiging punto ay hungkag naman talaga ang lahat ng karangyaang kakabit ng buhay na iyon, na walang ibang mahalaga kundi pag-ibig. May mga kritikong nagsasabi na nakababagot ang paksang iyon para sa mga kantang pop. May mga nagsasabi rin na narsisistiko ang parating paggamit ni Madonna sa kanyang sariling karanasan bilang lente. Sa palagay ko, may taglay naman talagang hibo ng narsisismo ang akto ng pagsusulat. Maaaring napapatingkad lang ito sa isang gaya ni Madonna, na pinalalaki ng international media ang bawat kilos.

Dagdag pa, bagaman ang mas madalas na turing kay Madonna ay isang pop singer, kapag sinuri ang kanyang mga kanta, may pagtatangka siyang maging confessional na singer-songwriter. Taliwas na taliwas nga lang ang kanyang imahen sa tradisyunal na imahen ng confessional singer-songwriter gaya nina Carole King at Joni Mitchell, halimbawa, pero may sinseridad namang madarama sa pagitan ng bawat linyang may mababaw na tugmaan.

Ang kanyang dalawang album na itinuturing bilang pinakamahasag ng mga kritiko ay kapwa may elemento ng pagiging confessional, ang *Like A Prayer* at *Ray of Light*. Ang kanyang album noong 2005 ay may titulong *Confessions on a Dancefloor*. Sa pinakahuli niyang album na *MDNA*, maraming kantang tumatalakay sa paghihiwalay nila ni Guy Ritchie. Isa sa mga ito ang “I Don’t Give A”: *I tried to be a good girl / I tried to be a wife / Diminished myself, and I swallowed my light*.

May pagtatangka rin ako na ipook ang aking panulat sa literal at hindi literal na paraan: ang lunan ng halos lahat ng aking mga kuwento ay parating Malabon, kahit na binabanggit nang tahasan sa kuwento o hindi. Ikalawa, hindi ako makapagsulat ng kuwento na naglalarawan sa buhay-mayaman. Itinuturing ko ito bilang kalakasan dahil mas nagiging mabilis ang pagbuo ng mga kuwento kapag gamay ko na ang “pisikal” na kapaligiran kung saan ito nagaganap. Pero itinuturing ko itong limitasyon (lalo na kung aalalahanin ang sabi ni Ricky Lee na higit na mahusay na manunulat ang hindi nakapunta sa Quiapo) dahil nahihirapan akong magsulat ng kuwento na hindi ko masasalok sa aktuwal at materyal kong karanasan. At hindi lang ito sa pisikal na pagpopook, kundi maging sa subjectivity. Wala pa akong kuwento na tungkol sa buhay-mayaman. Hindi dahil sa hindi ko talaga kaya—dahil literal namang kakayanin ko—kundi, natatakot akong matunugan ng mambabasa na nagmumula ako sa lugar na “peke” o puno ng “kasinungalingan.”

Na hindi rin isang paraan ng pagsasabi na pulos “katotohanan” ang nasa panulat ko. Gaya nga ng sabi ni Madonna sa isang soundcheck, *“I’m not really singing about myself.”* Pero tungkol pa rin naman iyon sa kanya. Sabay na pag-amin at pagtanggì: hindi pa rin naman ako nagsusulat ng creative nonfiction.

Nakakaugnay ako sa elemento ng pagsulat ni Madonna na pangungumpisal sa papel. Dahil gaya niya, lagi namang may bahagi ng sarili ko sa bawat panulat, at ang akto nga ng pagsulat ang paraan ko ng pag-aayos ng mga bahaging ito, dahil madalas, basag-basag sila sa “totoong buhay” at hindi mawawaan kung ano ang saysay. Pinagdikit-dikit ko lang sila para makabuo ng iba’t ibang hugis, at magkaroon ng kahit dating man lang ng isang maiintindihang naratibo. Pero hindi ibig sabihin na kung ano ang nabuo ay may kaparehong timbang ng “katotohanan” na taglay ng mga bahagi.

Ang mga kuwentong ipinasa ko, na pansamantala kong tinatagurian bilang *Gabriel at Alejandro*, ay gaya ng mga kanta ni Madonna: impluwensiyado ng kasalukuyan kong mga interes, partikular ang crime fiction, mga akda ni John Iremil Teodoro at (mga huling akda ni) Rene Villanueva, confessional, at oo: maaaring sabihin na naglulunoy sa cliché.

Isinulat ko ang mga kuwentong ito sa panahon na hindi ko inaasahan. Halos isang taon na akong hindi nakakasulat ng bagong kuwento, at nangangapa ako para sa bagong inspirasyon. Itinigil ko ang isang proyekto na pumapaksa sa trangenderism at tumakbo ako sa kabilang dulo ng spectrum: nagbasa ako ng nobelang pulp. Pagkatapos ng halos walang katapusang paglulunoy sa emosyon, identidad, at homoseksuwalidad, kung saan kayang magmuni-muni ng mga tauhan sa loob ng sampung pahina, ginusto kong magpaalipin sa plot at pumasok sa mundo ng mga “tunay na lalaki” na hindi mangingiming gumawa ng iba’t ibang uri ng krimen.

Pero napansin kong hindi lubos ang lugod ko sa pagbabasa sa mga naratibong pulp. Sa mga pagkakataon na pinagbigyan ko ang sarili mula sa itinakdang diyeta sa pagbabasa, nagbabasa pa rin ako ng tekstong nakasanayan na dati (e.g. character-driven, realist, at mas mabilis pa rin akong nakakapasok sa naratibo). Ang mga kuwentong ito ang inaasahan kong produkto ng mga tekstong pulp at “literary” na kinonsumo ko habang nagsusulat.

Ang isa sa popular na pagbasa kay Madonna bilang isang cultural phenomenon ay ang kanyang pagiging postmodernong icon. Tanyag na nga ang kanyang “kakayahan” diumano na maglaro ng/sa mga identidad. Ayon nga sa librong *Madonna as Postmodern Myth: How One Star’s Self-Construction Rewrites Sex, Gender, Hollywood and the American Dream* ni Georges-Claude Guilbert, itinatanghal lang din ni Madonna si “Madonna.” Wala naman talagang totoong Madonna. Pero ngayong nagkaedad na siya at naging prominente na si Lady Gaga, sa palagay ko ay lumilitaw na mayroon pa ring malinaw, kongkreto at “totoong” pinanggagalingan si Madonna. Bagaman pareho sila ni Lady Gaga na nagbibihis at iniaayon ang persona sa pagbibihis—maaaring ituring na drag—si Madonna ay may binabalikan sa bawat ekskursiyon niya sa pagiging iba. Nananatili pa rin siyang si Madonna, na siya rin naman niyang tunay na pangalan. Hindi gaya ni Lady Gaga, na itinatanghal ang sarili bilang isang alien, at kinakailangan pang gumamit ng alyas para tukuyin ang sarili-bilang-performer.

Ang pagiging grounded pa rin ni Madonna, na nasa anyo ng kanyang katawan, ang isa rin sa mga katangian ng mga kuwentong ipinasa ko. Nagpapalipalit ng katauhan sina Gabriel at Alejandro—nariyang maging magkasintahang magnanakaw, magkalaguyong bata at matanda, basketball player, bugaw, lalaking

bayaran, call center agent—pero may binabalikan silang identidad. Parati, si Gabriel ay nananatiling bakla at si Alejandro ay lalaki. Hindi para maging essentialist, kundi para magkaroon ng pagkakadugtong ang iba't ibang kuwento. Parang si Madonna, na tanging nagdurugtong sa iba't ibang album na niya na may iba't ibang persona, iba't ibang estilo sa musika, at oo, maging taglay na pilosopiya at politika.

Pinili kong magsulat tungkol sa relasyon ng lalaki at bakla, na maaari naman talagang ituring na cliché², sa dalawang dahilan. Una, kailan ko lang nabasa ang mga akda ni John Iremil Teodoro at ilang dula ni Rene Villanueva. Namangha ako sa paraan ng paglalarawan nila ng masalimuot na relasyon ng lalaki at bakla. Binigyan nila ako ng perspektiba na ibang-iba kaysa doon sa nakasanayan ko na. Ikalawa, kinailangan kong magsagawa ng eksorsismo sa isang personal na karanasan, at ang pagsusulat—pangungumpisal sa papel—ang isa sa mga paraan upang maisagawa ko ito. Paulit-ulit sa mga kuwento ang naratibo ng pagkakakilala, ang pagtataksil, ang paglamon ng dilim sa mga tauhan.

Kinakabahan ako sa epekto ng pag-uulit ng mga tauhan at ilang pangyayari sa mambabasa—baka sila maumay, baka lumitaw ang kanipisan ng konseptong napili kong gamitin sa proyekto, baka hindi ko mabigyan nang panibagong sipat ang gasgas nang paksa—pero magpapaka-Diyos muna ako. Lilikha ako dahil gusto ko, dahil malungkot ako, at gusto kong magkaroon ng mga bagay na magpapatunay sa aking pag-iral. Magpakaka-Diyos muna ako. Iyong Diyos na mapaghiganti. Iyong Diyos na Diyosa pala, at kumakanta gaya ni Madonna sa “Gang Bang,” isang awit mula sa *MDNA* kung saan gusto niyang patayin nang paulit-ulit ang taksil na mangingibig, dahil doon at doon lamang niya matatagpuan ang katahimikan. Sabi nga ni Madonna sa bridge ng kanta, “*I wanna see him die! / Over and over and over and over and over!*”

- [1] Siyempre, dahil nga hindi pantay ang relasyon: nananatili ang katotohanan na hindi man maililimbag, naipakalat pa rin ang tula dahil sa makinarya ni Madonna. At ako, bilang indibidwal na may maituturing na mas “may alam” sa pagsulat ng tula (kahit hindi makata), ay nagiging isang pasibong tagatanggap lamang ng pagtatanghal/pagbabasa ni Madonna ng kanyang akda.
- [2] Ayon nga sa isang review ng “Alejandro,” itinanghal sa Virgin Labfest 8, ang paksa raw ng aking dula ay “tired subject matter.”

ANG POLITIKAL SA PAGKATHA

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MAYO 2, 2010, walong araw bago ang pambansang eleksiyon sa Pilipinas, napanood ko sa telebisyon ang pag-indorso ni Pastor Apollo Quiboloy kay Gilbert Teodoro bilang presidente ng Pilipinas sa mga miyembro ng Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Hindi biro ang indorso na ito, umaabot din sa anim na milyon ang sinasabing populasyon ng relihiyosong samahan na maaaring magpanalo pa rin kay Teodoro kahit pang-apat lamang siya sa ginagawang mga sarbey. Tinatawag si Quiboloy na “The Appointed Son of God.” Pero sa pagkakataong ito, siya na ngayon ang nagbibigay ng atas sa kanyang mga tagasunod kung sinong presidente ang dapat iboto ng kanyang mga kapanalig sa paniniwala.

Sa panonood kay Quiboloy, ikinuwento niya kung papaano siya dumating sa kongklusyon kung sino ang kandidatong susuportahan at itatakda bilang bagong presidente ng bansa. Ayon sa kanya, maliwanag na binanggit ng kaluluwang sumapi sa kanya ang pangalan ni Teodoro na siyang magliligtas sa papalubog na kalagayan ng Pilipinas. Dagdag pa niya, mula sa banal na espiritu ang mga salitang lumalabas sa kanyang bibig. Habang pinapanood ang eksena sa telebisyon, hindi ko maalís sa isip kung sinong hindi maiinggit kay Quiboloy. Mayroon siyang lakas ng loob na tawagin ang sarili bilang inatasang maging anak ng Diyos. Bukod pa sa pagkakaroon ng libo-libong tagasunod.

Bawat salitang lumalabas sa kanyang bibig ay tinatapos ng “amen” at susundan ng masigabong palakpakan. Pinaliligiran siya ng mga tagasunod na taimtim na

nakikinig sa kanyang mga salita. Natapos ang eleksiyon. Nanatiling pang-apat si Teodoro sa mga tumakbong presidente. Hindi nangyari ang inaasahang himala. Subalit kahit hindi nanalo ang pinili ni Quiboloy, nananatili ang kanyang mga tagasunod sa pakikinig sa kanyang mga testimonya't pananalita. Para sa akin, ito ang kahanga-hanga: ang sundin kahit hindi natupad ang ipinangakong himala at pagbabago.

Kinabukasan, nagkataon naman na napanood ko sa ibang channel ang interbyu kay Ricky Lee. Ikinuwento niya ang kanyang pinagdaanang buhay bilang manunulat at kung papaano siya napunta sa propesyon na ito. Sa hayskul, naikuwento niyang pumipilas siya ng mga pahina sa silid-aklatan para gumawa ng sariling koleksiyon ng mga nagugustuhang akda. Hindi naman siya pinagbabawalan ng librarian kahit alam nito na siya ang pumipilas ng mga pahina. Siya lang daw kasi ang madalas pumunta ng silid-aklatan. Matapos ang kanyang graduation sa hayskul, naglayas si Lee. Ang bayad sa kauna-unahan niyang nalathalang kuwento ang ginamit niyang pamasahe sa pag-alis sa Camarines Sur sa Bikol. Pumasok siya ng iba't ibang trabaho sa Maynila at nag-aral ng AB English sa Unibersidad ng Pilipinas sa Diliman na hindi rin niya tinapos.

Ikinuwento niya ang kanyang malungkot na nakaraan dahil sa pinagdaanang kahirapan. Naranasan niya ang magutom at makulong noong batas militar. Paglabas niya ng kulungan, pakiramdam niya, hinog na hinog ang kanyang karanasan kaya't mabilis niya itong nailipat sa mga akdang kanyang isinulat. Magku-kuwento siya na may kababaang-loob. Mahiyain at tahimik daw siya noon. Sang-ayon sa kanya, naging daan niya ang pagbabasa upang punan ang anumang nararamdamang kulang sa kanyang pagkatao dahil na rin sa pagiging ampon.

Hindi ko maiwasang hanapan ng kaibhan at ugnayan sina Quiboloy at Lee; isang anak ng Diyos at isang ampon (ng tao). Kung anong garbo at laki ng programa at entablado ni Quiboloy, siyang simple at liit naman ng panayam kay Lee. Kung anong dami ng mga manonood kay Quiboloy habang nagpapahayag ng salita ng Diyos, isang tao lang ang kausap ni Lee. Habang ipinagdidikdikan ni Quiboloy na itakwil ang masasamang karanasan at nagawang kasalanan, niyayakap naman ni Lee ang kanyang "negatibong" karanasan bilang bahagi ng kanyang kabuuan.

Kung pag-uugnayin ang mga salitang binibitawan ng lider ng isang sekta at isang manunulat, mayroon silang tinutuhog na daan ng katotohanan. Para mas maging akma sa kasalukuyang panahon, sabihin na isang tuwid at isang baliko. Mistulang mas maraming sumusunod sa katotohanang inilalakso ni Quiboloy, ang tuwid na daan. Si Lee naman, animo'y nag-iisa sa tinatahak niyang daan. Habang ipinapangalandakan ni Quiboloy ang natagpuan nilang paraiso, paunti-unti naman

na natagpuan ni Lee ang mga hibla ng katotohanan sa kanyang mga sinulat na akda. Subalit sa esensiya, bagaman naghuhumiyaw ang lakas ng boses ni Quiboloy, wala itong nilalaman na bago. At habang mistulang tahimik at personal ang testimonya ni Lee, dinig na dinig ang kototohanang nilalaman nito; lalo na sa aspekto ng sining ng pagsulat. Paghahanap ng katotohanan ang pagsulat, kaya't kailangang maglagalag ng manunulat.

Sintomas ng isang malalang krisis panlipunan ang pagkakaroon ng kapangyarihan sa bansa ng mga katulad ni Quiboloy. At sang-ayon na rin kay Neferti Tadiar (*Things Fall Away*, 2009), nagluluwal ang krisis ng dalawang puwersa, una, ng mga mapagpalayang kilusan, at ikalawa, ng represyon ng estado. Sa ganitong konteksto, kung saan unti-unting nahuhulog ang mga bagay-bagay, saan papasok, o higit pa, papanig ang sining ng pagsulat? Kasama ba ang panitikan sa mga nahuhulog na ito o nananatili itong matatag at hindi natitinag? Nakakalungkot ito, subalit ang mas malungkot, ay kung hindi mo namamalayan na unti-unti na pala tayong nahuhulog.

Esensiyal ang pagkakatatibag ng mga bagay sa kapitalismo. Literal na tinitibag ang mga bundok para makapagpatayo ng mga minahan. Tinitibag ang bahay ng mga maralitang tagalunsod na nagre-resulta sa malawakang dislokasyon. Tinitibag ang hanay ng mga kilusang panlipunan; pinapaslang ang mga aktibista, dinudukot ang mga progresibo't radikal, minamasaker ang mga sumusuporta sa kilusang mapagpalaya. Sa pamamagitan ng disintegrasyon at likwidasyon, mas madaling mabubuo ang kita at tubo, ang monopolyo sa mga pribadong pag-aari, at kapangyarihang pampolitika sa bansa. Ang pagkakawatak-watak na ito, ang mga nahuhulog na bagay ang iniipon ng manunulat upang lumikha ng akdang bubuo sa kanyang imahinasyon at kritika sa lipunan. Kaya sa aking palagay, politikal na akto ang pag-akda. Magkakaiba na lamang ito sa kung kaninong interes ang sinusulong ng manunulat.

Sang-ayon na rin kay Ericson Acosta, makata at bilanggong politikal, ang mga artista'y mahalagang maging militanteng sektor ng lipunan. Pinalalaya niya, hindi lamang ang sarili mula sa tanikala ng indibidwalistang paghiraya ng kanyang kakayanang lumikha ng sining, kundi ginagamit niya ang sining upang magsiwalat ng mga katotohanan ng opresyon, at higit lalo ng paglaban. Sa pamamagitan nito, nagiging konsensiya ng lipunan ang mga manunulat. Sinusuong nila ang tinatalikuran ng karamihan, banggit naman ni Malou Jacob bilang pagsuporta sa panawagan ng pagpapalaya kay Acosta.

Inilalayo tayo ng estado at makapangyarihang uri, yaong mga panginoong maylupa at burgesya komprador sa ating alaala ng pakikitunggali upang maging dominante ang kanilang pagtanaw sa kasaysayan at moda ng produksiyon. Gayong

sila na iilan ang nakikinabang sa hirap ng karamihan. Sang-ayon nga kay Eduardo Galeano, ang sagana at luho ng iilan, ay gutom at pagkaalipin ng karamihan. Paano tayo magiging buo kung pilit pinaghihiwalay ang ating pag-iral? Isang political analyst sa telebisyon ang nagsabing ang susunod na gobyerno'y isang perya. Sa kongreso mauupo ang isang talk show host, boksingero at asawa ng dating diktador. Sa senado, muling uupo ang mga sikat na artista na nanguna pa sa halalan. Kasama nila ang mga dating politiko o anak ng mga dating politiko. Ang peryang ito'y paraiso naman para sa mga naghaharing-uri. Ito ang bigat na hatid ng huwad na demokrasya sa bansa. Mahalagang suriin ng manunulat ang sitwasyong panlipunan na kinasasadlakan ng kanyang bansa. Kapag ito ang kanyang naging paksa, tiyak na hindi siya mauubusan nang maisusulat.

Nawawala ang ating alaala sa paglagalag sa lipunang binatbat ng aliwan para tayo'y makalimot. Magnetong humihila ang mga mall sa siyudad para aliwin ang mga tao upang kalimutan ang kanilang mga alalahanin sa buhay. Nilulunod tayo ng mga produkto, binubulag tayo ng konsumerismo. Isang bansa tayo ng telenobela. Nakakalikha tayo ng simpatiya sa mga inaapi at galit sa mga mahaderang tiyahin, abusadong amain, o masamang madrasta. Subalit hanggang simpatiya lamang tayo, sapagkat sa huli'y matututong magpatawad ang inaapi, o kaya'y nare-resolba ang mga tunggalian ng uri sa pamamagitan ng romantikong pag-iibigan. Natutuwa tayo kapag napagtagumpayan ng pangunahing tauhan ang kanyang mga personal na suliranin, lalo na sa usapin ng pag-ibig. Umiiyak tayo kapag nalulungkot sa isang eksena, at umiiyak pa rin kapag tuwang-tuwa. Patuloy tayong naaaliw sa panonood ng mga talent show na nagpapakita ng pinapahirapang katawan. Habang may mga magsisilbing hukom na magtatasa kung naaliw sila o hindi. Ganito katindi ang kapitalismo, maging ang lungkot at pighati ng mamamayan ng bansang napapabilang sa Ikatlong Daigdig ay pinagkakakitaan.

Bansa raw tayo ng trahedyo pero nakukuha pa nating tumawa. Kung minsan, mahirap makita ang pang-aapi kahit tahasan na ang mga pagsisiwalat na ginagawa. Itinatago ito sa konsepto ng "maganda naman ang daigdig" at tanggapin na lamang kung ano ang kalagayan sa buhay. Ideal ang lipunan, tanggapin na lamang na may mahirap at mayaman. Ginawa ang mga talent shows, gameshows, malawakang singing contests at mga programang nagbibigay ng kahilingan kagaya ng *Wish Ko Lang* upang ilagay ang opresyon sa maskara ng aliw. Ito ang magko-kondisyon sa kamalayan ng mga manonood na tanggapin na lamang ang opresibong kalagayan. Tinuturuan tayo ng mga pampamanhid hanggang sa tuluyan tayong pumanaw na hindi man lamang nating namamalayan. Subalit hindi lahat ay yumuyukod sa ganitong mga panlilinlang, at sa aking palagay, dito pumapasok ang sining ng

pagkatha; ang mismong politisasyon ng sining upang maglanta ng mga panlipunang pagsasamantala, ng mga naghaharing-uri, at ng mga mismong tagapagdambana at tagapangalaga ng sining na mistulang nakipagmatrimonya na sa estado. Subalit hindi madali ang bumangga, ang lumikha ng kontranaratibo sa dominanteng pananaw sa sining ng pagkatha, sa paglikha ng bansa.

Sa ganitong konteksto, saan ilulugar ang sining ng pagkatha ng mga kontemporaneong manunulat? Maglalata si Epifanio San Juan ng tugon sa pamamagitan ng pagsusuri niya ng mga kuwento ni Carlos Bulosan. Ayon kay San Juan, sa panahon ng krisis kung saan ang pundasyon ng mapagsamantalang sistema ay nagkakawatak-watak, layunin ng artista na magsabi ng katotohanan—ang katotohanan ng obhektibong proseso ng pagbabago. Kaya, kahit mula sa pinagsanib na imahinasyon at impresyon ang isang katha, nagsisiwalat pa rin ito ng katotohanan.

Idadagdag ni San Juan na pinahihiwatig ng tensiyon ang pagbabago sa pagitan ng represibong puwersa at progresibong puwersa. Kung nais ng manunulat na gamitin ang kanyang bokasyon upang ito’y maging makabuluhang behikulo ng pagbabago at katotohanan, bilang humanistikong gawain, kailangan niyang muling ilarawan ang pakikibaka ng mga tao laban sa sinapupunan ng namamatay na pyudalismo. Kailangan ito upang biguin ang nabubulok na mga institusyon ng mga naghaharing uri na may pasistang ideolohiya, dagdag pa ni San Juan (“Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle,” 1972).

Nasapol ng siping ito ang personal kong paglalaglag bilang nagsusulat ng maikling kuwento. Siyempre, sa simula, sa mga unang tangka sa pagsulat ng anumang akda, may hibla pa ng adbenturismo ang dahilan ko sa pagsulat. Habang nagiging mas malalim ang politikal kong posisyon at pananaw sa lipunan, mas kumiling ang aking panulat hinggil sa mga isyung panlipunan. Naging isang proseso ng paghahanap ang pagsulat ko ng maikling kuwento.

Masayang magsulat, pero nakakalungkot din ito. Hindi pa sa usapin na dahil hindi mo masimulan ang isang akda, kundi dahil kailangan mong magkuwento ng mga trahedya, mga pagpaslang, gutom, ng kahirapan. Pasanin ang pagdokumento ng mga pangyayaring hindi pinapansin ng iba. Subalit may kapalit itong gantimpala, dahil walang mapa ang karanasan, ang akda ang nagsisilbing marka upang tukuyin ng isang manunulat kung ano na nga ba ang nilandas niyang mga katotohanan at samo’t-saring posibilidad ng buhay, paglikha, at oo, ng pakikibaka. Ayon kay Bulosan, hindi isang aksidente ang pagiging manunulat. Nangangailangan ito nang mahaba at mahirap na preparasyon, malay man o hindi ang indibidwal na ang landas ng panulat ang kanyang tatahakin na daan (“How My Stories Were Written,” 1971).

SOME NOTES ON MOTHERING AND TRUTH-TELLING

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IN 2015, WHEN I was preparing my manuscript for submission to the UP Press, I asked my husband what he thought of “How to Pacify a Distraught Infant” as a title for the book. My first choice had been “Inventories,” after my favorite story in the collection, but it sounded too generic for a book; would another story’s title, “How to Pacify a Distraught Infant,” with its various significations, capture the spirit of my fiction collection more accurately?

Yes, he said, but it would alienate male readers.

I found myself asking—quietly, so as not to initiate yet another argument, which we always conducted in very loud English that must have brought no end of amusement to the neighbors—Is that really so? Not one of those six words is gendered. Does everyone think that any allusion to child-rearing relegates text to the exclusive domain of women? Does the title automatically imply femaleness? And if so, is that a bad thing?

I eventually went ahead and submitted the manuscript under the title I wanted. Incidentally, around a year later, my daughter and I stopped sharing our home with my husband.

I have been writing fiction for twenty-three years and will probably keep writing fiction for twenty-three more. What I am writing now, however, is memoiristic

nonfiction. I know of authors for whom genre doesn't matter much—a good story is a good story, and that is that—but as a fiction writer I am flummoxed by nonfiction, by its claims of truth, by its constraints, its self-exposure, and its brazenness.

Why have I begun to write it, then? Fiction is easier for me because I have been reading it and studying its elements and actually writing and publishing it for years, even decades. But it takes me forever to finish writing a short story because I enjoy the crafting of an unreality and seeing truth in it; when I am writing fiction, I feel my mind work itself to exhaustion grasping at the fleeting, flickering elements, nudging them gently but quickly into place before they are lost; I get a high from juggling contrivance and intuition, and from letting the fiction take over my mind entirely until I believe in it so badly that it tries to write itself. And because I delight in the discovery of a story and trying to write it as it unfolds, because I find an almost magical pleasure in the trance-like yet highly cognitive experience of it, I never finish writing a story quickly. Revision is even trickier, and takes even longer.

On the other hand, memoiristic creative nonfiction is almost unbearable to write, at least for me, having had little training and exposure to the genre other than professional writing. But once I come across a promising structure, the writing is relatively swift—not because I do not enjoy its risks, but because intuition plays a smaller role in my process here, the truths I want to give form to being already visible to me.

The difference, then, is in how I navigate the labyrinthian process of writing stories in these two genres. In fiction, I revel in feeling my way around, listening to echoes, touching damp surfaces and cool earth, chasing ephemeral shafts of light; in creative nonfiction, more often than not, I am eager to get out. Perhaps because sometimes, I literally weep while writing.

Joseph Campbell calls my affliction “the darkest night of the soul”—I call it grief that doesn't let go. It reminds me of Budgette Tan's bangungot creature in the *Trese* comics: not the heavy spirit that sits on your chest as you sleep, which Tan points out is a batibat, but the sweet-scented specter of a woman who, sensing your broken heart, wraps her slender hand around it to keep it from falling apart. When your heart doesn't heal, she clutches more tightly, desperately, and in the end it is her hand that kills you.

I call it clinical depression because I have had to, because I have needed a prescription and therapy sessions, because when I was young I had thought about suicide but became certain that it would be too painful to be worth it, or rather, because twenty years later I replaced that certainty with the illumination that the pain of death would be nothing compared to the pain of living. I have seen traces

of the disorder among the women of my mother's clan, though one great-uncle had actually shot himself in the head, to the shock and shame of the family, but what truly began its rise in me was the death of a close friend in 2013. His death made me pay closer attention to the numerical machinations of grief—how many days before I can think straight and avoid breaking down in front of my classes, how many days will it take me to stop crying in the school corridors, how many days will pass before the strange day comes when the world is suddenly bearable again. Perhaps grief had an evolutionary purpose, I thought. Then my husband lost his job again, the first female kittens I had raised and loved died, and the Faculty Center and literally everything I had collected and invested in for my intellectual life burned down, and my daughter still could not speak in the way I or the world could fully accept, and my husband remained oblivious to my needs, trapped as he was in his own fantasies and sorrows.

Years ago, having to write about writing, I turned to Margaret Atwood's *Negotiating with the Dead* and reveled in her checklist of reasons, pages and pages of it. In truth, her book's title sums it up best; in the final chapter she writes, "not just some, but all writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a fascination with mortality—by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead."

Now, my reasons for writing fiction remain multifaceted—I have written for and about the dead, but I also write to understand, to take and give pleasure, to both conceal and safely confront difficult truths, and so on and on and on. But I have embarked on the task of writing creative nonfiction—a field I have garnered no accolades in, and feel no safety in whatsoever—for one clear and simple reason. I write to give form to my grief.

What will readers of my nonfiction think of me, writing as I do about my daughter, my husband, about our strained relations? I am not so concerned about my husband's presence, or absence, in my stories, because he can tell, and has told, his own stories about us. But I am worried about my daughter, whose language impairment means that she is unable to comprehend the kind of sentences I write, that she can barely construct her own, which means when I write about her, I am inscribing her in my narrative, which means that while I might attempt to write about her, I will always end up writing about myself, and I do not know at this point if she will ever be able to wrestle her narrative back from me.

My nonfiction project is about my daughter, about mothering a child with disabilities, and this sort of writing presents a particular challenge that begins with

politics but manifests in craft. The popular discourse of disability is the tragic model, where the disabled becomes the object of pity; she stays that way or overcomes her disability, thereby becoming an inspiration. However, disabled scholars like Lois Keith argue that transcending disability is just another way of rendering disabled people invisible, as disability is often a part of what the person has become.

In the memoiristic pieces that I have been writing, including “Animal Book, for Yuuki,” I have been conscious of not only my mother-persona but the responsibility that wearing that mask entails. I do not want to come off simply as a suffering mother to a suffering daughter, because my daughter, by all accounts, is a happy child; on the other hand, I do suffer, but not simply because my daughter is disabled, but because of a host of other factors, ranging from the specificity of my depression to the fact that systemic sexism, classism, and ableism can make life almost intolerable. There is also the gendered aspect of mothering, and the various dilemma of writers who are also mothers.

But this is something I must admit: when she was born, I couldn’t write. Writing has never been easy for me; it has never been a talent or a gift; it has always been nothing more, and nothing less, than a need. When she was born, I didn’t need to write.

And I would have been content if she alone can grasp what she means to me, the way I have an inkling of what I am to my parents, by watching them all my life, by listening to their reckless anger and unending misery and quiet happiness. I would have been content to simply enjoy my time raising her; I would have been content to stop writing if it meant we could talk to each other.

But she can’t, and we can’t, not in the way that my world demands, where language defines the limits of reality, of thought, of love. And so, because she cannot understand the breathtaking complexity of my love for her, I must make myself understand, I must make my world understand.

That, more accurately, is why I write what I write.

HINGGIL SA PAGSUSULAT NG NOBELANG “HIGH SCHOOL”

BEVERLY SIY

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MOTIBASYON

POOT ANG NAGTULAK sa akin para ituloy ang piyesang High School. Nag-umpisa ito bilang isang joke sa bahay namin, tapos tuloy ko na ngang itinala bilang personal na sanaysay. Ngayon, nag-evolve itong muli at isa nang fiction.

Madalas, for the past fourteen years, inaatake ako ng pagnanasang sumuko na lang bilang isang solo parent. Battered ka physically, mentally, emotionally and, of course, financially. Tama na, my gas. Biyernes Santo, araw-araw, 7 days a week? Tama na.

Pero wala naman akong masyadong pagpipilian. Hindi puwedeng i-display ang resulta ng malulupit na battering na ito sa bugtong na anak. O sa mga kapamilya at kaibigan. Kasi madalas, ako lang din ang source nila ng lakas. Kaya ang ganitong setup sa buhay ko, naming mag-ina, ang siyang dahilan kung bakit tinubuan ako ng kakaibang uri ng defense mechanism sa isip at sikmura:

Ang kaladkarin silang lahat sa aking mundo, ang mundo ng titik, salita, at pangungusap. Isyu, problema, bagay-bagay, alalahanin, tagumpay, pagkasadsad. Pasok!

Sa mundong ito, mas may kontrol ako. Ako ang nasa manibela. Ako ang pipili ng sasabihin ko, ng mga tauhan ko, at kung paano ko ito sasabihin o sila, paano nila sasabihin ang gusto nilang ipahayag. Ako ang maglalarawan sa lugar. Kung gusto ko silang pagtawanan, puwede! Ako ang ta-timing sa pagpasok ng anumang suliranin

o sa paglutas nito. Ako lahat. One point for me, zero for the team isyu, problema, bagay-bagay, alalahanin, tagumpay, pagkasadsad.

Isang nakalimbag na halimbawa nitong ginagawa ko ay ang horror story na “Bangis” (bahagi ng aklat na *Haunted Philippines* 8). Nang mamasyal kami ng mga kaibigan ko sa Sagada kasama ang aking anak, nakaaway ko ang nag-o-operate ng inn na tinuluyan namin. May dala akong water heater, kaya lang china-charge kami for the use of electricity. Sabi ko, o sige, di na namin ito gagamitin, paano kami maliligo? Nagbebenta kami ng mainit na tubig, anya. O, siya, pabili. Singkuwenta pesos daw. Pagdating ng tubig ay isang katiting na takore lang ang ibinigay sa amin. Akala ko, isang timba ang halagang singkuwenta! Sumisingasing sa init ang ulo ko, tamang-tama sa malamig na klima. Nang una naman kaming mag-order ng mountain tea sa kanilang restawran, inihain nila ito sa mapintog na teapot. Kinagabihan, nang mag-order kaming muli, ang mountain tea ay nasa iisang baso na lang, wala nang refill-refill whatsoever. Ito at marami pang nakakairitang pakikitungo ang naranasan ko.

Pagbaba mula sa trip na iyon, saktong may nag-alok sa grupo namin na magsulat ng horror book, ang Psicom Publishing. Sagada siyempre ang una naming naisip na setting ng mga horror story sa buong aklat. At kanya-kanya kami ng pili ng tourist spot na gagawan ng nakakatakot na kuwento. Ang pinili ko ay ang inn na tinuluyan namin. Siyempre pa, ginawa ko itong haunted at pinatay ko pa ang may-ari nito.

Dito sa aking mundo, libre ang maghamon ng pagtutuos.

Malaon ko nang gustong gawan ng masasamang bagay ang tatay ng aking anak. Literal. Literal na masasamang bagay tulad ng ipa-hitman, ipalason, etc. Napakalalim kasi ng sugat na idinudulot niya sa akin. (Kaya nga maaari ring isaalang-alang bilang autobiographical novel ang *High School*. Autobiographical ito kung ibabatay sa damdamin ko at ng bidang tauhan. Isama na natin ang mga plano ko at plano niya sa buhay. Ngunit fiction pa rin naman ito kung ibabatay sa events. Tulad ng akdang *Ellen Tebbits* ni katukayong Beverly Cleary.)

Ang mas masaklap pa sa sitwasyong ito ay pag nalilingat ako, mabilis na gumagapang ang sugat, umuuka papunta sa ulo ni EJ. Siyempre pa, ayokong mangyari ito. Ako na lang, ’wag na ang anak ko.

Kaya once and for all, at palagay ko nama’y handa na ako, si Ex naman ang kinaladkad ko sa aking mundo. Puwede ko nang gawin sa kanya anuman ang maibigan ko.

Pero, pero, pero hindi ko sinasabing puro pangit lang ang isinusulat ko. O tungkol lang sa mga taong maituturing na tinik sa lalamunan. Maging ang katangit-tanging mga tao sa buhay ko at ang maliligayang sandali na dulot nila ay pinipili ko ring ipasok sa aking mundo. Sa pamamagitan ng pagsusulat ko tungkol sa mga ito,

nabubuhay kong muli ang damdamin, ang kaligayahan. Nagta-times three tuloy nang walang ka-effort-effort ang magandang feelings na ito: kaligayahan sa aktuwal na pagdanas, kaligayahan sa pagsusulat tungkol dito (dahil nire-recount mo sa isip ang sweet and joyful moments), at kaligayahan pagkaraang maitala ang mga nangyari.

PAKSA

Ayoko nang lumayo pa. Buhay ng isang solo parent ang pinili kong paksa. Ito ang alam na alam ko. At isa pa, gusto ko namang sumulat tungkol dito na ang himig ay dark comedy. Madalas kasi, kung hindi dramatiko o melodramatiko, ang atake rito ay sobra namang comedy.

Ang pinili kong maging trabaho ng aking tauhan sa nobela ay manunulat/editor/proofreader. Tulad ko. Gusto ko sanang makapag-ambag sa “dokumentasyon” ng mga buhay nating creative writers na ayon kay Dr. Isagani R. Cruz sa kanyang introduksiyon sa aklat na *I Do or I Die* ni RJ Ledesma ay kadalasang underpaid, unpaid, unappreciated, at unwanted. Mula nang makapaglingkod ako bilang Executive Officer for Membership ng Filipinas Copyright Licensing Society noong 2010, mas namulat ako sa kaawa-awang kalagayan, buhay, at pagtrato ng iba sa mga kapwa natin manunulat, lalong-lalo na sa creative writers.

Pinararangalan tayo, binibigyan ng pagkilala, inaaral at iniidolo ngunit kadalasan ay hindi ito nagta-translate sa mas maalwang buhay para sa atin. Kabi-kabila ang paggamit sa ating akda nang walang pahintulot lalo na sa akda ng mga makata at mandudula. Sa tulang “Dispensa” ni Jose F. Lacaba, mababasa ang hinanakit ng persona sa walang harabas na paglalathala ng kanyang akda sa teksubuk:

Ang ibig sabihin
ng canon ay ito:
ang lumang obra maestra mo
ay muli’t muling
inilalathala sa mga teksubuk
nang walang bayad at walang pahintulot. . .

Tinapos ni Lacaba ang kanyang tula sa pagsasabing masaya ang makilala at mabigyang-parangal para sa inakda natin ngunit ’wag naman sanang kalimutan na ordinaryong mamamayan din ang mga manunulat. Sa mundo lamang ng titik, salita, at pangungusap tayo nagiging panginoon ngunit paglabas dito, ang pangangailangan nati’y gaya rin ng pangangailangan ng karaniwan.

Masarap sana ang canon.

Kung puwedeng ipambili ng ulam at kanin.

Ayon naman kay Prop. Reuel Aguila, naranasan niya ang magpunta (at magbayad ng tiket) sa isang palabas kung saan tampok ang kanyang dula. Gulat na gulat ang mga taong bumubuo sa produksiyon na siya pala, ang awtor ng kanilang dula, ay buhay pa! Kahit singko ay hindi siya binayaran ng nasabing produksiyon.

Kung humingi man ng pahintulot sa atin ang gagamit ng ating akda, wala namang pakundangan kung tumawad at mambarat, animo’y isda o baboy lang na kinikilo sa palengke ang hinihingi sa ating mga awtor. Nangyari ito sa tagapagmana ng copyright ng Pambansang Alagad ng Sining para sa Panitikan na si NVM Gonzales. Ikinuwento ni Selma Cortes, isa sa mga anak ni NVM Gonzales, minsan ay tinatawaran ng isang publisher ang paglalathala sa akda ng kanyang ama. Imbes na P5000 (na siyang habilin ni NVM Gonzales noong nabubuhay pa ito) ay P2000 lang daw ang gustong ibayad sa kanila ng publisher. Nang hindi pumayag si Gng. Cortes ay nagpasya agad ang publisher na hindi na lamang daw isasama ang akda ni NVM Gonzales sa kanilang textbook. Sa ganitong mga pagkakataon, nilulukuban talaga ng lungkot si Gng. Cortes at naiinsulto siya nang husto. “Para kaming mga pulubi,” anya.

Layunin ng akdang High School ang maipakita at madokumento ang aspektong pangkabuhayan sa buhay ng isang manunulat. Detalyado ang mga gastusin sa akdang ito para matanto ng mambabasa na hindi iba sa pangangailangan niya ang pangangailangan nating mga manunulat. At. . . buhay pa, naghihikahos, in fact, ang marami sa atin.

HIMIG

Dark comedy ang pinili kong himig para sa piyesang ito. Perfect combo meal ang pagsasanib ng aking poot para sa nabanggit na tao sa itaas at ang likas kong pagiging masiyahin. Madali para sa akin ang magpatawa habang naglalagapak ng trahedya sa kuwento. Bakit? Dahil na rin sa mga naranasan ko. Anong gagawin mo kung ikaw ang nasa kalagayan ko, ilang ulit nang humingi ng sustento sa tatay ng anak, halos maglupasay at mamalimos para lang sustentuhan ang bata? At para bagang joke ang batas (ang RA 9262 o ang Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act of 2004), dahil ayon sa officer of the day ng DSWD sa Mendiola, Maynila isang araw ng Oktubre 2010 na dumulog ako rito para ireklamo ang ex ko ng economic at emotional abuse (directed sa anak namin) at kay Bb. Vanessa Gluda at sa mga abogado ng Bantay Bata noong humingi ako ng tulong sa kanila noong Marso 2011, wala pang napaparusahan o nakukulong sa salang paglabag sa RA 9262 na may anggulong economic at/o emotional abuse. Gagastos lang daw ako sa pagdedemanda

pero sigurado raw na talo rin ako. Lalo na kapag wala raw akong katibayan na may trabaho nga ang lalaki. So nasa akin pa ang burden na magpatunay na may trabaho ang lalaki para mapilit ko siyang magsustento sa anak namin? Ako pa ang gagastos para magpaimbestiga at mangalap ng ebidensiya? Ano ako, tanga? Ay, di ikakain na lang naming mag-ina ang lahat ng para diyan!

Parang abyss, walang katapusan ang pagiging absurd ng sitwasyon namin. Didibdin ko ba ang lahat ng ito? Naku, hindi, hindin-hindi. Baka ikabaliw ko pa, hindi ba, ako rin ang talo. Tinawanan ko lang ito noon, tatawanan ko pa rin hanggang ngayon. Kaya nga patok sa akin si Mark Twain dahil sabi niya, “the secret source of humor. . . is not joy but sorrow.”

Tumagos ang ganito kong attitude maging sa aking akda. Narito ang tatlong dahilan kung bakit pinili ko ang himig na nakakatawa para sa High School.

Una, therapy. Therapeutic ang pagsusulat tungkol sa sarili. Pero di hamak na mas therapeutic naman 'yong habang nagsusulat tayo ay pinagtatawanan na lang natin ang negative feelings natin lalo na iyong feelings na tumubo at namunga sa dibdib natin once upon a time at dulot ng nakakasalubsob sa lungkot na sitwasyon. Ayon kay Melissa Hart, manunulat ng *Gringa*, isang nakakatawang memoir, “humor helps us deal with the difficult part of our past.”

Itong negative feelings tulad ng pagkadismaya, lumbay, inggit, selos at iba pa, kapag nahaluan ng humor, nagiging positive energy. Mas madali na siyang ilabas. Mas madali nang isulat.

Ikalawa, nakakatulong sa kapwa. Sa pamamagitan ng kuwento kong ito, nananalig akong natutulungan ko ang reader na makipag-deal din sa nakaraan at sa kanyang kasalukuyan sa mas magaan na paraan. Sabi nga sa introduksiyon ng aklat na *Writing about Oneself*: Let's help others define their own humanity.

Maaaring tadtad din ng napakahirap na mga kabanata ang buhay ng isang reader. Kung pareho kami ng pinagdadaanan o kahit na may similarity lang ang aming mga buhay at makita niyang nakakaalpas ako rito at pinagtatawanan ko na lang ito ngayon sa pamamagitan ng paglikha ng mga kuwento tungkol sa mga gagong tao, chances are, mai-inspire ang reader ko na makipag-deal na rin sa kanyang nakaraan o kasalukuyan sa tulong ng isang timbang humor. Masasalok niya ang moral lesson na: mas madali nga naman ang buhay-buhay kung ang puso ay laging nakabungisngis.

Sabi nga ni Anne Fine, manunulat ng mga akdang pambata, “. . . I wrote a little comedy—Ivan the Terrible—and doing so made me feel so much better. Humor is a healing art, both for the reader and the writer.”

Ikatlo, livelihood. Sa US, ayon kay Raymond Obstfeld, isang manunulat mula sa California at may akda ng dalawampu't pitong nobela sa iba't ibang genre, mas

mahirap ibenta ang akdang may humor kaysa doon sa may drama o suspense o action. Pero dito sa Pilipinas, humorous works are IN. Ayon sa National Book Development Board Readership Survey 2012, ang humor ay nasa top 5 ng mga non-school books read o NSB. (Ang top 1 ay Bible.) Ang NSB ay mga babasahin na binabasa ng adult Filipino kahit hindi ito i-require o ni-require sa paaralan. Malaki ang market ng humorous works.

Marahil ay dahil sa matagal nang seryoso at malulungkutin ang mga libro sa Pinas. Pag sinabing libro, ang mga unang pumapasok sa isip natin ay ang magkapatid na *Noli Me Tangere* at *El Filibusterismo* at ang mag-among *Ibong Adarna* at *Florante at Laura*. Ipinapakilala ang mga librong ito sa mabigat na paraan kakambal ng mabigat na mga project, skit, at book report.

One in a million ang teacher na magbibigay ng humorous na akda para pagbatayan ng project, skit, o book report. Kaya naman, pagdating ng mga libro nina Jessica Zafra, Bob Ong, RJ Ledesma, Eros Atalia, at iba pa, buong-buong niyakap natin ang mga ito. Wow, light. Wow, nakakatawa. Sa wakas.

Ang meron at marami tayo sa ngayon ay joke books, compilations ng mga nakakatawang quotation at “funny” comics tulad ng *Pugad Baboy* at ang *Kikomachine* ni Manix Abrera at mga sanaysay. Pero bihira ang humorous fiction. Hindi ko alam kung bakit!

Ayon kay Sir Abdon Balde, Jr., na isang consultant sa National Book Store, umabot na sa 500,000 ang sales ng mga libro ni Bob Ong. Humor at wit ang ilan sa mga puhunan ni B.O. Malaki ang kalahating milyon na sales ng libro rito sa bayan nating sawi kung saan ang bentang isang libong kopya ng libro ay itinuturing nang best seller at himala at the same time.

SUBCATEGORY

At bakit naman dark humor o dark comedy ang napili kong uri ng pagpapatawa?

Sa tingin ko kasi ay mas memorable ito sa reader. Mas dumidikit sa alaala ang mga eksenang may dark humor. Ayon pa sa young adult writer na si Sharon Creech sa panayam sa kanya hinggil sa pagiging manunulat ng comedy, “humor is stronger or more potent when it is juxtaposed with sorrow.” Kapag nakakatawa ka, mahirap kang malimutan ng tao. Pero kung nakakatawa ka dahil nakakatakot ka o nakakadiri ka or nakakalungkot ka, mas mahirap kang malimutan ng tao.

Sa kasalukuyan, mangilan-ngilang Filipino writers ang may ganitong uri ng himig. Siyempre number one na diyan si Bob Ong. Ang kanyang *Lumayo Ka Nga Sa Akin* na koleksiyon ng mga screenplay ay maituturing na dark humor ang himig dahil sa pagbatikos ng mismong akda (sa nakakatawang paraan) sa mga icon ng

popular culture tulad ng sine. Nariyan din ang aklat ni Jessica Zafra na *500 People You Meet in Hell* na koleksiyon naman ng maiikling sanaysay. Karamihan naman sa mga akda ni Eros Atalia sa *Wag Lang Di Makaraos*, na koleksiyon ng dagli, ay may himig din ng dark humor. Pati ang *60 Zens* ni Abdon Balde, Jr. na isang koleksiyon ng mga tula, sanaysay, at jokes. Pagtawanan ba naman ang pagtanda at paghahanda sa sariling kamatayan?

Ngayon, gusto ko namang testingin ang himig na ito sa nobela. Nobelang all through out ay dark humor. Ma-maintain kaya nito ang interes ng mambabasa? Bebenta kaya ito sa mga Pinoy? Teka, may matatawa nga ba?

Bakit naman wala?

Para lang makatawid sa araw-araw nating dark, humor nga ang kailangan nating lahat.

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MGA TULANG-LIHAM SA LALAKING SASAKSAK SA AKIN: ILANG TALA TUNGKOL SA KOLEKSIYONG “BALIW SA PAG-IBIG”

JOHN IREMIL TEODORO

FELLOW PARA SA TULA, 50TH UPNWW

KUNG ANG LALAKING makatang si Mike Bigornia ay sinasabing “bisyo ang pag-ibig” at ang sabi naman ng iniidolo kong babaeng makata na si Rebecca Añonuevo na siya ay “lasing sa pag-ibig,” ako naman na isang makatang bading ay “baliw sa pag-ibig.”

Kung makata ka, wala ka naman talagang kawala kundi isakodigo ang iyong buhay sa mga tula. Lahat ng tula ay personal. Kaya ang pagtutula ay isang uri ng pagsulat ng iyong talambuhay at pagmapa ng iyong mga paglalakbay—pisikal man ito, sikolohikal, o espiritwal. Kaya ang simpleng tula ay nagiging sagradong tulang-binalaybay.

Ibang usapan siyempre kung ang ideya mo ng pagsusulat ay isang paraan ng pagpapasikat ng iyong galing at talino kung kaya sumusulat ka ng mga tula upang manalo ng award at purihin ng mga kritiko. Kaya maraming makata ang inihiwasan ang mga madamdaming tula ng pag-ibig sapagkat akala nila imposible ang pagtitimpi sa tula ng pag-ibig.

Ano pa nga ba ang hihigit sa pag-ibig bilang karanasan nating mga tao? Wala na, wala na nga talaga. Kaya tama talaga si Rolando Tinio sa pagsabing “pag-ibig ang una’t huling paksa ng makata.” Kaya ang mga dakilang tula sa mundo ay tungkol sa pag-ibig. Kung kaya ang mga paborito nating tula ay mga tula ng pag-ibig.

Nitong Peberero lamang ng taong ito, naisip kong ipunin sa isang koleksiyon ang mga tula ko ng pag-ibig—erotiko man o emo; dalisay man o medyo bastos. Habang

ini-enkows ko ang ilan sa mga tula at nag-iisip ako ng pamagat, iisang parirala lamang ang pumapasok sa aking isipan—“Baliw sa Pag-ibig.”

Noong una parang ayaw ko dahil napakaordinaryo ang dating. Pero agad ko rin namang naisip—payak man subalit puno ng sinseridad kagaya ng mga tula kong isasama sa koleksiyon. Baliw sa pag-ibig.

Wala akong deyt noong Araw ng mga Puso. Bitter-biteran ang drama ko sa bahay. Paggising ko sa umaga, mga ala-singko, may tula na sa aking sinapupunan. Kaya binuksan ko na ang aking netbook at nagsimulang sumulat ng isang tula kung saan gagamitin ko ang pariralang “baliw sa pag-ibig.”

*Ngayong araw ng mga puso
Nagkulong ako sa bahay
At hinanap ang kopya
Ng mga tula ko ng pag-ibig.
Naisip ko puwede nang
Maging libro ang mga iyon.
Malay natin maging best seller,
Pagkaperahan ko pa
Ang aking kalungkutan
At pagka-ilusyunada.
Naghanap ako rito
Sa bago kong netbook.
Naghanap din ako
Sa luma kong laptop
Na nakatago na sa isang kahon
Sa kusina kasama ang mga bote
Ng red wine na ewan ko ba
Hindi ko pa rin tinatapon.
Naghanap din ako sa
Isang plastik na kahon
Na nakatago sa ilalim ng hagdanan.
Inisa-isa ko rin ang mga folder
Sa mga bookshelf.
Maghahanap din sana ako
Sa loob ng ref at oven
Subalit pinigilan ko ang sarili.
Naghanap din ako sa ilalim*

*Ng sala set pero wala namang
Nakatago roon
Kundi mga balahibo lamang
Ng aso kong makulit
At alikabok na ilang linggo nang
Di nawawalis. Napahatsing
Tuloy ako. Subalit
Ayaw ko pa ring tumigil
Sa paghahanap. Parang
Gusto kong maghukay
Sa maliit kong hardin
Sa likod ng bahay.
Baka kasi may inilibing akong
Isang baul ng mga tula roon.
Matagal na kasi akong
Nagsusulat ng mga tula
Para sa mga lalaking
Aking napupusuan
Alam man nila o hindi,
Naging mabait man sa akin
O hindi at itong matabang
Katawan ko lang pala
Ang habol nila
O kaya'y itong wallet ko
Kaya di ko masyadong iniisip
Kasi masaket syet. Syet
Talaga! Inabot ako ng takipsilim
Bago naipon lahat.
Aba, sitenta sila. Tamang-tama
Na isang libro. Nag-isip ako
Ng pamagat. Nainis ako sa sarili ko
At natawa. Para kasing hindi ako
Award-winning writer
At may MFA sa La Salle.
Ito lang kasi ang naiisip ko:
Baliw sa Pag-ibig!*

Madugo ang pag-ibig ng bading sa isang lipunang patriyarkal at heteroseksuwal. Palaging sablay. Palaging umiibig sa mga taong hindi dapat ibigin dahil imposibleng tugunan ang pag-ibig na inihahain. Maraming dahilan—sobrang bata, sobrang guwapo, sobrang yaman, sobrang macho, sobrang suplado, may siyotang babae, may siyotang lalaki, may asawa, o lalaki lang talaga na ayaw sa bading o kapuwa lalaki. Ang sabi nga ng isang bading kong kaibigang taga-Puerto Princesa na si Tong sa mga tila imposibleng pag-ibig na ganito: “Huwag mamangka sa gitna ng kalsada. Hindi ka na nga uusad, magmumukha ka pang tanga!” Oo nga naman. Ang mga melodramatikong one-sided na bading na pag-ibig ay isang pamamangka sa gitna ng kalsada.

Magtatatlumpu’t walong taong gulang na ako ngayong taon. Kaya ko nang tirisin, gaya ng pagtiris ko ng mga garapata ng aking aso, ang mga tumutubong one-sided na pag-ibig sa aking kasingkasing. Hindi ko na masyadong pinapayagan ang sarili kong makilig sa isang lalaki. Natuto na akong pekehin ang mga emosyon gaya ng pag-ibig. Natutuhan ko nang ariing mga mangingibig ang mga lalaking nakakaniig sa konteksto lamang ng pagtatagpo ng aming katawan. Kung may iniibig man akong lalaki ngayon, ito ay isang lalaking nasa imahinasyon ko lamang sapagkat siya ay perpekto. Perpekto dahil likha lamang siya ng isipan ko. Kaya baliw ako sa pag-ibig.

Tumatanda na ako at kung minsan masyado nang malungkot ang buhay. Naiinggit ako sa mga kaklase, kamag-anak, at kakilalang ka-edad ko na may mga pamilya na. Nitong Enero lamang, nakita ko sa Facebook ang larawan ng bagong bahay ng isang dating kaibigang lalaki noong nasa kolehiyo pa lamang ako. Tawagin na lamang natin siyang si Joshua.

Makata rin si Joshua. Nang magkakilala kami, isa siyang sikat na estudyante ng Arkitektura sa aming unibersidad sa Lungsod Iloilo sapagkat bukod sa matalino at editor ng kanilang magasing pang-estudyante, isa rin siyang atleta na nilangoy ang dagat sa pagitan ng Lungsod Iloilo at Isla Guimaras. Nang naging arkitek na siya, nagtrabaho siya sa ibang bansa para mag-ipon ng pera. Ngayon, may tatlo na siyang anak at may architectural firm na sa Iloilo. At iyon nga, may malaking bahay na at napakaganda ng disenyo dahil dream house niya ito bilang arkitekto.

Nainggit ako habang tinitingnan ang larawan nilang magpamilya sa bago nilang bahay. Siyempre masaya ako para sa kanila pero naiinggit pa rin ako. “Beautiful family in a beautiful house,” sinserong comment ko sa Facebook. Nang sumunod na araw, nagpasalamat si Joshua at may dugtong na, “Tinitingnan mo pala ang mga pix ko sa FB ha.”

Alam ni Joshua na in love ako sa kaniya noong nasa kolehiyo pa kami dahil minsan, noong nasa ibang bansa siya, nakatanggap ako ng email ng pangungumusta mula sa kaniya. Nagkataong nalulungkot ako nang mga oras na iyon at bigla kong

sinulat sa kaniya na crush na crush at in love ako sa kaniya noong nasa kolehiyo kami. Tinago ko lang dahil hindi pa ako matapang noon. Sagot niya, oo, alam daw niya. Kaya loaded ang dating sa akin ng mensahe niyang, “Tinitingnan mo pala ang mga pix ko sa FB ha.”

Sa ngayon hindi na ako in love sa kaniya. Marami na akong minahal na lalaki mula nang nagtapos kami sa kolehiyo. Tinatamad lang ako sabihin ito sa kaniya. Para ano? Baka isipin lamang niyang bitter ako. (Na kahit totoo ay hinding-hindi ko aaminin sa kaniya. Echuserang palaka!) Hindi ko na siya mahal subalit naiinggit lang ako at nanghihinayang. Naisip ko kasi, siguro kung naging babae ako at pinikot ko siya noong nasa college pa kami, akin na ang malaki at magandang bahay na iyon sa Iloilo! Sayang ang bahay. Hindi siya. Charuz!

Sa mga pagkakataong ganito, natatakot ako. Baka tuluyan na nga akong mabaliw dahil sa lungkot na dulot ng mga naunsiyami kong pag-ibig. Oo, mahilig akong mamangka sa gitna ng kalsada.

Ang kinatatakutan ko sa lahat ay paano kung dumating ang isang sandaling lungkot na lungkot ako, lababas ako at maghahanap ng panandaliang aliw at pag-ibig sa bisig ng isang estranghero sa dilim? Paano kung holdaper pala ang natagpuan ko? Paano kung may galit pala ito sa mga bading? Paano kung dinala ko siya sa isang nirentahang silid o sa bahay ko at patayin niya ako? Sasaksakin nang maraming beses hanggang sa malagutan ng hininga? Napakalaking eskandalo nito. Kawawa ang aking mga magulang at kapatid. Malulungkot ang mga kaibigan ko. Paano ang mga estudyanteng maiiwan ko sa gitna ng semestre?

Marami nang mga kahindik-hindik na kuwento tungkol sa mga bading na marahas na pinatay sa sariling bahay dahil nagdala ng lalaki. Mabuti na lamang at duwag ako. Hindi pa ako nagdadala ng lalaki sa bahay. Pero paano nga kung isang gabi hindi ko na makayanan ang labis na pangangailangan ng kaluluwa ko’t katawan? Isa ito sa mga kinatatakutan ko. Iisipin ko pa lamang, nakakabaliw na.

Ang taong baliw sa pag-ibig na tulad ko ay laging iibig. Dahil makata ako, susulat ako ng mga tula ng pag-ibig. Dahil bading ako, tungkol sa bading na pag-ibig ang aking isusulat. Ang bading na pag-ibig ay laging madugo. Sinulat ko ang tulang “Sa Lalaking Sasaksak sa Akin” bilang pakiusap at babala sa mga lalaking iibigin ko—panandalian man o pangmatagalan.

Ilang saksak ba ang kaya mong ilagda

Sa katawan kong nabubuhay lamang sa tula?

Kung iisang saksak lamang

Baka di sapat upang malagutan ako ng hininga.

*Baka maospital lang ako at humanda ka
Kapag ako'y magaling na
Susulat ako ng tulang-sumpa para sa 'yo.
Kung tatlong saksak naman
Para itong "i luv u,"
Malilito lamang ang katawan ko
Sa mensaheng ipinararating mo.
Kung pitong saksak naman
Baka di ako mamamatay.
Suwerte kasing numero
Tiyak may milagro.
Kung siyam na saksak naman
Sigurado akong hindi ako mamamatay.
Siyam kasi ang buhay
Ng mga pusang makatang bading na katulad ko.
Paulit-ulit akong mamamatay at mabubuhay
Sa halit ng lason ng pagmamahal.
Kung labintatlong saksak naman,
Aba, ikaw na ang mamalasin.
Habambuhay kang tutugisin
Ng itim na talinghaga ng pag-ibig.
Kailanman ay hindi ka liligaya
Sa bisig ng taong iniibig.
Ngayon, kung alam mo na
Kung ilang beses mo ako dapat saksakin
Upang masigurong mawawalan ng ritmo
Ang mga taludtod sa puso ko at puson,
Katulad ng pagkaalam natin
Kung ilang pantig mayroon
Ang isang soneto ng pag-ibig,
Sige, saksakin mo na ako ngayon
Habang iniibig pa kita
Habang inaawit pa ng aking balat
Ang pagsuyo't pagmamahal na dala
Ng pansamantalang pagtatagpo
Ng ating katawan at kaluluwa.
Sa susunod na linggo*

*Kung matatagpuan na nila ang bangkay ko,
Maaamoy ng buong mundo
Ang kakaibang bango
Ng binalaybay ng pag-ibig ko.*

Ang librong ito ay hindi lamang personal kong testamento bilang bading na makatang baliw sa pag-ibig kundi testamento rin ito ng lahat ng mga bading na sinusubukang maging matatag sa buhay kahit madugo para sa amin ang umibig. Mawala man lahat, maiiwan pa rin at mananatiling buhay ang mga tula ng pag-ibig. Ganoon ang aking pananalig.

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ANG DULA BILANG PANITIKAN

RODOLFO VERA

FELLOW PARA SA DULA, 51ST UPNWW

SA ISANG SESSION ng Writer's Bloc, noong buhay pa si Rene Villanueva, naging di pangkaraniwan ang init ng diskusyon naming dalawa tungkol sa dula bilang panitikan. Sa bahay niya ginanap ang session na ito noon. Linggo kami nagkita-kita at bagama't bihirang uminom ang mga miyembro, di ko na matandaan kung ano ang ipinagdiriwang namin noong araw na iyon at may nagpasa ng ilang bote ng beer. At kahit hindi ako umiinom, namumula kaming nagbabalitaktakan kung ano nga ba ang pangunahing esensiya ng dula: drama ba ito o panitikan? Napaka-importante para kay Rene na ang dulang isinusulat niya ay bahagi ng mundo ng panitikan. "Panitikan muna iyan bago ipalabas at panitikan iyan kahit hindi ipalabas. Dapat magtagumpay muna ang dula bilang panitikan," sabi niya nang may buong pagmamalaki at katiyakan. Sa isip ko noon, kalakip ng bahagyang katotohanan ng mga salitang iyon ay may bahagya rin akong naramdamang kayabangan. Wala na nga sigurong mas hihigit pa sa ego ng isang manunulat (bukod marahil sa isang artista). At hindi lang basta manunulat kundi manlilikha ng panitikan. Sapagkat mula sa mga sinabi ni Rene, mararamdaman mong ang bawat salitang isusulat niya, ang pagkakaorganisa ng mga salitang ito, ang kidlat at kulog na lilikhain nito kapag naihanay nang isa-isa't bumuo ng kahulugan, ng talinghaga, ng pananaw, ng lalim at butas sa malaking misteryo ng Buhay, ay isa nang ambag sa daigdig ng panitikan.

"Wala akong pakialam kung ipalabas ito, kung paano ito ipalabas, kung sino ang aarte sa mga papel, kung paano ito ididirek ng direktor—problema niya na iyan—

basta naisulat ko—'yon na 'yon," sabi pa niya, puno ng simbuyo ng damdamin na lalo pang pinaigting ng ikalawang bote ng beer. Hindi siya nakatingin sa akin. Hindi siya nakatingin kahit kanino. Isinasambulat lang niya ito sa maliit na espasyong kinauupuan namin. Isang deklarasyon ng isang manunulat na tila may halong paghahamon sa kapwa niya mandudula na nakapiligid sa kanya na basta sumulat lamang ng dula, lumikha ng isang akda bilang alay sa malawak na kawa ng Panitikan. Na para bang sa ganoong paraan ang likhang iyan ay may angking sariling palo na siyang magdadala sa may-akda sa harap ng pedestal ng mga musa.

Naalala ko ang pinagmulan ng diskusyong ito. Iginigiit niya kasi noon sa Writer's Bloc na mag-publish ang mga miyembro ng kanilang mga dula. Importante, aniya, na makabuo kami ng maraming publication ng mga dulang sinulat ng Bloc. Tungo marahil sa pagbubuo ng isang canon ng mga akda na maaaring maging batayan ng tunguhin ng Dulaang Pilipino. May ilang sumang-ayon, nagkibit-balikat at nag-akalang isa lamang itong pangkalahatang hinaing ng mga manunulat—dula man o maikling kuwento, nobela, o tula. 'Pagkat sino nga bang manunulat ang ayaw ma-publish? Pero hindi, nagpatuloy si Rene sa pag-usig sa mga aspiring playwright ng Bloc na sumulat para mai-publish at maihanay sila sa larangan ng mga alagad ng panitikan sa Pilipinas. Isali ang mga ito sa Palanca Awards, ang tanging timpalak na nagbibigay ng premyo sa magwawaging mandudula, kahit kung ang akdang ito'y ipalabas man o hindi.

Ako yata ang nagsimulang pumakli ng, "E, kakaunting publishing house lang naman ang gustong mag-publish ng mga dula. Kasi wala namang nagbabasa ng dula." Doon nga. Doon nagsimula ang diskusyong ikinapula ng mga pisngi ni Rene. At sa itinakbo ng diskusyong iyon, tuwirang magkasalungat kami ng tindig.

Dahil para sa akin, na lumaki at natutong magsulat ng dula sa ilalim ng Philippine Educational Theater Association o PETA, hindi naging pangunahing layunin ang sumulat para ito'y gawing libro. Naging mas importante sa akin na ito muna'y itanghal. Kapaloob sa tagumpay ng dulang maging isang akdang pampanitikan ay ang tagumpay nitong maisaentablado. Ang malaking puwang ng drama o teatro sa panitikan ay napagdudugtong ng tulay ng produksiyon. Ganoon ako pinalaki bilang mandudula. Ganoon ko nakita kung paano umunlad ang pagsusulat ko ng dula.

Ang tanong ko, ano ba talaga ang ibig sabihin ng katagang, "magtagumpay muna bilang panitikan"? Kailan ba masasabing nagtagumpay bilang panitikan ang isang akda? Kapag ito'y naisulat? O kapag ito'y nabasa na? Sino ang magtatakda ng tagumpay? Ano ang mga pamantayan ng tagumpay na iyan? At totoo bang kapag nagtagumpay ang isang dulang isinulat bilang panitikan, awtomatikong magtatagumpay rin ito bilang drama? Alin ang mas nagbibigay halaga sa isang dula?

Sa mahigit limampung taong idinaos ang Palanca Awards, mangilan-ngilan ang nagtagumpay nang sabay sa larangan ng Teatro at Panitikan.

Sa mainit na diskusyon sa maalinsangang Linggong iyon, sinabi ko, “Kaya nga playwright at hindi scriptwriter ang tawag sa atin. Dahil literal tayong bumubuo ng dula, hindi lang basta nagsusulat. At kahit sa pagsulat mismo ng iskrip, dadalawa lang ang paraang puwede mong gamitin: stage direction at dialogue. Hindi ba sabi mo noon, hindi kailangang maging mabulaklak ang stage direction na para kang sumusulat ng maikling kuwento o nobela? Dahil ang layunin naman ng stage direction ay upang bigyan ng malinaw na bilin ang artista at direktor kung ano ang dapat nilang gawin sa entablado?” Bagama’t may ilan rin namang mga mandudulang malalaki ang ulo at hayagang pinahahaba ang mga stage direction ng mga dula nila, tulad halimbawa ni George Bernard Shaw, kung minsan. O di kaya’y tulad ni Nick Joaquin na nagbilin sa sinumang babasa sa kanyang *A Portrait of the Artist as a Filipino* na ituring ito bilang isang nobela. “Kung ano’t anuman,” sabi ko kay Rene, “kahit naman gaano ka kasinop sa pagsulat ng stage direction, madalas, hindi rin naman nasusunod sa produksiyon dahil, hindi naman naisip ng mandudula halimbawa, na mahirap nga namang magpagawa ng barkong dadaong sa pier lalo pa’t kung ang budget ng produksiyon ay ni hindi sapat para magpagawa ng kahit kapisangong bangka.”

“Sa pagsulat ng dula, sino ba ang kausap ko? Hindi ba ang aarte at ang magdidirek nito? Maging ang pagbabasa ng dula ay may kakaibang paraan at lapit ng pagbabasa. Wala pa akong nakitang best \seller hit na dula sa mga bookstore, liban na lang kung ito’y required reading sa mga eskuwelahan tulad halimbawa ng mga akda ni Shakespeare.” At sa pagkakaalam ko, noong isinulat ni Shakespeare ang kaniyang mga obra, ni hindi pumasok sa isip niyang i-publish muna ito, o nilayong magtagumpay muna ito bilang panitikan.

“Stage direction lang at dialogue ang gamit ko para maghayag ng kuwento,” sabi ko kay Rene. “Wala itong masyadong pinag-iba sa pagsulat ng cookbook. Ang mga sinusulat natin, sabi ko, ay mga ‘recipe’ na kung tama ang luto, harinawa’y maging isang bonggang production. At pagkatapos na ito’y maitanghal, ang mga salitang nanatili sa alaala ng manonood, bilang mga salitang binigkas at binigyang himig ng aktor, ay maaaring sumaboy sa kolektibong alaala ng komunidad. At kapag ito’y nailimbag at muling naipalabas at muling manamnam sa entablado at pahina—hindi ba saka lamang natin tiyak na masasabing nagtagumpay nga ang dula bilang panitikan? At tulad sa isang recipe, paano natin masasabing nagtagumpay na nga ito bilang ambag sa tradisyon ng culinary arts kung ito’y binasa lamang at hindi sinubukang lutuin?”

“Bakit, ako, mahilig akong magbasa ng recipe kahit hindi ako marunong magluto,” ang sagot niya sa akin. Napakunot ako ng noo. Hindi ko alam kung seryoso siya o nang-aasar lang. May katahimikang namayani at nagmuni nang matagal ang mga tao sa paligid. Ayun pala’y sinisikap ng mga nakikinig sa amin na halukayin ang lalim ng kahulugan ng sinabi ni Rene. Nagpatuloy siya, “Mananamnam ko ang sarap ng luto sa isip ko. Maaamoy ko ang ginigisang kamatis at bawang at maririnig ko ang tilamsik ng mantika kapag sinimulan ko nang iprito ang manok na ibinabad sa toyo at suka. Hindi ba ganoon din naman ang pagbasa ng panitikan? Ikaw na mambabasa ang siyang magluluto niyan sa utak mo. At ikaw na rin ang huhugot ng sarap!”

“Hindi ka nga marunong magluto,” ang tanging nasabi ko sa sarili. Pero sa loob-loob ko ang gusto ko isagot ay, “Maaari nga, pero napakapambihira na siguro ng literary comprehension powers ko para tuwirang malanghap ang sarap ng amoy ng adobo mientras napakasimple at talagang mas praktikal kung mamamalengke ako’t lulutuin ito, at titikman saka mapatunayang, oo, masarap siya. Isa siyang akdang pampanitikan!”

’Pagkat ganoon naman ang iskrip na isinusulat natin, di ba? Humihingi—hindi—nagsusumamo itong maitanghal ’pagkat ang mga dialogue na nakasulat sa papel ay hindi kasing lutong kaysa kapag ito’y sinambit mismo ng artistang gaganap. At humihingi ito ng mukhang magpapatulo ng isang luha sa kanan—hindi—sa kaliwa dahil hindi makikita ng pinakamalapit na audience. Gusto nitong marinig ang perpektong taghoy kapag nalaman ng tauhang patay na ang kanyang pinakamamahal na asawa. Ang paraan ng pagkakahiyaw ng salitang sasambitin, kahit ito’y naka-all caps sa pahina ng iskrip, ay kailangang marinig at mapanood. ’Pagkat tulad din ng musical score na puro notang umiindayog sa papel—ay halos walang dating kumpara sa tugtog ng orkestra.

Hindi ko alam kung ang kayabangan ng isang manunulat ay nasasaling dahil ang prosesong dinaraan ng unang borador ng isinulat niyang iskrip ay kailangang dumaan sa dila, boses, at lantik ng katawan ng artista, laway at taas ng kilay ng direktor. Na tuwing pinapalitan ng isang artista ang kanyang dialogue dahil sanay itong mag-improvise ng mga linya ay nagdurugo ang puso ng nagsulat. O, mas higit diyan, ay kapag may napitas na mas magandang paraan ng pagkakasabi ang artista kaysa sa mga linyang sinulat dahil mas tumbok ng aksidenteng pangungusap na gamit niya ang kahulugang gusto sanang ipahiwatig ng nagsulat; bukod diya’y lalo pang dumulas ang linya, na siyang ikinatuwa ng direktor, at ikinatuwa rin ng manonood!

Dito sa palagay ko, naghihiwalay kami ng landas ni Rene. ’Pagkat ako ay mandudulang hindi gustong manood ng ensayo ng isinulat ko dahil lamang

ipinagdiriwang ng produksiyon ang tagumpay ng akda bilang panitikan, kundi gusto kong malaman kung ang binubuo kong dula ay tumatayo bilang teatro, bilang drama nang sa ganoon sa harap ng altar ng panitikan, maging tunay itong karapat-dapat. May pagpapakumbaba akong uupo at manonood habang sumasakit ang tenga ko kung sakaling hindi madulas ang pagkakabigkas ng isang linya. At pagkaraan ng ilang diskusyon ay posible kong amining, oo nga, hindi nga siya madulas, bakit di ko kaya subukang ganito ang linya? Kailan titigil sa gitna ng pangungusap? Ang lutong ng mura ay di dapat singlutong ng mura ng isang sanggano, kundi lutong ng mura ng isang taong noon lamang nakapagmura. Kailangan ko ng artista para matantiya ang tamang timpla ng tunog ng salitang iyan. At kung hindi umepekto, baka dapat palitan mismo ang salita para lalong humiwa sa damdamin.

Ang pagsusulat ko ng dula ay hindi natatapos sa pagtipa ko ng salitang Wakas sa aking iskrip. Nagpapatuloy ito sa rehearsal. Nakikita ko kung umuubra ang mahabang eksenang ito o bumabagal ang eksenang iyon. Nakikita ko ang problema ng dramaturhiya at estruktura dahil sa tulong ng mga artista at direktor habang nag-i-ensayo. Doon ako sa ensayo higit kailanman gising at alerto. Gusto kong malaman kung, tulad sa isang disenyong pang-arkitektura, ang totoong bahay ay tatayo at maganda.

'Pagkat nakapaloob sa produksiyon, sa kulay ng boses ng artista, sa porma ng kanyang katawan, ang potensiyal at katuparan ng dulang isinusulat ko. Bilang drama at panitikan. At kung makumbinsi akong problema ito ng tekstong isinulat ko, kailangan itong rebisahin. Kasama ang buong proseso ng ensayo sa pagsusulat ko ng dula. Importanteng bahagi ang mga miyembro ng produksiyon sa pagsusulat na ito. 'Pagkat hindi ko tinitingnan bilang hadlang o panganib sa pagsusulat ko ang anumang ambag na maaaring maidagdag ng mga miyembro ng produksiyon sa patuloy na pagbubuo ng dula. Kung kaya't wala akong malaking isyu kung ipakiusap sa akin ng direktor o ng artista na kung maaaring palitan ang linyang ito, o baguhin ang eksenang iyon. Ako pa rin naman ang magpupumilit na baguhin ito o magpasyang huwag ito baguhin. Pero hindi sa dahilang ang isinulat ko'y nagtagumpay na bilang panitikan, kundi sa dahilang, kailangang magtagumpay muna siya sa entablado.

Kapag naitanghal na ito, malamang marami pa rin akong makikitang pagkukulang na dapat punuan. At maaari ko pa ring ipagpatuloy ang pagpapakinis o pagpapayaman ng dulang isinilang na sa entablado. Hanggang ito'y pagyamanin ng iba pang produksiyon. Pero para sa akin, anumang paglalakbay ang tahakin ng dula ko patungo sa larangan ng panitikan ay kailangang dumaan sa masalimuot na proseso ng pagsilang ng dula sa tanghalan.

Ang isang mandudulang tulad ko ay nakatindig sa dalawang larangan. Ang

kaliwang paa ko ay nasa larangan ng teatro, ng performing arts, ng drama. At ang kanang paa naman ay nasa larangan ng panitikan. Hindi ko maikakaila na kaliwete ako. O tulad ni Huday, 'ika nga ng isang biro, tila mas mabigat ang kiling ng bayag ko sa teatro. Ito na rin marahil ang nagtatakda kung paano ako magsulat, para kanino, at iba pang mga isyung nauukol sa sining ng pagsusulat. Madalas nagsusulat ako ng dula dahil kinomisyon ako. Hindi dahil sa babayaran ako, bagama't magsisinungaling ako kung sasabihin kong hindi importante iyon, kundi pa dahil sa nakatitiyak akong ipapalabas ito ng nagkomisyon ng dula at hindi mananatiling blueprint ng isang produksiyon sa utak ko. Tiyak din sa akin kung sino ang manonood nito. At ang karanasan ko sa pagsulat sa teatro ang nagbibigay din sa akin ng ideya kung gaano karaming mga artista ang dapat isali, kung musical ba ito o dulang may awit dahil marunong umawit ang mga gaganap, at iba pang konsiderasyon. Maging ang mga estilong pinag-eeksperimentuhan ko ay nagbuhat sa karanasan ko sa panonood at kakayahan ng mga kumpanyang panteatrong ginagalawan ko. Pati ang estilo at diction ng panulat ko'y bahagya o tuwirang nakabatay sa karanasang panteatrong pinagdaanan ko. Kung mayroon mang inobasyon o pagtatangkang lumikha ng bago—ito'y batay na rin sa kakulangang natunghayan ko sa karanasan ng mga produksiyong nagdaan. At hindi kailanman sa karanasan ko sa pagpublish ng mga dula ko.

Para sa akin, sa ganoong paraan lamang mabubuo ang pampanitikang bahagi ng isang dula. Mas hinog at mas masigla dahil pinataba ito ng ibang kasapi ng produksiyon. Saka lamang ito nararapat na ituring bilang akdang pampanitikan. Wika nga ni David Henry Hwang, "Are plays literature? Yes, but in retrospect."

lilan lang naman ang naging layunin ko sa pagsusulat ng dula. Ang una'y nagbabaka-sakaling kikita ako kahit kaunti. Mas naikli ang panahong hinihintay para mabayaran ako sa pagsusulat ko ng dula. Di tulad siguro ng pag-publish ng sariling libro. Ang ikalawa'y bunsod na rin ng aking pampolitikang pananaw: na mayroon akong mahalagang gustong sabihin sa mundo, etc., etc. Ang ikatlo'y, oo, tulad ni Rene, hangarin ko ring makilala sa larangan ng panitikan ang mga akda ko, ngunit di ko maisip na iuna ang hangaring ito sa pinakamahalagang hangarin ko bilang mandudula, walang halong pagbibiro: ang magpalabas.

“THE CITY’S BAD ENOUGH AS IT IS”: WHAT I WRITE, HOW, AND WHY

ELIZA VICTORIA

FELLOW FOR FICTION, 54TH UPNWW

I’VE ALWAYS ENJOYED a good ghost story. I was born on All Saints’ Day, our Day of the Dead, and for many years the highlight of my birthday was the Halloween episode of the now defunct *Magandang Gabi, Bayan*, which my siblings and I watched in bed with a blanket around our shoulders. As a reader, a media consumer, and a busybody, I found myself gravitating toward dark fiction—everything from true crime to ghost stories about the UP Main Library—because it excited me, it intrigued me. In good horror tales, something always happened, and something always changed.

As a young reader, I only knew to categorize stories as either “good” or “boring.” Back then, all I wanted was to get from Point A to Point B—and to get to Point B fast. Who cares about lovely turns of phrases and language and words, who cares about character development? I only cared about one thing: what’s the plot? Is someone going to end up dead? Is there a lot of gore? Is there a twist? (I was a big fan of twists.) Is there a monster in it? During those early years of my life as a reader, nobody told me what to read. Nobody served as a guide, so I read whatever I found amusing, and I read blindly. Reading then was like walking around a dark house during a thunderstorm, and I believed, in my heart of hearts, that I’d be more excited if I reached out a hand and touched a large, slimy creature than if I came upon a room within which a young woman sat in silence and mourned the sudden end of her youth. (Unless the sudden end of her youth turned her into a large, slimy creature. Then that would be seriously awesome.)

Also, at an early age I got it into my head that I wanted to write horror, and so I treated every book I read and every story I heard as research, and, more importantly, as a challenge. Can you write something better than this? I read a lot of Stephen King, mainly because he had so many published books out in the market and a handful of them eventually ended up at the local book bargain bin, the only books I could afford with my allowance at the time. The 90s also saw the rise of slasher flicks. I devoured them and regurgitated them in the form of awful, completely un-subtle, B-movie-ish horror stories, with all of the gore and none of the soul.

While this train wreck of a writing career was chugging along, I was also exposed to the most fantastic tales from my mother and my maternal grandmother, who hailed from the Cagayan Valley. These stories included “Our Neighbor, the Mangkukulam” and “The Day Your Uncle Was Nearly Taken by a Sirena.” However, I didn’t immediately think of incorporating the aswang, the mangkukulam, the sirena, in my writing, because I didn’t see them as characters. They were real. They were my family’s stories, and they were sacred to me.

All of that changed when I moved to the city.

I was raised in a small town in Hagonoy, Bulacan, and after high school, I moved to Diliman, Quezon City, for college and stayed in the same city for work. I met the most wonderful people there while living away from my family, but looking at those years in hindsight, I feel now that I have spent most of my years there in sadness. I didn’t feel like I was interesting enough, or cool enough, or good enough. I didn’t feel like I fit anywhere.

I joined the workforce in 2007, and in that year I began writing stories about alienation and displacement. Tales of “urban ennui,” as a fellow writer told me once. I started incorporating the aswang from my mother’s stories—perhaps out of homesickness, or perhaps due to the years and the distance I felt comfortable enough to relegate them from “sacred stories of my childhood” to “fiction fodder.” As a sad, uncertain young woman in the city, I identified more with the monsters, the solitary souls, the outliers, than with the headstrong, hateful mob, and so I made the aswang the stories’ heroes. I transplanted creatures known to be connected to rural settings—like the diwata—to the metropolis, and watched them grow tired and sad as they worked long hours and struggled to pay the rent.

That was the year I also began writing poetry in earnest. The summer before my graduation as a Journalism major, I interned in the crime beat at a major newspaper, and my poems were also filled with the darkness and deaths of the city.

For four years I stayed at the newspaper as a researcher and writer. I was (over) saturated with news stories. I dug up files and conducted research on long-forgotten

crimes to establish timelines, revisit the narratives. In the face of real-life tragedy, who needs horror stories? A good question, and a question I asked myself often. And yet I continued to write them, and I continued to read them, even as I sat paranoid in commuter buses and locked (and double-locked) my apartment door at night.

By that time, writing became more than telling a good yarn.

Writing for me became a psychological exploration of motives, of the tragic trajectory of imagined lives. It was a way for me to try to answer the nagging question Why, why, why?

I wrote because I wanted to understand.

Why are we like this? Why do we commit these terrible deeds? Looking for the answer, I ended up with stories.

One can say I “grew up” in the city, in the sense that it was where I understood that horror and tragedy need not be loud in order to be grand, that it not be gory in order to be terrifying. That oftentimes there are no “twists”; that you can see the speeding car, the swinging blade, from a mile away, and still deny it.

“Horror is a fact of life,” said Joyce Carol Oates, “and as a writer I’m fascinated by all facets of life.” I have written in different genres with different settings, but I return to these things, again and again: alienation, displacement, world-weariness, crime, tragedy, horror, the city, the city, the city.

I explore the same themes and subjects in this new work, tentatively titled *Nightfall*, envisioned to consist of several interconnected stories.

The idea came to me while commuting, while stuck in traffic, while watching new buildings rise and suffocate the landscape: What if the city consisted of towers so high they block out the sun? In this bizarre, far-future setting I plan to write about our contemporary agonies: traffic jams, violence, corruption in the police force, loneliness.

It is my hope that the multi-story format will help me make the dark, nameless City come to life, and at the same time help me improve my craft and bring something new, exciting, entertaining, and thought-provoking to readers.

ON “ARKIPELAGORYA: A COMPOSITE NOVEL”

JANUAR E. YAP

FELLOW FOR FICTION, 57TH UPNWW

“ARKIPELAGORYA” IS A composite novel on what lies between the islands as a metaphor. The novel’s title is a portmanteau of “arkipelago” (archipelago) and “alegorya” (allegory).

STRUCTURE AS METAPHOR

The novel’s structure takes the nature of the “composite novel” or “short story cycle.” The composite novel, as defined by literary theorists Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris in *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition*, “is a literary form that combines the complexities of a miscellany with the integrative qualities of a novel. In other words, it is a grouping of autonomous pieces that, together achieve a whole-text coherence.”

Joseph Warren Beach in *The Twentieth Century Novel* identified the genre with the description he called a “composite view” by authors who “build up a set of stories into a larger whole, in which, by some compositional device, they are given a semblance of organic unity.”

Arkipelagorya, the composite novel, takes the challenge of making the form itself a metaphor, the supposed hybridity as being appropriate for the theme of cohesive insularities of the Philippine archipelago, which will be used as the novel’s central organizing principle. The pure novel form has its limitations as it works around the presumption of a single *po stou* or a *locus standi*, at once claiming a grand-narrativist

point of view. Unlike the novel, the composite novel is made up of interdependent stories that create coherent and cohesive dialectical narratives. It inspires a Gestalt as one appreciates the entirety of the composite stories.

To tell the nation's story from a single locus standi tends to create a fallacy. A collection of short stories does not work either since each narrative could not take reference from the consciousness of the other stories, which is not the novel's metaphorical intention. The Filipino-Australian writer Marco Cuevas-Hewitt in his paper "Sketching Towards an Archipelagic Poetics of Postcolonial Belonging" says that the notion of "insularity" only tends to disregard the narratives of other modes of experiences. Hewitt cites Antonis Balasopoulous's view on "nesology." The notion of the "insular" only tends to view the islands as "discrete and bounded entities." He says, "In effect, it sees only islands of order, forgetting that there is a whole ocean out there that mixes the things of the world. It is blind to the chaos from which all actuality is generated, preoccupying itself instead with the imposition of order, that is, with a vain attempt at the taxonomization and encoding of all reality. The Newtonian-Kantian ontology of order sees the world we are born into as always already mapped out in a series of contiguous, stable, a priori categories, in effect imposing a stark geometry of inside and outside upon thought. This, in turn, gives rise to an epistemically-violent logic of 'either-or,' which conceives of difference only in absolute terms."

If *Arkipelagorya's* overarching statement is that of the "archipelago as allegory," then it resists all notions of bounded insularities or, in the case of narratology, a fragmentation of isolated imaginaries. The islands must converse; they do not become an archipelago unless they recognize those that connect them.

Hewitt said that "there is an urgent need to re-found struggle upon new imaginaries of social space." He says: "To these ends, I would like to propose the 'archipelago' as an alternative imaginary to the centralizing, homogenizing, and essentializing schema of nation-state of 'island' space. The new archipelagic poetics, which I am proposing, would valorize what John Tomlinson calls 'complex connectivity,' rather than homogenous 'unity,' that would allow for commonalities to be constructed across differences, rather than at the expense of them. It would furthermore allow for notions of community and belonging to become founded in affinities rather as essences, rendering the Philippines a multiplicitous translocation community, rather than a unitary national one. Importantly, the various nodes of the Filipino diaspora might also be considered as part of the archipelago. Before proceeding, however, it will be necessary to provide a deeper discussion of that which I will be differentiating the archipelago from, namely, the modernist conception of social space, for which I will use the trope of the island."

It is this “complex connectivity” that is the novel’s intended mimesis and conceit—in form and substance.

J. Gerald Kennedy says the composite novel genre resists the “organizing authority of an omniscient narrator, asserting instead a variety of voices or perspectives reflective of the radical subjectivity of modern experience.” The genre employs fragmentation, juxtaposition, and simultaneism to mirror the “multiplicity” that characterizes the postmodern times.

Philippine insularity is seafaring, the village storyteller-savant is one who tells tales beyond the shorelines, he speaks of creatures in the sea, of other shores, of villages far and away, even as he narrates those that are close to home.

While Carl Jung speaks of the “collective unconscious,” there might also be, on the other hand, an “archipelagic unconscious” for the Filipino raconteur. The “short story cycle” resists the notion of hegemonies and grand narratives, while it allows multiple imaginaries and a certain degree of tentativeness in language and position. Above all, the form fits the narrative of the village savant who, despite being the local teller of tales, is nevertheless informed by a consciousness of the archipelago, of other towns, islands or villages, or what Filipino anarchist author Bas Umali calls the “archipelagic confederation.” The composite novel, therefore, allows new imaginaries in exactly that insular, but unbounded, seafaring, archipelagic social space.

The scholar Rocio Davis, who has done extensive study on the narratology of the “short story cycle” or the “composite novel,” says that the form had been common among ethnic American authors. He says the authors find it useful “as a metaphor for the fragmentation and multiplicity of ethnic lives” since it “highlights the subjectivity of experience and understanding” by allowing “multiple impressionistic perspectives and fragmentation of simple linear history.”

The archipelagic consciousness calls to mind the Filipino as a travelling, seafaring people. In his essay “The Travelling Filipino,” the scholar Resil Mojares says thus: “The role of travel in the fashioning of the self, the circulation of ideas, and the formation of nations has received a great deal of scholarly attention. The focus, however, has been on transnational travel. What about travel inwards? How much travelling did Filipino intellectuals do within the country, and what might this and the accounts they wrote tell us of how they imagined the ‘nation,’ of and for which they spoke?”

Arkipelagorya intends to travel the Filipino’s archipelagic self inwards, by which I mean soul-searching into the spaces between islands. Because that should be where the Filipino hermit-savant should tell the story of his country from. At once, in all corners of the islands cluster, and not from some cosmic, imperialistic, hegemonic center.

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His books include the novel *Salamanca* (Anvil); short fiction collections *The Kite of Stars and Other Stories* (Anvil), *How to Traverse Terra Incognita* (Visprint), *East of the Sun and Other Stories* (et al.), *A Field Guide to the Roads of Manila and Other Stories* (Anvil), *Stars in Jars* (Adarna) with Sage Alfar; and the children's book *How Rosang Taba Won a Race* (Lampara).

As an anthologist, he is the founder of the Philippine Speculative Fiction annuals, and the editor of anthologies including *Horror: Filipino Fiction for Young Adults*, *Science Fiction: Filipino Fiction for Young Adults*, *Maximum Volume: Best New Philippine Fiction 1 & 2*, and *Ang Manggagaway at iba pang Kathang-Agham at Pantasya mula sa Gitnang Europa at Pilipinas*, and the graphic novels *Siglo: Freedom* and *Siglo: Passion*, among others.

His literary awards include ten Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature—including the Grand Prize for Novel for *Salamanca*—as well as National Book Awards for the graphic novels *Siglo: Freedom* and *Siglo: Passion*, the Philippines Free Press Literary Award, and the Gintong Aklat Award.

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Si **Mesándel Virtusio Arguelles** ay manunulat, editor, tagasalin, at guro. Nakapaglathala na siya ng labinsiyam na aklat ng tula kabilang ang *Kurap sa Ilalim* (DLSU Publishing House, 2016) at *Pesoa* (Balangay Productions, 2014), kapwa finalist sa National Book Award noong 2015 at 2017. Nagkamit siya ng mga parangal kabilang ang Maningning Miclat Award for Poetry at Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature at nakatanggap din ng mga fellowship mula sa UP National Writers Workshop

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Nerisa del Carmen Guevara has exhibited her installations and performance pieces at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, and other spaces. She has received a Palanca Award for Poetry, a Silver Cup for Dance Solo in the April Spring Festival in Pyongyang, and a Catholic Mass Media Award. Guevara has an M.A. in English Studies from University of the Philippines, Diliman. She is currently completing a Ph.D. in Creative Writing in the same university. A featured Southeast Asian performance artist, documentation of her "Elegies" and "Infinite Gestures" are currently in the archives of The Live Art Digital Agency (LADA), London. She has done performance art pieces for the Philippine International Performance Art Festival, Solidarity in Performance Art Festival, PERFORMATURA, Grace Exhibition Space in Brooklyn, New York, International Rain Festival in Solo, Indonesia, and most recently in the LAPSody International Festival 2019 at the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. Guevara's poems have been published in *The Comstock Review*, New York and *The Asian Cha*, Hong Kong. Her poems have been anthologised in *A Habit of Shores: Filipino Poetry and Verse from English, 60's to the 90's* by Gémino H. Abad (Editor, 1999) and *The Achieve of, The Mastery: Filipino Poetry and Verse from English, mid-90s to 2016* edited by Gémino H. Abad and Mookie Katigbak-Lacuesta (The University of the Philippines Press, 2018).

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He started writing professionally as a college freshman, and for almost two decades has contributed to various publications and outlets. His writing led to work

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Carl has authored books of fiction, essays, and poetry and contributed to a wide range of projects from technical writing like process manuals and reports, to biographies and coffee table books, to work in television and film.

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Arvin Abejo Mangohig is the author of *The Gaze: Poems* published by the UP Press (2003), and *Bloodflow: A Lyric Sequence* published by DLSU/Central Books (2012). He received his BA and MA in English from the University of the Philippines Diliman. He has won Philippines Free Press and NVM Gonzalez awards for his poetry and fiction. He has been shortlisted for the Kokoy Guevara Poetry Competition. Mangohig was the webmaster of panitikan.com.ph for almost ten years and works as copy editor for the UP Press.

Clarissa V. Militante teaches Literature and Creative Writing at De La Salle University, where she is also currently completing her PhD in Literature. Occasionally, she also teaches writing courses under DLSU's Department of Communication. Ms Militante is author of two novels: *Different Countries* (Anvil Publishing, 2010) which was long-listed at the Man Asia Literary Prize in 2009 and a finalist at the

2011 Madrigal-Gonzalez Best First Book Award; and *We Who Cannot Be Daughters*, published by UST Publishing House in 2014. She is currently working on her third novel. Having previously worked with news organizations such as Philippine News & Features and GMA news online, she continues to contribute articles to various news and media platforms. She also worked with the Asian non-profit organization Focus on the Global South before she started teaching in DLSU.

Nagtuturo si **Will P. Ortiz** ng Philippine Studies at Malikhaing Pagsulat sa Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikan ng Pilipinas, UP Diliman. Nakatuon ang kanyang mga pananaliksik at akda sa bata at kababaihan. Nanalo siya ng ikalawang gantimpala sa Palanca noong 2017 para sa kanyang sanaysay na “Sisid” at nanalo ang kanyang tulang pambata “Himbinng na Kuting” ng ikalawang gantimpala ng 2018. Unang libro niya ang *Bugtong ng Buwan at Iba pang Kuwento* (UP Press) na nabigyan ng Madrigal-Gonzalez First Book Award noong 2012. Nalathala ang kanyang nobelang *Ang Pagbabalik ni Maria Makiling* noong 2015 ng University of the Philippines Press. Inaasahang lalabas ngayong 2019 ang *Si Maria Makiling at ang Alamat ng Animas Anya*. Serye ito ng mga nobelang pantasya para sa mga young adult.

Jenny Ortuoste is a California-based newspaper columnist, sportswriter, and broadcaster. She writes two columns for *Manila Standard-Today*: “Pop Goes the World” for the op-ed page every Thursday, and “The Hoarse Whisperer,” on horseracing for the sports page every Wednesday. Jenny also writes articles and produces magazines for the horseracing industry, and produces content (speeches, columns) for private clients. In 1993 Solar Books published her romance novel *Fire and Ice*, her first foray into fiction.

In 2016, UST Publishing House published her first collection of short fiction, *Fictionary*.

Ma. Elena M. Paulma was born in Butuan City. She finished her BA in Creative Writing, MA in Comparative Literature, and PhD in Creative Writing at UP Diliman. Her first book entitled “Southern Stories and Strays” was published by the UP Press. She was one of the fellows in the 2016 UP National Writer’s Workshop. She is currently working at the University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines (USTP) in Cagayan de Oro.

Si **Chuckberry J. Pascual** ay nagtapos sa UP Diliman. Siya ang awtor ng *Kumpisal* mga kuwento (USTPH, 2015), *Pagpasok sa Eksena: Ang Sinehan sa Panitikan at Pag-*

aaral ng Piling Sinehan sa Recto (UP Press, 2016), *Ang Nawawala* (Visprint, 2017) at *Ang Tagalabas sa Panitikan* (USTPH, 2018).

Si **Prop. Rommel B. Rodriguez Ph.D**, ay guro ng panitikan at malikhaing pagsulat sa Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikan ng Pilipinas, Kolehiyo ng Arte at Literatura, Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, Diliman. Awtor siya ng mga librong *Lagalag ng Paglaya* (University of the Philippine Pres, 2011) at *Mga Apoy sa Ilaya* (UP Press, 2018). Naging kasamang editor din siya ng mga antolohiyang *Kathang-Isip: Mga Kuwentong Fantastiko* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2011), *Transfiksyon: Mga Kathang In-transit* (UP Press, 2014), *Like/Unlike: Facebook Status at ang Politika ng Agam-agam* (Flipside Publishing, 2014) at *Wagi/Sawi: Mga Kuwentong Lualhati at Pighati* (UP Press, 2016). Naging punong editor din siya ng *Daluyan: Journal ng Wikang Filipino* mula 2015–2018. Bukod sa mga ito, dalawang ulit na siyang nagwagi para sa pagsulat ng maikling kuwento sa Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards. Taong 2015, naging exchange research fellow siya sa University of Shizuoka, Japan at naging writing fellow noong 2017 sa Placemaking Research Conference in Southeast Asia sa pangunguna ng Southeast Asian Research Foundation (SEASREP Foundation) sa Thailand. Ilang ulit na rin siyang naimbitahang maging panelist sa mga pambansang palihan sa malikhaing pagsulat at tagapagsalita sa mga pambansang kumperensiya hinggil sa wikang Filipino at panitikan ng Pilipinas. Isa rin siyang mananaliksik at tagapagsulong ng karapatang pantao sa bansa. Tinatapos niya sa kasalukuyan ang pagtipon ng naratibo ng mga bilanggong politikal sa Pilipinas sa suporta ng Enhanced Creative Work at Research Grant ng Unibersidad ng Pilipinas.

Anna Felicia C. Sanchez is the author of the fiction collections *How to Pacify a Distracted Infant: Stories* (UP Press, 2017) and *Frog Leap and Other Stories* (UBOD-NCCA, 2005). She also writes speculative fiction, with one of her recent stories appearing in the internationally published *Accessing the Future: A Disability-Themed Speculative Fiction Anthology*. Her most recent works can be found in *Likhaan: The Journal of Contemporary Philippine Literature* (Vol. 11, 2017). As Anna Ishikawa, Sanchez wrote the novellas *Odd Girl Out* (2006), *Glamour Games* (2007), and *Where Your Dream Comes True* (2008). An alumna of the UP, Silliman, and MSU-Iligan National Writers Workshops, she is an assistant professor in the University of the Philippines, Diliman. She is also an associate of the UP Institute of Creative Writing.

Si **Beverly Siy** ay isang nanay na manunulat, editor at copyright advocate. Siya ay awtor ng anim na libro at tagasalin ng isang American novel at isang Swedish comics.

Nagtapos siya ng BA Malikhaing Pagsulat sa Filipino sa UP Diliman bilang cum laude. Aktibo si Bebang sa larangan ng publishing. Isa siya sa mga Book Champion at Intellectual Property Ambassador ng ating bansa noong 2015. Dalawa sa kanyang mga aklat ay naging finalist sa National Book Awards para sa mga categoryang Sanaysay at Antolohiya. Ang kanyang *It's A Mens World* ay nagkamit ng Filipino Readers Choice Award noong 2012 para sa categoryang Sanaysay. Siya ay nakatira sa Bacoor, Cavite kasama ang kanyang asawa at tatlong anak. Puntahan ang kanyang blog na babe-ang.blogspot.com para sa latest writing tips. Maaari din siyang makontak sa beverlysiy@gmail.com.

John Iremil Teodoro is from San Jose de Buenavista, Antique. He is Associate Professor and the Graduate Program Coordinator at the Literature Department in the College of Liberal Arts of De La Salle University. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of San Agustin in Iloilo City, and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and a Doctor of Philosophy in Literature from DLSU. He is a multi-awarded writer in Kinaray-a, Filipino, Hiligaynon, and English. He is the author of more than twelve books, and his collection of short essays *Pagmumuni-muni at Pagtatalak ng Sirenanag Nagpapanggap na Prinsesa* won the National Book Award from the Manila Critics Circle and the National Book Development Board. Teodoro is also a scholar of Hiligaynon Literature. He contributes reviews, travel pieces, and cultural reportage to *AGUNG*, *The Daily Tribune*, and *Liwayway* magazine. He is presently the Secretary General of Unyon ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas (UMPIL or the Writers Union of the Philippines). On weekdays he lives in a condominium unit with a view of Manila Bay and on weekends he lives in Pasig City where he owns a small garden with bougainvilleas.

Rodolfo Vera (Rody Vera) has written more than twenty original plays and adapted numerous plays for the Philippine stage. He has won in a number of competitions, notably, the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature. "Senyor Paciano," his first film script, won Second Prize in the National Centennial Literary Awards in 1998. "Boses" was his first indie film script which he cowrote with Froilan Medina, directed by Allen Marfil. "Niño," directed by Loy Arcenas, is his first solo film script, which won the Best Film at the 2011 Busan International Film Festival in South Korea.

He was the former Artistic Director of PATATAG singing group and was musical director of some of its album recordings. He was also Artistic Director of PETA from 1995 to 1997. He appeared in a few musicals and films, including *Sister Stella L.* and the grand musical *1896*.

Rody has traveled extensively in North America, Europe, and Asia. He was a guest teacher of Philippine Drama at the King Alfred's College in Winchester in 1990. He was cowriter and actor of a successful Filipino-Japanese collaborative project: *Romeo and Juliet: Isang Komedi*, performed in Tokyo and a few other cities in Japan, and Manila, Philippines. He was awarded the Asian Cultural Council Grant and worked with the Ma-Yi Theater Company of New York, in July 1999. He wrote a few plays for the PINTIG Cultural Group in Chicago. He gave acting courses for three months in Bangkok, Thailand, under X-Act Entertainment in 2000. He was also awarded the Bellagio Study Grant by the Rockefeller Foundation in 2003. Rody also participated as cowriter and performer in several theater collaboration projects in Asia, notably: "The Hotel Grand Asia: Lohan Journey," a three-year Asian collaboration project initiated by the Setagaya Public Theater; the "Philippine Bedtime Stories Project" initiated by the Rinko Gun Theater Company, Tokyo, and "Mobile," a collaboration project with Singaporean, Thai, and Japanese theater artists.

He is head of the Writer's Bloc and one of the key founders of the Virgin Labfest, an annual theater festival of new works for the stage.

Eliza Victoria is the author of several books including the Philippine National Book Award-winning *Dwellers* (2014), the novel *Wounded Little Gods* (2016), the graphic novel *After Lambana* (2016, a collaboration with Mervin Malonzo), and the science fiction novel-in-stories, *Nightfall* (2018). Her fiction and poetry have appeared in several online and print publications and have received prizes in the Philippines' top literary awards, including the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature. She is currently in Sydney, Australia working toward a Master of Creative Writing degree at the University of Sydney.

Januar E. Yap currently teaches at the University of the Philippines Cebu, College of Communication, Art and Design. He is also opinion editor for *SunStar Cebu*. His shorts stories in Cebuano have won the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature. He was a fellow to the UP National Writers Workshop, the Silliman University National Writers Workshop, the Iligan National Writers' Workshop in MSU-IIT, and the Cornelio Faigao Memorial Writers' Workshop.

NOTES ON THE EDITOR

Francis Paolo Quina teaches at the University of the Philippines Diliman, where he earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees in Creative Writing. He has won a Palanca for the short story in 2018. His fiction, poetry and creative nonfiction have been published in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore. His first book, *Field of Play and Other Fictions* was published by Visprint, Inc. in 2018.

He was a fellow for the fiction in the 58th UP National Writers Workshop (UPNWW). He is married to writer Gabriela Lee, a fellow of both 39th (poetry) and the 52nd (young adult fiction) UPNWW.

