

A SPECIAL LITERARY ISSUE DEDICATED TO  
EDILBERTO K. TIEMPO AND EDITH L. TIEMPO

# SILLIMAN JOURNAL

ANTHONY L. TAN  
MARJORIE EVASCO  
GRACE R. MONTE DE RAMOS  
Guest Editors

Volume 54 Number 2 | July to December 2013

# SILLIMAN JOURNAL



**Margaret Helen Udarbe-Alvarez**, Ph.D., *Editor*

**Ian Rosales Casocot**, MA, *Production Editor*

**Nenith P. Calibo**, *Business Manager*

## EDITORIAL BOARD

**Myrish Cadapan-Antonio**, LIM

**Jane Annette L. Belarmino**, MBA

**Gina Fontejon-Bonior**, MA

**Jose Edwin C. Cubelo**, Ph.D.

**Roy Olsen D. De Leon**, MS

**Theresa A. Guino-o**, MS

**Enrique G. Oracion**, Ph.D.

**Muriel O. Montenegro**, Ph.D.

**Betsy Joy B. Tan**, Ph.D.

**Lorna T. Yso**, MLS

## OVERSEAS EDITORIAL BOARD

**Dennis Patrick McCann**, Ph.D.

*Alston Professor of Bible and Religion, Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Georgia, USA*

**Ceres E. Pioquinto**, Ph.D.

*English Lecturer, HMZ Academy/Dialogica Zug, Baar, Switzerland*

**Laurie H. Raymundo**, Ph.D.

*Director, University of Guam Marine Laboratory, Mangilao, GU, USA*

**Lester Edwin J. Ruiz**, Ph.D.

*Director, Accreditation and Institutional Evaluation,  
Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada,  
The Commission on Accrediting, Pittsburgh, PA, USA*

**Dr. Margaret Helen Udarbe-Alvarez**, *Chair*



## GUEST EDITORS FOR THE SPECIAL LITERARY ISSUE

**Anthony L. Tan, Ph.D.**  
Editor-in-Chief

**Marjorie Evasco, Ph.D.**  
Associate Editor

**Grace R. Monte de Ramos, BA**  
Associate Editor

Volume 54 Number 2 | July to December 2013



THIS ISSUE OF THE SILLIMAN JOURNAL  
IS DEDICATED TO

EDILBERTO K. TIEMPO  
ON HIS BIRTH CENTENARY

EDITH L. TIEMPO  
ON HER SECOND DEATH ANNIVERSARY



# SILLIMAN JOURNAL

Volume 54 Number 2 2013





The SILLIMAN JOURNAL is published twice a year under the auspices of Silliman University, Dumaguete City, Philippines. Entered as second class mail matter at Dumaguete City Post Office on September 1, 1954.

Copyright © 2013 by the individual authors  
and SILLIMAN JOURNAL

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the authors or the publisher.

ISSN 0037-5284

Opinions and facts contained in the articles published in this issue of SILLIMAN JOURNAL are the sole responsibility of the individual authors and not of the Editors, the Editorial Board, SILLIMAN JOURNAL, or Silliman University.

Annual subscription rates are at Php600 for local subscribers, and \$35 for overseas subscribers. Subscription and orders for current and back issues should be addressed to

The Business Manager  
SILLIMAN JOURNAL  
Silliman University Main Library  
6200 Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental  
Philippines

Issues are also available in microfilm format from

University Microfilms International  
300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor  
Michigan 48106 USA

Other inquiries regarding editorial policies and contributions may be addressed to the SILLIMAN JOURNAL Business Manager or the Editor at the following email address: [sillimanjournal@su.edu.ph](mailto:sillimanjournal@su.edu.ph).

Or go to the SILLIMAN JOURNAL website at [www.su.edu.ph/sillimanjournal](http://www.su.edu.ph/sillimanjournal)

*Cover and book design by Ian Rosales Casocot*  
*Cover photograph, "Acacia" by May Tobias-Papa, courtesy of the artist.*  
*Printing by SU Printing Press, Dumaguete City*

**Introduction**

Anthony L. Tan, Marjorie Evasco, and  
Grace R. Monte de Ramos | 19

**Dad's Marvelous Journey**

Rowena Tiempo-Torrevillas | 21

FICTION

**Out of the Pack**

F. Jordan Carnice | 27

**It Always Breaks My Heart a Little  
to See You Go**

Ian Rosales Casocot | 40

***Entonces Para Traducir Los Otros Poemas  
de Cátulo (The Story of My Master  
and the Plague of 1903)***

Thomas David F. Chavez | 52

**To Megan, With Half My Heart**

Vida Cruz | 67

**Shake the Disease**

Armand Gloriosa | 81

**Superman is a Bum**

Michael Aaron Gomez | 88

**Fighting**

Asterio Enrico N. Gutierrez | 109

**White Butterfly**

Peter Zaragoza Mayshle | 118

**The Relics of St. John**

Victor Peñaranda | 128

**Just Go Straight**

Nadine L. Sarreal | 134



CONTENTS



**Mrs. Medea, and Her Defeat to Totel the Wise  
and Ato the Great**

**141** | Joshua Lim So

**Policy**

**158** | Tim Tomlinson

**The Owl and the Hoopoe**

**164** | Renz Christian Torres

**Place**

**173** | Januar Yap

*Excerpt from*

**The Music Child & The Mahjong Queen**

**185** | Alfred A. Yuson

**POETRY**



**Santa Maria Goretti Asks for a Virtue**

**193** | Anne Carly Abad

**To Speak Then of Poetry**

**194** | Gémino S. Abad

**Here: Be Dragons**

**197** | Ceres Y.C. Abanil

**In the Springtime of Persephone**

**200** | Ceres Y.C. Abanil

**Life, As a Haiku**

**201** | Adlai Amor

**The Jar**

**203** | Ronn Andrew Angeles

**Kibitzer Kings**

**205** | César Ruíz Aquino

**Shout and Whisper**

César Ruíz Aquino | 205

**Personal Spell**

César Ruíz Aquino | 205

**Two by Two**

César Ruíz Aquino | 206

**Amorous Support**

César Ruíz Aquino | 206

**Memo**

César Ruíz Aquino | 207

**Wooden Chair Variations**

Corin Arenas | 208

**Style**

Cirilo F. Bautista | 210



**Incarnate**

Randy Bustamante | 212

**Winter Coast**

Randy Bustamante | 213

**Original Madness**

F. Jordan Carnice | 214

**Poet On the Ridge**

Albert B. Casuga | 215

**Oracle Bones**

Elsa Martinez-Coscolluela | 216

**Other Times**

Jhoanna Lynne B. Cruz | 218

**Cutting My Mother's Hair**

Alice Sun-Cua | 219



**Ofelia, Edith**

**220** | Zaldy Dandan

**Caesura**

**221** | M. Protacio-De Guzman

**Mime**

**222** | N. Adrian de Pedro

**Directions**

**223** | N. Adrian de Pedro

**Astral**

**224** | N. Adrian de Pedro

**Níðhögger**

**225** | V.I.S. de Veyra

**How the Arts Are Marketed to  
the Arts Market**

**225** | V.I.S. de Veyra

**Ohoy Butterfly Wings**

**226** | Simeon M. Dumdum Jr.

**Why the Fan Has a Mind of Its Own**

**227** | Simeon Dumdum Jr.

**Tanka**

**228** | Simeon M. Dumdum Jr.

**Justice Aspires to the Condition of Music**

**228** | Simeon M. Dumdum Jr.

**A Change of Vision**

**229** | Felix Fojas

**The Fugitive**

**230** | Felix Fojas

**Babel**

Antonio Hernandez | 232

**At the Mountain Refuge: Ed to Edith**

Francis B. Macansantos | 233

**A Visit**

Priscilla Supnet-Macansantos | 234

**From the Figs**

Hansel B. Mapayo | 236

**In Loon, Bohol**

Hansel B. Mapayo | 237

**An Instance of Fog**

Homer Novicio | 240

**Dear Mnemosyne**

Homer Novicio | 241



**density**

Corinna Arcellana Nuqui | 242

**Aside**

Allan Justo Pastrana | 244

**At Camp Look-out**

Myrna Peña-Reyes | 245

**A Momenry**

Myrna Peña-Reyes | 246

**Modest Claim**

Victor Peñaranda | 248

**Shared Space**

Victor Peñaranda | 249

**Angkor Wat: The Oracle of Stone**

Dinah Roma | 250

**Ferry Crossing**

**251** | Dinah Roma

**The Liturgy**

**252** | Dinah Roma

**Samurai**

**254** | Allen Samsuya

**Consolation**

**255** | Allen Samsuya

**How to Levitate**

**257** | Trish Shishikura

**Tokyo**

**258** | Trish Shishikura

**Soul**

**259** | Jojo G. Silvestre

**Afterlife**

**261** | Cherrie Sing

**Boat Ride**

**262** | Cherrie Sing

**La Madonna Alegro**

**263** | Victor N. Sugbo

**In Cebu while waiting for the thanksgiving  
mass for San Pedro Calungsod**

**264** | Brylle Tabora

**Ecology (After Ernst Haeckel)**

**265** | Brylle Tabora

**After the Flood**

**266** | Roberto Klemente Timonera



**Epiphany**

Roberto Klemente Timonera | 266

**This Poem**

Roberto Klemente Timonera | 267

**Gone Are Our Enemies**

Joel M. Toledo | 268

**Retreat**

Deedle Rodriguez-Tomlinson | 269

**The Word Jar**

Denver Ejem Torres | 271

**On a Map Out of a Nightmare**

Anna Yin | 272

**A Palm Tree's Dream**

Anna Yin | 273



**Verseliteration for Sawi: Nine Stanzas  
as Excerpt from *Music Queen***

Alfred A. Yuson | 274

**CREATIVE NONFICTION**

**Snapshots From a Visit to a Lakeside Town**

Timothy R. Montes | 279

**Taxonomy**

Michelle T. Tan | 297

**Wild**

Randy Bustamante, Melissa Salva,  
Seann Tan-Mansukhani, and Carla Pacis | 301

**A Loud Kind of Quiet: Introversion,  
Writing, and Lessons From Dumaguete**

Erin Cabanawan | 306

**Some Books are Forever**

**312** | Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo

**Bui Doi in the City of Angels**

**316** | Jack Wigley

**Mr. Basilio, the Sunlight, and the Birds**

**(Some Personal Notes on Breaking Bad News)**

**321** | Noel P. Pingoy

**The Streets of Dumaguete**

**331** | Lorna Peña-Reyes Makil

**LITERARY HISTORY AND CRITICISM**

**The Silliman National Writers Workshop  
in Dumaguete**

**351** | Mary Ann E. Pernia

**The Tiempo Legacy**

**373** | Merlie Alunan

**The Golden Horns of the Bull:  
Difficulty in the Early Works of  
Cirilo F. Bautista**

**378** | Ricardo M. de Ungria

**Getting Willie's Rizal/Getting Rizal's Willie**

**402** | César Ruíz Aquino

**True Lies**

**410** | Susan S. Lara

**Epilogue / Bonsai**

**419** | Elman S. Caguindangan

**425** | Notes on the Editors

**427** | Notes on the Authors





# NOTICE TO AUTHORS

## PUBLICATION GUIDELINES

SILLIMAN JOURNAL welcomes submission of scholarly papers, research studies, brief reports in all fields from both Philippine and foreign scholars, but papers must have some relevance to the Philippines, Asia, or the Pacific. All submissions are refereed.

SILLIMAN JOURNAL is especially receptive to the work of new authors. Articles should be products of research taken in its broadest sense and should make an original contribution to their respective fields. Authors are advised to keep in mind that SILLIMAN JOURNAL has a general and international readership, and to structure their papers accordingly.

SILLIMAN JOURNAL does not accept papers which are currently under consideration by other journals or which have been previously published elsewhere. The submission of an article implies that, if accepted, the author agrees that the paper can be published exclusively by the journal concerned.

Manuscripts of up to 20 pages, including tables and references, should conform to the conventions of format and style exemplified in a typical issue of SILLIMAN JOURNAL. Documentation of sources should be disciplined-based. Whenever possible, citations should appear in the body of the paper, holding footnotes to a minimum. Pictures or illustrations will be accepted only when absolutely necessary. All articles must be accompanied by an abstract and keywords and must use gender-fair language.

SILLIMAN JOURNAL likewise welcomes submissions of "Notes," which generally are briefer and more tentative than full-length articles. Reports on work-in-progress, queries, updates, reports of impressions rather than research, responses to the works of others, even reminiscences are appropriate here.

SILLIMAN JOURNAL also accepts for publication book reviews and review articles.

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically in one Microsoft Word file (including title page, figures, tables, etc. in the file), preferably in RTF (.rtf). Please send one copy of the manuscript as an e-mail attachment, with a covering message addressed to the Editor: [sillimanjournal@su.edu.ph](mailto:sillimanjournal@su.edu.ph)

The Editor will endeavor to acknowledge all submissions,



consider them promptly, and notify the authors as soon as these have been refereed. Each author of a full-length article is entitled to one complimentary copy of the journal plus 20 off-print copies of her/his published paper. Additional copies are available by arrangement with the Editor or Business Manager before the issue goes to press.

Other inquiries regarding editorial policies and contributions may be addressed to the Business Manager at [npcalibo@yahoo.com](mailto:npcalibo@yahoo.com), or the Editor at [sillimanjournal@su.edu.ph](mailto:sillimanjournal@su.edu.ph).



# SILLIMAN JOURNAL





# INTRODUCTION

Silliman University's reputation as the university home of writer-teachers Edilberto and Edith Tiempo has a long and rich history, wrought by the Silliman University National Writers' Workshop, the creative writing institution they established in 1962, which has flourished uninterrupted all through more than five decades.

Institution-building is a visionary task and Dr. Edilberto K. Tiempo, together with Dr. Edith Tiempo, believed in providing young writers of the country a nurturing environment where their creative writing work could be read seriously by experienced writers, and where they could expect well-considered critical responses from those who were invited to sit with the Tiempos in the panel of critical readers. At the Silliman University National Writers' Workshop, many a fledgling writer has gone through what is still considered as the serious young writer's most difficult rite of passage. The stronger ones among them have endured in the craft, and have published their poems, stories, creative nonfiction essays, and literary criticism in various literary journals and anthologies, as well as single-author collections.

Such a flourishing of literary talent even after the passing away of the founder-mentors is a heritage that Silliman University is proud to uphold and honor. This special literary issue of the Silliman Journal, dedicated to Drs. Edilberto



and Edith L. Tiempo, is a tangible proof of their valuable legacy. The editors have gathered in this special literary issue the works of writers who, in some way or other, have ties to the university, specifically to its National Writers' Workshop, either as workshop fellows or panelists. The response to the call for contributions was so astounding in quantity and quality that space and deadline limitations had to be included in the editorial protocols of the peer-reviewed selection process.

As editors and alumni of the university, as well as lifelong students of the *Tiempos*, we are grateful to Dr. Margaret Udarbe-Alvarez for asking us to be part of the gesture of gratitude to honor the valuable inheritance that Edilberto and Edith Tiempo, both outstanding Sillimanians, have left the university and the country. We believe that honoring the *Tiempos* with the best literary works from their colleagues and students, even from young writers who have not had the fortune of experiencing their physical presence, will speak of the depth and breadth of their literary influence. Their passion for the well-wrought work can be found shining here.

And we have no doubt that as the Silliman University National Writers' Workshop continues to grow and respond to the changes in the literary and social milieu in the 21st century, more and younger writers will benefit from the tradition of writing excellence that the *Tiempos* have set in place in the heart of the practice of creative writing. It is this tradition that emphasizes the individual writer's work of cultivating her or his best gift, as well as the individual writer's responsibility to nurture other young talents and continue building a community and country that values literature as a way of imagining a better, more meaningful life.

We hope this special issue will give each reader many hours of reading pleasure.

**Anthony L. Tan**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

**Marjorie Evasco**  
**Grace R. Monte de Ramos**  
*Associate Editors*

## Dad's Marvelous Journey

☀ Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas

My father's laughter took others by surprise. To those who did not know him well, it seemed at odds with what they thought they saw of the man: that hearty, sudden roar, the joie de vivre that sprang spontaneously from this dignified, quiet teacher who carried himself and all he did with such purposefulness. "Such gravitas?" I might suggest; and that would bring forth another laugh—of denial, of demurral, of, ultimately, self-effacement: the man who preferred to disappear into the characters, places and paradoxical predicaments he wrote.

Around the time he turned 75, and was working on his 18th or 19th book, I asked him if he was planning to write his memoirs. He looked at me in some surprise and dismissed the notion with another laugh. He did not need to; not yet...and perhaps not ever. I knew, though he did not need to say it, that his childhood in southern Leyte would live on in the young boy who set the sunbird free, who walked the windy fields, and confronted the village witch only to find the vulnerable and lonely individual misunderstood for her solitary integrity to self.

My father was in *The Standard Bearer*, and in the idealistic guerrilla fighter of *Watch in the Night*; he was in both Lamberto and Hilarion Alcantara, the brothers in *To Be Free*—that sweeping epic novel which spanned that history of the Philippine nation, a book that would have received greater recognition if its publication release had not coincided with the declaration of martial law.

He had already founded the Citizens' League of Dumaguete, and could be counted on to speak up in faculty meetings to voice, without mincing words, opinions his colleagues were hesitant to articulate.

When the writ of habeas corpus was suspended, and the head of the Philippine Constabulary came to Silliman campus, my father stood up at the faculty assembly; his silent colleagues were looking to him, but as soon as he spoke, the friends nearest to him, fearing for

him, said, "Ed, Ed, don't say it..." But he did.

He looked Fidel Ramos in the eye and said: "You know, don't you, that your president is turning our country into a dictatorship?"

That was my Dad: he spoke the truth as he saw it, and he was unafraid of the consequences. "What do you care what people say about you?" he'd tell my mother, if she'd express misgivings about being misunderstood for something she'd said or done in good faith, but which were likely to be misinterpreted by others in our little town, where people did not immediately see the nuances that were clear to her poet's eye.

"As long as you've given your best and acted in good conscience," my Dad would say, "that's all that matters. It's between you and God." And he'd add with a chuckle, "And those others buzzing around with their ambitions to upset you...they're just mosquitoes." Then he'd laugh.

Before he came back to Silliman to serve briefly as the University vice president for academic affairs before his retirement, Dad held the same position at Central Mindanao University, returning to Dumaguete each fortnight just so he could spend a little time with his infant granddaughter. When we visited Dad in Musuan, I saw his Bible on his bedside table. On the inside cover, he'd taped a list of the journeys of the 12 disciples, and where they had given their lives: Thomas, the great questioner, who had gone to distant India (as Dad had too, in his own lifetime).

And what a marvelous journey it was for my father. It brought him from walking barefoot, gathering data sent to General MacArthur, to the world's premier writing program at the University of Iowa; he returned to establish the first writing program in our part of the world—a lifework that is now continuing its second half-century nurturing writers and teaching the skillful power of the written word.

Along the way, he crossed many thresholds of decision: he gave up the offer of American citizenship, because he wanted his children to grow up Filipino, and because he knew where his services would be most useful.

He went to distant places, visible and unseen alike, because for my father, there was always something new to discover. Among all the people I've encountered—in academia, in the daily press of fulfilling one's quota of labor—where knowledge (or the appearance

of possessing it) is equated with power, Dad was always ready to say he didn't know something and wanted to learn more.

During our last summer together, he stood with me at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. We saw the shard of pottery from Brno, made millennia ago. On that humble piece of human work, we saw the fingerprint left there by the man who'd shaped the clay.

On August 5, a hundred years since my father came into the world, I'll be thinking: That, too, is the mark left by my father's hand.

*Originally published in Domini Torrevillas' column in Philippine Star on 1 August 2013.*







FICTION



## Out of the Pack

 F. Jordan Carnice

In the heart of Calcetta was a small wooded area where Fred's mother once said she and her friends had searched as children for firewood and the stealthy, fist-sized tarsier. "But they're nowhere near here already," she said of the primates that had lived in great numbers in the hills. "They've moved. They always do." She would always end this story with an affected smile, something Fred and his older brother Jaden would respond to with eyebrows raised. "It's dangerous in there," their mother added about the forest before telling them to go to bed. She would always repeat these words each time the two planned to wander deeper into the wild.

Her sons had practically lived and grown in this greener part of land, their house away from the flurry of the main city but not too distant to be considered pastoral. Next summer, Jaden would be pushing twelve and Fred seven. Curiosity was swelling in their blood.

This was very true for Fred, now that he noticed the strange heat and throbbing in his private regions when seeing Tonio. This he was embarrassed to talk about with the neighbors his age. Tonio was this tall, tanned lad, one of his brother's classmates but two years older than everybody else who visited Jaden every weekend afternoon. His presence always caught Fred's attention.

He eyed how Tonio walked, how he talked, how he ran, how he volunteered to cut the weeds in the garden for a small amount of pay and leftover chicken sandwich, how he carried boxes of clutter from the attic his mother had decided to dispose of, how he climbed up a tree to pluck his brother's slipper wedged in the gutter of their house when another kid threw it after losing in a game of *tsinelas-lata*. Fred felt he had another brother with him constantly around. Only closer. Sometimes Tonio would headlock him with a thick arm, brushing his bowl-cut hair with a fist, saying Fred would be a future heartbreaker. He always said the most adult of things, and Fred did not understand

many of them.

There were other things in Tonio that fascinated Fred. The boy wanted to know more about him, but he thought it was terrible to feel this way, even improper. Sometimes, the malaise of confusion summoned nightmares in his sleep, crept up to him in the middle of the night, and made him scream and cry in bed. Other times, he simply blushed. So he usually kept to himself in the kitchen with his mother or, if he felt more daring, settled for a good breadth of space between his brother and Tonio when they played basketball, *siyato*, *dakpanay* or spider battles with the other children, and he would watch them do their eventual roughhousing. Distance was safety. And then one day he believed venturing into the woods would make him feel better, braver, like how a real, big boy should be. He thought of it hard. All he needed was the perfect excuse.

Jaden taught Fred it lived in a variety of conditions in an array of imaginable places. It could be found inside their very own house, inside the dark hollow of a tree, inside the dry folds of every genus of plants. "The harder it is to find, the better." Jaden shared with authority that the *kaka*, or spider the size of a fingernail used for fighting another arachnid on thin wooden sticks, would be tougher and fiercer that way, especially if it would come from the crevices of a rock or from the tight coiling spirals of a *makahiya*. Jaden had learned this wisdom from Tonio, Fred eventually found out, and he took to heart all the details he could remember. In some indirect way, Fred believed he had learned something from Tonio. Also in his head, this would come in handy in future games of spiders.

This led to a scheme that Jaden found brilliant. Go deep into the forest and claim the strongest fighting *kaka*. Pride surged within him; finally, his older brother had agreed to something he had suggested. He thought himself lucky that he did, for he now had the chance to prove his gallantry in the wilderness.

The following afternoon, Fred and his brother were sitting on a fallen electric post at the end of a rough road, a walking distance from their house, while waiting for Jaden's friends. A few more steps and they would reach the first underbrush of the forest. A couple of minutes passed and Tonio arrived, saying the others would catch up. Slung over one shoulder was a small, sheathed bolo, the length of his

arm, its wooden case designed with carvings of unrecognizable vines and flowers.

Tonio had biked his way here. Wet patches stained his grey shirt's undersides, and when he realized Fred was looking at them, he approached him and jokingly attempted to headlock him once again under a sweaty armpit.

Fred leapt away from him, embarrassed, and looked at the other side of the road, staring at the crowns of *germilinas* peeking from the slopes. The trees' small globular fruits were curiously redder than yesterday. They seemed ripe and ready for the picking, but Fred knew better. They were bitter, poisonous.

The hike to the basin, an area Tonio called for its sunken, open space of carabao grass with a scattering of stunted guava trees, was short to the surprise of Fred and Jaden. They did not break a sweat at all. The two, though, were wary of their surroundings.

"Is it true? The *sigben* frequents this place?" Fred asked Tonio, picking a long, dead twig along the way.

"Ma said our father had seen it here before," added Jaden.

Tonio paused for a moment. "What was he doing here?"

"Looking for it, actually," said Jaden. "Ma said it gives wealth to anyone who will capture and own it."

"So our father went here to catch the *sigben*," shared Fred. "Put it in a jar."

"It has the size and face of an ugly, common dog," said Jaden as if with expert knowledge.

"No, it looks like a kangaroo with sharp teeth," said Fred. "It's big."

"Then how could you put it in a jar?" snapped Jaden. "If it's big and looks like a kangaroo?"

"I don't know."

"And have you seen one?"

"No."

"Then you don't know what it looks like."

"But. . ."

"Anyway, it couldn't be true," said Jaden.

"Ma said the *sigben* loves to eat the young flowers of a squash!"

Tonio turned to them, laughing in between his words. "You see, there's no squash around here. That means there's no *sigben* in here. I mean, there's no *sigben* at all. You're right, Jaden. It's not true. You of all people!"

"But Ma said the forest is full of them," said Fred.

"Full of what?" asked Tonio.

"Full of *sigben*, *wakwak*, *agta*, *kikik*, *di ingon nato*."

Tonio continued laughing. Jaden did not speak any further, trying to focus his attention on a plant that had clumps of small, bright yellow fruits. Fred, on the other hand, was looking defiant behind Tonio who was now searching for glints of silken web in the shrubs.

Fred believed it was true, the *sigben* among many other things. His mother had told him and Jaden that on the second day their father was searching for the *sigben*, his mother waited all day long in the living room for his return, glancing from time to time at the windows that faced the edge of the forest. She said their father had completely packed that day, prepared and all too ready to leave. Night came and not a shadow of his father was cast under the moonbeam. A few days passed and still she had not seen their father. She wept for a week or two. She told Jaden and Fred they were too young to remember. The *sigben*, she finally said to them in one Sunday dinner, had abducted their father. "It's dangerous in there," her mother would always say.

That afternoon in the basin, Fred believed her all the more, and that was why deep inside him he was angry at Tonio for laughing at the *sigben*, which, in turn, was laughing at his mother. It was the first time he was angry with Tonio.

While walking towards the threshold of a climb at the edge of the basin, Fred's loathing ebbed away. He was distracted by the whoops and claps of Tonio whenever he found the smallest hints of a spider's dwelling. Finally, he found one. Jaden emptied a pack of corn chips he had brought along with a bottle of water and proposed they keep the spider in it. Fred was designated by his brother as the keeper of

this plastic. He met this with hesitation.

"Don't be such a coward!" said Jaden.

"But why can't you be the keeper?" asked Fred defensively.

"Little children take care of little *kakas*."

"I don't want to."

"*Talawan!*"

"I'm not!"

"I should've bought an empty matchbox," said Tonio to himself. "I thought you'd bring two boxes, Jaden."

"I forgot," mumbled Jaden. Fred stuck out his tongue to Jaden's humiliation.

"Let me have that," suggested Tonio, reaching for the packet in Fred's hand. Seeing Tonio disappointed, shoulders drooping on the sides, he changed his mind.

"I'll do it."

"Do what?"

"I'll be the keeper."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Tonio walked up to Fred, messing his hair as what he usually did. He grinned, showing his lower set of teeth slightly crooked at the front. "Of course, you little one. This is an important task."

The three continued trekking uphill. They were only a few meters away from level ground when they heard a rustling in the bushes, frantic and brash, just right behind them. As the disturbance inched closer, the three stood close to each other. Fred clutched the plastic tightly in his hand, the other tugging at the hem of Tonio's shirt. He thought this would be a *sigben* or something else. Something that was more vicious.

Suddenly, more movements surrounded them. In every direction a bush would crackle, as if it would collapse from some unknown weight. Though dread had washed all over him, palms cold with



sweat, Fred managed to make out the disturbances. There were four of them, the *sigben* or something, rounding them up in the middle like hapless preys.

There was one violent shaking of a bush, and this was enough to make Fred set off in panic. Unable to stop himself, not looking where he was going, Fred tripped on loose rock. The thong of a slipper snapped, outward hands flailed in the air. When he realized at the last second the packet with their first sole spider would be crushed, he instinctively twisted to the right and skidded his side on dry, rough earth. His fall was quick and hard. The child writhed in pain.

At the first sign of whimper, the perpetrators fled out of their hiding places, their eyes wide in horror. After a few seconds of shock and silence, one of the four giggled which was then followed by the rest of the group.

"That was not funny!" Tonio said in a raised voice. He could not help it and slapped the back of one boy's head. He faced the other three who were almost the same age as Jaden. "Look what happened!"

Jaden approached one of them, calling him Edmund, a squat boy with an angular face, and whispered something in his ear.

"You know something about this?" Tonio asked Jaden in a serious tone. He picked the left slipper of Fred and fixed it.

"No, of course, not!"

Before Tonio could respond, one of the four boys whose face was so small as if his features were all mashed in the middle squealed, "It was Lolong's idea!" He was referring to the boy Tonio slapped.

"Do you want this slipper in your mouth, Junito?" said Lolong, whose face was ridden with pimples. He shook in his tall, wiry frame.

Jaden, Edmund, and the other one named Alfonse laughed. The latter laughed so hard his large belly shook while snorting in between.

"Maybe he wants my slipper, Long!"

"Keep your mouth shut, Alfonse! I can smell your lunch from here," said Edmund. Laughter rang throughout the hills.

"Your mother wouldn't like this, Jaden." Tonio said. He gave him another stern look before he approached Fred who was still lying on the ground. He put down his bolo, knelt beside the boy, helped him get up, and handed him the slipper.

"What did I do?" Jaden shrugged.

"Your face was funny." Edmund turned to Jaden.

"You were really scared," said Junito.

"I was not!"

"You were," said Lolong, rubbing the back of his head. "Especially your brother."

Once again, Alfonse laughed the loudest. "*Talawan!*"

"If you keep that up, I will leave you all here. In fact, I think we should leave now, Fred," said Tonio, dusting off dirt on Fred's shirt and checking his side. "Wound's not deep but it needs to be cleaned. Give me your water, Jaden."

"I'd be thirsty!"

Tonio stared at him without saying a word, hands on both knees. Jaden handed him the bottle without any question.

"I don't want to," Fred finally spoke after his fall, wiping the last trace of tears on his sleeves. He was still holding the packet.

"What do you mean?" asked Tonio, uncapping the bottle and pouring water on Fred's wound. The boy winced a bit.

"I don't want to leave. Let's not leave," said Fred. "See, we already have one *kaka* here."

Tonio stopped himself from laughing. "Well, you did save that one."

"Yes!" said Fred proudly. A few feet away from him and Tonio, the five other boys were arguing. Fred heard the name of a woman and something about breasts.

"Let's have a deal here," Tonio said to Fred at eye level. "We're not leaving only if you don't go running so suddenly next time, all right?"

"Okay."

"You run only when everyone else runs."

"Okay."

"You run only when you have to."

"Okay."

"And you run whenever I say you run."

"Okay."

"Good." Tonio untied a knot of white towel from his scabbard and patted Fred's wound dry. He stood up to his full height and warned the group. "If you're up to something again, I'm making sure it would be your last. And you guys better keep your voices down."

The sun was setting, its downward beam pushing through trees, bushes, and wild tall grass, casting crooked shadows all over the side of the hill. Fred already had six spiders inside the pack. He felt grim after falling for the gag of his brother's classmates. He felt worse when he noticed that even though Tonio was not amused by their act earlier he was now jollying up at their jokes, cracking his own brand of humor that was met with a lot of mirth and high fives. Tonio would then remind each of them to hush a bit.

"Who are we disturbing? The birds?" said Alfonse, rubbing his stomach, boisterously laughing and snorting.

"Maybe the *kakas* would scuttle away," whispered Edmund to Jaden, mockingly.

"Maybe we just don't want to get any attention," said Lolong, his eyes in slits.

Tonio shrugged at them. He rested under a towering *talisay* while Fred sat on a slab of stone nearby, scratching the area around his wound. The others started peeing on whatever tree they had found within the vicinity.

"Don't do that," said Tonio.

Fred looked up to Tonio's face whose features darkened under the tree's shade.

"Don't scratch that. It could get worse."

"But it's itchy."

Tonio took one glance at his shoulder and started wandering around. Fred thought he lost something. Soon, he returned with a handful of young *hagonoy* and guava leaves. He popped them into his mouth one by one and chewed, his face sporting a look of contorted mastery as he masticated the leaves with practice. He spat them onto his palm. "Here," he said, offering the pulp to Fred, "place this over the wound."

Hesitant, Fred was taken aback by the recommendation, the thought of slime on his cut repulsive. But upon seeing the others seemingly unbothered by the idea, now surrounding and eyeing them with interest, Fred gathered the paste off Tonio's palm and rubbed it on the gash.

This brought a lot of jeering from the small crowd at once, including his brother, all stomping their feet on the ground with gusto. Alfonse said he feels like throwing up.

"You're acting like little kids," Tonio said, shaking his head albeit with a lips curling into a smile.

Fred was surprised at Tonio's remark. Little kids? Would this mean his brother's friends were no longer little kids? But why are they searching for *kakas* with him? Was he a little kid in Tonio's eyes? Questions spun in his head.

"It's all right," Tonio spoke to Fred. "My grandfather taught me that remedy when I was about your age. It works."

"Really?"

"Like magic. Heals and protects you from anything." He gave him a wink and rumped his hair.

Fred trusted him. He wiped off the remaining bits of pulp on his shorts. He knew his mother would scold him once again, that the pulp stain would give her a hard time on laundry day. But it did not really matter this time. Because Tonio said it was all right, because it was like magic.

All their life Jaden and Fred were told they had to take good care of things important to them. And most especially, love them. This was their mother's advice when they arrived home from school and chanced upon her crying by the kitchen table. She stood up from her chair and drank a glass of water from the tap. She hugged her sons and went straight to her bedroom, leaving on the table a folded yellow piece of paper peeking out of an envelope.

A wave of seething emotion hit Fred. He believed this was a letter from the *abat*, the malicious hag that owned the *sigben*, the creature that abducted his father. He remembered her mother's words that the *sigben* would never attack unless threatened, disturbed or commanded

by the *abat*. Fred was sure it was the latter, especially with his father's attempt at claiming the evil woman's pet. When he tried to take the letter, Jaden held and stopped him. His older brother just shook his head, told him there was still time to play *siyato* outside.

The memory made Fred grip the opening of his little plastic pack tighter. He had to prevent the spiders from escaping since these were important to him, since he had claimed to be the keeper of the *kakas*. At this moment, failing Tonio on this task was his utmost concern.

Based on the color of the sky, Tonio said it was nearing five. It was the perfect time to spread out since the spiders were now easy to spot coming out of their nests and starting to repair their homes with their aerial spinning dance. The five boys agreed to separate while the other two, Fred and Tonio, remained by the *talisay* tree to wait for them.

"*Marka uno!*" Alfonse soon announced over at Jaden's far right, describing a spider famous for a white blotch that resembled the number on its back.

"There's another one here, too!" shouted Junito from the opposite side.

Above the towering fronds and shrubs, laughter was audible.

"You should see this, Long!" called Edmund out of nowhere.

"Wait, I'm coming over!" Two voices said the same thing.

A couple of meters away, Jaden thought he found a spider in a loop of *makahiya*. Not daring to dip his hands into the prickly creeper, he called Edmund.

"I'm here!" drifted a voice that was a stone's throw away from him.

Jaden was about to poke a stick into the vines when Edmund appeared by the bend and stood next to him, smiling.

"Hey, what did you find?" he asked.

Somebody screamed. Loud, prolonged, and suddenly cut short.

"What was that?" asked Jaden, worried.

"What did you find?" Edmund repeated, as if he had not heard anything.

Not too far away, Junito reached Alfonse just as he tried to

scramble for a spider that had escaped from his fat fingers. "This damn little thing!"

"Let me help you," said Junito, crouching under a log that leaned over a boulder. Somewhere in the distance, he got wind of a voice that was exactly the same as Alfonse's. This was then followed by his signature snorting. He found himself trembling under the dead tree.

There was another scream, more horrified, desperate.

Back in the main spot where the group would eventually meet, Tonio tried to situate where the bellow came from. Fred inched closer to him.

"You stay here," he told Fred.

Before Fred could protest, a terrified and breathless Lolong came running to them, pushing through brambles and vines.

"Something's not right!"

"What do you mean?" asked Tonio.

"I was talking, I was talking to Alfonse. . ."

"And?"

"And then there was Alfonse standing next to Junito!"

Neither Tonio understood nor Fred who kept looking at his back, sweat beading on his forehead and above his upper lip.

"There was Alfonse, I mean, there was another Alfonse! I just ran away and left him, the one who was with me!"

Soon after, Jaden came sprinting from the east side, followed by Junito from the west, and then Alfonse. They shared gibberish in unison, cautious of each other at the same time.

"Who are you!?"

"Someone, something's playing tricks on us!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Turn your shirts inside-out!"

"Tell him what you saw, Junito!"

"She's after us, the *abat*," blurted Fred above the din. "The *sigben's* master!"

"Who are you!?"

"Reverse it now!"

"I'm Alfonse! What's wrong with you?"

"The *sigben* will abduct us!"

Edmund finally caught up with the boys who were now in commotion, all trying to pull their shirts over their heads while cursing and reversing them. Tonio said doing so could break the spell of being *gi-mino*. The ruckus died down for a moment, until Edmund appeared running towards them, screaming for help. Another Edmund.

"Run!" someone yelled. The boys split and fled in different directions.

Everything happened in a blur. Fred was the first to spot the second Edmund coming towards them as the others began shouting in panic. The sound of feet pounding the earth filled the humid air. His mind went blank, froze like a stone. Unable to move, he felt relieved when someone dragged him by the wrist. It was Tonio.

Everyone ran mindlessly until all of them soon congregated on a plain with three unusual tracks at other end. At the center was a wide path, clear and obviously frequented. At the left area was a narrow but equally beaten trail. At the right was a wide track but obstructed by arching twigs and knee-high weeds.

Alarmed, Tonio set off to the path on the right without thinking, without even telling anyone the shirts had failed, that the enchantment was still in effect. The *mino* was strong. "Run!" he told Fred, a hand firmly holding his.

Fred's heart was beating fast. He was still clutching the plastic, could not let it go, when it was caught by a branch and was ripped open. Multicolored spiders broke out of the pack, crawling on his fingers and then on his arm. To Fred, they even looked more menacing than ever. Too much was happening he could not even scream. He tried to wave them off, now calling Tonio's attention as they sprinted faster and faster forward, but he had no plans of stopping. Suddenly, he felt the sting of tears brimming in his eyes again, but he continued running.

The voices not far away were still clear and anxious. He ran like he had never run before, with things sharp and clingy lashing his arms, legs, cheeks, the smallest patches of naked skin. Both never

dared to look back.

And the two boys found themselves back in the basin, in the glade where they had discovered their first *kaka*. A burst of light from beyond the hills blinded Fred, white-yellow spots blotting his vision. He shielded himself too late with a hand, and when things became clear, he felt the hair on his arms and nape bristling, a thousand needles piercing his entire body like spiders on skin. He saw himself, another version of himself, sweating and holding his left arm, with a smile unmistakably his. He jerked away from him and turned around only to find himself alone. He passed through the wilderness without Tonio.

In the heart of Calcetta was a small wooded area from which a boy emerged looking frayed and exhausted but ready to trudge back home. In his hand was a pack torn and empty of spiders. On his right shoulder was a wound drying under the last rays of a melting sun, flecks of green peeling off like old skin.



## It Always Breaks My Heart a Little to See You Go

☀ Ian Rosales Casocot

*For Rica Bolipata-Santos*

Deo has turned feral again. He lunges at me in a mad burst of energy I have come to suspect must be concentrated and kept in deep and scattered pockets of his eleven-year-old body. His anger—always sudden—has grown mass. It is an intruder into my old quiet, a kind of cancer thinning out the increasingly impatient years. I blink back tears. *Don't cry*, I tell myself. But this is no longer an uncommon morning, not for a long time. It is almost too cruel now to know how familiar it has become.

When he lunges in a furious twist of body parts, I catch again the vacant brightness in his eyes. They seem to taunt me, my son's eyes. I flinch from the slap of his unrecognition; when he gets like this, I am just like anyone else, not his mother. And it is all that I can do to turn my face away from his screaming. As Deo flails his small arms against me, the staccato of his wail piercing deep, I snatch remembered prayers between my uneven breathing and shield my face. I know the drill—to cower, to plea, to pray, to catch the tantrum tapering off. Then, later, when quiet returns and he has exhausted himself, I rebuild slowly the small shattered pieces of life around me.

His fists make contact, and I feel my skin burn anew.

"Deo, please... no."

I say this almost in supplication. Still, my words seem to fall around me as empty shells of pleading rigged with exhaustion. I have been saying those words for what feels like an eternity. Every day has come to be rehearsal *and* performance of the same mad bit.

By the time morning turns and has dissipated in the spiking ravages of the noon sun, the toll of the hours has taken away my last reservoir of strength. By then, the boy has been led away, his

undefined anger simmering perhaps ready to erupt again.

"Rica," my husband calls out in a low voice.

I look at Robert briefly, and he knows he doesn't have to ask the question. *Are you all right?* That's what that voice asks.

I close my eyes. The small nod I give him tells him I am all right—whatever that means. That I have survived another battle and that I am ready to pick up the pieces? But my husband has now taken charge, and I am allowed to breathe again. The househelp has disappeared into the kitchen to prepare lunch. Upstairs, secure in her quarters, I can hear my mother turning on the television, volume turned very low, her channel set to EWTN, the Catholic network. I feel tired. I know too suddenly the weightless inconsequence of prayers. *Dear God*, I close my eyes when I mutter this. *Please exist*.

Around me, in the living room, the evidence of the most recent bout lay scattered—a broken lamp, a torn book, an alarm clock smashed to reveal its innards of springcoil and such. Several decorative china toppled from the shelves now lay as jagged pieces on the carpeted floor. There is a fresh dent on the newly varnished front door. For some strange reason, I can hear my mother's voice at the back of my head, some remembered admonition recovered from beyond the haze, jagged as these broken pieces of things I am about to sweep up.

I don't call for the help. I know where the broom and the dustpan are hidden: in the dark and slim cupboard near the door. Such convenience. With these in hand, I proceed to do what has become part of this sad ritual. In my head, I can hear other admonitions, these ones from old friends. "Buy plastic things," they all have said. "That way, you know there won't be a constant cycle of broken things and cleaning up."

But no.

I have stubbornly done the opposite: all the more I buy things in glass and crystal. *They don't get it*, I think. If I start buying the plastic things now, that means I have given up. I wage my battle every day precisely because I cling to an awful hope, and the broken pieces of things... well, they are just broken pieces of things, replaceable, apt mementos that I am still mother to this child born in a dervish.

What I do not say is that my secret wish is to run. Away from all this.

Here's what's also true, but which I do not tell anyone else. I need

the sound of those fragile things breaking. That familiar splitting crack against hard surfaces. It has become a strange and welcome soundtrack. I think it must be how a soul must sound like when broken—and yet... And yet, and yet. That sharpness. Those slivers of sound so resolutely alive the way pain becomes a reminder for the living and not the dead.

I feel the throbbing of a new bruise on my arm. It takes slower seconds to remind myself there should be no crying over this.

Mother tells me Margie has been crying again. Margie is the nanny. A simple girl, placid-looking, barely in her twenties, from a town up north called Cavada. She has been with us—*what*, three years? Four? Maybe even five years. That is an eternity in this household.

"I hear her almost every night," my mother says in that pinched voice I have learned to tune out. "In her room. She's in her room crying all the time. Her room is right beneath mine, you know." I keep myself in check. As if I do not know that.

"It's her business what she wants to cry about, Ma," I say. "It's certainly not ours—."

"What do you mean it's not your business? She's probably tearful over that beau of hers. That man, that pedicab driver. What is his name? George? And what will the neighbors say? That we permit things like that to happen in this house? *Susmariahosep*. And how she weeps."

She uses that word in a big way. *Weeps*. I believe it strikes Mother as an elegant verb to use for a correct demonstration of sadness. "To cry" is never enough; one has to *weep*. She has become a connoisseur for lexicon involving grief. She loves the word "bereaved," for example. Practices it, refers to it constantly in her definition of self. She has been "a bereaved widow" much too long. Going on seven years now—it is a role she plays with such religion. That my father died seven years ago in the arms of his secretary—a beautiful young man I liked very much named Jacob—is something that goes unacknowledged. He died in a posh resort hotel down South, in Cebu, ostensibly on a business trip. I knew better. Mother knows, too—but keeps a fierce display of ignorance like it is a life force. She dresses the part. All black. Still impeccably good clothes, most of them patterned after the couture

she sees displayed on her television screen, or her fashion magazines. All carefully recreated, in black, by the *sastre* she has known since she was a young wife.

She does not understand.

"Let her cry," I say, perhaps a little wearily, a little too dismissive. Truth of the matter is, I do not want to think of such things—inconsequential emergencies that clog a life—as I prepare myself for my daily run. But mother has cornered me as I tie my running shoes by the front door.

Outside, the late afternoon sun winks escape. But Mother cannot be dissuaded from a tirade.

"Rica—*por dios*," she says. "It is not the weeping that bothers me."

"So what is it?"

I stand up quickly, my feet aching for the pounding of rubber soles on cement and asphalt. I look at her.

"Margie—how she carries on..." she sputters.

"What? What?"

"She is not a good *yaya*, that girl. How she carries on!"

"You have no proof."

"Think of Deo!"

"I think of Deo all of the time. Do you? Can you even be bothered to turn away some precious minutes of your time from your godly television shows? Margie thinks more about Deo than you ever had."

She slaps me, and hurries away.

I cling to the sting on my cheek like it is a gift.

There are many ways to forget. Movies. That's one. But it never does anything for me. There's food. There's having another child. There are romance novels, bodice rippers of incandescent purple prose.

My friend, Mars—her husband has run away with a policewoman named Janelle—she invents her own means of coping. When we heard the news of her marital woes, she soon called all of us up to arrange a breakfast party—"Think about it," she chirped over the phone, "I'll spill everything—over bacon, and sunny-side up eggs, and hotdogs.

And fried rice!"

"That does not sound very healthy," I slowly told her, quickly calculating what was needed to burn the calories away. *Five kilometers.*

"My husband just left me for a goddamn *parak*! I need cholesterol!"

When we've had our full, that was when we noticed Mars was laughing more than the usual. "It was those goddamned boots she wore all the time," she laughed when we asked her, finally, how she was faring. We thought the topic delicate. We said we heard the breakup was melodramatic, one for the books. There was shouting and broken dishes and cars rammed against lampposts. Was any of that true? ("Just a dent on the fender," she said. "And some scratches. No big deal. It was an old car, anyway.") Was she all right? Did we need to sit around her in bed, keep her company, and bask in the dark glow of her commiseration? But she shook her head at all those suggestions. We remember that. "I'm all right," she said. She is not all right. We know because she laughs at the strangest, unfunniest things these days. She laughs, for example, at street kids and fizzy Coke and how "garishly brown" our regular table in the café that we frequent looks, and we—Annabelle, Jacqui, and I—we all give each other meaningful side glances.

"My husband—my ex-husband," Mars continued, almost delighted in her sneering, "he has a fetish for footwear. I can't compete with that woman's boots! They were pointy! They were always shiny!"

When we prepared to leave, we took note for the first time that the Coke she was drinking was laced with Tanduay. She took us to the door, her sway melodramatic. "My dear friends," she said, "it always breaks my heart a little to see you go."

And so Mars escapes. To rum coke, like a thirsty horse, her anguished braying—and laughing at the strangest things—over the phone something we have to deal with as best we can. It is the same with Jacqui, I suppose. She has her fervent church-going, every day, except Saturdays. She has her endless cycles of *novenas*, her devotion to catechism, her trips to confession, her charitable works for the parish. She also has—she told me once, in trepidation, extracting from me my promise of absolute confidence—Fr. Rosales, that gangly new priest. Handsome. Irresistible. "He gives his homily like it was divine poetry," she breathes. I don't make judgments. *We all try to escape*, I tell myself. Her husband does not know; he has his own rabid porn habit to feed. And then there's Annabelle. What do I know about

Annabelle? Nothing. Nothing she tells me beyond the furtive ways she hides the skin beneath her sleeves—her cuts always red in that fresh way pain becomes most bearable.

We all escape. We try to, anyway.

I do no foolish things.

I run.

San Antonio Village. I run the length of our neighborhood, the main thoroughfares first, and then the byways that only those familiar with this convoluted cartography of dirt roads and potholed asphalt streets can know. It is easy to get lost here. But my route exists as a map that takes me as far as possible from all things I know. But not too far—never too far—that I cannot easily return. I know my duties. I know the lengths of familiar pain I must endure. It is inscribed on my skin. I know how precious escape can be, at its tenuous temporality. The knowledge of eventual return, that is what grounds me.

This afternoon, the run is a good one. I take note of my even breathing. There is blood pumping in my ears. When I close my eyes for a few seconds, the hardness of the road an even rhythm touching the soles of my shoes, I let a burst of exhilaration run through me. I feel the trickle of sweat on my body, how it teases the air moving past me. This way, I feel most alive, and nothing else seems to matter in the world. My temples throb, my pulse races, my sense of things is heightened.

I start to run towards home.

It had rained earlier in the afternoon. There are still traces of that—mud pools with strays of rainbows in them—and now the humidity makes way to the usual ravages of the sun.

I have already turned the corner that will lead me to the front door of my house, when I hear my name called out from the now busy street. I whirl about to see who calls me. But I find no one. There are too many people around. I suppose the neighbors have roused from their siestas. There are houseboys watering lawns, houseboys polishing cars, housegirls taking out the trash. There are some other runners, too—*matronas* mostly, all made up for their sweet and noble pretense at exercise. They come briskly running in threes, their gossip thicker than their strides. When they say “Good afternoon” to me, I smile back and say good afternoon in return. I don’t mean it.

When I open the door, I find Margie kneeling on the floor.

Deo is a storm around her, and she is a frail and wavering anchor—but there she is, her arms suddenly stretched out, and then she grabs the noise of my son into a grip.

My son shouts and cries, but she deepens her embrace some more.

I hesitate, and then I close the door, almost afraid to disturb that scene.

My forehead against the closed door, I find myself closing my eyes. I find myself breathing deeper, getting ready.

Margie looks up when I make my presence felt. I have closed the door behind me, and Deo looks at me with those piercing eyes.

"You can go to the kitchen now," I tell Margie.

"*Opo, Ma'am Rica,*" she says in a soft voice. Then she escapes.

I prepare to face the undefined but familiar wrath.

"Deo... please," I say. "*Please stop.*"

The flailing starts again. I tell myself not to wince.

I know escape, but the years have also taught me the proper ways of anticipation. You learn there are intricate and subtle signals you can take as harbingers of the coming of the wave, this daily darkness. I watch out for it, I gear up as the morning begins, as I plod about the house in search of breakfast and coffee, staking out the precarious silence that permeates the house. That silence is always short-lived.

From my bedroom door, I sometimes watch my husband snore, his sleep suddenly so precious—always I know it is about to come to an end as the daylight drags on. Sometimes, looking at his sleeping face on the pillow, I resent that he can manage sleep while mine is always fraught with nervousness. I know it is not fair of me. He wages his battles his own way. I know that. I constantly remind myself of that.

As the rest of the house wakes up, I deal with precision the management of small things.

And then Deo comes to me, always a little dazed, always with that face that betrays nothing of what can come. I am careful around him, but I am not guarded. He senses that, and is easily angered by it. I have learned to move slowly around him, like a ballerina in a dance all in tiptoes. I know anything can set it off. Sudden light,



for example. Or bird song. Rainfall. The rumble of cars passing by. The ticking of nearby clocks. I know all too well that final scowl that comes like an alarm. I dread its coming, and so I have learned to read well his moods, to identify what troubles him—at most, ten things I try to guess at, to give him a vocabulary of what irritates him. How long has it been? He was only two, perhaps three years old, when I knew everything was not right. Toddlers are always strange and temperamental—but Deo much more so: he was the definition of depletion itself. He started throwing things at three years. How he could shout at all of them with a vindictiveness shocking in one so young. The throwing remains, and we have gotten used to it, but no one gets used to that vacuum that erupts inside all of us.

“Deo, is it the crowing chicken outside?” I am soft-spoken in my query. My brain is frantic for a resolution.

It seems not. He keeps wailing.

“Is it the TV?”

It is not the alarm clock, nor the new coat of bright yellow off the kitchen wall. It is not the ringing cellphone, or the far-off sounds of a neighbor’s untimely karaoke machine.

Sometimes it is easy to forget he is anything else but this difficult boy. But no one knows his secret sense of humor. That’s what keeps me. How he makes me laugh with those occasional clowning around. Or how he can sidle up to me with a sketch of a dinosaur—a careful rendering in ink and pastel that always astonishes me—or how he can sing some novelty song with great comic timing. Where does he learn to do things like these? How does he find time to absorb these rare displays of wit and sweetness from all that diffused darkness that is his address?

“Deo, is it the smell of frying fish?”

He shakes his head. Again and again.

I do not solve the day’s mystery. His secret frustration undecoded, Deo becomes a hurricane. And I bear its thrashings—several slaps on my face this time, and I whimper. I feel my own hands twitching to do something. It is my own body wanting to defend itself. I know it will be so easy to do something. But I hold myself. I do not do anything.

I just kneel there, my eyes closed.

But he soon calms down, his body now inert—sleepy, perhaps.



Exhaustion is a friend. Margie is beside him now on the couch where he lays with that old innocence. Margie does not touch him. She does not dare. It is enough that she is there, a familiar figure for Deo—someone he knows, someone he can easily place and plot in the strict regularity of landscape he demands.

I feel that I must do my running. I change clothes.

I spy at the duo as I go about my preparations. I am thinking that he has gone to sleep when I prepare to leave the house.

“Will you be all right?” I ask Margie. I keep my voice low.

She nods, smiles a little.

“I’ll be back soon,” and then I open the door.

Before I leave, I catch a quick sight of Deo. He is not sleeping. He lies there, unmoving, and his eyes look at me with a strange fallen light of sadness to them—like the windows of a heart slowly breaking. *Do you have to go?* they seem to ask. I give him a little smile, some unsaid reassurance of my return. And then I close the door. And then I run.

“Ma’am Rica!” the voice calls out again.

I slow down and then I turn to look.

It is Anda, one of the neighbors’ *yaya*. The fiftyish woman is dressed in the typical uniform of a San Antonio Village housemaid—white blouse and skirt embraced by baby-blue pinafore. I know her. Anda is notorious for being the fount of all gossip, and perhaps because of that I steel myself with some caution: I know I do not want to end this day with ill news. God knows what the neighborhood’s housemaids all talk about her in their clandestine meetings—“Ma’am Rica used to be a beauty queen?” “Maybe she married for money.” “Her son—there’s something wrong with him. I think he’s *buang*.” “She’s not talking to the husband anymore.” “Why?” “He has mistress.” “It’s somebody from the golf club.”—and I have never liked the woman, not by all tolerable measure.

I soon stop in my tracks, stooping down to re-lace my running shoes. I call out to Anda with a voice poised on disinterest. She is standing by a curve in the sidewalk, a righteous rigidity amidst the yellowing green of the lawns. “If you want to talk to me,” I say, “don’t let me come to you.”

The housemaid looks quickly to her right and then her left, and then hurries down to where I am. "Ma'am Rica..." she begins.

"*Bilis*. I don't have the whole afternoon," I say, cutting the maid in.

"It's about Margie."

"My *yaya*?"

"*Opo*. I saw her yesterday with your little Deo."

"*Siempre naman*, she brings him to the playground everyday."

I am now standing up, easily towering over Anda, who is squat, her fat face lined with years of gossip mongering.

"It's not that."

"What is it then."

"I saw her grab the boy—" she hesitates. "And then she smacks him in the arms. Quite hard, I think."

I do not say anything. But I feel my face slowly warming—and certainly not from the run.

"I thought you *should* know," Anda is saying.

I stay silent. I weigh things.

The world whirls a little around me—and I struggle to understand it all.

"Thank you," I finally find myself saying—but it is a curt end to the conversation, the tone wounding. It is all I can say as I find myself drifting towards my front door in specter steps. I feel angry.

*But—but...* I breathe deep, and I know it is not Margie I am angry at.

The girl was only twenty-two—someone who had come into my household years ago, from the nothingness of Cavada.

I look back at the retreating figure of the older woman, and I seethe. Anda. I want to grab her by the pinafore she wears, shake her, tell her, *Mind your own business, you little old puta. What do you know about our lives here in my own house? Nobody knows anything, much less how we deal with pain.*

I only know this: sometimes I, too, feel capable of hurting—perhaps only a smack or two on Deo's arms—perhaps something a little stronger. Always something a little stronger. It is only so natural,

to flail against what hurts you, what you don't understand. Such is the terrible beauty of infliction in exchange for those tear-stained nights when sometimes our patience runs just a little too thin.

I suddenly understand Margie's weeping. I understand there has to be some form of reprieve when there is no other chance for occasional escapes. Like her, I wear my secret bruises like a badge that honors this surging but exquisitely suppressed anger. I feel the secret clawing, the secret need for flailing, the piercing sounds. There are lives—our own—in a whirl, and it is easy to forgive the trespasses of those who trespass for our sake.

It is a strange kinship, one of pain, to discover. That night, before Margie departs for her own small quarters beyond the staircase and below mother's bedroom, I tell her, "Margie, stay for a bit."

The girl comes into the light, her young weary face full. "Ma'am Rica?"

"Are you all right?"

"Po?"

"Here, staying with us. Okay *ka lang ba?*"

"Okay *lang po.*"

"It's not too hard, is it?"

She hesitates, smiles instead in that diffused way that seeks to gauge a proper response. Margie, I see, blushes from the nervousness. *How young she is*, I think.

"It's okay," I tell her. "You don't have to tell me anything, you know."

She does not reply to that—but there is that familiar fallen light in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Ma'am Rica."

"It's all right," I say.

She is about to leave the room, but she turns around, and then she says, "Sometimes, it's hard. Sometimes I tell myself I don't need this. But—"

"But what?"

"I think you have it harder."

I look at her. Perhaps Margie finds that a little too bold of herself,

to speak that way—and soon she is apologizing.

“It’s all right,” I tell her. “You can go to bed now.”

When she leaves, it is past midnight, and I climb the stairs to my own bedroom. Robert is already asleep. The flickering blue that seeps out of my mother’s closed bedroom door tells me she is still watching her television shows, devout in what she pretends she believes in. The house is quiet again. Deo in his room at the end of the hallway is quiet. That quiet has become that which I find unusual, but now I don’t mind too much. I do not sleep for a long time. As the shadows around me crawl and edge me over to sleep, I find there is always that one strange sort of rest for the weary.

## ***Entonces Para Traducir Los Otros Poemas de Cátulo (The Story of My Master and the Plague of 1903)***

☀ Thomas David F. Chaves

As I start my diary, my master beckons and I must skip for the day. He orders two of the three horses to be readied for the hills of San Juan Del Monte, he and I. It is an important command, judging from the way he says it. We'll be gone a good part of the day, he reckons, as he points northeast. We'll pack up from the district of Santa Ana, where there is a makeshift market by the river to provide for a mounted party of a dozen or so. Important officials, he adds. Would I do my best to prepare a semblance of a feast for lunch? The silver must gleam, the *timbreras* to sparkle, the whitest napkins stiff in starch. To entice them to eat in the circumstance. And oh yes, strips of cotton or linen to cover our noses with. They will be necessary.

(May 8, 1903)

\* \* \*

The parish priest of Santa Ana, Fray Luís Belmonte, greets us by the door of the *convento*. He has prepared quite a heavy breakfast of *arroz caldo*, *empanadas*, and thick chocolate. There are fourteen of us, including Col. L.M. Maus, my master who heads the Board of Health. Even the Archbishop of Manila Bernardino Nozaleda has come, to give us his blessings, but won't be joining us for the hills.

"Reports have reached me that there are about two dozens washed away at the bend a kilometer upriver, Colonel," said Fray Belmonte. "Many have been burnt beyond recognition."

The colonel nodded feebly. His piercing eyes of blue have lacked a luster for the morning. They cloud as he begins to speak.

"Isn't that at the confluence of the Pasig and the San Juan?" asked

Col. Maus. My master's eyes were heavy from a lack of sleep. His forehead twitched. Even if his Spanish was excellent, he tripped over his question and repeated it needlessly. He looked very worried.

"That is correct, Colonel, but there are over 50 of them from the upper Pasig near San Pedro de Macati, washed along the banks. Again most of them burnt," Archbishop Nozaleda said.

"The forces must have been quite injudicious recently," said Fray Belmonte.

A minute of disquiet crept into the stifling humidity of the hall. Only the soft shuffling of the *capiz* shells that hung overhead fanned themselves in the ineffectual breeze.

Col. Maus took out a kerchief from his breast-pocket and wiped his beady brow. He had nothing to add to the discussion, except what he had previously said in other occasions where the same officials had gathered. That was only five days ago in Farola.

"The interest of the new colony is paramount," he paused briefly with another swipe of the forehead and continued, "and the health of its citizens cannot be compromised. Archbishop Nozaleda, gentlemen and officers, Fr. Belmonte, cholera as you all know is highly contagious, more contagious than we like to think it is," he cleared his throat, bowed down, raised his head once more and surveyed the dining table.

"Without my preempting the military command who will conduct an investigation in the area starting tomorrow, I do not think the casualties, if I may call them such, fell as a result of a skirmish with our forces," my master declared.

"Manila and the provinces of Rizal and Bulacan have largely been pacified, gentlemen, their citizens able to sleep at night," said Col. Joseph Reedy. "I grant that certain places in Cavite and Batangas are not as lucky, but I would like to reiterate what Col. Maus has just stated."

He looked around the room. "The burnings along the river villages, we suspect," casting a quick glance at Col. Maus and then at the Archbishop, "are communally-driven as a result of fear from the plague."

Col. Reedy was a good friend of my master. He headed the Luzon Pacification Command, including the city of Manila and its environs.

"I do not seem to register the current discourse, Col. Reedy. Do you mean to say that these people burned themselves to prevent their own villages from being contaminated?" the Archbishop asked.

"A most likely event, Archbishop. There have been precedents up north in Pangasinan as well as the lower Caraballos," said Col. Maus, "in the Ygolote nation."

"But the reports indicate that many of the Pasig victims were also shot, a few of them at close range, some gunshot wounds behind the neck, some on the head. And then burned, in that order."

The archbishop raised his two arms and put them behind his neck, "A few with their hands tied."

"We have not heard of those reports, Archbishop. In these unsettling times, civilians may turn to rumor and wild speculation. It is of course easy to sow and spread fear among the populace, especially because many of them think that the wells and food sources have been poisoned by our own forces themselves," said Col. Reedy.

"But what would it profit civilians, granting that the plague had reached their places uncontrollably, to commit mass suicide? I do not know of such precedent in human history myself, good Colonel."

The archbishop paused for effect and then continued, "People flee, people lock themselves up or barricade their towns, set up quarantine, even commit murder of suspected kinsmen, friends and neighbors, but kill themselves altogether?"

The archbishop wiped a dot of egg yolk he felt upon his lower lip and then continued, "We are rewriting history down."

He took off his glasses, put them beside his chocolate, and made a sign of the cross.

"We did not say as much, Archbishop. What I said is that there is a possibility that some villages may have attacked others out of suspicion that their neighbors may be bringing or have brought in the plague," said Col. Reedy.

"Especially because," said my master, "that the villages near Laguna Lake where the Pasig originates are also the vinegar makers for the city."

My master now raised his voice in confidence, "You know that their superstition is that dousing everything with acetic acid will prevent the germs from spreading further," said Col. Maus. "That is

unscientific, to say the least."

"Granted that maybe so, Colonel, then why have not the towns of Bulacan like Paombong and Hagonoy, famous vinegar makers, burned themselves? Instead, we have heard of the same burning deaths right up here in Tondo at the island of Farola, and then again of the Navotas fisheries," said the Archbishop.

"Those are contiguous districts, Archbishop, and they melt into Bulacan. What I suspect in that case is that the northerners may have begrudged the city folk for spreading rumors that Bulacan vinegar was poisoned by cholera germs," said my master. "As their chief source of income, the Bulaqueños make have reacted rashly and torched some streets in Tondo to the ground".

"We cannot really say that, Col. Maus," said Col. Reedy. "What I will assure the officials gathered here is that in three days time, we will have a definitive word on the conflagration of the various villages and the deaths of the victims," he continued. .

"We will find out the root cause of this affair and will respond promptly and appropriately, whether they were caused by the civilians themselves," he stopped for a moment and looked at everyone, "or by our own forces".

He paused to stroke an imagined mustache and then continued, "Or have resulted as an encounter between them."

Much of our breakfast was left uneaten. We assembled our horses and provisions when the clock struck nine to make headway for the *ilaya*. The sun was beginning to burn and we wanted to be back in the city immediately after lunch.

The right bank of the Pasig in Santa Ana is an easy, smooth ride along the Panaderos pony trail but as we reached the confluence of the San Juan, the smell of dead bodies announced itself without mistake. It was not an ordinary smell of death. It was the smell of burning and decaying bodies put together, the kind when you forget to stir the pork of your *adobo* in its final stages and begins to singe it on the skin. Except that it was much stronger and fouler. The river smelled of hell.

I distributed the linen masks.

"We could have crossed the river Styx," said my master to me.

"Excuse me, sir?"

"Oh, an old Greek myth."



"Oh."

"I see no Charon to ferry us through."

I pursed my lips, not knowing how to respond.

We counted 27 bodies, 18 of them so burnt that we could not make out any of the faces.

All were men.

On some of them, strips of the khaki trousers still clung around the ankle left unburned. Those who wore *buntal* hats, about half of them, had their burnt heads and faces marked with the weft and weave of the *buntal* strips as if somebody had etched bas relief patterns on their scalp and forehead. When some of our soldiers poked the heads and necks with rattan cudgels to inspect the faces for signs of struggle, they indeed discovered that on about a third of them, there were bullet wounds, mostly around the neck.

As the archbishop had reported, a few had their hands tied up some around the neck, some around the back, with thick abaca cordage they use for the ships at the northern port district.

We left the scene in silence. The Filipinos among us bowed and mumbled the *Padre Nuestro* like instinct. On the way to San Pedro de Macati, our horses simply cantered, as if they themselves were saddened by the smell and could not gallop in the heat of a noonday sun. The Americans led, followed by the two Spanish priests of Santa Ana, and then us. We were mostly civilian men, a few section chiefs of the military command, but most, clerks from the sanitation and the interior offices. We did not understand what was going on.

"*No entiendo como mi siento,*" said Señor Pedro Lichauco of the interior office. *I don't understand what I feel.* But all of us Filipinos understood what he felt. Even if the rest of us had not spoken a word.

At the village of Mangajan in the town of Cainta, nobody came to greet us, except the village chief. He looked to me a foreigner, an Indian perhaps. Word had spread in the city that the sepoy descendants of this town had started the plague. This the chief denied vehemently. He reported 44 dead in the swamp by the creek where the Pasig is fed by the Mariquina, but he ordered them buried in a mass grave next to the cemetery. In the interest of public health, he said. It would be inauspicious to unearth them, he told the Americans.

That was strange. Filipinos wished the fallen from the anti-

American uprisings to be given a wake and then a decent burial. Their relatives wanted to grieve properly and pray the novena for the dead. The Americans did not. They wanted to bury them in mass graves immediately and avert epidemiologic disasters. Or so they explained. We suspected that the Americans did not want to leave traces of evidence of their wanton campaigns.

"*Manga maguinoo, janda na po an tanjalian natin lajat,*" I said as I distributed the food.

Nobody touched it. We left home not even hungry. Even my master did not eat.

I saw he felt deeply bothered.

When we arrived at our house on Arlegüi, the Colonel ordered me to fetch four pails of water for his bath. I was about to set the table for him to eat a late lunch, but he demurred. At least take some ginger tea and a boiled banana, I asked. No, he would eat much later. It had been a terrible day, he added. After his long bath, half an hour longer than was his habit, he asked to cook rice porridge, no chicken please, no ginger either. Not even *patis* or *toyo*, just a pinch of salt.

There was something not quite right.

On his way to bed, he asked for me to soak two face towels in hot water which I delivered to his door, and then bade me a good afternoon. He said he'd call when I was needed.

My master had been a man of habit in the two years I had known him. A punctilious man, he rose at four, wrote correspondence or reports with his old-fashioned quill for about two hours, and then ate breakfast. He had learned to eat *sinangag* with hot chocolate. Sometimes he ate bacon and *huevos estrellados* with *pan de sal* on Sundays or other feast days of his country and of the Philippines. Even though he came from a family of old Catholic Germans in Maryland, he never went to church unless it was required officially. Every other day at six, one or two of his fellow officers, either Capt. Murdoch or Sgt. Kenny who was a black man, came to the house to practice fencing in the court yard.

It was from *el negro señor* Tomasito that I learned to speak English. Sgt. Tom, the way he preferred to be called, gave me a kindergarten primer which I read in the night just before turning in. Because I spoke to Col. Maus in Spanish, he never showed interest in teaching me his language, but he always laughed when Sgt. Tom and I would sit on

the ledge of our *palmera* tree for our “lessons”. After eight months, I began to get the gist of their breakfast conversations. But one day, soon after breakfast just before my doing the dishes, Col. Maus asked me to sit down in his office next to the *azotea*.

“You’re beginning to sound like a Louisiana plantation slave.”

“Excuse me, master?”

“I see that you’re pretty determined to learn our language, but I’m afraid your friend Tom is not exactly the right man for the job.”

“How’s that, master? You all sound the same to me.”

Col. Maus broke into a hearty laugh. It was the first time I heard him laugh so good.

“Well, let’s just say that if you had to learn the language of Shakespeare, then you’ll have to learn it correct. In other words, you’ll have to learn it from me.”

“Then, I shouldn’t be talking to Sgt. Tom any longer?”

“Oh no, not that. You can speak with him for all I care, just don’t consider him your model for the language. So beginning tonight and every other night, you will come to this room and learn to read from the pages of *The Soldier*. All right, you are dismissed.”

When I turned my back, he quickly summoned me again. “Angelino, remember this, life is like a ladder. A brown man is better than a black.”

I nodded, pretending to understand him, but I didn’t.

It was after a few days later when it dawned on me that color of skin was an important thing in the American way of things. I never thought about this before. Here, whether you were brown or black or white or yellow, it was how much money you had, how large your tracts of land were, and how well you knew those people in the first place.

I began to see my master in a different light.

Our first lesson was a very difficult piece. It was not from *The Soldier* at all. It was a book about the life of General Emilio Aguinaldo that came out last year written by a Mr. Wildman. My master flipped to the page where General Aguinaldo delivered his official speech of surrender.

“Now, repeat and follow after me with each phrase.”

"Yes, sir."

"In this banner, they repose their trust."

"In this banner, they repose their trust."

In this banner they repose their trust, and believe that under its protection the Filipino people will attain all those promised liberties which they are beginning to enjoy. The country has declared unmistakably in favor of peace. So be it. There has been enough blood, enough tears, and enough desolation. This wish cannot be ignored by the men still in arms if they are animated by a desire to serve our noble people, which has thus clearly manifested its will. So do I respect this will, now that it is known to me...

By acknowledging and accepting the sovereignty of the United States throughout the Philippine Archipelago, as I do now, and without any reservation whatsoever, I believe I am serving thee, my beloved country. May happiness be Thine.

"May happiness be Thine."

"May happiness be Thine."

"Th-the-thine, as in the Castillian *Cádiz*."

"*Cádiz*. Thine."

"*Sobresaliente*, Señor Gonzales. You are an excellent student."

The general wrote it only two years ago, on March 23, 1901, when he was finally captured in the forests of Palanan and put to prison immediately. All this was in my master's collection of *The Soldier*, the first Philippine newspaper in English.

When Lt. Col Louis Mervin Maus came to the Philippines at the end of the war in 1898, he was the Chief Surgeon of US Volunteers at the Insular Board of Health. He reported to Major General Leonard Wood, who had governed Moro Province previously before becoming the temporary director of the board, which later became the Bureau of Health. Like my master, Wood was a surgeon by profession. They set up office at Arroceros. But all of them reported to one big fat man, the senator who became our governor, William Taft who lived in Malacañan. Lt. Col. Maus eventually became the first health

commissioner under Gov. Gen. Taft.

Because I used to trade in rice in Arroceros at the time the Spaniards left and America became our new masters, several of those officers came to patronize my shop. I had known my master for two years when one rainy August night, he dropped in and asked if he could borrow an extra umbrella. No problem, for as long as he remembered to return it at the end of November, I said.

*"Noviembre? Por que noviembre? Devolveré mañana."*

*"Las lluvias terminan en noviembre, señor teniente coronel."*

*"Ah verdad? Quiere decir que las lluvias continuan por tres meses?"*

*"A veces, los baguios también."*

*"Los baguios?"*

*"Tormentas horribles, señor."*

I realized that where he came from, there were no typhoons. But the next day, he came to my shop and returned the umbrella. He said he actually had two but just forgot them the previous night. Before he left, he asked if I could come and work part time for his office. They needed paid volunteers to set up rat traps and poisoned plates for the city's crawling vermin. He told me that the rat plague in the country had turned serious, with over 120 cases turning in every single day in their clinic at San Lazaro. His goal was to set up 7,000 rat bane in the city for four straight months. Because I volunteered each night for the whole time, he must have seen that I was a dedicated man, a tireless worker, such that when the rat plague was finally brought down by March of 1901, he asked if I could become his personal butler and cook.

My rice trade was becoming a headache at that time; the cash flow was getting slower. What happened was, in Bilibid prison, several dozens of inmates fell ill, some of whom died. The board, which my master assisted then, found out that the cheap imported white rice from China lacked the proper nutrients and that caused beri-beri among the prisoners. Two of the Arroceros traders who supplied the prison under the new American dispensation substituted the original rice subsidies for the inferior, if clean-looking, inexpensive grain. But my master is a wise man. He tested the rice and said it lacked Vitamin B, so he tracked down the two traders. They were tried in court and put to prison. However, that affair put a damper on our business and we all suffered. That is why when the Colonel asked me to work for

him, I did not hesitate at all.

This made me understand that my master was a very busy man. One after the other, he had to wrestle with the last effects of the rat plague of 1882-1883, whose tail end was still visible when they came in 1898. Then another outbreak of the rat plague erupted that very year. At yet then again, there was the beri-beri plague in Bilibid as well as in Batangas. And after that came the cholera epidemic of 1902, which was brought in by Hong Kong merchants who sold green vegetables from Kwantung that were fertilized with human waste. All these (except the 1883 plague) my master tested in his laboratory. So when I met him last year, he was nearly exhausted because of the continual challenges he met on the job. But I suspect, above all, that the deaths of 54 American forces from the cholera of this year troubled him mostly.

What was he the director of the health board for?

All this time, the *insurrectos*, as he called them, were still busy in the hills. Quite busy. Our country was officially an American territory, but peace was as elusive as the last days of Spain. But unlike the late Spanish times, all of the islands were now in ferment, not just in the provinces of *catagalogan*. Most of us felt that, instead of their promise of liberating us from the clutches of Spain, the Americans were our new masters, not liberators. And we had every reason to suspect this was the case. Governor General Taft put nearly all of the country under martial law. Long after when Aguinaldo surrendered, the patriotic forces in Cavite, Bataan, Quezon, Cebu, Masbate, Iloilo, and Misamis did not give up the fight against the new invaders. Even the Moro province became restive after the temporary peace under Leonard Wood.

Even though Manila was at peace, the rest of the country was not. What kind of government was that?

One evening after Christmas last year, Col. Maus summoned me to join him for dinner. Sir, I said, this is not done in my country. Well, for once, he added, just this one time. I kept to the other *cabezada*, bowing my head all the time.

"You must have known how busy we all have been fighting not only the plagues that have visited this country but also the hills where many have yet to surrender."

"I understand that fully, sir."

"You must consider yourself lucky, a healthy man, a prosperous man, and a hardworking one, too. Or should I say, a prosperous one because of all that hard work."

"I rest it upon the Lord of heaven, sir."

"Tell me then, our God in heaven aside, what makes your countrymen fight us as we bring along the gifts of peace, progress, and prosperity?"

"I do not know the answer to these things, master."

"Surely, you must have partaken of the fruits of that peace?"

"I might have, master, but I am not quite sure. Really, I don't know what you're trying to say."

"Take, for instance, the money that you earn and that which you save and send your family to Ilocos. Would you have earned as much of it when the Spaniards were here, or would you have earned anything at all?"

"That is true, my master, but my rice business before the beri-beri plague kept my head quite above the water, sir."

"So you did enjoy those fruits partly because peace had finally dawned when we came in 1898."

"If you say so, sir, in my humility, yes."

"Why is it then that the people are so indifferent to the sanitation campaigns amidst all the misery they are in?"

"Sir, will you allow me to be polite, or will you allow me to be truthful?"

"Frankness is the cornerstone of the American mind, Mr. Gonzales. Proceed with your truth, Angelino."

"It seems to me that the answer to your question lies in the fact that when you came as liberators, you also brought upon the people one disease after another, my master."

"I see the essence of what you mean, Angelino, but should not that be the other way around?"

"How so do you mean, master?"

"War brings forth pestilence, Mr. Angelino Gonzales. The conditions of war make it rife for germs and viruses to multiply rapidly. Think about it, the food sources become scarce and contaminated, the



health services are disrupted, the poor resort to paganistic practices to cure these diseases, I can go on, Angelino."

"I don't know what you're getting at, sir."

"Simply, the more the people resist us in their *insurrección*, the more they pave the way for famine and pestilence."

"Allow me a modicum of modesty, sir, to beg a disagreement with your idea."

"You have explained yourself quite well, Angelino. You are dismissed."

The next day, he summoned me again to his office.

"*Sabe que este drama Sin Herido, Señor Gonzales?*"

"*Perdón, mi amo?*"

"*La zarzuela tagala en Campo de Bagumbayan. Creo que ustedes dicen Walan Sugat.*"

"*Ah, si, es una historia de un amor, señor. Ya he visto la semana pasada.*"

"*Amor de quién?*"

"*De dos amantes naturalmente, señor, entre de una dalaga y un soldado.*"

"*Qué pasa al fin?*"

"*Es una tragedia, señor, la dalaga murió.*"

"*Oigo que las autoridades no estan felices de su alarde.*"

"*Alarde? Cómo señor?*"

"*Piensan que es teatro subversivo.*"

"*Subversivo contra quién?*"

"*Nuestro gobierno, Angelino. Mañana ellos demolerán el entablado, las autoridades.*"

"*Así es la más tragedia, señor.*"

The night we came down from the hills of Cainta and San Pedro de Macati, Col. Maus took to a fever. It was so high I was afraid he had caught the cholera himself. I hurried to the ice-makers of Bagumbayan Field and tried a cold compress. In the beginning he refused my ministrations, but in the end, when I showed him the thermometer, he relented. I also boiled some *lagundi* leaves and asked him to take it slowly. He just nodded his head because he felt so weak.

When I prepared myself for bed, I took my own temperature



because I was getting scared myself. But it read normal. Then from my master's room, I heard the unmistakable voice of Col. Maus. He was saying some words I couldn't understand. I got up again and eavesdropped by his door. The words were getting louder, almost frightening—coming from a man whose chest measured a barrel's, and whose snores, which at first I thought they were, were the fog horns of a ship. But no, he wasn't speaking normally now. While it was not something I would call a hollering, there was something demonic in his speech; the quality of it was like the delirium of an epileptic.

And neither was it English nor Spanish.

He spoke the Latin of the amulet sellers of Quiapo Church.

*Passer, deliciae meae puellae*

*Quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenete*

*Cui primum digitum dare appententi*

*Et acris solet incitare morsus.*

I dressed up quickly and took the mare to Intramuros where Maj. Gen. Wood lived. At that time, a curfew was still imposed in the capital. I was stopped by two sentries at Bagumbayan. I spoke to them in English and one of them said he would accompany me to the house because it was still quite dangerous. We rode together. The stretch between the west end of Bagumbayan and the first gate of Intramuros was very dark because the park's lamps had been put out.

The Major General himself, the sentry, and me galloped our way back to the house. My master had vomited quite some while I was gone. But he was still speaking in the alien tongue when we came.

Mr. Wood said, "Aha, Catullus' poem, the *Lament to Lesbia's Sparrow*." He translated it.

Oh, Sparrow, my girl's pet

With whom she's used to play

With whom she holds in her lap

For whom she gives her index finger to lick and then bite sharply.

For clarity, I translated that in my mind.

*O, Maya ng Sinta kong kinagigiliwan  
Hinahaplos-haplusan, pinaglaro-laruan  
Pinakandong-kandong sa kanyang sinapupunan  
Subali't may mithi ng ibo'y tumuka  
Daliring pina-alok, binting pabubuka.*

*Por diós, por santo, todos los santos en los cielos*, what was becoming of my master? Surely Archbishop Nozaleda would prohibit this poem if he ever heard it?

I admit it is a beautiful poem in Tagalog. Heaven forbid me if I say it in public, but Señor Balagtas would have approved.

Mr. Wood gave my master a shot of sedatives and gave me explicit instructions what to do the following day. “Delirium tremens,” he pronounced. “Visions of hell, and visions of heaven,” he added. And quietly, “At the same fucking time.”

His fever, however, had subsided the next day.

It was decided at the bureau that Col. Maus would rest for two weeks. In the meantime, an American soldier was assigned to keep watch and stayed with us for the duration. His name was Sgt. Philips and he was a trained nurse. His duty was to nurse my master back to health. I proposed to cook his favorite meals to help in the recovery, but Sgt. Philips said no. He was to eat only a light diet, and no meat or fish. Also a lot of fresh fruit juices, but nothing strongly acidic like oranges or pineapple.

In a few weeks time, Col. Maus had improved considerably. He had begun to stand up on the first week, and then to shadow fence by the second. I was much relieved. At that time, he complained that the food I was giving him “sucked”. I didn’t understand that immediately, but his frown told me he didn’t like the ordered diet at all. Slowly, I began to hide the food I was cooking from Sgt. Philips in order to give to my master and told him so directly. He laughed. He said there was no problem at all.

“Sir, if it will not be so inconvenient for us to start our English

lessons again?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Gonzalez. English is not for you. Instead, starting on Wednesday, we will commence with Latin."

"Excuse me, sir?"

"You heard me right, I will be your Latin teacher from hereon."

"Yes, sir."

I was perplexed. Why would Col. Maus want to teach me Latin? Certainly, I did not want to be an amulet maker of Quiapo?

About a month later, Lt. Col. Maus returned to work. But he was becoming more irritable, the petty clerks in the bureau told me. He had begun to converse in Latin with the other officers and to his Filipino staff. His Filipino assistant Dr. Pardo de Tavera talked to me in private one day. He said my master was beginning to hear the loud voices of Ovid and Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, the great orators of Rome.

Was everything all right at home?

I said yes, everything was fine. I told him my master was now teaching me Latin. Dr. de Tavera's eyes widened.

He said, "*Lumalalang kamalayan, munting kababalaghan.*"

\* \* \*

I packed my bags today. Tomorrow, Lt. Col. Maus will take the SS *Lincoln* back home. Yesterday, Sgt. Philips and four other American soldiers helped my master pack everything he owned, which was not much really. He gave me all his books, including Aguinaldo's biography and three Latin primers.

I wonder what I will do with my Latin and English when I sell rice again?

Oh, but there's tomorrow first. Off to canter to Padre Faura, at the library of the Ateneo Municipal, the old school of *el señor médico* Jose Rizal, the true doctor of our country. He who diagnosed our pestilences. *Y para mi, voy entonces allá para traducir los otros poemas de Cátulo a la lengua tagala y curan las enfermedades de mi corazón.*

(June 12, 1904)

## To Megan, With Half My Heart

☀ Vida Cruz

To my dearest little girl—

Then again, you won't be so little when you read this. By the time you read this, Meg, who knows, you may have already had your first kiss, your first love, and your first heartbreak, just as I once did. I'm hoping that, even if it seems to me that your Papa and I have been misunderstanding each other's words since the beginning, he followed my instructions in a separate letter to keep this sealed until your seventeenth birthday—just as I'm hoping he did a number of other things I asked of him, such as reading you fairy tales every night and sending you to school at Miriam. These two are very important. You need a big imagination to digest what I am about to tell you, and I think it would be easier for me to watch over you if you spent most of your school life there.

I don't have much time. They could take you at any moment, that is true, but I am not leaving this car until I've written down all you need to know about the truth of why you've grown up without a mother.

I'll start from the start, with Vince. We were *busmates* from Grades 3 to 7. He was small for his age, dark-skinned, the hand-me-down Ateneo Grade School uniform two sizes too big on him. But what eyes! Brown as the bottom of a pond on most days, occasionally golden when the light hit them just right, but flecked with green—green like the leaves of the acacia tree that still stands today at the corner of the Miriam Grade School parking lot (at least I hope it still is). I learned years later that the word for this was 'hazel.' We always suspected his father was a Caucasian, but his mother, Tita Mercy, said nothing on the subject.

We would sit together at the back of the bus, ignoring all the pointing and giggling, and he would share bits of dried mango Tita

Mercy packed in his lunch box and tell me stories of *kapre* falling in love with the high school girls, *duwende* tricking the loose change from little boys' pockets, the lady in white who roamed the campus wailing when the sun went down, and the *diwata* living in the trees who watched all the students' antics and came out at night to dance. I believed in all those things too, back then. You can believe anything when you're nine. The difference between Vince and me was that he said that all these creatures were his friends and they often spoke to him.

For this, he was often the butt of jokes, the target of the crumpled paper balls, the kicks and pushes, the dirt, the mean laughter. It helped that we were both English-speakers and everyone else on the bus preferred to talk to each other in Tagalog. Sometimes, I felt as if nothing anyone did to him mattered so long as we understood one another, even if I knew nothing about folklore before I met him. I never bullied him, but I did not stop anyone from bullying him, either.

Our friendship began with my curiosity and my guilt. At first I wanted nothing to do with him, but I was forced to sit next to him at the back of the bus one day, when I got out of school a little later than usual, and I couldn't resist asking him why he was talking to himself. He obliged me with a story. I can no longer remember what it was about. But then he told me another, and then another, and then another, and before I knew it, we were in front of your grandparents' house in Sikatuna Village and the all the boys and girls were hooting and calling us a couple and pelting him with Maxx and XO candies. Days after, Vince joked that maybe he really didn't belong there—maybe he was a changeling or a *kapre* or something, but I never found that funny. I remember having a hard time explaining to your Lola exactly why I came home crying when I had lost none of my things or had any injuries. How many little girls know how to explain their first experience of malice? Did you, Meg? I would have loved to have heard it if you had.

I used to write stories when I was younger. I loved it, too. I used to have one of those foot-long pencils covered in smiley faces and a cheap orange notebook with blue ribbon binding. The first stories I wrote with these were not my own stories, though. They were records of the stories Vince would tell me on the bus ride home. I know now that those first jottings weren't any good, but he appreciated them all the same and encouraged me to write my own stories. (I still have the notebook. If you should ever want to see it, it's in the taped Aldo

shoebox at the very back of the top shelf of my closet. I haven't looked at it in years.)

It sounds like a cheap romantic comedy plot to me now, but there was no denying that Vince liked me almost as much as he liked folklore. I guess it might have been because I was the first girl, maybe even the first person his age to be nice to him, to somehow understand whatever he was saying. But he didn't do anything about his feelings, not until many years later, when we were in the middle of high school, in the middle of a Miriam school fair, which also happened to be his first time inside the high school campus. Of course, by this time, he'd grown taller, more sinewy, had joined the *arnis* varsity team, earned the reputation of someone not to be messed with, and he was popular with the girls. He still loved folklore, but he was also all those things. Weird quirks didn't matter in high school so long as you hid them or let your peers know they'd be sorry for bringing them up.

Meanwhile, I was awkward, frizzy-haired, mosquito-bitten, skinny. Your grandparents never did let me attend soirees unless letters and reply slips were distributed beforehand. When our religion teacher recited a list of prayers and asked if anyone knew them, I alone raised my hand each time. I was part of the Campus Ministry Auxiliary for all four years of high school, too (they're actually more fun than they sound, plus there were a lot of us: we used to stay in the back of the gym every First Friday Mass, singing and dancing during all the hymns). I also spoke English, got misunderstood, tried again in Tagalog, and was told it didn't suit me. I had friends, but they had no more bragging rights in the matter of boys and parties than I did. And then Vince began courting me during the school fair of my sophomore year.

I wonder, Meg, are things still the same in the high school as they were in my day? How many new buildings must there be and is the Mini Forest still there? Are there any fields left or are they parking lots and swimming pools now? Do the students take the stairs or the elevator? Is the old *balete* ring still there? And what about you—do you also feel left out because of the language you speak or look? Does your Papa let you go to soirees? Do you know all your prayers? Or are you at the other end of all these things? If you are, I'd find it extremely funny. Your Lola used to say "Life is like that" whenever I found something ironic or strange.

But back to the story.

"Did you know that human girls encourage a *kapre's* attentions when they eat their gifts of fruit?" That was what Vince said to me, more or less, while we sat on a bench directly across the flagpole, slurping mango smoothies. There was a slight wind that day. Behind us, beyond the wire fence the administration had put up for the duration of the fair, was a cluster of huge *balete* trees. I wonder if those trees will still be there when you start going to school. I hope they will be. They will make my job somewhat easier.

"But you're not a *kapre*," I remember saying. "And these are fruit smoothies."

"Technicalities, Leni. Give me a break!" Only Vince ever called me Leni. I was Elena or El or Len to everyone else afterward, even your Papa. I meant to keep it that way. I didn't want to be reminded of Vince with so little a thing as a name.

"Why? You'd give up right away." Megan, I don't care how much times have changed from my day to yours. You are to make whichever boy who falls in love with you wait, even if you love him back. It's your first indication of his strength of character as well as the strength of his feelings. Vince was still there at the end of three months, when I had sorted my feelings and in spite of the anger of your grandparents at my getting into a relationship so soon.

I remember that just as Vince was about to reply, the wind blew a little stronger then, picking up fallen leaves and *calachuchi* flowers and blowing down the signs of a few booths. A few girls screamed and gripped their skirts. Vince's eyes sort of glazed over, and he turned to the *balete* behind us as if looking for something. To me, now, it was as if someone had called out his name and he couldn't find the one who called him. But when I shook his shoulder and asked him if he was all right, he turned back to me and smiled as if nothing happened. Then he poked my nose and teased me about being worried about him.

I think that this is when the trouble began. I can't recall any other instance that might have been the trigger for Vince's strange behavior since the fair. After we came back from our *sembreak*, he began to cut classes and to absent himself for days on end. He was in danger of getting kicked out of the *arnis* team. His grades were slipping. Whenever he picked me up after dismissal, the security guards could not seem to stop him from walking in the corridors despite their strict protocols. He always managed to slip in, and he always wanted to meet me at the half-ring of benches around the same *balete* tree to



share any mangoes Tita Mercy still packed in his bag even though they fought more and more. When I came out of my classroom, he would be looking up into the *balete's* leaves and vines. When he wasn't daydreaming through our conversations, he was paranoid—always looking over his shoulder, always asking “Did you hear that?”

But I didn't think much of this. I was pretending it was just him being a little more himself than usual, pretending that it was okay that Vince hadn't left his strange behavior in childhood like the rest of us. If I kept telling myself that, I could understand just about any of the changes, big and small, that came over him. I could also ignore the fact that, shortly after we became a couple, I started becoming sensitive to tricks of the light—from the corner of my eye, whenever I passed the Mini Forest, I thought I saw figures moving between the trees. Sometimes, in class—no matter if my classroom was on the third floor of the St. Therese of Lisieux building—I would see someone by the window. They wouldn't be there once I took a better look. The girl sitting behind me eventually requested a seat transfer because I often asked her if she was blowing down my neck. I didn't tell Vince about this. I thought seeing things was contagious. I thought if I told him, it confirmed that we were both crazy. I understood him, but that didn't mean I had to be just like him.

Meg, you may be wondering why, if I had seen the trouble from the very beginning, I had agreed to be Vince's girlfriend. I thought he was the only person in the world that I knew deeply and who also knew me very well. I thought, naturally, we should be together. Even before we became a couple, we finished each other's sentences. I learned fifteen different meanings of Vince's 'I love you's' by paying attention to the way he said it. He knew what all the arrows, blotches, asterisks, and squiggly lines—symbols incompatible with any correction guide in existence—in my notebooks meant. I got really good at getting to the heart of any matter because I learned to ask the right questions when his story didn't make sense. I thought my understanding of him as my weapon, especially when his easy questions changed from curious to doubting, from the things around us to himself:

Do you think dreams mean anything when you're awake? Why do you think only I can hear these voices? Who do you think my father is? Leni, remember when I used to tell you I was really a changeling or a *kapre* or a *duwende* and maybe that's why all the other kids used to pick on me? What if it's really true?



But there is only so much that understanding can do, Meg, especially when the person you are understanding can't or won't tell you why he does what he does and you yourself are afraid to speak. Understanding can't stretch infinitely in all directions like a plane, nor can it travel in only one direction like a ray. And no matter what you do, you can't hope to understand someone completely, just as I know that if I had been there as you were growing up, I would have understood you the most and the least at the same time. I know. I've been there with your Lola. At the same time, it's okay—I think that if we completely concentrated all of our understanding toward another person, we'd have nothing left for understanding ourselves.

Which is why it took me an even longer time—longer than the three months it took to understand my feelings for Vince—to realize that we, as a couple, could not go on for much longer. I clung to him for over a year, even though he frightened me and we had many arguments over his behavior when before, we never used to argue at all. No one should ever have to make you feel as if you have to cling to them.

So after one dismissal just before Christmas break, I had him meet me under the acacia tree by the corner of the grade school parking lot, the same one under which we first met, and hiccupped between sobs that I couldn't see him anymore but wanted to remain friends. He protested, he said he had been looking forward to us going to each other's proms, but he ended up agreeing with me when I pointed out that he wasn't even paying attention to how I once said I'd go in a *baro't saya* just to see if he was listening. We needed time away from each other, I thought. Finals were close after all, and that was the summer before our own college entrance exam season. But weeks turned to months without seeing or speaking to one another. My seeing anything untoward ceased soon after, to my relief. I also avoided coming near the *balete* ring, partly because just looking at it brought back memories I had no intention of examining.

Until now, I don't know whether we were too caught up in our own issues or if I used busyness as an excuse. I thought a language could live on even when it hasn't been spoken in less than a year, but the truth is, you lose a few more words every day if you don't practice. I entered my final year of high school without having seen Vince once (this, this my dear Megan, is why I wish you to put off reading this letter until you are 17. I was 17 too, when this happened. Not so far from your childhood games and old enough to understand

that adulthood is no game). I was afraid things would end there, but even more afraid of picking up the phone and hearing his voice—and worse, the strangeness beginning again. As it turned out, I didn't have to worry.

The CMA was having their annual sleepover at school. It's something we do every year to initiate and orient new members. We take showers in the creepy bathroom behind the chapel or the even creepier bathroom attached to the allegedly haunted Speech Room above it. At night we walk around the Mini Forest in pairs armed with flashlights, then go to bed in one of the freshman classrooms—usually the one with easy access to the field, directly across the flagpole and the *balete* trees. Lights out at midnight, but of course some of us stay up and chat with each other, eating junk food 'til 5am.

That time, I woke suddenly at 3am, according to the wall clock. Everyone, surprisingly, was asleep. I hope you never know the feeling of being woken up because of the intensity of someone's gaze on you, sweetheart. And if everything goes according to plan, you never will.

Anyway, I couldn't find who it was in the room. I dragged a chair around, I beat the blackboard with a textbook, I shook some girls, even sat on our moderator. Nothing happened. The light in the hallway was on, but dim and flickering, as if the bulb needed changing. I was scared, I didn't want to get up, but I had to make sure it wasn't just someone playing tricks on me. I was stepping over aisle after aisle of girls in sleeping bags, checking on them and shaking a few just to test my theory, every now and then getting jumpy when I thought I saw a shadow move, when I spied lights somewhere across the field, bright and yellow. I thought they were fireflies, but they couldn't have been. There was a strong breeze that should have blown them all away, but they remained concentrated around the *balete* ring. I peeked out of the slats of the classroom windows on the corridor side to get a better view. That's when I saw someone standing by the flagpole.

It plays out in my head like a horror movie now, the kind where you scream at the girl being chased by the killer not to open that door or look over her shoulder. That night, I was that girl. There is nothing I can say in my defense, Meg. When I discovered someone standing in the middle of the field, I started to hear voices, whispers, words, shifting in volume, mixed and embedded in the wind. I turned around to run back to bed, but the shadows—the very darkness beyond the classroom windows on the other side of the room, now that I think

about it—began to move, to take faceless shapes against the dimmed, flickering outdoor light, banging against the glass, and all the while, my clubmates and moderator slept on. The voices were reaching a high pitch within the room. I was too scared to scream—who would have heard me?—but not too scared to run. So I did, down the steps outside the classroom, down the catwalk cutting across the field. My limbs were freezing and my lungs were burning, but I had to keep going. I would have run straight into the flagpole if Vince had not stopped me. He held me and smoothed my hair and told me to stop crying. I didn't even know I was.

"Eat this. It will make you feel better." He held out half a mango to me. I took it and let him lead me to a bench under one of the *calachuchi* trees. We sat down and began talking of something I no longer remember. All I know was that he was chatting with me as if his being on campus at an ungodly hour of the morning, watching a tree glowing with abnormally bright and huge fireflies, was a typical occurrence. I was shaking, still too stunned to speak. Vince pressed me to take a bite of the mango, so I did.

That was probably the best mango I ever had in my life. Just the right amount of ripeness, incredibly sweet, and it warmed my whole body as it slid down my throat. It also gave me my voice back. I asked Vince what he was doing there, although those words cannot even begin to express what I wanted to ask him.

He went quiet. I repeated the question.

"I felt you were in trouble. I came as soon as I could."

I noticed he was wearing his school uniform, soiled in many places. "Have you gone home, Vince? Did you have another fight with Tita Mercy? Where have you been? How did you know I'd be here? What do you mean you felt I was in distress?"

"Nanay is angry with you."

"Why would Tita Mercy be angry with me?"

"Not her." Vince shook his head. You should have heard the way he said 'her,' Meg—as if she were a persistent beggar woman, a stranger, a nobody. He gestured to the *balete* ring. "Nanay. She says you took me away from her."

At the same time, the fireflies—which weren't actually fireflies but floating orbs of varying sizes when I really looked at them—circled the tree faster.

Meg, you probably won't believe what came next, but I'm going to write it down anyway. It's time I told somebody what happened that night. Before I go.

The tree trunks untangled themselves from each other, slow and creaky like an old door, older than the buildings themselves, older than anything except perhaps the acacias. From the gaps between the trunks I saw what I thought was another trunk, since the lights from the orbs revealed it to be brownish-gray like the gnarled trunks of the *balete* ring, splotted with moss. Only when I saw her eyes, Vincent-green eyes furiously narrowed in my direction, did I realize what I was looking at was neither tree nor human.

When he spoke, the orbs slowed. The wind died. My blood froze. The surrounding air went cold, the shadows deepened, and I clutched Vince's hand out of fear—but he'd gone as cold as the air. His skin had gone rough and knotty as bark and several shades of brown, gray, and green, like army camouflage, warred just beneath. His hair floated as if he were underwater. His eyes, though they looked on me with kindness, were greener than was humanly possible.

It was worse when he spoke. It was the same language the thing in the *balete* ring spoke, the language of all living things. It sounded familiar enough to my ears, as if someone were speaking English or Tagalog too far for me to hear. If I listened harder, the actual words sounded like handfuls from other languages jumbled together. It echoed over the trees, in my bones. I think we all might have known this language once, Meg, just as we once knew our places among the plants and the animals.

When I heard Vince speak to the thing in the *balete* ring, I knew two things: I still loved him, and I'd lost him for good. It was one thing to be bilingual, another to be in on an open secret that everyone else knows, excepting the person most important to you. Isn't it funny how just a few words create barriers between people whose hands might otherwise fit together like puzzle pieces?

Vince told me his mother was angry with me because when I broke up with him, he had no reason to come to campus. She had been waiting to exact revenge, but she could not enter any room where the Crucifix hung and I'd so often avoided the *balete* ring since. She would have cursed me on the spot, he said, if he had not woken up in the middle of the night and broken into Miriam grounds to stop her.

Staring at the ring the whole time, Vince told me she wanted him to

go home with her. I asked him if he was going to. He smiled. "Leni, I love you. I think I always will. But I'm a changeling, although I was never supposed to have been switched. You know I don't belong here."

And I did know it. But his way out was by moving to another space. Mine was time. It's by far the more difficult of the two ways, but I guess everything is difficult when you're the one who has to be the human, the one who has no choice in growing old.

Then he said, "Why don't you come with me?"

I felt all the trees, the wind, the orbs, even his mother await my answer. We argued back and forth about why I should and I shouldn't.

"Maybe someday." Even then, I was afraid of disappointing him. This was my mistake. "If I ever get tired of living where I am and the way I do. But not now, Vince."

You shouldn't say things like that if you have no intention of making a boy hope, Megan. Vince had to go soon but he said we'd see each other again, that his mother wouldn't harm me anymore, not if he could help it, and wouldn't I like to have one last mango with him?

This falls under allowing a boy to hope when he should have had none. I ate that impossibly sweet mango until I felt contractions in my chest and an unstoppable urge to vomit. I spat out my own dusky yellow orb, smaller than the others. It looked like a half moon or a lopsided grin. Vince caught it, threaded a vine through it, and clasped it around his neck. He said it was my heart—well, half of it. I wanted to scream at him and make him give it back to me—I had many plans for that half heart—but the queasiness had spread to my knees. I needed to sit.

"Sorry Leni," Vince said. "I need to make sure you'll make good on your promise."

Then he kissed me.

When I woke up, some of my clubmates were crowding over me, telling me I must have sleepwalked and spent the night on the bench. I caught a bad cold from being out in the damp. It stayed with me throughout June and most of July. I got diagnosed with pneumonia and hospitalized for another month, but nothing any of the doctors did cured me. Only when one of my *titas* stopped by with a fruit basket and forced me to eat a mango did I start getting better.

Tita Mercy sent Vince's picture and her contact details to

news stations and newspapers, notified the police, and kept the neighborhood watch on the lookout for him. She also paid me visits in the hospital, always talking about Vince: a memory of him as a baby or a little boy, their last argument before his disappearance, his favorite food or TV show, how she couldn't understand what had come over him the past year. She often asked me where she had gone wrong. I was thankful for the pneumonia's weakening even my ability to speak—I had no answers for her, at least none she'd believe. On the last of these awkward visits, she told me she was moving to Canada to live with her sister. All I could do was squeeze her hand.

I shocked my whole family, including myself, when I wrote down a number of pre-med courses on my college application forms—probably a direct result of having stayed so long in the hospital, watching the doctors and nurses work on me and my roommates in the ward. I had the silly thought of becoming a heart surgeon, but I think the missing part of me contained all of my tenacity. I got too tired to specialize and settled for working in the sort of clinic whose patients paid me in chickens and fish. At least we were never hungry.

Meg, you should know that after Vince took half my heart, I have been unable to really talk to anyone. I let my friendships die. I don't ask about my patients' lives. I've been in many fights with your grandparents over what I should specialize in, where I should work, money, your Papa, why we haven't gotten married yet, where we're living, having you, the way I'm raising or would have raised you. I have argued with your Papa over the same things, honestly. I've stopped praying, too. It's as if I can't seem to make the right decisions anymore, as if I don't know how to listen or to speak.

Did your Papa ever tell you that when we were choosing an apartment, I put my foot down against any place that had a lot of trees, *balete* or acacia or what have you (I don't know if you still live there, Meg, but we ended up with a small room near Intramuros, which happened to have the one tree (mango) in the entire neighborhood shadowing the window)? I never let him know I was once a writer or that I once wanted to take up English Literature. I'd locked up my notebooks. I'd given most of my books away and let the ones that meant the most to me once gather dust on my shelf.

For a long while, I kept telling myself that *diwata* and *kapre* and *duwende* and all those other things didn't exist. I almost succeeded.

Then the other day, I woke up at 3am. I woke up in a cold sweat.



I had this terrible feeling, so I stood up and put on a bathrobe before going to your crib. Someone stood next to it. He was facing away from the outdoor light beyond the window, but I knew who he was. I also knew that even the end of the world would not wake up your Papa. I wish I'd pushed our landlady to cut down that godforsaken tree.

Vince was taller, broader, long-haired, no longer keeping up the pretense of wearing clothes, and beneath his foot were the guttering embers of a smelly cigar. Still small for a *kapre*, but a *kapre* unmistakably. He told me I'd changed. I said so had he. He said I did not laugh or dream as much as I used to, and I said I didn't have much time for either, being a doctor. He asked me if I still wrote and I told him I didn't have the time now.

"I hate doing this to you." He sounded embarrassed, sad, after hearing all that. "I'd have thought that by now, you would have decided to come to me. I'd have thought that you'd have gotten tired of this life. I can reverse all that. Just come with me. I'll give you the other half back and you can be yourself again. You'll never have to return to this gray place, ever."

I asked him, what if I wanted to come back? He said I wouldn't. I told him he'd be surprised at how much the other half of my heart has learned to put up with, and maybe that was what being human meant. I hated how close he was to you that night. When he reached into your crib. I screamed at him.

Then his eyes were on me, angry, completely drained of what was left of the Vince I once knew. Those darkened eyes, now fully an impossible green, had acquired a slant on the edges, an alien look. No more pond-brown, no sunlit-gold, as if he lived some place where neither existed. He said to me, "You know who you sound like? Those kids on the bus when we were little! Come with me, Leni. I'll fix you."

I tried to explain that it wasn't that easy. I had a life now: a demanding job, your Papa, you. I told him it was never going to be as easy for me as it had been for him.

"Him?" Vince gestured with his chin over to your Papa, snoring peacefully on our bed. "You don't love him, Leni. Not as much as he loves you, and not as much as you love me."

"Loved."

"Halved hearts will never be able to love completely. But you'll love me again when you get the other half back," said Vince. "Come

with me. Now."

"You don't know that." I made fists out of my hands. They shook. How dare he presume he still knew anything about me after all this time? But then, what he said got me thinking—if I got the other half back, wouldn't I be able to love you more? Wouldn't I be able to love your Papa, finally?

That must have hurt to read, Meg, but since I am telling you many truths, I might as well keep going. Let it not be said that I did not try to love your Papa—I did. That is why I stayed with him for so long. He was different from all the rest: persistent, but quiet about it. Safe. He asked too many questions, but he never forced me into anything. I don't know what he saw in me, if he had seen at all what I lacked. But he stays anyway. I thought that if I stayed long enough, love might grow in me like you did. But it didn't. I don't know why, but I would have gone on pretending that it had.

And then you were born, and you brought hope with you like a twin. Maybe, if Vince had not come, that broken-off part of my heart would have finally learned to beat as if it were whole. But I couldn't resist the offer. I owe Papa the other half of my heart too, just as I owe it to you. Maybe it would make me a better mother, a better wife. I could easily have barred Vince from the apartment. I could have called a priest and had a Crucifix brought in, but no. I had to try. Stupid, I know. But I love you and I want to love your Papa—so much, it hurts.

Meanwhile, as I was thinking all of that, Vince talked about knowing things I could not possibly dream of. He thought I wanted to know what he knew, as when we were children, and promised to do so if I went with him. I tried to stall; I asked him for time to warn your papa, and to prepare. He gave me three days; he was irritated that I'd suddenly and unexpectedly grown hard to persuade. Vince said I'd know where to find him. I asked him what he'd do if I didn't go, and this is what he said:

"Then my precautionary measures stop becoming precautionary. Anywhere you go, anywhere there is a tree or a shadow, I will find you. Or would you like me to move on? I've never been good at moving on, but I can try if you insist." Then he looked down at you, Meg, and for a moment, his old tenderness was there. Ice filled the half heart left to me. He would have taken you back with him, and there would have been nothing I could have done to stop Vince.

You know what? I just realized. That probably isn't even his name



anymore.

So anyway, here I am in the car, writing you a letter longer and probably less coherent than it should be. I've told your Papa I'm just going for a drive. In truth, there is no privacy in our apartment and this was the only place where I could write this down for you. I know I should be telling these things to your Papa—him the most—but we know, or at least we think we know each other too well at this point. He says he loves me, but I can feel and see him getting tired. I wish I could do more for him. I wish he had a better life than this cycle of fighting and making up and fighting again with an unaffectionate wife in a dinghy apartment. Most of all, I wish that I really wished for all that. But I can't. Not without half a heart. Maybe I'll get it back, maybe I won't. But it's worth all the risk.

I feel there is so much more I should be telling you, Megan, but I can't remember any of it now. Maybe these things I should tell you are supposed to be the things mothers and daughters should learn from one another and for themselves over time. That's the one thing we don't have, and for this, I'm sorry. I'm sorry if you are angry with me, sorry if you do not care or have been made not to care about me. You might feel as if I left you and your Papa voluntarily, but I did it for a good reason. If I still believed in prayer, I would pray for your life to unfold in the farthest possible direction from the one mine went.

You know, when you were born, the half of my heart that was left to me almost burst—I didn't think I could love anything or anyone again. I was really looking forward to figuring out the many meanings of your crying, your different laughs, your funny expressions. I would have wanted to learn how to tell when you are lying and when you are telling the truth, and whether you are doing either in order for me to encourage you to open up or leave you alone. Maybe you would have topped Vince and come up with sixteen different meanings of 'I love you.' I haven't wanted to know someone so much since half my heart got taken away. I wouldn't have minded if the half that got left to me would have had to work overtime, overmuch.

You are my miracle, Megan, and even though I can't feel the missing part of my heart, I love you with all of both halves. If anybody could have saved me, it would have been you. Be good. I'll know if you aren't.

*Mama*

## Shake the Disease

 Armand Gloriosa

### August 2009

I call up my old friend on the cellphone from the comfort of the air-conditioned taxi. "Rico, *bai*, this is Henry. *Kumusta?*"

Rico replies, "I'm in Mandaue. Where are you?"

"I'm at the Mactan airport. Just flew in from Manila. On my way out, I bumped into Mr. Nacua."

There is a laugh in Rico's voice. "Mr. Nacua. Electronics teacher."

"Him. He's getting married. To Miss Valladolid."

I expect the usual cutting witticism from Rico. Instead there is an embarrassed mumble. "Uhm. Good luck to them."

I ring off, regretting the call. Of course I had more to tell him. I will probably never say it to him. People do grow up, and after twenty-five years, some things are not as funny as they once were.

Because when Rico and I were sixteen, everything was funny. That was the problem.

### June 1984

"Isn't it strange?" I said to Rico in earnest profundity. "I was buying a sandwich at the canteen and realized that, after eleven years in Sacred Heart, we're finally seniors. Everybody other boy in the crowd was either our batch or younger. It was an odd feeling, somehow. I hadn't expected that."

Rico, in his all-knowing way, replied, "I can't wait to get out and go to college. A co-ed school at last. This single-sex environment is

unnatural and unhealthy."

Feeling challenged by his tone, I said, "*Some* people in this place are getting their rocks off."

"Like who?" asked Rico, trying to keep his avid curiosity from showing.

We were looking down from the third floor of the Ludo Science Hall onto the well-trimmed lawn below. I jerked my head in the direction of a pleasingly plump young woman. She was walking across the sunny courtyard from the administration building to the speech lab on the ground floor of the building we were in.

"Ah," breathed Rico, "Miss Pacita Valladolid. You shouldn't be teaching the little boys English. The Jesuits, damn their dirty minds, should allow you to mentor us older boys. Once you get used to the smell of testosterone in the classroom, you might even like it."

"Not so loud, *bai*, she'll hear you," I said, almost ducking under the low wall against which Rico and I were leaning. Other boys were nearby, dressed like us in white polo shirts, khaki pants and black leather shoes. Our neat uniforms belied the grubbiness of our minds. The others were used to Rico's smutty talk, and continued with their own conversations.

Miss Valladolid disappeared two floors underneath our feet. I flung out my arm, bent my elbow, and ostentatiously looked at my watch. "Twelve forty-five. Classes begin at 1:30. Enough time for a bit of post-prandial fun."

Rico goggled at me. Under his breath he said, "Miss Valladolid is doing it with Mr. Nacua?"

I nodded, pleased that I had got a reaction out of Rico.

"No, *bai*, I don't believe it."

"You're just jealous. Let's go down to the speech lab and try the door. I'll bet you it's locked."

"Nacua! That twerp! What does she see in him, with his whistling teeth and unshaven chin?"

"All right, maybe I'm being unfair," I say in a conspiratorial mutter. "I'm really speculating. Mr. Nacua and Miss Valladolid are likely just enjoying the air conditioning and praying the rosary, as they have been since late last school year."

Rico marched off and I followed. He stomped down the ramps to the ground floor, and walked up to the door of the speech lab.

He tried the knob. It was locked.

I said, "I told you."

To my horror, Rico gave the door five loud raps. Yet I checked the impulse to run away, because I was curious to see what Rico was up to.

Mr. Nacua opened the door a crack and peered out, meekness written on his face. Perhaps, from the authoritative sound of the knuckles on his door, he had been expecting the principal, or one of the priests. When he realized that we were only students, his abashment became annoyance.

"Sorry, sir," said Rico with an innocent air, "we were looking for Miss Valladolid. You see, my younger brother is one of her students and he's absent today, and perhaps she's given the class an assignment that he needs to know about."

"She's not here," said Mr. Nacua, and closed the door. A delicious whiff of cool air wafted over us. We had noticed that the top buttons of his shirt were undone.

Rico glared at me.

It was my turn to feign innocence.

Rico growled, "You've ruined my lascivious fantasies forever. Now I can't think of *her* without *him* being in the picture as well."

I managed a pompous, "I didn't want you to be in the dark, *bai*. You're my friend."

With Rico's shoulders slumped in dejection, the two of us walked back up to the third floor. The yelling of the younger boys playing basketball in the gymnasium echoed throughout the building.

As we resumed our post outside the classroom, his face took on a look of mock solemnity. "Miss Valladolid is from out of town, isn't she?"

"From Siquijor, I believe," I responded.

"And she's only been in Cebu for two, three years?"

"At least that's how long she's been teaching here in Sacred Heart. But you could be right. Why?"

"Because," said Rico with inspiration, "it's possible she doesn't know the secrets of her secret lover."

I laughed. "You mean the bird coop incident?"

"The bird coop incident," he echoed with satisfaction.

"What are you going to do, write an anonymous letter?"

"I don't have to write anything," said Rico with malicious glee.

"That was just idle gossip," I pointed out.

"Actually, the bird coop story did feature in the papers. I read it in *The Freeman* when it came out."

At lunchtime the following day, as I was reviewing my physics textbook, Rico approached me with triumph all over his face. He waved two sheets of paper stapled together. "I went to the library during morning recess. And here it is: from *The Freeman*, February 12, 1980."

I read the photocopied news article. It was entitled, "Mentally ill man kills birds." According to the story, a young man named Agustin Nacua had climbed into the bird coop where his father kept pigeons, and wrung the necks of all sixty-three of them. His father found him curled up on the wooden floor that was spattered with bird droppings, jabbering about the Holy Spirit.

"So it was true," I said, realizing too late how lame I sounded.

Rico repeated my words in mockery. Then he said, "Who knows if it's true? It was in the papers, that's all we can really say. But it's out there, in the public domain. And our dear Miss Valladolid, God bless her broken hymen, is entitled to know."

After school hours, Rico anonymously mailed the photocopied story to Miss Pacita Valladolid, c/o the Grade School Faculty Room at Sacred Heart School for Boys, General Maxilom Avenue, Cebu City.

Then we waited.

## July 1984

It took about two weeks for us to see any results. Since the two of them had been having their affair in secret, it was difficult to confirm that they had broken up. But gradually we could see it in their long

faces and the dark circles under their eyes.

On a Friday at around this time, I accompanied Rico as he went to the speech lab late during the lunchtime hour. He twisted the handle and the door came open. The atmosphere within was cooler than outside, but the air conditioner was not running.

Rico peered in and there was Mr. Nacua, seated at a workbench and fixing one of the speech lab's headsets. As the Electronics teacher for the third year of high school, it was only natural that he should also be put in charge of keeping the speech lab's equipment running.

"Hi, sir," said Rico.

"Good afternoon, Rico," said Mr. Nacua, looking up from his work, and stroking the whiskers under his chin which had irritated Rico so much. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Just one question, sir. Would I be able to boost the voltage from a 110 volt outlet to 220 volts? Or would I have to convert the 220 volt appliance itself?"

"You can use a step-up converter," said Mr. Nacua, his teeth giving a slight whistle. "A good electrical goods supply store should carry them. The ones downtown can help you."

"Thank you, sir. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Rico."

He closed the door and we gave each other high fives.

"Mission accomplished," said Rico as we walked away.

I began to agree, but thought again. "So is that it? You've broken them up. I thought you wanted Miss Valladolid for yourself?"

Rico said with a shrug, "Come on. You know those dogs that like chasing cars? Cars they can't drive or eat?"

"Or screw," I added in attempt to be helpful.

"Or screw," he concurred. "I'm like that, *bai*. I'm like a dog chasing cars. Chasing cars is an end in itself."

## August 2009

I come out of the chaos of the passenger arrival area into the chaos of the lobby. And I see him standing there, an overnight bag slung over

his shoulder, buying a chilled can of Sprite from a vending machine.

After twenty-five years I still recognize Mr. Nacua, although now he is wearing a full beard. His hair is thinning on top, so the graying beard balances out the baldness and gives him an aging dignity. He would be around fifty.

"Hi, Mr. Nacua," I say to him, "I'm Henry Teng. I was one of the students in your third year Electronics class, back in '83-'84.

"Hi, Henry," he says, shaking my hand. "I'm sorry I don't remember you better. It's been a while."

"That's quite all right, sir. You've probably had hundreds of students over the years."

"For certain. I suppose you're running your own business?"

"Yes, sir. Medtech labs, call centers—I'm into those things. Are you still teaching in Sacred Heart?"

"I am," he said with pride. "The Jesuits are good to the staff—teachers, janitors, utility men. That's why many of us stay in Sacred Heart, even though we'd get better pay elsewhere."

"You certainly seem happy."

"I am happy. But not just because of my job. I'm getting married in a couple days' time. I suppose you remember Miss Pacita Valladolid?"

My ears do not burn. My face does not turn red. I marvel at this. "Vaguely. She taught English to Grades Three and Four, didn't she?"

"That's her. Although she later left Sacred Heart to teach at Cebu State College. And after that she taught in schools in her home province, in Siquijor. She's going to be my wife very soon."

"Congratulations," I cry over the hubbub of the lobby. "Did she wait for you all this time?"

"Long story, Henry, long story."

"Whatever that story was," I venture, "it's the happy ending that counts."

"Perhaps you're right. Although some things can't be papered over. Like murder," he said so softly that I almost did not catch it.

"Murder, sir?" I ask with some incredulity.

He sighed. "We were going to get married, back in late 1984." Mr. Nacua turned to me as if suddenly remembering something. "You

would have been in Sacred Heart at that time, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, sir," I say with a sinking heart. "I graduated in 1985."

"Anyway. Yes. Pax and I were planning to marry back in 1984. The wedding would have been in August. Of course we were in love, but let's just say the process was being hurried along by the imminent arrival of, ah, the fruit of our love."

"Hm," I go, nodding my head.

"And then she changed her mind. She said she didn't want to marry a crazy man, and have crazy children. She wrote me a letter telling me that she had had the baby—" He takes a deep breath.

I wait for him to go on.

"Of course, who did I think I was? If God might eventually forgive her sins, I had no business holding those sins against her." He gives a small, bitter laugh. "I say that like I've thought it all along. Of course not. It took a while for me to find peace. But—throughout all these years, she never married, and I never married. Now here we are, it's 2009, and it's finally going to happen. So yes, it's a happy ending."

I clear the frog from my throat. He doesn't hear it over the noise of the people around us. I manage, "Again, sir, congratulations."

"Thank you. I must be going. Glad to see you again—Henry Teng," he said, shaking my hand once more.

Mr. Nacua and I part ways.

I call up my old friend on the cellphone from the comfort of the air-conditioned taxi. "Rico, *bai*, this is Henry. *Kumusta?*"



## Superman is a Bum

☀ Michael Aaron Gomez

In all her nineteen years, Angel had become used to living without a father. She had lived with her forty-year-old mother her entire life: Angel had only ever known one house—a nice and unadorned two-storey concrete house along the national highway in Banilad, Dumaguete City—and it was in there that her mother had taught her how to read and write and count, it was in there that her mother had fed and dressed her, it was in there that her mother had explained to her what was right and what was wrong. Sitting on Angel's bed at night, the mother had caressed Angel's head in her lap, and laid out to her the building blocks on being a good and respectable human being—the fairy tales came in later.

Only that the mother had never mentioned Angel's father—not even his name: not when the child had learned to ask the important questions, when the child had begun to make friends who have whole families, when the child had started to entertain petty crushes. No, nothing—only vague answers to clear questions: Angel would go to sleep dreaming about her father making business deals in Hong Kong, or about her father fighting rebels in Mindanao, or about her father defending clients in court in Manila—in Angel's mind, her father had become three completely different men, trapped in a single body. And there were times Angel had imagined that her father was dead. In the end, Angel only learned his name through her birth certificate.

It was clear to Angel, though, that her mother had significant trouble talking about him—she noticed her expression going dark whenever the question popped up: her eyes clouding over, her lips pursing inward, her voice breaking up.

Adding to the girl's difficulty was the fact that she had no idea what her father really looked like: no pictures of him existed at home—when Angel decided to peruse their family albums once (she was ten), only pictures of her grinning with her mother were inside,

smattered with the occasional photo together with her aunts or uncles or grandparents (on the mother's side)—Angel's family had gone everywhere, too: to the foot of Mount Mayon, to the hills of Tagaytay, to the beaches of Dauin—all without the shadow of her father. And so Angel's father assumed different appearances in her mind: the bald businessman, the one-eyed soldier, and the long-nosed lawyer. This thought made her smile—she thought: her mother was only a civil engineer, but her father had three jobs, and three faces, too!

And then she also realized that she didn't look like her mother at all.

In the end, Angel figured that maybe mothers knew best, after all—if her mother felt that she doesn't need to know her father, it must be for a good reason. She had stopped asking questions about the man, and soon erased him from her mind: gone were the bald businessman, the one-eyed soldier, and the long-nosed lawyer, and in their place Angel inserted the personal memories she had begun to collect—her first day of first grade at St. Louis School-Don Bosco in Calindagan, her elementary and high school graduations (both with honors) at the same school, her first day as a Mass Communication student at Silliman University, her joyous debut.

Through those years, Angel's mother had her on a tight leash: no more playing beyond 6 p.m. (this was until she turned ten), no more hanging out beyond 8 p.m. (this was until she turned sixteen), and most importantly, no dating (this was indefinite). And so Angel turned to books for refuge and escape—she had fallen in love with the bedtime stories her mother told her, and the world of Literature became an alternate dimension into which she dove whenever the walls of her own life got too cramped. She had written stories, too, but she stopped in her freshman year of college.

And in college, Angel found a boyfriend: Robert. He was a Literature major at Silliman, and he was the same age as Angel: the two had met at the university's acquaintance party in their freshman year, striking up an easy conversation—Robert liked books too, and was an aspiring poet, in fact—during one of the lulls between the production numbers. Robert was initially attracted to Angel's good looks—she had deep brown eyes that seemed to share an important secret yet withhold it at the same time, full cheeks that simply begged to be pinched, pink and pencil-thin lips that colored every word that issued out of her mouth, all of which were held together perfectly by

her round face and framed wonderfully by her silky flowing hair.

"You know, I should be home now," Angel had told him at the time.

"Strict parents?" Robert asked, chuckling.

"Well, yeah," Angel shrugged. "I have a curfew at ten, thanks to Mom. I shouldn't even be here—if I didn't beg her to let me attend, she would have made me stay home all night."

Robert checked his watch, and then he said: "It's ten-thirty."

"So I'm in trouble."

"Oh, don't look so sad. It's a party, you know."

"Don't we have this every year?"

Again Robert chuckled: "Ah, well, that's true. But a party is a party."

"You don't have a curfew?"

Robert ran his hand through his long, wavy hair. He answered, punctuating his reply with a smile: "Ten o'clock, same as you. But since today's a Friday, I can stay out late—just not too late. Dad would kill me."

At this Angel smiled, too: "You're lucky, Robert."

"Well, that's how parents are, I guess. They're just looking out for us."

"They're looking out too much."

Robert said nothing, but stared straight into Angel's eyes, smiling meaningfully. The dance floor had opened for the students just then, and accompanied by the cheers of the partygoers, the loud dance music began to reverberate throughout the spacious Silliman gymnasium. Their friends had joined the fray as well, rocking wildly to the beat. At first Angel was uneasy, being stared at like that, but soon she found herself getting pulled into Robert's steady gaze—he has nice eyes, she thought.

"Okay, Angel, we can't just stay here, can we?" Robert said, bolting up from the bleachers where they had sat, at the same time offering a hand to Angel. Her momentary daze broken, Angel laughed and took his hand.

"I'm warning you, Robert," Angel said, "I don't know how to

dance.”

“Don’t worry, I have two left feet myself.”

And so the boy and girl laughed onto the dance floor.

After that the two began to see each other frequently: they had lunch together, they had gone to cool off at Robinson’s after their ROTC sessions, they had bought cheap books at Booksale together—but she just could not trust Robert with the most sensitive issues she had, the necessary courage simply wasn’t there: he wouldn’t understand, Angel thought, I don’t even know where to start. She liked Robert’s patience, though: he took things in stride, waited for the right time to tell Angel what he wanted—which ultimately happened at Angel’s debut a year later: Robert had been her escort then, dressed in a prim Americana, Angel in a blue gown.

“Robert,” Angel had told him gently, “I can’t. My mom won’t let me.”

“I really like you, Angel,” Robert said. “Just tell me you like me, too.”

Sighing deeply, Angel gripped his hand.

Robert smiled, and kissed her—a sweet beginning to a yearlong relationship.

A few days after she’d turned nineteen, Angel tested the waters with her mother—going to the same university proved mightily advantageous for Angel and Robert, they could see each other whenever they wanted, provided Angel would come home before 10 p.m.—using the time her mother sat down in her room to work on her drafts or her blueprints. Time and circumstance had been unkind to this middle-aged woman—her cheeks had sunk, her eyes had lost their gleam, her forehead had wrinkled—but through it all, she managed to keep going: Angel admired her mother’s resilience—coupled, however, with disdain for her father: that bastard, she thought.

Her mother was hunched over on her desk, working on a plan for a new house: her head never lifted off the paper, her hands never stopped measuring and drawing lines and erasing mistakes—the light from her desk lamp glinted off her thick glasses, and the music from her small stereo beside the lamp filled the room: it was a soothing jazz number, Horace Silver’s version of *Lonely Woman*. Angel slipped inside the room, sat quietly on the bed, and listened intently to the music.

"You're done with your assignments, Angel?" the mother asked, still immersed in her work.

"Yes, Mom."

"Do you need something?"

"No, Mom."

"Do you have a problem, dear?"

Angel straightened up on the bed, fidgeted for a bit, and tucked her hair behind an ear. And then she asked: "Mom, what would you think if I had a boyfriend now?"

At this her mother sat up in her chair, turned off the radio, and looked at her daughter: she didn't seem as authoritative as she would have liked in her loose white pajamas, which eased Angel's nerves for a moment—however, Angel's body remained stiff, wary of her mother's reaction.

The woman stared at Angel silently.

"I told you I don't want you to have boyfriends while you're in school."

"It's hypothetical, Mom. Just a what-if, you know."

"Do you have any suitors?"

"No, Mom," Angel said, careful to keep her voice clear.

Looking unconvinced, Angel's mother continued: "Are you in love?"

"It's just crushes, Mom," she replied. "That's normal, right?"

The woman removed her glasses and wiped the lenses using the collar of her pajama top, and then she sighed deeply. Uh oh, Angel told herself, this won't be good—she prepared her ears for the forthcoming sermon.

"Look, Angel, you're still too young to be in love," her mother began, "you should save it for when you can support yourself already."

"I'm still a virgin, Mom."

Her mother coughed, cleared her throat, and glared at her.

Meeting her gaze, Angel said nothing.

"Angel, dear," her mother said, "I don't want you to do something

you will regret. You're too smart for that. Boys your age are too stupid to care about love."

Speaking from experience, Mom? Angel wanted to ask, but she elected not to.

And then her mother added: "I was young too, you know. I've been in love—at least I thought I was, in love—and I made my mistakes. And now I'm still paying for some of them. Please, dear, don't rush, okay?"

Angel nodded—but then she asked herself: paying for her mistakes?

"Go to sleep, Angel," her mother said, returning to her work. "It's late."

It was on the following Tuesday that Angel met the writer Miguel Cornelio—he was a visiting fictionist, invited to give a lecture at Silliman and conduct mini writing workshops over the next three Saturdays: both of these events were open to all Silliman students and faculty. Angel had heard about the man from Robert, during one of their conversations about books—Robert really gushed about him, she remembered, he really liked his novels and stories: I wonder what he's really like—there's no picture of him in his books.

Angel was enrolled in a Literature class for the first semester of her junior year—Lit-21, Philippine Literature—and their professor, also serving as emcee, required all of his classes to attend Miguel Cornelio's lecture: or else they were going to miss out on a chunk of their prelim grade. The event was scheduled for 10 a.m. at the Audio-Visual Theater located just outside the Silliman library, a room that was equipped with all the necessary instruments, even a technician's booth at the back of the room. And so, Angel attended, sitting quietly at the middle row, by the aisle—Robert was there, too: he motioned for her to sit beside him at the front row, but she declined—and then she saw Miguel Cornelio himself walk in, thirty minutes late.

Intriguingly, what Angel saw didn't surprise her: the writer had staggered into the room sporting scraggly hair and a bushy beard, wearing a pair of aviator shades and a smudged-up white T-shirt and torn jeans and espadrilles, smoking a cigarette (prompting the professor to break into a sweat). He should take a bath, Angel thought. Miguel Cornelio ignored the professor rattling off a short biography—he graduated Literature from Silliman University, was

a fellow of the university's national summer writers' workshop, won a bunch of awards, went abroad on writing fellowships, published some short story collections and novels, and is now based in New York City—and he stood behind the lectern at the middle of the stage, stomped out the cigarette on the wooden platform. Wow, he looks drunk too, Angel observed.

Angel glanced at her boyfriend: his mouth gaped at the writer before him.

And then, after further observation, she noted that the writer's face looked somehow familiar to her—his rounded jaw, his bony cheeks, and his narrow mouth.

Soon enough the emcee was finished with the preliminaries, and Miguel Cornelio took the microphone from him. Loudly clearing his throat a few times and pointlessly brushing back his unruly hair, Miguel Cornelio greeted the shocked audience a good morning: I've got a fucking hangover, he said.

His voice deep and throaty, Miguel Cornelio talked mainly about one of his novels, going over his writing process and his inspirations for that book: writing is essentially a lonesome activity, he said, and that was what I tried to convey in the novel, that was why I made the protagonist a man of the world, a writer finding love and losing it over and over again, you know, to evoke starkly that particular feeling of crippling loneliness every person must live through...

He's making this up as he goes, Angel remarked to herself.

"But I don't know why I'm talking about this," Miguel Cornelio sighed. "None of you here have read that book. Shit, you're all just required to be here."

No one said anything—the professor wiped his forehead frantically.

"I have," Robert said, raising a feeble hand. "I've read it, I mean."

Miguel Cornelio removed his shades and squinted at the sweating boy. And then, putting them back on, he said: "Good for you, kid."

After this, Miguel Cornelio waved grandly to the technician's booth, and soon a wave of jazz music broke inside the room: Miles Davis' Sketches of Spain.

"Let's just listen to this shit for an hour," Miguel Cornelio said, and he sank into the chair placed beside the lectern. "All of you who



want to leave, do it now.”

And that was what they did for the rest of the lecture: they simply listened to the *Sketches of Spain* album for an hour—more than half of the audience did leave the lecture hall, some in disgust and some in relief—until the professor reminded Miguel Cornelio that the hour was up, and that he should wrap things up. The writer was smoking another cigarette, dropping his ashes on the lectern, and he merely waved the emcee off—you do it, Miguel Cornelio ordered him: it’s your students.

Angel remained inside and enjoyed the jazz music, so did Robert.

This sounds like one of Mom’s CDs, she noted.

The emcee nervously concluded the lecture, and reminded the remaining students to attend the workshop on that weekend, those who were inclined to writing—short fiction and poetry were welcome: two to three poems and six to seven pages of stories—finally ending the proceedings with a weak clap: a fraction of the students clapped with him. Miguel Cornelio crushed out his cigarette underfoot, waved to the technician’s booth again—and then silence fell. And after repeating to the writer that it was time to go, the professor stumbled out of the room, followed by the students.

Miguel Cornelio was about to light another cigarette when Robert dashed toward him, holding out a pen and a well-used copy of the man’s novel: oh sir Miguel, Robert begged, could you please sign this book for me? Shooting the boy a sidelong glance, Miguel Cornelio grabbed the pen and book, opened the novel to the cover page, scribbled a short dedication and his signature, and then returned the book to Robert, who was sweating profusely.

Holding out a hand, Robert asked: “Could you also shake my hand, sir?”

Miguel Cornelio gripped his hand and shook it violently.

Robert bowed and bowed and bowed in gratitude, and Miguel Cornelio waved him off—he had his lighter poised when he glimpsed Angel coming up behind Robert, finally settling beside him, smiling at him and tapping him on the shoulder. In turn Robert threw himself at her: whoa, take it easy honey, Angel whispered to him. Miguel Cornelio took this in, stroking his thick beard, and finally lit his cigarette.

“Is this your girlfriend, kid?” Miguel Cornelio asked Robert.



Angel answered: "Yes sir, I am."

The writer ran his eyes all over Angel's face: Robert was too flushed to notice. For her part, Angel inspected the man's face: she tried to pinpoint what it was exactly about Miguel Cornelio that seemed so familiar to her—but she could not put her finger on it. Somehow she felt as though her blood had been pumped with electricity.

Defeated, Angel finally said: "Excuse me sir, but we're going now."

"Go ahead, kids, have a nice day," he replied, tapping out his cigarette ashes onto the varnished wood. But before Angel could lead Robert away from the writer, he called out to the boy and asked: "Hey, kid, are you attending the workshop, too?"

Robert exclaimed: "Yes, sir! I also plan to apply to this summer's—"

Angel pulled at him, but Robert refused to be moved: you dummy, Angel chided him in her head, how come you don't act like this around me? She pouted, crossed her arms, and waited for the dialogue to be over.

"What do you write, kid?"

"I'm a poet, sir."

"A poet?" Miguel Cornelio noted, puffing on his cigarette. And then, smirking impishly, he continued: "Too bad for you, I don't write poetry."

"That's okay, sir," Robert said, "I'm sure I can still learn a lot from you."

At this Miguel Cornelio looked at Angel and, keeping his gaze on her, he said: "Kid, the only thing you should learn right now is taking care of that beautiful girl."

Walking out of the AVT and into the College of Business Administration building, Robert couldn't stop grinning. Angel had slipped her arm in his, and she couldn't stop thinking about Miguel Cornelio, the accomplished writer—what was it about him, Angel asked herself, was it his face, was it the way he talked? But his name is different—Miguel Cornelio couldn't be him, could he? And then she looked at her boyfriend: look at you, Angel thought, grinning like an idiot—he wasn't that great, anyway. They had walked out of the Silliman gate outside the CBA building when Robert suddenly broke free from Angel's arm, trotted ahead, and stopped.

"Hey, honey," Robert said, "can you believe what just happened?"

"What?" Angel retorted, holding the strap of her small knapsack.

"I just met Miguel Cornelio!" he exclaimed again, and then, holding out his signed book as though he were offering it to Angel, he continued: "And he just signed my book, and he even shook my hand!"

"That's really something, isn't it," Angel sighed.

"You bet it is, and his lecture was great, too."

Angel slightly angled her head sideways, stared at Robert.

"It wasn't great, honey. It was terrible."

Now it was Robert's turn to frown. Despondently, he asked: "Why do you say that? I mean, he gave us a lot of insights into what inspires his work, and then he let us into his world: you know, the jazz music—"

Angel cut him off: "Robert, it was a lecture. You know what a lecture means, right?"

"I just think it was very original and very poetic, that's all," Robert hedged.

"Fine," Angel gave in—why are we even arguing about this, she thought.

"Is there a problem, honey?"

Angel walked beside Robert, and then she said: "No, it's nothing."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure—" Angel said, but then an idea popped into her mind, and she veered off: "What is it about that guy, honey?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why do you like him that much?"

Robert raised an eyebrow and thought about his reply—he was still thinking when they reached the Portal West building, when they crossed the street—and when the couple had passed Video City, Robert finally answered: "I love his work, I guess. And how mysterious he is—he really is a poet at heart, I think."

"I'm sorry, but to me he's just a drunk and a bum."

"Well," Robert smiled sheepishly, "he does seem like that."

"He is like that. He even came in with a hangover."

Turning to Angel, Robert asked: "Why don't you like him, honey?"

"I just told you."

Eyeing her curiously, Robert continued: "Is that all?"

Angel looked at the road, at the passing motorcycles and pedicabs, at the OK Mart building and at the LBC branch and at the Chicken 'J' eatery, and then at the pavement before her. After that she replied: "Don't you think I look a little like him?"

Robert was surprised. He asked again: "What's with that question, honey?"

"It's just an observation."

At this Robert recalled Miguel Cornelio's face. Again, this process took a while, and it was when they had reached the Pick & Carry cell phone and gadget store that he replied: "I didn't get a good look, honey. It's those shades and that beard."

You were too excited, you dummy, Angel retorted in her head.

After dinner that night, Angel was in her room reading Raymond Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*—it was Robert's present to her on her nineteenth birthday, she loved it—after finishing her various assignments and projects for the next day: one of them was finishing up a news article for her Communication-31 class. She had turned off her desktop computer, and had ignored the continuous beeps of her cell phone. When she finally checked the thing, she saw that the text messages were from Robert: he even called her a few times.

The messages were mostly asking her what her problem was.

She frowned, laid the phone beside her pillow and resumed reading, glancing at the gadget in between a couple of pages—eventually, her focus was stolen, and she closed the book, placed it on her bedside table, and picked up the phone.

Angel sent a text to Robert telling him there was no problem, she was sorry, and she just wanted to be left alone for a while. And then Robert replied with his own apology, also saying that he was just concerned about her—I don't like seeing you like that, honey, the message read. This time Angel replied with a message asking Robert if it was required to submit a poem or a story to attend the workshop next weekend.

Robert's reply went: I think it's required, honey. I mean it is a writing workshop. Hey, do you want to join the workshop, too?

A shiver ran down Angel's spine—now what, she thought—and, ignoring Robert's question, she thanked him and put the phone back beside her pillow. Okay then, Angel told herself, I'll try writing one again, so I'll see him again, and then—

Padding out to the corridor, Angel peeked into her mother's bedroom—the door was ajar—took a deep breath, and slipped inside. As usual, the mother was burning the night away on her work—tracing lines with her French curve—and soft strains of a jazz number were floating across the room: Bill Evans' *My Foolish Heart*.

Angel sat down on the bed, inspected her mother's room: there was a tiny bookshelf to the left of the desk, and it was filled with creased and yellowed textbooks—exercises on estimates, measurements, and drafting.

"What is it, dear?" Angel's mother asked. "It's late."

Angel looked at the wall clock above her mother's desk: it was 9 p.m.

"I want to ask you something, Mom."

"Don't tell me it's about boyfriends again," her mother answered dryly.

"No, Mom," Angel said, and then she took a long pause. After that, she asked: "Mom, why do you like jazz?"

Her mother put down her tools, and looked at Angel over the shoulder.

"What's with that question, Angel?"

"Nothing, Mom," she said. "I just noticed that you listen to jazz a lot."

Angel's mother scratched her head, and fell silent for a few moments. It was a little difficult to see from the dim light and the angle, but the woman's face suddenly seemed to go just a bit darker—a dart of dread bolted up Angel's spine.

And then the mother answered: "It helps me relax, it's smooth and it's easy. It also helps me get in the mood when I'm tired. It's something me and your—" she cut herself off, and after the momentary silence, she continued: "Angel, who was that lecturer again? The one who

showed up drunk...and just played jazz for an hour?"

"It's Miguel Cornelio, Mom."

"Oh," her mother sighed. And then she murmured: "Just a coincidence, then."

Angel wanted to ask her something more, but the dread that had shot up her spine began to creep all over her body, so she decided to keep her questions to herself—don't worry, Angel reminded herself, you'll find out this Saturday.

And so Angel bade her mother good night, and returned to her room.

Miguel Cornelio's writing workshop took off without a hitch—despite the fictionist's tardiness, that is: the workshop had been scheduled for 8 a.m., at a classroom in the Katipunan Hall—KH-01—but he arrived at 8:45. Seven students had emailed their works for consideration that past Thursday—four of them had submitted short fiction, the other three had handed in poems—and Robert was, of course, one of them, positioned front and center. He brought Charles Simic's *The World Doesn't End*. Angel was also there, and this time she was seated beside her boyfriend—her small knapsack slung on her chair-back. Aside from the participants, the Lit-21 professor was also present (he was the host this time): the English department's chairwoman had joined him earlier, but she stomped out of the room at 8:30.

The writer's attire was a few shades different: he still had on his aviator glasses, but he wore a gray NYU sweater and white sneakers, and his jeans were whole and neatly pressed—although his hair remained unkempt, and he didn't shave. Once again he entered the room with a lit cigarette dangling from his lips—his face a total deadpan—and upon setting foot inside the classroom, he set the manuscripts on the teacher's table, and greeted the students a wry good morning: good for you kids, he said, I don't have a hangover today.

Relieved, the Lit-21 professor went up to him and whispered: "It's good that you're finally here, sir Miguel, we were getting worried."

Miguel Cornelio simply glared at him.

But the professor was undaunted—he whispered again: "But don't you think we have too few participants today? We were expecting ten or thirteen."

At this the writer counted all the students in their seats, and he answered: "No problem. Seven is a lucky number."

"I'm not so sure about this," the professor stressed.

Miguel Cornelio removed his shades, stamped out his cigarette, and stared blankly at the host. And then he said: "We have enough."

Here the professor backed down, stepped away from the writer—Miguel Cornelio had put his aviators back on and sat down at the table, perusing the manuscripts on hand—and started with the preliminaries: he led the invocation, reintroduced the fictionist, and explained the workshop process.

"Basically, kids," Miguel Cornelio interjected, another cigarette between his lips, "I read your works, and I tell you whether they're shit or not." At this point he looked meaningfully at Robert and Angel, and then he continued: "The fun part is that you also get to tell your friends whether their works are shit or not."

Angel kept her cool, but Robert began to sweat.

"Yes, that's pretty much it," the host said, smiling weakly. "That's how our national writers workshop also goes. Sir Miguel can tell you all about it."

"It gets really fucking bloody," Miguel Cornelio said with a smirk.

Angel sensed a wave of trepidation break across the room—it was more palpable when she turned to Robert: futilely he tried to wipe away the sweat forming on his brow, he squeaked his chair some inches backward, he took several deep breaths. However, Angel was unaffected—I don't care, she said to herself, I just want to find something out, that's all I came for.

A few minutes later, Robert leaned close to Angel and said: "Did you also submit something, honey?"

Tilting her head slightly, Angel replied: "Yes, I did."

"Oh," he said. "I hope he's not too cruel."

"He won't be," Angel assured him, holding his arm. It was a few moments after that when Miguel Cornelio picked out the first work to be discussed.

As predicted, Miguel Cornelio's workshop did get pretty bloody: he spent nearly the entire morning trashing the students' works—he labeled the poems as incredibly sappy (this made the student—a

tall and lanky boy—hang his head), miraculously overwrought (this was directed at Robert’s poem, and he was dejected), or as terrible singsong bullshit (this comment made the student—a short and curly-haired girl—cry and walk out of the room), and he called the stories cripplingly pretentious (addressed to a short, bookish boy shouldering a huge backpack, and his face simply crumbled), an absolutely worthless diarrhea of words (said to a bespectacled girl with shoulder-length hair—she buried her face in her hands), or as a totally pointless exploration of nothing in particular (spoken to a skinny and pimply boy with messy hair, who looked out the window in stung indifference).

All except one: Miguel Cornelio called Angel’s submission—a short story about a woman whose husband had left her—the best of the whole damned lot, describing the piece as the work of an actually gifted young writer, a story that boasted an instinctive knowledge of craft in storytelling, a piece that manifested the raw understanding of human nature—Mom and Dad would have liked this one, Miguel Cornelio capped off.

Angel responded with a surprising deadpan: it was almost arrogant.

She asked herself: whoa, that was my first serious story—it’s really good?

Miguel Cornelio observed her reaction carefully. And then he said: “Well, kids, it’s your turn now. What can you say about your friends’ works?”

The room was drowned in a chilly silence: nobody dared to speak, not even to defend his or her own work—the curly-haired girl who had left the room earlier came back and sank down on her seat, sniffing, her eyes red and misty. Instead the students turned their gazes to Angel, in varying degrees of contempt—particularly, the girl in glasses glared at her as though she wanted to rip Angel’s hair out, and then some. Robert ran his hand endlessly through his close-cropped hair, wiped the sweat streaming now from his brows: he looked at his girlfriend and was unable to speak in the face of Angel’s supreme coolness—the only sound she made was clearing her throat.

Secretly giddy, she asked herself what she should do next.

Sensing the tension, Miguel Cornelio lit another cigarette and said: “Okay, you don’t want to speak up? Well, then, go have a ten-



minute break. There are some snacks in the back."

Immediately the participants exited the classroom, their expressions suggesting they might never come back—only Angel and Robert, plus the poor and frazzled Lit-21 professor, remained inside: but only for a little while—the teacher soon went out of the classroom, sighing to himself. After a while Miguel Cornelio left his seat, walked to the large stereo near the whiteboard, produced a CD—Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*—from his sweater pocket, and slid it in. He pressed PLAY, and the first few bars of *All Blues* flowed out of the speakers. And then Miguel Cornelio returned to his chair, stretched his legs on the table, and tapped off his cigarette ashes onto the chalk box.

Angel stood up and approached him. Robert followed hesitantly.

Miguel Cornelio noticed her and sneered: "Oh, the only halfway decent writer in this fucking sea of mediocrity. What is it?"

"Sir," Angel said, "I want to talk to you."

The writer furrowed his brows. He asked: "Is this about Literature?"

"A little."

Intrigued, Miguel Cornelio agreed, but he added: "Okay, but let's talk alone."

They sat along the rim of the dry fountain outside the Katipunan Hall—Robert had tried to follow them, but Miguel Cornelio shooed him off sternly, and so the young poet was left to listen to jazz alone—and talked. Miguel Cornelio threw his cigarette butt into the fountain, and then he lit another one: the guard by the gate shot him a consternated look. For her part, Angel bided her time by thanking him for liking her work, and asking the writer all sorts of inconsequential questions: how did he like Dumaguete now, did he miss it, what was New York like—she was arranging and rearranging the important questions in her head.

When the round of questioning was over, they both fell silent.

Miguel Cornelio broke the pause: "You know, kid, I got to ask you something."

"What is it, sir?"

He asked: "Where'd you get the idea of writing that story? You're sure as hell not married, but you wrote such a goddamn believable piece. You didn't just pull it out of thin air, did you?"



Angel took a deep breath and replied: "You're right, sir, I didn't. I have some experience."

"Your mother?"

"Well, yes," Angel said, her voice rather low. "My father left us when I was very young. I think it was before I was born."

"What a motherfucking piece of shit," Miguel Cornelio declared.

Angel sneered inside, and she said: "You're right, sir."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"Did you try to find him?"

"No, sir," Angel answered, "I didn't. My mom won't even talk about him. I don't even know if he's alive or dead."

Miguel Cornelio dropped his cigarette into the fountain. He pulled out another one and released the now-empty pack into the pit, and then he lit up again with a deft flick of the fingers—his tobacco-stained fingernails flashed in Angel's mind. Examining Angel's face for a minute, he asked her: "What's your mother's name?"

Angel told him.

And then Miguel Cornelio cleared his throat and took a couple quick puffs out of his cigarette. He smoothed his beard, tried to fix up his rowdy hair, cleaned his aviators—Angel nailed him with her gaze, thinking: I've got you now, bastard. Putting his shades back on, Miguel Cornelio asked: "Where do you live, kid?"

"In Banilad, across the street from a junkshop."

"Have you ever lived in Calindagan?"

This confused Angel: evoking a nonexistent memory rattled her thought process. She wanted badly to ask Miguel Cornelio about that place, but was unsure how to proceed. For a second Angel couldn't speak, and then she said: "No."

His eyes wandering, the writer said: "I remember they had a house there, where her boyfriend used to visit. I used to drop by, too, drink and smoke pot, some dope. We also listened to jazz. Good woman—the guy's pretty fucking neat, too."

"No, he's not," Angel shot back mindlessly. "He's an asshole."

"Easy there, kid," Miguel Cornelio said, "he can be a bit difficult,

sure, but—”

“Difficult is an understatement.”

Sighing deeply, Miguel Cornelio stood up and said: “Okay, you know what, kid, see me later at Florentina Homes—we’ll talk about your story there.”

Angel watched the writer walk back inside Katipunan Hall—her eyes burned.

Nobody else was in the room when Angel returned—only Robert was there, reading Charles Simic’s poetry and listening to Miles Davis’ quintet playing *Blue in Green*, his expression serious and contemplative. Miguel Cornelio was nowhere to be found: on his table were an empty saucer, a spoon, and a mug—the smell of cigarette smoke lingered in the air-conditioned classroom. It was nearing noon.

“Hey, honey,” Angel addressed Robert. “Let’s get out of here.”

Perking up, Robert closed his book and smiled at her. He turned off the stereo and said: “Okay, honey, I’m getting famished anyway. You in the mood for lunch?”

“Sure.”

And so they went out of the campus, crossed the street, and ducked into the Chicken Dinagyang eatery, where they each ordered a plate of cheap chicken inasal—Robert paid for both meals. They went upstairs and then settled themselves at one of the tables by the window.

There was a momentary silence.

And then Robert asked: “So, honey, what did you talk about with sir Miguel?”

With wary eyes, Angel answered: “We were talking about my story.”

“Oh, yeah! That story...yeah, I really liked it, too.”

Angel stood up and fetched them both a glass of water. And then she said: “I’m going to meet him at Florentina Homes later today. He said we would talk more there.”

Robert’s eyes sparkled, his mouth gaped into a toothy smile, and he replied: “That’s awesome, honey!” He paused, looked down, and then he added: “Can I come?”

“I think it’s better if I came alone, honey.”

"Oh," Robert sighed. "Oh well."

To assuage him, Angel laid her hand on top of Robert's. And then she told him: "I'll tell you all about it, okay?"

Inwardly, however, Angel apologized: I'm sorry, honey, but there are some things you don't need to know—I mean, what would you feel if you found out one of your idols was an incorrigible asshole, an unapologetic bastard who'd walked out on his daughter—your girlfriend—when she was very young, too young to understand anything?

Keep your memories sacred, Angel said to herself.

Presently their meals arrived, and the couple shared a hearty meal in silence, although Angel's mind was whirring at full speed now: she imagined her mother's reaction if she ever discovered that her husband had come home and had met her daughter—she would probably blow up, if she could strangle the man she would, she would hurl herself at him and kick him in his balls, stuff a dirty sock down his throat, and then hang him up a tree...

After the meal, Robert fetched them both another glass of water. They gulped them down. Angel recalled Miguel Cornelio smoking inside the campus—he was the most disrespectful, crass man she had ever encountered in her life: how could Mom ever end up with a man like that, how could I ever be his daughter?

"What time are you supposed to meet sir Miguel, honey?" Robert asked.

"I don't know, he said later."

"Why don't we go now?"

"Okay, honey," Angel said.

And then Robert stood up, tucked his book under his arm and led Angel out of the eatery, his face wearing a dazed and faraway expression: Angel felt sorry for him, but then she felt good—recognition from an asshole is recognition nonetheless.

Miguel Cornelio was sitting in a lawn chair at the lot in between Gabby's Bistro and Florentina Homes—his feet were propped up on the table—having a leisurely smoke, slugging down a can of San Miguel beer, and reading Henry Miller's *Under the Roofs of Paris* when Angel arrived around 2 p.m. He had removed his sweater: his aviators stayed, and he kept wiping them with his white T-shirt. Patronizingly,

Miguel Cornelio beckoned Angel to sit with him—and she did.

He asked her where Robert was: Angel answered he'd already left.

"Good," Miguel Cornelio said. "I sense this is going to be very personal."

Angel grunted: "You're damn right it is."

The writer sighed, emptied his beer can, set his book aside, and laid his cigarette on the ashtray. He removed his feet from the table, frowned, and then asked: "Are you really sure I'm the guy you're looking for? What if I'm just your mother's friend?"

"Have you looked in the mirror lately?" Angel snapped.

Scrutinizing her face, Miguel Cornelio replied: "Well, you have my eyes."

Angel said nothing—and then: "How could you?"

He scratched his head, shut his eyes, and said nothing.

And then: "I was broke. I was in school trying to be a writer, and I did not need a baby. I had a hard enough time feeding myself."

Indignantly, Angel barked: "So you left us, became a writer, and flew to New York. You must be really proud of yourself."

"Honestly, I am."

This irritated Angel so much she made to stand up and leave the writer to his callousness and his insensitivity—forever. But then a memory popped up again, and she prodded on: "Miguel Cornelio—you changed your name, didn't you?"

"That's my *nom de plume*," he said.

"Okay, so what's your real name?"

The writer told her.

"So I was right."

"Birth certificates don't lie," he said.

Miguel Cornelio picked up his cigarette and took a long drag from it. Angel felt all the questions cascading down her consciousness like a waterfall, and she was finding it hard to pick up from the last one: so she just fell silent and waited.

And then the writer asked: "Are you going to tell her about this?"

Angel said: "What for? You've already hurt her enough."

"You have a point," Miguel Cornelio agreed. "How is she anyway?"

"You don't need to know."

At this a nervous silence descended upon the two—Angel gazed at the writer's book, and Miguel Cornelio crushed out his cigarette on the ashtray—and it took a few more minutes before Angel managed to ply another question: "Tell me, did you really like my story?"

"I did," the fictionist said, his tone serious. "But it needs a lot of work."

Breathing deeply, Angel said: "Okay, so teach me."

Miguel Cornelio smiled—to Angel it looked genuine enough.

"I'll be back in New York next week," he replied.

"I don't care. Teach me."

"Fine," he gave in. "Wait here. I'll get your manuscript upstairs."

And so Miguel Cornelio returned to his hotel room, his strides huge and his gait assured: Angel glued her eyes on his broad back, a sight her mother must have looked at a million times before, and waited—now she would not let him go.

## Fighting

☀ Asterio Enrico N. Gutierrez

It was the first time Reginald Acosta had been called to Mrs. Amechachurra's office, and for an offense she would never have imagined of him: fighting. And not the bloodless, almost comical fisticuffs typical of fifth-graders, with everyone swarming the football field at dismissal impatient for a punch or two, only to be treated to a stare-down, a fuss of shoves, before finally climaxing with taunts of *Tae!* or *Bakla!* or whatever cuss words they were just learning to use; by the time Mr. Talay, their homeroom teacher, cut through the crowd bellowing "Back to your classrooms!" Reggie had already left the boy with a black eye, a broken nose, and a chipped front tooth.

"He just left for St. Luke's, but he'll be okay," Mr. Talay reported as they sat in her office. "Reggie though..."

They turned to Reggie, who was waiting at the padded bench outside, and then back at each other. The beaten kid happened to be Martin Henares—the youngest son of Congressman Serge Henares, a fixture of televised congressional hearings, and a generous alumnus besides. Mrs. Amechachurra clucked her tongue, and was not surprised when her cellphone—instead of her trunkline—rang even before she and Mr. Talay had finished, well before she could speak with Reggie. She hit the answer key, and without waiting for Fr. Cuevas to talk, said she was on her way to his office.

Upon entering his office, a knot formed on her brow. The principal's scotch snifter was still half-full—two-thirds of which was melted ice. When he looked up from his Blackberry to greet her, *it was the most clear-eyed she could remember him.*

"The congressman himself called," he said, as she took a seat. "He's demanding expulsion."

She opened her mouth to speak but shut it just as quickly; her lips instead settled into a scowl. Another time, she wouldn't have held her tongue—even before being promoted to grade level coordinator

six years ago, she was known for her personal advocacy to care for students mixed up in fights. At town halls and trainee workshops, her voice rose a pitch higher as she *declared how for her, fighting* was not just another offense to be perfunctorily sanctioned, but a critical boyhood struggle they had a great responsibility to help overcome.

Her hands-on doggedness had already set her at odds with other school administrators. “Encroaches on Guidance Counselor’s duties,” her evaluation survey once read after she’d invited herself to every counseling session of a student who’d roughed up his best friend—over, as she’d sniffed out, a girl. Even Fr. Cuevas had asked if she could perhaps pick her spots—maybe after she’d signed off on the sanction, let them do the counseling, after which she could do all the follow-ups she needed? She brushed him off, reasoning that giving the boys the help they needed began with knowing every detail—the sequence of events, the personalities involved, the crux of the conflict—no matter how ordinary the fight.

But they both knew Martin was no ordinary boy. And he’d suffered more than the ordinary busted lip or scraped cheek. He’d practically been disfigured, which made a claim of special treatment hardly bulletproof.

“Don’t worry,” Fr. Cuevas said, lowering his voice. “I told him we needed a proper meeting first. It’ll be us with the boys and their parents at 10 am tomorrow.”

Her scowl vanished. “Ohhh,” she murmured under her breath. So while expulsion was still a possibility—the likely possibility—she now had a chance to at least learn and understand Reggie’s reasons before he got kicked out. She uncrossed her legs, sat up, and asked if they were done. Fr. Cuevas shook his head and smirked. “I know I sound just like a priest here,” he said, “but hopefully the truth will save him.”

When she returned to the faculty lounge, she walked past him without a word or glance. The better to scare him a little, she thought. Keep him in suspense, imagining how their talk would go—a trick she’d learned made full disclosures that much easier to coax.

It also gave her time to review his file. She already knew of him, certainly more than grade level coordinators would often

know about the average boy in their batch. He was, after all, their standard-bearing, over-achieving, golden boy. The first to make it to the ten GLC-merit mark. Advanced Math and Science track. She'd pinned gold medals on him herself at the interpretative reading and declamation contests, and had seen him and the rest of his teammates off to the annual interschool Math Olympiad. She'd long overheard his teachers burning entire lunch hours, even skipping *siestas*, *over talk about latest feat*: how after just two months, he was already five colors ahead of the entire class in SRA, how he'd scored a hundred in six of his eight quarterly exams, how he'd been elected class president by a 41-2 landslide. His standing only made her more intrigued. She crouched beneath her desk, shed her pumps and stepped into her slippers, then pulled his folder from the filing cabinet.

She turned the last page with a careless flick. Crammed as his file was with certificates and clippings and forms, there was nothing she could use. "Mature conversationalist" and "Respectful to teachers," his guidance office assessments read, while the parent-teacher conference notes indicated he'd been raised by cookie-cutter examples of upstanding parents: his mother had been a GLC herself at an exclusive boy's school in Pangasinan before becoming a housewife, while his father was an engineer for the DPWH, a homeowner's association officer, as well as a warden of his masonic lodge. Setting aside the folder, she rang the secretary to send Reggie in. She hoped their talk would yield some explanation—his record utterly spotless, it would be all she had to go on.

His entrance alone only added to her regard—and interest—towards him. Unlike most *others she called in after a fight*—half of them already reduced to tears and snot, begging her not to tell their parents even before they'd taken their seats, the other half-exaggeratedly swaggering in, wearing their band-aided scrapes like prison scars—Reggie strode in with his back straight and his chin up. And, most impressively, all without giving off an air of defiance or smugness. Though his polo uniform was sweat-rumpled and his shoes were scuffed and dust-caked—and with his short, stocky build, spiky hair, and thick glasses, he was not what she could call a handsome boy—he still stood every inch the future student council officer, future lawyer, future great man his litany of achievements prophesied. He quietly waited for her to indicate he could take a seat, and when she did, he sat up straight and established eye contact right away. Adjusting her stance, she relaxed her brow, unfolded her arms, and leaned forward



into her more 'motherly' pose: elbows on the table, hands clasped, chin resting on her knuckles.

"Reggie," she began. "Mr. Talay told me that you were going back to the classroom from the basketball court after P.E. when you started punching Martin in the face. Is that what happened?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you want to explain any part of it?"

"No, ma'am," he said. "But thank you for the opportunity."

She stared at him, arching an eyebrow as she searched his face for the slightest twitch or flinch. But he merely held her gaze, looking her in the eye earnestly. Breaking the stare, she drew back and idly began arranging her fountain pens. In all her years at the school, she'd never spoken to a boy like Reggie—in fact, it was as if she was talking to hardly a boy at all.

Not looking up, she spoke again. "So why'd you do it?"

"I acted wrongly," he immediately replied. "It was my fault. I shouldn't have done it."

Her fingers fell still. Interesting, she almost said aloud—as she often did when caught in a spell of thought. He didn't answer the question. She knew that with his precociousness, he'd understood what was being asked perfectly. So why wasn't he answering? And—now more intriguingly—what was the answer? She turned back to face him, leaning towards him even further.

"Reggie, I'm very grateful for how you're accepting you were wrong, and sincerely regretting your actions," she said, keeping her tone gentle and casual. "All of this will help you get a light sanction, I promise. Now I just have one last question: what made you do it? Why were you fighting?"

As soon as she finished her question, it was there—a twitch of the eyebrow, a faint flush in the ears. It was almost imperceptible; if it were any other boy, while she still would've noticed, she wouldn't have made much of it. But she knew Reggie was not just any other boy. And that he'd just shown his first signs of weakness.

"Don't worry," she said. "Telling me will only help you tomorrow. I'm sure it wasn't that bad. And when you tell me, I'll make sure they hear the real reason."

Instantly, every inch of him hardened—his jaw, his shoulders, his

eyes, his entire stance. She cursed inwardly, and knew his reply even before he uttered it.

"I was wrong," he quickly volleyed. "And I will completely accept expulsion if that's the decision."

She held her breath to check a sharp sigh. While she could drag on the conversation, weather him with questions and offers and even threats, she knew she would get nothing. She drew herself up, scribbled a note detailing the time and place of the meeting for his parents, and said they would just see each other tomorrow.

As soon as the door closed, she spun her swiveling chair to the filing cabinet, thumbed through the tabs for her last remaining resource—Martin's file.

She'd actually never seen the boy before. The grade four GLC had whispered to her that the popular congressman's son was in her batch, but Mrs. Amechachurra had never had reason to pay him attention. She opened the folder and leafed through the slim sheaf. As she'd expected, his records depicted him as, if anything, the typical son of a powerful politician. Remedial Math. No extra-curricular activities. No 'Best In' certificates. A GLC demerit in grade four for smoking in the rock garden at dismissal—a lenient sanction she knew was courtesy of his father. *Susmaryosep*, she broke, as she realized that the only thing of possible note was his 1x1 ID picture, which showed him to be fair and handsome-seeming—but it was, no surprise, a home print-out of a cropped low-resolution photo, so even that she couldn't tell.

She clucked her tongue, shut both files, and returned them to the filing cabinet. It was useless. There were none of the textbook reasons for fighting—envy, competition, a threat to his position—much less something that could have provoked an attack of such violence from a boy like Reggie. All she could do was pray he wasn't expelled. And if he wasn't, she resolved not to rest until she'd found out what exactly the fight had been all about. She outlined the steps as she shut down her computer and packed her things. After tidying up the matter of sanctions and appeasements, she would sit Reggie down and use every method and trick and threat she knew until she'd finally learned the truth. From there, perhaps work on rehabilitating him, patiently explaining why fighting was wrong, telling him what a real man was in the real world. Whatever it took to make sure he'd grow up to be the man Fr. Cuevas, the school, the world wanted boys like Reggie—

especially boys like Reggie—to be.

The Acostas arrived first. As soon as they were ushered into the conference room by the secretary, Fr. Cuevas stood to offer greetings and introductions. Mrs. Amechachurra fell back and left the principal in charge of the chatter, while she quietly ran an eye over father and son.

Reggie was as he had been yesterday—straight-backed but not stiff, poised, courteous. But this time, beside his father, she realized that Reggie was, in fact, impersonating his father. Taking every cue from his dad's bearing and appearance, the classic kid who thought the world of his father and wanted nothing more than to obey and eventually become him.

She could also see why. While Mr. Acosta appeared the typical dad—5'7 at best, completely bald, button-down shirt draped over a globe of a belly, two cellphone holsters clipped to his belt—he bore himself with a strength of presence she rarely saw even in the most distinguished and powerful men she'd met. He strode smartly across the room, extended his arm with piston-like efficiency as he offered a firm, confident grip to her and Fr. Cuevas. He offered apologies for the trouble the incident had caused in a robust, perfectly-modulated baritone that filled the room. In every gesture, word, and look, he had the air of precisely what he was—a man who spent his days walking around immense, bustling sites where massive things were being built, overseeing important heavy-duty labor, giving imperative advice, reminders, orders.

Five minutes later, the Henareses arrived as well. As she'd done with the Acostas, Mrs. Amechachurra sized up the newcomers between introductions. Mrs. Henares was, as she'd expected, very beautiful. There was obviously a trace of old Spanish in her—towering height, fair complexion, *mestiza* nose and eyes. Her crisp all-white blazer and pants clung loosely around her trim, well-maintained figure, and a classic monogrammed Gucci handbag hung from her shoulder. What she hadn't expected was Mrs. Henares's modesty. She immediately reassured them when they asked about Martin's injuries, generously returned Mr. Acosta's apologies, and even offered her own for her husband's rash demands—nothing like the severe congressman's wife she'd braced herself for a full morning of argument with.

But for all of Mrs. Henares's allure—and what her unanticipated graciousness might mean for Reggie's chances at avoiding expulsion—Mrs. Amechachurra's gaze was immediately fixed on Martin. While she'd intended to observe his every move and mannerism in hopes of gleaning something that could have made Reggie tick, soon she was merely marveling at the boy's looks.

He was, simply, one of the handsomest boys she'd ever seen. Not even the purplish ring around his eye or the bandaged nose could hide the mestizo features he'd inherited—the immaculate skin, the straight, dark brown hair, fine nose, the almost heart-shaped lips. He was already very tall, 5'4 at least, and had a broad-shouldered build that was already beginning to bulk up. As they shook hands, he smiled politely, revealing a row of bright, perfectly-lined teeth—which miraculously showed no trace of the chip Mr. Talay had spoken of. She could easily imagine him in high school, four or five years from now, his features further developed and his frame filled out, the heart throb of every soiree and dance, breaking the hearts of girls—and boys.

After introductions were completed, Fr. Cuevas took his seat at the head of the table. The rest followed suit. The talk settled down, and the principal began to speak.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Henares, Mr. Acosta," he started. "Thank you very much for coming. As we discussed over the phone, we're here to talk about the fight that happened yesterday between Reggie and Martin.

"Before we begin," he continued, "I'd like to say that I believe it's in everyone's best interests if we find out and assess what exactly happened between them that afternoon before we take any action. Rest assured, we will get to the bottom of this, that no party will be favored, and whatever measures the school will take will be nothing but fair."

Mrs. Henares had straightened up to reply when Reggie spoke. "May I speak, ma'am?" he said in a quiet, but firm tone. They all turned to face him. As he'd done last night, Mrs. Amechachurra noticed, he'd leaned towards Mrs. Henares and addressed her with an earnest eye. She nodded to herself, knowing he was about to give a brave, contrite statement no different from yesterday's—which, if Mrs. Henares was what she seemed, would save him from expulsion.

Mrs. Henares raised her eyebrows, visibly impressed. "Yes,

Reggie, please.”

“It was all my fault,” he began. “Martin did nothing to deserve what I did. I acted like a bully, and I’m very sorry. I hope you’ll accept my apology. I will accept the consequences of my actions, and whether or not I’m expelled, I promise never to do anything like that to anyone ever again.”

As Reggie spoke, Mrs. Amechachurra watched Mr. Acosta from the corner of her eye. Unlike other parents who watched intently, mouthing the words along as their son, near tears, tripped over every sentence of the stilted speech they’d rehearsed the whole night, he was merely looking at the floor, arms folded, ear just slightly cocked toward Reggie. And when Reggie was finished, he hardly reacted—just a sharp nod to himself, as if he expected nothing less from his son. She turned towards Mrs. Henares. As Mrs. Amechachurra had guessed, a wide, warm smile was on her lips. After a second of silence, she took in a deep breath, and addressed Reggie.

“Very good, Reggie. You’re admitting your mistake and accepting the consequences of your actions like a man. And that’s why we accept your apology. A boy like you shouldn’t be expelled. Just don’t do it again. Because while it may seem cool to be one of those bullies, it’s really not. You won’t have any friends, everyone will talk about you behind your back, and girls won’t like you. And you don’t deserve that. Martin told me you’re very smart, and you’re actually the class president. I can tell you’ll grow up to be a great man.”

“Yes, ma’am, I won’t do it again, I promise,” Reggie replied, never breaking eye contact. “Thank you, Reggie,” Mrs. Henares replied, before turning to Mr. Acosta. “Wow, it’s like he’s not a boy anymore.”

Mr. Acosta responded with wordless smile and a measured tilt of his head. Fr. Cuevas beamed benevolently at them, and then at Mrs. Amechachurra—which she knew, from their years of having worked together, was a sure sign the scotch snifter would be emptied many times over once the meeting had ended. She leaned back, satisfied for the moment. It had ended far sooner—and better—than she could’ve hoped. Reggie’s poise had saved him from expulsion, which in turn meant she now had every opportunity to learn the truth right from him—something she planned to start at once.

Her thoughts were broken when Martin stood and went over to take the seat beside Reggie. Mrs. Amechachurra smirked at the trite moment she knew was about to unfold, which, she admitted to

herself, she hadn't expected from a boy like Martin.

"It's okay, dude," Martin said. "I mean, sorry if, like, I did something wrong. I guess I was just pissed, cause, like, it's the first time I ever talked to you, and then you just started punching me in the face." He began patting Reggie's back as he continued, "But it's okay, I mean, like, we're cool now. I just hope the whole expulsion thing with Papa didn't scare you."

Nothing but powerful parents and good looks, Mrs. Amechachurra said in her head as she settled back, ready to tune out and sink back into thought. Until, suddenly, she paused in half-recline.

As Martin continued rubbing Reggie's back, it was as if all calm and confidence had been drained from Reggie, who was now fidgeting as he stared awkwardly at the ground and gnawed his lip, a bright flush washing over his cheeks, leaving him blushing like a—

She froze in her seat. Her gaze panned from Martin's hand, to his broadening shoulders, and then to his face, to the purpled eye and fresh bandages marking injuries that might have permanently marred his terrifying attractiveness had Mr. Talay not arrived in time to stop Reggie...

Gooseflesh broke out on her arms. Her throat contracted. "... Well," she suddenly blurted out, only half-realizing she was thinking aloud. "He *is* very handsome..."

A beat of silence, then the room broke into laughter—Fr. Cuevas, Martin, Mrs. Henares, even Mr. Acosta. They all turned to Mrs. Henares as she shared how Martin had actually just shot a commercial for Jollibee, and that he'd hadn't slept last night worrying his nose wouldn't heal in time for his upcoming Penshoppe photo shoot.

Reggie, however, was still as stone, his face turned towards Mrs. Amechachurra to the end. And the look she found there would stay with her long after the meeting had ended: his eyes wide and trembling and glassy, his jaw stiff, his mouth fixed in a warped O, as if she'd just told the world a secret he'd been fighting with all his might to keep.

## White Butterfly

☀ Peter Zaragoza Mayshle

I was fifteen when I left my body. I was asleep, supine on my cot on the floor, peaceful, dreaming perhaps, perhaps not, for I remembered only blackness, blackness opaque, when slowly slowly, as if a radio were being turned on, its knob moving in minute increments, hair's widths, gently twisting, softly turning whirling swirling, unfurling a strand, a sliver of sound, a sound far away drawing nearer nearer, then clearer clearer, until I started to hear a ragged jagged gritty sound, a throaty sound, low drawn-out, yet rhythmic repetitive repetitive, and I realized I was listening to a croaking, the croaking of the *tuko* lizard outside our window. *Tu-ko! Tu-ko!* it said. *Tu-ko! Tu-ko!* it said. Deep and ancient and insistent. *Tu-ko! Tu-ko!* it said. It seemed to reverberate in the room, or at least, in my head. At first I thought I was dreaming, at second I thought not, at third I just thought, and when I couldn't get to the fourth or fifth or sixth thought anymore, I opened my eyes. *Tu-ko! Tu-ko!* I was looking down upon my sleeping body, supine on the cot on the floor, dreaming perhaps, perhaps not, my hair trapped underneath my arm flung above my head, my knee wedged against my little brother's back sleeping next to me, beside me, beside my *body*, beside *it*, next to it my brother in a fetal position, dead to the world, oblivious to his big sister floating above him, above my body, my face, my eyes closed, mouth open, a worm of drool hanging from the side, stretching down my jaw. I tried calling out to my little brother. I shouted to him. *Tu-ko!* I shouted to him. *Tu-ko!* I flailed about in the air, inches from the ceiling, and I saw I had no arms, no legs to thrash about with, no body. I thought, Of course, my body is down there and I, well, I am up here. And what is this I, this I with no arms, no legs, no torso, no body? A non-body, a no body? A spirit? A ghost? *Tu-ko! Tu-ko!* Shut up and let me think! Spirits and ghosts have shape, don't they? They have form—a white translucent sheet is a form, right? Not much, yes, but it's translucent, therefore, it can be seen. But I am formless, I am shapeless, like air, yes, like air, but



unlike air, I cannot be contained, my body was my container, and it has toppled over, and I have spilled out, and now I am free, I am free! But free to do what? Let me think. You coconut head, free to do what? Wait. I can see, yes, that much I'm sure of, I can see, though I have no eyes, I can see, and I can feel, yes, I can feel the coldness in the room, and I can hear, I can hear the stupid tuko outside, Tu-ko! Tu-ko! I can smell, I can smell the bougainvillea's scent wafting in through the window—who needs a body? I am all sense now, all consciousness, all being. I am I am I am I am falling back down, down to my body, down to skin and flesh and mucus and ligament and bone and nerves and blood and tissue and cell and atom and and

I

blink.

It was the summer when white butterflies shriveled on the hot dirt road outside our hut, the summer when I left my body and I never told anyone. It was also the summer when I started leaking blood, and I was afraid, so afraid I cried, but my mother told me not to cry, for I was a big girl now, a woman, and she bunched up my stained panties and told me to mix the blood with the juice from boiled guava leaves and wash my face with the reddish brown mixture to prevent pimples and warts and other ugly marks, and that I must do this every time I bleed, for it is during this time when the evil spirits of the forests behind our hut can smell a newborn woman, and only the blood on my face can ward them off, deceive them somehow. I was very close to my mother, for I felt she was a part of me, and I of her, but I never told her of that night, that night I left my body. Nor did I tell my brother, nor my father, especially not my father, for I thought he could go on drinking himself to his grave and beating my brother and me and slapping my mother everyday till we all went red-raw but I will never ever tell him, never tell anyone, for this blissful secret was mine alone, and I clasped it close like a locket to my chest, my chest that was swelling remarkably fast that summer.

The second time it happened I again had no control over it. But the third time, oh, the third time, I willed it. It was easy really, almost



natural, as if preordained, as if it were just waiting for me to be ready. I knew for certain I wasn't dreaming. When my brother had turned to his side to go to sleep, I closed my eyes and asked that I may float away again—asked who, I do not know, perhaps I prayed to God. I simply pictured myself floating out of my body, and, seconds later, I did, and I found myself again suspended in the air, looking down upon my body and my brother lying next to me, and I felt myself brim over with joy. The first two times I was in shock, confusion and fear almost paralyzed me, but this, oh, this was pure elation. If I had my lips, they would probably have been curved in a smile. If I had my heart, it would probably have been pumping in ecstasy. But no, down there my body lay inert and innocent, my lips in a line, my heart beating calmly, while up here I was ready to burst.

Feeling brave as well, I thought to move around our room. I went to smell the *sampaguita* garlands hanging round the neck of dear Sto. Nino. He stood smiling at me from our little dresser table, wearing the tiny farmer's costume and straw hat that mother and I made for Him that summer. I floated to the oval mirror hanging on the other wall and I tried to see myself in its face, but all I see reflected was our open window and part of the mango tree outside in the quiet night. I realized the *tuko* wasn't croaking that night, and I flew to the window to look for it among the branches of the mango tree, but it was no longer there, perhaps it had grown weary and left to pester someone else's sleep. Staring up at the moon that was like a white grin, I wanted to fly out the window and explore our little village, be like a stealthy thief that enters people's homes, but I was too scared, so I turned to go back, but before I fell back into my body, I saw my brother, his eyes were open, his face scrunched as if in anger, and I noticed his hand furiously moving underneath his shorts. He twisted his neck once, twice, three times, to look at my sleeping form, and then he started to shudder, and seconds later he took out his hand from inside his shorts, wiped it against his shirt and quickly went to sleep. I thought how silly my brother was back then!

My mother, being like all mothers who had eyes at the back of their heads, she noticed after only a few days that something was wrong with me, something awry. I had been a quiet girl growing up, respectful of my elders, hardworking, a dutiful daughter helping her

mother sell the fish that her father would catch every morning. I was polite, shy yet quick with a smile, but since I began practicing my gift—it *was* a gift, I firmly believed it then—I started becoming listless, easily distracted. Often, while selling at our stall in the town's wet market, I would catch myself gazing at a fish's luminescent scales or a mollusk's yellowish-purple sheen for seconds, sometimes minutes, before I would hear my mother impatiently calling out my name and snapping me out of my daydreaming to hand her the next heaving pail of fish.

Other times, I'd be mesmerized by the white butterflies burning on the dirt road such delicate insects, butterflies, flitting about, bobbing to Beethoven in my head, or was it Bach? I can never tell who was the deaf one—white butterflies settling lightly on bushes, scattering at the passing fury of rattling tricycles, perhaps choking on the exhaust diesel fumes, flitting about some more, like dainty little ballerinas in the air, only to land on the dirt road, seconds too long, and then they are burnt to a crisp by the scorching sun.

If a white butterfly enters your house, my mother once said, it means that someone you know has just died and is paying you a visit and you should cross yourself and say a short prayer and consider it a blessing.

Thinking I was possessed by an *enkanto* from the forest, my mother brought me one night to the town's *arbularyo*. I did not like going to him. His hut is on the far side of town and surrounded by all kinds of plants that he uses for his healing, trees such as *kamias*, tamarind, *lagundi*, *caimito*, *dapdap*, *kalamansi*. Once when I had been suffering from a bad cough that went on for days, he boiled some red hibiscus petals and, mixing it with a dark brown liquid which he poured from a Pepsi bottle, forced me to drink the horrible-tasting concoction. My cough disappeared the next day, but the mixture's taste stayed in my mouth for a week.

We found him squatting on his yard, fanning the flames under his rice kettle, and when my mother told him what was ailing me and what she suspected, he stood and puffed on his *pandan* tobacco and looked me up and down and said that he couldn't believe I had grown so big, that I was practically a young woman now and my mother laughed her high laugh, gay and ignorant, for she trusted him but I did not. I was scared of him and he was looking at me now, one eye as grey as the bottom of his kettle, and his smile was like an ugly gash on his face.

He invited my mother and me into his hut and told me to sit in front

of him. He took out a twig from his pants pocket and placed it against his palm as if measuring it and he waved it inches from my face and told me to close my eyes and I did and when I smelled smoke I knew he was blowing his tobacco on my face. He told me to open my eyes and I did and he placed his twig on his palm and somehow the twig had grown longer, extending a couple of inches past the tip of his middle finger. Sitting next to me, my mother gasped. He said that indeed an *enkanto* had found favor in me and he now told me to lie on the floor and close my eyes and I did and he told my mother to close her eyes too and place her hands on my arms and grip them tightly and she did. Then I felt his damp hand clamp on my mouth and I felt his tobacco breath on my face and I felt his other hand massaging my breasts and my eyes popped open and I saw him leering down at me. When I tried to shout his hand clamped tighter on my mouth and when I began to squirm and struggle he shouted to my mother to keep her eyes closed and pray harder and hold me tighter for the *enkanto* was trying to break free and I twisted wildly and I kicked him in the groin and he let out a yelp. I sat up and looked at my mother and she looked at me, both of us breathing heavily, and she asked if the *enkanto* was still inside me and he, curled on the floor, said I was cured and my mother promised to send him a pail of crabs from father's next catch. We left him there still holding on to his testicles and cursing under his breath and I never told my mother about this, too, about how he groped me while in her presence, for when we exchanged looks that day on the *arbularyo's* floor, I only saw benevolence and concern in her eyes, unaware of what she had really done. How could I have told her then that she had just put her daughter in danger?

That night after the incident at the *arbularyo's* my breasts hurt. They felt heavy and sore and I wept silently next to my brother who was feigning sleep. I wanted to escape the pain, I wished to be free from it. And just like that, I was. I floated out my body again and immediately felt light and good and well. I flew out our window and left my brother to his distractions.

This time I wanted to explore and see what our town was like at night, when I thought most everyone should have been asleep. My father wasn't home yet so I decided to look around town for him. I went to the cockpit arena where he would bet and throw money away on days when he felt more than lucky, but only silence and

sleeping gamecocks greeted me there. I went to the port area where on mornings my mother and I would wait with the rest of the women of the town for the men's return from the night's fishing, but I only saw the *bancas* tethered to the sand and I listened to the waves slap against the shore. I thought, Where could my father be? And the moment I thought that, it was as if I were a lamp dead in one room but finding itself switched on in another. I was suddenly inside AliBangBang, the small beerhouse farther up the town. A grating ballad blared from the karaoke box in the corner and gaudy multi-colored bulbs dangled and flashed erratically from the ceiling. Only one table was occupied, three men were drunk around it and my father was one of them. His ears and nose were red, his eyes were bloodshot and his eyelids were flickering, one arm was dangling to his side and the other was draped across the table holding a bottle of San Miguel and a glowing cigarette. And while his friends were gesticulating feebly and mumbling incoherently, my father had his chin down to his chest, looking stoic and unaware. It was only when a curly-haired woman with yellow highlights sat next to him and slapped his shoulder playfully that he snapped out of his stupor and smiled widely and embraced the woman and began kissing her in a quite lascivious manner to the sudden hooting of his friends. This was a very disagreeable sight for me, to see my father making out with a woman not my mother, to see him making out with a woman at all, to see him making out, period. It made me so angry that I wanted to lash out at him, if only I had my hands with me then. But then he stopped and pushed the woman off violently and stared blinking towards where I was and I thought he was looking directly at me but then he quickly turned away and took a gulp of his beer. The woman angrily asked him what did he do that for, pushing her away like that, to which he replied that he thought he had just seen his daughter staring at him from the corner. His friends and the woman laughed, saying he was far too drunk already he was seeing ghosts. And I thought there must be something else to this gift of mine, something more special. Of course, I didn't know back then that I was to see and experience things far more fascinating than the sight of my father cheating on my mother.

I swam with a family of dugong off Negros Oriental.

I felt Marie Antoinette's head go through me as it jumped off the guillotine.

I discovered another moon orbiting Saturn.

I splashed around inside a cow's abomasum.

I saw Jose Rizal recoil from the bullets fired on him in Bagumbayan Park.

I learned who really killed JFK.

I saw an octopus being harpooned off the coast of Corfu.

I witnessed Kierkegaard breaking up with Regina. He is a stupid, infuriating man.

I saw Imelda Marcos picking out a pair of Manolo Blahniks for a party with her Blue Ladies.

I sat inside an Edsel.

I saw Napoleon picking his nose in the Russian winter.

I saw Chinese landing on Mars.

I raced with Neanderthals hunting on the plains of what became Mindanao.

I watched Siamese twins being separated with a sword in a carnival in Bulgaria.

I saw Siamese cats that were also Siamese twins.

I saw Longinus drive his spear into the side of Christ.

And then one morning, after doing the mambo with angels on the head of a pin, I returned to our hut to find my body gone. My brother was still asleep, but my body was no longer beside him. I panicked. Surely my body couldn't have just up and gone away without me. And then I saw her, me, entering our room and walking to the mirror on the wall and brushing her, my, hair and humming a tune. Then my mother called out to her, *me*, and she replied in her, *my*, voice that she, I, was coming. I could not believe this was happening. I screamed at her, this thief, this interloper, this squatter. She merely continued brushing her, my, hair and went on humming that stupid song. But before she left she smiled, and I knew that she meant that smile for me, she knew that I was hovering near her, and it was a smile of triumph.

I followed her and my mother to the port. The sky was turning light and I could see my father's *banca* farther out, a speck on the sea. I turned to the impostor and saw that she still had that smile on her face and it infuriated me. She must be someone like me, I thought, a wanderer, from another place, perhaps even another time, who perhaps has been searching long for a receptacle, another body to contain her again. My mother hugged her and the girl giggled. Don't be deceived by her! I shouted to my mother. That is not your daughter. Your daughter is me, I am here, if only you could hear me, if only you could see me. It was useless. When my father arrived I watched the three of them haul away the catch of the day and I felt forlorn as the wind and the sound of the waves whipped all around me.

Much as I loathed the idea, there was only one person who could help me. When I got to his hut he was pounding guava leaves to a pulp with a small mortar and pestle and straining the juice down narrow-necked bottles. I screamed his name, he stopped his pounding and looked up, and when he continued his task, I screamed his name again. This time he put down his pestle and scanned the room. I screamed again and he jerked in fright. I started talking to him, telling him that he knows me, that I need his help, but he started shaking and he cowered behind a table and shouted into the air to leave him be. The sham is startled to suddenly find

himself genuine. Unfortunately, he is also a coward. I gave up and left him there, quivering among his colored bottles.

And then I thought, if she had left her body then that body would be empty then I could enter it. But no, why didn't she just go back to it? Why occupy mine? Because someone else was in it! I thought that I must then look for the original wanderer's body, and I feared it would take time. But I thought I had all the time, so I must try.

I have searched every corner of time, every recess of space, and still I could not find one empty body. I tried calling out to the one inside my body, tried to reason with her, but each time she grew deaf and deafer still. She was losing contact with where she used to exist, with where I was now. She was becoming used to her shell.

Perhaps God is the original wanderer. Perhaps he too had a body before and has been searching all through the ages for an empty one. If He is then I am in serious trouble.

I do not know anymore how long I've been away, how long I've been anchorless like this. Time seems to fold and unfold unto itself for me now, an intermittent occlusion of consciousness. For example, I cannot tell if it's been days or months or years that have passed since my eviction, as I've grown to call it. I only see events and mere moments now. It is not so bad actually. It's like a filmstrip flashing before me in various degrees of brightness. I hover around our house and watch my family go about their days. I weep for my mother and brother when my father beats them. I weep for her, too, my sister. I have taken to calling her sister, for in a way she is. I see her bear a child with a man from the city. The little boy looks just like her, like me. I see my brother go to America and become someone of importance there. I see my father drown in a sea storm, his body eaten away by the very fish he'd come to catch, an ichthyological revenge. I see my mother grow

old and die. I cannot tell if it's been days or months or years since these happened. Perhaps they're happening now. Time seems to fold and unfold unto itself for me. It is not so bad actually.

I am tired of remembering, dismembering memories. It is all I do now.

This morning, as my mother is mending a hole in her dress, a white butterfly flutters into the room. It alights on her knee, on a spot of light, and upon seeing it she crosses herself, murmurs a little prayer and returns to her sewing.



## The Relics of St. John

☀ Victor Peñaranda

Antonio Brucelango found the skull of John the Baptizer, studded with jewels, on display in the museum of Topkapi Palace. It was accompanied by the skeletal remains of the saint's right arm, encased in golden armor, and the hand adorned with precious gems.

The sight of holy treasure made him think of himself as a fortunate man who had been given a chance to braid the past and present, religion and history. Among hundreds of people present inside Topkapi, Antonio imagined himself as one among the very few who knew that Elizabeth, St. John's mother, was the sister of Mary who gave birth to Jesus the Christ. Elizabeth was married to Zachary, a temple priest. One day an angel told Zachary that Elizabeth would bear a child full of holiness. Because Zachary doubted the announcement, he lost his power of speech until John was born in Judea. His birth feast on June 24, a few days after the solar solstice, is celebrated in some Christian countries by randomly and recklessly dousing each other with water. It was St. John who baptized Jesus at the river Jordan.

Antonio imagined himself as a rare Christian Catholic, from a typhoon-swept tropical archipelago in Southeast Asia, in the huge hall at that moment; someone who grew up fascinated by stories from the Bible. He was on his way to Macedonia where to join an international poetry festival that would be held at the lakeshore towns of Struga and Ohrid. The idea of reading poems in the courtyard of monasteries and inside ancient chapels guarded by icons of saints and archangels, fascinated him. To visit Istanbul, even for just a day, before his poetic appointment felt like a baroque option, a generous accident configured by the travel agency to spare him the inconvenience of waiting long hours in airport terminals.

A glass panel separated Antonio Brucelango from the remains of the saint. He stared at the relics, almost wanting to speak to the bones. But he asked himself instead: how was it possible for an ascetic saint

to be transformed into objects of unredeemed opulence and how did it become priceless archaeological exhibit in a place that was once the seat of power of Ottoman sultans for almost four centuries?

He carefully read once again the bronze plaque found at the side of the display. It offered facts and invited mystery:

"The skull of St. John the Baptist was originally in the possession of the Byzantine and fell into Ottoman hands after the conquest [of Constantinople]. This relic was presented by Mehmed II (1451-81) to Mara Despena, daughter of the Serbian King. Subsequently it became the property of Cezayioli Hasan Pasa and after his death brought to the palace around 1790."

He checked his museum brochure. It mentioned the construction of Topkapi, how the activity started during the reign of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror after his army overwhelmed the Byzantine capital of Constantinople in 1453 and gave it the new name of Istanbul. But Antonio needed more information: who was Mara Despena?

Dolores Gonzalez knew the answer to Antonio's question. She was traveling from Chennai, India to Athens, Greece to deliver a lecture at the European School of Theosophy. Although a citizen of Uruguay, Dolores had been residing in India for almost 10 years as a researcher at the Adyar Library and teacher on comparative religion. She knew that Topkapi housed the relics of St. John the Baptizer. She intentionally decided to stay for a day in Istanbul, for a stop-over in her journey, to see for the first time what has been a source of deep interest to her.

In her studies, Dolores came to know of a document in the Vatican Library that is known as the "Massarelli Manuscript." This record contains information on Mara Despena as the daughter and the second child of the Serbian monarch Durad Branković and Eirene Kantakouzene. Mara was betrothed to Murad II in June 1431 in a coordinated attempt to prevent a major invasion of Serbia by the Ottoman Empire. They were married on September 4, 1435 in Edirne. Perhaps, it was during this event that she received the skull of St. John as wedding gift. Mara Despena had only one son of her own, Mehmed II, who later on became Mehmet the Conqueror.

During the reign of Mehmet the Conqueror, the cathedral of Hagia Sophia was converted to a mosque, and Constantinople—which the Turks called Istanbul—replaced Baghdad as the center of Sunni Islam. The city also remained the ecclesiastical center of the Greek Orthodox Church, of which Mehmet II had himself proclaimed as protector and had the power to appoint a new patriarch after the custom of the Byzantine emperors.

St. John the Baptizer had been a source of scholarly fascination to Dolores. In her mind, the veneration of the precious relics provided quiet testimony about the importance of St. John among Christians, Gnostics and Muslims. He served as exemplar to ascetics and as the original prophetic witness to Christ. She learned from research materials that after St. John was beheaded by order of King Herod, a woman known as Joanna, wife of Chuze, Herod's steward, recovered John's head and buried it with honor. No one knew when and how it was exhumed. There were all kinds of stories. Some said that the skull passed through several caretakers until it found sanctuary under Bishop Ouranios of Cappadocia in what is now central Turkey. In the 9th century, it was reported to be in Constantinople.

Antonio Brucelango moved slightly backward to allow other tourists, including Dolores, to file past him. He lingered on to observe the compelling sight of what remained of St. John the Baptizer who was a harsh critic of Herod Antipas, governor of the Roman province in Palestine that included Galilee and Peraea, for defying Jewish law. When Herod married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, St. John denounced him in public. Herod retaliated by imprisoning and later on, beheading him.

Sitting on the bench near the doorway of the big hall was Zahira Pasa who visited the Topkapi to view the relics of St. John in memory of her great, great grandfather—Cezayioli Hasan Pasa. She was a resident of the town of Pehcevo in Macedonia. Her family belonged to a small community of Muslims who traced their Turkish ancestry to members of the Ottoman army who were assigned to occupy the old Macedonian-Bulgarian trade route.

She came to Istanbul to visit blood relatives, the part of her clan that joined the massive evacuation to Turkey after Pehcevo was devastated by an intense earthquake in 1904. Zahira took up history

and then anthropology in a university in Skopje. At that moment in time, she became dedicated to the study of mysticism in the practice of Islam in the Balkans.

For a few seconds, Zahira noticed Antonio Brucelango who seemed engrossed with the bejeweled cranium and skeletal arm of St. John, but she viewed him as just another tourist. Her interest in the saint's relics, she thought, is personal and unique.

Even as a child, Zahira was taught to be proud of being a Pasa. After all Cezayioli Hasan Pasa was known for a long time as the owner of the precious relics of St. John. These were donated to the Sultan's palace for safekeeping and exhibit by the family after Cezayioli died in combat in 1790 at the age of 77.

Zahira could readily claim that Hasan Pasa was the main naval strategist of the Ottoman empire in its military campaigns against the Russian empire during the contest to gain control of the Aegean and Black Seas. She could relate how Hasan Pasa rose from Algerian slave to Barbary pirate and eventually, to Ottoman fleet commander—his record marked by achievements in naval battles. It's possible that he fought against John Paul Jones, the celebrated naval hero of the American Revolutionary War, at the sea battle of Ochakov. After the conflict between the United States and England ended, Jones settled in Paris and then accepted the appointment of rear admiral in the Russian fleet upon invitation by Empress Catherine II.

While Antonio Brucelango recalled the circumstances of St. John's death, Zahira caught herself smiling, amused by the thought that Hasan Pasa made a striking impression among people on land because he attended to his public affairs accompanied by a full-grown, pet lion. Hasan Pasa always made assurances to the public that his lion was domesticated and tamed.

While Antonio was clueless about the thread of ownership of the saint's relics, Zahira had entertained, time and again, certain possibilities: *first*, it could have been one of the treasures plundered by Hasan Pasa in the Mediterranean Sea when he was still one of the acclaimed leaders of the Barbary pirates, or *second*, it was given to him as a gift by one of the leading figures in the Ottoman court when he became a naval figure. But Antonio did not know Zahira. They could not share information that would have allowed them to weave together a cloth of history.

Lost in thought, Zahira did not notice that her small notebook, serving as a personal journal, fell from her jacket. Antonio motioned to tell Zahira, but it was Dolores who picked up the notebook and gave it back to Zahira. They all looked at each other and connected momentarily, but they could not contain a minute longer the point of common attention.

Claro Mateo Avenir occupied the space in front of the displayed relics of the saint while Antonio, Dolores and Zahira had their strange but passing coincidence. Little was known of his origins, except for his having lived in Sri Lanka and Guatemala. His last known address was in Crozet, a French town near the border of Switzerland. His registered occupation was as trainer of dogs that rescued victims from snow blizzards and avalanches.

In Istanbul, Claro had an appointment with a bookseller who claimed to have a rare copy of "The Guide for the Perplexed" by Moses Maimonides. He arrived a day earlier to have time to visit Topkapi and satisfy his curiosity. He wanted to confirm a historical footnote passed on to him by a friend who had been studying the life and spiritual influence of St. John the Baptizer.

Claro angled his body to take a closer look at the arm of St. John. He noticed that the metal work had the stamp of the Venetian lion, with its wings and crown, and of the Maltese Cross. He suspected that the arm's gold armor must have been made or re-worked in the island of Rhodes where the relic was kept by the Knights Hospitaller. Claro learned from research that Cem, Beyezed's brother became a rival to the Ottoman throne. During a battle, the military force of Beyezed II defeated decisively the army of Cem. The Knights imprisoned Cem when he sought refuge in Rhodes. In 1484 Beyezed II sent the relic arm as a gift to the Knights.

Later on, the Knights turned over Cem to Pope Innocent VIII. Cem was used as a bargaining chip against the Ottoman threat. When the papal ploy failed, Cem was kept in a Neapolitan prison until he died. In 1522 the Knights were crushed by the conquering army of Suleiman the Magnificent. The relic arm reverted to the Ottoman rulers and was kept in the Imperial Treasury together with the holiest Islamic articles and documents.

What Claro saw confirmed what his informant reported: the missing thumb. It was taken from the hand while the relic still was

enshrined in Antioch. The thumb was used to slay a dragon, according to legend. He also took extraordinary effort to read what was incised on the index finger of St. John. He could only recognize parts what it said: "This is the Lamb of God." It was a reference to St. John as the holy person who identified and "pointed" to Jesus the Christ as the new prophet and messiah.

Claro felt like rejoicing. He felt like a vessel with a story that needed to be poured. But he found himself all alone in a huge hall. He was a stranger just like Antonio, Zahira, and Dolores. They came and departed not knowing each other and what each one had to tell. It would take another occasion to put their stories together.

## Just Go Straight

### Excerpt from *St. Anne's Basement*

☀ Nadine L. Sarreal

She was a toddler. This she knows because she remembers her head as just a bit higher than the arm rest when she sat on the wooden sofa in the house they all lived in with her grandparents. The arm rest was cool against her cheek, its curved surface smelling of fresh wax. They were in the sala—Mama, Papa, herself, her grandparents, and Uncle Dido and his fussy wife, Tita Marie. Tonina was wedged tightly between the arm rest and her nursemaid's bony hip. Lola looked displeased. Her lips were drawn into a tight, straight line and she couldn't look at anyone, so great was her agitation. Lolo cleared his throat and said something. She can't remember the exact words, but he admonished the family authoritatively yet gently, asking for polite behavior and cool heads. He didn't raise his voice and his eyes didn't spark with anger. Even to young Tonina, it was clear he'd been called in to deliver this mild scolding because Lola was upset.

Mama and Papa sat across from Tonina, Papa on a rattan chair, and Mama on the companion footrest, in front of him, slightly lower, so that Tonina could see only the upper half of Papa's face. He had a closed expression on his face. Neutral. Mama sat with her head lowered, her body leaning forward slightly as she listened to Lolo.

The scolding finally over, Lolo sighed deeply. He glanced at his wife who sat with her arms still crossed over her chest. She nodded curtly to say that he had adequately represented whatever grievance she'd reported. Lolo stood slowly from his chair and straightened his frame. He walked out of the living room, down the shadowy hall to his bedroom, a small, dignified man even as he shuffled in his house slippers. Lola sat for a silent minute longer, finally able to lift her eyes and survey her family—her two sons, their wives, her granddaughter. She nodded again, this time more amiably, taking leave of their company. She straightened her skirt as she stood and followed her husband to their room.

It was hot. The gauzy curtains hung still in the windows. Tonina started kicking her feet, feeling her thighs sticking to the wood beneath. Sima took her on her lap to still her and then exclaimed, "*Ay, porbida! Basa!*" when she discovered Tonina's wet cloth diaper. It was just enough to relieve the tension in the room. Uncle Dido laughed suddenly, too loudly, and Mama came to take Tonina from Sima so they could change her diaper.

When Tonina was seven, Papa started taking the family to a beach along the sandy La Union coast on weekends. He borrowed Lolo's old, black Mercury, and piled them all in, just the four of them. By then, Martin was three, permanently part of the family, and yet constantly referred to as the baby. Uncle Dido and Tita Marie doted on him as though he was their own. Perhaps they thought their crowing and cooing over the youngest family member would divert attention from the fact that they remained childless themselves. Martin was a quiet baby, and then a compliant and good-natured toddler. With pride, Mama told strangers that he'd never passed through the terrible twos.

In Lolo's car, Martin sat with Mama in the back seat so he could take a nap whenever he felt sleepy. Tonina took the front passenger seat next to Papa. They left Lolo's house in the dark, even before dawn. They rolled the windows down halfway as they pulled out on to the street. Mama didn't like too much wind in her face, even though it would get hot along the unshaded drive to the beach. The trip took a very long time. The seats smelled of deeply imbedded mold and cigarette smoke. Tonina always sneezed several times in the first few minutes of a car ride. She liked sitting in front and watching the dashboard instruments, what Lolo called "concrete certainty of American modernity." There were dials and knobs and gauges, lines that quivered sensitively over a quasi-clockface of numbers. She recognized the gas gauge and checked it often.

"Be my navigator," Papa said in his teasing voice. He liked to break her out of her solemn reveries.

"That means guide," Mama explained from the back seat.

"Just drive straight," Tonina said gravely. "Follow the road." She gestured forward with her hands. The road lay wide and open before them. Not a single car marred the way. She didn't understand why



her parents laughed loudly, simultaneously. Papa released his right hand from the steering wheel to reach over and muss her hair. The sun was bright in her eyes. Even though she wasn't sleepy, she closed her eyes and rested her head against the car door. The tires hummed over the road. The wind whistled through the half-open windows. Martin yawned from the back. Once in a while, Papa chuckled to himself as he drove. In her mind's eye, Tonina saw her father at the wheel, his dark eyes alive with internal laughter, the dimple winking from his right cheek. His hands held the wheel in a loose, calm way and he drove with half attention to the road. His eyes darted to points of interest along the way—a young woman delicately balancing a woven tray of sweets on her head as she walked on the side of the road, two bicycles on their sides while their riders took a dip in a mud pond, a crude paper kite fluttering overhead. When Papa chuckled again, Tonina kept her eyes closed and murmured, "Just go straight." But she did not sleep. She was guiding Papa.

They stopped in a small town to use the "facilities," as Mama called the primitive toilet. Tonina held her breath at the communal trough where Mama pointed to an empty spot between two women. "Pull down your pants and panties and squat beside them, Nina. It's okay." Mama gave her a push when Tonina hesitated. Martin was done with his business and stood next to Mama, holding her skirt with his grubby hands. "Hurry up," Mama said crossly. "Then take Martin out so I can pee." Reluctantly, Tonina squatted next to the fat lady whose face was drenched with sweat. Great big drops of perspiration rolled down her face and neck and disappeared into the collar of her green dress. Tonina looked between her own ankles and watched the stream of urine pass. "Now shake!" Mama instructed. Already, she was pulling Tonina up so she could leave the crowded room with her brother. Tonina nearly slipped from the force of Mama's push, but instead, she bumped into the fat lady who happened to stand up at the same time she had. She walked out with the children. Tonina wondered why they didn't have to wash their hands here, away from home.

She waited with Martin under a mango tree a few meters from the road. She could see Papa standing by the car. The door on his side was open, and he had one foot up on the running board. He leaned forward, his elbow resting on his raised leg, his head tilted at a jaunty angle. Two women sharing a parasol had stopped in front of him to talk. He said something that made the shorter woman in a tight pink

skirt lean her head back and let out a throaty laugh. Papa smiled in his easy way, patting the top of the black car. Tonina thought maybe he was telling the women that the car was a 1949 Mercury coupe, 8-cylinder, still in great condition. "I like older songs and older cars," he was probably saying, "—and older women, too." Tonina had heard him say that many times. It always made Mama go quiet or say something quickly to change the topic.

Mama came out of the public toilet with a damp wash cloth. She wiped Tonina's hands, and then Martin's. She put a hand on each of their shoulders and shepherded them towards the car. Papa caught sight of them and nodded at the women who glanced quickly in their direction and bade him hurried farewells.

"We had to pee on the floor!" Martin crowed as he clambered into the back seat. Papa held the back of the driver seat forward so Mama could squeeze by.

"So did I," Papa laughed. "Well, actually, I went over there." He pointed towards a clump of bouganvillea shrubs near a huge, leafy narra.

"Who were those ladies, Papa? Do we know them?" Tonina asked. She could sense Mama bristling as she took Martin's shoes off so he could stretch his legs out on the seat.

"Nobody special, Nina, just some good time girls," Papa said in his sing-song teasing voice. "Just some good time girls," he said again.

Tonina pulled her door hard to shut it tightly. Mama had said to be careful or she might roll right out of the car and be left behind. Papa started the car up and slowly eased it on to the road. He passed the two women with the parasol. The one in the pink skirt raised her hand to wave as they went by. She had her other hand over her mouth, covering a wide smile which carried to her eyes. The wind had blown her hair out of its fashionable do.

Papa smoothed down his own hair and then flipped his hand out the window to wave goodbye to the women. "Some good time girls, good good times," he hummed under his breath softly so Mama would not hear. When Tonina looked into the rearview mirror, she saw Mama's mouth set in a firm, unhappy line. She turned her head and looked out the other window towards the vegetable fields, away from the women.

Tonina leaned against the door again and shut her eyes. The tires

beneath them sang softly on the road. Papa squinted towards the distant horizon, scanning for clouds and signs of rain. It was Saturday morning and Mama had said they had a three-day weekend.

She didn't mean to doze but when Papa pulled the car up on the pebbly drive to the cottage, the jostling motion of the vehicle shook Tonina awake. Papa was whistling a popular tune and singing the few words he knew. "Love me tender, love me sweet!" Tonina rubbed her eyes. Mama and Martin were asleep in the back, identically slack-jawed, their mouths slightly open.

Outside, the sun shone even more brightly than when they had stopped at the toilets. The sea spread before them, seriously deep and blue. The wide strip of sandy beach glinted invitingly, looking deceptively cool. The stretch was smooth gray, unmarked by foot prints. Tonina felt anxious to be out there in her swim suit. Papa had put food cans, emptied and washed carefully by Sima, into the trunk of the car. He had also borrowed Lolo's gardening trowels so Tonina and Martin could build sand castles.

Martin and Tonina burst out of the car on to the sand in front of their cabin. Mama looked rueful as Papa helped her unload their food and clothes from the car. "It's a good thing I brought the old pillows and sheets," Mama grouched. "This is no cottage! It's just a roof with four walls."

"What more do we need?" Papa laughed happily. Her mood couldn't touch him today. He tugged at the clip holding her hair up. The whole mass tumbled down about her shoulders and Tonina, struggling to reach the cans and trowels, saw how this simple change transformed her mother into a softer-looking young woman, prettier than the good time girls at the rest stop.

Before they were allowed to play on the beach, Tonina and Martin had to eat lunch. There were individual meals wrapped in banana leaves—rice still warm from Sima's early morning pot, rubbery fried eggs, and salted fish. Mama hung a bunch of bananas from a nail in the center post of the cottage. And she was right. The cottage was a large square of space shielded from the elements by four walls of dried leaf strips woven into tight sheets to keep the sand out. The roof was simple thatch and kept their cube of space fairly cool. There were no breezes at mid-day. A wooden platform had been built against the wall facing the door. It took up more than half of the room. Next to it was a small table. Mama piled their beddings on the platform while

Tonina laid out their food on the small table. While everyone else attacked their rice and fish, she played with hers, lifting the egg by its brown edges and pinching the crisp bits off. She had no appetite. Outside, the waves crashed and hissed against the shore, beckoning her.

As soon as they were released from the meal, brother and sister pulled on their swim clothes and raced to the sandy expanse a few meters from the door of the hut. They ran gingerly across the hot portions of sand and finally settled in the meager shade of several coconut trees. Small flies darted up at them but they paid no mind, eager to build castles and dig deep holes that would fill in again at high tide. In a few minutes, Mama came out with towels and the bottle of baby oil. "This will keep your skin from peeling," she said, impatiently motioning for Martin to submit to her oily hands. She rubbed him until he shone like varnished wood.

"No!" Tonina begged. "It will make the sand stick to me. I'd rather peel!"

But Mama insisted without raising her voice, until Tonina yielded sulkily. Mama's hands were gentle, her motions rhythmic. Tonina resumed digging the hole in front of her. Uncle Dido had told her if she dug hard enough, she would reach the children from China and they could all play together on the beach. Papa dragged two of the bamboo stools from the hut out to the lengthening patch of shade. Without speaking, he offered one to Mama. They sat amiably, side by side, watching the waves. The two ladies with the parasol receded from memory.

Later, just as the sun started its desultory descent, before complete darkness took over, the four of them walked far down the beach, away from their simple cottage. "This is the good thing about the beach," Papa observed. "You can only walk in two directions, so you won't get lost."

"Just go straight," Mama said playfully and tweaked Tonina's ear playfully.

Tonina wrested her hands from Mama's and Martin's clutches and stopped to watch tiny crabs scuttle towards their round holes in the wet sand. How did they know which hole to go into? Did they have tiny signs telling them which was their home? Did they have minute crab villages underneath the sand that led to China? Her toes sunk into the sand a little bit, the water sucking at them and leaving a

blurry cast of her feet when she pulled away. The family had walked a few steps ahead without her, Papa holding Mama's hand, and Mama holding Martin. Tonina sat on the wet sand and watched them, knowing they were confident she would follow in her own time. She saw the trail of their footprints like paths being branded on the grey sand. Three sets of prints moving forward, the tail-ends disappearing as the waves ate away their marks. A strong wind played up from the water, cooling her sun-hot skin. In all her short life, she had never been happier.

## Mrs. Medea, and Her Defeat to Total the Wise and Ato the Great

 Joshua Lim So

Friday, Flag Ceremony day, and how could I not be dizzy from sing-songing the National Anthem when the brute of a sun felt like it reached down to arm lock my head, and it just won't stop squeeze squeeze squeezing my face. Nobody was whispering to me from the other line—except I could hear Miles trying to catch Laylay's attention by singing "*Bayang tigulang, may bukol sa agtang, kinsa'y ni sumbag, si Dionisio pangag*"—which meant Total was late again, but I knew he was probably slinking around the bushes, waiting for the right opportunity to sneak into the formation to avoid the much feared late mark. Wise Total. Always the man with the plan. I wished I had a plan.

I remember the day we were done with Grade-II, and the heat hadn't been all that different. The third graders were all lined up on the platform, and I just knew they were trying oh so badly to control jumping for joy and singing praises to the King of Kings because Mrs. Medea, who stood at the other end of the line, was ready to snap anyone's neck if they misbehaved. Mrs. Medea was the Civics teacher, and of course everybody knew her, including the big people in high school. She was the most terror of all terror teachers who everybody dreaded to go through. Everything about her was scary: her forever squinting bulging eyes, as if her eyelids could hardly contain those eyeballs; her thin, black eyebrows that seemed drawn on her face with pentel pen; even the big, black mole above her lip had its own personality; and the way she always wore very white makeup and big jewelry, like several gold bracelets on her arms, and big gold earrings, and how it made her look like some Incan Queen Total showed me once in the library. Maybe she wanted to look that way given that the Incans were a cruel, human heart-eating people. Or was it Aztec? I forget. But the thing that really got me was that, underneath her pink and flowery teacher's uniform, Mrs. Medea had these huge *tutuy*. Big as big gets. They were bigger and hung lower than any woman I had

ever seen, even Mama's. You had to be blind not to notice it, really. I mean, she could swing them up behind her back. Maybe. I don't know how they work. Some of the students started calling her *Tutuy Mole-a* (Har har), but it didn't really catch on. It wasn't any good anyway, and her scariness was always priority number one, so Mrs. Medea suited her fine, like her name was already made for the history books. When Director Dionisio had handed out the rolled-up bond paper with a red ribbon wound around it, even if the bond paper was as plain and as white as our school walls, the smile the going-uppers gave when it touched their hands, *bai*, I tell you, it was like they've been given a lifetime unlimited card at Net Gamers. Most horrible of all, the saddest part of that day was reserved for us. After summer, we were next. I'm not sure, but I think I even heard the fourth-graders-to-be laughing at us. No *awa-awa*. Why should they? They went through the same horror everybody went through for probably thousands of years, so it serves us right we should too. And it's not like we could have done anything about it. Like transfer? Good luck with all our Papas and Mamas. Even Totel couldn't cook up a plan. We all had to follow the rules written on some rock like the Ten Commandments or else they would have called us *bugò* and our parents would've ask the janitor to throw us inside this huge concrete dumpster at the back of the school where they burn garbage and stuff. So no. No escaping her. Ever. The school said Mrs. Medea taught Grade-III Civics, and everybody has to go through Grade-III *and* Civics. Everybody.

Ms. Nilda became our class advisor for Grade-III Orchid, and you couldn't imagine what a relief that was, although I'm sure poor, poor Santan Class couldn't sleep for so many nights when they had found out who their advisor was going to be. Ms. Nilda was a very nice woman who taught English Language and Reading. She has a soft voice, and that's how I would describe her too: soft, with the addition of sweet. Like cotton candy, maybe. The first lesson she taught us was why teachers were our second parents, and she described it so nicely: when our Mamas and Papas dropped us off, the teachers were the ones who'd guide us, take care of us, teach us, and so and so. Mrs. Medea was probably the world's worst second parent. On our first day, she came to class with her class record and a big metal ruler, and she stood in front of everyone for several minutes and just stared at us with her bulging eyes squinting like she was picking someone to



grab by the neck and kill kill kill. She didn't even bother to know our names, unlike Ms. Nilda. But that was the Mrs. Medea we've always heard about. She seldom smiled or laughed, except maybe this one time when Dan-dan fell off his chair and hit his face against the steel dustpan and he was bleeding all over the place as he was rushed to the clinic, and when I looked up I saw her smile, which was more of a frown, showing only her small, short teeth, so I'm not exactly sure what she was really expressing. And did I tell you most of the period was spent in complete silence as she'd copy our textbook on the blackboard? It's what Totel called a textbook case of "No sense nonsense", and he just loved the way that sounds. I mean, couldn't she just let us read the book? Sometimes she'd clean the blackboard two or three times because there was so much to write, covering her with chalk dust like she just came out of those American film winter storms. My best friend Totel and I usually raced who could copy everything first. Just for fun. He usually won.

And every Friday, Mrs. Medea gave quizzes that were harder than Math:

Who discovered what?

Who killed who?

When and where was who born?

How were we supposed to memorize all those things she wrote on the blackboard? But recitations was even worse, I tell you. She would shout the question in class and wait for someone to raise their hand. Of course, no one ever did. We would all stare at the red, always freshly waxed, floor. So she'd open her class record and call a name. It was one of those most terrifying moments in our lives. If we got the answers wrong, she'd ask us to come up front and we'd get slapped with her cold and hard metal ruler; her big arm would come swinging with so much might with each *WAPAK!* I poured all my heart and prayers in memorizing everything in my Civics class, which was why I was *bugò* in Math. Even those snooty, snotty smart kids who never ever lent me  $\frac{1}{4}$  pad paper or let me borrow a number 2 pencil became *bugò* at something when they had to have Mrs. Medea for Grade-III Civics. She was that awful, so it wasn't all that unbelievable when we found out it was from recitations that got Bibi eaten. I didn't know anything about it until Totel told me the news the day after it happened. We were inside the canteen when Totel grabbed me so hard by the sleeve my face almost slammed against



my plate of spaghetti. Mrs. Medea wasn't far from us. She had been eating three red as red can be hotdogs on a stick and was using a lot of ketchup. There was ketchup all over her mouth, and that made her look like she just ate a live baby. No one dared to sit near her.

"They say she was sexy before," Totel had whispered, his breath always smelling like corn chips. "Then slowly she turned into the monster teaching Civics."

"You're such a liar. Mrs. Medea can't ever be sexy."

Sexy was a word I picked up from Totel. Totel said sexy was a better word than beautiful or *nindut*.

He went about checking if Mrs. Medea was looking at us. And then he emptied a bag of Chippy in his mouth, wiped his hands on his skirt, leaned toward me, and whispered, "She ate Bibi."

"Unsa?"

"You know Bibi, from next door. Grade-III Santan? The one who disappeared yesterday? Everybody in school is talking about it. I asked my father why he disappeared and Papa said Bibi went to the Guidance Council Office and his mother came by to drop Bibi out of Central High. But I knew it wasn't true." Totel raised his head to check again, and had said: "Mrs. Medea ate Bibi because he couldn't get the answer right."

I remember all her bracelets shimmering like they had some flare power as she raised her hand to slowly finish her coke.

"Mrs. Medea can't eat children," I had said, still looking. "The police would put her in jail."

"Are you *bugò*? The police can't do anything. With a person like that, no one can stop her."

And it seemed so true that Mrs. Medea would eat people our size. Well, at least one. Bibi was the skinniest and the most *bugò* person I've ever met. When Mrs. Medea asked Bibi who killed Ferdinand Magellan, Bibi answered Ferdinand Marcos. WAPAK! She asked him again. Bibi was crying when he answered Erap Estrada. WAPAK! The Aetas! WAPAPAPAK! And it was said that when Mrs. Medea asked Bibi one more time, Gumbay jumped up from his seat with his lunchbox, screaming because it got all wet. Bibi had peed in his shorts. Before Mrs. Medea could do anything, the bell rang for lunch and Civics was over. Everyone ran out, not because they didn't want

to run out of cheese waffles, but they just wanted out of there. No one even seemed to care why Mrs. Medea asked Bibi to stay. When they came back for Ms. Nilda's Reading class, Bibi was nowhere to be seen. According to Totel, Ms. Nilda was preparing for Speechfest. The entire Santan class was rehearsing "In the beginning, there was nothing. There was only God! And the vast space..." and afterwards, Millie's performance of "Alms, alms, alms. Spare me a piece of bread. Spare me your—" when Millie stopped short of "mercy" and the entire Santan class went quiet. Totel said Mrs. Medea entered the classroom, wiping her mouth with her sleeve. Mrs. Medea and Ms. Nilda went to talk outside and then Mrs. Medea left. They never saw Bibi ever again.

And I asked, "His parents didn't even do anything about it?"

And Totel said, "They can't do anything, Ato! Mrs. Medea is here to stay, teaching Civics forever. And no one can do anything about that. She's like—like Satan!"

"If she's Satan then Jesus can beat her up," I had said proudly. "Mama said if I ever saw monsters or demons I'd just have to say *"In Jesus' name, I rebuke you Satan!"* and He'll make them disappear."

And Totel had said, "Well I sure hope Jesus does something before Mr. Medea gets to us." This time, Totel was emptying a big bag of Snaku. There was what looked like green glue all over his teeth.

I wouldn't have believed Totel unless he was my best friend, and he became my best friend because he was the smartest kid I know, but not the *hambugiro*, *siponun* type. We've been best friends since kindergarten, but he was called Tina back then. His father was Edgar, the school janitor. A kind man, and seemed more like a Lolo than a father. Don't you have any male friends? Mama had asked me one time. I told her Totel was what my classmates called a tomboy, which was close enough. He's really dark and his hair was always cut like a coconut scrub. After school, Totel would spend a lot of time in the library after he had spent time with me because he still had to wait for his father to finish cleaning the bathrooms. I also liked him because he always had interesting stories to tell from history books, like all these great heroes and civilizations, wars and conquests. He even got his nickname from this person called Aristotle. Totel said Aristotle was the smartest man who ever lived and he even taught Alexander the Great. I told him Alexander must have been that amazing to have *The Great* for a last name, and that got him rolling on the floor, laughing.

Stupid me. Everyone called me Ato, and it's not as special as Totel, but it suited me fine.

"*Bai*, look. She's leaving."

She had just finished eating her last hotdog. Mrs. Medea stood up and her *tutuy* jiggled. Totel told me her *tutuy* could transform into two snakelike bloodsucking devices that drilled holes in my neck and suck me dry before she'd eat me. For better digestion, he said. I didn't bother to ask him where he got that from. As Mrs. Medea wiped her mouth, she hadn't noticed how everyone in the canteen was staring at her. When she left, the whole place grew noisy again.

The news of Bibi being gobbled up spread everywhere. Stories started popping up from every grade. There was one about Mrs. Medea being a special kind of Super *Manananggal* or a Mega Witch because she ate fully grown children instead of babies inside pregnant mamas.

But one time, when the library closed early to reorganize books and Totel had to wait for his father in the faculty room, he accidentally overheard other teachers talking about Mrs. Medea: how she was married before, but her husband left her for an Ilokana because Mrs. Medea couldn't get pregnant, and that's why she still wears the same giant pieces of jewelry he gave her on their wedding day, hoping someday her husband would leave the girl and come home. They said her husband now lives in Cagayan de Oro and had lots of children with the Ilokana, and Mrs. Medea now lives behind Agdao Market.

Sometimes, on weekends, I would invite Totel to come over our house to tutor me in Civics.

Who was born on when?

Who did what?

Who was who?

But most of the time, we talked about Mrs. Medea over basketball.

"Maybe that's why she wants to eat us." Totel stole the ball from me and made a shot. "She wants her husband back."

"That doesn't make sense." I took a shot and the ball bounced against the board.

"What else is there?" Totel made another shot.

"I mean, Mrs. Medea could be a Super *Manananggal* for all we

know." I took another shot and it hit our trashcans.

"You're so stupid, Ato uy! Everyone knows that those are just make-believe. What is amazing is her *tutuy*." Totel tried a slam-dunk but he could only reach half the height of the ring. The ball went through the basket anyway. "That proves that there are only monsters with *tutuy* so big and droopy, it's used to suck your flesh and blood." And he laughed. "Proof? Well, how about all the jewelry? Years living near Agdao and still she never got robbed? Ha?"

We sat by the road, sweating and panting, and I felt what seemed like drums beating behind my ears. Totel was wearing a pink Sailor Moon shirt with matching pink shorts. He had his legs wrapped around the basketball. "We'll just have to find a way to finish Grade-III without getting eaten."

Totel stood up and started dribbling the ball. I didn't know how to do that that well. At that time, all I could do was bounce it a couple of times before it rolled away.

Someone flicked my ear. I turned around and saw Totel standing in line with the girls. The man with the plan is always the man. He still had leaves in his hair, and despite the heat, he was totally cool and fresh, as if his skin just deflected sun rays. He asked me if I saw Mrs. Medea and I said I didn't see her either. He said it's impossible not to see her. I said I guess she doesn't attend Flag Ceremonies that much.

"That's because she hates prayer," Totel said.

Director Dionisio climbed up the platform with Ms. Noyel the librarian behind her. Ms. Noyel was very thin and yet she was carrying an awful lot of books. She kept balancing the weight from one thin arm to another. Director Dionisio started talking about the newly donated books. I didn't understand much of it because she spoke like her tongue was sticking out of her mouth, and I was a couple of minutes away from passing out. Director Dionisio was so old looking I had always thought she would collapse to her death at any moment. Ms. Noyel handed her *The Human Body* book, and Director Dionisio flipped through the pages and showed some pictures, saying something like "*Thlu tha wanderphul vook donathions op tha Ocampho phamile*," while we looked.

"I wonder which part Mrs. Medea eats first," I whispered to Totel

as Director Dionisio went on.

"Probably the hands," Totel began, "remember Bibi and how Mrs. Medea slapped his hand? My Mama does that to pork cubes before she marinates it. It's called *tenderizing*."

"How would your Mama know?"

"*Amao!* She sells barbeque, remember? I once brought you some—"

Ms. Nilda turned around and made a frowning face at us. It made me like her even more. I wonder why horrible people like Mrs. Medea couldn't just be like Ms. Nilda. Ms. Nilda always got lots of flowers and thank you notes from her students on Teacher's Day while Mrs. Medea's faculty room table remained plain and empty. Wouldn't she want flowers, too? When Ms. Nilda's birthday came up, we all begged her to give us an early recess so we could go out to the canteen and eat cheese waffles with her. We didn't even know when Mrs. Medea's birthday was. Of course, everybody would rather jump into the school dumpster than ask her. But wouldn't she like it to have someone know her birthday, too?

And then everyone started laughing. Director Dionisio had accidentally turned to a page showing a picture of one big braless *tutuy*. Director Dionisio quickly closed the book. Director Dionisio got mad and scolded us before asking Pastor Darwin to come up for closing prayer.

Grade-III Orchid was a colorful room. Cartolinas cut and pasted all around, spelling out bible verses and school subjects. Ms. Nilda came in. We all stood up, greeted her: "Good morning, Miss Nildaaaaaaaaaaaaa!" Our lesson for the day was past, present, and future tense. The whole time, the *tutuy* I saw doubled and got pasted on Ms. Nilda's chest.

Totel disappeared around lunchtime. It was very hot and noisy in the canteen. After I finally elbowed my way to the counter and got my spaghetti, I looked for a seat only to find Totel all alone, eating a bag of Nutristars and three small packs of Orange.

"I have something for you." Now he had these gummy candies and crushed chips stuck in his teeth.

Totel took a piece of paper from his skirt and unfolded it.

I couldn't believe my eyes even if my eyes could speak.

"My Orange!" Totel wiped off the spaghetti sauce I spilled on his

candies.

"*Amao!* Why did you—" But he didn't seem to mind. Totel just folded the picture and slid it on the table toward me, and went on eating. So I said, No Totel! I don't want it! I didn't tell you to get the picture! You take that back!

"Don't worry about it." Totel said, finishing his Orange and stars. "Nobody reads those books anyway."

I didn't want anybody to see the picture, so I took it and hid it under the table. It was the same *tutuy*. It had words and arrows around it, but I didn't mind. It looked strange up close. I remember thinking it had the soft round thing like mine (nipple, the arrow said), only it was darker and bigger, and the nipple dot much pointed. The *tutuy* was big, or maybe because it was just up close. Mama's was smaller. I imagined Mrs. Medea's would be even bigger, and have sharp neck-drilling teeth.

The bell rang. Totel left early because he had to go to the CR. Other students were still screaming their throats off and running around the field, but Orchid class was completely quiet, and everyone (except Totel) was in their seats, flipping through their notebooks and studying for the quiz. When Totel finally arrived, he smelled really bad. He put toilet water on his skirt and sleeves again. Totel started doing that ever since Bibi got eaten. He said it was to hide his child smell so Mrs. Medea wouldn't eat him. Totel read that some animals do this to fool their predators. I used to do it until Papa whipped me with *walis tingting*.

Now, we could always tell when she's near. Those in the corridors would freeze in their positions and stare at the same direction, and they'd run and hide in their classrooms. Faintly, the clack-clack-clacks would reach our ears. Every leg in class would begin to shake. The tables would tremble. Totel started smelling himself. I even thought I saw hundreds of birds fly fly flying away from her direction. I always knew when she was standing by the door, but I never glanced her way. I could see everybody sitting up straight and lowering their heads. Her shoes would go clack-clack-clack again as she walked up to her desk. We all stood up and said: "G-g-g-ooooood mu-morning Mrs. Muh-muh-dede-eeeeaaa..." Her face with her frown, and even her mole seemed unhappy too. How could anyone look like that day and night?

Mrs. Medea placed her metal ruler on the table and sat down. Her

chair groaned. She opened her class record and her tongue came out, swirling around her lips, and then she opened her mouth and started licking her tiny teeth.

"She's picking someone... just like from a menu." Totel whispered.

Mrs. Medea placed the class record on the table. "Before anything else, I want you all—" she paused, and her eyes darted angrily at us. "I want you all to place your bags on top of your table." Mrs. Medea took her metal ruler and stood up. She started going around the room, walking in between the rows, tapping the ruler on her palm. "Miss Noyel reported to Director Dionisio just over an hour ago that someone stole a school library property. Worse of all—" she wiped her pentel pen brow, and I had this horrible fear it would come off—"it contains a picture of a private part... a page torn off from the brand new *The Human Body* book."

Totel gripped my hand. Images of the *tutuy* on Mrs. Medea flew and hit my face.

"Didn't you hear me? I said place your bags on top of your tables!" And she lifted the bag that was nearest to her—it was Laylay's—and slammed it on top of his table. Laylay jumped up from his seat in fright, and I got scared that he might pee in his shorts too. As I lifted my stroller, I glared at Totel with burning eyes.

"*Yawa yawa yawa!* I knew this was going to happen!"

"Hide it! Hide it!"

"Where? Where?"

"I don't know! Oh, she will—"

I just wanted to punch him and grab his eyeballs out, I tell you. So much for the man with the plan, *inatay*.

"Open your bag!" Mrs. Medea ordered Em-em from Row-I. She searched the bag and removed everything. She even flipped through his books. She grabbed his collar and made him stand up straighter, and she shoved her hands in his pocket just to make sure. I didn't even rip the picture off. It was all Totel's fault. I wasn't going to let myself get gobbled up for something I didn't do. I took the picture and placed it in his lap. He didn't even notice it. He was busy keeping an eye on Mrs. Medea. I couldn't bear to look.

A deep, dark and loud voice asked me out of nowhere, "What are you doing?"



I slowly opened my eyes and saw Mrs. Medea standing right in front of me. She was wondering why I had closed my eyes and covered my ears. I wanted to run, but I was trapped. Mrs. Medea started sniffing, and her face turned sour. She leaned down toward Totel and began smelling him. Mrs. Medea noticed the torn page in his lap, and she looked at Totel again. Totel almost had this proud smile on his face, thinking his bad-smelling plan was working. She took the picture. I turned away and heard him gasp, but he never said a word. The chair screeched so badly I thought I heard the monkey-eating eagles we saw in the zoo once. Mrs. Medea had pulled Totel up by the arm and dragged him to the front.

"What are you doing with this?" Mrs. Medea slapped Totel across the face with the page, her bracelets jingling. "Only *igat* girls do this! Are you a slut? Are you a *buring*?" I could almost hear her grinding her small teeth.

Totel turned white. He closed his eyes, bit his lip and shook his head. Mrs. Medea grabbed her metal ruler.

"Open your hands!"

Mrs. Medea smacked him with the picture again. And again. And again. And again. His mouth began to shake. His eyes too. And all the evil things Mrs. Medea did to us and the others before us came back to me. *Copy! Exam! Recite! WAPAPAPAK! Do what I tell! I am Mrs. Medea! Fear me! Mwahahahaha!* Totel was about to crumble, and I saw Bibi trying to get out of her gigantic stomach, begging me to rescue him before what Totel called the *gastric juices* melts him completely away.

"Open them, you godforsaken tomboy!"

"IN THE NAME OF JESUS, I REBUKE YOU SATAN!"

There are some instances where you'd feel like God had slowed everything down to a jelly. My Lola makes jelly all the time. Hot, it was runny as water, but as it slowly cooled, it moved less and less until all it could do was jiggle. I was completely amazed. I kept asking Lola to melt the jelly again so I could watch it go through all that. Very weird. And just like that, from my standing up to my teacher and blasting those words off my mouth, I tell you, *bai*, everything sloooooooooowed down as everyone turned towaaaaaaaaard me, opeeeeeeeeeened their mouths, and gaaaaaaaaasped.

And silence.



And I heard my stomach hit the floor.

Mrs. Medea turned toward me, the last one to do so, probably. I couldn't move. I couldn't even put my finger down from pointing at her. I was so sure I was going to wet myself.

"*Unsa?*"

I was done for, I thought, because clearly even Jesus couldn't destroy her. So, if I was going to die, I might as well die like those heroes Totel always talked about, like Alexander the Great, who stood up against kingdoms bigger than his, and whose conquests are remembered to this day, and after I thought about this, the jelly got heated up again.

"You're just like that because your husband left you because you couldn't get pregnant and he moved to Cagayan de Oro with an Ilokana and you have to move to Agdao Market hating all children and wanting to eat us all with your bloodsucking killer *tutuy* you monster!"

She didn't move. I, on the other hand, jiggled with anger and fear and hate all mixed up, but I would not let my eyes look at anything or anyone else except her. And despite all the white makeup, her face, which I never thought would show any other color, turned red. And with all her weight, she stormed toward me. I knew I was going to die. She was going to wrap her hands around my arm, let loose her snake like *tutuy* and suck me dry, and then she'd eat me right in front of everyone. I didn't have a plan, but at least I was going to die like a man. Ha! But I was sure scared, I tell you. I mean, of course I couldn't fight her off, so I started thinking of wonderful thoughts, but nothing came to mind except Civics lessons:

The first race to come to the Philippines was the Aetas.

The EDSA Revolution overthrew Ferdinand Marcos in February 1986.

The Philippines became a colony of Spain, United States of America and Japan.

Magellan landed on March 16, 1521 in Homonhon Island.

Lapu-Lapu killed Ferdinand Magellan.

Lapu-Lapu killed Ferdinand Magellan.

Lapu-Lapu is not our national fish.

She stopped short. I opened my eyes, and Totel was right in front of me. Mrs. Medea lifted her ruler, and Totel did something I never thought anyone could do: he snatched the metal ruler from her. It happened so quickly. Even Mrs. Medea was stunned. Some classmate in some corner started crying.

"Mrs. Medea! Don't get mad, think things over first. We are all thinking people here—" I don't know what came over Totel, talking to her like that. Then again, I didn't know what came over me too.

*"Pisting Yawa!"* she screamed. *"You're all bastards! Mga walay batasan!"* And she grabbed a clump of hair beside Totel's left ear and pulled it so hard his head turned red. In fact, his neck began to drip red too.

It took some time to figure it out, seeing Totel fall to the ground, his hand covering his left ear. He was bleeding, but he just lay there, and it was odd that his face didn't give any sign of pain. It was like he became a statue, and so did Mrs. Medea. I guess that was the first and only time I saw that expression from her: she seemed so scared.

I spent the rest of the day with Totel in the clinic. Nurse Ging splashed something on his wound and it sizzled like pouring Sprite. Totel shook and bit his lip so hard it turned white. Totel appeared so strange without a clump of hair beside his ear, but he never cried.

"I knew there was something wrong with that woman," Nurse Ging said. "Ever since she lost all her children in a fire. You know that? She had to move and now lives behind Agdao. I was here when it happened. She suddenly stopped talking to everyone, and everyone stopped talking to her."

"That's not true. Mrs. Prador and Sir Malona said her husband left her—" Totel squirmed and his face went all funny as Nurse Ging dabbed brownish-red liquid this time.

"Did they? I don't think that's true. Not from what I heard."

"How about her husband?" I asked.

"Husband? I'm not sure if he died in the fire too. I think I've actually never heard of a husband."

Totel and I looked at each other, our brows in knots.

Everybody greeted us as soon as we emerged from the clinic. Even the big people of high school knew what Totel and I did. They were saying "*Kuyawa ninyo uy!*" or "*Isuga ninyo uy!*" We became like stars who happened to go to this school: Totel the Wise and Ato the Great. And we earned it, by the way. No one has ever stood up against Mrs. Medea until we came into the picture. Now they know she wasn't such an invincible child-eating demon. Totel didn't mind all the attention. He even showed off the bandage beside his ear. Everyone started coming up to us in the canteen, asking us what had happened and what it felt like. We said we weren't sorry for what we did and that she deserved it and that she had it coming *ha!*

"I wonder where Mrs. Medea went," I asked Totel that afternoon. Almost everybody had gone home, and we were on the lobby steps.

"She's probably going to get kicked out," Totel said. "Papa was so angry, I heard him screaming at Mrs. Medea inside Director Dionisio's office. I don't know where she went after that. Mang Jack said she just left like nothing happened, carrying her bag and her notebooks and all when she went home."

"Weird," I told Totel. "I wonder what really happened to her before."

Totel didn't say anything. I wasn't sure if he didn't hear me or if he thought all of that didn't matter anymore now that she's gone. We didn't talk much after that. I didn't even apologize for giving him away to Mrs. Medea. He didn't even bring it up, or seemed bothered by it, though I am unsure now if he knew what exactly had happened. We just sat there by the steps, just like always. Mama and Papa were always late, and Totel usually kept me company with his history stories, or, if he ran out of things to talk about, we would invent stories why my Mama and Papa were late yet again: their car, zooming across war torn Belgium circa Napoleonic Wars, unloading machine guns out their windows for the French. But this time, we just kept quiet, just kept shifting our arms and legs from time to time. Around an hour later, I saw our car park right outside the school gate. I said goodbye to Totel and told him I'd see him tomorrow.

I sat in the back. Papa was driving, and Mama was beside him. Mama asked me how my day was. I said it was fine. She said I don't look so happy about it, but I was really happy about it. Really.

"Do you want to eat?" Mama turned to me and smiled. She had sunglasses on, even though the sun had finally almost disappeared.

Her big earrings twinkled still. I said no.

Not far from the school there was an eatery called Pepeng's that was built like the *bahay kubo* drawing in our Civics book. Mama asked Papa to stop the car.

"You want to eat here?" Papa asked.

"Of course not." Mama said. She lowered her sunglasses and was staring at something. "Antonio, doesn't she teach in your school?"

I sat up and saw Mrs. Medea standing outside the eatery, finishing her grilled hotdog. She was reading the sign beside her: *Serving Old Favorites Over 10 Years*.

"Let's ask her if she needs a ride," and Mama rolled down the window. I jumped up and tried to pull the window back up. Papa said it was embarrassing to ask teachers a lift with our rundown, sputtering car and I said That's right!, but she wouldn't listen. She always did this every chance she got, even with Director Dionisio. Mama said it was the Christian thing to do.

"Antonio, be quiet." Mama said. "I want to offer your good teacher a ride. *Ayaw samok*."

It was happening all over again, but I didn't have Totel, and I didn't know how to escape from the car. I couldn't jump out.

Mama kept calling *Miss! Miss!* Mrs. Medea saw Mama and gulped down what she was chewing. She kept pointing at herself, as if she wasn't sure if she's the one Mama was referring to. She drew closer.

"Do you teach in Central High?" Mama asked.

"Yes, Ma'am—"

"I'm Helena Bustamante, and this is my husband..." I hid from her view but Mama made me sit up. "And this is my son Antonio." I sank back so hard I wished the back seat could swallow me to the trunk. Mrs. Medea was going to tell them what I did and Papa will be whip whip whipping me with the belt buckle end again.

But all she said was, "*Maayong hapon*."

And Mama asked, "Can we give you a lift?"

Papa gave a loud sigh. Mrs. Medea politely said no. She said she'd rather ride a jeepney and not bother us. Mama insisted. Mama said it was no problem. Papa sighed again. Mrs. Medea was never polite. Mama was always making efforts like this. Mama just won't stop.

"Where do you live?" Mama asked.

And Mrs. Medea said, "Just around Agdao, but there is no need—"

Papa glared at Mama and Mama just raised her eyebrows like a flag being lifted up a pole, and she smiled at Papa.

"Get in, get in. It's on our way. We'll drop you off," Mama said.

Mrs. Medea searched behind Mama and Papa, and our eyes met, and I felt like I couldn't place myself, like I was in a different world. You see, the squinting was absent, as if she wore a different set of eyeballs when she got off school. Even her mole seemed like a welcome mark on her face.

"Get in!" Mama rolled up the window before Mrs. Medea could say anything.

I went about pretending to look out the window and observe, I don't know, electric poles? I heard her jewelry clinking and the backseat sank a little when she sat down. The right side of me got cold. Mama fussed over the radio and Papa flicked it off.

"Antonio, be respectful and greet," Mama asked for her name, "Mrs. Corazon Medea good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Medea" I said without looking. I never knew she had a first name. Corazon. Sounded nice enough. Papa sped on.

Mama asked, "What are you teaching again, Cory? May I call you Cory?"

"Grade-III Civics, Ma'am."

"Ay! So you're teaching Antonio here?"

"Yes. Third graders."

I could see Mama from the rearview mirror. She was grinning at me, her eyes hidden behind her big sunglasses. "And has he been a good boy?"

I turned to face Mrs. Medea, her big loop earrings swinging. She was already smiling at me, her small teeth showing.

"He's very popular with the ladies," Mrs. Medea said.

We dropped her off near Agdao market. She said thank you, but before she closed the door she turned toward me, her *tutuy* swaying slightly, and said, "See you in school, Ato."

Mrs. Medea never came back. Sir Ruiz, who had the same features as the Tabon man in our book, replaced her. He was okay. His voice was slow and deep and made us feel bored. There wasn't much to talk about him except his funny face and even funnier nose (Ilong Ranger we called him), but that's about it. While Mr. Ruiz taught us dates, events and people, I usually tried to imagine what had ever happened to Mrs. Medea. Maybe she's teaching in another school, making students there cry and wet their shorts, or maybe her husband came back and they had many children, and she wouldn't be so terrible and angry anymore. It's all a bit fuzzy, though, like how I couldn't get the drawing of my house right in Art class. What does keep coming back to me is what I could say is the clearest way I can imagine Mrs. Medea: the time I saw her last. Our car speeding away, Papa grumbling about the gas, Mama constantly tuning the radio, Papa slamming his fist on the steering wheel, Mama bursting into threats of car window breaking, and I turned my back on them and knelt on top of my seat because, for some odd reason, all I wanted to know was where she was. I tried looking for her through the rear window, and I looked and looked so hard but I could barely see her anymore. She was already walking away, toward the busy market. The further we went, the smaller she became, and I thought: it's not possible that I could miss her that easily when everything about her seemed so big, so epic, and when, just a few hours ago that day, everything about her felt so close.

## Policy

☀ Tim Tomlinson

Wally said Cliff started it. Cliff said, no, Wally started it. But under their mother's new policy, it didn't matter who started it. If she was disturbed while on the phone, they were both to blame.

"What did I tell you?" she said, entering Cliff's room first, her voice rising. "What did I tell you?"

She wore square-tipped red loafers and slid one off the left foot and gripped it at the toe.

"It wasn't me," Cliff said.

She said, "What did I tell you?" and started swinging.

The first blows glanced off Cliff's arms, which he'd raised over his head. The heel-box popped against his forearms like folded newspaper off the backside of a dog.

"But this time he really did it, Mom," Cliff explained.

"What did I tell you?" she repeated, correcting the angle of her swing, testing overhand instead of sidearm blows, and now instead of the leather glancing off shirt sleeves the heel dug in to flesh.

"Mom," Cliff screamed.

It was the fifth one that caught Cliff's elbow. They both heard the crack. For an instant they held each other's eyes in silence waiting for what that crack meant, then Cliff erupted.

"This is his fourth cast in three years," Dr. Holman said. He wrapped wet white gauze around Cliff's forearm, overlapping each swirl in a pattern that climbed gradually like color in a barber's pole. "What can you tell me about that?"

Cliff's mother had been crying. Now her face went from sorry to

something else.

"He's a boy," she said, blowing her nose.

"Oh," Dr. Holman said. "Is that it?"

Mrs. Marinello, the nurse, fed the dry powdery gauze into the water tray where it soaked until Dr. Holman pulled it around Cliff's arm. He had already used an entire roll that had started drying around Cliff's chest. It felt like it was folding Cliff's ribcage open like a book.

"And he's wild."

"I was wild, too," he said, looking up over his glasses. His walls were lined with the heads of animals he'd shot on trips to Africa. A gazelle, a lion, a buffalo. "Still am, I guess." A polished case with spotless glass windows was stocked with gleaming rifles. "Wild boys have strong bones."

"You never had a cast?" Cliff's mother said.

"Never had a cast," Dr. Holman said, holding up his arms as evidence. He wore a white shirt with short sleeves, a stethoscope tucked into the pocket. His arms were hairy. Wet white lines of plaster trickled down the wrists into the hair.

"Well," she said.

He said, "Wild boys cause trouble though, don't they, Mrs. Foote?"

Cliff's mother looked at him blankly.

"I mean they can be a load."

Above the refrigerator a white box that resembled a birdhouse had a sign that read, "Lollipops for Good Boys and Girls." Cliff pictured what color he'd get this time. Red. Yellow. Green. He wondered if wild boys got lollipops, too.

"I don't know what you're saying," she said.

"What I'm saying," Dr. Holman said. Then he stopped. The wet gauze was going over the elbow now. "That hurt, slugger?"

Cliff shook his head no.

He said, "No?"

"Not really," Cliff told him.

He arched his eyebrows, which were black and white over the black frames of his glasses. "Well it hurts me."



Cliff laughed. Around his eyes felt crusty from crying.

"It hurts me enough I'm gonna need a lollipop," he said. "That OK?"

"OK," Cliff said.

He said, "OK." He said, "Mrs. M, get us wild boys a pair of lollipops, would you? Make mine green. Yours?" he said to Cliff.

"Can I have yellow?"

"And yellow for the slugger."

Mrs. Marinello stood on a step-stool and pulled out the lollipops. She peeled the wrapper off the yellow.

"Say 'ah,'" she said.

And she slid the lollipop onto Cliff's tongue.

"Give him one for the road, too. A man needs one for the road, Clifford, don't you find that's true?"

Cliff smiled. "Two," he said.

He backed up a step. "Two indeed," he said. He looked at Mrs. Marinello. "You heard him."

"I don't know what you're saying," Cliff's mother repeated.

"What I'm saying, Mrs. Foote, is wild boys hate to see other wild boys get so many casts."

"How many is so many?"

"Put it this way," he said. The gauze began climbing Cliff's biceps, where it felt cold and wet and funny. "I haven't articulated an overarching policy, I take it case by case. And in this case, one more will be too many."

"Meaning?"

He kept wrapping. Inside the wet wrap, the gauze was tightening. Cliff's muscles felt bigger inside than they did in the air.

"Mrs. M," he said, "you finish him up, all-righty? And you," he said, winking at Cliff, "no cello for a week." He opened the door to his office between examination rooms. "Mrs. Foote," he said.

"What are we gonna tell your father about this?" Cliff's mother asked

him.

They were on the way home. It had turned dark. A driver in an oncoming car flashed his headlights to get Cliff's mother to turn hers on. She was sniffing into a crumpled tissue. A light mist dotted the windshield.

"About what?"

"About your arm, how it happened."

Cliff shrugged. "I don't know," Cliff said. "How did it happen?"

They approached the fork in the road. Route 25A, the short way, veered right and passed the Peerless Photo Products factory. North Country Road, the scenic way lined with undeveloped woods, veered left and passed Cliff's old kindergarten and the chapel. Cliff's mother always took the short, treeless way. His father always took the long.

"We have to tell him it was an accident," his mother said.

Cliff said, "That's not the truth."

She turned left.

"It's not exactly the truth," she said, "but it's not exactly a lie, either."

Cliff said, "How come you're going the long way?"

"Isn't this the way you like?" she said. "With all the trees."

Cliff said, "What trees?"

Back home she stirred Bosco into a glass of milk and placed a box of Mallomars on the counter. Cliff took the Bosco in his cast hand, which hung stiffly in front of his chest like a shelf. He proceeded to his room.

"You're not hungry?" his mother asked.

Cliff said he wasn't.

"Not even for a snack?"

Cliff said no.

She followed Cliff into his room and closed the door.

"It was an accident that your elbow broke, Clifford, you know that, right?"

"Stop calling me Clifford," he said.

"Cliff," she said, correcting herself. "But you know I didn't mean to do that, right?"

"Sure," Cliff said, "Fine."

"So can you forgive me?"

"Just leave me alone," Cliff said.

He sipped at the Bosco. He studied the spines of the books he'd borrowed from the library. How was he going to carry these now? He pictured the days or weeks it would take to forgive her. And during the time it took to forgive her, who else would he have?

"I'll come back in a few minutes," she said.

"It wasn't even my fault," he sputtered. "You wouldn't even listen."

"I know," she said, "I know, I know."

From the hallway, Wally shouted, "It wasn't my fault."

"You started it, you liar," Cliff shouted.

Wally said, "You started it."

Cliff's mother said, "Walter, go to your room and close the door."

"Or what?" Wally said. "You'll break my elbow, too?"

Cliff's mother flung open the door, and Wally stood his ground, without even flinching.

He said, "You're in there trying to make up a story, aren't you?"

She said, "Watch it, mister."

"No, you watch it," Wally said. He leaned around her in the doorway. "You tell the truth, Cliff, like they taught us. See how she likes it."

"Don't push your luck," she told him.

But Wally pushed it, and she didn't push back. He said he was telling the truth if nobody else was. "That's my policy."

"It's none of your business," she told him.

Wally said, "That could have been me, and if it was you wouldn't even care."

"What are you talking about?" she said. "Of course I'd care."

Wally said, "Tell it to Dad."

Cliff's father called home. He'd be working late.

Dinner was late, and it went by quietly, the television humming in the background. *Ozzie and Harriet*, the *Patty Duke Show*. Cliff stayed up later than he was allowed. He and Wally watched *Ben Casey*. "Man, woman, birth, death, infinity." Cliff didn't understand a word. Wally couldn't either, Cliff was certain, but he appeared to. He had that 5th grade thing about him.

*Ben Casey* was their mother's favorite show. Ben Casey was a sensitive doctor. He didn't condescend to uneducated patients, and he looked like the Italian boys from her old neighborhood. Ordinarily, she made sure Cliff and Wally were in bed before it started. Tonight she didn't watch. She sat at the kitchen counter, smoking by the window. Some of the smoke drifted out through the screen. Some hung below the ceiling. Cliff wondered if Ben Casey smoked. He wondered if Ben Casey fixed broken elbows. But this episode wasn't about broken elbows. It was about hospital policy, and how, in order to really help a patient, Ben Casey had to break hospital policy and make up his own.

In bed, Cliff lay on his back, the arm out stiff above him. It was hard to pull the covers up over his arm. It was hard to turn from side to side. The cast around his ribs felt heavy and hard. Like a shield. Like a suit of armor.

## The Owl and the Hoopoe

☀ Renz Christian Torres

It had been raining for days in the city of Doha.

The port city has had regular flooding ever since the Persian Gulf Tsunami of 1922, with the tides coming in as high as three sailboats, which dot Doha's briny coast, put together. It is fortunately a resilient city, although it does help to have a high budget for city reconstruction. The government has since redirected its programs to morphing the desert city into an amphibious metropolis, accommodating the rain water when it comes rather than having it flushed.

At night, despite the heavy mist that surrounds Doha's desert air, small lights still do glow sparsely across the skyline. One of these lights belonged to a rooftop cafe owned by Aling Dorita, who serves up a variety of delicious yet inexpensive cuisine, offering a small haven for expatriates that make up the majority of the capital's populace.

Hasna, Aling Dorita's stepdaughter, trudged outside to shut off the lighted sign of their little cafe. It was one of the little things she would do for the last time in Doha.

A camel, wrapped in threadbare scarves and golden trinkets, jingled as she stood up from her seat. "I hear you're off into a well-endowed future," the camel said to her.

She gave the young woman her payment for the chicken samosas. Hasna nodded, smiling shyly as she wiped the countertop. The camel lifted herself from the table, gave Hasna a little wave, and then disappeared.

Hasna shook her head as the overly-decorated spirit faded away. Spirits have been popping up regularly ever since the tides started to come in. But they've been quite benevolent. They've been coming in and going out like regular humans do, only in the skins of animals. Still, Hasna didn't want to believe in such near-impossible things, like seeing spirits; it was not part of her faith.

And yet, despite her adamancy, she *had to believe* they were real. The coins in her palm were real, rattling now in her grip, just like the camel she just served. She shrugged and went inside the shop.

"*Ibu, Aya...*," she spoke to the two pictures on the side table near the door. "I guess it is time I start packing up." Hasna released a great sigh as she entered the camel's payment into the cash register. She was to leave for medical school in Jakarta, her father's home city. She had passed all the entrance exams and was only spending the summer at the house of her stepmother.

Aling Dorita, the busy cook and captain of the Single Bite, the name of their rooftop cafe, yelled from the downstairs kitchen: "*Hija*, can you please take the plates down here? I need to wash them." A stack of greasy dishes were set up in a basket by the corner of the rooftop, and as Hasna reached out to take it, she remembered that the last customer didn't take her plate inside. So she braved the rain and went to where the camel had sat, which was at the farthest table, nearest the metal railings.

The young woman skipped across the wet concrete floor, which was painted coral, like a canyon, and went to where the table was. She took the plate and shielded her head from the rain with her free arm, quickly glimpsing the sparkling city below her. It was late at night but the lights, even in the rain, still buzzed like fireworks; it had been like that every night, for all pedestrians and spirits to see.

She remembered how her father would take her up on his shoulders to see more of the city lights—but also quickly remembered how little she knew of her mother before the bed and the medicine. Hasna remembered sitting there on the metal railings, clasping hands with both parents. Now she felt herself melding with the raindrops, and felt a tear shedding down her cold face. "How I wish I could say goodbye, one last time," she said.

"Seems you have a troubled soul now, dear."

Hasna turned to look for the source of the voice. By the railings, just beside her, was an owl. And a hoopoe. The hoopoe looked neat and crisp in his navy suit, his chest feathers held back by his stark white shirt. The owl had a necklace of pearls draped around her neck. She wore an olive-green bodice and a peach *hijab*, just like Hasna's, only more elaborately textured.

"I—I'm sorry," Hasna stuttered, "but we're closed for tonight."

She clung to the plate, which she clasped near her chest, and almost stained her apron. She quickly looked around for shelter and found it a few steps away under the canopy of a juniper tree growing at the side of the building.

The hoopoe gazed into the distance, smoking a cigarette. "Oh, we're not here for the food," he said. He closed a tin of spearmint gum, a makeshift case for his cigarettes. "We just happen to know how you can say goodbye, one last time."

Hasna's eyes widened, then she gulped. Her heart was pounding. Her grip on the plate grew tighter. "There is no way you can talk to the dead," she said. "And if you do, you never come back..."

She paused, thinking of how happy she *should* be, now that her mother and her father are in Paradise—*Jannah*—and how well-provided they are in the Garden.

The owl flicked the hoopoe's lit cigarette into the dark street below. "We're only trying to help, dear," the owl said. "If you do want to see them again, go to the top of the spiral minaret."

Hasna looked far into the foggy cityscape, and could barely see the top of the Kassem Darwish Fakhroo, where her father used to pray. "Are you mad?" Hasna barked at the spirits. "Going out into this rain is suicide."

The hoopoe leaned back at the railings. The owl preened at her green dress.

"Well, they will be waiting for you there, either way," the hoopoe informed her.

"And you only have until midnight," the owl added.

"Good luck," the spirits said in tandem, and then faded away into the misty air.

Hasna let out the heaviest of breaths. She ran inside, all wet, and sat down on the straw lounge in the living room.

"Hasna, can you *please* bring them down now?" Aling Dorita was still asking, still waiting for the girl to finish her chores. It was the end of evening, and Aling Dorita wanted resolution for the day.

But the only thing that didn't seem to get resolved was the stirring in Hasna's gut. The young woman tried not to think about the spirits' offer. She was shaking while she sliced the pomegranates for tomorrow's salad. She didn't think at all of the Greek crocodiles

who usually ordered it for their regular Friday nights out. Each slice she made with the knife was paired with hard exhalation. Four pomegranates in, and she tossed her knife in complete depression. She rubbed her forehead and took a glass of water to her room.

Her bedroom was a converted attic covered in lights and tiny mirrors. It held her tiny boating trophies, as well as her mother's. Her mother was an expert navigator back when she was still young, and coasting the Javan Sea in her myriad of boats. In her room, Hasna was surrounded by mementos of her parents. She sat down on her bed feeling defeated.

A drip of rain fell from the ceiling and into her glass of water. She looked up, and she saw the canoe her mother once used to catch fish back in the old country. Hasna and her father had used it to cover the gaping hole in the attic's ceiling. This was before Aling Dorita met her father, and before Hasna was to call it her bedroom.

All of a sudden, a strange determination replaced the churning in Hasna's stomach. She rushed two floors down, to Aling Dorita, and found her simmering a pot of pork stew.

"Mom?"

"Yes, *hija*?" Aling Dorita answered, while removing wilted leaves of Chinese cabbage from the stew.

"Can I use the boat in my room? The one that has been covering the hole in the ceiling? I'll be sure to cover the whole with the emergency tarpaulin instead."

Aling Dorita let out an amused giggle. "But what are you going to use that old thing for? You're not going to row it through the flood waters, are you?"

Hasna licked her dry mouth and nodded.

Her stepmother's eyebrows shot up. She set aside her onions and motioned for Hasna to take a seat. "*Hija*, where are you going with that thing?"

"It's important," Hasna replied. "I...I need to go out to the spiral minaret."

"In this weather? What for?"

"I *need* to know something," Hasna said in a shy, pained voice. The shame was painted all over her face. Aling Dorita softened her expression and brushed a slightly bruised hand over her



stepdaughter's face.

"You are just like your father," Aling Dorita said. "Always astoundingly curious."

She lifted Hasna's chin up.

"Go. But take the umbrella with you."

Hasna embraced Aling Dorita, a tight embrace only eight-year-olds know how to give. Aling Dorita returned the gesture, and watched Hasna, her daughter by heart, rush up the stairwell. "Oh Lord...," she muttered, crossed herself, and wished the girl safety in the downpour.

Hasna took off her apron and replaced her soggy clothes. She wrapped a beige *hijab*, her mother's, around her head and secured it. She tossed the ropes of the emergency tarpaulin over the roof of her room. She then took the giant oar which had been sitting ornately in the living room, and then went outside into the rain. She used a ladder to get to the canoe, which was perched on top of their building. Under the pouring rain, she nudged the boat with the oar, pushing the boat closer to the edge, until it finally slid down the side of the cafe, into the galley, knocking down a few chairs and tables in its way. Aling Dorita watched her. She had seen Hasna passionately read through her cookbooks, and her father's medical books, and her mother's navigation books—but she had never seen her daughter fulfill her curiosity in this hasty, abrupt manner. She could only offer the protection of an open umbrella, which Hasna politely grabbed from her, before kissing her on the cheek.

"You keep yourself safe, okay?" Aling Dorita told her.

Hasna nodded.

Aling Dorita secured a rope ladder—a souvenir of her husband's first wife from a ballooning trip—on the hand railing, and watched Hasna lower herself on the rickety canoe. Tonight, Hasna will go out for the first time all by herself.

Hasna hadn't ridden a boat in a long time, much less driven one down flooded streets. Those boating trophies of hers were won in childhood, and riding a boat wasn't exactly the fastest, or trendiest, manner of city travel. The sailboats and yachts that surrounded the

port of Doha were mostly for show, owned by the rich, the famous, and the well-enthused. Hasna paddled her way through the streets-now-turned-canals. The city now seemed to be a Venice in the making, its buildings towering over her like grand cathedrals.

The flood tides rose steadily, engulfing whole floors of buildings. The Qataris have grown accustomed to the floods, and only used their first and second floors as empty caverns to hold the waters. Hasna's canoe bumped into canvas canopies and old street lamps. It rocked and tossed with every nudge as Hasna tried to gain its bearings.

The rain proved to be another obstacle. It poured like an infinite thread of water bombarding the city, easily filling the canoe. After every few minutes, Hasna had to bucket away the water from the boat, wasting precious time.

But she proceeded still. As the hours crawled, she regained her capacity to navigate the boat, like her mother once did. A sudden gust of desert wind propelled her closer to the minaret, and before she knew it, her boat seemed to aim straight towards it.

When she placed the oar on the canoe's floor, she knocked away an old metal box. Its metal casing was wet, but the rust had been washed away. It seemed to have been hidden away inside the boat. When Hasna took the box, it made a rattling sound.

She held up her stepmother's umbrella, and with one hand, she tinkered with the lock of the metal chest. The box soon popped open, and she held it carefully so as not to let the contents fall onto the boat's wet floor. She wiped her hands with the dry parts of her shirt, and then started to scour through the box.

Inside were photos, letters inside envelopes, and some other knick-knacks. She sat back under the cover of her umbrella and rummaged through the items. She found a handful of tamarind pods, which were dry and flaky. She remembered that her father used to grow tamarind in his backyard back in Jakarta, before they had moved to sandier lands. She remembered how every time she had a cough or a bad fever, her father would pick some ripe and brown tamarind, heat it up in a pan with water and sugar, then make her drink it, iced.

The aroma of the tamarind always brought her back to a memory of the tropics, where Aling Dorita was also from. She remembered what had drawn her father and her stepmother together: a familiar glass of *agua de tamarindo*. Her father had met Aling Dorita in her

Doha cafe. She had a chalkboard sign outside Single Bite advertising a fresh batch of the tamarind drink—and he was drawn in by it. After a few swigs of the bittersweet refreshment, they began exchanging recipes, and soon were exchanging contact information. Both easily reminded each other of home, though not *en pointe*, which made their nostalgia more personal and more refreshing. Aling Dorita was not from Indonesia, not like his previous wife, but she was from somewhere very, *very* close. So they had their similarities and their differences, and that dynamics was what stuck.

Hasna rubbed the tamarind pods with her damp fingertips, which were now wrinkled from the cold rain. Soon, the spiral staircase of the minaret came fuller and fuller into view. Still, she continued her rummaging, and found an old golden rose necklace. Its box chain was tangled and tarnished, and Hasna could not push open its lobster hook. She remembered how her mother used to wear this necklace on sunny days, when it was hot enough to wander about the city without having to cover up too much. Hasna's mother was a little fervent in preserving her *aurah*—the intimacy of her naked skin—but even on blistering days of her youth, she would go out in public with sleeves shorter than usual, with necklines wider than usual, often much to the chagrin of elders and the pious. Her mother used to bring Hasna around the city, to window shop at the Pearl, or to stroll down the long Corniche beside the wharfs and the port, the yachts in sight. Sometimes her mother would give little Hasna treats to quench the heat. Qatar drew people and trade from across oceans, so Hasna could sample tiny tastes of things from every corner of the globe. She loved the aroma from the mango *lassi* cart near Education City. She loved the multitude of flavors of the *halo-halo* near the Museum of Islamic Art. Whenever they went to the Pearl, Hasna would get *gelato* in a small paper cup, and always in different flavors. Traversing the labyrinthine alleyways and avenues of Doha in the summer with her mother, to look for a particular store or a food coffee house, had always delighted Hasna.

The canoe came to a sudden stop. Hasna looked over the starboard and saw that the slack of rope from her boat had caught on a loose nail on an old date palm. She leaned over to lift the rope, and the boat soon went on its way to the spiral minaret. Hasna continued rummaging through the contents of the box. A handkerchief had snagged on the hook of her bracelet. She lifted the delicate satin cloth and examined it carefully, like a mother would her children. The handkerchief was

embroidered, its golden edges in a scallop. There were initials sewn on one corner. She remembered the stories her parents told her about their wedding, how various family members pushed and pulled them days before the grand celebration, how her aunts fixed the bride's hair and jewelry, how her uncles dressed the groom for pictures, how they argued about the costs and the venue, and how the chaos somehow brought them even closer together, even more than the wedding did. Hasna remembered. She went through the items inside the metal box, and remembered. And for once in her life, she didn't feel at all lost.

At last the boat came to a stop. Hasna hid the metal box in the driest part of the boat's hull and then paddled the rest of the way to the minaret, which was shining bright under the downpour from the orange lamplights around it. With the slack of rope, she tied the boat tight to one of the lamps that made the minaret glow. With her stepmother's umbrella at her shoulder, she trudged carefully up the tower, already half-blind from the lights. Hasna covered her eyes with one hand and with the other began feeling the minaret's walls, guiding herself carefully through the slippery steps of the staircase.

It was a long climb. When she found herself at the very top of the tower, she saw that it held a gazebo, its dome supported by eight pillars. By then her vision had blurred into misty blueness. She soon reached the apex of the spiral minaret, and began looking for her mother and father.

She looked and looked through her blurry vision, but she didn't find them. In their stead were the bird spirits from the cafe. The owl and the hoopoe stood in the midst of the dome's pillars, garbed as they had been earlier. They stood with some nonchalance as Hasna trudged up the tower, recovering still from the blinding glow of the tower's lamplights.

Hasna did not sigh with anger or despair. Her breath neither grew hot or cold. She breathed, and then smiled. She crossed her arms and then leaned on one of the pillars.

"You don't seem too disappointed, dear," the owl said, while her wings toyed with her pearl necklace.

Hasna looked at the pair. Her eyes held a tiny glimmer that rivaled the city lights. "They weren't going to be here at all," she said.

Hasna swallowed a lump down her throat. "But the last time I maneuvered a boat was when my mother was still alive," she said. "And that boat that carried me all the way here? It had a box full of mementos left by my parents. It was like they were with me on that boat ride."

The birds stared back at her.

"So it was like I finally had a chance to say goodbye one more time," Hasna continued. She bowed her head to the two spirits. "Thank you," she said.

The two spirits came closer to Hasna. "No, we should be the ones to thank you," said the owl. "To see our daughter, resilient and strong, one last time," said the hoopoe.

Hasna raised her head, tears in her eyes. "*Ibu? Aya?*"

The spirits raised their chins to give her a quiet nod.

"*Selamat tinggal*, Hasna," they said.

The pair of spirits, the owl and the hoopoe, faded into the heavy rain. Hasna bent down, covered her face with her shaking hands and wept.

## Place

 Januar Yap

I can't make love to you now. Why do you insist?

I want to make love to you when you're menstruating. It's as though a part of me were caught in you and your blood were mine, pulsing out from a vein that belongs to us both. What do you feel then?

I feel the blood staining our bodies as if your hardness made me bleed, as if you had flayed my skin, and had eaten me, and I was drained.

~ JERZY KOSINSKI, *Steps*

Something is amiss. I still want to write this in my own language. It would likely read better if I did. Although by saying that now, I am already confused, and this wouldn't have happened if there weren't choices to make. But if I did, I mean write in my own tongue, this would not have reached you as swiftly as it did. There'd be the tedious routine of getting a competent translator, whose approximations of all that shrieks between the lines could only go as far as the only time he can spend for my work. There'd be a lot of things to be missed out. So I beg your indulgence if I find it important to explain a few things in the course of this story.

For what exactly lies between reality, from which imagination is rooted from, and language, I don't know. There is a place I want to tell you about, but only because at some point, at the beginning of my narrative, I missed the mark. Once, I had written and dedicated a book to people who don't find books to be any part of some survival kit. It was the friendlier folks with comfier lives who bought the volume. The morning after my book launch, I woke up besieged by a bad case of paralysis. Who was I, the morning insect in Kafka's story? So I have this tale now before you, and not written in my own language. Should

I find myself writing a new book, perhaps this time it would be for you.

You see, my story doesn't have the epic sweep of a classic. It transpires in a jeepney, in my city. It's workaday, like I said, two characters—the woman across me and myself. We don't move. She doesn't even know she is part of the story, everything runs in my head only.

It is when the jeepney lunges into the highway rush, when the wind rouses her hair to life that she turns devastatingly lyrical. This is a case of a lady from a shampoo ad taking a jeepney, alone, in a rush hour amidst the dust and fumes in this Third World second city. I thought they travel in SUV's. But here she is, a godsend among this pack that smells of fish and humidity. You seize moments like these—a relief from and all the dark, imposing presences around here.

She has long legs, her elbow juts out in contrast to the dark, smelly, fat arms beside her as she clutches at the jeepney's handle bars each time we swerve through traffic or run across a puddle. Every now and then, she fixes a straying strand of hair back in place, and she emerges like light again.

She is a persistent apparition in not a few movies. I don't exactly remember which ones they were. Maybe in a Baz Luhrman version of *Romeo and Juliet* or that damsel in a sinking ship. You see, this "Pretty Woman" draws a hundred movies. I leave the others to bask on the ancient cliché of "beauty launching a thousand ships." This goddess simply sweeps me as someone cut out from a haul of celluloid strips. Here, let me splice my cut into the scene. In the spirit of the auteur school of cinema, let me deliberate the frames from hereon and take charge of our movie journey.

She hates me. She probably thinks I'm this grumpy old hermit next door. I despise her, too. You see, I don't trust women who swagger. They play around with men, they are ruthless teasers who make us fall head over heels for them and leave us thank-you notes while we dehydrate. They give us their numbers, but they drop our calls, they just jump into cars with men twice their age while they know we're watching, and they will just disappear without trace.

But not in my story though. This isn't "Gone with the Wind." Weekends, she knocks at my door to ask if she can borrow the day's paper, so I make it a point to play Sinatra or Bubl  in these precise moments if only to drop a hint that I am, you know, a man with a heart. She might love it, too. Reader, scenes like these are worth the



best track, take it from me. Like I said, she calls to mind a century of cinema.

So I open the door and, there, shafts of light fall on her. This is Holly Golightly in a bath robe with a towel coiled on her head. "Can I borrow your paper?" No, I am tempted to say. There's something I want to keep from her, this morning at least—Frank sinks ship, 700 missing. There weren't floating bodies found, the rescuers reported. The storm that took a singer's name must've gobbled them up whole sale. I learn later that her name is Mary, and yes, Mary, if by any chance you're reading this story now, let me tell you that it was all from out of love that I kept a secret from you that lonely morning of the tragic news. I wanted you to go about your day clean in the head while I gathered strength to make just one step into the circle of your life.

One of these days, when it all becomes unbearable, I will find my way into one of those newsrooms to sneak in a few words into a copy. Maybe, somewhere between the words "China space mission successful...", I will insert the message "I'm desperate to talk to you." For maybe, I pray, that when Mary reads the papers in the silence of her breakfast, beyond her toast and egg, she will chance upon my message, crack the code and, in return, clink a coin in the plumbing to send back a signal.

Would you like some coffee? Already, I am outsized to have managed those words. "Sure." Just like that. Words like stars oftentimes leave us dazed with cosmic puzzles. So here she is, on my couch, underneath which the story of the M/V Princess of the Stars lies hidden. "*Fly me to the moon...*" I see, she says, you like standard music. "Among others." Although this would have been my reply: In the tradition of "Sleepless in Seattle," where old music sits well with modern love. But every second came fragile.

I have, of course, the best brew—an old friend, who read Merton eventually ended up in a Trappist monastery in Miag-ao—a concoction meticulously whipped up by a handful of dedicated monks. The friend sends me bags of coffee every now and then to pay off an old debt. I didn't ask, but he probably thinks it is part of an atonement regimen. When he was young and penniless, he secretly sold his grandmother's blankets to a junk shop, leaving the old woman bare and grim with a terrible arthritic attack. Today, however, my friend has God to pay the rent.



I see that Mary is laughing now. She puts the cup on the sofa's arm and places a hand on her chest as she chuckles. Catching my gaze, she tries to fix her robe tight, revealing the slow double-curves of her body. Lines, Japanese painters think, are what's permanent; shadows are elusive. She removes the towel and sets free her hair. "Can I put this here?" she asks. Here, let me have it. (In another world, when the corner man hurls the towel, the fight is done). This is when I know that something beyond the astronomer's oversight has darted somewhere. I seize the moment.

And so, my dear reader, the story goes that we dated, wrote our own love scenes in the weirdest theme rooms in many cities. One of the country's more hilarious tycoons had built a grandiose replica of the Acropolis on a quay at the South Road Properties and strewn hereabouts pocket vegetation that played host to a handful of plush diners with obscenely expensive fares. It didn't matter, of course. We found ourselves a corner at the beachfront Parthenon and I went to as far as bribing a bunch of warblers from Mt. Olympus to stick around and keep the sound track going until the night's credits rolled. Just so I can whisper to her "Sweet dreams, my love..." with a wistful serenade at the background. Perhaps, like how George Peppard would say it to Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* as she climbs her apartment's porch. So, you see, that's the shelter and glow of romance—cool, breezy, utterly magical. So comfy I can see the maidens at the Parthenon so at ease despite the tons of concrete over their heads.

Our love brought us to as far as Manhattan where we made love in a room that gave us a good view of the queue of flags before the UN building. At the crux, as she moaned, I tried to clear off the frost on the casement and looked for the Philippine flag, to no avail. When I came I only saw the star-spangled banner.

"*Lugar lang!*" All too suddenly, I am back in the heat of the jeepney, and Audrey Hepburn sits still across me. At this point, allow me to explain a few things. *Lugar lang* is to ask the jeepney driver to pull over. The Tagalog says *para*. In my language, *lugar lang* literally means "to put into proper place (*i-lugar lang*)." The man who calls out carries with him a wooden box from which fissure jut out tips of a coping saw and measuring blades. A carpenter cut my movie back to real life. Perhaps—and I should say sorry, dear reader, for my flightiness earlier—there might be some deep design to urge the story into its proper place. For didn't we say how crucial it is in the act of

writing to have a “sense of self and place?”

At this point then, I apologize for bringing you to Acropolis, in the Parthenon particularly, in the middle of a nameless vegetation and over a forgettable Corinthian dish whose name I couldn’t even pronounce—and with the girl in Funny Face.

Really, I beg your indulgence for the meandering sham that it was. With all due respect, I will try my best from hereon to bring the matter down to the level of street. Because, sir/madame, this is where the story is supposed to happen. I am sorry for being dishonest about the sunk ship and the 700 missing passengers. Fisherfolks in the surrounding islands near Mindoro buried decaying bodies that were washed ashore without the benefit of any rite because flies have feasted on them and the stink left entire villages with a severe loss of appetite. The families of these victims will never see their loved ones ever again.

I’m sorry, too, for deliberately leaving out one detail, that beyond the borders of the quay where stood the phony Parthenon were a bunch of *badjaos* in decrepit outriggers crying out for coins. I took the help of those warblers from Mt. Olympus to drown out the poor wailers. I was most pretentious, building my story around a puny Hollywood clone. If, in the middle of the erstwhile romantic notions of the earlier story, some bond had formed between us, I would like to say sorry, too, to have cheated on you. Let me say now that any attempt at forming a pact between us should be built upon a stronger foundation with honesty and good will. So I will change my story.

The lady across me is a fraud. I don’t say that out of hatred. I say it with gnawing compassion and guilt. As the carpenter lifts his tool box, saw teeth catch Mary’s stockings. Or, in the spirit of the revision, let me call her Iyay. She bursts into a cussing fit, “*Pesteng yawa! Animal!*” The swearing sprawled itself across Osmena Blvd. I know short-fuses like these, people who boil at the slightest agitation. Most of all, I know Iyay, the story of her life and where all the unlikely gush of rubbish from her mouth was coming. “*Leche!*”

She was born in the hovel colony of Pasil. That’s what she said anyway. She is a loose bundle of odds and ends. But I met her in Kamagayan, that labyrinthine inner-city neighborhood.

The 400-year-old university with European architecture stands arrogantly next to Kamagayan. My 7 p.m. class in Room 401, despite its zeal and depth, often retreats from my head as I gaze through the

window, over the shabby roofs of the university's neighbors. I can't point exactly which roof, which hovel, but I know someone worth the love is fast asleep there, and just as I am explaining the concept of *simulacra*, I stop after the phrase "copy of reality," and fall silent before the curious faces of my students. I know right at this moment, she is opening her eyes and thinking about tonight, I will try to save her yet again from a bunch of Indian loan sharks out on a vengeful binge. The neighborhood's most powerful pimp, a Chinese mestizo who uses his mother's name Chingbee as his business name, often feeds the meek ones to the most ruthless predators. It is good training, he keeps on saying; soon, these girls will learn that the body is no different from the machine. Oil it up a bit, tighten some screws and there you go again, cowboy.

Iyay is one of those who needed these "good trainings" only because, Chingbee tells me, the girl hadn't been heard cussing. Not once. "She's too silent, I needed her to be mean," said Chingbee. "And you, professor, I hope you don't put anything into her head and change my lesson plan!" Oh, no, I wouldn't do that, sir. He laughed and waved me off as I slipped my arms around Iyay inside the cab, "Go ahead, you'll be late for class!" A year had passed since then.

Tonight is different, and I bought her a book, my anniversary gift for her. "See you next week, guys. We're moving on to intertextuality." These students knew I had been such a distracted man tonight. If they could decode layers in Borges' *Ficciones*, my case is elementary. I am taking Iyay out tonight and make love with her like never before.

"The Philippines, sir," a student approaches me as I zip my bag, "We're the most postmodern race."

"Interesting. But I'm in a rush. See you next week, I'm sorry." Her name is Salar, one of the more inquisitive in the class. She thinks she's an artist, but I think she makes a better theorist.

I scurry to one of the university's more inconspicuous exit gates, accessible through the basement corridor, from which one can cross the street to a dim-lit alley leading to the heart of darkness. The city keeps obscure dungeons, sudden turns, dizzying mazes, time-travel portals and hole-in-the-walls that allow for all these anonymous walks and invisibility. This is an alternate universe your tour brochures, written by dozing copy writers, avoid mentioning. The hospitality sector tries to skirt darkness in their itineraries, but that only makes it more seductive. By the end of the day, the more imaginative guests would

drop all those sunshiny manifold guides and turn into hobgoblins out on a hunt.

Kamagayan is where these people disappear into. Even the president's close-in security, when the chief executive falls into deep slumber after an arduous barn-hopping in our city, sneak into this labyrinth and immerse themselves into the true state of the nation. When government built the "Palace of the South," you can imagine the explosive glee in the hearts of the president's security detail. The boys love their job here. They hate capital Manila.

Around dawn, just when the girls, smelling of ash tray and motel soap, drag their bodies back to their lodgings after a string of unforgivably quick rough-housing with the city's lonely men, the procession carrying a glinting image of the Virgin starts the rounds. The girls push their way against the candle-waving throng. And so with the flower vendor and the peanut vendor pushing their wares and rolling carts at every opening in a crowd singing Ave Maria. Suddenly, this corner of the labyrinth explodes into a robust mingling of light and colors. It is at this hour when Kamagayan rises as though from bursting sea foam while the rest of the city is left to the long wailing of a cat.

A friend once brought along a writer.. We sat by a convenience store along a narrow alley and took a few beers to make the writer comfy. In a moment, the night's first customer came in a black Fortuner. The girls were herded into the perimeter of the car's rear light, close enough so people (if at all it wasn't a solitary man) behind the dark tint of the car could shop properly. Some curber would run up at the hint of a gape through the window and negotiate. (Let me explain a few things: They don't call the car-chasing curbers here as pimps. They are way down the hierarchy, they are merely foot soldiers working for a small commission. In Kamagayan, they're called *itik*, literally ducks, because that's exactly how they look like, swarming after a cruising car and hard-selling for a good deal.) The writer banged his bottle on the bench and in a restrained voice cried to us, "How can you allow this, guys? Where is your moral obligation?" We spent the rest of the night with my friend illustrating his point that we were merely witnesses in the scheme of things and that we really couldn't do much to change it. "Even the barangay captain admits," said my friend, "he couldn't just round them up and leave the rest of their families starving and eventually go to stealing and what other crimes, God forbid! It's not that easy, bay." But, still, the

writer insisted, there's something you can do. By at least not having the stomach to look at this, he said. The night's commerce appalled him. Kamagayan has always been here, deeply embedded in the city's language. It also goes by the name of Junquera, but the cultural myth it had become gave it the rather stylish name of Hong Kong. I dished out a few factoids, my part in the heated exchange. Helpful or not, I really couldn't tell.

"I love Kamagayan," Ely, the fat tomboy who moonlights as a pimp, told me once. She'd been away many times, but found her soul tethered to the place. "I always come back here. I miss this place every time." Ely shares the solemn feeling with so many others who couldn't bear too much light outside. She broke taboo once when she fell in love with one of the girls. "It's a nice feeling when you take charge of someone else's life, you know," she said. She earned Chingbee's ire and was eventually driven out of the loop. Some months after, she came back, knelt before Chingbee and asked if he could loan her some money. She needed false teeth, she said. So where's your girl now, she was asked. The girl, some weeks after she left Kamagayan with Ely, ran off with a married police officer. Briefly after that, Ely would see her photograph at the front page of a tabloid: "Cop shoots girl, self in cab." The consequent probe suggested it had something to do with "love angle." But Ely insisted it was "love triangle." The girl's real name was Daisy. She was from the south.

"Daisy cursed a lot anyway," Ely told me. But even the way she said "Daisy" had the brittleness of a soul scorched by love. She needed Kamagayan again, to seek the safety this pit offered her. If only because it was Ely who brought Iyay into my life, she earned a spot in this story. Knowing that I was a professor, Ely brought me Iyay, who she saw loved reading. "*Edukada*" was how she described her, although the strange girl only left her with much to desire. "She's probably a scholar where she came from. You two are quite a pair," Ely said. In the darkness called Kamagayan, there is a lit spot that plays host to the likes of Ely, who takes the role of a wizened, old matchmaker whose unrealized dreams she makes true in the act of pairing off people. I found myself fortunate to ever fall on that spot.

"But this is the same book you gave me last year," Iyay says, as I gently pull her into a dark corner.

"I did?"

"Yes, and you even told me to read it slow. Remember? I'm

hurt. *Boang.*"

The book was Jonathan Livingston Seagull, and all of a sudden I realized why the whole arch of explaining to her the book's point to get her into reading it was so familiar. Exactly a year ago, I gave her the book when I saw how different she was from all the others. Chingbee was right, she never cusses, and even the way she says "crazy" doesn't amount to any hint of meanness.

"I'm sorry."

Suddenly, noise broke out at the far end of the alley. "*Pesteng yawa! Borekata ka!*" Two of Chingbee's girls were at it again.

"Your pussy smells, you cunt! Pay me tonight or I feed you to the devil!"

"Your cunt stinks like drainage, you filthy whore! *Animal!*"

Iyay slips her arms around me and whispers, "Can you take me out tonight?" How that voice shuts off the rest of the world, I still wonder now.

"Of course, love. Of course. It's our anniversary. It's just us tonight."

"I want quiet."

"Yes. Quiet."

We take one of the cheaper rooms in a downtown motel just around the block. She can't go far, she says. Chingbee suspects she is having an affair with some professor. "He's just a regular customer," she'd always assure him.

I am about to close the door when she pushes it shut and grabs my nape and kisses. I push her slowly and we fall onto the bed. "You have condom?" she asks.

"Why?"

"Just get it."

"Why only now?"

"I have my period."

"I don't mind."

Her skin has the warmth of an animal's. She coils her arms around me and flips so she can be on top of me. Our bodies begin to burn, we're starting to lose count of the moments of undressing, we are

naked now and it doesn't feel any cold in this room at all, there isn't a spark, but a conflagration, as bold as desert fire, like breathing, like moaning, and as I squeeze the round flesh of her rump, she grabs a handful of my hair and squeezes it as though it is the closest she can do to holding my soul as though we are up in the air and some dark wind is trying to part us. Our eyes meet, but the vision blurs when we catch our breath. She shivers and it is here when I see the old tattoo on her groin: O.L. Certainly, my name. Or certainly not, it was there even the first time I scaled upon her flesh like an uncharted terrain. What does it mean? Old Love? Odd Life? Obscure Light? Old Language? Oh, Lord?! Reader, my name is Obscuro Luz, single, a professor of puny letters, the loneliest man in the world.

Layer upon layers of embraces, she loops her arms around me and as though trying to perfect the whole act, she loosens her hold and tightens it again, loosens and tightens and loosens and tightens, tight tighter, all the redundancies of love in this very act alone. "Why not every second every day?" I ask myself. It suddenly occurs that I am asking my life's most difficult question, and here I am with a blurred vision only because water had gathered in my eyes and disposes itself like a shameless cliché. "Never leave me alone," she cries and rolls over. She turns on the TV to find a videoke channel, and she bursts out singing, "*When there's no getting over that rainbow...*" While she sings, we hear cussing from the next room. She raises the volume and sings even louder. "What do you think of the book?" I ask, but she can't hear me.

"I'll take a shower," she says and leaves the bed.

And so I wake up, and she is gone. But on the crumpled sheets, I find instead a fine print of a red bird spreading its wings on a white cloud bordered by creases. I remember her warning, but I insisted. She leaves me instead this lone scarlet image of her flight.

Outside, the sky is starting to show the bluish hues of yet another day. I cross the street and notice the intense swarming of people around an obscure figure of a body on the ground. As I walk toward the crowd, there is no mistaking whose body it is, although with splashes of blood on her flesh, it is harder to get a trace of the once cheerful face of the woman I know.

The word was that a masked man on a motorcycle shot her pointblank. So this is how it all comes down to—just one for the tabloids, the other end of the trajectory and, alas, how the word falls



a few letters shy from the word “tragedy.”

“Look, she’s still breathing!” one of the men in the crowd cries out. A cab halts nearby and I can’t move as some nameless men carry her body into the car. To Vicente Sotto, someone cries out. The cab speeds off, and suddenly, as something grew immeasurably, immensely, my soul caves in.

One cold night a few months after that, I grab Chingbee by the collar in a mad rush. There she is, he points to the girl. But the girl looks at me with a strange gaze. “Goodness, prof!” Chingbee tells me, “She doesn’t even know where she is!”

Word flew that the lady who had returned was a different one. They said gunpowder changed her head. The woman swears like hell at the slightest agitation, but this was not the kind Chingbee had wanted. It, in fact, terrified the Chinese pimp. “She’d turned into a witch, prof! I don’t know who the hell has gotten inside that body.”

“*Lugar lang!*” It is the woman across me this time and the jeepney slows down to the side of the road. Perhaps, *lugar lang* reads as “it’s just place.” *Lugar lang*. It doesn’t matter where. Reader, you of course know that her name is neither Mary nor Iyay. She is as nameless as the woman who tucked herself back in the darkness called Kamagayan. I also don’t know if by any chance the imagined stories that I told you transpired in varying versions out there. I just know that the lady across me is now calling out to the driver to pull over.

(Yes, Salar. You have pretty well read words like pastiche, collage, intertextuality, etcetera, the disjointedness of our islands, the absent center and all that crap. Your jeepneys are rolling collages and your roads are endless mazes. The *halo-halo* pretty much illustrates the Filipino spirit, although you would rather have more sago than the usual. With the dry spell, I prefer more ice.)

But I have no wish to tell you at what point in our journey did our lady call a stop. It doesn’t really matter, does it?

But let me give you a hint. It is in one of the busier districts of the city. There is the incessant honking of horns, the caterwauling of downtown traffic, vendors yelling, the amplifiers from the Indian stores playing pirated DVDs, and just about anything that makes sound, this is where we are at this point in our journey. Inside me, there is an alternate universe that is persistently silent. Beyond language, beyond place. There is a throng spilling out from the sidewalk, and



the jeepney dispatcher calls out to them, “Colon! Colon!” Next stop will be in our city’s oldest street. We move on, and I see the woman disappearing into the crowd. I want to go after her, with the hope that perhaps, there’ll be a third story to tell. But for now I’m staying, and at this juncture I wish to thank you for your indulgence. Some of us use the rather unimaginative term for all these—Love.

*Excerpt From*

**The Music Child & The Mahjong Queen**

 Alfred A. Yuson

Another couple of nights in a hotel, somewhere in the world, far from home.

At some point, making up on fatigue or having boozed up the night before, you wake close to noon, stare at the same beige or ivory colored ceiling with discreet lamps, turn on your side and gaze at the same heavy curtains with the large folds just right and just so — bland universal tapestry that shields your bedspace from the sun, through the same large glass windows.

You pull yourself up and stagger a few feet to reclaim a link with the outside world, reach out to that hidden break in the curtains and pull some folds aside. You just have to check if it's still the same grand view you found you had, as privilege, right after checking in, unless you were assigned a room where you look out and see another wall, or a sorry glimpse of the outdoors through a spaghetti tangle of electric wires, especially common in the Third World.

But here and now, lo and behold, a tropical garden greets you, and you see part of a swimming pool a few floors below, there are bodies sunning, a few of them white and still pale, kids frolicking into view then disappearing with their imagined yelps, those voices now inaudible, the mute music of childhood play.

Through a glass pane, brightly, you squint and confirm to yourself that you're far from home. The air-con has been steady all night, it is quite cold now where you find yourself gazing out at a warm world, here within the interiors of yet another four-star or five-star hotel, part of a global chain, your credit card and the respectable name of your office have seen to that. Yet another room, just another room.

And yet there's a gnawing, perceptible difference that you begin to note, you began to note even before the taxicab deposited you at Bayview right across your embassy, on that boulevard by the city's namesake bay.

You had sensed it an hour earlier, once you landed at the bedlam-stricken airport of this country's capital, Manila of the inchoate history, and made your way past the immigration counters and the luggage carousel, past a Customs official seemingly holding back a smile. You handed him the form tucked into your passport, and he responded with a silent nod, not perfunctorily but as if part of a ritual, as if in time to a lilting beat. When you cleared his counter the man began to whistle, as if to make something of his moments before the next visitor, the next form. And you just had to look back at him over your shoulder when you recognized the abused refrain from *I Left My Heart in San Francisco*.

In the cab, the long-haired driver thumped at his steering wheel with both hands every time his vehicle had to idle before a stoplight. He just had to. On his cassette player was an album of The Doors. You yourself hummed initially to *Love Me Two Times*, but by the time you reached your check-in destination, you had tired of the repeat of *People Are Strange*.

Maybe it was because you had taken in too much of the crowded streets, with hordes of people displacing one another from where they stood or walked, or lolled and idled on the sidewalks, where you noted fat women seated beside open wooden cases filled with cigarette packs of all labels. And took in, too, as they whizzed menacingly alongside your cab, the strange-looking jeepneys.

On the flight you had read how they had been redesigned after the war from all the old Willys jeeps your Yankee soldiers had left behind, how they were lengthened, customized to accept two rows of facing seats that accommodated ten or twelve light-framed Asians, as passengers that eyeballed one another across a narrow aisle. When you tried the experience after your first night, you had great difficulty going past the boundaries of knees, and everyone had tittered.

Ah, yes, the people. Where Asia wears a smile, the airline you took across the Pacific touted in its posters and brochures. Why, it's more of a grin, foolish half the time. Why, even the mock grimace is infectious. Everyone's cheery, everyone looks up to any question you pose, and smiles even before any answer frames itself, satisfactory or irrelevant, off the wall or coming straight from left field, peripheral or elliptical.

Such is the jeepney's apparent own course, lurching and zigzagging past teeming crowds in corners and mazes of the city —

Manila the merry, Manila the Thrilla, The Noble and Ever Loyal City as tagged by the Spanish empire that took it as a waif to clothe in pomp and ceremony for over three centuries, before it was taken over by your own imperialist forbears, God Bless America.

With a proud grin and in mock grimace, the first of many Filipino pundits you meet as informants blithely quotes what must already be an overused quip on his country's history: Three centuries in a convent and fifty years in Hollywood.

True, some parts of the city look like sections of Baja California, or Cuba or Medellin in Colombia, but transported closer to the equator, so hot and humid it is, yet sportive with modernity in enclaves of the wealthy right amidst the more common pockets of hovels spelling shantytown.

You have an interview with a young congressman at a golf club, and as you sit down and ask for orange juice you scan the greens highlighted by flame trees, watch the motorized carts wheel out into the distance, and you can swear you're in Pasadena but for the torrid heat in the lanai. The politician arrives and suggests that you both move into a confined radius of air-conditioning, some salon or cafe or bar or meeting room in this, the premier golf club in Manila.

When you bid him goodbye and thanks after the interview that came with a four-course meal and fine wine from Chile, he hands you a business card, offers a firm handshake, smiles, and tells you maybe the next time you're around he'll be a senator, just a matter of time, the votes are as good as counted, 'cause his pretty young wife can sing up a storm on the hustings.

At Mactan airport, after the hour's flight from Manila, you are met with a garland of flowers by a winsome, bronze-skinned lass in what must be a regional costume. She slips it fast around your head, so you tell yourself under your red-eyed breath, why, now I'm in Hawaii. And you think the lei-ing has been appropriated as a welcome rite, until you realize that someone has actually taken a photograph of you and the girl. You blink and give a little wave of goodbye, but as you walk away a young man rushes over and emits a flurry of protestations with his high-pitched voice. You look back at him, he's remonstrating with the girl and the photographer, gesticulating wildly and pointing at another direction. The girl runs towards you, and you realize she's about to tell you you're the wrong visitor, but she checks herself, tosses up her hands, wheels back to the men and

gestures that she still has a lot of garlands anyway. They all laugh and toss their hands in the air. They look impishly in your direction, lips pursed into arrested smiles, until the boy yells out, "It's all right, sir, it's all right, you can keep it, sorry, mistaken identity!" And you almost feel like tittering with them.

Then guitar music escorts you out to where the taxis lie in wait, and it's not just one guitar or two guitars, but a whole battalion of avid strummers, all men who are also dressed up in costume. There's an important group being welcomed right behind you. They're Japanese, the men in three-piece suits and their wives in elegant dresses, except for a young lady in a summer chiffon and beribboned straw hat. The music rises to a crescendo. You realize it's a souped-up version of *Sakura* that has welcomed you to Cebu.

It's not just another room, this one. You're on Mactan Island, which is not much more than a rocky atoll connected by steel bridges to Cebu City in the much larger Cebu Island. On one of the twin beds in your special room are travel magazines, the local papers in English, your open briefcase with your sundry documents and research files, plus the Polaroid prints you took of the Maligta. Those alone make your hotel room special. Their stories are even readable on the prints. They tell of songs that are among the strangest you have heard. And they speak of much stranger promise, a boy who is yet in the realm of fiction.

On this island, too, there is rich history, of how the explorer Magellan and his Spanish crew came in 1521, found an icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary on a white-sand beach, and heard Mass to affirm their faith in the roundness of a sphere of seas and oceans. And here, right on the craggy shores of Mactan, the would-be circumnavigator of the world met his death at the hands of local chieftain Lapulapu.

You dine with Fil in a bamboo restaurant on stilts that rest on the edge of a mangrove swamp. He says Lapulapu gave his name to a fish, the grouper or garoupa as the Chinese in Hong Kong call it. He points out a shrine nearby, where two statues are perched. One is of Lapulapu, the other of Magellan.

"Magellan had an iron helmet," Fil recounts. "But when Lapulapu struck him on the head with his sharp *kris*, the sound it made drove Magellan mad. It was as if he heard the oldest sirens wailing in his ears. He dropped to the water. He couldn't even say a prayer, Pardner. So Lapulapu cut him up. Like sashimi, ha ha ha ha ha!"

You squint at the far-off statues, shaking your head.

“Now they stand there like pardners, Pardner! And you know, Magellan became a hotel, there in the city. Old hotel already. And Lapulapu became a fish, great for steaming. Now Lapulapu is served at Magellan Hotel, ha ha ha ha ha! Pardner, what you think of that? That's history, right? Right, Pardner? That's the way history goes. Like love, makes the world go 'round. Ha ha ha ha ha!”





POETRY





## Santa Maria Goretti Asks for a Virtue

 Anne Carly Abad

I might have been near death  
I don't know where  
the rogue truck went  
but I met the Santa then  
in peasant garb, still a child,  
had the hesitant halo  
that gave Renaissance artists  
such a headache.

Using two fingers  
she pinched the nimbus  
and lilies fell  
to the ground like light  
*lily white*, she muttered.  
Apparently, she had a beef  
with the flower  
realizing after all these years  
her sainthood relies  
on withholding her blossom.

And when I told her she was pure  
she laughed and laughed  
*In heaven you can have everything  
but not a virtue  
you do not already have  
and what else can a girl have?*  
Drunk with mirth, she screams  
for only a passing soul to hear  
*Give me another!*  
*Another!*

## To Speak Then of Poetry

☀ Gemino H. Abad

*For Ed and Edith Tiempo*

First,

from word to poem,  
though the poet's in heat,  
he only seems to play  
the satyr's role,  
for the poem's only made  
where his words best him;  
and thus worsted, sir,  
he becomes his burden's beast.

    The poet isn't one  
of anyman's world  
but only heir of the strangest words  
he loves and he detests  
which the poem afterwards  
so perfectly displaces.

Next,

the poem is what one thinks  
but cannot say,  
so the poem speaks words,  
and words—  
the words' own speaking  
but cannot read.

    So reader, beware  
of this innermost wounding;  
the poem's wisdom  
is what you only read—  
your hidden self, your stalking-horse.  
Go not in quest of meaning,  
seek only the happenstance

of every word in the poem's space,  
 in the void of its reading —  
 words and only words,  
 but the poem's Advent  
 their eventfulness.

So then,

take note, critics, judges.  
 Of words those crossings  
 are part of the poem's weave  
 in whatever state of torture or rest:  
 only the script for its performance  
 which the poet, like an envious director,  
 withholds, so he alone may know  
 to run the intrigue  
 behind the poem's scenes.

Yet, after many fordings,  
 if you still believe the poet,  
 the poem's other presences  
 like shadows surprised  
 are brought to play —  
 there, in the text's own clearing  
 and jealous keep, themselves  
 become the light.

But then,

the poem's of course  
 an ego trip,  
 the poet must love himself  
 to loose his brood upon the world —  
 oh, the infinite pity of it,  
 persevering and prolix,  
 by the poem's fragilities  
 and dubious uses,  
 the world's only vexed:

Narcissus,  
 without echoes more,  
 only flower and stupor!  
 for words refuse their mirror  
 and build their mazes,  
 the poet must love himself purely,  
 or who would persist?

And yet,  
     the poet must write  
     and write still,  
     be so unstilled as to reach  
     that stillness without words;  
     oh, to write still and pose  
     and be deposed  
     because the self must disbelieve  
     its words—

        At last,  
     the poet must relent, "No more!  
     it's just my poems that I hate."  
     Ah, do not believe him,  
     it's his special hypocrisy,  
         But how else  
     might he save himself  
     from his poem's rout?

In short, then,  
     poetry is the poet's mystique  
     ("Forgive me," says the poet,  
     from poem to poem,  
     "It's my first time to speak.")  
     Oh, everyman in fact  
     must needs find his own word  
     to utter him utterly—  
     often, the simplest, most common,  
     yet final and proper as any noun.

        The finding, too,  
     Is often quite natural  
     like walking on a late afternoon  
     in half-light to think one's thoughts.

        One must needs find always  
     the very word  
     because one must always risk  
     himself—the same imperfect self  
     that all his words compose;

        Himself,  
     for he has finally nothing else,  
     himself being nothing that speaks.

## Here: Be Dragons

 Ceres Y.C Abanil

Fairy tales are more than true;  
not because they tell us that dragons exist,  
but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.  
~ G. K. CHESTERTON

Mariner:  
Mark you well how I am  
calling

calling your name true—  
fast, as tears,  
on my tongue that tastes

all things.  
Is there nowhere at all  
on this world

you long to go?  
If so, if so, then come  
shadow into me

and shepherd me: Show me  
with skin and sheen and soil  
the singular colour of man.

For what else do you long  
to enter the azure  
depths and leave—

live beyond all longings,  
and lassitude—your earth  
was never your home.

(But I will be your last.)

Hue me well for there is  
no longitude to this  
yearning. O earth:

Call yourself *terra firma*,  
if you will—I will not  
name you hold you give you

dominion only for your resolution  
to fall as fickle fruit  
from an ashen tree.

Call me secretive  
and you will—but where  
is the point to all

your turning? Find me  
the pivot and I will  
look for there must be

a lever for me to move  
our world.  
Your will, my wound.

Only come  
if you dare  
and change me for here

—where it matters—  
—here where there is more—  
—how can this not be more than true—

(There is a cave in my heart of all.)

is where how easily you see how I  
can claim no latitude over you.  
But if you would only delve

deep within the band into  
the blue churning indigo  
far from the confusion of charts

and the minds of mortal men  
where the colours—flexing  
under the myriad mantles

(these my skins)—drown  
for a colder kind  
of cerulean:

Come prism my night,  
Come compass my spectrum,  
Come to the many hollow hues

of a porous kind of sky.  
And wings—the white  
waves are winging

to you, for mine  
is the calling, mine  
the asking and I am asking,

I am asking you to sink,  
silently—surely home,  
meaning Come Here:

(Be dragons, be men.)

*For Sonni Viudez:  
my very own  
Fiddler's Green*



## In the Springtime of Persephone

We must not remind them  
that giants walk the earth.

~ FRANK MILLER

It was no seasonal love for there were  
no seasons before you left me.

Nobody will remember the old  
woman who was looking for flowers

or the boy who nearly became a god  
since everything happened after you.

When you forsake me, it will not be  
for the sake of a fruit. The worm feeds

at the very core; at heart: My name is Famine.  
Now you are leaving for time

is beginning to exist:  
You are leaving as the green

leaves the earth, green as the leaves  
that you envy now that you are internal,

immemorial. My grief is immortal.  
It will not pass. This too is time:

Everyone will remember the young  
flower who was looking

for nothing, really, a bit of earth  
and some seeds. So winter begins.

When you return from all you are  
becoming, who will you ask

and will it be me:  
Where was the sin?

**Life, as a Haiku** Adlai Amor

Low Tuscan hills sing,  
ochre tones as Sienna chalk  
draws the early morn.

The Aegean Sea  
crashes our azure senses,  
breaking our fences.

Lush olive orchards  
dotting the Etruscan hills:  
My soul be thou still.

Fresh juicy mangoes,  
sun-dappled Visayan Sea  
mark summers for me.

I thought she was tall  
Until the grates made her fall.  
The heels now broken.

Paul gave me a print  
Of an artist, eyes asquint.  
Carving two new globes.

In Cebu they crowed:  
Pit Senyor! Please heed our cry!  
Fix lives gone awry.

Chasing the half-moon  
across the skies to Europe.  
I will be there soon.

Life's simple pleasures:  
book sale at the library  
where I bought treasures.

New paint hides old scars  
of my snug, weathered abode:  
Now ready for stars.

**The Jar** Ronn Andrew Angeles

For the burnay makers

It must have been the way  
his hands were taught  
to arrest tremors  
that he knew he could will  
the supple clay into something else.

For years, this wet of earth  
he's shaped in grace  
notates the clean script  
of his fingers.

Now his palms curve  
each into a sure wing,  
rounding the outline of a mouth,  
where at sundown  
in some water-scarce village,  
a boy will peer into the hollow  
to learn the language of thirst.

*Thirst.* The artisan  
knows this much,  
as he begins the body  
in small motions,  
he thinks as well  
of the word *rain*  
or *spring*, turning  
in his own parched tongue  
in his own lean years.

For a while there,  
among the hands' austerities,  
one spies wonder  
being worked  
into the grooves of the jar.

Already, the smell  
of burning woodpile  
thickens around him.  
There is a room  
besmirched with soot  
where this jar will be made  
of harder earth.  
And what fire-stained creation  
goes out of the scarlet maws  
becomes somebody else's  
flooding.

## Six Poems

 César Ruíz Aquino

### Kibitzer Kings

Borges was a chess  
kibitzer, Kawabata  
go, & Poe checkers

### Shout and Whisper

In Robert Graves' story 'The Shout' shout can wipe out armies,  
kill.

Perhaps whisper can resurrect. A broken promise  
fulfill.

### Personal Spell

Said he  
at the SU Cafe:  
'Global warming  
sounds like a pranksterstein's  
conspiracy warning  
but it's true  
catastrophe is due.  
Only one place is safe.

The Philippines.'

She:  
'Why?'

Because that's where  
we are  
you and I

## Two by Two

The two don't agree  
he says it's porpoise and she  
dolphin to a T

And which more monstrous  
after metamorphosis  
porphin or dolpoise

## Amorous Support

You cheering  
me was  
rather  
like hearing  
the sound  
of one hand  
clapping because  
I held the other

**Memo**

a sonnet for Sonia  
an ode for Odette  
for Tina a sestina  
for Marinelle a villanelle

a quatrain for Katrina  
a couplet for Colette  
for Aiko a haiku  
a line for Caroline

a terza rima  
for the twins Teresa  
and Rima  
a limerick for Lee Remick

for Rose  
prose  
poem, free verse  
for Ms. Universe



## Wooden Chair Variations

☀ Corin Arenas

I surrendered my severed limbs  
to the mercy of nails  
to become whole again.

\*

I have offered my flat surface  
for comfort. I never learned  
to count the hours.

I serve many, indefinitely.

\*

Sensing your restlessness,  
my sturdy form keeps you still.

\*

My back remains unmoved by your back.  
I knew you'd lean, eventually.

\*

I am behind and beneath you.

\*

Despite the common intimacies,  
Solitude is my loyal companion.

\*

A touch is always foreign;  
one person's grasp  
is unlike another's.

\*

One day you will not resist  
the urge to carve words on my skin.

\*

My skin is my memory:  
I keep the marks you leave,  
the deep and undecipherable  
as well as the names  
you carve yet forget.

\*

Everyone is fleeting.

I remain unmoved  
and never used to it.

\*

I am grateful you keep me occupied  
however momentary. I accept  
this is my purpose.

\*

I recognize the warmth  
of your body at rest.

I keep this for as long as I can.

## Style

☀ Cirilo F. Bautista

My mother smoked a cigarette with the lighted end  
inside her mouth. I would watch her as she sat  
on a stool doing the day's wash, she blew  
a constant stream of smoke from the left side of her lips,  
while her hands made soap suds rise and burst.  
In a village not known for unusual things, it was  
short of a miracle, the ember not dying  
in her mouth and her palate not getting burned.  
Style is the perfection of design, a habit  
of usage that strives after elegance,

by which a language is renewed to bridge  
desire and idiom, not to singe the text that pushes  
into the air but to clarify its warm edges.  
Fine rhythm, no spittle adrift or, if a landscape,  
no embellishment to spoil the perspective.  
Nature rendered into a convincing craft makes  
tension bloom from puffs and billows as in  
a night song rain drips from branches over a lagoon:  
It's not survival that's the leitmotif, nor  
harmony to connect the stars, but a solitude

in working out a peace of mind or a pattern  
of units above the dense imagery, so that  
to suffer is to suffer wherever the place,  
to love always has an ending. What is forever  
but a chance encounter with the sublime  
while the here and now, immersed in soapy water,  
is erasable, therefore improvable.  
Mother did not have to choose. To be where one suffers  
is to suffer everywhere, so to get somewhere  
you must construct a fable of pain to soothe the ache.

Mother would spit the cigarette on the grass and start another one. The art is in getting used to it, its essentials and fringes, its common moves toward meaning that unclutters the mind, fire's danger considered. When the breathing normalized there might be a tune in her head or a frenzy in her hands, every squeeze on clothes a validation of her history, the ragtag ghost army of it, the soap that stings the eyes and washes away the tears of cold neglect. Style is not about freedom.

## Incarnate

☀ Randy Bustamante

Music wafts from the orchestra pit  
and light begins to bloom on the stage.  
You lean toward me  
and as you clasp my hand  
oh how the curtain falls  
on my mind: suddenly  
I am all body, all  
eyes and ears and bated breath,  
all spine and limbs and skin  
waiting, waiting.

The bodies enter *en pointe*,  
muscles sculpted by the mimicry  
of creatures suffused  
with their agile corporeality:  
prance, lunge, twirl, leap,  
crouch, soar, roll, spin.

Their dance traces fluid lines in the air—  
movement on the other side of my stillness  
as when, on days in a room full of mats,  
I come home to my anatomy,  
become cobra and frog,  
child, warrior, marvelous dog.

Making thunder or channeling mantra,  
my hands proclaim the oneness of the incarnate  
in each performance or pose.  
You wrap your fingers round mine  
and I know I'm no angel, which is simply  
Divine.

## Winter Coast

Today the sea and the clouds pull back  
and I discover islands, tide pools,  
the undulation of waterfowl.  
At my feet the ocean's edge  
is drawn by the tides' calligraphy:  
sand dollars, bivalves, conch and crab shell,  
dusky pebbles honed to unimagined shapes.

An outstretched shadow brushes past mine,  
and turning round I see a raven  
contemplating a blade of dune grass  
on the frosted beach. It senses  
my breath-steam and wings away  
I know not where, for my eyes  
fill with the shimmering meaning  
of *white*.

In that blinding moment I imagine  
the coast and all my prepositions  
suffused with snow—primeval  
purity abidingly new—  
and the eternal sea shaping  
my life's shifting landscape,  
sustaining all that sustains me.

Breathless I stagger back to the house.  
I stomp my boots clean, yet in my wake—  
a trail of snow and sand crystals, tenacious  
like grace.

## Original Madness



F. Jordan Carnice

If you are one to fall into madness,  
Hold on to the many ways of mending  
Fragility, like how one makes sense  
With beautiful chaos: impressionism,  
Sunflowers at night, the drunkard  
And the gurgle in his throat that is his opus.

Maybe, just maybe, the trouble is not  
Only the seeing but also the reading:  
A ship is a whale ahead of its time,  
A glance is always a message to be cracked.  
We are our own makers of mischief  
And, sooner or later, casualties.

The air will then throb with meaning.  
Though no one will ever be as wise as stars  
Or hold love captive that could shy them  
Away from us, a little dent in logic  
Is the nearest we could get. To be free,  
To laugh like fields of anemones.

## The Poet on the Ridge

☀ Albert B. Casuga

*For Edith Tiempo, 92, Poet and Teacher<sup>+</sup>*

Poet on the Ridge, *hermana Maestra*,  
pray for me, as I would you, that the dusk  
catches us still swearing by the rhyme,  
perishing on the rhyme, convulsing  
on the sudden quiver that comes on a stealth  
when rhyme and rhythm become the sound  
of the sea, the pulsing river, cupping you  
in time for that peremptory dive off your perch  
into that devouring sea, betting life, love, limb,  
and surfacing again to offer God your nakedness,  
basking under Lo-oc's sky, waves laving now brittle  
haunches because you were always gentle and pure.

*Paalam, maestra.*



## Oracle Bones

☀ Elsa Martinez Coscolluela

grandmother, here we behold these bones  
dug deep from villages long gone: ox scapulae  
and tortoise shells whose fire-cracked pits  
foretell human fate or fortune.

we are told also how by fire artisans glazed  
these burial urns: bone-white funeraries, fine  
jade jars, vessels made of bronze, crafted  
to honor the spirits of heaven and of earth.

and so the grave-mounds draw us to our knees  
in worship at your ancestral shrine: source  
of all we know of myth and magic, math and music,  
calendrics and calligraphy.

as promised, we offer here your oracle bones  
and wonder—did these bones foretell how  
as a child you'd wake to find your village burned,  
your parents dead, and you—left

by wounded kinsmen on a huge strange ship  
that took you far across the seas? you hardly  
spoke, and all we know are tales grandfather told  
in his old cartographer's voice, his tongue

singing with the music of madrid. but you  
did not forget: you spoke in your sleep, light  
as crystal chimes at the window when the wind came  
sweeping in from the cold china sea

like an old familiar ghost returning, seeking  
a secret room to inhabit, standing luminescent  
at your feet, calling you by your one true name  
in words you no longer speak—

and you would wake, and sing so softly that the air  
stood still to listen, as we did—and wait  
for the ritual sound of tiny little bones flung  
upon the cold hard floor, mapping

a world lost beyond retrieving.

## Other Times

☀ Jhoanna Lynn B. Cruz

At the dining table we picked at a bowl  
of old basil from the crisper—maybe

we could salvage a pesto or a green  
curry. Quickly my pile grew bigger

than his. He was angry again.  
He pinched the stalks without method.

He wanted to give up  
on this basil, this dinner. I grooved

to the neighbor belting out bossa  
Cole Porter on her karaoke machine.

“After You, Who?” “Just One of Those  
Things,” “What is This Thing Called Love?” Once,

I trashed a jar of olives, once a box  
of cheese, and once a quart of soy milk

molding in different hues of white.  
Sometimes we know. Other times

we pick, we salvage,  
we sing someone else’s song.

## Cutting My Mother's Hair

☀ Alice Sun-Cua

We need a hairdresser, I tell her,  
but she insists. So I sit her near  
the morning light, where flawed eyes  
like mine could better see.  
I comb her eighty-eight year old  
white, wispy hair and realize  
that not too long ago,  
she grew my hair long.

Every day she spent time washing  
and combing, attaching pins  
to make a tight chignon.  
But my hair was too wavy,  
too wayward, too wilful, too wild.  
The clips often got undone in school,  
and I went home with hair all askew.

I gently separate the strands, measuring  
the length, unsure where to start.  
She laments its thinness, and although  
I see her scalp through the now-lanky hair,  
I assure her it's not too bad.

Shaping the ends behind the ears,  
I hear the snipping, soft and muted,  
like the sound made while cutting  
the umbilical cord,  
separating child from placenta.

I tell her I'm done, bringing a mirror.  
She looks at the freshly-cut hair,  
turning her head this way and that.  
She smiles. I heave a sigh of relief.

## Ophelia, Edith

☀ ZalDY Dandan

Whenever a great poet dies  
poems bloom like sunflowers  
trailing after the setting sun.

The great didn't say a lot,  
just enough, and they said it so  
well you can never say them again.

Their verse clings to you  
like guilty pleasure.

And when they died in their sleep  
we all woke up  
as if to an amputation.

## Caesura

☀ M. Protacio-De Guzman

My Muse  
Holds a sword  
To cut my verses  
Into coherent parts  
That will please  
Every discerning ear  
And captivate  
The most aloof heart.

My feelings await  
The same fate.

## Mime

☀ N. Adrian De Pedro

I am yours, I am yours. What was  
the cummings poem, "i carry your heart  
despite my heart"; was it, correct me.  
Better yet, believe me. I was almost you,  
almost you on this page, almost the lilt  
in the gaze that tarries upon this very word, hi,  
how have you been keeping and I'm glad  
to meet you, here, of all places. Have  
a stolen bouquet of best intentioned parentheses  
((((()))) to go with the shut story of my life.  
We are of equal footing, identical walking echo  
chambers, same modestly hollow body of sound  
waves; say crash and I fall, say tide and I come;  
in the air that you strike with your voice,  
I could be the delay of the plucked chord,  
the tremor in your breath, bearing you  
in me like a voice I have always known.

## Directions

1. There is a list of the invited: mostly former lovers, make certain they arrive near simultaneously. Hire a butler who will seat them in a row. Hire a crier who will make them feel jealous; there is a well revised script in a shoebox inside my desk drawer. She has to be the kind of beauty that is utterly believable, but the kind of woman I wouldn't be seen dead with.
2. The body, after it is harvested, is to be cremated. Take a handful of ashes and mix it with the coffee. Have everyone partake. Like it was a ceremony. Carbon atoms ingested by carbon beings, like how suns feed on themselves. I mean to put stars in their blood, I could supply the dead light.
3. Hire an astronomer, demand the height of Venus in millisquaremeters from where I was exactly in life, in direct proportion to how much love my mother has had divided by the number of beds she has slept in multiplied by the ratio of first minus last kisses, equalized by my father's naming of me. Also, have the astronomer monitor the aurora borealis, one way or another, I'm going to end up as a fixture. Demand feasible theories.
4. I've always wanted to be an invisible man, unseen, in limited omnipresence. The coffin has to be the cheapest one in the worst store. I'm fine with a plywood box. For contrast, bury my best suit, the sepia one, with my gray ash winter tie, stuff the lapel with vermilion santan, to prove a point.



## Astral

Listen: I've got this nowhere placed inside me, really just  
 a dummy poltergeist, force squared off on the hapless; funneled from body to body, indestructible.  
 worn old energy, how much matter was annihilated  
 Fear that fact and ask: as energy equivalence, as time bomb  
 to create me? Mass possibility. Look at me, this isn't me.  
 I am readdressing my body, I have ordered new bones.  
 Look again, closely: I'm gaining  
 tangibility; for now I make do with what I can take:  
 small coins or goldfish, full inkwells, pieces  
 from lost lots of stolen brass and stainless steel. I swallow and weigh  
 and it's working, an ounce or two of what I'm becoming shows.  
 Better than nothing, I tell myself in front of someone's mirror  
 to a pittance of a reflection, full of lack. The shadow I've procured  
 doesn't even know where to cast itself but that's fine, we'll both learn gravity,  
 friction. Heaven, too, from a far point on earth. Listen: I want  
 to be anchored to a form that will not dismiss me as mere light.

 V.I.S. de Veyra

That the country is in  
 shambles  
 is a myth. Only politicians  
 are debating,

ordinary Filipinos rela-  
 tively  
 agree with each other's  
 venom.

## How the Arts are Marketed to the Arts Market

Singers are actors, they act out dumb characters on the  
 packaging marketed to the major niche;  
 dumb actors are singers, it's their voices & phrasings that  
 carry poetry & a society into a Face.

This may be a sad note for the lost faces & voices of asocial  
 songwriters, film writers/makers.  
 But more a realist poem about clever, faceless businessmen  
 who, like me, talk always of life  
 without being heard, seen, interviewed or booed, who, like  
 me, talk always 'bout those in the arts.

## Ohoy Butterfly Wings

☀ Simeon Dumdum Jr.

La la la la la

Ohoy butterfly wings, if you fly do it today  
The sun sets and the clock may not tell more than the time  
The next day that arrives will again start to depart  
As he takes her hand in the garden of the roses

La la la la la

Ohoy butterfly wings, when you're gone it will be night  
The cold winds are now blowing, the brown leaves start to fall  
And words fail to remind as they float weightless as fluff  
The sea in the distance recedes as far as nothing

La la la la la

Ohoy butterfly wings, from my study I can glimpse  
The green world and your flicker of pride over the flowers  
These two wings could be mine as I write day after day  
They close like a life on a shelf with light as bookends

La la la la la

## Why the Fan Has a Mind of Its Own

A carpet was unrolled, then strewn  
With petals, mostly of red roses,  
On which the couple were to walk  
When word was given by the planner,  
Now endlessly fanning herself  
As she attended to the details  
(With its red and white rays, the fan  
Fluttered like a mad butterfly  
Lamenting the disarrayed petals,  
Which really were thrown there on purpose.)  
Now that all loose ends had been tied up,  
She gave the signal, and the couple  
Marched in accordance with her music  
And pre-rehearsed choreography.  
But suddenly, while everyone  
Was clapping in lusty approval,  
They kissed before reaching the altar—  
He wrapped his arms around her back  
And swung her upwards in the air,  
Her feet curved up into a U—  
The bell of a saxophone, which  
He had to bend backwards to blow.  
Which kiss transfixed the rest of us  
And stopped us dead in our tracks,  
And nothing moved—except the fan.

## Tanka

Every little rose  
Lifted up by a finger  
Like a lover's chin  
Looks at you with its dewdrops  
And desires to be a ring

## Justice Aspires to the Condition of Music

In court my gavel is authority  
Whenever I bang it all noise ends  
I sent two women out who talked too loudly  
And warned a lawyer when his cellphone rang  
If both the truth and the lie were a pin  
Dropped in the courtroom, I would like to hear it  
Its ting might be the small, still voice of justice  
So just imagine my shock when one morning  
While the accused was insisting that he  
Was somewhere else on the night of the crime  
From a tree outside came the trill of birdsong  
So sweet that we all looked at where it came from  
And the complainant felt set to forgive  
And I, the useless gavel in my hand,  
Yielded the moment to a better witness

## A Change of Vision

☀ Felix Fojas

For a change I've decided  
To roll and turn my eyeballs  
Inward and probe the dark  
Universe within the cave  
Of my skull, the convoluted  
Grey planet floating there,  
And everything that lurks

In such interior landscape.  
I've spent half a lifetime  
With my eyeballs fixed in  
Their sockets to look out  
There with a very limited  
Freedom of movement,  
Except to gaze sideways,

Up and down, and roll these  
Marble-size orbs clockwise  
And counterclockwise, too.  
And what do I expect to find  
In the deep, mysterious dark?  
Nothing quite as blinding as  
Staring at the noonday sun.

Yet darkness fascinates and  
Enlightens like the negative  
Of a photograph. Darkness  
Teaches more wisdom than  
Light because in the dark I  
See only vague, half-defined  
Shadowy forms which leave

Enough room to stretch my  
Imagination to its elastic limit;  
Unlike when I look outward  
At objects in the light of day  
Whose sharp, clear-cut shapes —  
A vivid still life — require no further  
Metamorphosis in form or

Essence, and soon becomes  
Jaded in the beholder's sight  
Like the usual sunny side up,  
O Cyclops' yolk-eye I stab at  
With a fork each breakfast  
And bleed its viscous yellow  
Blood that's cloying to my vision.

## The Fugitive

Yes he is a most peculiar kind  
Of fugitive who has just escaped  
From solitary confinement not  
Of a cramped, damp prison cell  
But from the penitentiary of his

Own conscience, dogged by  
A fully armed posse composed  
Of the memories of the past  
In hot pursuit of his present,  
In the biggest manhunt ever

Assembled — with attack dogs  
To bring him back dead or alive.  
All his craftiness and guile he  
Musters to throw his pursuers  
Off track and effect his grand

Escape by crossing the river  
To confuse the hellish hounds,  
Erase all traces of his scent.  
Gradually his pursuers' gruff  
Voices and the sharp canine

Barks become fainter, fainter  
Until absolute silence prevails  
Deep in the forest. Yet he must  
Keep on running and running  
Long after he has realized that

He is just imagining himself  
To be the most wanted man  
On earth although he has not  
Committed a single petty crime.  
He is the seeker and the sought,

The pursuer and the pursued,  
The lawman and the desperado.  
He is simultaneously trying to  
Capture his dark truant shadow  
And eluding his bright self.



## Babel

☀ Antonio E. Hernandez

I would assume there is a list  
of thoughts that had solidified to words  
and travelled distances from lips to ears  
of listeners intent or simply near.  
I would assume somewhere a Clerk  
appointed harshly to recount  
the babblings of the vocal mob  
(God's special hatred for this job  
Caused Him to pick a sinful angel  
To suffer through the madness of the human tongue).

Each word from this celestial file  
is measured, weighed, categorized  
against the heart that sent it flying,  
then tagged as truth or merely lying  
and given worth in grades of ten  
then added to the sum of Man,  
Be in the end called argument  
in summing God's Experiment.

For even now, you may agree  
we seek not sense nor greatness in the words  
we aim at ears and not beyond.  
Why, we are deaf to sense so why should we  
Do otherwise? Bedamn the Clerk and his rewards!

## At the Mountain Refuge: Ed to Edith

 Francis C. Macansantos

After laughter over steaming cups  
Over memories of friends  
A deep pleasure settles in the mountains  
Amid forest and underbrush  
And carpet of mist.  
We had trudged up this trail—endless, it seemed—  
To where no steps had pressed the grass  
With the muzzles of enemy rifles  
Flowering below in distant darkness.  
A fortunate error, *felix culpa*, that war.  
Now we know where peace can be found.

## A Visit

☀ Priscilla Supnet Macansantos

*For ELT*

It is the fruiting season  
When we come to visit—  
Your table, redolent  
With mangoes from your yard.

In the afternoon light,  
Your small, slight figure  
Astonishes, even unnerves us;  
*Have we stayed away this long?*

Yet you are spirited host,  
Still with so many stories.  
And your soft, slow voice  
Brings us easily to earlier times—  
To summers radiant as the sea  
Downhill from your home;  
Stories of foolish friends,  
Delightful talk under the shade of trees  
In your yard, wherever you were living.

We listen raptly, a lifetime of memories spilling onto our laps,  
Falling like fruit  
From a tree long ready  
For harvest.

It is your caregiver  
Who brings us back  
To the present—the mangoes on your table,

Your shaking hands, your need to rest.

As we leave,  
Bidding us goodbye,  
You dance a jig, a quick shuffle of still-nimble feet,  
To our surprise, and delight.

I remember my own mother  
Who passed on at 68, babysitting her month-old grandson.  
I used to wonder why mothers  
Would not live forever  
Or virtually so.

Seeing you, perhaps I understand why.

## From the Figs



Hansel B. Mapayo

From my window, I see the fig  
trees whose leaves do not curl.  
Leaves that spread like fingers,  
out to touch the sun.

But at times when the sun out-  
does the rain in visiting our gardens,  
the fig leaves sparely jut out,  
nevertheless, green.

Yet the trees never cease to bear fruit,  
once they have borne fruit,  
even if they're not showy  
with their flowers.

There is a word for that—  
inflorescence.

My pomology teacher tells me  
their flowers are in the stems.  
And the fig wasps come through  
the ostioles to lay eggs and in turn  
spread the pollen in the flowers.

I think of the times when I had many  
things done. What were the tiny wings  
and feet that left seeds of hope  
to make my mind think, make my hands  
move, my mouth to say, beauty?

But I also think of the many dry spells.  
 My mind not inflowering.  
 No poem written; no prayer  
 as if I closed myself to the world.  
 Or perhaps the world is closing out  
 itself, and I can only open my palm  
 to remind me that somehow,  
 somewhere, a wasp flutters.  
 And my heart waits while the leaves  
 dance to the wingbeats as I nod to  
 the gift of every sunbeam,  
 every raindrop, every embrace,  
 every tear, every breath.

## ***In Loon, Bohol***

i.

Spring here is *loon*.  
*Tubig loon*, they say of spring

water which for years has been  
 company to their table's offering.

If you go there early morning,  
 you pass by under the coco leaves

that share with the ever green  
 ferns and banana trees the sandy land,

a kind of soil foreign to my hands  
 which tilled only the Bukidnon uplands.

But perhaps, this was how this woman felt—  
 She who was from Dapitan—the little star

of her mother who lost the last light  
 while giving her daughter her first breath.

For here in *Loon*, she speaks their tongue,  
acts the gentle ways of this crab-shaped land.

As I arrive at the source, I understand the melding:  
portal open, ring of spring—its water flowing on

and on, literally at bay, waiting for the saline  
waters by the bay to pool in, into a brackish stream.

ii.

Friend Jun B. sent a sparse text while I beheld  
the scene: My holy week was mundane.

Recalling Meister Eckhart\* say that God is everywhere,  
I told Jun— Patience, soon it will rain God.

iii.

Well he, and much more I, never actually know  
when that would be. What I know is that—

this spring is neighbour to the Mangrove family—  
*Bakhaw, Bonggawon, Pagatpat*—where

the macaques, mangrove monkeys, scuttle  
to and fro to glean crabs from the trees' roots.

Towards the deeper sea, the *lusay*, sea grasses,  
on which the fishes feed and the starfishes rest,

---

\* "Some people prefer solitude. They say their peace of mind depends on this.  
Others say they would be better off in church.

If you do well, you do well wherever you are. If you fail, you fail wherever you are.  
Your surroundings don't matter. God is with you everywhere—in the market place  
as well as in seclusion or in the church.

If you look for nothing but God, nothing or no one can disturb you.  
God is not distracted by a multitude of things.  
Nor can we be."

~ MEISTER ECKHART

sea urchins also congregate enjoying their space  
in the configuration of this everyday living, and I—

I who have come to your town *Loon*,  
see in these sea waves' perennial reaching out

to the spring: God desiring the human;  
while the spring, secured in her place,

in her freshness, sits still, open to that reach out,  
that rich moment when things live together—

peaceably, what they also call here, *loon*:  
beyond obligation—quenching the thirst

and filling in the hunger for one's presence  
that other lives or one more life may spring.



## An Instance of Fog

☀ Homer Novicio

Light reading light like  
aluminum prism overture  
overturned  
for the sun-king in hiding.  
Who are we to know?  
White on white in the moving.  
And where are we to go  
when the earth surrounds itself  
with the soft bones of  
an ageing morning?  
Eye interferes between  
step and roadstretch.  
Assumptions run more or less.  
The trudge is no heavier than  
the weight of all things lost  
like howling and voices  
thrown out the distance.  
No way of recovering faces  
from the tones they make.  
Here, one enters slowly as  
one does an abandoned chapel.  
There lies the ancient phase  
of holy water; the time before  
dipped fingers rippled  
inside bowls held by  
cold-eyed marble angels.

Landlocked in luminous edges  
I move my arms and in my  
own chosen way  
bow down and feel some  
wild, silent exaltation.

## Dear Mnemosyne

Dust as decimal to placate  
all remaining symbols, my dear.  
Because sweetness and sorrow alliterate  
find none of them here.  
This one's for the nostos slashing the  
algos and leaving a weary head  
to speak in charades:  
paper-white the bone-threads  
free at last to dance, a dangle  
of unleashed fog fresh out of frog-  
like metaphors and the lake, err, like.  
Hangover is over and done with.  
No more orbit around indifferent  
satellite; throw out verses by the  
bucket and don't push it with your  
countless why's.  
In place of eyes, I place now  
a cauldron to fire up a universe  
of pure new inventions to swallow  
without spitting you whole.  
For limbs, may there be invisible rivers  
to chart my flow into the vast  
order of chance before I re-set the compass.  
And for thighs, there are new names  
to take in—dark star, celestial pull,  
light-breather, great harness, greater harvest,  
Eve's silent eye, grief's swollen lie—  
Oh, but to start at the beginning  
at least, *at least*. No suite  
for love and fingers to suffice  
what was surely never built in a day.  
Because the way demands that  
death does not diminish just as  
words do not wholly represent.  
I pack up all my belongings that  
in turn, possess me. There are no more  
lines in the regrets department.  
All is set. You are ready to go.

**density**

☀ Corinna E.A. Nuqui

I learn that the matter we know  
is mostly empty:  
atoms aren't pebbles, but bubbles can be collapsed into mere iridescence.  
and if a star collapsed into a neutron star  
that would be much like tucking an entire elephant  
into a demitasse—

taking your hand,  
I would want for longing to be collapsible  
at first, much like that elephant  
carefully packed, gristle, guts, ivory and all  
into a neat ceramic nest,  
because that way, pain  
could be tucked into a low drawer  
in the back room filing cabinet  
and we could go on with tidy numbers  
and foreshortened angles  
like a camera frame captures only smiles  
when brought too close to your face

I would be brave now,  
calling on all the lightness I can pack into my voice,  
and say goodbye  
as if this leavetaking were as natural as  
the way a live elephant flicks ears  
to the sound of water miles away,  
to the sound of low rumbling  
heavier than we can hear.

this elephant will not be packed into a coffee cup.  
my grief if packed like so, would sink through the mantle of the earth

and fall through the heavens,  
so lightly, I will leave  
to the sound of my blood  
thumping in my ears  
rushing to the surface of my skin  
flush to meet the weight  
of your sad eyes on me.

## Aside

☀ Allan Justo Pastrana

Must I believe  
that to understand this man's  
impatience—in time—

those fingers rehearsing—  
pulse now steady, now  
tense—the lyre and its taut

strings giving way just  
before the last lap—out  
the cave, forgetting all too soon

the future, ours—  
so much more of what is *now*  
behind him—is it mine

lips, eyes he steals,  
wants to—how, from the beginning  
to be betrayed thus, I must

have known? I did not.  
If he is to turn that head, and  
look—I shall live forever.

## At Camp Lookout

 Myrna Peña-Reyes

Fog haze, morning chill  
chart our days:  
linger under blankets,  
breakfast at ten, then  
ascend a weedy trail,  
lift our faces to the sun,  
the wind fancying our hair;  
listen how the mountain sings:  
bird calls, insects, wind  
in the trees, billowing the grass,  
the trickle of a hidden stream,  
the sudden startle of wings!

Down in the sweltered plains  
doll houses, offices, streets lost  
in the toy towns with borders  
blurred in the clustered trees;  
bathtub boats streaking a silver sea,  
curve of shoreline holding back  
the deep; Siquijor, Sumilon, Cebu  
breaking up its sparkle and sweep;  
and at the airfield scarring the land  
planes descending, taking off—  
we're here to escape them all.  
How distant they all seem!

Late afternoon,  
the monotone cricket song,  
cicada wings shivering the air,  
bats navigating the dusk.  
Soon the firefly hour,

Night's bright sentinels encamped in the sky.  
Far below, the town lights blaze,  
ship lights crawl their slow trails  
across the blackened sea,  
drop below the horizon,  
fade, flicker, sink.

Drawn downward,  
our thoughts turn home,  
the lowlands closer than we think.

## A Momentry

Father thigh-deep in the sea  
lapping gently against his body  
carries me against his chest  
his free hand peeling seaweed off  
my feet his hips  
flinging them aside  
as he strides forward  
stops and shifts me onto his back  
then dog paddles into deeper water

Piggyback I look around us  
am suddenly afraid cry out  
*Go back! Go back!*  
as shore birds flap our way  
then veer back heading elsewhere  
The dark mass of seaweed sways  
between us and the shore

Ahead the sea rolls outward  
to the curved sweep of the sky  
Over Father's shoulder  
I peer down through glass  
sunlight snaking downward  
bathing the grassy bottom  
sloping deep deep deep  
I tighten my arms around his neck

But he holds us up  
his pale feet treading water  
his hands and arms sweeping the water  
like bird wings stroking the air  
hovering in place  
*Don't look down* he says

And I discover I am floating off his back  
one hand resting on his shoulder —  
blue sweep of sky  
sun gilding the water  
the warm sea reaching farther than the eye  
and Father and I  
poised in a moment  
like birds hanging in the air

flown away elsewhere forever



## Modest Claim

☀ Victor Peñaranda

We rarely count the years  
We've been together,  
The number of houses  
We've lived together,  
Even the thunderstorms  
Caused by my indiscretions,  
The rift and painful drift  
While you held the compass:  
All things will come to pass.  
There's no denying  
How I've deviated  
From the golden mean,  
The fibonacci of pure intention,  
By taking intimate journeys  
North and south of my navel  
Where tests of uncertainty  
Curled and foamed like the waves,  
Caught wild doves at twilight  
Of our conversation.  
I've learned to respect  
What cannot be desired  
By chance or possessed by space.  
It's not to belittle our faith  
In ever after or the speed  
Of the elusive.  
Our modest claim to love  
Enjoys the luminous,  
The thrill of combustion,  
The way we invent flame  
At the flick of the moment  
And embrace dearly  
Mornings beyond redemption.

## Shared Space

I lean on the honesty of a window  
To recognize the pliant bamboo,  
To appreciate the useful broom  
Made of mid-ribs from palm leaves.  
My mind relates easily with the ordinary,  
Expands itself into a garden where a child  
Can play and exchange pencil for a rose,  
Where I can claim a portion of the day  
To rest habits in parenthesis.  
It seems the right thing for me to do:  
Invite you to share this familiar space  
So we can probe the migrant nature of birds  
And dwell in the pleasure of our laughter.  
I shall burst like a pod of seeds  
At your bright touch or consign myself  
To be a poem hanging on a clothesline  
Waiting for you to pass by and read me  
Slowly, release me from words delicately ...  
Find home wherever we may journey.

## Angkor Wat: The Oracle of Stone

☀ Dinah Roma

The minutiae of steady existence.  
Bas reliefs on the walls where his face  
Hides in rubbles spelling mysteries,  
Pillars and slabs braving oracles  
Uninterrupted by ages.  
In the procession of gods time  
Whittles away where monks  
Engrave their lust for heaven.

We walk listening to their hands  
Moist as the walls that have known  
Enough of dark, their patience  
Enclosed deep in silences. Light breaks  
Through stone and years. Moss  
Made sacred in the green softening  
Of music beaded in prayers.

In the routine of an afternoon drizzle  
We relive itineraries of descent  
Into a world injured by myths  
And ransomed by faith. Of a woman  
So beautiful, her breath alone is life.  
For whom forests flutter in her danger  
And temples rise in witness to her trial  
By fire. We wage ourselves against  
The penance of fate, swear  
Ourselves unchanged in distance  
And absence, our vows embossed  
In the rough eternity of granite,  
While outside a reign of survivors  
Looted by memory rush to trade  
And alms made divine within.

How do we find our way  
Knowing the labyrinth persists  
Even as we rejoice at finding our exits  
The opening to landscapes  
Into which we blink ourselves  
Into clearer vision, past the deception  
Of threshold from where we pilgrims emerge  
Stunned still with horizon.

We leave as we must  
On the path we tread in ignorance.  
We praise the divine, wait in awe  
To vanish in the expanse of worship  
As night fall dims the intricacies  
Of this world only so we can ask—

*In the ruinous sweep  
Of love, we build and rise  
To let the oracle abide.*

*Speak to me stone: Tell me  
Where I can lay down and rise  
From my own ruins.*

## Ferry Crossing

On the ferry to the next harbor—  
Your words alone are compass.

The sea wind, adept at other shores,  
Burns deep into my skin.

Whatever rest comes to me now  
Is simply to know water.

The way it holds the earth  
Calm in its surface; its slow time

Girdling islands into archipelagos,  
Drifting as the heart does

In search of its own depth.  
Dark swells through from underneath

As tides surge for exodus, when arteries  
Of rivers part to reveal our own.

We shall alight then, not missing a step,  
Eager for anchor and a well-lit coast.

The vessel empties for another mooring.  
This is what it is to arrive:

The waters recede gently  
Unnavigable.

## The Liturgy

*after Olena Kalaytiak Davis*

Don't say I haven't tried, Lord.  
Don't say I haven't bruised my knees  
pleading once more for mercy.  
Have you not heard me gasping  
in the night, Lord, as I pulled  
at my hair from the tearing  
of flesh? I waited long for you  
to become Love Incarnate,  
Lord. Have I confused heaven  
and hell again? Where  
are the lush fields, fruits,  
and feasts of the Song of Songs  
I sang? It was your Word, Lord,  
Close to my heart, The Promise  
Of Salvation, The Kingdom,

## The Reward—

The way out of fire.  
I grit my teeth, Lord, until I knew.  
“Be still,” You said. “And know  
I am God.” I know. I am still.  
To Know, and Be Still. Only prayer  
Tending to my Soul  
As the world pays for its mortal heart—  
each day, Lord, not knowing  
the ascent from the crucifixion.

## Samurai

☀ Allen Samsuya

The professor wanted to wield a katana  
many years ago. But even then, he understood

that the world has long since moved on  
and that a sword is a thing of the past.

He adores olden blades that are kept undrawn  
inside their scabbards. In his sleep, he dreams

of himself in battle, unsheathing a blade  
that is as bare and as inconsolable as rain.

He crosses swords with a hundred warriors  
in the heart of his moonless slumber. Later,

when he awakes, the professor can only  
jump out of bed. Outside, the sun is vengeful

and daylight shoots through the window  
like ancient arrowheads.

## Consolation

If we must relearn tenderness,  
I will ask you to forget all things  
permanent. Have the maps we keep  
on our palms rubbed off so that trees  
stay unmarked, stones remain unturned,  
and geographies of good luck, love,  
and rain become uncharted parts  
of the universe. If we must insist

on warmth, I will ask you to forget  
all things that permit forgiveness  
so light and prayer don't die on us  
like fingernails, promises don't grow  
like sleep—unhurried, unnoticed—  
and stars don't dare fall without  
meaning or magic. Come the end of it

all, I hope to find you scavenging  
for sunflowers in the outskirts  
of a rainbow, wearing nothing  
but your wings and dented halo.  
I hope we never run out of things  
to say to each other. Say, how  
we have come to understand  
what the world is made of after

all—Earth and all its complexities,  
heaven and all its sadness, splendour  
and all things that make for mystery.  
Listen. If you listen close enough  
to the clockwork of olden love songs  
you will hear its metal pulse beating  
steadily against our bodies, against  
the weather, against everything under

the sun, as though its many hands  
keep count of every second we spend  
before we come to our senses. If



we really must come to our senses,  
I will ask you to forget all things  
beautiful. If you ask for a reason,  
I will tell you—I have lost

my reflection in the wreckage  
of water. If you ask for help,  
I will say—let dewfall settle  
at the tips of your lashes.  
If you ask for consolation, I will  
have you know—our shadows press  
through the gaps of stained-glass  
windows. We are quick and strange  
like the beginning of sorrow.

## How to Levitate

☀ Trish Shishikura

Prudence says, I know this: we pursue no reason at the beginning, plan toward the end. She aims to write the world instead, makes decisions in a snap as though it were that easy. The man on the road turns out to be just a body now. Its foot sticks out, soul reads like poetry—one callus at a time. Once, Prudence explained why the moon resembles a lemon and not a cat, told me about waxing or waning. Complained about poetry, songs on repeat. Never listens to a song twice, she hates redundancy. Prudence believes in angels, reads Bukowski over cups of tea. Pretends she is incapable of loving, pretends to be a character from a book. This is the problem with abstraction, that attempt to detach itself from reality, tries to become intangible like grace, while Prudence tries to be tangible like water. It cannot be held. I tried to tell her; she went on and on, reciting a poem that spoke of a girl who wrote about uppercase poems about angels and god. She howls to the poet, tucks him in her pockets as though she had pockets, waits for moonrise, thinks some more. I wanted to remind her about confluence, but the lights on this year's tree are too-inconsistent. As the tree—neither pine nor true. There is no truth to truth. I keep calling out her name: Prudence, Prudence. I say this the way I would sing a song, chorus on repeat, on again, and again. Silence. Halts. Soles of Buddhist monks evading pebbles, chanting: Prudence, Prudence.

## Tokyo

The motion elastic: sunflowers lean towards a fantasy about walls mimicking grandfather's posture in pictures taken with the third wife. He was staring at the pattern of her kimono. She was looking directly at him, feared morphing into a reptile. She used to tear her scabs off, only to find the new skin green. How do I reconcile

with photosynthesis? Since fish can jump over water, may I, too? The scene creates a stained glass effect. My lack of understanding sincerity is crucial to the tone I use when comparing weather-changes here and there. I was out under the sun for too long; my skin did not mind. Isn't it a beautiful thing? The mind? Yes? Such astonishment

about cicadas crying in humid air. Taxonomy claims: salaguinto, patango. Same nodding, different complacence the makahiya applies when folding. What many neglect is that amorseco knows how to keep stubbornness a façade, how to hold on. Take these puddles, for example. If I claim that these hold Mariya's tears, should I suspend

the line? Only once did I see my parents lose composure. It was rather funny—they had painted their car with my name; father was driving and then they found my body, claimed I was at the edge of a field, the end. I kept some tulips close to my chest. Carefully, she crouched down (making sure her dress didn't wrinkle) and checked my temperature.

She began dusting my shirt off abandon. She forgot what day it was. She was holding my hand on our way back.

**Soul** Jojo G. Silvestre

Next to the body  
Or right behind it  
Or even before it  
Or maybe beside it  
Why not inside and above?

Overtaking, covering the back  
Frolicking within  
Playing with one's innards  
Making home in one's ears  
To whisper and to listen

In between the teeth  
Chewing and chomping  
In one's tongue tasting  
In one's esophagus swallowing  
In one's intestines digesting

In one's heart, well, feeling  
Loving, searching itself  
Knowing what one doesn't  
Dictating where to turn  
Or letting go and freeing the slave

The soul does know  
Where one goes  
What one eats  
Whom one desires  
Whom one hates

It is the self  
It is the other self  
It is the multiplied  
Divided self  
The surprised self even

It is the soul  
One's own  
No more  
No less  
Than one's  
Unseen Other

## Afterlife

☀ Cherrie Sing

Uncle died a gruesome death.

An invalid for years,  
the radio his only friend.  
Until it shorted:  
burning the mattress  
burning him.

How he must have screamed.

Yet he was not mourned  
and his sins had grown black  
like his fire-scorched body  
that no one dare speak it:  
the wish his death  
was a glimpse  
of his afterlife.

## Boat Ride

Strange

that the current moved  
in swift patterns  
the day of his first boat ride.  
Smoothly, it seems  
to the middle of the sea  
the lair of the Ocean Dragon King  
where he and his father  
threw ashes of paper money  
begging the King  
to give them to his grandfather.

Many boat rides past  
the weight of dead pictures  
marking his years:  
his father, mother, grandmother, uncle.  
He now understands  
the salt of tears  
the wind of journeys  
the comfort of rituals  
his first boat ride  
becoming

Unforgettable.

**La Madonna Alegro** Victor N. Sugbo

Every morning, I lift up in my arms  
this little girl  
so she can smell me,  
and like a whelp,  
remember my scent.  
She knows I never bore her;  
but I shall keep her smelling me,  
stain her memory with my fragrance  
so she will never forget me  
even when she walks  
down gardens among gardenias and geraniums,  
and along food alleys  
or passes by city parks  
and lawns of huge cathedrals.



## In Cebu while waiting for the thanksgiving mass for San Pedro Calungsod

☀ Brylle Tabora

Morning peels the shell of night, spilling the  
sun's color all over Cebu—a conflagration of

red and yellow. The locals, under their straw hats,  
have been waiting for quite too long, with the chorus

of smiles they wear over their red shirts.  
Remember, these are what they have come for:

Flower-strewn carrozas on the cobblestones  
in front of the cathedral, already missing

a bulb or two, children running freely  
around while holding candlesticks the priests

have handed over, and morning blisters  
caught in the frayed ends of straw hats.

The fluvial procession will begin in two hours  
and we have positioned ourselves where

they said the bus will pick us up, some  
unknowing tourists. One bus drives past us.

The cold makes a rush to our feet that travels  
through our threadbare pants and sends a chill

down our spine. From afar, we see a tarpaulin of  
San Pedro Calungsod dancing jovially by a pole.

## Ecology

*after Ernst Haeckel*

Ecology became a household word that appeared in newspapers, magazines, and books—although the term was misused. Even now, people confuse it with terms such as environment and environmentalism. Ecology is neither.

~ ELEMENTS OF ECOLOGY

We have called it struggle for existence, among many names, because that is how we've thought it to be, a follow-through of what had come before us: names that we only read in books, places we have never gone to before, and the mouths of the rivers in their lees of laughter. But it exists, like the very existence of touch, maybe through the slowness of bloom coming to being, or the transience of a puddle on the soil surface after a spring rain. And we are not exactly sure of its name, neither being environment or environmentalism, and the books have not clearly defined it. Some say it is an agreement between man and those he holds superior to him, perhaps his love for the littlest of things: a small leaf, a single fiber of hair, a black feather, or the farthest fringe of life.

It has taken us years to define it, however undefinable, or at least to give it a name. All we know is that animals do not bother to care why the ground shakes in the wee hours of the night, or why the trees have hidden so many secrets from us under their gnarled branches. For this we should only be thankful that light enters through God's pores and speaks to us in many ways. We will go on with our lives, our feet breathing at the same time with the ground, now with the promise of rain.

## After the Flood

☀ Roberto Klemente Timonera

Here I am at the door  
or what's left of it.  
To enter this house  
is to leave it behind.  
The living room with its old chairs,  
the porch that heard  
our shared words,  
these are places  
I cannot visit anymore.  
The cracks in the thick mud  
form a mosaic of grief.  
The new hole in the wall  
is a jagged window  
giving a perfect view of loss:  
here and there a dead body,  
a crushed head, keeper of untold stories  
smashed between rocks and stray trunks.

## Epiphany

he compared her to a summer's day  
but realized he was  
more lovely & more temperate  
& her rough winds  
shook his darling, darling buds

## This Poem

it is  
a conch.  
from the tip  
a studded spiral  
widens but your gaze  
falls to the fragile body that  
(when pressed tight to your ear)  
cradles every ocean, every beach  
you have never/ever been to. you hear  
the crash and roar of water on water, the siren  
songs the years have yet to sing. a phantom saltiness  
simmers on your tongue: you become a child  
swimming after his slipper or an old woman  
who has forgotten everything but the taste  
of water. this is the echo of your own  
coursing blood. when your breath fills  
the shell, the note must boom at just  
the right frequency to make all things  
tremble, to shake the birds off  
the trees, to make the earth  
ring with longing even as  
this poem tapers  
to a close.

## Gone Are Our Enemies

☀ Joel M. Toledo

Doom came to me last night,  
neon and polyester-strong. Gout,  
says Tom, is my big toe's celebration.  
Gangrene rhyming with penicillin —  
they do, now and then. But Darwin  
didn't know this. He's as innocent  
of bugs as those rats brought to Italy.  
See, it's not scurvy that does most  
sailors in. Magellan hacked to death  
in Mactan. Slow voyage, quick death.  
So instead of more tragedy, here's  
a pill. Language tries too-hard; flowers  
are already super-adequate. Mitigation,  
claim both the pollen and Tom, would  
mean my demise. Gravity's too-heavy,  
too-formal. Try explaining this to waves.  
Try winking with both eyes.

**Retreat**

☀ Deedle Rodriguez-Tomlinson

In the terrace of a retreat house  
on a hill, I was staring at the moon

when he joined me, hair combed

and in a fresh white shirt that glowed  
in the moonlight. He sat beside me

on the bench, facing the other way.

We said nothing. Then,  
when he spoke, his breath smelled of cool mint.

He brushed his teeth before coming out to talk to me.

I felt like the girl in that toothpaste commercial  
falling for the guy with the fresh breath.

He asked why I was smiling and I said

*Listen to the wind in the trees. Isaiah was right—  
the trees of the field clap their hands.*

We listened.

The wind picked up and rustled the leaves on the trees  
above and below us, and it sounded like an applause,

the kind I heard in a theater once

after Eponine sang about being on her own  
in *Les Miserables*. I caught him

staring at me, the way he always had. He looked away quickly.

He never looked at her that way and yet  
they're together now and that night

was so long ago I wonder how I even remember it, or why.

I can't recall what else we talked about  
but not once did her name come up.

I remember his eyes, his smile, his breath

and how the trees on the hill seemed to clap for us  
that night. The night I thought he'd tell me

something I'd been waiting to hear.

## The Word Jar

 Denver Ejem Torres

*After Geminio Abad & Albert Camus*

All the Words  
Known to Man  
Were stolen  
By the Bad Being  
And in a giant jar  
He stashed them all, all  
Helpless, hapless  
Words.

In minutes,  
Without Sun, whereunder  
They thrive, they died  
One by one  
Like brain cells,  
Like fireflies caught by  
The lizard's  
Tongue.



## On a Map Out of a Nightmare

☀ Anna Yin

A fine set of china glows in twilight,  
great chants linger by the horizon,  
flags redden a rushing river.

Heat builds up and fog forms,  
the huge vessel turns white.  
Beneath its lid,  
silence cuts through.  
Night, again, darkens.

*Great stars of white frost\**  
sob on withered leaves;  
from the chimney of a forbidden  
fortress, clouds rise.

Deep down, stains congregate  
in yellow, and yellow—  
where endless deserts expand,  
dust blown from bare lands.

\* Garcia Lorca

## A Palm Tree's Dream

The night, a canvas sprayed by ink;  
a huge hand stretches to clean.

Above finger nails  
between gray and dark,  
he scrapes its indigo dust—  
the emerging starlight  
too frail to sparkle.

Along the rim of sky  
an angel rinses her moonlit dress.  
She gazes at the beach:

Wave upon wave,  
blue irises open, pale.

## Verseliteration for Sawi: Nine Stanzas as Excerpt From *Music Queen*

☀ Alfred A. Yuson

Another home.  
Stare at beige or ivory, gaze at curtains  
—universal tapestry from the sun  
through large windows.

You stagger to reclaim a link with the world,  
the same grand view as privilege,  
a sorry glimpse of the Third World.  
There are bodies sunning, voices now inaudible.

Yet another room, just another room.  
Manila of the inchoate history, past  
holding back a smile, a silent nod,  
when you recognized the abused refrain.

You hummed initially, tired of the repeat  
of fat women of all labels redesigned after the war  
that eyeballed your first night, going past  
boundaries of knees, and everyone had tittered.

Even the mock grimace is infectious.  
Satisfactory or irrelevant, off the wall,  
peripheral in corners and mazes of the city —  
Manila the merry, as a waif in pomp and ceremony.

True, parts look sportive with modernity  
as you sit down and ask for orange juice in the lanai.  
You tell yourself under your red-eyed breath, why,  
now I'm in Hawaii. You give a little wave of goodbye.

You're the wrong visitor, still a lot of garlands anyway.  
Wives in elegant chiffon rise to a crescendo. You realize  
it's a version that has welcomed you to Cebu. They tell  
of songs that are among the strangest you have heard.

In the realm of fiction, on this island, affirm their faith  
in the roundness of a sphere of seas and oceans.  
Rest on the edge of a mangrove swamp. Point out a shrine,  
hear the oldest sirens wailing a prayer, like sashimi.

Squint at the far-off statues, shaking already.  
That's history, right? That's the way history goes.  
Like love, makes the world go 'round.  
Ha ha ha ha ha!





CREATIVE  
NONFICTION



## Snapshots From a Visit to a Lakeside Town

 Timothy R. Montes

### Part I. Mainit Sojourn

One summer in the late 1990s I found myself taking a side-trip to a small lakeside town in Surigao called Mainit. I considered it a side-trip because my main purpose for going to Mindanao was to visit my girlfriend in Iligan. My mundane reason for my detour to that town was to collect a debt amounting to a measly 500 pesos from a housemate of mine in Silliman University. My life, however, depended on that amount for I had squandered my money on dates with my girlfriend while I was in Iligan. Holding hands with her along those dusty, narrow streets of an industrial city, I realized too late that I did not have sufficient fare money for the return trip to Dumaguete in Negros Oriental. I had no choice therefore but to hunt down that roommate to collect the money he owed me so I could complete my summer travels from Mindanao back to the Visayas.

From Surigao City I took a bus to the junction of that small town. It was not difficult to remember my roommate's instructions prior to the summer break: "Just get down at The Crossing and ask for my father. His name is Enoch. Everybody there knows him."

Enoch: his father's name gave my trip a Biblical resonance. It did not help that my roommate's name was Llargan (although Momoy was what everyone called him). I would end up either in Canaan or Scotland with such strange-sounding names, I told myself.

It was not hard to find Enoch at two o'clock in the afternoon. The big, Mafioso-looking character was behind the counter of the only gasoline station at the crossroad going to the lakeside town. He did not look like my roommate at all. If Momoy exuded the arrogant conceit of a gigolo—eyes squinting *a la* Richard Gere—his father was a nondescript man who had to squeeze his girth out of the chair armrests just so he could shake my hand.



Enoch, despite his heft, proved to be a shy and uncommunicative businessman. He had a bulbous nose on his corpulent face, and he showed off his gums whenever he smiled because he did not bother to wear false dentures over his missing front teeth. I introduced myself to him and told him I was looking for his son. Swamped by the debris of bric-a-brac and gasoline receipts, the patriarch of the Garcia family slyly looked at me and sighed before getting up to call his son on the CB radio.

Through the nasal, raspy static, my roommate's voice coming from the rice mill on the other side of town sounded evasive, as if he knew that I was no better than a tax collector. "So," he said. "You're here." For a while, when he hesitated, I thought Momoy was hedging on the payment of his debt. "I'll pick you up in half an hour," he said on the CB radio.

While waiting for my friend, I tried to hold a conversation with his father in that junction gas station.

I knew, of course, that Enoch had also graduated from the same university where I was teaching. My being a college instructor on a summer binge in Mindanao helped a lot in improving my standing, although my mission in visiting his son was far from pedagogical. Enoch told me that during his time—the 1970s—he was a working student in Silliman. "I worked in the cafeteria," he said. "No, not the kitchen. I was at the service counter ladling out food to the children of the rich." There was certain levity to the way he recalled things, as if the job was child's play, no use fretting over adolescent humiliation at being caught by crushes while wearing a sissy apron behind the cafeteria counter. "A radio announcer was my roommate at the dorm. He was a slob, although he was quite popular because he was a DJ on campus radio. A beauty queen fell for him although he seldom took a bath. Sometimes he would wear my polo shirts, washed and pressed by yours truly, when he would go a-courting. Of course, the beauty queen never knew her boyfriend was wearing *my* shirts." His laughter sounded more like a snort.

Here was this self-made man whose idea of success still hinged on those university days when fame and talent were the true measures of gentility. That he was considered the town's most successful businessman was not something he would boast about. He carried himself like he never outgrew those days when, after college, he started out with a small vulcanizing shop. Twenty years later, when I met him

that summer, he already owned the major commercial establishments of Mainit: the gasoline station, the drugstore (which was also a department store), and the rice mill. The simple lives of people in that obscure town revolved around the grinding of Enoch's commercial mill. He was Mainit's counterpart of a Lopez and Gokongwei; there was, however, no room for business expansion. He was just that: a small-town businessman. And like most small-town entrepreneurs, he was no manager in Armani suit ready with a dealer's handshake. Enoch was driver, manager, accountant, warehouseman, canvasser, and deliveryman all rolled into one. He would not survive in the advertisement-driven credit of modern business. At heart, he was just somebody ladling out Sloppy Joes on the trays of the rich. Hence his shyness; hence his no-nonsense way of looking at the world. I was relieved to see his dog-eared college textbook on Accounting on the shelf in his shop. That book seemed to be his Bible.

My roommate Momoy arrived on what they called a "Mad Max," a skeleton of a jeepney with the motor of a tractor which they used to haul sackfuls of rice grains at the mill. That my entry to Mainit would be on this noisy, rickety contraption was something I found heady. Jesus had a more modest ride on the back of an ass as he wound through Bible country. In my case, I laughed aloud with Momoy, thinking all of it was adventure, the pure unadulterated gumption of the young. I only had to look at my friend for him to understand what I had come for, and we did not discuss the 500 pesos thinking it too vulgar between friends. That ride with Momoy on a mutant vehicle was one of the stillpoints of my young life, when I was mired in romantic sensations and didn't care about financial liquidity, when I could risk things without bothering about insurance. It's there, lodged in my brain, a picture in the album of my memory: the young man who wanted to be a writer and his triumphant entry on a Mad Max into the town of Mainit.

The town, it turned out, was still three kilometers or so from the highway. It was a cat pushed against a dead-end corner. There was a squeezed, coiling quality to the streets that ended in the lake itself. Like most riverine towns bypassed by modern highways, it was stuck in the ethos of its heyday when trading was by water and people buried their china plates along with their ancestors near the riverbanks. Copra and rice were dried on the streets, and there was an indefinable tang to the air that only lakeside places had. The houses were small, the people, too, and we rode into a *poblacion* bathed in

the golden light of a three o'clock summer sun. Momoy maneuvered Mad Max past the elementary school, through a gauntlet of kids with bicycles. The girls walked in droves and my peripheral vision took note of the young men in street corners ogling them while shouting obscenities with vernacular gusto. The town was small but it was not sleepy. There was a fiesta quality in the air, what with the basketball summer tournament in the offing. Momoy was in a hurry to deliver me to his house because he had a basketball practice for the coming tournament. "I'm in the First Five," he said. Such boasting was a foil to the humility of his father, I thought. In the eyes of the young, making it to the basketball team was more prestigious than owning the rice mill.

On my first day in town, I went around without a tour guide.

Let me say before I proceed that I went to Mainit in my mid-20s. I was writing my first book of short stories and I thought I was going to become a major Filipino writer, this despite my nonchalance at being introduced as "a writer" and "a professor from Silliman." Since it was merely a side-trip, my impressions were colored by a romantic hangover from my amorous sojourn a few days before in Iligan where I had visited my girlfriend. Little did I know that this small town I now found myself in would offer a more colorful vista when it came to the study of human characters compared to the monochromatic vision of Iligan. For when my girlfriend and I broke up a year later, Iligan wilted in my mind's eye into a nondescript basin of hot asphalt and dusty houses. Mainit, on the other hand, would reveal certain hints of the grotesque and the bizarre, a town waiting for my pen to chronicle its grotesque soul.

Let me also say that when I was there I was at the height of my vain phase. At twenty-two, a young man in the best of health is full of himself and tends to judge people by their looks, not by what they have done. At that age, combing one's hair was as momentous as composing a symphony or writing a poem. But then more than hormones would account for my elation in being there. I carried my vanity like an actor waiting to be invited to escort the Reyna Elena, preening and taking walks in the afternoons knowing that the townspeople were talking about "the stranger." It would take a real photograph and several more years for my impressions there to gel into insights, for discontinuities to strike me with a particular power. I see myself walking there with a tourist's tread, the ground firm beneath my feet, taking in the raw impressions that would only

become coherent with the passage of time and vanity and youth.

Momoy's house was really a corner drugstore. Only the gabled second floor gave the impression of its being a domestic nest. Since Mainit had not been infiltrated by the entrepreneurial Chinese, it was Momoy's family which took on the job of providing the main outlets for small-town consumerism. As such, the family house was no different from a traditional Chinaman's house in the Philippines: part bodega, part store, part living room/dining room, with a concatenation of sleeping quarters for six children on the second floor, not to mention four domestic helpers who twirled around the store and kitchen like secondary mothers. It was a far cry from the cozy, quiet home I'd been used to when I used to live with my parents (who didn't have any business sense). There was continuous noise in Enoch's house: the wail of a younger sister, the opening and closing of the cash register, the squeaking of bikes on the street, the shouting of customer orders, the lilt and litter of a family in disarray. It did not help that Momoy had five other younger siblings over whom he lorded his authority like, well, an authoritarian. My friend, by virtue of his status as the eldest child coupled with a self-conscious notion of his being good-looking, ordered the people in the house to do his bidding. Once I even saw him slap his younger sister. She cried, and he went out as if nothing had happened.

I spent my first afternoon taking a stroll around the town: quaint houses, wrinkly-faced old people, sari-sari stores in almost every corner, a forlorn market where hawkers proudly tried to entice customers with a freshwater fish from the lake called *pidyanga*. At the marketplace, I took the time to read a poster announcing a Miss Saigon presentation, a lip sync extravaganza concocted by the local gays. And where all the houses ended, there was the greenish-gray waters of the lake which failed to reflect the colors of a raging sunset. I stopped for a few minutes beside a moored canoe while I watched a half-moon rising over the horizon. The sight of nipa palms lining the other side of the shore made me feel somber; they drew in my inchoate feelings into whatever I thought of a vague future. I, however, missed the portentous quality of these shadows because I was still bathing in the afterglow of a visit to my girlfriend. Half of my brain was still soaked in the sensations of kissing the pretty girl I had left behind in Iligan. For me at that time, the town was therefore a projection of everything bright and beautiful about what I felt about life. I stayed there at that bank of the waters for almost an hour, watching an

orange sun sinking over the nipa fronds on the other side of the lake.

The next day, after waiting for Momoy to finish with his basketball practice, we went back to the gasoline station at The Crossing. Our ostensible purpose was to spend half a day pumping gas, but when his father left to check on the rice mill, Momoy padded the receipt of a truck being tanked up and changed the amount in the duplicate of the receipt. He then swiped a 500-peso bill from the till and, with bills from the cash register, pompously paid me back the money he owed. It was as easy as that: the children of the rich stealing their mess of pottage. This scene, I observed, was repeated at the drugstore. Momoy's younger brothers and sisters had no qualms about swiping money from the cashbox: drops in the bucket of Enoch's wealth being nibbled away by the children. The family enterprise, I surmised, needed a good Confucian sense to make it succeed in the long term.

The opening of the basketball tournament was signaled by a parade followed by a "Miss Summer Tournament Contest" at the local gym. The team muses, wearing shorts no shorter than those worn by roundgirls in boxing bouts, followed each other in preening quarter turns that would have made any gay director proud.

"Look at that one in red shorts," Momoy whispered in my ear. "She used to be my girlfriend. She's a *bakasyonista* from Cebu."

Her name, I learned later, was Yvonne. She moved with the exaggerated flourish of the buttocks when she turned around, and although she was a college student in Cebu City she emitted rustic sparks which belied her *probinsyana* origins.

"I've had a taste of her," my friend said, licking his lips.

True enough, it was my friend's ex-girlfriend who won the beauty title, notwithstanding the saccharine elisions of her English vowels during the interview. It was the sheer sexual provocation of her moves that won the judges over, and my friend, challenged by the rise in the girl's market value, wanted her back in his life. He did this by showing off in the first game, outdoing Jaworski in his intentional fouls.

Momoy's team won the game. On the way out, I found his father Enoch fuming mad on a side street. It was clear that he did not like the arrogance and bullying that his son displayed during the game, but he could not do anything about it. I knew that he knew what his children were doing behind his back. In Enoch, I found a genuine

tragic helplessness of a parent who does not know what to do with the sins of his children.

It was no secret that my friend Momoy was considered the town gigolo. His friends and relatives could attest to his prowess and precocity when it came to sex.

"We watched him doing it with his girlfriend in high school," his cousin confided in me.

"How?" I asked.

"Through a peephole. We arranged it with him."

The town gave me the impression that lurid things were happening for the delectation of gossipmongers and macho *istambays*. Boys and girls seemed to have started at sex quite early, and everybody seemed to know who was doing it with whom. My sensibility, molded by my puritan Protestant upbringing, found this phenomenon interesting. But despite the girls he was able to have had sex with during his high school days, Momoy, like his father, put a higher premium on brains than on looks. As such, his avowed true love was his high school girlfriend who graduated valedictorian in his batch. Back in Silliman the year before, as friend and roommate, Momoy had requested me to write love letters to his high school sweetheart with lines like: "But the skin has its own memory..." For the price of a pizza pie, I provided the words for my friend's sensuality. I earned my bread by writing love letters for my friends.

I think I stayed in Mainit for about five days. I spent them reading and writing, finding a sanctum on the second floor of the house while people downstairs were caught in the bustle of the store, the *botica*, and housework. I was treated like a guest, pampered and shown around. Gigi, one of Momoy's younger sisters, was tasked to bring up to me my *merienda* mornings and afternoons. She hovered over me, unable to understand how I could spend the whole day just reading, the most boring thing she could imagine. It was as if the life of the mind had been mystified to such a degree in her family, and the encyclopedia that Enoch had bought for the children was left under lock and key in the cabinet, unread.

On a Thursday, I was informed that I would be the guest preacher in the local Protestant church, a task I accepted since it would be a good way to repay the kindness and hospitality of the folks there. But I was blinded by the sin of pride: quite frankly, what I really wanted



was to show off my intelligence and verbal adroitness for whatever a college instructor's pedantry was worth in that rural town. It was my way of leaving my mark: KILROY WAS HERE, and he shouted at the top of his lungs like a false prophet. I then buckled down to write my sermon, trying to translate my English thoughts into Visayan words.

One afternoon, while I was writing my sermon, Momoy's sister, bearing a glass of juice and bread meant for the visiting scholar and guest preacher, stumbled on the stairs and dropped the tray. She cursed herself and apologized to me, something I found so amusing because her tone was that of a slave feeling like she did not deserve to serve her master. It was not that they considered me a genius. It had something to do with the fact that I taught in a prestigious university and what I was doing was something strange to them. In other circumstances, I would have been considered an idler wasting his time in a useless preoccupation (reading and writing). But as a guest, I needed no less than servile idolatry for the mumbo-jumbo I was doing. In that town, in that businessman's house, I found myself privileged as an intellectual and writer. I had to remind myself that the secret to enjoying it was not to overstay and strain the hospitality of the people there.

I had brought with me a tattered copy of *Playboy* magazine, with photos of nude women digitally retouched so they looked like fairies with wings—*eros* cleaned up to the level of hazy fantasy. I gave it as a goodwill gift to Momoy's younger brother, a kindly overweight adolescent struggling, at 17, with high blood pressure. Somehow the sleazy magazine ended up in the hands of the patriarch Enoch, from whom Momoy and his brother got the gene for high blood pressure. Instead of being angry, Enoch was amused by it. Not that he needed it, he said during one drinking session with us. From one of his nephews I had learned that he had not had sex with his wife for years.

I delivered a theologically unsound sermon in the small Protestant chapel of the town. It was the week prior to Holy Week, and I was trying in my own way to redeem the place from a somber view of Christianity based on Christ's crucifixion. I said something about the necessity of staying young because Christ himself had died at 33; that one who is in Christ stays spiritually young forever. In defiance, I glorified youth by wearing a flamboyant Hawaiian polo shirt and expatiated on the pulpit like a cheap TV evangelist. "Christ," I shouted to make my voice reach the man on the last pew, "wants us to experience the happiness of life. A Christian stays young in

spirit throughout his or her life. The brooding, serious killjoys are descendants of the Pharisees..."

Everyone felt I did good. My theatrics worked well for a congregation that had been fed with cut-and-dried doctrines. On the other hand, my personal theology seemed palatable to these folks who did not seem to be bothered by my feel-good philosophy. It would have made me embarrassed if my pastor of a father were there to listen to what I had to say. What mattered then was the performance, not the sincerity of words.

After my debut as a preacher, Momoy's mother made the offer of postponing my departure for another week just so I could be one of the preachers for the *Siete Palabras*. "I can buy a plane ticket for you to Cebu," she said. It was a tempting offer that would show my professional progress: from being a debt collector to being a jetsetter preacher. I was not sure if she really thought my preaching was worth that plane ticket; nevertheless, I started feeling bad about my fake showmanship. I was almost tempted to accept her offer, but then I felt I would be overstaying my leave there and strain their hospitality at the same time.

I said no, not without regrets.

That Sunday afternoon after church, we had a luncheon party at Momoy's grandfather's house. The grandfather had a more transgressive name: Nahum. He had a cream-colored wooden house with fighting cocks at the back. I don't remember what the occasion was, some birthday or something else. The whole clan was there.

It was there that I met The Aunt. She was a short, imposing woman whose hair bun and make-up reminded me of Margaret Thatcher. The whole family was agog over her running for Mayor in the coming elections. She was a pharmacist by profession, and it was her license which made it possible for Momoy's family to run a drugstore. The Aunt, though, was by temperament a politician. Her assertiveness struck everyone in the room in the same way that a field commander would exude a particular aura to servile subalterns. Over lunch, there was a litany of stories from her about the dirty campaign tactics perpetrated by the opposing candidate, the incumbent Mayor.

"No doubt about it," the Aunt said. "The present mayor is a corrupt politician and deserves to be replaced." The family members nodded their heads in assent. And then the Aunt suddenly laughed a laughter that dispelled the idea that *she* was the one who deserved



to be the mayor. Hearing her laughter, I realized that only a thin line divided earnestness from a joke. The rest had no choice but to laugh with her.

I was introduced around the family as “Momoy’s friend” even as I perspired through the political intrigues. After eating I retired to the back of the house where the men congregated around bottles of beer. Lolo Nahum, the patriarch, was a gentle old man with a penchant for laughing out loud over macho jokes. The cocks in the backyard were strutting around their pegs, going round and round in circles while the men started to feel tipsy in the heat of summer.

I left Mainit the next day 500 the richer and dreading the prospect of long bus rides to get back to Dumaguete. I did not take a last glance at the town; there were cursory good-byes with the family members of my host. Enoch had left early in the morning to open the rice mill; I saw him struggling with the steering wheel of the cab even as he wriggled to get his stomach paunch out of its way. My bag felt only heavier in my head: I had managed to write a short story in the five days that I was there. Momoy brought me back to the junction where the highway snaked away to the “real” world. When a red provincial bus passed by I hailed it and boarded it without fanfare. There, on the bus, I felt that time was also beginning to move, jerking against the inertia that I had been stuck in for the past five days. The trouble with the town I was leaving behind, I realized, was that it was caught in a static sense of time: the stagnant water of the lake, the smell of copra, the clink of a sari-sari store till. It was a strange town for it lay outside the ring of time, as if not only the highway had bypassed it but also the sense of resolution and movement towards something. The coiled cat lay sleeping dreaming its own version of existence. Those people, I thought, would never move in their lives, like mannequins frozen in a particular act: Enoch driving the cab to the mill, Miss Summer Tournament waving her hands like a pretentious celebrity, Momoy getting angry at a failed jumpshot, his younger sister wiping the spilled juice on the floor, the Aunt laughing a small-town politician’s laughter over a joke—and me, coming and going to take literary snapshots of their small-town lives.

A year later, I would break up with my girlfriend in Iligan. My surreal ties with Mainit, however, would expand into ever-widening ripple rings of meaning as I tried to make sense of what happened to the people I knew in that place.

Before I proceed, let me make it clear that I am now a writer plodding on to middle age. As a fiction writer, I always feel the tug to resolve the endings of my narratives. My manuscript of unfinished stories is piling up, a testament to my failure to make sense of my own stories. I could have ended this piece with my departure from Mainit, but events in my life have conspired to force me to round up the chronicle around certain epiphanies. I am forced by circumstances and a sense of form to make some sense of my impressions of the people in Mainit. But the following events, though embellished, really happened.

## Part II. Snapshots Explained

Some events after I left Mainit coincided with my loss of innocence, first, as I've mentioned, as signaled by my break-up with my girlfriend in Iligan and, second, by my gnawing insecurity about my writing skills. Strangely I found myself unable to write anything for the next five years. Perhaps it had something to do with the subconscious self-confirmation that life was not what I had dreamt it to be. Loves and friends came and went, and sooner or later I found it difficult to be moved by certain events. Or perhaps I was just bored with life, with that great sin of *acedia* or spiritual indifference. I don't know when I stopped giving pompous literary sermons, but looking back, I think I know that everything in life had been done for show. Mainit, to me, and whatever happened to the people there would affirm this cynical attitude in me. My perception of events that would happen to my friend Momoy and to his family was largely colored by my brain which was trying to unwire itself from the previous romantic program. For instance, now, at hindsight, I have chosen to remember that view of sunset at Lake Mainit as a black hole sucking in the shadows of the scene. But when I was there, that scene was colorful, the pink clouds a backdrop to an egg of a rising moon reflected on the water, material for a slapdash expressionist painting done in heat. Somewhere between those snapshots of Mainit and my interpretation of them must lie the truth.

I know I sound vague, but I felt I needed to make this qualification because I don't want to hurt the people there I have learned to be fond of. The slings and arrows I have taken in life may have distorted the pictures in my head, but if my brain would be unspooled it would

reveal the following snapshots from that visit. The captions and explanatory notes are mine.

### *1. The Aunt Laughing at a Political Joke*

She lost the elections, and along with her defeat the reputation of the Garcia family went plunging down. The Garcia family plowed in a lot of money in her failed bid to become Mayor and they would always feel they were cheated by fate, if not by the town polity. All politicians are sore losers.

### *2. Miss Summer Tournament Waving to the Crowd*

Yvonne actually came to visit Momoy in Dumaguete a few months after that trip to Mainit. It was then that I learned her name because she slept in my room one evening when she was too drunk to make it back to Cebu where she was supposed to be studying.

Momoy said that during school breaks, on his way to and from Mainit, he would pass by Cebu to rekindle his romance with Miss Summer Tournament. A romance was not really how my friend would describe it, for all he wanted was a free quickie. Yvonne was by then a radio announcer in Cebu, specializing in giving advice, in Visayan, to lovelorn letter writers who were asking advice on what to do with their good-for-nothing-boyfriends or resolving listeners' dilemmas on which to follow—the heart or the head. But her own obsession with Momoy was more mired in bathos than the crazy letters she read on the air.

I remember that when she came to visit Momoy we had gone to Silliman Beach and rented a canoe. It is only now that I realize how much courage it must have taken on her part to come to Dumaguete just to see Momoy. When we went to the beach, she was the only girl in the company of Momoy's henchmen, including myself. Ordinarily, a girl would not go to the beach unchaperoned especially if the guy was with a tipsy gang; had we been less gallant about it, we could have gang-raped her. But no, this girl who Momoy talked about as no better than a slut, went with us to the beach to show us how much she really cared for him. While we rowed the boat against the tide,

she sat in the middle trying to retain the regal bearing of a muse. At close quarters, I observed that her eyes were brown and that she had such provocative downy hair on her arms and hands. Momoy, by that time, had demystified her beauty with his stories of how this beauty queen was really his sex slave, and no matter how much I tried to refine my vision of her, I must admit I was more turned on by the sexual predatory quality of Momoy's version of her than with my waning romantic view of a queen on a pedestal, if not on a boat. Later at the beach we drank beer and Momoy would never exhibit any intimate gesture towards her—there was no mistaking the fact that she was not his girlfriend. To him, she was just a good-time girl. There was something pathetic about her situation; no matter what she would do, she would never be good enough for him. The thin *camisa chino* she borrowed from me was soon clinging to her skin, and she hugged herself against the chill as we rowed to and fro along the beach to get rid of our hangover.

Coming home from the beach, I volunteered the use of my room for Momoy not only because I was pimping for him but also because it was the simplest way to be hospitable to his guest from Cebu. When we arrived at the faculty dorm, Yvonne was already showing clear signs of tipsiness. After washing my face, I came back to my room to find Momoy trying to make her get up from my narrow bed, but she was limply trying to get back to sleep.

"Get up," Momoy dragged her from bed. "I don't want you here."

It was not necessarily a sadistic scene—long-haired, pretty young woman, arms outstretched, deadbeat drunk on my bed. It was a bracing sight to compare the old picture of her as Miss Summer Tournament waving her hand at the crowd and her present sight as a limp rag trying to make it to the heart of a macho gigolo.

"Let her be," I told my friend. "She can sleep in my room tonight. She is in no condition to travel to Cebu."

For about an hour I roamed around the city to give Momoy a chance to be with his girl. I thought it was a foregone conclusion that since they had been doing it anyway, they would be doing it again in my room.

But when I got back, I found Momoy alone.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"Left early," he replied. "Brought her to the pier early."

"What happened? She was drunk, wasn't she?"

He grinned. "I don't want her here. She's a pain in the neck."

I was not shocked by my friend's lack of chivalry, but the way his lips curled into a smile made me think he was a certified asshole.

### *3. Enoch Driving the Pickup Jeep*

In two years, Enoch would lose his businesses to the banks. Another roommate of mine, now a lawyer, told me about it. "Momoy's father came to my office a few months ago. They were deep in debt and I had to negotiate with the creditor banks for the rescheduling of payments."

Enoch, to me, was the epitome of the hardworking businessman who failed to balance his books because he did not take into consideration the debit side of the cost of sustaining small-town social pretensions. All their businesses, I learned later, had started out as loans from banks. Just as Enoch was able to make the income of his ventures plateau to a respectable level by building the most impressive house in the middle of the town, his wife also had to catch up with the social rituals—parties, political patronage, etc., and pretty soon all these expenses were overtaken by the college education of the children. Enoch, like the cat of a town he lived in, was pushed against a dead-end.

When the banks started running after Enoch's assets, the children were forced to stop schooling. Except for Momoy. He retained his privileges as the eldest child. He stayed and overstayed in Silliman and saw the dispersal of his younger brothers and sisters as they were forced to live with more fortunate uncles and aunts in other parts of the country just so they could continue schooling. The Diaspora of Enoch's children was a landmark event in Bible country with no Jews to weep for their exile to Babylon.

Enoch's blood pressure problem would worsen. The last time I saw him, he was lying down in a room in Dumaguete, face flushed with anxiety. His bulk had turned into a sag, as he dropped by to tell Momoy of the developments in their family's misfortunes. His pain, though, was undeniably there. It was the Filipino version of *Death of a Salesman*, I thought. When it became difficult for him to breathe, he lay back on the bed. He had all the right reasons to suffer from

hypertension. He was losing his businesses to the banks, his children were gone, and his son Momoy was not making good at his studies.

*4. Momoy's sister wiping the spilled juice on the floor*

The poor girl Gigi was sent away to an aunt in Bicol for her high school studies. Unlike Momoy, she would not have the privilege of studying in Silliman. She became a working student in a relative's house. Perhaps she has overcome the slave's apologia for being down on her knees to wipe spilled juice. I wish, though, that she had learned to read books.

*5. Momoy angry at a failed jump shot*

In two years' time, Momoy would see his life going down the drain. He would get a girl pregnant, get married while toiling at his studies, come to grips with what they call the realities of life. I was there during his wedding, the bride trying to conceal the bulging belly with a vernal gown. Since he and his young wife were still in college, their parents had agreed on a financial arrangement which would tide them through college. By then, however, Momoy's family had gone bankrupt and he could not rely anymore on the Mainit connection for financial support.

So he usually ran to me for help. The 500-peso debt, like seed human population, grew exponentially through the years. When he borrowed money from me, I did not expect to be paid back. Eventually, he even sold me his TV.

In the first place Momoy had never been cut out to be a scholar. When his grades plummeted, he was forced to shift to Agriculture. But in the end, having fallen into the company of scions of Negros *hacenderos* who were notorious drug users, he did not even get to finish a college degree. While his father had managed to go through college as a food server at the cafeteria, Momoy played out the role of the prodigal son with no compunction. He was not intentionally wicked; he possessed an irresponsible temperament that he thought could be redeemed by natural charm but nevertheless left wreckage and tears in its wake.

My meetings with Momoy at the university became less and less frequent. His debts were getting in the way of our friendship. When he disappeared, I did not even notice it. The gradual disengagement was perfect. Friendships, I learned, could fade away like a song that does not know how to end and just keeps repeating the last line: "Kuya, can I borrow money from you?"

#### 6. Momoy slapping his sister

Later, Momoy would ask me to write two letters for him: for his wife and for his mother-in-law. They were no ordinary love letters, and he could not afford a pizza as payment for my letter-writing skills.

For he came running to me after beating up his wife. *Gaan man gud ko ug kamot*, he kept on saying. *My hands*, he said, *are so light*. The words were so fragile, so poetic they perfectly hid the compulsiveness towards physical abuse. I, of course, was not shocked. There had been a foreshadowing to this act that I witnessed in Mainit when he slapped his sister.

What he now wanted me to do was the most difficult rhetorical context for a persuasive letter. It was his wife's parents who had been supporting them and Momoy had lost his lifeline.

"When my wife left with the baby," he confessed, "I tried to hang myself."

Was it pathetic to show remorse by attempting suicide? I tried to psychoanalyze my friend, trying to understand him because I was going to write his letters for him. As far as I was concerned, he was just a brat who could not be expected to clean up his own mess, much less pay the money he owed me. But he was also a friend and at that age friendship, like love, meant the world to me.

On moments like this, a potential suicide usually looks for explanations. Of course, Momoy blamed himself but he also tried to blame others for what he had become. And this is where I was shocked by the bizarreness of his revelation.

"Do you remember Lolo Nahum?" my friend mumbled. I nodded. The cocks at the back of the cream-colored house were going round and round their pegs. "When we were still children, my cousins and I used to have siesta at his house. On those afternoons, while I was



sleeping, he would come over and fondle my genitals."

Was Freud right? Was there a connection between a childhood siesta and a body dangling from the kitchen ceiling?

"And my father," he continued with his post-suicidal confession, "recently had an affair with one of our housemaids."

Why the sordid confessions? Were these stories being told to explain what he had done? For the first time, I felt my literary powers failing to rise up to the enticement of a pizza. I balked. But I did write that letter for my friend, and it brought back his family to him.

### *7. A real photograph*

When I broke up with my girlfriend in Iligan, I lost the drive to write. My attempt to pick myself up from where I'd left off, at moving on, happened at that moment when I started writing those letters for Momoy: the indefinable pain, the loss, the regret, the cycle of hanging on and letting go. If a writer could get his friend out of the mess he was in, he could at least say he was no mere idler. For the first time in my life, I felt the heft of every word I wrote. If I could bring back Momoy's wife and child to him, I thought that I could at least say there was a reason for keeping the faith in words. I knew my friend was an asshole but even such a person, I told myself, deserved to be happy in life. And so I wrote the letter thinking of how much pain it took to make one's words ring with sincerity and genuine hope.

Twenty years later, after a failed marriage and having moved on to Manila, my life would totally become secular and lose its Biblical resonances of a pilgrim's journey. One day, however, I would receive a letter that would bring back everything in that town with Proustian power. Recently, after opening a strange mail postmarked from the U.S., these memories came tumbling out of my brain in the wake of a real photograph I found myself holding in my hand. It was the picture of a woman hugging a child. *Hi, I am now in California working as a nurse. I am divorced, but I have a beautiful daughter...*

So, I told myself as I looked at the picture and tried to reconcile the face with the memory of that girlfriend in Iligan, was this where love (x) and time (y) intersected as in a mathematical graph? A flat, inert image of a woman gaining weight, hugging her daughter for emotional survival in a far country: the photograph felt so light as



I tried to conjure the feeling of holding hands with her in the dusty asphalt streets of Iligan a lifetime ago. I only had to close my eyes to feel that I could step back into that world of the past, akin to watching darkness falling over a lake, knowing that it would only take the closing of the eyes to linger over a remembered kiss.

Unceremoniously I decided to burn the picture in the yard. The pictures in my head, I decided, were more important than the truth I held in my hand.

As the tongues of flame turned paper to ash, I felt I was shedding off something of myself, a laughable caricature of what I might have been. The essence of youth, I thought, was this cock-eyed view of the world and of one's self. Why, I asked myself, did I waste my youth in pursuit of love? I could travel miles just to kiss a girl while later dismissing the small-town miseries of a people that I felt then did not deserve notice.

Romantic love seemed to have squandered its own light and in its place were peripheral images of small-town characters that dragged the shadow of my love to the fragments of a burned photograph. The paper curled around the edges, turned black, and in no time at all became charred and wispy to be blown by the wind. Now, I told myself, no real photo exists except the ones in my brain, telling me that some things are more important than what I felt then.

And so the place, the small town by the lake, remains in my mind while the face of that girl has dissolved with the years. All I remember are the children on their bikes riding through the streets, the young men ogling the girls, the colorful buntings overhead announcing the summer tournament. My friend is at the peak of a jump shot, Miss Summer Tournament is waving at an adulating crowd, Enoch is driving his pick-up, and I am, like that girl wiping the spilled juice on the floor, trying to clean the mess I have made of my life. But my vanity is such that I try to salvage whatever joys I can retrieve from the imaginary pictures I took of that segment from the past. Closing my eyes, I still hear the bustle in the drugstore, the shouts of people strolling on the street, and then I see what I did not see before: the old people smiling at a young stranger, their faces showing the cracks and wrinkles of life's future cartography.

## Taxonomy

 Michelle T. Tan

There is a name for everything in Dumaguete. Here, clouds creep across skies that flicker into a dozen hues each day—ochre, mauve, cerulean, azure; colors that only now appear real to the mind's eye. In this city, foreign words roll easily off the tongue, which is why a Hibbard Avenue has sprouted so close to Rizal Boulevard, why a Cervantes Street intersects Silliman Avenue. The roads stretch out like a spiderweb all across the province, linking capital to capital, nook to cranny, each corner bound only by the laving sea.

The best way to travel is by bus, windows wide open to the journey's gifts. Outside, trees rush past in a single brushstroke, all green and dazzling in the sun. Here is where you learn their names: *lansones*, *mansanitas*, *marang*, *langka*. Here is where your eyes sharpen to recognition: *kamias* leaves clustering at the ends of branches, mangrove roots high above soil, *talisay* trees in the shape of fountains, water collecting like dew on the surface of a *gabi* leaf.

Elsewhere, shorter distances provide occasion for strolls. On the road outside the Writers Village, you spot a hand of bananas growing out of a purple *puso sa saging*. Nearby, beehive ginger flowers and birds of paradise grow in profusion, awaiting the approval of *Manang Bibi's* shears. Dusty cement covers the road until the gate, beyond which the row of *nipa*-roofed houses disappears and tiny rocks form an uneven track between slopes of *carabao* grass. The path winds further away from the Village, toward a view of Mt. Talinis just past the bend guarded by a tall *araucaria*. The mountain is impossible to miss. Just follow the line of green and yellow coconuts, of *makahiya* plants sprouting between stones. Even in the mornings, the walk is never solitary.irate roosters preen and prattle outside the neighbors' houses. Black-eared goats graze on the surrounding grass.

One rainy day in Valencia, you jump on an impulse to go catching frogs. It is the middle of summer, the downpour has faltered

for a moment, and the air is warm with the smell of adventure. You and Karlo begin the hunt in the meadows behind *Balay* Jasmine. The sky is overcast, but everything else seems inviting: cascading steps of Bermuda grass, the earth sinking beneath your feet, *amor seco* seeds clinging stubbornly to your pants. For a while you sneak around *Balay* Magnolia, hoping to catch the frogs by surprise. Instead you discover antlions buried in the soil and giddily watch them drag foolhardy ants down into their dark lairs.

It is Christian who finally catches the amphibian. “*Ito Mich o, palaka.*” There is a picture of you and that toad in TJ’s phone. It shows you grinning at the camera, hair a little messy, ponytail slung over one shoulder, neckline askew. In your left hand the toad appears to have stopped breathing. Defiantly, it stares away from the camera, but the image spells defeat—its legs are dangling in midair, its heartbeat caught between your fingers.

Most other days, you attempt fewer exploits. Post-session afternoons find you arranging a thin checkered blanket under the Village’s largest pine tree, marking a yellow patch on the green, green grass. You sit with your knees up, reading a story about four sisters in Africa. On either side of you ants crawl along the blanket’s edges, crossing over the border to unfamiliar terrain—bold, audacious, as yet ignorant of fear. Moths and mosquitoes soon follow suit, hovering around candidly. In the manuscript you hold, a tiny ladybug appears atop a page about a welcoming party in Nairobi. Later, a black and yellow striped spider finds its way to you through Karlo, who hands it to you on a stick and says, “We call this the *star-staran.*” Cicadas buzz in the distance. Lambent light falls through from above, dappled by leaves in the shape of rain, in the shape of cotton, dark branches holding them in place like so many pairs of outstretched arms.

Like everywhere else in the Philippines, Negros is a place for the palate. Even now you can imagine Royal Suite Inn’s sizzling *bulalo* and call to mind the smoke, the aroma, its tender flavors melting in your mouth all over again, always for the first time. Manilans find novelty everywhere in the islands. On the shores of Silliman beach, you balk at the prospect of swallowing a spoonful of fresh sea urchin roe—spines still bristling on its orbbed shell—but days later you gobble down a midnight snack of *balut*, emboldened by Hayahay beer. The empty shell has everyone clapping; it’s your first time!

At Bais the next week, you clamber aboard the *bangka* after a swim

on the sandbar below and discover a spread of *kinilaw*, *dinuguan*, grilled oysters on the half shell, whole *lechon*, green bananas... To finish the meal you crack open an *alimasag* and greedily pick at its slivers of white flesh. The salt has barely dried on your sea-stained fingers when you begin unrolling *budbod* for *merienda*. You dip the sticky rice roll in hot chocolate, savoring its powdery bitterness before following it up with the sweet-sour tang of ripe mangoes. Back in Dumaguete, you try pungent horse meat at Kabayuan and have your weekend fill of cakes at the famous Sans Rival. Even on the last day you do not forget to make a stop. Boxes and boxes of *pasalubong* obscure the man behind the counter. A bite of *silvanas* dulls the pain of leaving.

Taste is not the only memory that lingers on the tongue. When a scheduled blackout takes the lights of Siquijor, you find another way to navigate the darkness. Between the flickering of candles, you learn to shape sentiments in the local language: *nalipay ko nagkita ta, lingaw ka kauban*—phrases that you end up telling everyone, insistently, on that last day. “*Buotan ka,*” you declare between farewell hugs, “*Buotan kaayo ka.*” There is hardly any time to contemplate the grass, the slope, the array of cabins. Suddenly you are swept inside the Silliman bus, for what you know will be the last time. The engine starts, the bus shivers with life, it is all too real. Everyone shouts their goodbyes. *Manang Jo* and *Manang Bibi* and all the staff wave back, perhaps less wounded by a parting they witness year after year. “*Mingawon ko nimo!*” you yell, half-rising out of your seat. The breeze carries your voices up to them, as the bus pulls out of the Village and begins the long, winding descent down the hill.

In Siquijor, fire trees line the highway, which doubles back and circles on itself like a snake swallowing its own tail. The Ouroboros. Perhaps this is where the secret of the island’s enchantment lies. Perhaps not. Magic extends all over Negros, proclaiming its presence that summer with the year’s biggest full moon, which rises over the sea at Bacong beach like an omen, like a riddle in the night. On another shore, fortune comes cloaked in the figure of a braided stranger who invites you to his seashell garden. Hidden in a tiny barrio, the collection houses a lifetime’s worth of coral, shell, starfish; whorls and spirals in the smallest of scales, in bright colors that you had not known existed beneath the sea.

Silliman also offers such rarities. At the conservation grounds you glimpse Philippine spotted deer, fruit bats, bleeding heart pigeons of

the Luzon and Negros variety. In Valencia, the supermoon looms over the hills, illuminating the forest path for the ants already marching toward *Balay Jasmine*. “*Saan ba ito nanggaling?*” *Manang Jo* frets the next day. “*Wala namang ganito dati!*” You gaze at the black ants crawling up your walls, circling the floor, floating in shower puddles. “From Siquijor,” you think. “From Siquijor.”

On the plane ride back to Manila, the last image you have of Dumaguete is that of an acacia-lined runway dissolving into thick greenery. You tell yourself not to think, not to think about it. There is so much waiting for you back home. Sleep weighs down your eyelids, but still the image persists. It is one of the many you will take with you back to Manila. You do not dream. Sleep lulls your mind into an illusive quiet. The first thing you see of home is the towering cityscape of Makati: column upon column of buildings and skyscrapers, the air gray with smoke, the sun peeking from behind slabs of concrete—somehow a little more distant, somehow a little less bright. You retreat from the window and see TJ and Vida regarding the same view. There is no need for words.

Somewhere, in another language, there is a term for the sadness of separation. In Bisaya, there is only *mingaw*, I am quiet without you. It has been months, yet every day you still notice tinted flowers, pointed leaves, thin branches curving upward to the sky. You have memorized their names, you know them, but at the moment no words form on your lips. Sometimes they come, two, three days later. You look again and there they are—*kalachuchi*, *neem* tree, *yucca*, as if you had known all along.

You have learned to keep names close to you now. *Manong* Alfredo, Gabby’s Bistro, a *tuko* christened Mozart, a bird’s nest in Montemar. Dumaguete itself has come to mean much more to you now, more than the souvenirs, the pictures. Most of all, the name carries with it that sense of smallness in a world so bright, so safe, so wide and full of wonders. That feeling that you can cease to exist and the world will be all right, everything will be all right. For now you try to hold on to that feeling, keep it alive and safe inside, guarded by the names you have learned, have yet to learn. And you hold on to a promise: Dumaguete, *magkita pa ta*.

**Wild**

☀ Randy Bustamante, Melissa Salva,  
Seann Tan-Mansukhani, and Carla Pacis

Anatomy, yes, but deep  
And far as time  
And all the lost places  
I become in sleep,  
Body as rhythm and rhyme,  
Body as the paths and mazes  
I imagine bathed in light—  
My anatomy is hymn, sob, psalm,  
And I become  
The poem I write.  
~ EDITH TIEMPO, from “Becoming”

The early morning sun was gently warming us as our little band—Carla, Randy, Seann, Liza, Melissa, and a few other co-fellows—boarded our hired catamaran and set off for Tañon Strait. It was our second Saturday in Dumaguete; having weathered two transfers of accommodation and daily encounters with dreaded/delightful workshop panelists and very talented co-fellows, sleeping in or retreating to a quiet nook to write seemed like the obvious ways to recuperate. But Carla had announced, “I’m going whale-watching on Saturday,” and invited anyone who wanted to come along. None of us had seen whales in the wild before.

“They’re wary of people.” This from Elsa, the Silliman University marine biologist who accompanied us. “We have to spot them from afar so we can kill the boat’s engine before we can approach them. Do you have binoculars?”

The whales were typically active at dawn. It was already close to ten a.m., but we were optimistic. Silent, all of us sitting in different areas of the boat, looking at the horizon for the tell-tale break in

the water. Hopeful that we would be the one to see that one fluke, that water spouting from the blowhole in the distance and pointing triumphantly, "Whale!" In about an hour or so, the sun was directly above us. We had been staring out for so long that we couldn't tell if the undulations were wave or whale. Elsa called off the search: "I guess the whales decided to breach elsewhere."

It was high noon and we wanted to be on dry land for lunch but Dumaguete was still a few hours away. So when we came upon a small island, we were all ready to dock. Melissa looked around and noticed how clear the beach was—not a single umbrella, lounge chair, kiosk, or boat. "Maybe we're the first people ever to set foot here." She turned to Liza. "Want to name our island?"

"Too late. Elsa says it's called Balicasag." And as it turned out, it was a renowned diving spot.

It was a small consolation because by all appearances, our whale-watching adventure had little chance of success. None of us had gear, except for Carla who had flippers and a dive mask. Considering how shy and sensitive the whales were, it was quite foolish to believe—though it was still possible—that unaided we could spot them. Bea, Third, and a few others could not swim—Lourd was actually afraid of the water—yet we had sailed out on the open sea. Pierra had brought canned food for lunch but no can opener. Still, the island was full of opportunity for Liza and Randy, the photographers of the group; Seann and Carla, the snorkeling enthusiasts; Melissa and Chingbee, who liked skipping stones; and the other members of our group, who looked forward to spending time with Pierra. The hours flew by with each of us left to our own pursuits until Elsa reminded us we had to make it back to Dumaguete before low tide.

The long ride back had lulled some of us to sleep. It was a small wonder to watch the brilliant young poet, the much-published writer, the group's lovely muse—all otherwise intimidating without meaning to be—so vulnerable. Some of us continued to stare out to sea, still hopeful or just plain bored while others had grown pensive. Melissa and Lourd giggled when they saw Randy, who had been sitting astride the prow already scribbling in his journal, drop his pen in the ocean when the boat lurched. He spent the rest of the ride back contemplating the water, now writing without pen or paper.

"Dolphins!" Elsa pointed at the horizon. Everyone jumped up, cameras at the ready, but none of us could see anything—our eyes



were not trained to spot the subtle changes in the water. The boat changed direction, then gathered speed. We bent over the side of the boat, our bodies taut and watchful. We didn't know exactly where to place ourselves or where to expect dolphins to emerge. And then they were just there, swimming right alongside us. We could almost *touch* them. As with the whales, finding the dolphins had little to do with staring hard enough. They were there and so were we.



Seann, Melissa, and Liza have just arrived for dinner at Carla's apartment in Malate when there's an unexpected knock at the door. Their puzzled looks give way to delight and their shrieks startle Carla's dogs. It is Randy, recently returned from Boston. This ushers in a flurry of recollections about our one shared summer in Dumaguete, ones we inevitably go back to whenever we have a reunion. "I haven't been this pleasantly surprised in a long time," Carla murmurs, after recovering. "Not since the dolphins."

Our group gathers around the potluck table of pesto and fish, salad and samosas, iced tea and sans rival. "I hope everyone's hungry. Shall we say grace?" Carla turns to Randy, "You've been gone a dozen years. Please do the honors." He pauses a minute, smiling, and recites a poem by Mary Oliver.

### Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,



are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

“Oh, the poet of my heart,” sighs Carla.

“Here’s one more for your heart,” says Melissa. “One of the Dumaguete fellows this year was born in the same year we were fellows.”

“She could’ve been my daughter!” exclaims Liza. “Which would make her Dad Ed and Mom Edith’s grandchild.”

We ponder the life they had lived. Summer after summer it seemed as though they kept giving birth. Now their progeny are published poets and novelists, playwrights and critics, but that doesn’t even begin to tell the story about how these writers got there. We remember how we always sighed with relief whenever either Dad Ed or Mom Edith would be in a workshop session. Somehow, they’ve always managed to find a way to encourage the writer who was put on the spot.

“I wanted to hug Mom Edith one time after a panelist tore into my poem. I thought I was going to be scarred for life,” confesses Seann. An easy silence falls among us as we each think about learning to trust Mom Edith, Dad Ed and the other panelists; that this formal initiation into the terrible/wondrous world of imagining and creating worlds with words would not leave us unable to trust our own voice. And we did.

Liza nods knowingly, remembering how nervous she had been when it was her turn to have her work critiqued. “I had seen how everyone sweat in the hot seat. I could see what I was in for.”

“And you turned out okay, just like we said you would,” Carla says, and the rest of us chime in, repeating the reassurances we had said to her eighteen years ago.

Seann and Melissa exchange a look, both of them remembering another moment of fellowship. The two of them and Liza sprawled on the sandy Silliman beach, stargazing, when a local drunken man suddenly intruded on their peaceful space. Melissa, a karate brown belter, had frozen, unable to perform her lethal kicks outside a dojo;

Liza wielding her flashlight at the drunk; and Seann, with chinky eyes glinting fiercely in the dark and with her frail arms shielding Melissa, shouting at the drunken man to stay away. Then their animal instincts kicked in: they ran for their lives back to the safety of their dormitory.

While Carla's miniature schnauzer and two Jack Russells cavort at our feet, we savor the commonplace and the wondrous: beginning the day at the same time the chickens outside our dorm were roused with the banging of pans; sitting through a whole day's session and giving our best; and catching the moon rising only once over many nights on the beach.

The dogs had already fallen asleep when we sit back and regard each other across the table. Over the years, we have stood witness to how each of us has grown—fin, scale, feather and fur—as we let the “soft animal of our body love what it loves” and know the silver threads that wove our bonds were grown during that moonrise.

## A Loud Kind of Quiet: Introversion, Writing, and Lessons From Dumaguete

☀ Erin Cabanawan

John Green, author of *Looking for Alaska* and *The Fault In Our Stars* says, 'Writing is something you do alone. It's a profession for introverts who want to tell you a story but don't want to make eye contact while doing it.'

This is something I believed in for most of my life. As an introvert, I naturally sank to writing like I would into a nice, big, comfortable sofa. It is a primarily solitary activity, one that does not require much contact with people and the outside world. It is a state of comfort. Growing up, I was puzzled by how other people could easily strike up conversations with anyone, or make friends. It was something I found so difficult to do. I also found it weird when people complained about being alone, because that's when I was most comfortable. At first I thought I had chronic shyness, sheer social ineptitude, or horrible insecurities. Then I realized I probably had a mix of all that and more—I had the symptoms of introversion. Though I only diagnosed myself, I think it accurately describes how I feel about interacting with people in general. That is, if I had the choice, I'd rather not.

And so I wrote by myself and for myself. In college, I wrote for the school paper while keeping close friendship with fellow writers at bay. For my thesis, I wrote a collection of short stories without asking for comments or advice from anyone else apart from my adviser. Most of the time, I would start writing a story, then just bury it deep into the hard drive, a file to be forgotten until it's time to free up some space in the computer. And it's just writing for my personal intentions—mostly for credit, for grades, for completing a project.

A few years after graduation, I tried out for the National Writers Workshop. As a writing major, it had always been my dream to have a chance at the workshop. It was every Filipino aspiring writer's Mecca, a rite of passage, a form of affirmation. In the summer of 2006, I received the best birthday gift ever—I got accepted as a

writing fellow to the 45th National Writers Workshop! I packed my bags, faked a bit of sadness in front of my boss (*bummer* I have to take a leave for three *whole* weeks from government work!), and flew to Dumaguete, the idyllic city by the sea. It was love at first sight—the smell of the sea breeze, trees, gently rolling hills—until I saw them. *People*. I knew I was going to be with 11 other fellows, but I kind of glossed over that fact until the very last minute that I had to acknowledge it. During the first few days, I got to know the fellows—Ino Habana, Darwin Chiong, Douglas Candano who wanted to have a drink out that first night, Patricia Evangelista and Larissa Chavez who were my roommates, Dominique Cimafranca who wanted to jog in the morning, Noel Pingoy who was a doctor (and who gave me vitamins the moment he heard me cough), Andrea Teran, Michellan Sarile, and Ana Neri who were roommates down the hall. I also knew the workshop was designed to help us critique our work and improve ourselves, but I glossed over that fact, too, until I was actually sitting down with the rest of the fellows in front of the panelists. And in the middle of the panel was *Edith Tiempo*. National Artist. Poet. Novelist. All-around award-winning writer. Who was now peering down at the pages we've written. I sank into my seat. *What was I doing here?*

And so I started my first attempt at a true blue literary journey a little lost at sea. I couldn't find my voice to give a decent comment, mostly because I felt like I didn't know how to critique. I had a crash course at poetry, short story, and criticism from literary heavyweights, including Alfred Yuson, Marjorie Evasco, Susan Lara, Cesar Ruiz Aquino, and Gemino Abad, which made it all the more challenging. I loved writing but realized quickly that I didn't speak the language. I was so lost I couldn't even pronounce *trope* at one point. I couldn't bring myself to talk more because I had nothing to say, and I just wanted to run away and be alone for a moment, and write some poem about the feeling of cold dread, preferably in couplets. Or something like that.

And then came the moment of truth. It was time for the panel to look at *my* short story. Now you've dunnit, I remember myself thinking, *Next time, write a story, and then bury it into your hard drive, like always. Saves you a lot of pain*. People spoke, one by one, and I found it surprisingly...*pleasant*. Sure there were comments that hit hard, but for the most part, they were truly nuggets of wisdom to be treasured. There were kind words from Anthony Tan and Dean Francis Alfar. There was interest and appreciation for the story, and

the cold dread that had settled in my stomach was slowly replaced by a feeling of warmth. Afterwards, Edith Tiempo approached me and said, in halting Ilocano, that she was an Ilocano herself, a Gaddang from Nueva Vizcaya. I used an Ilocano setting for my story, and it was one of the few times another Ilocano actually read it. It was a bizarre, amazing moment.

There was no turning back then. Everybody had read and spoken about everybody else's work, and we were all already 'read' by everybody else. Our deepest, most personal thoughts were open for reading, which made the workshop a soul-baring process as well. Meanwhile, people were also opening up and forming friendships. By the second week, we had already done a trip to Siquijor, trips to nearby beaches, and of course, trips to cafés, bars, and restos, and other tour spots in and around the city. We attended dinners, poetry readings, and other random gatherings. As usual, I was having a hard time acting like it was the most normal thing in the world to interact and converse with people I was just getting to know. But the fellows and the panelists were a lively and friendly bunch—and extremely talented as well. I learned from them in a few days more than I had in my years of actually working for the Philippine book publishing industry.

An evening with Edith Tiempo at Montemar, her home in Sibulan was a workshop tradition. It was one of those memorable nights in Dumaguete when good food and wine led to talking and talking led to poetry reading and poetry reading led to singing and dancing and basically just turned into a wonderful summer evening. It was also one of those times when I felt awkward and uncomfortable. I realized how rigid I had allowed myself to become that it was hard to be spontaneous and just let go. As I watched them sing song after song, I faced reality. My time in Dumaguete was almost up, and I had so far dodged opportunities to interact meaningfully with people. But the workshop showed me otherwise. I had always thought human relationships were an illusion, and that I only needed a few real ones to get by in life. I felt like human relationships were superficial because I was actively trying to keep it at a superficial level. I kept on thinking, *why do we have to have all these gatherings? Can't we just focus on critiquing our work?* In the process, I missed out on knowing new people, knowing *more* about people, and making myself known. I could not develop a comfortable level of closeness that fast. In fact, I could not bring myself to call Dr. Edith Tiempo *Mom*, when

everybody else was already calling her that. It felt strange, like calling Manuel Arguilla *Bro*, when we're not even remotely associated with each other.

That evening at Montemar, though, we saw a big table full of published books from former Dumaguete fellows. The workshop's literary children, they called the authors. *Edith's* children. At that moment, I understood that the workshop was bigger than any of us. It was something that pre-existed us, and will go on existing long after we parked our pens. It was time to tell myself that I was *there*, and that it was not right to waste time trying to carve out an invisible panic room in which to retreat every time there was an opportunity to connect with people. It was also not right trying to avoid people, just because I thought I should just be respecting them from a safe distance. At that point, in my heart and mind, *Ma'am* Edith became *Mom* Edith.

Of course, things did not magically turn around overnight. I did not transform from my socially awkward self into an easy-going, talkative person.

Do I wish I spent the time I had practicing conversations with random people? Yes. Do I wish I were more of a sociable and open person? Yes. Do I wish I did not have so many cringe-worthy memories of my social blunders? Of course. But I am also grateful that the workshop served as a mirror not only for me to look at my writing, but for me to take a good, honest look at myself.

The workshop is now years behind me, a colorful spot in an otherwise gray canvas of my early 20s, a receding shoreline of the vast blue sea. I have since attended reunion dinners with my batchmates. We've kept in touch online, when Facebook was but a fledgling site, and Multiply was still a thing. We've complained about work and the lack of it, we've expressed frustration at being former fellows with nothing to show for it so far, we've returned to Dumaguete at one point or another, thinking we could relive one particular summer. Some of us continued writing and publishing, while others continued studying or pursuing other interests. We got together to celebrate achievements, and at times, to mourn a loss. I treasure the few times I was able to reunite with the fellows, because it reminded me that Dumaguete was not a dream; it was real. And I had promised to improve myself since then.

I am not trying to become what I'm not. It is, of course, perfectly

fine to just be ourselves, but it would also be good to go beyond our comfort zones and see how we could stretch ourselves further. I am not beating myself up either. But an unexpected self-assessment is one of Dumaguete's gifts to me, and since then, I have been trying to give up long held beliefs that fuel my selfishness and do not help me grow. Opportunities to mature and change come and go, and I should not be making excuses not to grab them.

The workshop, and the stories of people I've met in the workshop, inspired me to go beyond my comfort zone. I pursued postgraduate degrees, got involved in small film projects for a cause, and attempted research and academic writing, all of which required constant contact with people. I find great joy in collaborative efforts and creative work, and when a sense of panic grips me and makes me want to crawl back to my own corner, I ask God for the help I need.

It is not my intention to position introversion like an abnormality, and extroversion as the preferred personality trait in our talkative and noisy culture. Indeed, we have plenty of material subverting that dichotomous representation of personality traits, and we have experts, most notably author Susan Cain, who explain the complex manifestations of introversion—it certainly is not as simple as being shy or rejecting human interaction. It is also not easy being introverted and 'Othered' in a society where extroversion is dominant and preferred. But I do not want to patronize it either, just because I identify with it. I guess I have my own brand of introversion—I have recognized a degree of selfishness, immaturity, and stubbornness in myself that are reflected in the way I think about and do things. These had to go away. And while introversion is so closely linked with the writing profession, I dare say Dumaguete proved it otherwise. As a fellow, I learned the value of group work, of shared opinion or different points of view, of opening up and taking things in. Writing, as in any creative work, has a degree of collaboration involved. Otherwise, the acknowledgement pages of books would have been empty, just like the rolling credits at the end of films would not have actually rolled. Writing may indeed be done alone, as John Green says, and that could easily be proven. But I doubt the experience would be as rich, and the results as rewarding, as when a writer opens up and shares the work.

Is it fitting to talk about introversion as my personal tribute to Mom Edith? Why only now, after so many years, am I putting into words what I have learned in Dumaguete? For one, when Mom passed away in 2011, I felt a sense of disappointment that I did not try to have



at least something worthy of putting on that table in Montemar (or maybe even just at the foot of the table, it would have been more than enough). I have always been putting things off and not writing what I should be writing because of my tendency to procrastinate (which is, of course, another story). For another, my tendency to withdraw from people instead of interacting with them made me miss out on Mom Edith, so I could not let this opportunity to give her tribute pass. Looking back, I wish I had walked up to her the way she did to me after discussing my short story. She always leaned in close when she was trying to say something. I remember her voice being so soft yet firm, like she was emphasizing a point from her heart that her mouth alone could not. For such a soft-spoken woman, she held command of the room during the workshop and everybody hung on to her every word. Her strong presence is a loud kind of quiet—even if she does not speak, you could sense her open and honest spirit, and her deep connection with people.

Mom Edith has also shown that a writer cannot simply write by herself or for herself. Having upheld the National Writers' Workshop since 1962 is something extraordinary. When her husband Edilberto Tiempo passed away in 1996, Mom Edith continued directing the workshop. It was like she realized early on that this was going to be something bigger than her. It was going to connect writers with fellow writers. It was going to start off people in their careers. It was going to span generations. It was going to define Philippine literature. And it was going to be a literary legacy. Through this workshop, Mom Edith led a life of giving and sharing. Writing, as she has shown, is not so solitary as it seems. Because of her, I now understand that I should not always simply write by myself or for myself, just as I should not live life that way.

It always blows my mind that in a moment in time, one of the Philippines' literary greats sat down and took the time to read what I had written, to comment so meticulously on it, and to give such generous and encouraging words to me. Every year, when Silliman University announces the writing fellows, I think about what they would learn and how their lives would change during their summer in Dumaguete. It would be different for the new batches—Mom Edith would not be there anymore to witness their journey, but they would be there to witness Mom Edith's legacy. I hope they grab opportunities to turn solitary to solidarity, understanding that writing, and life, does not always have to be done alone.



## Some Books are Forever

☀ Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo

The most difficult things to part with are books. Not jewelry, of which I have very few pieces in any case, and which I am happy to give to whichever of my daughters fancies them. Not clothes, certainly, vulnerable as they are to vagaries of taste, even when one favors the so-called “classic lines.” Not even the old glazed vases, enamelled vessels, ornamental boxes and dishes, jars, jugs, rugs, clocks and candelabra, carved chests and tooled trunks, paintings, tapestries—the odds and ends of many years of living as gypsies. We sold or gave away many of those each time we packed up in preparation for a new sojourn; I can imagine doing so again, if not quite cheerfully, then at least calmly.

But parting with my books has never happened without pain, not even when I know I might never read them again, not even when I am certain the receiver will put them to good use, will perhaps even treasure them. Nor have I ever chosen to sell a book.

At this stage in my life, however, the parting has become a bit easier. The books in my shelves now are a mere fraction of what used to be a fairly large library, begun when my husband and I brought into our first home—a tiny apartment on Malakas Street in Quezon City—his small precious collection and mine.

These days when I move it is no longer from one country to another, only from one office to another. And the latest move is from one office to another in the same campus. Still I seize it as an opportunity to pare down further, to keep only what I know I need, for my teaching and my writing... literary and historical works by Filipinos of course; memoirs, essays, literary reportage and every other variant of creative nonfiction that I can find; the Latin American fictionists, who blew me away from the moment I first stumbled upon them (the very first was Jorge Amado's *Doña Flor and Her Two Husbands* which was lent to me by a Brazilian colleague of Tony's in Bangkok in 1975), and who

continue to amaze me each time I encounter a new one.

And then there are my close companions—friends both old and new, whom I turn to for solace and comfort when the shadows loom large and the long hours weigh heavily on my heart—Henry James and James Joyce, Albert Camus, Lawrence Durrell; Sei Shonagon and the Lady Murasaki; Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, and Anita Brookner; A.S. Byatt and Jeanette Winterson; Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie; Annie Proulx and Seamus Heaney; Basho and Li Po and Tu Fu; Calderon de la Barca, Federico Garcia Lorca, Juan Ramon Jimenez, Pablo Neruda, Keats, Browning, Pasternak, Cristina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson, Dylan Tomas, e.e. Cummings, Muriel Rukeyser, Denise Levertov... ah, but there are poets for every season and every mood. It is nearly impossible to part with poetry!

Like this, for instance, which speaks for me now... "I've come back to the country where I was happy/ changed. Passion puts no terrible strain on me now. I wonder what will take the place of desire./ I could be the ghost of my own life returning/ to the places I lived best..."

Or this, which I would speak to the daughters in a distant land: "... Know that the psyche has its own/ Fame, whether known or not, that/ Soul can flame like feathers of a bird./ Grow into your own plumage, brightly,/ So that any tree is a marvellous city."

I return to the business of picking and choosing. But while going through the paces, I realize that, rather than culling, I am simply shifting the dear things about—from my office in UST to my bedroom, from my bedroom to the spare bedroom, from the spare bedroom to my office in UP, from my UP office to the bookcases in the Miflores stockroom, from the stockroom back to my UST office. What foolish game is this?

Just as I have made up my mind to desist, my eyes fall on a little volume I had forgotten I owned: Italo Calvino's *Why I Read the Classics*, translated by Martin McLaughlin, the Vintage edition (2000). A note written in my hand tells me I bought it in Washington D.C. in 2004. Is it possible I never read it? I tuck it into my purse, and later that night, curl up with it, read a little bit here and a little bit there... and so I find the essay titled "Hemingway and Ourselves."

It has been such an age since I heard anyone speak of Ernest Hemingway, such an age since I myself mentioned him. And here is Italo Calvino proclaiming: "There was a time when for me—and for many others who are more or less my contemporaries—Hemingway

was a god. And they were good times, which I am happy to remember without even a hint of that ironic indulgence with which we look back on youthful fashions and obsessions. They were serious times and we lived through them seriously and boldly and with purity of heart..." And he might have been speaking for me and my classmates in the old Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in UST, or for my late husband and his contemporaries in UP.

The essay was written in 1954, when Hemingway had just received the Nobel Prize. By then, Calvino had "seen through" him, so to speak, had taken full measure of both Hemingway's limitations and his achievement, but had nonetheless come to this conclusion: "... Assessing the balance of my apprenticeship with Hemingway, I can close the account in the black."

I am struck by the fact that all the works he mentions, both by Hemingway (like that fairly obscure story "Indian Camp" which I liked to include in all my writing classes), and on him (like the work of Carlos Baker and Philip Young), are familiar to me; and bemused by the recollection that, for all the immense distance between myself and the violent, macho world that Hemingway and his characters inhabited, I think that I understood him somehow, understood what he tried to say. I felt for the Hemingway Hero and admired the Hemingway Code. And, of course, this was doubly true of Tony, who, I think, actually identified passionately with him as a young man, and tried to live by that code.

"Leaving aside the limits of behaviourism," Calvino adds, "the identification of man with his actions, his being able to cope or not with the duties that have been imposed on him, is still a valid and correct way of conceiving of existence."

Politically incorrect as he must seem to contemporary readers, there is much in there that still rings true. And, of course there is the style, which is the perfect fit for the code, and which young writers today—grappling with their own inclinations toward self-indulgence and mannered, overwrought prose—could learn a few lessons from.

I turn back to Calvino: "Hemingway has understood how to live in the world with open, dry eyes, without illusion of mysticism, how to be alone without anguish and how it is better to be in company than to be alone; and, in particular, he has developed a style which expresses fully his conception of life, and which though sometimes betraying its limitations and defects, in its more successful moments..."

can be considered the driest and most immediate language, the least redundant and pompous style, the most limpid and realistic prose in modern literature.”

How well I remember the long conversations we had—Tony and I—about *The Sun Also Rises* (which was my favorite among his novels) and *A Farewell to Arms* (which was his). And about the Nick Adams stories which we agreed were even better than the novels.

And now I recall teaching *The Old Man and the Sea* in the mid-80s to a class on the modern American fiction in Sogang University (the Jesuit university) in Seoul, Korea; and finding, to my delight, that while they had serious problems with William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, and were confused by F.S. Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, they responded quickly to and were immensely touched by Hemingway’s novel. So, I said to myself with a grin, the old man has crossed not just generational barriers but racial and cultural borders as well.

I suspect that these memories of Hemingway, and the appeal he had for us in our youth, have come to me now because the past couple of years have been a bit rough. Perhaps the memories are a reminder that those values that I admired in his work might serve me well today.

And now I see that I have stumbled upon a pretty good argument for keeping some of my books by my side a little while longer.

## Bui Doi in the City of Angels

☀ Jack Wigley

Growing up in Angeles City with an American father whom you have never seen is no joke. For one, you become the butt of jokes from kids who have no better things to do than bully miserable kids like yourself. They assault you with so many names: G.I. Baby, *mestisong bangus*, Victory Baby, *singaw ng Kano*, Daddy Joe Mommy Ago-go. These were some of the common expressions hurled against me.

I had an Amerasian friend who suffered even graver blows because he was dark and had an African American father who had also left his mother. All the issues of race, color and gender were flung against him. *Ita, negrito, ulikba, kampon ng kadiliman, barkada ni Dark Vader*, as if the color of the skin had to do with good and evil. Oftentimes, I would see him crying in one corner, hurt and helpless. Never mind them, I told him. We are different. They're still getting used to us.

It was not always a sad case to be different though. It had its benefits too. When I was about to enter kindergarten, Mother brought me to the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, Inc. This foundation is a non-profit organization through which rich American individuals or childless couples support Amerasian children (of American fathers and Asian mothers) by sending them money. The medical, dental and educational needs are provided for by sponsors who donate to the organization. Each child gets a sponsor who writes to him regularly and the child must write back. The child receives a monthly stipend of thirty pesos.

The only requirement is you have to be a son or daughter of an American serviceman. I remember one mother saying that the reason the foundation has a branch in the Philippines is that the military servicemen, who fathered all these illegitimate children, never atoned for their sins, and that other American civilians had to cover for them. Amerasians from war-torn Cambodia and Vietnam instantly get American citizenship, but Amerasians from ally countries like the

Philippines never enjoyed the same benefit.

At that time, I didn't know what the organization was, much less who Pearl S. Buck is. I thought she was just a good natured lady who once visited the Philippines and took pity on children who never knew their American fathers. I thought that she might have been filthy rich because her first name was a gem and her last name meant money. Maybe she, like the rest of the women who frequently peopled the office, had had illegitimate children who didn't know their fathers.

As "case members" (that's how we were called), we were asked to report to our respective case workers once a month, and write to our dear sponsors, updating them on our daily activities in school, at home, or in church. The case worker would warn us not to ask for money and to never to indicate our address in the letters we wrote. Later, I would learn that the case workers never sent the original letters we wrote. The office secretary would type them out and have them sent to the main office in Manila. Neither the child nor the sponsor knew each other's address or how much money the sponsor sent or the child received. I figured that the office kept some of the money and that this was how they got money to pay for the salaries of the case workers, the secretary, the guards and other personnel and for the general upkeep of the foundation.

Better this than no support at all, my mom would say. "See, it's a good thing that your father is an American! We'll never have this kind of support if I had opted for a Filipino partner. Look at the dirty helpless children on the streets. Pity them! Because their mothers didn't know better, they have no support. *Iba talaga ang Kano!*"

Right! As if my father had everything to do with this, I thought. He wasn't even the one sending the support.

The best time I had with the organization was shortly before Christmas in 1978 when I was about to turn ten. I was so thankful because my sponsor had sent me money. Mrs. Carrera, the stern case worker looked at me with curious eyes and sternly inquired what I would do with the money.

"Umm... I will buy rice and canned goods for the family."

"Not too many canned goods. Your sponsor might think you have a very large family and you eat voraciously. Sponsors don't like gluttonous and greedy children. We don't want to discourage her from supporting you, right? What else?" She arched her eyebrows as

she reached for a pen at the far end of the desk.

"What else? Umm..." I suddenly felt pressured to think of something.

"Perhaps you don't need anything. I might just as well send the money back to your sponsor, no?" She started flipping the pen as she squinted at me.

"Ay, ma'am. I... I... have something to... buy. A school project po," I nervously uttered.

"Are you sure?" she interrogated, leaning her face forward to me.

"Opo, ma'am." I felt that the office had turned into a *barangay* outpost. I was a petty thief and the rotund lady investigating me across the table was a *kapitana*. "I need to buy coconut shell pieces, some strings and a bottle of Elmer's Glue ma'am, for our school project in Practical Arts."

"You are telling the truth, no?" The voice from the other side of the table was shrill and imperious.

I felt my neck stiffen. I cleared my throat but only managed to nod my head.

"You have a check here amounting to 295 pesos. I think your dear sponsor was happy that you were the top of your class during the first grading period. Your last letter to her was deeply touching. Well, that's according to her. I couldn't give the letter to you because it has her address." She sounded like an impromptu speaker at a demonstration rally in our school. "So write her a moving letter thanking her for all the help she extended." She ripped the check from the checkbook.

"Ahh... ma'am, I need to buy a white polo uniform po..." I nervously added, "And a shirt to wear for our Christmas party, if it's ok..."

"The uniform is good but you don't need a new shirt. Especially if it's gonna be used for a senseless party. NO!" The last word was a thundering assault to the very core of my being. I simply looked down at my trembling hands. I had never noticed them to be as sweaty as they were now.

"You have to come back here after you have bought all the needed items because I have to check and compute whether you used the money wisely. We need to take a picture of you with all the items you bought. Your dear sponsor will surely be happy to see your photo. In



the picture, don't just smile. Wear a large grin!" She flapped the check near my nose. I anxiously took it.

"And write the most beautiful thank you letter you can. Don't forget to include my name. Tell her I'm so kind to you, ha?"

I just shyly turned away.

Outside the office, I saw my mom clutching her bag to her chest. There were several parents with wailing children crowding the area. "So how much did you get?" she asked me.

"Almost 300 pes..." I stopped speaking because my mother suddenly raised her hands in jubilation. The mothers sitting on the bench with her were looking at her either with envy or with scorn. One guardian remarked that we were lucky because his protégée only had 89 pesos as a Christmas gift. The others had even less than that, or worse, nothing at all.

"Well, my boy is brilliant. He really knows how to write to his dear sponsor. He's at the top of his class. Sponsors like intelligent children, you know."

"Ma..." I started pulling at her skirt, embarrassed.

Outside the gate, my mother was happily tapping my shoulder. *Buti na lang, Kano ang tatay mo! Kung Pinoy ang hinanap ko, malamang tirik na ang mata natin sa gutom. Hah! Iba talaga ang Kano!* She was beaming with pride and hummed a tune on the way to the bank. I felt that she would brandish the check in front of everybody we met like a victorious soldier parading on Independence Day.

We spent a whole two hours buying this and that. In between the buying, I was warning Mother about what Mrs. Carrera told me—to only buy things that we needed and were necessary. I cautioned her that we needed to go back to the office for the picture taking.

We had to hire a public jeepney to take us back to the foundation. The driver helped us unload all the things we had bought. We took them to the small corner with a chair wrapped in a yellow cloth. The skinny photographer motioned my mom to go back to the waiting area. "Parents are not allowed beyond this point," he said offhandedly.

*Tse!* Mother flipped her plastic fan and walked away.

The photographer instructed me to empty all the shopping bags and place their contents on the yellow cloth. Cans of sardines, toothpaste, soap, white polo shirt—one by one I put them on the chair.



I saw a number of mothers and children peering through the window screen. "Shall I include the rice?"

"All the things you bought," he boomed, without looking at me. He was busy setting up the camera and the tripod. With small and feeble hands, I cupped the grains of rice and piled them on the chair. They spilled to the floor. "Idiot!" he cried. "Just place the whole bag of rice on the table so your sponsor can see them in the picture." I had to return the rice back into the bag little by little with my bare hands.

After the picture taking, I went straight to the mini library to compose a letter for my dear sponsor. "My dear sponsor: thank you for sending me 295 pesos..." I crossed out the amount. I remember that we should never declare how much we had received. "With the money you sent, I was able to buy rice, canned goods, a school uniform and materials for my projects. Because of you, my family and I will be happy this Christmas. May God bless you. I hope to see you when I get older so I can thank you in person. I will never forget you. Love," I inscribed the last word and signed the pink sheet.

Mrs. Carrera read the letter and made marks here and there. She nodded her head and motioned me to leave. "I hope you bought all the things you needed. Merry Christmas and send my best regards to your mom." She flashed a wide toothed grin and winked.

Outside the office, I saw my mom packing all the goods that we bought. I was luckier than most children because I had a generous sponsor.

I was luckier than most children because my father was an American. But I did not know him.

## Mr. Basilio, The Sunlight, and the Birds (Some Personal Notes on Breaking Bad News)

☀ Noel P. Pingoy, M.D.

*Mr. Basilio must have momentarily passed out. In the humdrum bleakness of the cream-colored walls of this clinic, he must have been wishing he were somewhere else. Somewhere loud and rowdy, where life throbbed with every color, sound and texture imaginable. The local cockpit evoked an image of paradise. But not this antiseptic environment that reeked of an odd mixture of ethyl alcohol and a faint pungent-sweet whiff of some unfamiliar drugs.*

*He noticed a delicate strand of greying hair shimmer in the subdued stripes of daylight piercing the dense glass partition of the room. He watched it keenly like an acolyte to an icon as it floated on air, as if carried by some angels and suspended by some unseen force that begged to interrupt the passing of seconds, only to succumb to gravity moments later, and lie like a hopeless heap of broken china on the tabletop.*

*Outside the sky was a cerulean shade of warm March and the street was a frenzied jumble of animated schoolchildren traipsing some uneasy strides from school, of perked up office workers with diverse agenda in their minds and of peripatetic strangers in search of their fortunes amidst the chaotic rhythm of the city. But Mr. Basilio was strangely cold and numb. The only sounds audible were the strident thump-thumping of his heart and the restrained sobs of his wife.*

*I had just told him that he has metastatic lung cancer.*



A tableau like this one has always been, for me, an uncomfortable scenario to walk into, much more to be part of its cast of characters. There is a distraught patient who has yet to recover from the initial shock upon hearing the bad news. Across him sits a startled family member who can scarcely catch her breath and is trying to sort out emotions that suddenly well up, and which could burst out of hand any second.

The process of disclosure especially of a serious and chronic illness has always been a source of anxiety for both the patient and the physician. It can make or break the already wobbly doctor-patient relationship, one that is initially threatened by the beleaguered patient's knee-jerk response of denial, anger and hopelessness. A patient's instinct at self-preservation may make him confrontational, cynical or outright boorish. It does not help that the level of trust among patients and their families of their physicians has taken a significant nosedive over the past two decades, which is largely attributed to the development of a vastly litigious society, to external forces, both political and otherwise, that sometimes perceive Medicine as a predatory enterprise rather than as a noble profession, and to the low self-esteem and downright indifference among some members of the profession. This is further aggravated by the fact that modern medicine has yet to offer convincing answers and effective remedies to some devastating pathologies known to man: congenital illnesses, connective tissue diseases, infections and degenerative disorders. These diseases not only drain the patients of their strength, physiognomy, demeanor and productivity, they also require considerable amounts of time, money and attention from the family, the medical community and society's well-being in general. Sadly, the citizens have already resigned themselves to the fact that even the government cannot wring its coffers dry in order to alleviate the physical burden that longstanding diseases have on the afflicted and their immediate families. Each subspecialty has its own minefield of distressing chronic diseases: the heart specialists are saddled with cardiomyopathies, while the pulmonologists are burdened by chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD), the nephrologists have chronic renal failures, and the rheumatologists, lupus erythematosus. But nothing can be more frightening and disquieting to the patient (and even more distressing to a physician) than the disclosure of cancer.

For centuries, doctors have wrestled with the dilemma of whether to tell their patients of any threatening illness. Hippocrates wrote about concealing most things from the patient while under a physician's care in order not to distress the diseased. For a dying patient, Hippocrates instructed a doctor to enlighten a third party of the prognosis and this person was responsible for telling the patient of his state. A doctor's foremost task was to comfort his patients and the telling of bad news was deemed inapt behavior on his part.

Things have certainly changed over the centuries and along with the rest in the profession, I have learned to deal with the issue with much introspection and prudence. Until the late 1970s, several studies have reported that physicians were reluctant to tell their patients in case of serious illnesses. But emphasis on the so-called patient rights has compelled the medical community to re-examine its previous stand on the delivery of "bad news." Patients have learned to invoke their right to control both their own living and dying, and medical literature is replete with catchphrases that articulate the intensifying fixation on autonomy: full disclosure, informed consent, patients' right to unrestricted communication, etc. The highly celebrated Arato vs. Avedon case in the United States has alerted the contemporary physician to the importance of patient-centered decision and information-sharing as the foundation of an ideal doctor-patient relationship. While some physicians may perceive this necessity for proper disclosure as a means of avoiding legal complications in the future (read: reduce malpractice suits), it must always be borne in mind that at the heart of disclosure is the wellbeing of the patient. When a physician is able to reduce the patient's psychologic and emotional morbidity from hearing the diagnosis of cancer or any serious medical illness, then every process, even though how multifaceted and stressful it might have been, would be worth all the efforts.

There is yet no consensus among experts regarding the definition of "bad news." Some authors defined bad news as "situations where there is either a feeling of no hope, a threat to a person's mental or physical wellbeing, a risk of upsetting an established lifestyle, or where a message is given which conveys to an individual fewer choices in his or her life." Another widely used meaning is "any information which adversely and seriously affects an individual's view of his or her future."

I was just too fortunate to have been taught by some of the most compassionate and benevolent medical practitioners in the country. Most medical undergraduate and postgraduate programs do not usually offer specific training in breaking bad news and most oncologists learn to break bad news by observing more experienced colleagues in clinical situations. Even in the United States, cancer clinicians do not receive routine training in the psychosocial aspect of patient care such as how to communicate bad news or how to respond to patients who have unrealistic expectations of care. This scenario is most likely similar to the other subspecialties. Not only are postgraduate interns and residents in most teaching hospitals encumbered by the obvious demands of training, most of them come to the workplace unprepared for the myriad responses patients and

their relatives exhibit upon hearing bad news. In an oncology clinic, a physician is expected to discuss bad news beyond mere diagnosis, staging and treatment plans. These even more distressing topics include disease recurrence, spread of disease or failure of treatment to affect disease progression, the presence of irreversible side effects, and raising the issue of hospice care and resuscitation when no further treatment option exists.

A review of the medical literature has consistently shown that cancer patients would like to be told of the diagnosis. There are cultural differences in terms of how patients would want the disclosure process carried out, but majority of the patients in these studies have indicated the necessity to be told of the diagnosis no matter how bad the prognosis might be. Ninety-seven percent of Filipino cancer patients indicated that they should be directly told their cancer diagnosis. Another study in U.K. revealed that 80% of older people would like to be told if they developed cancer. Most of these subjects wanted their families to be informed, although a few commented that they would rather tell them themselves. Most patients want to know as much as possible about their illness and treatment, and most prefer to participate in decisions about their care. Several studies in Asia, Europe and the United States have consistently echoed the same results. An important paper at the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) described a review by psychologists from Bucknell University of all articles (letters, opinions, reviews, empirical studies) dealing specifically with bad news from 1985 to 1996. From 67 articles that were retrieved and analyzed, the authors highlighted recurring themes that permeated these papers.

They were able to come up with 13 common issues that were frequently mentioned in these publications.

**Physical and Social Setting:** [1] Patients prefer a location that is quiet, comfortable and private.

**Structure:** [2] Disclosure is done at a convenient time and without interruptions. There should be enough time available to ensure no rushing. [3] Patients favor that disclosure is done in person, face-to-face, and with eye contact. Physicians are expected to sit close to patient and physical barriers are avoided.

**People:** [4] A support network is identified (significant other, family, friends) and these persons should be present at patient's request.

**Message:** What is said? [5] Before the actual disclosure of the diagnosis, the doctor gives a warning shot. [6] The physician makes

an effort to find out what the patient already knows. [7] Some measure of hope is conveyed. [8] He acknowledges and explores the patient's reaction and allows for emotional expression. [9] Questions are allowed. [10] And the doctor summarizes the discussion, verbally and/or in written form.

**How is the message said?** [11] Disclosure is done with warmth, caring, empathy, and respect. [12] The language is simple. The doctor is careful with his word choice and he avoids euphemisms, technical diagnostic terminology and medical jargon. [13] The news is given directly to the person face-to-face.

I have learned that there is simply no procedure that will work for all kinds of patients, a sort of magic formula that shall address this problem. Each individual patient (and even every relative) will require a distinct approach and a particular strategy considering each patient's uniqueness. Cultural aspects of values and behaviors are the key variables, along with life experiences, socio-economic status and personality differences, that affect the meaning of cancer for both individuals and their families, as well as how they cope with the disease. The doctor needs to adopt a style that promotes openness, trust, honesty and hope on the part of the patient while encouraging the latter to participate in the decision-making. Some studies have found that physicians tend to be invariable in their information-giving. Rather than develop one approach that risks giving too much information to some and not enough to others, it was suggested that oncologists work to individualize their communications to each patient. In one study, patients indicated that learning the diagnosis of cancer sooner is not necessarily better and that the concerned physicians must consider the risks and benefits of any particular way of telling, realizing that all methods of telling are not equivalent. In the cross-sectional study among oncology and non-oncology physicians in the major cities in the Philippines, Ngelangel and her colleagues arrived at some generalizations: that more than half of physicians disclosed the information first to the relatives and then the relatives decide if the patient should be told and who should tell him; that indirect method of disclosing diagnosis and prognosis was preferred; and that there was higher tendency not to tell the prognosis. Indirect disclosure was defined as revealing the truth to people (relatives) other than the patient himself; using other means rather than face-to-face interview (telephone, mailed letters); and not using the word "cancer."

Family members play crucial roles in the disclosure process. Among relatives of Filipino cancer patients, 79% believed that patients



should be told directly about their diagnosis; that patients should be told of their diagnosis directly (52%) more than indirectly (44%), and that 3% said the diagnosis should not be revealed at all. Another study at the University of Athens argued that more attention needs to be paid to family members of cancer patients, as they are the primary caregivers to enable them to have more open communication with their patients, and realize the welfare of their patients' quality of life.



*After recovering from the initial shock of learning the diagnosis, Mr. Basilio was all at once confrontational, condescending and cynical during the early phase of the disclosure process. Despite a history of smoking a pack of cigarettes daily for the past 2 decades, he maintained that he had been physically fit all his life. An imported brand of vitamin E guaranteed that his immune system would be able to resist any attempt of an uninvited disease like cancer to lodge in his body, he boasted. And he refused to accept the pathologist's report and insisted on seeking a second opinion. Two other pathologists however concurred with the findings and this certainly made the patient even angrier.*

*I was on the verge of giving up; his obstinacy exasperated me. My patience had never been challenged as relentlessly as this case. It also did not help that he refused to see another oncologist as it meant travelling to another city 70 kilometers away over a mountainous terrain. Shall I remain silent? Shall I simply ignore his apathy and pretend that his sarcasm does not upset me at all? Left with very limited choice other than to appeal to his better judgment, I proceeded to conduct a series of heart-to-heart dialogues with Mr. Basilio and his family.*

*After a painstaking contemplation about the pros and cons, Mr. Basilio acceded to pursue palliative chemotherapy with a stern admonition that "I will quit anytime I feel that it is not doing me any good at all." I could only acquiesce and pray that everything will work out fine. His family had high hopes for a positive response. He was able to breeze through the first cycle of the protocol without much inconvenience except for occasional bouts of nausea. "Unavoidable casualties of war," he once remarked. I found this statement rather odd and intrepidly proceeded to do a little probing. He had been in the guerilla forces as a young man, joining his older siblings in pursuit of fleeing Kempeitai during the last few weeks of the Second World War. Too young to carry arms, his job had been to look after comrades who had been struck by enemy fire. Burnt flesh, smashed bones, mangled bodies caked with blood, sulfur and mud—he had seen them all; cries for help, summons for survival,*

screams of pain—he had heard them too. Suddenly he became silent. It was as if a sigh heaved out of a heart that was burdened with so much anguish and desperation. Could he have realized that with cancer as an enemy, his body was also littered with such horror and stench and depravity? But just as quickly, his face lighted up, a smile emerged from that despondent face; he lifted his shoulders as if a load had been instantaneously taken away, stood up, and casually dropped the subject. “You should pay me a visit one of these days,” he declared, “the birds are coming to roost.” He was speaking of the thousands of migratory feathered friends from neighboring countries like Indonesia and Malaysia that take refuge in Mr. Basilio’s hometown this time of the year.



SPIKES, a six-step protocol for delivering bad news developed at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, was developed to gather information from the patient, to transmit the medical information, to provide support to the patient by reducing the emotional impact and isolation experienced by the recipient of the bad news, and to elicit the patient’s collaboration in developing a strategy or treatment plan in the future. When I was in fellowship training, I tried applying the procedures outlined and found them to have been effective not only in increasing my confidence in carrying out the disclosure of unfavorable medical information to my patients, but also in improving patient care based on shared decision-making. The article also enumerated emphatic statements, exploratory questions and validating responses that a clinician can effectively use throughout the disclosure process.

Another article on consensus guidelines for clinicians in the Journal of Clinical Oncology summarized the principles of breaking bad news. The paper highlighted some salient points:

1. One person only should be responsible for breaking bad news.
2. The patient has a legal and moral right to information.
3. Primary responsibility is to the individual patient.
4. Give accurate and reliable information.
5. Ask people how much they know.
6. Prepare the patient for the possibility of bad news as early as possible.



7. Avoid giving the results of each test individually, if several tests are being performed.
8. Tell the patient his/her diagnosis as soon as it is certain.
9. Ensure privacy and make the patient feel comfortable.
10. Ideally, family and significant others should be present.
11. If possible, arrange for another health professional to be present.
12. Inform the patient's general practitioners and other health advisers of the level of development of the patient's understanding.
13. Use eye contact and body language to convey warmth, sympathy, encouragement or reassurance to the patient.
14. Employ a trained health interpreter if language differences exist.
15. Be sensitive to the patient's culture, race, religious beliefs, and social background.
16. Acknowledge your own shortcomings and emotional difficulties in breaking bad news.

The telling of bad news must constantly be viewed by a clinician as a surmountable challenge if only to improve the doctor-patient communication. It might be a gruelling task sometimes but the rewards are always worth the endeavor: patient satisfaction with care, compliance to treatment, coping with disease, quality of life and overall state of health.

In the end, why we tell is rooted in our true nature as social beings. Doctors should not only view cancer or lupus or any chronic disease as a pathology that is merely objectified by a breached anatomy or by a ruffled physiology. The patient falls ill and there is a far-reaching makeover of his empirical self: time decelerates, plans are abruptly changed, comfort zones become constricted, roles and rules change especially within the family circle, and the future gets dim and uncertain. The patient becomes vulnerable to the little aggravations in life and becomes an exile from the dynamic proceedings of the outside world. To amplify this exile with insensitive conversation is simply to amplify suffering. It is within this framework that a physician must acknowledge the sublime duty given to him despite

the obvious ambivalence of the human heart. In the disclosure setting, the doctor may withdraw from the ill consequences that the process might create or he may press on and reach out despite the costs. It is the physician's duty to recognize that what he says to a patient matters a lot, and it is a choice between allowing words to come across as scalpels that pierce and hurt or as salves that comfort and soothe.




*Mr. Basilio only received up to the second cycle of cisplatin and etoposide. He developed severe chemotherapy-induced mucositis and boldly declared he was through with these medications that constantly burned his mouth and his bladder. He would not even hear of radiotherapy despite the family's frantic pleas. He spent his remaining days happily sedated at home with his Frank Sinatras and his Tony Bennetts. During his lighter days when pain and somnolence failed to perturb the better of him, he would tinker with his tools or he would lie serenely on his favorite couch and gaze lovingly at his wife of 30 years.*

*He did get to see the birds perch on the long stretch of kapok trees at the nearby farm, thousands of them, more numerous than in the previous years, in orange and gold, in teal and crimson, and silver and black, and Mr. Basilio had never been in so much awe of his life and the world he's seen. On the last day of the hottest month of the year, with his wife and children beside him, Mr. Basilio marveled at the sunlight that seeped through his window and he basked in its warmth. A faint smile radiated from his parched lips as he caught a glimpse of his family. My God, how radiant and beautiful she remained after all these years; he must have been telling himself. And are these the kids that I used to smother with hugs and kisses? Why, they have grown to be so strong and decent and true. He took one long look at them, heaved a sigh of appreciation for their love and devotion, and closed his eyes forever.*

## REFERENCES

- Ajaj, J., Singh, M.P., & Abdulla, A.J.J. (2001). Should elderly patients be told they have cancer? *British Medical Journal*, 323: 1160.
- Annas, G. (1994). Informed consent, cancer and truth in prognosis. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 330(3): 223-225.
- Baile, W., Kudelka, A., Beale, E., Glober, G., Myers, E., Greisinger, A., Bast, R., Goldstein, M., Novack, D., & Lenzi, R. (1999). Communication skills training in oncology. *Cancer*, 86(5): 887-897.
- Baile, W.F., Buckman, R., Lenzi, R., Glober, G., Beale, E., & Kudelka, A. (2000). SPIKES—A six-step protocol for delivering bad news: Application to the patient with cancer. *The Oncologist*, 5: 302-311.
- Buckman, R. (1992). *Breaking bad news: A guide for health care professionals*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 15.
- Cassileth, B.R., Zupkis, R.V., Sutton-Smith, K., & March, V. (1980). Information and participation preferences among cancer patients. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 92:832-836.
- Girgis, A. & Sanson-Fisher, R. (1995). Breaking bad news: Consensus guidelines for medical practitioners. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 13(9): 2449-2456.
- Lind, S., Good, M.J., Seidel, S., Csordas, T., & Good, B. (1989). Telling the diagnosis of cancer. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 7(5): 583-589.
- Miller, B.R., Goldman, E., & Scher, E. (1993). The meaning of bad news in HIV disease: Counseling about dreaded issues revisited. *Counsel Psychol Q* 6:69-80.
- Mystakidou, K., Parpa, E., Tsilika, E., Kalaidopoulou, O., & Vlahos, L. (2002). The families' evaluation on management, care and disclosure for terminal stage cancer patients. *BMC Palliative Care*, 1(1):3.
- Ngelangel, C.A., Ramiro, L.S., Perez, E.S., Ramos, M.S., Lacaya, L., Agbanlog, T.P., Talaver, B.C., Martinez, F.G., & Delvecchio-Good, M.J. (1996). The process of disclosure in Philippine oncological practice. *Philippine Journal of Oncology*, 2(1): 13-27.
- Ptacek, J.T. & Eberhardt, T.L. (1996). Breaking bad news: A review of the literature. *JAMA*, 276(6): 496-502.
- Siminoff, L.A., Fetting, J.H., & Abeloff, M.D. (1989). Doctor-patient communication about breast cancer adjuvant therapy. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 7(9):1192-1200.
- Taylor, K.M. (1988). Physicians and the disclosure of undesirable information. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 10:109-132.

## The Streets of Dumaguete

 Lorna Peña-Reyes Makil

*Streets help organize one's knowledge of a place. They mark building locations and other social institutions, mapping out passage ways that facilitate movement. Confidence comes to a newcomer who begins to learn street names, navigating through the town and taking the best shortcuts. Streets give a place its distinctiveness and character, marking its daily flow of life that helps newcomers develop a sense of community, though they may not be consciously aware of the social process taking place forming part of their identity.*

I write about the Dumaguete I first knew as a student in the 1950s, with emphasis on some of the Dumaguete streets that formed my world then.

Living as a senior citizen in this university town today, I have overwhelming pride of place in Dumaguete. But it was not always so at the beginning.

I was almost twelve when I arrived with my family in Dumaguete in June 1950. Within that decade of the 50s, I finished my elementary, high school and college education at Silliman University. At the start, I would write down “Cagayan” (which became Cagayan de Oro after we had left) as my hometown, still feeling homesick for the old place where my twin sister and I were born and began our schooling. By the time I was in college, however, I was hopelessly captivated—*na-daguit*—as a proud Dumagueteña. This sentiment must have formed slowly as I interacted with new friends and learned to favor certain locations in town, including the Dumaguete streets.

### Rizal Avenue and Rizal Boulevard

The Rizal Boulevard introduced me to why Dumagueteños feel they are blessed to be living—and not just visiting—here.

One afternoon, a new friend, Babsy Royola, daughter of the UCCP town church pastor, took my sister and me to Rizal Avenue and Rizal Boulevard. It was a new experience, seeing the sea so near we could wade in the water if we wanted to. Where we had come from, the sea was far from town, and beach outings were occasional treats to look forward to.

The Boulevard was a cool place, the green acacia trees complementing the blue of the sea beyond. In its uncrowded and unhurried setting, people were having their paseo, strolling slowly and relaxing at the end of the day. A Chinese woman (who, we were to observe as time went by, was a regular of those afternoon strollers) hobbled on her small feet in the company of her Filipino maids, a survivor of the foot-binding practice for girls of wealthy families in pre-modern China. She never ceased to fascinate as she traversed the Boulevard in her unsteady, swaying gait.

The old name of Rizal Avenue/Rizal Boulevard was Calle Marina, descriptive of its location beside the sea (Sagun Notes).

In early Spanish times, the Dumaguete shoreline was not protected by any breakwater. The waves lashed the shore, making it dirty and uninhabitable during bad weather (Rodriguez 2001:18). There was only a dirt road, and no residences were found because it was not safe from the Moro raids.

But as the town grew, the area of the Marina also improved and houses began to be constructed there. By the time Dumaguete had developed into the largest pueblo of the province in 1850 (Sitoy 1993:8), larger houses had been built along Calle Marina and nearby. One of the houses there became the residence of the Spanish governors. This was the house which was rented by the Hibbards in which Silliman Institute was opened in August 1901. This site was near Bethel Hotel today.

The Marina was important because it was the spot where passengers from the steamers anchoring in Dumaguete would disembark or board their vessel. Strong men would carry these passengers on their shoulders the short distance to or from the shore. This is how Jose Rizal began his Dumaguete visit when he dropped by on August 1, 1896 from his exile in Dapitan (Sagun Interview). He was returning to Manila, having volunteered to serve as surgeon in the Spanish Army in Cuba where a revolution was being fought. (We know, of course, that he never made it to Cuba.)

This means of reaching the Dumaguete shore was true when the Americans came, since work on the Dumaguete pier began only in 1919. When the Philippine Commission visited Dumaguete in 1901, a large bamboo raft was constructed to ferry the VIPs in a more dignified manner to the shore (Rodriguez 2001:15). How about the seven St. Paul nuns who arrived in 1904? A re-enactment of their arrival during the centennial of St. Paul University five years ago had each of the nuns seated on a bamboo chair carried by two men on their shoulders—a bit more sedate way for the prim and proper sisters to reach the shore, if this, indeed, was what happened.

On 16 September 1906, through a municipal resolution to honor the memory of the national hero who had stepped on Dumaguete soil, Calle Marina was renamed Jose Rizal Avenue (Dumaguete City Hall records).

The Americans further improved the Dumaguete breakwater by riprapping the shorelines with large rocks. With improvements made on Rizal Avenue, it became a popular place for afternoon promenades or *paseo* for the townspeople. Certain restrictions, however, were imposed on the young women in keeping with mores of the day. Silliman female students, for example, took their *paseo* on Wednesday afternoons and were not allowed to entertain young men who approached them; otherwise, they would lose their *paseo* privilege (*The Sillimanian*, 1922, January 15).

After the war, a stronger breakwater was installed with the concreting of the seawall.

These improvements transformed Rizal Boulevard into a choice residential area. In the 1950s, there was a “Millionaires Row” of elegant homes that were owned by the Teves brothers by the seafront (Calumpang 1993: 204). “Millionaires Row” is practically gone today, taken over by business establishments, like Bethel Hotel and various restaurants and eateries. The residence of Gov. Julian Teves, for example, was converted into Al Mar Hotel (Calumpang 1993:204) or La Residencia Al Mar today.

“Millionaires Row” sharpened my eyes to the nature of social class in Dumaguete. The *katsila* and *tisoys*, some of whom were also the ranking civil leaders in the community, had wealth and haciendas outside town. Ironically, it was in their homes where I became aware that the social distance between the classes was being liberalized. “Ordinary people” were invited to these rich homes. Student groups,

like the Campus Choristers of Silliman, were invited to sing and eat with the owners for birthdays and special occasions, like fiestas. We got to know the prominent people up close and learned not to be too awed by them.

It probably was the easier access to formal education in Dumaguete that was spreading the democratic values of social equality and opportunity, where rank was not of paramount concern. The friendly American missionaries, considered among the town's elite, must have also helped to modify the traditional norms of social interaction. They were the first to open their homes to Filipino students and teachers.

The Boulevard promoted wholesome bonding of young people in my time. The Campus Choristers would end up there at night after rehearsals. We were fortunate if the moon was out, flooding us with renewed energy and lightness as we sat at the breakwater, telling stories, laughing, singing, and eating. An elderly *manang* with her basket of peanuts, a regular fixture of the Boulevard—we named her “Salted Peanuts, ‘Day” after her sales pitch—supplied our favorite snack. She did not join our laughter when the naughty ones among us would try not to pay by suggesting “Sample lang, ‘Nang” for her roasted peanuts wrapped in small cones of old newspaper.

Our swimming lessons for our P.E. classes in college were held in the sea across from the Silliman Gates of Opportunity, in front of the area where the CAP Building now stands. (The lessons were required of every student, and we could only be excused for one reason: when the roll was called, some girls would answer to their names by saying “Observing, Ma’am,” which the teacher took to mean that it was the time of the month for them. We couldn’t fool our teacher who kept a close record of our “Observing” responses and knew if we were lying when the number would be more than once a month.) We would strip to our bathing suits (demure by today’s standards) among the rocks below the breakwater, suffering acute self-consciousness of the men who would line up above to gawk at us. Mrs. Sofia Ravello, our P.E. teacher, would urge us to go deeper as we huddled in the water. At our first swimming sessions, she got in the water with us and showed us the basics, dunking our heads when we hesitated. Later, she wouldn’t join us in the water but sat on the seawall, shouting out her commands and instructions. She never learned how to tell my sister and me apart, so when she would shout “Twin, go deeper,” Myrna and I could pretend we didn’t know who of us she was addressing, and thus got away with many things.



The mid-afternoon schedule for our swimming class rendered the water uncomfortably cold, and our faces itched and our eyes would sting from the polluted water. We took extra pains not to accidentally swallow it. At times, the ships that were docked at the nearby pier discharged garbage. A few times, oil would smear our hair and bodies, but we were more concerned about our bathing suits being ruined. As now, raw sewage from the town continuously flowed into the sea out of the large *embornal* drainage pipes at the base of the seawall.

Understandably, we were unhappy with those swimming lessons, never learning how to swim properly. I passed the course using the *iniro* or dog paddle style, or by faking it, pretending to swim in chest-deep water and just walking slowly on the sandy bottom, making the necessary arm and head movements. From her perch on the sea wall, our teacher could not tell the difference.

Dumagueteños were jolted into realizing the importance of swimming skills after a swimming accident and the tragic loss of a young girl's life at the Boulevard. As reported (and verified to us decades later by one of the survivors, Angelina, who became a good friend), three young schoolgirls from the Chinese School decided to play at the Boulevard after classes were dismissed for that morning. There was no plan to go swimming, but it was a hot day, the sun was out and the water so inviting. So they decided to go in. Only Angelina knew how to swim. They kept close to shore, unaware that the outgoing tide was carrying them farther out. Their fun was interrupted by the sight of one of them being carried away into deeper water, but Angelina could not go to her aid for her other non-swimmer companion who was nearer also started to struggle in the water. Angelina managed to pull her to shore where they collapsed in stunned silence, not fully comprehending what had just taken place before their eyes. Their other companion was nowhere to be seen. Thereafter, school officials and parents prohibited their young children from going to the Boulevard without adult company, reminding them that danger sometimes lurks where beauty dwells.

### **Gov. Mariano F. Perdices Street**

This used to be called Alfonso XIII Street, Dumaguete's main street since Spanish times, referred to by the natives as Alfonso Trece. Who was Alfonso XIII?



Alfonso XIII was born in 1886 (just four years after Dumaguete became the capital of Negros Oriental). His father, Spanish King Alfonso XII, had died the year before. This made his son the Infant King whose mother, Queen Maria Cristina, ruled as Regent Queen until her son came of age in 1902 (Sagun Interview). By that time, America had taken over the Philippines from Spain, and poor Alfonso XIII never had a chance to be our country's sovereign.

Stuck with his name, Calle Alfonso XIII was a quaint reminder of the Spanish past of Dumaguete. The Americans referred to it as "Alfonzo."

The desire to honor one of Dumaguete's local leaders in modern times brought about the renaming of Alfonso XIII to Mariano F. Perdices Street on September 30, 1987 (Dumaguete City Hall records).

Mariano F. Perdices served with distinction as Mayor of Dumaguete for twelve years, and later as the Governor of Negros Oriental province. He was popular and was fondly called "Katsila" for his Castillian features. Under his watch, some of the city's important buildings were put up. He encouraged beautification projects, earning for the province the title of "Most Beautiful Province of the Philippines" at one time. He died while in office. (His son, Agustin "Tuting" Perdices would later hold the same government offices as his father, and like his father, his governorship was also cut short by his untimely death).

Alfonso XIII was the "road to downtown Dumaguete," lined with big and small business establishments (mostly built of wood) with a few residences between them in the 50s. People called a portion of Alfonso XIII "Escolta" (the present area from the Veterans' Bank up to Po's Marketing), perhaps after Manila's premier business center then, the Escolta. At Escolta stood the Dumaguete United Church of Christ in the Philippines (now the site of Aldea), the Funda Bookstore, Cuizon Tailoring, Dainty ice cream parlor, and even a shoe repair shop among the establishments that met the needs of a growing university town. Main and Park (further down) Theatres provided our main entertainment, creating a generation of Hollywood fans of musicals like *The Toast of New Orleans*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, *Tea for Two*, etc., and loyal admirers of Jane Powell, Doris Day, Mario Lanza, Gordon McCrea, Gene Kelley, Frank Sinatra, and others.

With all the bustling business taking place, however, Alfonso XIII was not the traffic-choked place that Mariano Perdices Street is today.

Though horse-drawn *tartanilyas* plied the streets of Dumaguete, people preferred to walk the unhurried and shady streets. The occasional parades (4th of July, Rizal Day, fiesta) and processions were the only activities that caused the street to fill up.

My memories include the Silliman University Founders' Day parades when we marched proudly for our school. As high school students, my twin sister and I would be assigned to march in front of our all girl contingent of Y-Teens holding up its banner between us, feeling somewhat embarrassed by the comments we would hear from the sidelines: "*Kaluha man na sila*" (they are twins), or our names being called out: "Lorna...Myrna!" How did they know? We would wonder. The town had a smaller population then, and it was easier for people to know each other.

Alfonso XIII Street led to the center of town with the Dumaguete Cathedral (named after St. Catherine of Alexandria, the town's patron saint), Dumaguete's oldest landmark—the bell tower or *Campanario*—and the Plaza (Quezon Park now), landmark witnesses of Dumaguete's past.

Before the 18th century, progress was slow in Dumaguete where life was often interrupted by the continuing slave raids from the South (popularly known by the politically-incorrect term, "Moro raids"). It was not until the mid-18th century that some respite came to the settlement with the building of a strong fortress by parish priest Fr. Jose Manuel Fernandez de Septien who served from 1754-1776. He built a massive church (the first stone church in the province) and convent of strong material surrounded by an equally strong wall over two meters in height. The wall enclosed a large space where the people could gather in times of danger. The church was built like a fortress, and four watchtowers were set up on each corner of the surrounding wall, with canons mounted on them (Sagun 2005:112-113).

The present bell tower was built a century later as an additional structure. When times became more peaceful, the wall and watchtowers were eventually torn down, and a bell tower was constructed on the foundation of one of the watchtowers. (Some of us do not realize that the bell tower houses a bell that was made in 1818 and which, until the 2008 town fiesta, was still working (its clapper fell off). To ring the bell, a long rope was pulled by a sacristan from the convent. There are three other bells in the

*Campanario* which were installed in the 1930s but which no longer work. (Sagun Interview).

The presence of the strong church transformed Dumaguete into a well-defended, better-organized settlement. The Spanish authorities were able to plan the further development of the town. Taking their cue from the relatively well established Intramuros in Manila, the officials used the Plaza Complex concept of town planning. It was characterized by the physical layout of the area into streets meeting at right angles and forming a grid of more or less equal blocks. This was prescribed by provisions on city planning and laying out of new towns in the Law of the Indies.

"The church and residences of various officials were laid out around the central square. The houses of the townsfolk occupied the rest of the area in accordance with a grid pattern of streets. This type of planning conformed to the colonial requirement of gathering the population *bajo de las campanas* (under the bells)... The plaza eventually emerged as the nerve center of towns, where the people gathered to listen to announcement of royal decrees, watch the performance of theater folk (e.g. Moro-Moro) and market their wares on that day" (Santiago 2003:48-49).

Dumaguete by 1850 was a well-established pueblo (town) "*con cura y gobernadorcillo*" (with parish priest and mayor), a church, convent, a tribunal (municipal hall), and a parochial school. It was the largest *pueblo* in eastern Negros, with 5,300 people and 896 houses in the *poblacion*, and more people residing in the *barrios* (Sitoy:8).

Thus, in 1890 when Negros Oriental was established as a separate political unit from Negros Occidental, Dumaguete was chosen as its capital.

I remember across the street from the church was the plaza where people would relax and enjoy the surroundings and special activities on weekends and holidays. There used to be a covered plaza kiosk where the town parades would inevitably end and where programs were held. The important town dignitaries sat on the stage while we gathered to watch and listen to their speeches. Sometimes the Campus Choristers provided the intermission numbers. This was how I was able to rub elbows (*well, almost*) with such VIPs as the late Senator Lorenzo Teves, a Silliman alumnus, and Mayor Mariano Perdices.

Seven years ago, it was *déjà vu* for our Silliman high school batch 1956, now senior citizens, as we marched down Perdices Street for the

last time as Golden Jubilee celebrants during the Silliman Founders' Day celebrations, with the more energetic women in front of the men. The cemented street was easier to traverse, and the crowds on the sidelines applauded our senior status as we marched by. One of us had brought some candies to throw to the crowd, and children scrambled for them. We made a valiant effort to march in rhythm with the band ahead of us, but we couldn't keep up as we went farther, especially the one whom we kidded for wearing step-ins. The women teased the men about showing their age when we had to stop and wait for them to catch up, wondering why they lagged behind. They explained that they were just taking it easy, which we didn't completely believe, of course. But like the old Alfonso XIII Street, we had survived the years, and it felt good to be reliving our youth by marching in the parade.

### Hibbard Avenue

Hibbard Avenue was actually a continuation of Alfonso XIII Street, running northward through the less settled area of town. It was renamed Hibbard Avenue in 1930 to ensure that the name of Dr. David S. Hibbard, American missionary and first president of Silliman University, would remain a permanent part of the community (Carson 1959:145).

New at Silliman in 1950, I thought that Hibbard Avenue was "owned" by the university, the street running parallel between the eastern and western sections of the campus.

The street took me to our Elementary School (on the site of the present High School) where learning was pleasant and exciting under very good teachers. Across the street was a spacious vacant field (the Divinity School now occupies that place) where we used to play games like softball, *takyan*, and *satong* after school. Or we would sit talking with close friends on the grass, facing westward to an unhindered view of the blue slopes of Mount Talinis in the background. The SU Gymnasium was just being constructed then northwest of the field.

Nearby was durable Channon Hall with its lattice front wall, home to the then College of Theology on the ground floor and the women's dorm on the second floor.

Next to the ball field and extending southward was a line of faculty homes—all looking the same with wide front stairs leading up to

the porch—up to where Hibbard Avenue and Langheim Road meet. (Only one of these houses survives today, standing solitarily beside, and partly hidden by, the Elementary and High School overpass). There was a big *embornal* emptying into a large drainage canal beside the street at this point which would fill with water when there was a heavy rain. Some of the faculty kids would swim in the dirty water, frolicking and yelling to the delight of onlookers.

Hibbard Avenue's main landmark then was the Dumaguete Mission Hospital (now Katipunan Hall) before it grew to become the SU Medical Center at its present site on Aldecoa Road. Its presence made that section of Hibbard Avenue very busy with people and vehicles coming and going.

As each school year began, all elementary and high school classes took turns going down to the Hospital for our physical examination. The sexes were separated as girls stood in line and boys in another. As we waited in line, Mr. Bulfa, a middle aged man, would tease us girls with: "Girls, did you change your panties?" sending us into hysterical laughter. We returned at another time for the mass vaccinations that were mandatory at that time.

When I was in high school, my family moved to a house (now the ABS-CBN building across Coco Grande Hotel) at Hibbard Avenue and near where our closest friends and classmates lived. It was most convenient for us with our high school less than a block away. The present Davao Cottage and Worcester Cottage were already there, homes to American missionaries.

We turned the almost deserted street at night into our playground, roller skating or playing *tubig-tubig* (*patintero*), taking care not to play near a bamboo clump beside what is now the Divinity School's Chapel of the Evangel. Stories about this feared spot were legend—it was haunted and inhabited by ghosts and *ingkantos*. This was easy to believe at night because of the creaking sound the bamboos made as they swayed and bent over the street when the wind blew, accompanied by moaning sounds associated with the supernatural. Some accounts even had a mysterious figure in white seen sometimes in the area. And the few times we were brave enough to peer into the hollow space within the center of the bamboo clump, we could make out a small opening that looked like a doorway or entrance to somewhere. (Only recently did we hear two guys we knew since the elementary grades explain the source of those mysterious moans.

Paul and Paking, former faculty kids, laughingly confessed to how Paul would crouch behind the bamboo growth and make those eerie moans when people went by. Sometimes Paking, draped in a white sheet, would be glimpsed, thus giving life to the scary accounts by and for the gullible).

Near our house, Hibbard Avenue sloped down before leveling off and continuing to Tubod and Piapi (this spot is where Hibbard and the present Bypass Road meet). The slope gave a sensation of going downhill or uphill depending on where one was going. Those on bicycles had to work harder, some even standing up while pedaling, when going up, then coasting effortlessly down. Besides the ubiquitous *tartanilya*, bicycles were popular then for transportation. My sister remembers in high school sometimes seeing Dr. Edilberto Tiempo riding his bike from the Tiempo home in Piapi to and from the Silliman campus.

Hibbard Avenue led to Tubod, the place of many springs. The sound of endless flowing water was magical, especially at night. It was where people could fetch pure and clean water freely, and the *lavanderas* (laundry women) did their laundry, filling the air with their chatter and laughter, and the rhythm of their *pakang* (wooden paddle) beating the clothes clean. There was a thriving laundry industry that served the populace, especially the many students in the dormitories. When the moon was out, the springs and the sound of flowing water were transformed into a place of ethereal beauty. Old timers like me deeply regret the loss of the springs, denying Dumagueteños their right to what may have always been a priceless legacy until “progress” came along.

### **Silliman Avenue**

The Spanish authorities followed the concept of “encircle and protect” when they named the early streets of Dumaguete after saints (e.g., Calle Santa Catalina, Calle San Juan, Calle San Jose, Calle Santa Rosa).

Calle Sta. Cecilia (the patron saint of music) was the old name of Silliman Avenue (Sagun Notes). It was then the only thoroughfare leading from Real Street to Rizal Boulevard. Beyond it grew coconut and other trees, including fields of corn and sugar cane until the Silliman University campus was developed.



On 5 June 1905, the Municipal Council passed a Resolution renaming Calle Sta. Cecilia to Silliman Avenue. This honored the American philanthropist Horace B. Silliman for donating money to start a school for boys in Dumaguete (Dumaguete City Hall Records).

When we arrived in 1950, one of the landmarks of Silliman Avenue was C-Hall (the present Insular Hotel), a dormitory for women enrolled at Silliman, owned and managed by the Tembrevilla family whose first names all began with the letter "C." I had my first experience with Silliman people at C-Hall when my father took us to call on his old friends, Crispin and Custodia Tembrevilla (Silliman faculty) who had been students like him and my late mother at Silliman before the War. They were friendly and spoke only English with us. I took note of the smartly-dressed C-Hall girls crossing the street together to the Hibbard Hall entrance (where the Silliman Post Office branch is now) to reach the Silliman campus in minutes.

The other street landmark was the old Gallardo House which still stands today (near the Philippine National Bank) showing signs of neglect. Its main attraction is a roofed arcade with *barandillas* stretching along the whole length of its front wall.

Silliman Avenue was already a busy street in the 50s. It provided entertaining distraction to us when our classes were held in the temporary classrooms of bamboo and nipa (T-Rooms) overlooking the street, in the area now occupied by the Silliman Pre-School. The T-Rooms were airy, with walls only three or four meters high from the floor, affording us an unobstructed view of street life. When the lessons got boring, we would turn our attention to the pedestrian traffic, including vendors shouting out what they were selling in various decibels. Unusually loud was a young boy who sold the native *gabi* delicacy *botchada* close to noontime when our stomachs were already beginning to grumble. We persuaded Sr. Gervasio Miranda, our Spanish professor, a few times to give us a break from conjugating verbs so we could call the *botchada* boy over and temporarily assuage our hunger pangs.

### **Maria Cristina Street**

Branching off Silliman Avenue heading south is Maria Cristina Street. West of and running parallel to then Alfonso XIII Street, it was named after the infant king's mother who ruled the throne until he came of

age (Sagun Interview). Unlike her son's street which was renamed, the mother's name has been retained for the street that leads directly to the town's business center, bustling with various stores and the Public Market.

While it is noisy and crowded with vehicles and pedestrians today, the street used to be quiet and shady, where walking was a pleasure.

The street borders the community of Cambagroy, a small barrio which, legend goes, acquired its name from a corrupted version of "Come back, Roy." American soldiers who occupied Dumaguete in 1899 befriended the beautiful girls of the barrio. One of the soldiers was named "Roy." When the soldiers were leaving, Roy's girl called out to him "Come back, Roy!" Hearing this, the native boys grew jealous and taunted the girls, calling out: "Cambagroy, Cambagroy!" (Rodriguez 2000:6).

At the corner of Maria Cristina Street and San Juan Street was Oriental Panciteria where we went for the delicious *pancit* made from special noodles or *miki* which the owners, the Wong family, made themselves. The restaurant was always filled with customers until it closed down years later when the special flour for the noodles ceased to be available.

### **Santa Catalina Street**

Calle Santa Catalina was named after Dumaguete's patron saint, St. Catherine of Alexandria, known as the "Warrior Saint." We read that she was chosen to be the town's patron saint due to the great need for protection against the southern slave raiders. Legends about her courage and physical prowess were narrated by the townsfolk who had observed that her image on certain mornings would carry *amor seco* (a grass weed) clinging to the hem of her dress, and making them believe that the saint had gone out at night to drive away the pirates (Rodriguez 2000:2-3).

I used to walk down Sta. Catalina Street to go to Dumaguete City Hall for some school assignment, as observing the City Council in action. City Hall was an old building built in 1937 with capiz shell windows and wooden floors that survive to the present. The building was refurbished using an attractive blend of Hispanic and native design.



The street also took me to Dumaguete's "Old Casa Español District" which grew out of the original Plaza Complex. Its short side streets leading to Rizal Avenue—Burgos Street and Tan Pedro Street—bordered the place where homes of wealthy and important Spanish-Filipinos used to be (Notes from Larena interview). Although many of these homes were torn down or converted into businesses, a few of them still stand, old and sad reminders of Dumaguete's early elite whose younger generation adapted to modernization.

### **San Jose Street**

Calle San Jose was named after St. Joseph, the Worker, also known as the Carpenter and earthly father of Jesus (Sagun Notes). His feast day on March 10 was an occasion when families re-enacted the life of the Holy Family, welcoming others into their homes and sharing food with them.

I used to pass by a favorite landmark on San Jose Street—an elegant white house with a front façade of American southern plantation style. It was owned by the family of Jose E. Romero, former ambassador to the Court of St. James and father of the late National Artist for Film, Eddie Romero. As Dumaguete grew, the house changed from a well-kept private residence whose owners took pride in it, into a structure that saw many uses, the last of which was the Dumaguete Rural Bank, before the house was torn down in the past year or two.

This house played an important role during the Japanese Occupation in 1942-1945. The Rotary Club, which used to be one of Dumaguete's premier organizations then, was banned from meeting by the Japanese authorities. A Friday Reading Club took its place and members held their meetings at the Romero house for discussions presumably on more literary concerns and mah-jong sessions. Jose Romero was a good friend of the Japanese Garrison Commander and had gained his trust. We are told that the Japanese officer used to attend some of the meetings of the Friday Reading Club and play mah-jong with the men. In conversations, he would blurt out inadvertently certain vital military information to Atty. Romero, which would then be picked up and passed on to the guerilla contacts (Calumpang:191-192).

## Real Street and Veterans Avenue

Most towns in Spanish Philippines had a Calle Real—“royal street”—which served as their main street in honor of the Spanish royalty. This street was where the larger houses were located, its inhabitants getting a better view of the religious processions that went by.

Dumaguete seemed to have been an exception, since its main street was Calle Alfonso XIII (now Perdices Street). Calle Real was an important street and was the main highway for entering and leaving town.

When we just arrived in Dumaguete, we rented a house on Real Street and lived there for three years. There was no traffic to clog the street then, so different from today when it is one of the most traffic-congested and polluted streets from the exhaust fumes of hundreds of vehicles. Our house was a stone's throw from the clear, spacious Capitol grounds that showed off to full advantage the white Capitol building with majestic Mount Talinis in the background. Now, that classic view is broken up, and the once-spacious grounds, now bordered by sick-looking acacia trees that no longer flower in season, is cluttered with concrete paths, hedges, and other cement structures. That the site is prone to heavy flooding now may be blamed on the excessive concreting and new structures added, affecting the once trouble-free drainage system. The once thick green grass and the healthy shady acacia and mango trees made an ideal restful place for us to meet with friends. Children also turned Real Street into their playground at night when the moon was out, playing noisy *tubig-tubig* and other games until their parents called them in.

While living along Real Street, my family was introduced to the continuous flow of carolers that descended on the community at Christmas. From neighboring barrios, dressed in their best, the carolers came with their singers, dancers, and string instruments to accompany their singing of *daygon*, traditional Christmas carols in Cebuano (sometimes with corrupted Spanish here and there). The dancers, usually cute little girls dressed in white with flowers in their hair, would sometimes perform on the street, but most times they went to every house where they would sing two or three *daygon*. Then a member of the group would shout out “*Maayong Pasko*,” at which time the house owner was expected to give them a gift, always monetary, in return. At first this quaint Christmas custom was harmless, even enjoyable (unless we heard the same *daygon* again and again), but

when the groups of carolers became too many, homeowners were unhappy with the commercialization of the season. While one group would be singing at our place, we would hear others performing nearby, resulting in a cacophony of *daygon* filling the neighborhood. It got to the point that sharing Christmas cheer became too expensive! When we saw groups along the street going from house to house with their string instruments, we would close our windows (and turn off the lights at night), hoping they would bypass our place. The invasion of carolers got so bad that the City had to do something. So permits and fees were required, which cut down on the number of *daygon* groups. The requirements may have been too much for them, and gradually through the years, their number became fewer, until we only hear a few “professional” carolers today, and the *daygon* of our fathers, no longer remembered, are lost with the younger generation.

In 1997, the portion of Real Street from the Philippine National Bank northward to the Dumaguete-Sibulan boundary was renamed “Veterans Avenue” to commemorate the Filipino soldiers who marched through Real Street and helped liberate Dumaguete from the Japanese forces on April 26, 1945 (Dumaguete City Hall Records).

The late historian, Caridad Aldecoa Rodriguez, told me in a private conversation that when the City officials agreed to honor the liberating Filipino soldiers of 1945 by renaming part of Real Street to Veterans Avenue, they seemed to have forgotten the role of Gen. Diego de la Viña who, in 1898, marched down Real Street with his *revolucionarios* from Tayasan to free Dumaguete from the Spanish friars. But, she added, when they entered Dumaguete, there were no friars and soldiers to fight because they had all fled to Cebu the night before.

But this revolutionary hero had not been forgotten. In 1995, Dumaguete officials bestowed on a newly-opened road the name of Gen. Diego de la Viña (Dumaguete City Hall Records). This is the street where the Dumaguete Water District office is located in Daro, but it is not where the good General and his revolutionary soldiers marched in their important role during the Philippine Revolution.

### **Jose Pro Teves Street**

The previous name of this street was Calle Cervantes. The earlier choice of the street name after Miguel de Cervantes, Spanish novelist of *Don Quijote* fame, dramatist and poet, is informative of the

romanticism and enlightenment that most probably characterized the Spanish authorities in Dumaguete. These friars and officials seemed to be men of intellectual and cultural interests. This may have played a role in their choice of Dumaguete's patron saint, St. Catherine of Alexandria, who was also the patroness of philosophers. And as we noted earlier, they also named one of the streets after Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of music. The town seems to have been favored by this kind of enlightened leadership that helped shape it into a place of learning that it is today.

One of the better respected Elementary Schools in town, the West Central Elementary School, is located on what once was Cervantes Street. Many of my high school classmates were graduates of West Central, which continues to enjoy a good reputation among the Dumaguete schools. Its clean grounds and shady location is still a landmark of the street.

Cervantes Street retained its name until the 21st century when it was renamed Jose Pro Teves Street on February 3, 2005 (Dumaguete City Hall Records).

Jose "Joe" Pro Teves succeeded Mariano Perdices as Dumaguete Mayor and served for 19 years (1959-1978). He was loved by the people who appreciated his simple ways. He always started the day with a dip at the Rizal Boulevard, then breakfast of *tsokalate* and *budbud* at the *Painitan* section of the Public Market. He was the mayor when martial law was declared in 1972, and helped to maintain stability at a time when many changes were taking place in the country.

In transforming to the present, many changes came to Dumaguete and her quiet and gracious lifestyle, then socially evident in the homes and expanses of her quaintly-named town streets. Some changes, unsettling to the old timer, have been mitigated in my case by my memory of place and pride in community that continue to make living in Dumaguete satisfying and rewarding.

## REFERENCES

- Calumpang, A.A. (1993). From Tanjay to the Continent: Jose E. Romero. In M.M. Alunan & B.F. Villasis (Eds.), *Kabilin: Legacies of a hundred years of Negros Oriental*. Dumaguete City: Negros Oriental Centennial Foundation, Inc.
- Carson, A.L. (1965). *Silliman University 1901-1959: Gateway of opportunity and of service in the Philippines*. New York: United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia.
- Dumaguete City Hall, Records of Resolutions passed by the City Council.
- Larena, P. (n.d.). History of Dumaguete City. Report of his class in hotel management and Tourism, first semester 2008-2009, St. Paul University, Dumaguete City.
- Rodriguez, C.A. (Ed.). (2000). *Negros Oriental and Siquijor Island legends, beliefs and folkways*. Dumaguete City: Author.
- Rodriguez, C.A. (2001). *History of Dumaguete City*. Dumaguete City: Author.
- Sagun, R., Jr. (2005). The 'campanario' of Dumaguete. *Kinaadman*, 27.
- Sagun interview. Information gathered from the ideas expressed during an interview with church historian, Fr. Roman Sagun Jr. of St. Joseph Seminary in Sibulan, Negros Oriental, on 9 January 2008.
- Sagun notes. Loose Xeroxed materials from Fr. Sagun's files which he showed during 9 January 2008 interview.
- Santiago, A.M. (2003). *The restoration of historic Intramuros: A case study in plan implementation*. Diliman, Quezon City: UP School of Urban and Regional Planning (SURP) and UP Planning and Development Research Foundation, Inc. (PLANADES).
- Sitoy, T.V. (1993). The making of Negros: A brief history. In M.M. Alunan & B.F. Villasis (Eds.), *Kabilin: Legacies of a hundred years of Negros Oriental*. Dumaguete City: Negros Oriental Centennial Foundation, Inc.
- The Sillimanian*, (1922, January 15).



LITERARY  
HISTORY  
AND  
CRITICISM



## **The Silliman National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete**

 Mary Ann E. Pernia

The Creative Writing Program was established in Silliman University by Edilberto and Edith Tiempo to give students a knowledge of writing, particularly the special kind of writing known as literary writing. This covered all genres including the essay. The task of giving this knowledge to students usually occurs in the workshop. This aim did not change through the years, although in the late 80s, the money from the Luce grant enabled a modification of the format to include a semester-long graduate program. Students were allowed a regular graduate school load of twelve units, including the workshop.

This was the Tiempos' take on the Iowa Writers' Workshop. The catalog of the Program in Creative Writing of the University of Iowa states

...The Program in Creative Writing is known informally as the Iowa Writers' Workshop and these two titles suggest the duality of our purpose and function. As a "program" we offer the Masters of Fine Arts in English, a terminal degree qualifying the holder to teach creative writing at the college level. As a "workshop" we provide an opportunity for the talented writer to work and learn with established poets and prose writers. Though we agree in part with the popular insistence that writing cannot be taught, we exist and proceed on the assumption that talent can be developed, and we see our possibilities and limitations as a school in that light. If one can "learn" to play the violin or to paint, one can "learn" to write, though no processes of externally induced training can ensure that one will do it well. Accordingly, the fact that the workshop can claim as alumni nationally and internationally prominent poets, novelists, and short story writers, this is, we believe, more the result of what they brought here than of what they gained from us. We continue to look for the most



promising talent in the country, in our conviction that writing cannot be taught but that writers can be encouraged.

Workshops in general have the following characteristics: [1] a defined outcome and are conducted to improve how people think, organize and perform within the workplace, [2] six to 20 participants, [3] a highly participative process that emphasizes application, [4] an openness to new theories/ models/ techniques, [5] a conducive venue outside of the worksite, [6] a group of participants that work together as colleagues and share responsibility for the success of the workshop with the leader, [7] a shared process of learning and action.<sup>1</sup>

In writers' workshops, the focus is on opportunity and the ability and willingness to apply learning. Klatt says "...change supported by workshops focus on factors that support or block willingness and opportunity."<sup>2</sup> For writers or would-be writers, some of the factors that support willingness and opportunity would be meeting and hearing more experienced writers discuss the art of writing; having their works go through the critical eyes and ears of the more experienced writers and their peers; and have the "sense of immersion in the local scene."<sup>3</sup> In workshops, ability is usually a prerequisite. An awareness that their works belong to themselves and to the world once they are finished writing will aid the writers in the workshop. Some of the factors that block willingness and opportunity are money and time, thus the idea of fellowships and holding the writers' workshop in the long vacation month of May.

The National Writers' Workshop was established because the Tiempos felt that the writers in the country needed it. Dr. Edith Tiempo said "...in our day and age, we can't bother with the trial and error method...one is never sure from work to work whether he has succeeded...this is very deflating and corrosive on a writer's effort."<sup>4</sup> Through the workshop, the Tiempos also sought to correct the conventional thinking that writers are very dependent on their feelings and need always to have inspiration to write. Wrote Dr. Edith Tiempo, "...the aim is not to teach literary principles as such, but to learn to know them from direct analyzing and scrutinizing of the works that the fellows have submitted for discussion."<sup>5</sup> Dr. Cirilo Bautista wrote that workshops "answer the need for a rational and sustained effort to build the country's literary resources by attending to the requisites of its primary component, the writer."<sup>6</sup>

### Objectives of the Silliman National Writers' Workshop

The Tiempos set up the National Writers' Workshop for the following reasons: "to help serious writers discover their own strengths and weaknesses, to stimulate the creative faculties and develop the critical insights, to familiarize writers with the procedures of writing and rewriting."<sup>7</sup> Variations of these include "providing a link between the intimate act of writing and the work's publication,"<sup>8</sup> and giving the writer a chance to be in "fellowship with other writers, sharing with his own kind the privilege and excitement of analyzing and exploring and creating, until his own work each time ceases to be a thing of frail possibilities, and becomes an adventure toward completion, towards a sturdy and seamless work."<sup>9</sup> Having an agreement about the purpose of the workshop "informs the interaction and relation between reading and writing."<sup>10</sup>

One important long-term objective of the workshop was to choose four or five fellows to take their graduate studies in English, literature and creative writing in Silliman University. This was to make possible a more extensive training in writing and teaching.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the resources of the workshop were not enough to sustain this particular objective.

While previously mentioned objectives dealt with creative writing in the country, the National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete also wanted to develop teachers' instructional skill, "refine literary tastes in the country..., and increase the pool of responsible and percipient literature teachers in the country along the lines of developing the art of good reading."<sup>12</sup> Dr. Edilberto Tiempo wrote that one of the teaching program's emphases was to "prepare the writers for the teaching vocation, while they upgrade the craft."<sup>13</sup>

In the early days of the workshop, the fellows, who were seated behind long tables arranged in a rectangle, were surrounded by the teacher-observers. The panelists would usually sit in front at the head of the rectangle. The formal arrangement of the tables and chairs is used to allow both panelists and fellows an unobstructed view of one another. Some sessions are held alfresco either in the garden of a private residence or on the beach. The workshop atmosphere is then more relaxed.

Observers take their seats outside of the rectangle. This arrangement of inner and outer rectangles is also a form of recognition of the fellows as writers, and encourages the fellows to contribute

to the discussion not only in terms of comments on the works but also questions about the writing craft.<sup>14</sup> The observers, however, may choose to speak to either the fellows or panelists after the workshop sessions to give their comments or ask for clarification from the panelists on a critical practice issue.

The encouragement to contribute to the discussion could be attributed not only to the arrangement but also to the atmosphere of the workshop. While criticisms may be harsh they are never personal and they are always meant to be constructive. As one workshop fellow put it, the critical comments and evaluations were made in such a way that the goodwill came through. Linda Ty-Casper recalls that the writers were down to earth and were truly concerned with writing.<sup>15</sup>

When Dr. Edith Tiempo begins the workshop, she introduces herself and adds, "you can call me Mom." This helps ease the tension because of its suggestion of nurture and closeness/familiarity. A fellow of the 1996 National Writers' Workshop attributed the "strong community spirit that bound all the fellows together in genuine concern for one another" to the Tiempos' commitment to each other, to the fellows and to the writing, and their sense of humor.<sup>16</sup>

Fellows who have attended both the National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete and the UP National Writers' Workshop pointed out the difference between these two. Apart from the fact that the latter is held for two weeks, the UP workshop has formal lectures focusing on the theme of the workshop for that year. The National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete does not have a yearly theme. The bases for the day-to-day discussion in the National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete are the manuscripts. It may happen that in dealing with a particular manuscript, it is necessary to give a lecture to expound on a literary concept but this is very few and far between. Some of the lectures were given by Cesar Aquino, Francis Macansantos, and Isagani Cruz on topics such as paradox, modernism, and the evaluation of the Tiempos as New Critics.

In the first few days of the workshop, it is the panelists who begin the discussion. Dr. Edith Tiempo believes that the knowledge and skill of literary criticism would be better demonstrated by the panelists. In the early days of the workshop both Tiempos led the discussion of poetry and fiction, oftentimes disagreeing with one another. When Dr. Edilberto Tiempo had a mild heart attack in 1991, his work at the workshop was cut back. He would come only in the afternoon

to lead the discussion on fiction. Kerima Polotan-Tuvera described his manner of critiquing "thoughtful and deliberate."<sup>17</sup> Dr. Ophelia Dimalanta was quoted as saying

...For him the author ultimately decides what his work should mean and the author must shape and create his text in order to arrive at that one definite meaning. If the author is good enough, the reader will get exactly what he means. Ed believed in the old rules like unity of subject, coherence, consistency of point of view, authority in fiction and supremacy of form.<sup>18</sup>

Dr. Edith Tiempo would do the same for poetry in the morning, emphasizing "poetic integrity and resonance, formal excellence and veracious autonomy—qualities which the poems must possess by necessity and not by endowment of external agencies like critics and readers."<sup>19</sup> Kerima Polotan-Tuvera pointed out that Dr. Edith Tiempo's criticism aims for the point between the head and the heart, "always hitting both dead center" in her critiques.<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Edith Tiempo in the 90s let the guest panelists lead the discussion and sometimes would even let them take care of the afternoon session. The rotation of the facilitator is also advisable as it lessens predictability in the critical treatment. The reason for Dr. Edith Tiempo's absence in some afternoons was for her to get much-needed rest and conserve her energies because on the last day of the workshop, she hosted the fellowship dinner in her home, which also was the couple's way of celebrating their wedding anniversary.

As the fellows become acquainted with the practice of literary criticism, they gain confidence and are asked to begin the session. This usually happens on the second week. Dr. Anthony Tan recalls that it was Dr. Bienvenido Lumbera who suggested that the workshop fellows speak first.<sup>21</sup> The fact that the author of the piece being discussed is unknown enables the fellows to speak frankly. A fellow is asked to read the work to be discussed after which the panelists give their comments. Linda Ty-Casper wrote that the works were taken for what they were, and there were "no academic formulae to cloud the review of works."<sup>22</sup>

Most discussions begin with content and move to style. Teresita Rodriguez observed that, in terms of the short story, the panelists

looked into the plot, theme, characterization, dialogue, conflict, atmosphere, and tone. For poetry, Dr. Bautista wrote that panelists seek "to discover the existence of such internal factors as coherence, harmony and counterpoint; to justify or reject prosaic elements in the context of the poem's aesthetic direction, and finally to evaluate the clarity of its meaning within the boundaries of the poetic philosophy."<sup>23</sup> To help the writers discover their strength, positive comments are given about their work. There is a story about Dr. Edilberto Tiempo bearing down on the work of a writer and being reminded by his co-director to begin with the good points first.

There are of course bad points about the works which are pointed out to the fellows. In the 1988 workshop, the fellows came out with chronicles of the workshop, which they called "Silly Man's Day." In one issue, they listed down the faults highlighted during the past discussions. Other comments are variations of these. The comments noted down by the 1988 fellows were:

#### *Poetry*

1. Lack of imagery, discursive lines instead of images, metaphors
2. Lack of tension
3. Inaccessibility of the poet's private world to the reader
4. Inexact, imprecise language
5. Lack of focus, fuzzy focus, persona not clear
6. Flabby lines
7. Lack of concept

#### *Stories*

1. Inexpert handling of language
2. Too many themes, an embarrassing richness of topics
3. Cardboard characters, inadequate motivations
4. Telling the story instead of rendering/dramatizing it
5. Lack of a point: so what?

Suggestions are also given on how to re-write the work. Quotable quotes include "Cliché-ish but have good enough potential to be re-written using more original images and a dramatic approach," "The first parts should be pulled out in the revision," "...Mark the tension between the metaphorical line and discursive line" or "...Get a core situation, get a core image; then provide a metaphorical frame," "The

lack of dramatic rendering may be solved by breaking out of the form of interior monologue." The panelist would also refer to past works related to the manuscript on the block or what fellows would call "literary tradition as framework" after T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent." According to T.S. Eliot, a writer's significance is to be seen in relation to the past/previous writers. The writer's progress is "a continual self-sacrifice" because s/he no longer has "a personality to express but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways."<sup>24</sup> In the 2000 workshop, the kit included, upon the suggestion of Dr. Edith Tiempo, copies of works by Denise Levertov, William Carlos Williams, Vachel Lindsay and Sarah Cleghorn as means of showing the fellows how to deal with images, and subject matter, among others.

The panelists' comments may contradict each other, something which might not seem helpful to the writer at first. Demetillo recounted that in the 1972 workshop during the discussion on a piece which was political, one panelist likened the piece to mud, which she refused to deal with and in response, another panelist believed "mud can be metaphorically important and can be potentially used in writing meaningful literature."<sup>25</sup> In a discussion on propaganda and literature, the works were said to fail if these had only a purely artistic appeal on one hand, or if these were mere propaganda on the other, Demetillo noted.<sup>26</sup> In another and later workshop, some panelists believed that the omniscient point of view of one story should be used while others were for the retention of the two characters as points of view in that story (one poet writing to another). In the discussion of Ricardo de Ungria's poem, two panelists expressed their liking for the poem, comparing it with Paul Valery's poems while Dr. Edilberto Tiempo said that this kind of writing exemplified by the poem might lead to the death of Philippine literature. It is left to the workshop fellows to follow the suggestion that challenges them, the one which they believe would help them in the revision process to bring out the work's potential. Or, the workshop fellow may opt not to follow any of the suggestions at all. The panelists might sometimes sound to the fellows like they are imposing their views or are being prescriptive, but ultimately it is the fellows who decide on what to do with their work.

Dr. Bautista pointed out that creative writing workshops are actually criticism workshops.<sup>27</sup> In the National Writers' Workshop in

Dumaguete, the praxis of criticism is predominantly New Criticism although since the 70s, there have been other approaches used by the panelists. The panelists begin with a New Critic/Formalist way of reading the manuscript to provide the critical frame for comments on the work, and from there use other critical approaches such as Feminist, Marxist, Structuralist, and Post-Structuralist ideas. As one panelist wrote

...In spite of the emergence of other schools of criticism in the last 30 years, I notice that most members of the panel still approach literary pieces in the workshop the way the New Critics did. Even those who mouth newfangled theories like deconstruction and structuralism still criticized the works of the writing fellow in more or less similar fashion as if time hasn't changed.<sup>28</sup>

New Criticism involves a detailed textual analysis of the work itself which does not go into areas such as the author's intention (intentional fallacy) and the effects of the work on the reader (affective fallacy) which are not directly related to the work itself. In terms of the praxis of New Criticism in the National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete, the concept of organic unity comes to play when the panelists "seek justification for mannerist forms,"<sup>29</sup> or advise the fellows to take out some parts of their work because these are decorative or not relevant to the structure of the work. The panelists who were literary editors pointed out not only grammatical errors but also the weaknesses of the work's structure. In keeping with New Criticism's belief in the autonomy of the work and to avoid intentional fallacy, the workshop focuses on the manuscript and, except in the panelists' copies, does not provide the names of the fellows alongside their works. This emphasis on the autonomy of the work necessitates close readings and enables panelists to point out "...the infelicitous word, mixed metaphor, awkward versification, arbitrary line cutting,"<sup>30</sup> "the strained metaphor, the redundant word, the dangling modifier..."<sup>31</sup> The close reading also made the panelists see the fellow's work with language. As Susan Lara wrote

...But all were quick to applaud the majesty of a well-constructed sentence; and none were immune to the spell of



a well-wrought poetic line and other serendipities, of which there were plenty.<sup>32</sup>

In looking at the workshop process one may be helped by Elkins' observation on art critiques as a means of teaching. One of the metaphors he used to describe an art critique is that it is a seduction. He wrote that the artists want attention, but most critiques maintain that a work can be evaluated on its own. Thus, it is the teachers and the work that have an indirect relation and the artist has only a variable role. As Elkins put it "the artwork 'presents itself,' or is introduced, and it, not the student, is to be the object of the teacher's attention."<sup>33</sup> This is also the situation in workshop and art critiques in that the panelists and fellows have read the work beforehand. The fellows are able to speak only after the comments on their works have been given.

### **Impact on Literary Production**

The Tiempos had been trained in the Iowa Writers' Workshop and therefore were confident of a workshop's success in the Philippines. Dr. Cirilo Bautista wrote that the National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete drew many applicants and the works of the fellows added to the storehouse of Philippine literature. He wrote, "The amount of learning these writers got from this workshop is incalculable, and is measurable only in the way they have contributed to the qualitative and quantitative growth of our literature. Being a pioneer, the Silliman Writers' Workshop occupies a premier position in the history of creative writing in the Philippines."<sup>34</sup>

Apart from Bautista, there were others who recognized the contribution of the workshop and the Tiempos to Philippine literature. Literary historians point out that the tradition of Philippine writing in English continued in the National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete. In fact, many of the country's leading writers have attended it either as fellows or panelists/lecturers. Lumbera, Chua and Lucero wrote

The writing workshop, already established as an institution in the United States, was brought into the Philippines by Edilberto and Edith Tiempo of Silliman University in 1957.



New Criticism by this time had become accepted as the critical orthodoxy in American colleges and universities, and the Tiempos, by their practice as writers and their advocacy as teachers, set the trend toward painstaking refinement of the craft of writing.<sup>35</sup>

Alegre and Fernandez attest to the influence of the Tiempos when they wrote, "...The Silliman Summer Workshop is patterned after it, and has been the conduit for the approaches to creative writing and criticism absorbed by generations of young Filipino writers – mostly those writing in English."<sup>36</sup>

Another proof of its position is as Dr. Edilberto Tiempo wrote, in reference to the joint writers' and teachers' workshop, "...even teachers who got their degrees from the US could feel the need for this interaction with creative works."<sup>37</sup> Among the teachers were Aida Rivera-Ford, a former Sillimanian, and Zenaida French.

Describing the outcome of a creative writing workshop may be more challenging because the results may be long in coming and are oftentimes unpredictable. The kind of person the writer is and the quality of the work are factors to consider. Dr. Edith Tiempo believes that the workshop gave Philippine creative writing "a new way of writing and reading and thinking; close reading of the text; the demand for fresher and original insights in the work; awareness of the role of ambiguity and paradox and other artistic devices; fidelity on both the physical and symbolic levels, among others, contributing to a more profound and inventive literature."<sup>38</sup>

One outcome of the workshop is that many fellows of the National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete become nationally recognized writers. The 1978 workshop brochure stated that these former fellows won prizes not because they attended the workshop but because they have been able to "demonstrate talent to get the most out of the Workshop."

Whether or not writers develop such attitudes or qualities through the workshop, they learn to look at writing as a way of life. Lara mentioned Jose Dalisay, Jr. and Tita Concepcion Taule going back to the University of the Philippines after attending the National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete to continue their pursuit of literature, inspired by what they learned at the workshop. In the write-up about the authors in the centennial issue of *Sands & Coral* (2002), the editors wrote that Dalisay's "resolve to devote himself to the writing life came to him in the S.U.

Writers' Workshop."<sup>39</sup> Former fellows also returned to the workshop to be part of the panel. Dr. Edilberto Tiempo himself once said that some alumni have even "outdone the teacher" in terms of astuteness in criticism. Others serve in the U.P. Workshop and some have established workshops in the universities and regions where they teach.

Among these workshops which have been inspired by the example of the National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete are the U.P. Writers Workshop, the Ateneo Writers Workshop, and the Iligan National Writers' Workshop. The U.P. Writers Workshop was established in 1965 and is still ongoing. The Ateneo Writers Workshop was also established in 1965 but lasted only until 1968. In 1970, the Ateneo had a workshop focused on writing in Pilipino. Both the U.P. and the Ateneo offer creative writing as an area of specialization. The Iligan National Writers' Workshop was established in 1994 to answer the need for a workshop on a national scale to be held in Mindanao.

Closer to the National Writers' Workshop home, the *Sands & Coral* has also been benefitted by the workshop. Many of its editors who were workshop fellows had their works published in national publications. Contributions to *Sands & Coral* came not only from Silliman University students, particularly creative writing majors, but also from fellows and panelists of the workshop. The diamond jubilee anthology of the said journal had works by the fellows and panelists, and this was used in Malaysia as a textbook on Philippine literature. Some of the essays written by the Tiempos and published in the literary journal were explications of their ideas in literature and writing.

The *Sands & Coral* came out with an issue dedicated to Dr. Edilberto Tiempo in 1997. In this issue, remembrances of the workshop and Dr. Edilberto were written by Prof. Merlie Alunan and Dr. Cesar Ruiz Aquino. The centennial issue of the journal also mentioned the inspiration provided by the Tiempos through their classes and their guidance of young writers.

Another work dedicated to Dr. Edilberto Tiempo is *Tribute: An Anthology of Contemporary Philippine Fiction* (2001). Among the contributors were Edith Tiempo, Rowena Tiempo-Torrevillas, Kerima Polotan, Aida Rivera-Ford, Erwin Castillo, Cesar Aquino, Alfred Yuson, Raymond Llorca, Bobby Villasis, Jaime An Lim, Carlos Aureus, Anthony Tan, Carlos Cortes, Susan Lara, Ernesto Superal Yee, Jose Dalisay, Jr., Maria Victoria Kapauan, Charlson Ong, CJ Maraan, Danton Remoto, Timothy Montes, Gina Apostol and Eileen Tabios.

They are family, friends, and workshop fellows from the 1960s to the 1990s, story-tellers all. "It was a common story we told: meeting Doc Ed was a turning point in life. I remember him, the first time I joined the workshop, taking me aside and saying, "You can write." And I began to write seriously."<sup>40</sup>

The creative atmosphere fostered by the creative writing program and the workshop in Silliman University produced graduates such as Myrna Peña-Reyes, Leoncio Deriada, Antonio Enriquez, Anthony Tan, Marjorie Evasco, Grace Monte de Ramos, and Rowena Tiempo-Torrevillas. The latter served as coordinator of the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa during the directorship of Paul Engle.

It also inspired former Sillimanian, Graciano Arinday, to create the Arinday award. Arinday, a former editor of the *Sands & Coral*, intended the awards to be open to both undergraduate and graduate students. He was surprised by the number of entries received and the fact that some of these were from nationally published writers. It was not only the Arinday awards wherein writers associated with Silliman University and the workshop did well. Many win in the annual national literary competitions like Roberto Villasis who won first place in the 1987 Palanca drama category, and Elsa Martinez-Coscolluela, who received the Palanca Hall of Fame award for garnering five first prizes.

The National Writers' Workshop is associated with Philippine writing in English because of the predominance of works written in that language that are submitted to the workshop. Dr. David Quemada commented that one of the problems of the workshop was that the fellows lacked the "mastery or skills in the use of language."<sup>41</sup> That problem still comes up although in cases, it is attributed to its being Filipino English. There is still, of course, the admonition to know the language in order to wield it well.

A question had been posed by both past and present workshop participants as to why it continues to draw people, and if it has been effective or has met its goal. In the early years of the workshop, no formal evaluation was done. In its place, the Tiempos received letters from fellows that state their reactions to and feeling about the workshop. The Tiempos believe that in a workshop, one gives oneself. In their case, the insights they give to the fellows as well as to the panelists are born not only out of their reading, but their experience

as writers.

In 1989, the fellows noted in *Penpricks* that “there was a mid-evaluation” (synthesis-analysis of intra and extra-literary points and angles) that clarified several muddled areas on the selection process, the need for summing up discussions, time allotment and the like.” Since 1994, a formal evaluation was given by the fellows. The evaluation is divided into two sections—the summer writers’ workshop and the literature workshop. The latter was in keeping with the workshop’s aim of teaching the fellows and observers, who are usually teachers or literature students, skills in teaching literature. The writers’ workshop evaluation asked them to comment on accommodations and travel arrangements, preparation and distribution of manuscripts, social and free time, and the handling of the workshop sessions. The literature workshop evaluation asked whether it has fully accomplished, fairly accomplished or not accomplished the following goals: “[1] to acquaint the participants with contemporary trends in writing,” “[2] to provide the participants a deeper insight into the practical aspects of the problem involved in writing by involving them in the discussions of literary pieces with the writers themselves,” and “[3] to strengthen the participants’ knowledge and grasp of the approaches to literary criticism by actually involving them in the applied practice of criticism.” The evaluations are unsigned and undated. The fellows usually answered both forms although not everyone answered the forms. The evaluations were kept by the coordinator and shown to members of the Creative Writing Foundation, Inc.

Some comments on the summer writers’ workshop, particularly with regard to the handling of the sessions were:

- More fictionists please!
- In their respective fields, OK *naman*. All had basis.
- Quite ambivalent. I appreciate the knowledge-sharing by the panelists but more participation from the fellows should be encouraged. There should be a healthy balance.
- Quite satisfied with the credibility of each panel’s critique but they should have had an introductory explanation of where they were coming from in the context of their criticisms.
- Too many panelists on certain weeks.
- Workshop sessions were very good although certain lecturers

talked and harped too much on things that didn't really concern the poem.

- In the workshop sessions, it's like the fellows who are fictionists get marginalized because most of the panelists are poets. A fictionist would critique a short story quite differently from a poet. In this vein, some fellows didn't fully benefit from the workshop.

In 1972, Demetillo asked fellows what their expectations of the workshop were and he perceived that the fellows wanted to know the best techniques in writing poetry and fiction.<sup>42</sup> While the workshop does not prescribe one best way of writing, the fellows say that they learned as much from the comments on the works of the other fellows as the ones on their works. Others recalled the emphasis given on the art of writing, and the techniques and devices of poetry and fiction they learned. Samples of these recollections by fellows and panelists are:

**Wilfrido Nolledo:** It does fortify the way you read or see things. You begin to think of your readers somehow, though not always. Any writers' workshop will heighten your perception of things, in life in general. The Silliman experience was invigorating and inspiring.

**Linda Ty-Casper:** I don't approach stories as exhibits of current ideologies or trends in formal techniques, but read them for what they are. I don't even think of the writer as I read. The story is whole unto itself.

**Alfred Yuson:** Ideationally, the process in turn leads to the crafting of an exemplary scene or situation, to the unraveling of paradox, irony, insight—as some form or other of personal illumination.

**Linda Faigao-Hall:** ...I was astounded by the questions, the insistent need to know exactly what you were describing (though it didn't have to be in the text) was impressed upon me so ferociously it drives the way I research my plays up to now.

**Joy Dayrit:** The workshop has succeeded in projecting the more serious aspect of writing. It has taught me that one writes for readers, not for

himself. ...And from these principles, I have changed my attitude as a writer from a haphazard to a more disciplined attitude.

**Merlie Alunan:** ...I got to meet other writers who 'gave me a hand up' in a manner of speaking...The sessions also helped me clarify some of my own ideas...I am a very good reader. It helps if you know the ins-and-outs of the text.

**Anthony Tan:** The workshop made me a better writer because I learned what's "in" and what's "not in." I became more critical of my work.

**Simeon Dumdum Jr.:** The workshop made me objective about my work and I am able to do more thoughtful revisions.

**Marjorie Evasco:** I was taught that the poet needs to develop the critical eye with which to establish a workable distance, a different space from the poem's initial urges, in order to apprehend and appraise the integrity of the poem's articulation and performance.

**Timothy Montes:** ...It made me aware of the existence of critical readers. From raw, instinctive writing I graduated into developing a critical doppelganger, a sort of third eye. I think I also became more ambitious after that...I began to explore the teaching of poetry, especially difficult-to-understand modernist poems to students using a workshop, writerly perspective.

**Lakambini Sitoy:** ...I remember that summer as a time of awakening; it was then that I gained an inkling of the mystery of other people's imaginations, and also the importance of mine.

**Mike Maniquiz:** In this country, writers have more reasons to be discouraged. All criticisms and harsh words we received that summer in Dumaguete is nothing compared to what we deal with everyday — or don't. If panelists roar in disapproval over a wrong choice of word or make a big fuss about a slip in grammar, outside the workshop no one cares. But still, some of us persist, if only because there were people like Mom Edith and Doc Ed who gave us a glint of realization that some people do, in fact, give a damn.

**Ralph Semino Galan:** ...All of us learned the importance of organic unity, Mom Edith and Doc Ed being the major proponents of New

Criticism here in the Philippines. We were also introduced to the concept of the objective correlative, a theory first presented by T.S. Eliot in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems."...Thus the writers' workshop in Dumaguete (formerly known as the Silliman Writers' Workshop) has bestowed on me two essential gifts: a lasting sense of community with kindred spirits and a sensitivity to words and the emotional worlds they create through objective correlatives.

**John Labella:** Apart from developing one's critical sensibilities, one also gets the benefit of seeing your work unfold in a variety of ways—technically and otherwise, good and bad—because of the different contexts the readers are coming from. I also saw how writing is always a beginning and the truth in the saying that one begins in writing with a sense of wonder.

**Joy Cruz:** ...It was only then that I named me to myself: WRITER. I returned to Manila feverish with the desire to be/come, to carry myself beyond: meta/phora...But it was in the years that followed that I discovered the hard work required to turn the magic into a poem and transform the sensibility into text. I realized that for a writer, it is important to be fully present to life, as it is to sit down and write.

**Lorenzo Paran III:** ...Doc Ed slapped me on my back, put his arm around me and, turning to the other fellows in the room, said, "This is a writer", an acknowledgement, perhaps not so much of my skills but the attitude I took toward writing and criticism. I doubted the accuracy of the words, but I found them certainly very inspiring.

**Carolyn Howard:** We came away valuing our writing more, vowing to give it better form although often with greater difficulty. Talent was not enough, we were told; writing required love and discipline—things which, beginning then, I would strive to have in greater measure.

**Mary Ann Tobias:** After Dumaguete, I became more critical of my work. Dumaguete had become a yardstick against which I measured my stories. Was there still a conflict not fully wrought out? Tension that needs to be strengthened? Any potential metaphors lying untapped? Characters that need to be more fully delineated?

**Tanya Sevilla:** ...And as part of the workshop, I learned how to handle my discoveries with care, respect and responsibility. Beauty may not



have a name but it requires much from those who behold it.

**Isabel Huggan:** ...I learned a lot during that week by watching and listening to "Mom" Edith, and saw that my blunt North American ways were not necessarily the most effective tools to help writers improve. I gained a real sense of admiration for her and for the other panelists, so in tune with the needs and talents of the workshop participants.

**Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo:** ...By then the standards of Silliman seeped into everyone's writing. I did not become a fellow of the workshop but we wrote with Silliman in mind. When we wrote, we always asked ourselves "Will this pass Dumaguete?"

More than the dominance of English in the workshop, the spread of New Criticism in the country is attributed to the workshop. For one thing, it aims to wean the writers from their dependence on inspiration to begin their work as this is what is known as fallacy of expressive form. This "refers to the ideas that if a poet feels with sufficient intensity then this will be enough to create a successful poem."<sup>43</sup> One gathers from the statements above that through the workshop, the fellows became more disciplined in their writing and more critical/objective about their works, revising these to "transform the sensibility into text" and to give these better forms. The fellows' objectivity is evident also in the manner in which they read a work as "whole unto themselves." While fellows strive to create the better form, meaning is not neglected thus the presence of insight, irony, paradox and objective correlative. The latter implies the coming together of form and meaning, something the New Critics emphasized.

The Tiempos' training in the Iowa Writers' Workshop made them adept in the praxis of New Criticism. In his "Tiempong-Tiempo: Dalawang Kritiko, Iisang Kritika," Dr. Isagani Cruz asserted that the Tiempos' New Criticism was basically a reaction against the mimetic theory. According to Cruz, what the Tiempos did was "...binago nila and Bagong Panunuri ng mga kano at isinafilipino nila ito ayon sa hinihingi ng sarili nating literatura."<sup>44</sup> He further said:

Situating themselves firmly with the dominant tradition of socially conscious and politically subversive Philippine



literature established by Francisco Baltazar and Jose Rizal, the *Tiempos* formulated a distinct literary theory blending both the reading strengths of the American New Critics and the thematic preoccupations of Filipino writers.<sup>45</sup>

The *Tiempos* would, however, point out that the New Criticism was not exactly new as its principles have their origins in classical thought. Dr. Edilberto Tiempo recognized this as he took Greek classics for his PhD.

The *Tiempos* also would point out the need for communication between the critic and reader, that the critic is the bridge between the reader and the text. The idea of communication—hitting the heart and the mind both—is dear to Dr. Edith Tiempo whose other field of specialization was communication.

Workshop discussions focus on the primacy of the text. Because of the direct analyzing and scrutinizing of the works, the fellows know the literary principles by application and not by definition, wrote Dr. Edith Tiempo.<sup>46</sup> Dr. Edith Tiempo said

...We are not outmoded because we cling to those principles. We are just firmly rooted in critical ground. We take in some of those principles—what my husband liked to call “fads.” And like a version of irony we call “camping,” we take them in because those are our versions of something already established.<sup>47</sup>

As to why their choice is New Criticism, Dr. Edith Tiempo replied a “more inventive and profound literature” is born out of writers’ understanding of ambiguity and paradox and artistic devices, their fresh and original insights and “fidelity on both the physical and symbolic levels.” Dr. Edilberto Tiempo wrote that there are other approaches which a critic may use “to enrich his evaluation but are subsidiary to the textual and analytical approach. What is most fundamental is the recognition that literature can be a living experience when seen through the eyes of Longinus and the New Critic.”<sup>48</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Klatt 18.

<sup>2</sup> Klatt 16.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Yuson, "From Dumaguete, the Mother of All Workshops," *The Philippine Star* 20 September 2000: 1-4.

<sup>4</sup> Domini Torrevillas-Suarez, "How Should Edith Tiempo Mean?" *Philippine Panorama* May 1974:6.

<sup>5</sup> Tiempo, letter to the author, 7 January 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Cirilo Bautista, "Literary Workshops and Contests: Forces in Literary Growth," *Illuminated Terrain: The Sites and Dimensions of Philippine Literature* ed. Victor Sugbu (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 1998) 24.

<sup>7</sup> National Writers' Workshop, Brochure, 1969.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Lara, "Dumaguete: Paradise Regained," *FOCUS Philippines* 29 August 1981:32.

<sup>9</sup> National Writers' Workshop, Brochure, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> Jon Cook, "A Brief History of Workshops," *The Creative Writing Coursebook* (London: Macmillan, 2001) 300.

<sup>11</sup> Tiempo, letter to the author, 7 January 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Alunan, "Proposal to Extend the Operation," np.

<sup>13</sup> Tiempo, "Addendum to the Proposed Expansion of the Operation of the Silliman University National Writers' Workshop," ts. Graduate School Library, np.

<sup>14</sup> James Coplien and Bobby Woolf, "A Pattern Language for Writers' Workshop," 18 May 1997. 14 March 2002. Retrieved from [www.bell-labs.com/~cope/Patterns/WritersWorkshop](http://www.bell-labs.com/~cope/Patterns/WritersWorkshop)

<sup>15</sup> LindaTy-Casper, email to the author, 6 March 2002.

<sup>16</sup> "Essays on the National Writers' Workshop in Dumaguete," ts. Marjorie Evasco and Susan Lara collections, np.

<sup>17</sup> Kerima Polotan-Tuvera, "Dateline: Dumaguete," *Philippines Free Press* 15 July 1967: 47.

<sup>18</sup> Lourd Ernest De Veyra and Ramil Digal Gulle, "Doc Ed," *Today Weekender* 29 September 1996: 6.

<sup>19</sup> Bautista, "From Dubuffet, the Silliman Writers' Workshop and the Making of the Poem," *Philippine Panorama* 20 June 1993: 14.

<sup>20</sup> Tuvera 38.

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Tan, "Silliman in the Seventies," *Sands & Coral Centennial Issue* (2000): 122.

<sup>22</sup> Ty-Casper

<sup>23</sup> Bautista, "The Uses of Creative Writing Workshops," *Philippine Panorama* 7 February 1993: 26.

<sup>24</sup> Isagani Cruz, ed. "T.S. Eliot: Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Modern Literary Criticism* (Manila: DLSU Research Center, 1984) 140,142.

<sup>25</sup> Ricaredo Demetillo, "Confrontation at Silliman," *Graphic* 12 July 1973: 13.

<sup>26</sup> Demetillo, "Confrontation at Silliman," 12.

<sup>27</sup> Bautista, "Writing Workshops and the Sound of Poetry," *Philippine Panorama* 24 May 1998: 20.

<sup>28</sup> Tan, email to the author, 22 March 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Lara, "New Beginnings for an Old Tradition," *Sunday Inquirer Magazine* 19 September 1993: 15.

<sup>30</sup> Lara, "The National Writers' Summer Workshop in Dumaguete: 35 Years and Getting Better," *The Evening Paper* 7-9 June 1996: 19.

<sup>31</sup> Lara, "New Beginnings," 15.

<sup>32</sup> Lara, "The National Writers' Summer Workshop," 19.

<sup>33</sup> James Elkins, *Why Art Can't Be Taught: A Handbook for Art Students* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2001) 133.

<sup>34</sup> Bautista, "Literary Workshops and Contests," 19.

<sup>35</sup> Philippine Literature, *CCP Encyclopedia of Art*, ed. Nicanor Tiongson, Vol IX (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> Alegre and Fernandez 404.

<sup>37</sup> Tiempo, "Addendum," np.

<sup>38</sup> Tiempo, letter to the author, 31 May 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas Crispino, Claire Dy and Ellen May Sojor, eds. *Sands & Coral Centennial Issue 2001-2002* (Dumaguete: Silliman University's English Department, 2002) 284.

- <sup>40</sup> Timothy Montes and Cesar Aquino, eds., *Tribute: An Anthology of Contemporary Philippine Fiction* (Pasig: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2001) viii.
- <sup>41</sup> NVM Gonzales, "The University Experience with Philippine Letters," *Solidarity* 2: 6 (1967): 98.
- <sup>42</sup> Demetillo 12.
- <sup>43</sup> JA Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1998) 298.
- <sup>44</sup> Cruz, "Tiempong-Tiempo: Dalawang Kritiko sa Iisang Kritika," ts. Marjorie Evasco collection.
- <sup>45</sup> Cruz, "Edith Tiempo as Critic," *Edith Tiempo Reader* eds. Gemino Abad, Isagani R. Cruz, Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo, Alfred Yuson and Edna Zapanta-Manlapaz (Quezon City: U.P. Press, 1999) 240.
- <sup>46</sup> Tiempo, letter to the author, 7 January 2002.
- <sup>47</sup> J. Edmundo Reyes, "Hymn, Sob, Psalm: An Interview with Edith Tiempo," *Pen & Ink* 2 (1997): 14.
- <sup>48</sup> Tiempo, *Literary Criticism in the Philippines and Other Essays* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1995) 90.

## REFERENCES

- Alunan, M. (1989). Proposal for funding: 1989 CCP Lit Grant. ts. Graduate School Library Silliman University.
- Bautista, C.F. (1993, February 7). The uses of creative writing workshops. *Philippine Panorama*, 26, 32.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1998). Literary workshops and contests: Forces in literature growth. In Sugbo, V. (Ed.) *Illuminated terrain: The sites and dimensions of Philippine literature*. Manila: NCCA. 15-27.
- Cook, J. (2001). A brief history of workshops. In Bell, J. & Magrs, P. (Eds.). *The creative writing coursebook*. New York: Macmillan.
- Coplien, J.O. & Woolf, B. (1997, March/2002, March 14). A pattern language for writers workshops. Retrieved from [www.bdl-labs.com/~cope/Patterns/Writers Workshop](http://www.bdl-labs.com/~cope/Patterns/WritersWorkshop)
- Cruz, I.R. (n.d.) Tiempong-Tiempo: Dalawang kritiko, isang kritika. ts. Marjorie Evasco collection.

- Cuddon, J.A. (1998). *The Penguin dictionary of literary terms and literary theory*. London: Penguin Books.
- De Veyra, L.E. & Gulle, R.D. (1996, September 29). Doc Ed. *Today Weekend*, 6.
- Demetillo, R. (1973, July 12). Literature in a time of crisis. *Solidarity* 104/105(1995): 119.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (n.d.). "Confrontation at Silliman." *Graphic*, 12-13.
- Dimalanta, O. (1983, June 17). The Silliman Writers' Workshop: Tradition key like solemn vow. *Philippine Panorama*, 12, 14-15, 44-47.
- Klatt, B. (1999). *The ultimate training workshop handbook: A comprehensive guide to leading successful workshops and training programs*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lara, S.S. (1996, June 7-9). The National Writers' Summer Workshop in Dumaguete: 35 years and getting better. *The Evening Paper*, 19.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1981, August 29). Dumaguete: Paradise regained. *FOCUS Philippines*, 32-33.
- Polotan-Tuvera, K. (1967, July 15). Dateline: Dumaguete. *Philippines Free Press*, 36-38, 47.
- Reyes, J.E. (1997). Hymn, sob, psalm: An interview with Edith Tiempo. *Pen & Ink* 2, 13-18.
- Torrevillas-Suarez, D. (1974, May). How should Edith Tiempo mean? *Philippine Panorama*, 6-8.
- Yuson, A.A. (2000, May 29). From Dumaguete, the mother of all workshops. *Philippine Star*, 1-4.

## The Tiempo Legacy

 Merlie Alunan

Not a few times had Edith Tiempo remarked in informal conversations with her students that the late nineteenth century would likely be known as the age of Yeats. The first half of the twentieth century, by the same lights, would likely be referred to as the Age of Eliot, she thought. Her observation was aligned with the popular reference to the sixteenth century as the Age of Shakespeare, the eighteenth century as the Age of Alexander Pope, or the Age of Milton, whichever one prefers. This mode of naming springs from an appreciation of the powerful influence these writers cast upon their age by merit of their works, by virtue of their critical pronouncements, or even by sheer personality.

Following this line of thinking, I may state with due respect that the last fifty years of the 20th Century in Philippine literature may also be referred to as the Tiempo Age. This would cover the immediate years following the end of the Japanese Invasion, the early years of Philippine independence from American Rule, starting from, say 1947 up to the present and extending a few more decades hereafter. Within these years, Philippine writing in English was gaining ascendancy, with the support of an educational system which favored English as the medium of instruction. Filipino writers in English dominated the intellectual scene. Educated in prestigious American universities and alumni both of the University of Iowa International Writers' Workshop, the Tiempos were among the most passionate advocates of English as medium of instruction and as medium for creative writing.

The Silliman University curriculum for Literature and Creative Writing from the undergraduate to the post-graduate level, included literary criticism that begins from Plato and Aristotle and ends with T. S. Eliot; the complete period courses in English and American literature that starts from Beowulf and proceeds all the way to Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti in the wild and woolly 60s.

Meanwhile outside the domain of academe, many young Filipinos were leaving home and leaving school to join the struggle for political change. U.S. imperialism was the fingered enemy and was perceived to be behind the general *deshabille* that plagues the country morally and politically. U.S. imperialism was blamed for corruption in government, widespread poverty, breakdown of traditional values, a sense of disconnection from history and tradition and fragmentation and confusion in the national identity. The country was working towards Martial Law. The country went through the indignities of this period, and so did individuals and institutions. We had to evolve to cope with the exigencies of a militarized and dictatorial system. It was a struggle not to lose sight of that sense of humanity which is the bedrock of civilization.

The backbone of the Silliman University literature curriculum was the period courses of English literature, enriched by electives such as World literature, Asian literature, Philippine literature, aesthetics, contemporary fiction and poetry, and religious themes in contemporary literature. The last was a must-take course for all Literature majors. This is the one course that Edith Tiempo developed to describe and critique the intellectual climate of the times as it manifested itself in the works of the major literary artists of the period.

If one signified to be a creative writing major in the program, one had to take nine units of the creative writing workshop. One of these workshops could be the National Summer Writers' Workshop which the Tiempos established in 1962. As an enrollee in the National Summer Writers' Workshop, one sat with the creative writing Fellows of the season and have his works examined by a critical panel which consisted of the grand literary figures of Philippine writing such as N.V.M. Gonzalez, Nick Joaquin, Francisco Arcellana, Ophelia Dimalanta, Alfred Yuson, Simeon Dumdum, Isagani Cruz, Cirilo Bautista. One might call this as one's baptism into the serious world of writing.

The Silliman University National Writers' Workshop was really part of the academic curriculum, at the same time that it also served as an extension program of the English Department, and hence of Silliman University. The strength of the creative writing program of Silliman University was due to these two elements: firstly, it was anchored on a well-grounded academic curriculum, and secondly, at the time it was started, it had the total support of Silliman University. That support came from a number of factors, but to us who came to the workshop in

those early days, the total experience of the Silliman University campus life made for a distinctive experience that no other campus could give anywhere in the Visayas. Silliman University had a dependable cultural calendar which featured musical concerts by artists of national and international repute, and serious theatrical events offered by the Speech and Theater Arts Department. An intellectual atmosphere pervaded the environment. The beauty, graciousness and hospitality of the Silliman University campus were unforgettable. One of the most impeccable hosts then was Dr. Albert Fautot in his home at Endhouse. An experience of a Fautot soiree was replete with music from his collection, his books and his art pieces of which he had a story to tell about each one of them. I am equally sure the home of the Tiempos would also remain an enduring part of any Sillimanian's memory of the Workshop and of being a literature student in Silliman University.

At the heart of the S.U. literature curriculum and the Creative Writing Program was a view of literature as a fundamental and necessary aspect of human activity. The pursuit and enjoyment of literature is essential for human survival and for society's well-being. Poet Myrna Peña-Reyes provides the best term to describe the weight of the Tiempo presence as they presided over the Literature Program and the Workshop. They had *gravitas* and they infected their students with it.

The program produced writers, and graduates who eventually became teachers of literature themselves. Soon these graduates found themselves in various colleges and universities all over the country. Wherever they were, they continued and expanded the labor of the heart and mind, teaching literature with the same passion and acuity, the sense of *gravitas* that they had absorbed from their mentors. Their deployment in the countryside, albeit unplanned, was strategic. A few names might be mentioned as example: in the National Capital Region, Marjorie Evasco in DLSU and Jaime An-Lim in FEU, Manila; in Central Visayas, Erlinda Alburo in USC, Cebu City; in Western Visayas, Leoncio Deriada in UPV, Iloilo, and Elsa Victoria-Coscolluela, USLS in Bacolod City; in Northern Mindanao, Anthony Tan and Christine Godinez-Ortega, both in MSU-IIT in Iligan City; in Southern Mindanao, Antonino de Veyra, perhaps the youngest in this bunch, probably among the last of the Tiempo mentees, in UP Davao. Cesar Ruiz Aquino and Ian Rosales Casocot remain in Silliman University to carry on the old legacy with Myrna Peña-Reyes standing to remind us of how things ought to be.

The Tiempos kept the Workshop going through the trying years



of Martial Law. I was in Silliman University during the dreariest years of the Workshop. During this period, the University, compelled by a number of exigencies, had set its eyes on other priorities. The Workshop had become the least of S.U.'s priorities. It had seemed as if only the Tiempos were hell-bent, against all reason, to keep it going. I had been beside Edith Tiempo when she went knocking on the homes of certain politicians and community leaders to raise the funds to add to the P11,000 a year earnings of an Endowment Fund that Ed Tiempo had set up in the earliest days.

But it is not my purpose to trace the history of the SU-NSWW. My purpose is to show how much Philippine writing owes to the work of these two great Filipinos, and thereby show the significant contribution of Silliman University to the nation's cultural development. Despite the controversies that have attended their careers as academicians, as creative artists, as public intellectuals, and finally as human beings, our age, our generation, bear the mark of their progress. We must acknowledge that with humility and gratitude. These are my personal insights about the importance of the Tiempo work and by extension, that of Silliman University to the cultural life of the nation:

1. Edilberto and Edith Tiempo wholeheartedly embraced literature and dedicated most of their life and career in the labor of propagating it. By the example of their life and work, they have inspired generations of Filipinos to take up literature as a serious life pursuit, insuring the continued production of literature to chronicle the experiences of the nation.
2. By providing the institutional support for a strong curriculum in literature and a home for the National Writers' Workshop, Silliman University has produced in the last fifty years among the most excellent teachers of literature whose work bred the new generation of writers and teachers to insure literary production and instruction in the field of literature in the Philippines. To this day, Silliman University enjoys the reputation of being a center for intellectual discussion in the humane disciplines and the cradle of literature in the country.
3. What distinguished the SU-NSWW from other workshops in the country was its uncompromising stance on a formalist approach in its critique of literary works. Workshops established by alumni of the SU program conduct workshops

under the same rigorous standards of craft. A literary critic who had trained under the *Tiempos* or had been through the S.U. writers' workshop appreciate the primacy of form and content before it would allow other levels or streams of discussion to take place as the writer's fundamental tools for creative writing.

4. The direction of growth of Philippine literature today is towards literature in the languages. Among the advocates of this direction are also the writers and teachers who trained under the *Tiempos* and the Literature and Creative Writing Program of Silliman University. This is at variance with the mission/vision of the program under which they trained, but this advocacy is also part of our growth in understanding of our identity. We are beginning to realize that our cultural and linguistic plurality, is not a weakness but a strength of our communities and hence, of our nation. Inevitably thus, such innovations as we see now in regional writing may be attributed to the Workshop, the *Tiempos*, and Silliman University, for they are instigated by alumni of both the S.U. Program in Literature and the *Tiempos*. For good or ill, therefore, writing in this last fifty years, including the rise of regional writing, which is slowly but surely taking place today, also bear the imprint of the *Tiempo* influence and of Silliman University.

Aside from breeding excellent teachers of literature and among the best poets, fictionists and critics today, the S.U. National Summer Writers' Workshop was to de-center discussions on Philippine literature. Manila has always been recognized as the base for literary discussion in the country. The campuses of the University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, and University of Santo Tomas are recognized for their leadership in the literary scene. The SU-NSWW is said to be the first institutionally organized Creative Writing Workshop in Asia, hence, it must be, also in the Philippines. Silliman University became the hub for literary discussion in the south. Moreover it was a workshop with a definite stand. As long as the *Tiempos* sat in the panel, the formalist critical grounding was stable and consistently applied. Craft was the first lesson the *Tiempos* taught the young writer, the only lesson that serves him well through all vicissitudes. Craft, the well-wrought piece is the one true thing he must work for.

## The Golden Horns of the Bull: Difficulty in the Early Works of Cirilo F. Bautista

 Ricardo M. de Ungria

There is an intriguing album titled *Beethoven: Key to the Quartets* by the Emerson String Quartet consisting of excerpts from the early, middle, and late string quartet output of the German master. They are arranged, however, in such a way that the selections from, say, three early quartets could be mistaken by an amateur listener like myself to comprise an entirely new piece—the Allegro represented by the C minor quartet, the Adagio by the F major, and the Menuetto by the A Major, all from opus 18. Similarly for the middle quartets, the “first” movement is taken from the Allegro molto (actually the fourth) of the “Razumovsky,” the “second” from the Poco Adagio-Allegro (actually the first) of the “Harp,” and the “third” from the Allegro con brio (actually the first) of the “Serioso” quartet. Charming. And quite enigmatic too. At first hearing, one can take solace in the three-movement form of the sonata as a kind of frame, but one already senses that he is missing out on something between the movements, and that the ostensible “finished” piece is not quite all of a piece just yet. A check with the inlay card will show the details and the extent of the illusion, the pleasure of which is different from listening to a compilation of mere highlights or to a sequence of adagios or allegros. The deluded delight, I would like to think, takes its root in the sheer conventionality of the artistic form and the expectations met (or nearly so) therein rather than in the knowledge of what such form actually contained.

The example came to mind while I was searching for an analogy to describe the effect of reading the poetry of Cirilo Bautista. The other comparison that comes to mind is working out the crossword puzzles of Will Shortz that a local daily carries, specifically his hard and medium-hard ones where “Opens up for an examination, in a way” is “says ah,” “Group that has its own organ” is “choir,” “Booboo/students” is “slipup,” “Ironed” is “decreased,” and “History that no longer matters” is “water over the dam.” Of course, like in other

puzzles, to get “shoestring,” which is what “Tiny bankroll” calls for, one needs on the Down blocks words like “fists,” “deodorant,” “Estragon,” “ionic,” and “geritol.” When completed, the answers look so chucklingly easy and obvious and right. But what makes a Shortz puzzle such an exquisite pain while being worked on is that it blanks you at first go and dampens your enthusiasm, forcing you to give up or else will the time and effort to put in more than the usual “esses” and “iers” that fill out the squares like shameful tokens of your, er, prowess. I’ve been so taken by those puzzles that I clip these every day and pile them up on my table like veritable feathers in my morning cap.

Versions of punk music that sound like music because they have at least one chord and a verse-refrain-verse pattern, and of course collages of Picasso and Braque also come to mind as comparisons.

What is common among these is this feeling of going through an x number of leapfrogs and abridgments and being left out ultimately of some relevant business needed to connect point C to point G through points D and F and even E and make sense of it all. Which is what one gets when one reads Bautista’s texts. The possibility of signification and meaning remains only imminent and hovering, cloying and toying with the mind—which qualities had traditionally been taken as signs of the presence of “Poetry” worthy of delight, but which, when relentless and unyielding, could try the reader’s mystified patience and eventually cause in him fatal indifference.

But I exaggerate, however slightly. Difficult as the poems of Bautista are, there is a distinct pleasure to be had in reading him. In the late sixties when I read *The Cave*, I enjoyed the novelty of his discourse and the boldness and impudence of his attitude, which seemed to proclaim to me a la Cassius Clay (who was then a rising star in boxing and an idol of my youth), “If you’re good enough boy come and get me!” Though I tried to keep my stance and step, it always happened that some phrase from nowhere—“Crossing the foggy fjords of the skull” or “the metaphor dead in his throat”—floored me. Lines like “Since purity of form is absolute / After language has passed into disgrace, / There remains only the final curse / Of identity whose greater part is / Sounds” were his way of saying “Eat my shorts, man!” The time when he wrote them was the reign of New Critical ambiguities, tensions, and paradoxes in literature, and I—a student in literature and a beginner in

the writing of poems—greatly enjoyed his obfuscating powers. Against possible critics and unformed readers, I sided with him—not knowing enough myself how to even begin to understand him. His works were magic and magical, and I did not know the tricks. His imagination seemed to me like a magnet attracting all those strange words and allusions and stranger combinations of images and ideas I failed to find in Demetillo, or Hufana, or Espino. The poems left me with knitted eyebrows but breathless. As a student writer I took it on instinct that I knew what he was doing in his poetry, though I knew a little of where it came from and nothing of where it was going. It was a proud moment of “being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”

Now I venture to make clear to myself the grounds of my youth’s mystification, not however to anesthetize and deaden it but to keep it alive with more passion and enlightenment and to provide a framework with which future readers of his texts could start. Many years ago, I abandoned my master’s thesis project on his works on the ground that I needed to see the “Trilogy of St. Lazarus” completed to validate any of his statements or discoveries about his art. With the recent publication of *Sunlight on Broken Stones*, the third and final part of the epic, I have no more excuses to myself. I am faced with the moral duty to make clear to myself what I failed to make clear to myself several lifetimes ago. This is not an easy task, especially since I had taken it upon myself to be as simple as possible in bringing Bautista closer to more readers. In this project I talk about Bautista’s poetry under three aspects that I think his works could begin to be discussed: the difficult Bautista, the experimental Bautista, and the unknown Bautista. My focus will be mainly his early works, though I will turn to his later ones too as the need arises. I have published somewhere my take on his experimental works, and now I present here the kinds of difficulties I encountered in his poetry—in loving memory of Drs. Ed and Edith Tiempo whose writing workshops in Silliman University also endeavored among many other things to untangle the knots inherent in the works of young writers. It is not lost on me too that Bautista once sat in that workshop several times as panelist. I gave the fancy title of “The Golden Horns of the Bull” here as a kind of “psst” with a wink to this humble piece. But in plain terms, this will be how reading the early Bautista could be

such a delight and a pain.

### The Difficult Bautista

The kinds of difficulty encountered in Bautista's poetry would probably be no different from those in other poets, except that in him the difficulty gets to a different level and becomes a strategy informed by a personal philosophy. But this is to get ahead of our discussion.

The simplest, most obvious, difficulty pertains to the words in the poem. Uncommonly used words like "postulant," "bursar," "minoan," "minatory," "entelechy," "ziggurat," and "bantams" in *The Cave* would gain their meanings with the help of a dictionary. The strange words will multiply in the later works where the reader will be momentarily stopped by "biliken," "contumelious," "flummery," "scriveners," "donjon," "opah," "grex," "kaka," and "rand," among others, in *The Archipelago*; "sorgo," "duenna," "gnomon," "calendrics," "termagant," "fashion," "lummoxry," "mummery," "glyptic," "dolmen," "parallax," and "alar," among others, in *Charts*; "tabard," "dragoman," "Kabala," "devachanic," "karmic," "izzat," "zukan," "enchorial," "creance," "chordotonal," "ekantin," "isagogics," "phthisic," "sabulous," and "kalpa," among others in *Telex Moon*; and "manumitted," "debilitude," "colligation," "exilum," "fletchers," "bowyers," and "kalends" in *Sunlight on Broken Stones*. There are also the allusions and references to the following figures in history: Giotto, Einstein, Jerome Bernini, Van Gogh, Cortes, Fray Landa, Pizzaro, Abbe Glory, Hokusai, Giulio Romano, Torquemada, Raleigh, Plato, Euclid, and Bohr would be easy enough. But Overbeke, Ludwig, Flagge, Gottshalk, Rigaldi, Blavatsky, and Hernando Riquel.

These words and references show the kind of learned clutter that Bautista has been putting in his poems, as well as the range of his readings notably on history and the occult. Thus, a fingertrip to the dictionary and other reference books would reveal "manumitted" as being "set free from slavery" and "lummoxry" as "clumsiness," and Blavatsky as a late nineteenth-century Russian occultist and theosophist who founded the Theosophical Society and wrote *Isis Unveiled* among many others. This patina of scholarship in the poem, requiring an editor to footnote the meanings and allusions in the text, is Bautista's inheritance from the Modernism of the Poundian stream that reveled in erudition and a plethora of readings to signify the



writer's cosmopolitanism and universalism and art and literature's worthiness as sources of knowledge equal to the sciences. It was a turn-of-the-century movement that had far-reaching effects due to its making language the paramount arena in battling the flourishing scientific and technological mind-set and forces at that time. Villa was our first modernist, though he is of a different variety from Bautista. As singers, Doveglion is all tongue and tone, while Bautista is brainfood and atonal. Both, however, were able to find their creative selves within the confines of modernist language. Bautista's early works until his trilogy are prime examples of high modernism in our literature, and to a lesser degree also the works of Ricaredo Demetillo and Alejandrino Hufana—epic poets all—and the fiction of Wilfrido Nollado, Erwin Castillo, Wilfredo Pascua Sanchez, and the early Alfred Yuson. I was happy however that Bautista took a different turn in his poetry after finishing his epic. But I digress.

Sometimes, the words in a Bautista text are used idiosyncratically, like "bloodlery," or "prisonery," or "perplexions," or relentlessly, like "ancestry" that appears in *The Cave* twenty-one times and connects with a variety of substantives but with almost no change in meaning that I suspect it is either a thematic obsession let loose or else a very private allusion. The unfamiliar dictionary-bound words listed above get their rationale in the poems most probably from a Stevensian fascination with and savoring of words and word-sounds. Jolting as their effect on the reader may be, those words nevertheless remain decorative for the most part and defensible on grounds of their auditory contributions to the poetic line—e.g., as alliterations, like "Out of the maze of moral flummery" or "Neither our palaver nor our posturing could / Pester the onslaught . . ." of "The City and the Flood" or "to vex the vervain into a blood of light" and "Ascetic or / nomadic, volar or virid, my veins / burst no more with fire fervor for fervor" of *Telex Moon*; or as assonances, like "[only her wings fill /] Space with brass kaka, scarab, opah, and" of "Before Picasso's Woman" and "with whose defluxions my economy / is constructed" or "minions and pinions—giants and minikins— / cyclops and mannequins" and "The sex of telex brings the grex an ax" also of *Telex Moon*.

More special and problematic than the uncommon words is the way Bautista deals with the common ones. Sometimes and without warning he wrenches a word out of its normal meaning and replenishes it with his own. In "The City and the Flood," the circle becomes a symbol of the unity of the self: "Broken / And speechless,

a ship my only token, / I am Circle complete, clad for the nonce: / Not shod for the dancing, deaf to the dance." Likewise, in "The Verb in its physical form is nothing," which opens the poem "The Virtue of Metaphor," the grammatical verb that is the center of a predicate and inflected for agreement with the subject becomes upgraded into a symbol (the capitalization again does not hide that fact) of action—specifically that of action shorn of context, pure act as it were. This "Verb" seems to retain such symbolic assignation in "Astronauts" where the encapsulation of the astronauts in space dramatizes their alienation from the context of the earth, but no longer in "Politics" where it becomes another name for "speech." Also in "The Virtue of Metaphor," the word "metaphor" is given a personality to emphasize its qualities: "metaphors alone / Will save, being the only courage; being cool, / Their various tongues predicate the concept of love." Or in "In an American Graveyard," pain "stands guard, rises / in the poplars saying, 'Stranger, notice / our teeth—we are happy.'"

As if things and images could never be simply what they are but must always be something other in a kind of open network of meanings and possibilities, they rise without warning into symbolic or metonymic expressions in a plasticity of contexts, as in the close of "How Finally the Turning becomes a Wing" (TC):

So that while the garden  
Bleeds in many eyes of growth, the peacock lordly  
Sternly walks without argument, saying, "Praise frogs  
The wakers of visions, praise waters all laughing."  
And moving thus lordly sternly laughing, becomes  
Giotto with his campanile, Becket in his tomb.  
It is the peacock alone strides with a pure womb.

Or in "Danak-Bunga Beach, Zambales"(C):

Silent, unafraid,  
the craws mark the footprints on the sand  
where they end on cross-sticks, the butt-head

of a numeral, their cackles mocking  
the human tears, and fierce as tarragon  
the crabs draw the planets on the spray,



tilting the mourners' tongue to a world gone

mad with cymbals and scimitars clashing,  
taxing the equinox for snow or sex,  
and the black figures on the beach become  
the parable before the lunar facts—

how love cringes and the bony feet  
flex its hirelings to the wave; the salt in  
sceptre; sealing wax; sarcophagus;  
nothing is won and nobody wins—

nature's lummoxy.

"Epiphenomenal" or contingent difficulties are what the English critic George Steiner calls this class of difficulties, which refers to words, phrases, or references that need to be looked up in regular and special dictionaries. Bautista, more than most Filipino poets in English, exhibited this kind of difficulty, making one wish for an edition of his works that is edited and annotated with erudition and authority.

Different in kind are those that Steiner calls "tactical" difficulties that can be traced to "the writer's will or in the failure of adequacy between his intention and his performative means." Ambiguity, obscurity, obliquity are the operative words here. In the attempt to revitalize "the words of the tribe," Steiner says that the writer "will reanimate lexical and grammatical resources that have fallen out of use. He will melt and inflect words into neological shapes. He will labour to undermine, through distortion, through hyperbolic augment, through elision and displacement, the banal and constricting determinations of ordinary, public syntax. The effects which he aims at can vary widely: they extend from the subtlest of momentary shocks, that unsettling of expectation which comes with a conceit in Metaphysical verse, to the bewildering obscurity of Mallarme and the modernists. The underlying manoeuvre is one of rallentado. We are not meant to understand easily and quickly. Immediate purchase is denied us." Understanding comes one step at a time and remains provisional.

Bautista's texts are replete with this class of difficulty. At the simplest level, the sentence constructions are usually long and complex

and ramifying, as though the mind has found no reason to stop in its red-hot pursuit of an idea or image, accumulating textures and odors and echoes of it for inspection or as souvenirs. The first section of "The Cave," entitled "The Great Hall of the Bulls," for instance, has 411 pentametric lines but only 37 sentences. "Burnham Park" has 16 lines doled out in two sentences, "Pegasus at Session Road" 20 lines in two sentences, "This Woman" 35 lines in six sentences, or "The Importance of Wilderness" 28 lines in a single sentence! What happens is that clauses are piled up, separated only by colons or semicolons; consequently, the ideas become packed and increase in density and gravity, renewed or given a new turn with every modifying phrase but pushing the original impetus deep into the background. For instance, the opening stanza of "Study for Horses" (TC):

There are horses caught in their own muscles.  
Poised on ambiguous anger, who prance against  
This harsh landscape of gleaming rock and gleaming  
Winds must extend their language to include  
Damnation of ancestors now content  
With the earth, who under their hooves repent  
The coldness of temples in which horse  
First were fashioned down to a rite, believing  
In confidence pledged for blood, pledged for a dark  
Beginning.

Here, the pronoun "they" that is subject of the verbs "poised" and "must extend" and the clause "who prance . . ." has been omitted; "who" in line 6 refers this time to "ancestors" and no longer to "horses"; and "believing" has either "ancestors" or "horses" for its subject. Again, in "Study for Cocks in the Kitchen" (TC), observe the grammatical behavior of this passage:

Quick the descent into air choked by pepper  
And steam; neck-wrung, undressed, unlimbered  
  
From greens, fence and lunar infidelity,  
Limed always to day by songs dark now, today,  
Listen as domestic syntax whirl  
Plucking away their precious skins, here murmur

Objects of butlery, there faces  
Fixed as icons.

Without “they” that is the subject of the “neck-wrung” catalogue and of the verb “listen,” the clause “Listen as domestic syntax whirl” becomes erroneously read as an imperative to an unsaid “you.” The lack of parallel construction in “here murmur / Objects of butlery, there faces / fixed as icons” where “faces” gets an adjective phrase instead of the verb it cries out for to balance with “murmur” also momentarily throws the reader off. Incidentally, the metonymic use of “syntax” for “chores,” like the above-mentioned “Verb” for “action” is a typical Bautista move.

There are places where a reading could have been helped by a more decisive use of punctuations or by having clear antecedents for clauses or pronoun references. Sometimes the syntax has an archaic ring to it—“O with what instrument the space be / Probed, with what the pure plunge be fired”—or else lapses into plain obscurity: “It is what, / Denied, the denier; laughing, the weepers, / Seen, the eyeless: for time’s virtue is time’s / Loss, and honor possesses no alphabet.” Rhetorically, the amplification offered by similes and metaphors does not simplify but instead complexifies. There are many instances of this:

To seduce the bright bull:  
The function of metal is the sorrow of rock  
For that which completes space must destroy space,  
As in Mondrian—how composition lacks  
Similitude of mass, how a line outweighs  
The eyes’ distance.  
(8 *Portraits*: “1. Study for Minotaur,” TC)

The crags deep in cold and with cold synthetic—  
But that is the function of sadness, to delegate  
To the mind the contextual perplexity of the wound,  
Like a mirror looking at itself, arbitrary in birth  
And more real, itself the begot and begetter,  
Stranger to us all. As Fuji in Hokusai’s Great Wave:  
The mountain stands in pain while the water tongues

Curl in torture, to swallow nothing.  
*(The Cave, 1, TC)*

Tension between mind and mind is  
 Reality only Nothing upholds  
 If the heart forgets. As in flutes, how grace  
 Seems to emanate from air vents and fills  
 The blood with love, a mathematical  
 Romance where lovers kiss the sheen of skulls,  
 As they touch time melts persisting vocal  
 Chords against the sweating flesh.  
*(A Manner of Looking, C)*

The smooth animals in fleshment  
 Of snow dragging the heat they are  
 Mastered by like crystal tails bent  
 To a whisper rise in water,  
 Rise in the funeral pyre,  
 Rise in the future bones of those  
 Consigned to the pyre, iterate  
 A copious mathematic...  
*(The Archipelago, 3071-78, TA)*

Sometimes, the similes are suspect and could even be false, as in the example above from "A Manner of Looking" or this passage from "Rizal at La Trinidad: A Windy Day"(C):

you must exile the fern and the rock  
 To see the forest and the light,  
 As the sea rejects sand and shore  
 To simulate a pattern of flight; ...

Here, although the acts of exiling and rejecting could be comparable, the relationship of fern and rock to forest is not quite the same as that of sand and shore to waves (the "pattern of flight").

A variation of this false simile is the definition that does not elucidate but complicates, as in the beginning of "Study for Saxophone" (TC):

They have a word for it: *Shalom*, whether  
 Be it done or doing, a trouble in  
 The blood or a sacrifice in error  
 (Committed, thus human, and stable in  
 Only the most dead), the word is there, bright  
 As the meaning it conjures, meaning, Those  
 Who break the shadow of pain repeat the rite  
 Of ancestry and are as icons close  
 To godhood, being self-effaced.

Another is the oblique and roundabout explanation, as in this passage from *Telex Moon*:

I have cracked the calendrics of greed  
 enough to chart its grammar, meaning,  
 the Lord of the Exchequer has a strange breed,

but not with blood or documents can he  
 be dislodged; meaning, the Royal Seal  
 that dances in the streets of Manila  
 each time the galleons rest their noses will

tax your ancestry and your sex if you  
 exhibit no scapular: bony, alar,  
 it is the queen; meaning, between the corpse  
 of sainthood and the maxims of lunar

witchery runs the golden footman,  
 the fear that must be bough [sic] as surety  
 against the mathematical Charonities;  
 meaning, the Indios have no booty,

butter will not touch their tongue.

Or the explanation that does not make plain but obscures, also from "Study for Saxophone" (which also includes a false simile):

Why then do I curse death,  
 You ask, I a dying musician, lord  
 Of nothing but this saxophone whose breath  
 Shortens mine? Because O between speech  
 And the importance of speech lies an image;  
 Not the symmetries of darkness that reach  
 Only the minor edges of our rage  
 Nor the vulgar light the painter's petals  
 Hold, but that by which both achieve a point  
 Of marriage in time, like the kiss of metals  
 When heat dies.

Or from "Study of Poetry" (TC):

Still, reality is fringed by  
 The absence of reality, as that  
 Which completes space must kill space: for instance,  
 Hokusai with his waves or Mondrian his mass,  
 For instance, that train swallowing the rails  
 Northward swallows nothing, but is not nothing;  
 If you stretch fingers to the wind, they are nothing  
 But the wind is there.

Here, the allusion to Hokusai and Mondrian would make sense only in the context of Bautista's other statements about these artists—that in Hokusai's *The Great Wave*, for instance, the mountain Fuji "stands in pain while the water tongues / Curl in torture, to swallow nothing" ("The Cave," 1), or that in Mondrian, "composition lacks / Similitude of mass [and] a line outweighs / The eyes' distance" ("Study for Minotaur"). Furthermore, there is something not quite right about the statements regarding the train and fingers: what is "not nothing" is not the train but the nothing that it swallows, and it is not the fingers that "are nothing" but the wind that is there.

Aside from placing images in new contexts and combinations, Bautista deepens them by rendering their powers and qualities in the form of quotable thoughts or speeches:

while in the sky the water

Hardens alphabet to say, "Regret her,  
 There is no jess nor opah in Papal  
 Bulls—signets call only the golden, call  
 Only when flesh retires the vicar dance.  
 Regret her" ...

...

Water will not flow to carambola  
 With greeny woodlocks, to capybara,  
 Feet spread like a fan against a mud, saying,  
 "Life is mere apostil to the weighing  
 Of acts and nightmares—what is so concerned  
 With trees or fauna will not last, or burned  
 To ashes will not hold an urn well-stood  
 Upon history—may all etched in wood  
 Outlive their price in silver ..."

(The City and the Flood), (C)

If in a flurry  
 Of antiquarian scripts the single colour  
 Emerges draped in myths it is because sea  
 And light conspire: against rocks to break the cold,  
 Against weeds, thinking The assault of form  
 Verifies movement, thinking Only valid  
 Wounds have right to ancestry; . . .

(8 *Portraits*: "1. Study for Minotaur," TC)

Only the peacock remains  
 Whose typography is conceit  
 Even if it simply goes round.  
 She is pacific, venerable,  
 Schooled in the martyrdom by fire.  
 She walks in the garden, thinking  
 The earth is an exhortation  
 Of pride; thinking The power of grass  
 Is its own direction.

(8 *Portraits*: "8. Study for Poetry," TC)

There is more than world to playing your part

Of king and bishop when out in grief went

Footlights and foglights before initial lines.  
They recite, out of context with the stage,

"All things are moving of will—peacocks, times,  
The sorrow of peacocks and times—reconstruct  
Alone the makelessness of bones crying

For fulfillment of function. There's no  
Delight in meaning in times when meaning  
Is myth, and language is speculation

For those with leisure."  
(The Bright Monolith), (TC)

One other rhetorical feature of Bautista's style is the "if...then / since...therefore" construction that could cause discomfiture because sometimes the terms of the argument are not clear, or at least "poetically" stated, as at the end of "Ballad of Kings and Gardens" (C):

If kings and gardens ruled the world  
and made fear lord the treasury  
then banktellers and bankdrafts would  
achieve perfection in some degree

But kings are jesters and gardens stones  
who shut out language from their throne  
tie it to the stake with royal pomps  
and killing it perish with its bone.

Or from "Study for Horses" (TC):

So now this dark beginning tells  
A myth shaped in terror whose images  
Shake the horses; thus, since pain and betrayal  
Are the same, and movement presumes an act,  
Horses are a labour of rocks. Not  
A flowering of pain that is merely  
The beginning of virtue, but that which sets



Both pain and virtue antipodal only,  
 Therefore the only truth, therefore fixed  
 Since blood is an abstraction of the womb,  
 A residue of ancestry not for them  
 To shun but acknowledge, they are the product  
 Of violence.

Or this passage from "Rizal at La Trinidad: A Windy Day"(C):

...

For now I am green, now the sea has me,  
 And my shadow is blood. If I break  
 A twig in my fall, if a tree  
 Smiles as I fall, then Shri Visjaya  
 Mints coins with the hardness of my blood.

This mannerism, which highlights the almost tortuous doubtings, parryings off, hesitations, and turns of thought of a mind trying to come to terms with its apprehensions, is a consequence of the meditative mode that Bautista typically works in. However, his meditative mode is activated by a voice whose tone is didactic, overbearing, declamatory, and dead certain of the conclusion or closure it wants to reach. The effect of this is a dry, because thoroughly thought out, pseudoscientific text whose poetry becomes treed into a lushness of vocabulary, paradoxes, and ambiguities. "The Lateral Passage," the third section of "The Cave," exemplifies this kind of text where nearness in space becomes a "law of proximity" and realism in representation a "principle" integrating artist and art, and the condemnation of the place by the speaker a matter of "logical" conclusion:

If 'form follows function,'  
 Then the shape of freedom is love,  
  
 Then the Passage is not shaped love,  
     Nor shaped dream—an error in architecture;  
     If 'form follows function,' then the artist—  
 Priest is brother to the vulture,

If FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION then by  
 The law of proximity ecstasies  
 In this passage could not be gotten, though  
 Beast and artist crawled on bent knees.

The cerebral (and toneless) aspect of this kind of imagination, where the pushy mind usually gets its way through a lush foliage of words, could reach a point of artifice such that the work ends up dense and opaque, and we get a third kind of difficulty—the modal sort where, according to Steiner, our responses become atrophied (though we have already “done our homework”) because the “autonomous force of life” of the poem—its *raison d’être*—escapes us. I will present here two specimens of this kind of difficulty, both of them from *Charts*. One is “The Effect of Moving Objects on Stationary Bodies,” which is actually the first line of the poem that then proceeds as follows:

is minimal, enough to pull the eyes  
 to the moving center:  
                                   if on water, because  
 movement is a wing, without jess, that knows  
 the circle is complete:  
 being optic, constructs the parable  
 of pain, that blood returns  
                                   bending to wet the wound,  
 and, itself being wounded, remains cyclic:  
                                   that is the argument.  
 One says of the boat, Forget The Parallax.  
 That is history.

The other is “Football”:

The system of the foot, and the foottrack.  
 You know by the turning  
 of the globe, the splash of water on the planes,  
 the quick geometry. Each knock

at the mind’s corner retains  
 the diagonal pluck  
 and the limbs refuse the grass:

and the million people, who never touched wine  
 or whore, upon whose numeral  
 the pins move on the map,  
 await the terrible result  
 of tax in their sex,  
 their city laid in cubes,  
 the anger politic.

In both poems we are left clueless as to what is being talked about. In the first poem, is it about a sea disaster that has struck a number of times in the same place, or something else? What is the circle that “constructs the parable / of pain”? How could blood itself be wounded, and how could it forget to “wet the wound” such that it had to return and bend to do so? How is its being “cyclic” an “argument,” and of what and to what end? What is “The Parallax” that must be forgotten? Where is the boat? And in the second one, what is really being kicked about—a ball, or an idea, or a people? What is the “splash of water on the planes”? Whose are the limbs that soar to block the ball “at the mind’s corner” and what is the “knock” that sounds off there? Who are the million people “who never touched wine / or whore”—are they the fans in the stands, or the audience at home, or the generic poor? What and whose is the map? What is the “tax in their sex”? Why is their city “laid in cubes”? What is the “anger politic”? The poems’ idioms and orders of apprehension are, to cite Steiner again, “no longer natural to us” and their “entire syllabus of sentiment and allusion is either a closed book or the terrain of academic research.” Undecidability is the keyword here, and the reader’s receptivity the cold lump left out of the frame of the poem.

But the more fundamental difficulty with Bautista’s texts is the ontological, which concerns the function of language and confronts the reader with “blank questions about the nature of human speech, about the status of significance, about the necessity and purpose of the construct which we have, with more or less rough and ready consensus, come to perceive as a poem.” Steiner traces this kind of difficulty, found in the hermeticism of Stephane Mallarme and esotericism of Stefan George, to the “crises of idiom and values” in modern Western culture. Against a background of “philistine positivism of the industrial and mercantile structure of the nineteenth century” and the “drastic mutual disenchantment of artist and

society," the poet's isolation from society and his pose of inward exile became cultivated. Through journalism, popular media, and mass use, language became cheapened and emptied of numinous meanings, thereby making necessary the Mallarmean programme of cleansing the "words of the tribe" and preserving for poetry "an arcane realm of uncompromising significance." Ultimately, through ontological difficulty, the poet expresses his "sense of the inauthentic situation of man in an environment of eroded speech."

In Bautista, the basic stance of the poetry is, paradoxically, a problematization of language as a prerequisite to the creative act. As his daemon instructs him in the opening poem of "The Cave," he must "learn to distrust language" and "Kill it in seduction or heraldry" so that "eagle-like" he may "invent" his act. This surprising and self-consuming aesthetic could be a function of his fondness for paradoxes, but it is worked out earnestly in poem after poem in that collection—its aspects doled out in motifs and staked out by various poetic pronouncements.

One such aspect is the self-sufficiency of reality that could mock the best of human theories put forth about it. In "Albert Einstein Speaks to a Butterfly," (TC), the scientific genius humbly acknowledges the simple supremacy of the lepidoptera insect to his own theoretical constructs:

You are beyond the dialects of translation  
 Who rehearse with each flipping wing the atonement  
 For our ineffectual stratagem. That is why,  
 Exiled in this pogrom of the mind, in this dry  
 Reality where our finest theories multiply  
 Our errors merely, we watch, stunned in wonderment,  
 How you can step from flower to air without doubting  
 Your ancestry: without logic your colors are  
 A better argument than our strict schooling;  
 Tiny, you are a language without, cooling  
 With every syllable the universal stare  
 Of our morality. I ask you: how can you be  
 So proud of your fragility?

.....

... so now as I see you,  
 I hear the supreme laughter of space, my captive

Equation, the knife in the back of my brain through  
Which my moment's triumph lost its meaning.

.....

... And with morning  
I descend sighing, upon my garden, afraid  
Of extinction, knowing as butterflies know that all  
Equated energies, theories and angles are no  
Purer than grass, falling clouds, shepherds and gleaming rocks.

Where reality appears to have relaxed in its defenses, the imagination finds only a solipsistic world of its own making, as in "Buddha by the Stairs" (TC):

Perchance he whispers cruel  
Words to himself too, only we  
Do not hear the clang of syllables,  
The clash of letters; lonely, we  
Confuse them with our thinking.

In "Mind is Cooler than Tongues. Words are Hot but Sleeping. There Arrives the Bright Images of Heart in Constant Singing" (TC), in which could be discerned a kind of a poetic statement rooted in the four heraldic words of "mind," "tongue," "words," and "heart," Bautista reiterates the theme of impenetrability of reality and reveals a strategy of dealing with it:

What is beyond us exists beyond us—  
It has no need to declare itself and  
Bare its pride. How, as we break bread before  
The harsh reality of light—this brand  
Of butter weighed against the metaphor  
Of tongues, or burying the last cold hand

Of memory for a dead friend who is  
Not quite dead, with delectation we let  
Distance draw of topography of words  
Where ignorance is the primal conceit:  
It turns the worn curves, puts up the bridge faced  
A dried river, imagines woods that split

Lakes in their sleeping; where it should fly  
 It crawls, where stop, postulates antipodal  
 Voices: 'The ribald who cursed the Virgin . . .'

.....

We are less than stones; hardened by abuse  
 Of time, batlike we flip and flap in caves  
 Of fear, tired of our wings yet will not choose

The better of dark prospects. The caves swallow  
 Us in our flying, drowns our blind crying  
 In stony silence whose import we do not know  
 while distance hides from us men that are dying,  
 Sounds of important warfares, children born—  
 And the world hears the news of our lying.

Here, the possibility of language rests on our ignorance of the real that is beyond us, and the distance it creates becomes the ground for our comfort and divagations, calling as it does for an art of words. The poem here enacts such distance, put between us by the real and requited by language, by means of passages from G.G. Coulton's *Life in the Middle Ages* that deal with corruptors of things holy and that dramatize the power of language to imagine "woods that split / Lakes in their sleeping." But such power is tragic because it is only self-contained—through it we become like bats that "flip and flap in caves / Of fear, tired of our wings [but not choosing]/ The better of dark prospects"—and in the end announces only "news of our lying." And if we take the poem's title as saying something significant at all, it could only lead us to the conclusion that for Bautista the poetic act is self-consuming and futile, and language, for all its powers and liberties, is worthy not only of the poet's genius but of his contempt as well. These are weighty words, but the poems bear them out. Bautista has found himself in a very modern predicament, and the solution he arrived at is similarly modern, though he reached it by way of the scholastic philosophy he studied in college.

In *The Cave*, the battle for the dignity of poetic language against its metaphysical futility and inconsequentiality in the real world is enacted in almost every poem. Bautista extracts from language its metaphorical powers and pins on these his hope for an adequate and sustained representation of reality—but at the price of a painful

hermeneutics. In the second section of "The Virtue of Metaphors" (TC), he writes:

It is lonely

To go back to the old haunts of the heart—motifs  
 Of betrayal: thick wine: cigarette smokes: love chime:  
 Cinema tickets: for a cue missed is wrecked time.  
 Neither will the captive pang of betrayal, fixed  
 Against the face welded in eternal guilt, against  
 Walls of despair, replace the burnt icons which long  
 Ago lost rights to godhood: metaphors alone  
 Will save, being the only courage; being cool,  
 Their various tongues predicate the concept of love:  
 The virtue of metaphors prevents the seduction  
 Of meaning, the breaking of speech into ruins,  
 Those mere signs and mechanics: by sheer deduction  
 They cut the brain, such that in symbols' husbandry  
 Pain is brightened by the possibility  
 Of fulfillment (Yes, Ortiz says, yes: the personal  
 Fugitive scratching the shoreless expanse of "I,"  
 Who moves in darkness and therefore real, in the process  
 Disturbs the stout gulls of memory, sending them  
 Reeling into the wilderness of blood where passion  
 And error are the same, and hungry); if metaphors  
 Hurt, it is arbitrary; they wound our finer  
 Sensibilities because we refuse seeing  
 Our wastage of honor, which in return is a wastage  
 Of fear (Yes, Ortiz says, yes). Then who can salvage  
 From ruins the physical Verb? When all the precepts  
 We plan collapse to bones of rhetorics like Greek  
 Pillars, metaphors alone create the garden  
 Where language, nursing the broken branches of its pride,  
 Swears growth upon the hides of rocks and falling birds.

This poem comes right after "Addressed to Himself," and Bautista already has worked out a response to the daemon's advice to him in that poem to kill language "in seduction or heraldry." His solution was to seek refuge and solace in metaphor whose "various tongues" and "symbols' husbandry" resist easy meanings and "wound our finer / Sensibilities." Elsewhere, he will write that "The right virtue / Of

metaphor is disorder," which is anathema to the sense-making mind. The interesting psychological thing here, however, is that rooted in personal pain and masking that pain, metaphor inflicts pain on others by disguising (or burying deep) the enabling and epiphanic term or situation that is really the tenor of which it is just a vehicle. Such pain is looked at as an "arrival," "therefore real [and] Therefore the only truth." In "Study for Peacock," Bautista will claim that "The value of pain / Is its own glory plucked, as it were, / From beginning syllables sprung too from pain." The virtue of metaphors is that of camouflage and masquerade—and therefore of difficulty, of "cutting the brain." Since they deal with the possible fulfillment of that which was unfulfilled and with the "wilderness of blood where passion / And error are the same, and hungry," metaphors put ordinary language to shame and create the garden where language, quite impossibly—and therefore only poetically—can "[swear] growth upon the hides of rocks and falling birds."

Pain, guilt, betrayal, and memory, as well as wounding and bleeding, recur too often in the other poems that it only struck me recently how I could have missed in my earlier readings the forces of pain and painfulness at work in the book. *The Cave* is to Bautista what *La Via* was to Ricaredo Demetillo, namely a spiritual journey—except that with Bautista the sources of the pain and betrayal remained deep and unrevealed, so masterfully masked were they by the heraldry of language and rhetoric. Perhaps his biographer could attempt to reveal the roots of whatever travails and difficulties Bautista underwent at that time of the writing of the poems that went into the collection.

Such "wilderness of blood" will evolve into a wilderness of the heart set in barrenness and full of despair at being unable to communicate what really counts. In "In Distrust of Language," he pictures such heart as follows:

Yes, the heart has its own wilderness.  
Its weeds and grasses are lepers of the sun.  
They will bloom, if ever they bloom, in caress  
Of eagle rocks and every eagle song;

They will bleed in the futility of words,  
Their phrases will break under rocks and stones,  
Below the eagle that dazes the herds



Them, they will lose the meaning of their bones.

It is only language that evens sounds;  
It is only eagles repeat the shadow;  
And we, tired of a heaven that only binds  
Us deeper in faults, repeat images

Of ancient wounds, re-living, in the act,  
The unnecessary errors of the mind:  
Eagle-like, we fly repentant in the dark;  
We are shocked by the branches of the wind.

Writing as a mind of penance for the unnamed pains and missed-out opportunities in life, its language forever restless and incapable of being stood still for fear of alighting on the pain that must remain unworded. It is the exact condition of some words described in "Somewhat Illustrating the Fallacy of Cathedrals" as "the most terrible of all" since these "never fall / But flip and flap in the sky / Not knowing when or how to die."

No small wonder, then, that in these early works of Bautista, we seem to get a definite impression that the poems are almost always on the verge of being translated into something familiar, e.g., scalding hens for cooking or being in a zoo or leafing through a book on cave art or sulking after a spat with the wife, but which almost always never happens because it is aesthetically better that way. It is as if, to follow Bautista's Platonism, reading his poetry means looking only at the shadows of the Ideas without getting the privilege and pleasure of getting out of the cave and seeing these face to face—or worse, looking at the very Ideas themselves and thinking they are only shadows of themselves! In any case, the reader is left alone to his own devices. Defended against an intimate contact with its affective source, the poem in its turn deprives the reader of an intimate contact with it.

In 1973, Bautista put forth a theory of poetry where emotion is dispensed with, and idea is made paramount. He had actually considered the place of feeling in poetry in a few poems in *The Cave*, but he projected it as far out of himself as possible and left it animated by such things as a carabao or a breakfast egg or such places as Burnham Park or Dominican Hill. In fact, he tried to deal with it in his "Study for Poetry (Dialogue between Minotaur and Peacock)" but

failed because the two characters became indistinguishable from each other, the Peacock (symbolizing the powers of language) slipping into the dry, cerebral stance of the Minotaur (symbolizing pure form and logic). Bautista's wariness, if it is not an inability, to handle things of the emotion could be one source of the pain that permeates his solo collection. And he has developed a poetics of difficulty just so he could be farthest from feelings and nearest the artifices of the mind.

This preliminary account of the stylistic subterfuges in Bautista's poetry may already look sumptuously numerable, but they do not (or should not) inhibit the pleasure that attends their occurrence.

## Getting Willie's Rizal/ Getting Rizal's Willie

☀ César Ruìz Aquino

### LOVE IN TALISAY

*By Wilfredo Pascua Sanchez*

That's how I came to love you,  
you are mine  
though I pity the man that  
cannot know his blindness  
from his love. May you not blame  
me, sweet Josephine, for putting you  
in this terrible mess.

You call me Joe, and I for joy  
tremble at your innocence  
and what of it is left? You and I,  
perhaps in abundance of knowing,  
and also in revenge  
God teased when our backs were  
turned, in an absolute way

in your body I knew the guidings  
of my dream.  
Towards night, we would walk  
streets away into the woods  
for you are all my virtuous sisters  
seeking me in vain.  
I'm lost time and again in  
illuminated roads.

The world owes you a hearing,

but my pen is late.  
 Josephine, we shall write no words,  
 but only walk in rain  
 so I may feel your breasts,  
 and kiss your feet  
 and in a blaze of madness wake  
 the buried spring.

When did Rizal say this?

And I mean really Rizal, the self-same Rizal of history who, as it were, had written a memoir—this.

(Just another way of saying the “I” in the poem is not necessarily fiction.)

If so, how is it the hero had written the text—a highly, or deeply, expressive one – in English not Spanish?

Well, since he is addressing a girl with an Irish mother and British father and American stepfather—he talks to her *naturellement* in English. *Since I heard your lilting laughter, it's your Irish heart I'm after*, if you ever heard Mitch Miller. Besides, admit it, like the girl we don't know Spanish; so it's our fault not his—or if you do, the fault is not his or yours all right but neither is it mine. *Es la culpa de nuestra historia*. Makes good historical sense to suspect polyglot Rizal had learned all those languages with an eye on Miss Universe, eh?

More serious, how is it possible that Rizal, over a hundred years ago, had left a text the author of which is Wilfredo Pascua Sanchez, Filipino poet in Chicago? The black magic of poets obviously.

I suspect the poem to be autobiographical; Sanchez had transmuted his own story into the seamless one of the hero such as we have it – in exactly the same manner that John Keats, in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, had drawn a story from antique tradition and disappeared, as it were, in the persona of the knight. The personal is transformed into archetype or myth is another way of putting it, the process rightly compared to the Great Work of alchemy. As Fanny Brawne, in John Keats' life, was the belle; the belle in John Keats' poem is Fanny Brawne. But Keats had to work it, and when he succeeded there was no need for the reader to know of Fanny Brawne's existence, as well as of John Keats'.

I took this as the power of myth to validate a personal experience until the expatriate poet, in our correspondence, called my attention to the correct order. Didn't I rather think, he asked, it is personal experience that validates myth?

Overlooked that!

Indeed Sanchez made it *jell* with a vengeance. Not only has the author's story been made invincibly invisible/ invisibly invincible in the poem's story; but the episode in the life of Rizal which is the poem's story is turned into myth, in fact the monomyth. And in double fact creative lightning struck twice, the miracle is two-fold. First, Rizal's life validated or authenticated or gave life to or became the monomyth; then Willie's personal occultation gives the one story and one story only a new translucence.

Jose Rizal was born in the summer solstice, when the sun is at its brightest, and died in the winter solstice, when the sun is its own ghost, as Thomas Mann in one of his stories describes it. Moreover he died in pure *droumenon*, executed facing the guns, though they wouldn't let him, in full view of his people and stirring the mythopoeic sense forever, especially as his death sparked the revolution.

So here's to oblige our own rhetoric. When did Rizal put those words together? A good while after he and Josephine Bracken had become lovers.

That's how I came to love you,  
You are mine

Note the retrospective, post-coincidence, even post-honeymoon, mood of the poem—if the word may be forgiven; that is, as if the love affair of Josephine Bracken and Jose Rizal were not in fact a star-crossed one. Moreover *honeymoon* is no match for the intoxication alone of days when, strangers to each other, Joe and Jo (coincidence or synchronicity? I prefer coincidence) exchanged glances in the perfect if dangerous night of Taufer's blindness. (The variations both positional and combinative of the situation, as you can see, are well-nigh infinite and all lead to mate. But of that, later.)

But the mood is not post-crisis either; not at all. If the surgeon general were to take his pulse at this point in his story I would put all of Luneta on the line if it were mine dear Joe would be advised to take

a sedative. Although the two have learned to live with it ("this terrible mess"), it continues to be a thorn on their bedside.

One of them takes to bed, yes, and though it's Josephine who does, the ailment that interests us in the poem is not hers, since her character is subsidiary, but Rizal's. However, at this point that is again to digress.

*Sweet Josephine*, shifted to Spanish, is *Dulce Josefina*—which could be what Rizal called Josephine Bracken, not just "Josefina," long before he came to write the *Mi Ultimo Adios*. Either that or it is a beautiful invention of Sanchez's to intimate that Rizal already had an intimation or premonition of the phrase, the most beautiful in his legendary poem of farewell, not to say death: *dulce extranjera*, sweet stranger.

In any event it is improbable that Sanchez hadn't heard "Sweet Caroline" a pop song that was a hit around the time he wrote the poem—1969 to be exact. If I'm right about it, the song played into his hands, insofar as the poem, I believe, makes allusion to it. To demonstrate this, I will cite parts of the song, along with those from film-writer and poet Pete Lacaba's clear, unencumbered rendition of Rizal's exile (a dominant aspect of it).

From Lacaba's synopsis of the screenplay *Rizal sa Dapitan*:

It is 1892. The sun has not yet set on the Spanish empire, and the Philippines is its prized colony in the Far East, the last outpost of the Spanish Inquisition. On a rainy day in July, Dr. Jose Rizal arrives in Dapitan, a backwater town in the province of Zamboanga, on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. He is an internal exile, deported there to isolate him from the revolutionary ferment in Manila—a ferment stirred up in large part by his anticolonial writings.

Though Dapitan is a paradise of bucolic charm, it is still a prison paradise. Into this Eden of profound loneliness now comes his Eve, in the form of an 18-year-old Eurasian orphan named Josephine Bracken. Her blind stepfather, George Taufer, has heard of Rizal's fame as an ophthalmologist in Hongkong and seeks treatment. The 34-year-old Rizal is smitten by her beauty.

From the essay "When Joe Met Miss J." by the same author:

When Rizal met Josephine Bracken during his exile in Dapitan, he was 34 and she wasn't quite 18.

From Neil Diamond's song "Sweet Caroline":

Where it began  
I can't begin to knowin'  
I only know it's growin' strong  
T'was in the spring  
And spring became the summer  
Who'd have believed you'd come along

Note how the two parallel continuums coincide.

Lacaba, the same sources:

Josephine suffered a miscarriage while she was living in with Rizal. The child was premature and did not survive.

In an unfortunate confrontation, Josephine suffers a miscarriage, and a grieving Rizal buries his stillborn son.

The song:

And when I hurt  
Hurtin' runs off my shoulder  
How can I hurt when holdin' you

The match or correspondence is still exact.

Lacaba once more:

Nevertheless, the nearly two years spent with Josephine are largely happy times.

The song:

And now I look at the night  
 And it don't seem too lonely  
 We filled it up with only two

Oh yes that's him, mutant king (after Alexander, Jesus, Von Kleist, Van Gogh, Kant, James Dean, Bobby Fischer et al) after Josephine's miscarriage.

Looking at the night is the lingering last thing I see Willie's Rizal doing, in deep thought. Here is the son we sent to study in Europe, our one and only Renaissance man, Filipino heir to Goethe and Da Vinci, to all intents and purposes a scion of the civilization of the west—at the premature twilight of his life, repudiating that civilization somewhat when he confesses:

I'm lost time and again in  
 illuminated roads.

The lamps in Dapitan he himself has installed in the goodness of his European engineer's heart; but on a deeper level a metaphorical reference to the civilization and culture of Europe that he ultimately finds inadequate, unavailing.

The shadow of modernism is upon him.

The 1890s are only just discovering the unconscious, although the acknowledged discoverer of the concept, Sigmund Freud, acknowledges the poets to have known it long before he came. And perhaps it's really Henry James' big brother William who had come right before. *En español, el cerebro de un centenar de años antes de Robert Ornstein*, if we may profit from online translation. Meantime JR's faith in reason, which may be what drove him away from the church into the lure of secret knowledge of the mysterious Freemasons, has come to nothing.

This is what ails Rizal.

But "ailing" may be too strong a word.

Even "out of sorts" would exceed.

*Listless* is a little more like it.

What vice or, graver, what inner weakness could he possibly have felt himself sunk in, that his nine sisters, nine-fold virtue itself,



were all of them alien to his innermost core, as the Irish lass was, virtue being, in the latter's case, vestigial innocence that could yet stir and arouse and make a man to tremble, for all that her lavisher, the unfortunate Taufer, had lavished on his stepdaughter by way of not so much upkeep as education, i.e. savvy in the ways of the world?

The world turns and because it does we have light and darkness and their eternal alternation; knowledge and ignorance, wisdom and innocence, being and nothingness—their alternation and their variance—a variance so irresoluble ancient Persia invented the end of the world by fire, the Big Bang except they were looking in the opposite direction.

But where in the poem is this coming from?

You and I,  
perhaps in abundance of knowing,  
and also in revenge  
God teased *when our backs were*  
*turned*, in an absolute way

My italics.

Our ambidextrous universe, at least the human or anthropocentric one is also unfortunately one-faced; i.e. we can only see what's in front of us, the other—the one behind—is the realm of the unseen and unknown, the dark, a condition the ancient Greeks, fools for light forever, apparently found so unacceptable they could not be content with *spin* or *twist* or *turn* and they invented Janus.

The idea (of two faces looking in opposite directions and therefore covering both) sounds like overreach, overkill, overdose. In other words, fucking fantastic and futile.

It's in the nature of everything that we cannot see it. On the opposite side, there is not a moment when God does not see everything that we do.

Therefore, enabled by love to become children again, Joe and Jo avenge themselves, teasing hapless sightless Taufer whose back is always turned as it were. Literally the English "act of darkness."

But the syntax of the poem twists or spins when, instead of the normal and expected "You and I teased God" the clause is "You and

I God teased.”

That we cannot see God is God teasing us absolutely. Our backs, as it were, are always turned and thus we know nothing in an absolute way. *Vengeance is mine, said the Lord*. Every man is Taufer.

Happily, in Rizal’s case, in Josephine he discovers the primacy—which had been in truth lifelong—of intuition.

In your body I knew the guidings  
Of my dream

At the final split moment Rizal makes a heroic effort to twist, spin, turn around and see the sun, the firing squad, the guns, maybe even the bullets coming, the lone shooter whose gun had no bullet, the moth, you and me, the child grown instantly into a handsome son of a bitch, everything.

*However, brilliant and sublime our intelligence may be, it is scarcely more than a small spark which shines and in an instant is extinguished, and it alone can give us no idea of that blaze, that conflagration, that ocean of light.*

(Rizal in a letter to Father Pastells.)

And in a blaze of madness wake.

## True Lies

☀ Susan S. Lara

"True Lies" comes from Jean Cocteau: "The matters I relate/Are true lies." This was quoted by Wallace Fowlie in his Introduction to *The Journals of Jean Cocteau*.

The Silliman University National Writers Workshop started including creative nonfiction to literary works for discussion in 2005. So it has been eight years, and yet we still receive a lot of questions on what exactly is CNF. Definitions range from the strict, "facts only" rule, to "it's emotional truth that matters" argument.

The term is still controversial and being questioned. Why are nonfiction narratives considered more creative than other nonfiction pieces? Are newspaper columns and editorials not creative? Aren't feature articles creative too?

There is also the problem arising from naming and defining something by what it is not. I thought it odd when, in one literary conference, a CNF author was introduced as a nonfiction writer. It's like calling a vegetarian a non-meat eater.

"Creative nonfiction" was first popularly used as an umbrella to describe this genre in the application form for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Creative Writing Fellowship, a phrase which seemed to have been employed to distinguish the personal essay from traditional journalism.

So it's not something that we invented. And while we continue to find a term we can be more comfortable with, let us stick to its official name.

It doesn't help that although CNF deals with verifiable facts, it has the same elements as fiction: clear, well-developed characters, a narrative arc, tension and revelation, engaging dialogue, use of scenes rather than straight exposition, and an identifiable theme.

So you see how easy it is to blur the boundaries between fiction

and nonfiction. Tracy Kidder once said that “the nonfiction writer’s fundamental job is to make what is true believable.” And the fiction writer’s job is to make an invention—a lie—believable. So whether you write fiction or nonfiction, your job is to make what you write believable.

I write both. And I have done it long enough to know that anyone who reads my fiction would assume that it was based on real life, and that anyone who reads my nonfiction would suspect I did some embellishment, and that it’s not really the whole truth.

It comes with the territory, I guess, and is the predicament of writers who engage in both literary forms. It is based on an assumption that happens to be true: life provides material for art—everything is grist for the writer’s mill, as we say—and art shapes life, gives order to chaos, makes sense of the seeming randomness of everyday occurrences—a healthy symbiosis.

You may have noticed how, after a disaster, or any tragic incident, we hasten to seek an explanation, or at least ask questions that might lead us to answers that make sense of it. Anything but a random act of terror, anything but the statement “oh, things happen.”

I made up many stories when I was a kid—it was the best way I knew to get attention from my family—when you’re the youngest of five children, and your siblings are at least a decade older than you, it’s hard to get a word in edgeways, and you have to be creative if you want attention. When my sister’s close friend died, my three other siblings momentarily stopped the teasing that was their usual strange way of showing affection, and huddled around her to comfort her. I said I’d seen the close friend’s ghost. I stole everyone’s attention from my grieving sister. When I was told to describe the ghost, that didn’t stump me. Without missing a beat, I said she had red eyes; long, blindingly white nightgown, sunken cheeks, and a long, black, narrow leather belt where her tongue should have been. I described her so vividly that I scared myself and couldn’t sleep that night.

That was how I learned, long before I read any book on the craft of fiction, that it was the details that mattered—the red eyes, the white nightgown, the sunken cheeks, those are clichés, but that black leather belt that passed for a tongue convinced my adult listeners that I was telling the truth. I didn’t just say dog, I said a black bulldog with a torn ear and eyes that blazed. I didn’t just say cat, I said all-white blue-eyed stray with a wounded hind leg.

Lesson no. 1: Give concrete details that appeal to the senses. God is in the details.

Henry James called it the “solidity of specifications,” a phrase that Dr. Ed Tiempo couldn’t emphasize often enough, adding that “The first concern of a fiction writer is to give the illusion of reality, and to give the illusion of reality you have to use details in a striking manner.”

Let me give as an example a paragraph from Gemino H. Abad’s CNF piece, “How to Handle—A Wife” from his essay collection *Imagination’s Way*:

The house was made of tanguile and had a shiny cement floor. A Picasso print from Chicago days—a man with a blue guitar—hung on a wall. We had a bed from our Ninong and Ninang, my brother-in-law’s living room set, a gas stove, and an old Frigidaire and dining room set from Mercy’s early working days. We also had a stack of canned goods on the floor. Our maid hadn’t arrived yet from Cagayan de Oro, and Mercy couldn’t cook. And when the kitchen sink leaked one night, I tried in vain to fix it and made a flood that lacked only a choir of frogs.

I am sure you have read and heard many accounts of the humble and awkward beginnings of young married couples, but that Picasso print of a man with a blue guitar, and the stack of canned goods on the floor, made it special, uniquely Jimmy’s. And only Jimmy could have caused a flood that lacked only a choir of frogs, simply by trying to fix a kitchen sink.

Of course, there is such a thing as overdoing it—I was usually a conscientious student, but in the sixth grade I was forced to make up a story when I could not submit a knitted sweater, a project in my home economics class. I honestly didn’t know where my project went, it simply disappeared, and no amount of searching and praying to St. Anthony made it materialize. But I knew I couldn’t convince teacher with “I just don’t know where it went.” So I fell back on the cliché: my cat ate my homework, but I gave it a twist: it was not the cat’s fault, but my brother’s, because he hated my cat for chewing his favorite shoes, and goaded her to ruin my project so I would throw her away.

That was too convoluted for my teacher, and did not save me from a failing grade for that project.

When I started writing compositions, I often got my characters all tangled up, even while doing the simplest tasks like getting dressed:

Version 1: She got dressed.

Version 2: She pulled on jeans and a shirt.

Version 3: She grabbed her old jeans from the closet, and her faded Simon & Garfunkel Farewell Tour t-shirt from the drawer.

Version 4: She grabbed her favorite jeans, the ones with the holes in the knees, and her faded Simon & Garfunkel Farewell Tour t-shirt from the drawer, and relished their familiar softness.

My composition teacher's critique was crisp and to the point—"That's enough—just let her get dressed."

That brings us to lesson no. 2: Give only the necessary, significant detail. The writer who is so unsure of his ability to persuade will resort to piling one detail over another. Quantity over quality. But the one who gives one or two precious, significant, unexpected details is telling her audience, you can trust me, I was there. The voice of authority.

Now, creative nonfiction has a built-in advantage over fiction, and that is your reader's readiness to believe everything you say. Unlike in fiction, which requires a suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader, there is no need for the CNF reader to decide whether to suspend disbelief or not.

But there is an unwritten contract between the author and reader, and that is for the author to tell the truth, no more, no less—violate that just once, and you'll have a hard time getting your reader to believe you again, if you get caught. And believe me, the more successful you are as a writer, the more likely it is that you will eventually get caught.

Take the case of James Frey, who wrote a so-called memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, a best-selling nonfiction book published in 2005. It sold more than 3.5 million copies; it was in *The New York Times* nonfiction best seller list for 15 weeks; and it was endorsed by Oprah Winfrey. It attracted so much attention that a few people got curious.

An investigative Web site started poking around, and uncovered quite a number of inconsistencies. Among other sensational exaggerations, he wrote that after hitting a police officer in Ohio, he was jailed for three months, when in fact, it was only for three hours.

When he was exposed, he issued a public apology and admitted "I made other alterations in my portrayal of myself, most of which portrayed me in ways that made me tougher and more daring and more aggressive than in reality I was, or I am." He also revealed in "Larry King Live" that he had initially offered the manuscript as a novel but it was turned down by several publishers. Then Nan Talese bought his manuscript, but proposed that it be repackaged as memoir. It was a market-driven strategy that brought success, then disaster, to the author.

Where are the boundaries, then? Stephen Minot defined the parameters of nonfiction in his book *Literary Nonfiction: The Fourth Genre*: "Literary nonfiction is based on actual events, characters, and places; it is written with a special concern for language."

But, as every fiction writer knows, you can do a story based on actual events, characters, and places, and it will still be fiction. Some blurring of boundaries has indeed occurred here; it has become difficult to know where nonfiction ends and fiction begins.

Still, just as you cannot be a little bit pregnant, so you cannot deliberately make up or exaggerate or embellish a story and call it creative nonfiction—the fellows will remember that Butch Dalisay was unequivocal about this. Roy Peter Clark suggested that a writer of creative nonfiction may subtract, but may not add. Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo agrees that it is often necessary to condense—take out certain details, omit certain events that may not be relevant and can only clutter up your work—but when you include events that did not happen, or invent a character that did not exist, you have crossed boundaries.

What makes it even more difficult is that, in writing creative nonfiction, we have to rely on our memory. And many writers have warned us how tricky memory can be—William Zinsser, for one, who has a book on the craft of memoir writing titled *Inventing the Truth*, and our very own Mang Ben, Bienvenido N. Santos, with his *Memory's Fictions*, which opens with this epigraph: "My best memories are those that never really happened."

Journal keeping may help a great deal, but not completely. Joan

Didion, in "On Keeping a Notebook," said that she writes in her notebook "what some would call lies... *How it felt to me*: that is getting closer to the truth about a notebook."

Given the unreliability and slipperiness of memory, how do we ensure we really "write the real"? I found that relentless self-questionings could minimize the possibility and danger of distortions, and lead to realizations.

One of my former students was a young woman who has had a sheltered upbringing—she was chauffeured everywhere she went; if no family driver was available, her parents would pluck one from the pool of drivers of their family company.

This young woman who didn't even know how to flag a taxi wrote about taking the MRT and LRT and keeping it secret from her family. She wrote about it the way another person would write about mountain-climbing, or bungee-jumping—an adventure fraught with danger (from reckless drivers to hold-uppers to rapists). At the same time, she saw it as an act of rebellion against her parents' restrictions. She ended her first draft waxing romantic about a sense of commonality that she felt she shared with the other passengers—many of them ordinary students and workers, many of them sweaty and scruffy. I said "You will have to give this more thought. How much do you really have in common with the other passengers?"

After a series of intense self-interrogation, she came up with her final version, which ended with her recognition of the yawning gap that actually separates her from the other passengers. On the one hand there she was, the adventure-seeking MRT rider who could always call the family or company driver if she got tired of her game and of being a rebel. On the other were the other passengers, who had no choice but to take the MRT. The shock of recognition, which should happen in nonfiction as much as it should in fiction, was that it would take more than a train ride to bridge that gap.

Epiphanies like this make writing memoir worth it. Another student described his semester as "dehumanizing," but "my CNF class was what kept me grounded as a human... Writing was never just writing anymore. As the weeks unfolded, it turned into a heartwarming time travel. Through writing, not only have I reminisced the happy and important moments in my life, but through it, I was able to perceive these events (from) a very different perspective, a magnified view of things (that) I overlooked or did not even notice."



"A magnified view of things." That brings us to lesson no. 3: Yes, details are important. Yes, trees are fine—so make us see the leaves and their colors and shapes, the gnarled trunk, the branches, the intertwined roots—but lift us above them and let us see the whole forest as well. Beyond the fine details, there is what Philip Gerard calls the larger Truth. Insight, Mom Edith called it—that's Insight with a capital "I." There is no getting away from it. A story that is just a story may give momentary pleasure when it is well-told. But a story that tells you something about life, about the human condition, about you, the reader—will stay with you forever. You will read it again and again, and passages from that story will keep echoing in your head.

Phillip Lopate described the process as the "reverse of the Chinese set of boxes that you keep opening, only to find a smaller one within. Here you start with the small... and suddenly find a slightly larger container, insinuated by the essay's successful articulation and the writer's self-knowledge."

One of the more memorable scenes in *The Builder* by Edith L. Tiempo, shows one of the characters, Colonel Roger, telling the persona, Felix Acuña, the mysterious story of a little, white-haired, old woman who suddenly appears in the forest, from out of nowhere, to warn Colonel Roger's detachment about a rebels' planned attack, and then suddenly disappears, subsequently saving them from death. The next scene shows Felix puzzling out the mystery:

Late that night as [Felix and his wife Agnes] lay in bed snug but not yet sleepy, they talked about the Colonel's story because Agnes was still thinking of the spookiness, a kind of mystery and redemption in the very hotbed of danger. Unreasonably, Felix hoped that the Colonel had actually done some embroidery on a fortuitous but explicable wartime happening... And yet he admitted, he had wondered that the little white-haired woman had materialized out of literal darkness, out of that uninhabited place, at that unlikely hour... And then, not at all irrelevantly, he thought of the unknown wonder that Agnes was carrying in her body, a mystery he had been made to share, and he knew how needful to the wholeness of one's being to accept and to make room for any bestowal of the strange and the unknowable.

There it is, the larger Truth. It does not offer any answer to the mystery, it merely accepts that there are certain mysteries we may never unravel, but our unknowing does not in any way diminish us, and our acceptance of that unknowing even contributes to our wholeness.

Let's go back to Jimmy's CNF piece. After all those delightful details about their years as a married couple, Jimmy ends with a reply to the question posed by his title, "How to Handle—A Wife," an allusion to King Arthur's question how do you handle a woman?

How then does Arthur's simple ditty hold still through our ashfall of years? How, it asks still, handle a woman? Aye, but there's no handling. The same woman becomes a wife, the same man a husband, and the years pass through them like the wind, at times cool and balmy, at other times a tropical depression, and the wine of bright passion grows stale, and the flowers of their illimitable bliss fall as humus to their thirsting root. ...

"O western wind," cries the anonymous lover, "when wilt thou blow, that the small rain down can rain?" I shall be the rain, and you shall spread the earth for me; you shall be the wind, and I shall be its invisible breath. You and I, for the time left to us, shall be our small earth's halcyon weather."

From detail to Insight. For Toni Morrison, the crucial distinction is "between fact and truth... facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot." Facts are out there, truth is in you.

The bridge you have to cross to get from fact to Truth, from fine details to large Insight, is long and tortuous, with twists and turns, rising and falling actions—a hanging bridge, not a concrete one. But it is a bridge we need to cross, because stories cry to be written, and will not be silenced until they are on paper. Joan Didion said we tell ourselves stories in order to live. She might have meant it figuratively, but it can also be literal: John Ciardi once spoke before a group of powerful businessmen, who didn't think much of writers and what they do. He said: "An ulcer, gentlemen, is an unwritten poem." It can also be an unwritten story.

**WORKS CITED**

- Abad, G.H. (2011). How to handle—a wife. *Imagination's way: Essays critical and personal*. Manila: UST Publishing House.
- Didion, J. (1969). On keeping a notebook. *Slouching towards Bethlehem*. London: Andre Deutch.
- Fowlie, W. (1956). Introduction. *The journals of Jean Cocteau*. Suffolk, U.K.: Poor Richards Books.
- Lopate, P. (1995). Introduction. *The art of the personal essay: An anthology from the classical era to the present*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Minot, S. (2002). *Literary nonfiction: The fourth genre*. London: Longman.
- Morrison, T. (1987). The site of memory. In Zinsser, W. (Ed.). *Inventing the truth: The art and craft of memoir*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Santos, B.N. (1993). *Memory's fictions: A personal history*. Manila: New Day Publishers.
- Tiempo, E.L. (2003). *The builder*. Manila: Anvil Publishing.

Bonsai

☀ Elman S. Caguindangan

Voice

Piano

*mp*

*♩* = 54 - 60

5

*mp*

All that I love I fold o - ver once and once a

Pno.

8

gain And keep in a box or a slit in a hol - low

Pno.

11

past or in my shoe\_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

13

All that I love? Why, Yes,

Pno. *mf*

15

but for a mo<sup>3</sup>ment\_\_\_ and for all time, both.

Pno.

17

Some-thing that folds and keeps eas - y

Pno.

19 *piu mosso*

Son's note or Dad's one gaud-y tie A ro - to pic-ture of a

*piu mosso*

Pno.

22

queen A blue In-dian shawl e-ven A

*meno mosso*

Pno.

25

mo-ney bill It's ut-ter sub-li - mi - na - tion a

*rall.* *a tpo.* *p*

Pno.

28

feat, this heart's con - trol Mo-ment to mo-ment to scale all love down to a

Pno.

8<sup>va</sup>

[illegible]

39 *mf*

Things you can run and breath-less hand o-ver to the mer - est

Pno. *mf*

42

child.

Pno. *mf*

44

Pno. *8va*





### ABOUT THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

When **ANTHONY L. TAN** retired after 43 years of teaching, he had taught in four schools: Notre Dame of Siasi, Silliman University, Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology, and De La Salle University. His poems, essays and short stories have appeared in various magazines and journals, here and abroad, including the *Manoa of the University of Hawai-i* and the *Atlanta Review*. His poems have been anthologized in poetry books such as *A Habit of Shores* and *In Time Passing*, and have been collected in book form: *The Badjao Cemetery and Other Poems* and *Poems for Muddas*. He has won three Palanca awards: two for poetry and one for the essay. He has sat as a panelist in various writers' workshops such as the Iligan National Writers Workshop, the Silliman Writers Workshop, the IYAS Writers workshop, and the workshops in Davao City and Zamboanga City.

### ABOUT THE ASSOCIATE EDITORS

**MARJORIE EVASCO** earned her M.A. English (Creative Writing) in Silliman University, and trained under Drs. Edilberto and Edith Tiempo. She writes in two languages: Cebuano-Visayan and English. In 2009 she was given the SEA Write award for her third book of poetry, *Skin of Water*. Her first two books, *Dreamweavers* and *Ochre Tones* both won the National Book Award for Poetry from the Manila Critics' Circle. Her poetry is published in various anthologies, among them the 2008 Norton anthology of poetry, *Language for a New Century: Poems From the Middle East, Asia and Beyond*, and the 2012 Southbank Centre's anthology published in the U.K., *The World Record: International Voices in Poetry Parnassus*. She has participated in various literary festivals such as WordFeast in Singapore, the Man Hong Kong Literary Festival, the XVIII International Festival of Poetry in Medellin, Colombia, the VI International Poetry Festival in Granada, Nicaragua and the 2012 Poetry Parnassus Festival of Southbank Centre in London. She was also a writing fellow in the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa in 2002.



## NOTES ON THE EDITORS

**GRACE R. MONTE DE RAMOS** obtained her B.A. in Creative Writing from Silliman University under the tutelage of the Tiempos. She has been a literature teacher, a freelance journalist, and a government cultural worker. She is also a translator from English to Binisaya, and writes and edits copy for *Kitang Lungsuranon*, a pioneering newspaper in her hometown. She is also an author of reading primers for the Mother Tongue-Based Language Education program. Her poem "Brave Woman" has made its way from college literature courses to the reading lists of peace workers.

**ANNE CARLY ABAD** has been a fellow in several national writing workshops, including the Silliman University National Writers Workshop in 2010. Her work has appeared or will appear in the *Philippines Free Press*, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *The Asia Literary Review*, *Modern Haiku*, *Shamrock*, *The International Poetry Review*, and *Poetry Cornwall*, among others.

**GÉMINO H. ABAD**, University Professor Emeritus of literature and creative writing at the University of the Philippines, is a poet, fictionist, literary critic and historian, and anthologist with various honors and awards. In 2009 he received Italy's Premio Feronia for his poetry. *Care of Light* (2010) is his eighth poetry collection, and *Imagination's Way* (2010), his eighth collection of critical essays; he also has two collections of short stories, *Orion's Belt* (1996) and *A Makeshift Sun* (2001). He is known also for his three-volume anthology of Filipino poetry in English over 1905 to the 1990s: *Man of Earth* (co-ed., Edna Zapanta Manlapaz; 1989), *A Native Clearing* (sole editor, 1993), and *A Habit of Shores* (sole editor, 1999). He has recently finished his six-volume anthology of Philippine short stories in English over 1956 to 2008: the first two-volume set is called *Upon Our Own Ground* (2008); the second set, *Underground Spirit* (2010); and the third, *Hoard of Thunder* (2012). Dr. Abad obtained his Ph.D. in English at the University of Chicago in 1970, and continues to teach at UP where he has served as Secretary of the University, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and Director of the U.P. Creative Writing Center (now an Institute).

**CERES Y.C. ABANIL** graduated from the Ateneo de Manila University in 1999 with a degree in A.B. English Literature. Aside from receiving the university's merit and financial scholarships, she won literary awards and scholarships such as the Dean's Award for Creative Writing in Poetry and the Emmanuel Torres Award for Excellence in the Humanities. She was a fellow of the 3rd Heights Writers Workshop, the 37th Silliman University National Writers Workshop, and the 5th Iligan National Writers Workshop. She taught in the English



## NOTES ON THE AUTHORS

department and the Filipino department of her alma mater for a couple of years. After that, she held down a variety of jobs and finally returned to her first profession and currently teaches English to Europeans.

**MERLIE ALUNAN** writes poetry in English, earning several honors for her work from the Carlos Palanca Memorial Literary Award, the *Philippines Free Press*, and *HomeLife Magazine*. UMPIL (Unyon ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas, 1998) recognized her lifework as poet and literary advocate. The Cebu Catholic Mass Media Award also cited her in 2003 for her column in the *Cebu Daily News*. She began writing fiction and poetry in Cebuano late in her career, and won a prize for a collection of poetry from the Gawad Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino in 2007 and another Palanca for Fiction in Cebuano in the same year. She was the first Filipino writer to receive in Bangkok the Sunthorn Phu award for literature in 2013.

**ADLAI AMOR** tweets (@adlaiamor) and posts (facebook.com/ajamor) haiku on social media platforms to relieve stress. Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas writes of Adlai, an Outstanding Sillimanian awardee: "A stroke of brilliance/Form perfect for this medium./Adlai, new Basho."

**RONN ANDREW ANGELES** graduated from the University of the Philippines, Diliman with a degree in English Studies. He was awarded fellowships to the 11th Iyas Writers Workshop and Kritika 2013: National Workshop on Art and Cultural Criticism. His works have appeared in *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *Philippines Free Press*, and *The Hundreds*.

**CÉSAR RUÌZ AQUINO** was born in the terrible forties (World War II) in Misamis Occidental to an Ilocano father and a Cebuana mother, both with strong artistic inclinations. He is the author of *Chronicles of Suspicion* (1988), *Word Without End* (1993), *Checkmeta* (2004), *In Samarkand* (2010), and most recently *Caesuras: 155 New Poems* (2013). Along with Erwin E. Castillo, Wilfredo Pascua Sanchez, Ricardo A. Trinidad, and Jolico Cuadra, he is one of the poets in *Companionable Voices* (2013).

**CORIN B. ARENAS** is a Communication Arts graduate from Miriam College who has worked for a PR firm, television network, and several BPO companies. She attended the 52nd Silliman University National Writers Workshop as a fellow for poetry and is presently a graduate student of Creative Writing in the University of the Philippines, Diliman. She was born in Valenzuela, Manila and has lived in Quezon City all her life.

**CIRILO F. BAUTISTA** is Professor Emeritus of Literature and University Fellow at De La Salle University-Manila. His poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have been awarded the country's highest prizes. His most recent honors have been the 2012 Gawad CCP Para sa Sining for literature, from the Cultural

Center of the Philippines; and the 2013 Gawad Dangal ng Lahi from the Palanca Foundation. He lives in Quezon City with his wife, Rose Marie, with whom he has three children. His garden has four big and lovely kalachuchi trees.

**RANDY BUSTAMANTE** was a poetry fellow in Dumaguete in 1995 and in Baguio in 1997. He has taught writing and the humanities at the University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, and Boston College.

**ERIN CABANAWAN** is a graduate of AB Communication Arts from the University of the Philippines at Los Baños. She is currently finishing her graduate diploma on Gender and Development from The Flinders University of South Australia, and her master's degree on Media Studies at the University of the Philippines Film Institute. Her research interests include Asian cinema, babaylanism, and representations of the female divine in film. Her study on Filipino films about religion has been presented at the 2009 International Convention of Asian Scholars in South Korea and the 2010 Annual Southeast Asian Cinemas Conference in Vietnam. Her study has also been published by the UP Center for Women's Studies' Review of Women's Studies in 2011.

**ELMAN S. CAGUINDANGAN** teaches at the College of Performing and Visual Arts in Silliman University, where he handles special classes for the college's extension program.

**F. JORDAN CARNICE** is a creative writing graduate of Silliman University. His works have been published in *Dark Blue Southern Seas*, *Philippines Graphic*, *Philippines Free Press*, *Philippine Speculative Fiction 7*, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *Under the Storm: An Anthology of Contemporary Philippine Poetry*, and other publications. He is a recipient of fellowships from Silliman University and Iligan National Writers Workshops, and the Iyas Creative Writing Workshop in Bacolod. He is also a delegate in the 4th Taboan Writers Festival. This Boholano currently works as a corporate communications senior specialist in a food company.

**IAN ROSALES CASOCOT** has a Masters Degree in Creative Writing from Silliman University, where he is a faculty of the Department of English and Literature. He was a fellow for fiction in English in the National Writers' Workshops in Dumaguete, Baguio, Cebu, and Iligan. He has won several Don Carlos Palanca Awards and an NVM Gonzalez Prize for his fiction, and was chosen as one of the authors for the UBOD New Writers Series 2003 by the country's National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA). In 2002, he edited *FutureShock Prose: An Anthology of Young Writers and New Literatures*, which was nominated as Best Anthology in the National Book Awards given by the Manila Critics Circle. In 2005, the NCCA published his first short story collection, *Old Movies and Other Stories*. His other books include *Beautiful Accidents: Stories* (2011), *Heartbreak & Magic: Stories of Fantasy*

and Horror (2010), and *Inday Goes About Her Day* (2012). His novel *Sugar Land* was longlisted in the 2008 Man Asian Literary Prize. One of his stories, "Old Movies," has been translated to French. He has published in *Esquire Philippines Magazine*, *Story Philippines*, *The Sunday Times*, *Sands and Coral*, *Dapitan*, *Tomas, Philippines Free Press*, *Philippines Graphic*, *Sunday Inquirer Magazine*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *SunStar Bacolod*, and *MetroPost*. He was Writer in Residence for the International Writers Program of the University of Iowa in 2010. He also does graphic design, and has recently produced the documentary *City of Literature*, directed by the Chinese filmmaker Zhao Lewis Liu.

**ALBERT B. CASUGA**, a Philippine-born writer, lives in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, where he continues to write poetry, fiction, and criticism after his retirement from teaching and serving as an elected member of his region's school board. He was nominated to the Mississauga Arts Council Literary Awards in 2007. A graduate of the Royal and Pontifical University of St. Thomas (now University of Santo Tomas, Manila. Literature and English, magna cum laude), he taught English and Literature (Criticism, Theory, and Creative Writing) at the Philippines' De La Salle University and San Beda College. He has authored books of poetry, short stories, literary theory and criticism. He has won awards for his works in Canada, the U.S.A., and the Philippines. His latest work, *A Theory of Echoes and Other Poems* was published February 2009 by the University of Santo Tomas Publishing House. His fiction and poetry were published by online literary journals *Asia Writes* and *Coastal Poems* recently. He was a Fellow at the 1972 Silliman University National Writers Workshop. As a journalist, he worked with the United Press International and wrote an art column for the defunct *Philippines Herald*.

**THOMAS DAVID F. CHAVES** teaches English and medical sociology at the University of the Philippines as an assistant professor, where he is also completing an MA in Creative Writing. He has attended both the Silliman University and the U.P. National Writers Workshops and has won the Palanca and Nick Joaquin prizes for short fiction. He published his first story collection in Wuhan, China in 2011, and will come out with another collection called *Wintering Flocks* to be published by UST Press later this year. Thomas has taught in China, Vietnam, and Thailand.

**ELSA MARTINEZ COSCOLLUELA** is a poet, playwright, and fictionist. She graduated with AB and MA degrees in Creative Writing from Silliman University. She was inducted into the Palanca Hall of Fame in 1999 and is the recipient of awards from the Cultural Center of the Philippines, Philippines Free Press, and the Philippine Centennial Literary Competition. She was Vice-President for Academic Affairs at the University of St. La Salle, where she founded the Negros summer Workshops with film director Peque Gallaga in 1990, and the Iyas Creative Writing Workshop in 2000, in collaboration with Dr. Cirilo Bautista, Dr. Marjorie Evasco, and the Bienvenido N. Santos

Creative Writing Center. She was conferred the rank of Emeritus Professor upon her retirement in 2010.

**JHOANNA LYNN B. CRUZ** teaches literature and creative writing at the University of the Philippines, Mindanao. She received her Master of fine Arts in Creative Writing from De La Salle University, Manila. She has been a fellow to the Silliman University National Writers Workshop (1996), the UP National Writers Workshop (1995), and the Iyas National Writers Workshop (2011). Her first book, *Women Loving: Stories and a Play*, was published in 2010 by DLSU and Anvil. In 2011, she came out with a poetry chapbook entitled *Heartwood*, published by Tita Lacambra Ayala in her Road Map Series. She has received Palanca Awards for the play and essay. She is currently president of the Davao Writers Guild, and serves as regional coordinator for Eastern and Southern Mindanao for the Committee on Literary Arts under the National Commission on Culture and the Arts.

**VIDA CRUZ** majored in Creative Writing, with a minor in English Literature, at the Ateneo de Manila University. She was a fellow at the 51st Silliman University National Writers Workshop and the 20th Iligan National Writers Workshop. Her first job was as a copy editor for GMA News Online, but stubbornly continues to write speculative fiction.

**ALICE M. SUN-CUA** is a practicing obstetrician gynecologist at San Juan de Dios Hospital. She is a poet, and a translator. Her books include *Riding Towards the Sunrise* (2000), which won the National Book Award for Travel Narrative, *Charted Prophecies and Other Poems* (2001), *The Transition Years: Perimenopause in Filipino Women* (2009), and *Autumn in Madrid and Other Travel Tales* (2013); and with the ALON Collective, the anthologies *What the Water Said* (2004), and *Water Shed* (2010).

**ZALDY DANDAN** studied broadcast journalism at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines and wrote for the *Daily Globe*, *Manila Standard*, and *Manila Times* before moving to Saipan, Northern Marianas in 1993 where he now edits the Marianas Variety. A fellow at the 1996 U.P. National Writers Workshop in Baguio and the 1998 Dumaguete National Writers Workshop, his poems won first prize in the 1996 *Panorama Magazine* literary competition, and an honorable mention in the 1996 *Philippines Free Press* literary competition. His work has been published by *Panorama*, *Philippines Free Press*, *Graphic*, *Sunday Inquirer Magazine*, and the 1996 and 1998 *Likhaan Books of Poetry and Fiction*. He was awarded first prize for best editorial writing in 1995 by the U.S. Society of Professional Humanists and was the recipient of the 2001 Northern Marianas Governor's Humanities Award "for outstanding contributions to journalism and media."

**N. ADRIAN DE PEDRO** is a graduate of AB Literature from De La Salle



University Manila, without honors. He is currently earning his Master's Degree in Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines Diliman.

**RICARDO M. DE UNGRIA** has published seven books of poetry and edited a number of anthologies, for which he has won six National Book Awards. On a Fulbright Grant, he received his MFA in Creative Writing from Washington University in St. Louis. He has received writing grants from the Hawthornden International Retreat for Writers and Bellagio Study and Conference Center. He is a founding member of the Philippine Literary Arts Council (1981) and the Davao Writers Guild (1999). He was Chancellor of the University of the Philippines in Mindanao (2001-2007) and Commissioner for the Arts at the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (2009-11).

**V.I.S. DE VEYRA** was a fellow to the 16th Silliman National Writers Workshop in 1986, the 26th U.P. National Writers Workshop in 1987, and again to the first and second Silliman Creative Writing Center semester-long seminar-workshops in 1988-1989. He is the author of nine online books of poems, an online book of stories, and a blogged bilingual novel. He currently has a social and cultural criticism blog site called *Social/Isms* as well as an art criticism blog site called *A Party-Crashing Angle*. He is currently gathering people online for his campaign for a Philippine shift to Switzerland's model of direct democracy.

**SIMEON DUMDUM JR.** is a Regional Trial Court Executive Judge who has received a medallion for writing the best decision in a criminal case, in the Judicial Excellence Awards sponsored by the Supreme Court of the Philippines. His poetry has likewise garnered recognition: five Palanca Awards for English poetry, and three National Book Awards from the Manila Critics Circle. He also writes a column for *Cebu Daily News*.

**FELIX FOJAS** is an award-winning and internationally published writer, and a retired advertising creative director and professor who now works for Bank of America. He has a BA in comparative literature from the University of the Philippines, an MA in linguistics and literature from De La Salle University in the Philippines, and a Ph.D. in Metaphysical Science from the University of Metaphysics in Hollywood, California. Fojas's works have appeared in, among others, *Paris/Atlantic Journal*, *Evergreen Review*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *The American Dissident*, *Snake Nation Review*, and *Anthology Magazine*. He was a recipient of a creative writing fellowship in Cambridge University, England, under the sponsorship of the British Council. A resident of Canoga Park, a suburb of Los Angeles, Felix Fojas is a co-host of Pinoy Poets' Circle, a literary blog with over 600 members worldwide.

**ARMAND GLORIOSA** was born in Cebu City in 1968. His short stories have previously been published in the *Philippines Graphic* and in online literary

e-zines. He was a fellow for the short story in the Dumaguete National Writers' Workshop in 1999.

**MICHAEL AARON GOMEZ** is an aspiring writer currently based in his hometown of Dauin, Negros Oriental. Having completed his elementary and secondary education at St. Louis School-Don Bosco in Dumaguete City, he began his course-hopping adventures at Silliman University: jumping from Accountancy, briefly touching down on Literature, and eventually landing on Political Science—after which he left school for a couple of years: a period which he spent trying to write. Coincidence gave him a big break in 2012, when he was awarded a fellowship for the 51st Silliman University National Writers Workshop. And in 2013, he was also accepted as fellow to the 13th Iyas National Writers Workshop held at the University of St. La Salle in Bacolod City. Since the SUNWW, his stories have seen print in the *Philippines Graphic* and *The Nomads Quarterly*—a literary review independently published by the eponymous group of young writers and artists in Cebu, through their publishing arm Bomba! Press.

**ASTERIO ENRICO N. GUTIERREZ** has published fiction, poetry, and essays here and abroad. He won first prize in the short story category of the Palancas in both 2004 and 2011, and has been included in the international *Best of the Net* anthology for his poetry. He works in advertising, and lives in Makati.

**ANTONIO E. HERNANDEZ** was born in 1945 in the Philippines and is now a retired IT executive who lives in Sydney, Australia. He attended both the Silliman and UP Writers Workshops. His short stories and poems have won prizes in the *Asiaweek* Literary Competition and in the *Focus* Literary Contest. He is married, with three children and six grandchildren.

**CRISTINA PANTOJA HIDALGO** is the Director of the University of Santo Tomas Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies. She is also Professor Emeritus at the University of the Philippines and continues to teach graduate courses in Creative Writing and Literature at both UST and UP. She has published more than 30 books of fiction and creative nonfiction (including two novels), and received national awards, among them the Gawad Balagtas given by the Union ng Manunulat sa Pilipinas, for her achievements in the writing of fiction; and the Carlos Palanca Grand Prize for the Novel. Her latest book is *Stella and Other Friendly Ghosts*, a collection of essays (UST, 2012). Her stories and essays have been included in international anthologies and journals; and she has read papers and delivered lectures in numerous conferences and symposia, both national and international. She has served as Director of the UST Publishing House, the UP Press, and the UP Creative Writing Center, and Vice President for Public Affairs of the UP System.

**SUSAN S. LARA**'s stories have won the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature and *Focus* Literary Awards. She wrote the National Book Award-winning *Letting Go and Other Stories*, and her fiction and essays have been included in various anthologies. She majored in English at the University of the Philippines Diliman, attended the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa, and attended the Seminar on Contemporary British Writing at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom through a British Council grant. She held the Irwin Lee Professorial Chair in Creative Writing at the Ateneo de Manila University in 2011. She has served as panelist in various writing workshops, including the Ateneo Institute of Literary Arts and Practices (AILAP) Workshop, the DLSU's Malate Writers Workshop, and the University of St. La Salle's Iyas Writers Workshop, and the Silliman University National Writers Workshop, of which she became director in 2013. She is currently a professional communications consultant and facilitates writing workshops for corporate clients.

**FRANCIS C. MACANSANTOS** was born in Cotabato City, spent his early childhood in Dumaguete and Zamboanga City and his early manhood in Marawi, Iligan, Cagayan de Oro and Dumaguete. He was educated at the Ateneo de Zamboanga, MSU-Marawi, Xavier University, and Silliman University, where he obtained a Master of Arts in Creative Writing. He has taught at Silliman, MSU-Marawi, U.P. Baguio, and Baguio Colleges Foundation. He has been a panelist-critic at the Silliman/Dumaguete Writers Workshop, the Western Mindanao Writers Workshop in Zamboanga, and the UP Baguio Cordillera Writers Workshop. He has won five Palanca awards for his poetry. In 2003, he was adjudged winner of the NCCA Writer's Prize for poetry, a competitive grant. His entry was the first three parts of an epic poem titled *Womb of Ocean, Breasts of Earth*. His recent book, titled *Balsa: Poemas Chabacano*, a collection of poems in his native Chabacano, with translations into English, was finalist in the 2012 NBDB National Book Award (for English poetry). He lives in Baguio with his wife, poet-mathematician Priscilla Supnet Macansantos. Their daughter Monica, also a poet and fictionist, recently graduated with an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Texas at Austin, where she was on a Michener Fellowship for three years at the Michener Center for Writers.

**PRISCILLA SUPNET MACANSANTOS** was a fellow in the 1979 Silliman Writers Workshop. She also attended the 2012 UP Writers workshop. She writes poetry and nonfiction in English, Pilipino and Iluko. She has a PhD in Mathematics, and was Chancellor of UP Baguio from 2003 to 2012. She is finishing her term as head of the Committee for Literary Arts of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. She is married to Francis Macansantos with whom she has one daughter, writer Monica Macansantos.

**LORNA PEÑA-REYES MAKIL** was born in Cagayan de Oro one hour

ahead of twin sister Myrna. She first came to Dumaguete in 1950 and finished her elementary, high school, and collegiate education (A.B. Sociology-Anthropology) at Silliman University where her father was a biology professor. Always interested in writing, she signed up for Edith L. Tiempo's creative writing workshop in college. Her short story, "The Funeral," was published in the *Sands & Coral* (April 1960). She earned her Master of Arts (Sociology) from the University of Hawaii and taught Sociology for several years at Silliman. She relocated to Manila in 1980 where she was briefly associated with the Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University, before she worked with the Philippine Social Science Council for 12 years. She returned to Dumaguete in 2002, keeping busy with research, writing, volunteer work, and other activities in a community which she finds "kind to retirees."

Bro. **HANSEL B. MAPAYO**, SSP, author of *Prayer Seasons Poems and Paintings Prayer* (Aria Edition, 2011) is the editor of *Verbuhaay Magasin* of St Paul's. In 1991, he joined the Silliman University National Writers Workshop as an auditor.

**PETER ZARAGOZA MAYSHLE** received an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, where he was awarded two Hopwood Awards, a Farrar Award in playwriting, and a Civitas Fellowship for teaching in the Detroit public schools with the InsideOut Detroit Literary Arts Project. He was also a fellow at the Silliman National Writers Workshop and a resident at Yaddo. His stories have been published locally in *The Sunday Manila Times*, *IDEYA*, *Sands & Coral*, and *Philippines Free Press*, and in *Mandala Journal* (U.S.), *Every Day Fiction* (Canada), and *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine* (U.K.) He is currently pursuing a PhD in Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he was awarded a UW-Mellon Summer Fellowship to conduct his research on Intramuros, Manila. He is, alas, writing a novel.

**TIMOTHY R. MONTES** came under the tutelage of the Tiempos during the late 1980s and early 1990s when he enrolled in the creative writing program of Silliman University, from which he obtained his masters degree in 1993. *The Black Men*, his collection of short stories, was published by Anvil in 1994; he also co-edited (with Cesar Ruiz Aquino) *Tribute*, a memorial anthology in honor of Edilberto K. Tiempo. He has been a recipient of literary awards like the Palanca, *Philippines Graphic*, *Philippines Free Press*, and the Writers Prize from the National Commission for Culture & the Arts. He started his teaching career in Silliman during the 1990s before moving on to join the faculty of the creative writing program of UP Mindanao (Davao City) during the 2000s. He is currently teaching in De La Salle University, Manila.

**HOMER NOVICIO** considers his Dumaguete National Writers Workshop experience in 1996 as a turning point in his life. He's based in Tagaytay City

with his ever growing family and is currently employed with a major television network.

**CORINNA E.A. NUQUI** has a degree in Medical Science from the University of the Philippines College of Medicine, trained under Filipino pastry chefs, and was certified by the U.S. National Restaurant Association as a Professional Baker. Her plays, an essay, and fiction have won Carlos Palanca awards, and her poetry has been anthologized in various collections.

**CARLA M. PACIS** was a fellow in 1995. She is a professor at the Department of Literature at De La Salle University-Manila and is also a published writer of children's and young adult books.

**ALLAN JUSTO PASTRANA** holds an MA in Creative Writing (Poetry) from the University of the Philippines, Diliman. He finished his BA at the University of Santo Tomas Conservatory of Music (Music Literature and Piano Performance). He is a two-time Thomasian Poet of the Year and a recipient of the Rector's Literary Award during his college days. He had been a fellow for poetry at the University of the Philippines and the Dumaguete National Writers Workshops. In 2005, he bagged the Grand Prize in the English Division of the Maninangning Micalat Award for Poetry and won for the Essay in the 2007 Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards. His first book of poems is *Body Haul* (UST Publishing House, 2011). Pastrana teaches Literature at Miriam College and Music Literature at Ateneo de Manila University.

Born and raised in the Philippines of Ilocano stock but Visayan upbringing, **MYRNA PEÑA-REYES** was educated at Silliman University elementary through college (B.A., English) and the University of Oregon (MFA, creative writing). While a resident of Eugene, Oregon, for 35 years, she was a winner of the Oregon Literary Fellowship grant for poetry (2002) from Literary Arts, a nonprofit organization. Her two poetry collections are *The River Singing Stone* (Anvil) and *Almost Home: Poems* (U.P. Press). She is retired in her hometown, Dumaguete, with her husband.

**VICTOR PEÑARANDA** joined the Silliman Writers Workshop in 1984. He has three collections of poetry: *Voyage in Dry Season*, *Pilgrim in Transit*, and *Lucid Lightning*. He works as a freelance writer-researcher and capacity-builder in community development projects.

**MARY ANN JOSETTE E. PERNIA** is a graduate of the BA Humanities program of UP Diliman and MA Language and Literature program of De La Salle University-Manila. She works as head of education and special projects of the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD) in DLS-CSB, and teaches part-time at UP Manila. She has sat in workshop sessions in Dumaguete and in Bacolod, in the latter as a documentor.

**NOEL P. PINGOY** was a fellow at the 2006 National Writers Workshop. He is a proud graduate of the Davao Medical School Foundation. He completed his residency in Internal Medicine and fellowships in Hematology and in Medical Oncology at the University of the Philippines-Philippine General Hospital. He is now based in General Santos City.

**M. PROTACIO-DE GUZMAN** is a registered nurse working in the field of HIV/AIDS, specifically in health communication. He started writing poems in grade school, encouraged by his grandmother. He attended the Dumaguete National Writers Workshop in 1996 and until now he believes that the workshop had the most profound effect on his writing. Mr. Protacio-De Guzman also writes in Filipino and although his first passion is poetry, he also writes fiction and stories for children. His “Dalawang Daddy ni Billy” (Billy Has Two Daddies) was a finalist for the PBBY Salanga Writers’ Prize for 2013.

**DEEDLE RODRIGUEZ-TOMLINSON** is based in New York City but since being married to her husband, the fictionist Tim Tomlinson, has found herself living in places like Bangkok, Florence, London, and Shanghai. Her poem, “Euston Road on an Autumn Afternoon” was published in the poetry anthology released in 2011 called *Under the Storm: An Anthology of Contemporary Philippine Poetry*. *Potluck Hidalgo Bonding: A Family Heritage Cookbook* (2006) also contains a couple of her recipes and essays.

**DINAH ROMA** is an associate professor of literature and creative writing at the De La Salle University-Manila. An award-winning poet of two collections, she is currently the Chair of the Literature Department of DLSU, Manila. She was affiliated with the NUS Asia Research Institute from June 2010-June 2012 where she worked on a book manuscript entitled “Not Just An Ordinary Tourist: American Women’s Travel Writings on the Philippines, 1900s to 1930s” and other articles on the representations of Southeast Asia in travel narratives.

**MELISSA SALVA** was a poetry fellow in Dumaguete in 1995. She took up graduate courses in Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines and was a fellow of its workshops in Baguio and Miag-ao, Iloilo. She is a freelance writer and editor.

**ALLEN SAMSUYA** was a fellow for poetry in the 50th Silliman National Writers Workshop. He spends his weekends mastering the Hiten Mitsurugi Amakakeru Ryū no Hirameki on Youtube.

At the 1978 Silliman National Writers Workshop, **NADINE L. SARREAL** was overwhelmed by the wealth of thought and opinions on the writing submitted by the fellows. It took 16 years til she started her MFA in Creative



Writing through the low-residency program at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her poetry, fiction, and essays have come forth sporadically, generally in response to calls for submission. She lives with her husband in Manila and misses her children immensely.

**TRISH SHISHIKURA** is currently pursuing her Communication degree in Miriam College. She was awarded the Ophelia Dimalanta Award for Poetry in the 27th Gawad Ustetika and was a fellow for the 52nd Silliman University National Writers Workshop. Her poetry has appeared in the *Philippines Free Press*, *Philippines Graphic Magazine*, and *Softblow Poetry Journal*, among others.

**RODOLFO ANTONIO "JOJO" G. SILVESTRE JR.** attended the Silliman University National Writers Workshop in 1985 and the University of the Philippines National Writers Workshop in 2012. He contributes feature articles and poetry to various national publications and writes and edits coffee table books. Mr. Silverstre's continuing oral history on the Philippine upper class, high society, and elite is the most extensive in the country today. He is a graduate of the Isabela State University where he took up BS Agri-Business.

**CHERRIE SING** was a fellow for both poetry and fiction in the 1996 Dumaguete National Writers Workshop.

**JOSHUA L. LIM SO** is a Dabawenyo, born and bred, but currently resides in Manila. He graduated from De La Salle University and has received Palanca Awards for his one-act and full-length plays in English and Filipino. In 2012, his play was shortlisted for the BBC International Radio Playwriting Competition. His stories have appeared in several national publications, and his plays have been produced by the Cultural Center of the Philippines, DLSU, UP-Diliman, University of Sto. Tomas, and other venues. He was a fellow in Iyas and Iligan National Writers Workshop in 2007, and belongs to the 47th batch of fellows of Silliman University National Writers Workshop. Currently, he is the artistic director of Destiyero Theater Commune. He co-owns Exile on Main St., a hole-in-the-wall restaurant/mini-gallery where he is also the chef and occasional busboy.

**VICTOR N. SUGBO** is from Tacloban City. He is a professor of communication and literature at the University of the Philippines Visayas Tacloban College. He has poems published in anthologies and periodicals, local and foreign. He writes poetry in English and Waray, his mother tongue. His first book of poems is *Inintokan*, a collection of poems in Waray with English translations. He is preparing his second book of poems in Waray which he wrote during a writer's retreat in Red Sea, Egypt in 2011 under the El Gouna Writer's Residency Program. He has likewise published papers in reputable academic journals.

**BRYLLE TABORA** recently graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Santo Tomas. He was a writing fellow for fiction to the 12th Iyas National Writers Workshop, and a fellow for poetry to the 52nd Silliman University National Writers Workshop. His poems have been published in *Philippines Graphic* and *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*.

**MICHELLE T. TAN** graduated from the Ateneo de Manila University in 2011. She has been published in *Philippines Graphic* and *Philippines Free Press*. Her short story "Her Afternoon Lives" won second place in the 2012 Nick Joaquin Literary Awards. She is currently taking up an MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, where she was awarded the Southeast Asian Bursary.

**SEANN TAN-MANSUKHANI** was a poetry fellow in Dumaguete in 1995. She earned her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the Ateneo de Manila University. She teaches psychology in De La Salle University.

**ROBERTO KLEMENTE TIMONERA**, Arkay to most people, is a senior Creative Writing student at Silliman University. He was a fellow to the Iligan National Writers Workshop in 2010 and the Iyas National Writers Workshop in 2013.

**JOEL M. TOLEDO** holds a Masters degree in English Studies (Poetry) from the University of the Philippines Diliman, where he likewise finished two undergraduate degrees (Journalism and Creative Writing). He has authored three books of poetry: *Chiaroscuro* (UST Press, 2008), *The Long Lost Startle* (UP Press, 2009), and *Ruins and Reconstructions* (Anvil, 2011). He co-edited *Under the Storm: An Anthology of Contemporary Philippine Poetry* (The Antithesis Collective, 2011). *Chiaroscuro*, *Ruins and Reconstructions*, and *Under the Storm* were finalists for the National Book Awards. He is an assistant professor at Miriam College. Toledo was the recipient of the 2006 NCCA Literary Prize, and has won major literary awards for his poetry in English.

**TIM TOMLINSON** is a co-founder of New York Writers Workshop, and a co-author of its popular text, *The Portable MFA in Creative Writing*. He was born in Brooklyn, New York, and raised on Long Island. Since 2003, he's been visiting the Philippines (with his wife, Deedle Barrion Rodriguez Tomlinson), teaching from Baguio to Davao, diving from Anilao to Talikud Island. He has lived in London, Florence, Shanghai, New Orleans, Miami, Boston, and the Bahamas. All these places figure, in one way or another, in his fiction and poetry. Some of his forthcoming books and publications are *Asia Writes*, *Blue Lyra Review*, *Caribbean Vistas*, *Citron Review*, *Coachella Review*, *The Dirty Napkin*, *Extracts*, *Full of Crow*, *the Soundings Review*, *The Tule Review*, and in the anthology *Long Island Noir* (Akashic Books). In the Fall of 2013, he returns to New York where he'll resume teaching in New York University's Global Liberal Studies program.



**DENVER EJEM TORRES** has a BA in English Language and Literature Studies from Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan and was a fellow for poetry and literary translation at several national workshops. As a bilingual poet, he writes and translates in his mother tongue, Cebuano and English. He has been published here in the Philippines as well as in India, Singapore, and the U.S. His work is in the anthology *Querida: An Anthology*, ANI 37, and a collection of poems appeared in *Assaracus Issue 10* (Sibling Rivalry Press, USA). He hopes to finally begin his MFA soon.

**RENZ CHRISTIAN TORRES** is an Accountancy student at Silliman University. His time in this universe is spent reading, drawing, and creating, in between bouts of homework. He is nineteen years old.

**ROWENA TIEMPO TORREVILLAS** teaches nonfiction writing and transnational literature at the University of Iowa. Prior to joining the English Department faculty at the University of Iowa, she was for nearly two decades administrator of the International Writing Program. She holds the Ph.D. in English and Literature from Silliman; her career includes the Gawad Balagtas from the Writers' Union, two Philippine National Book Awards, as well as the Palanca for poetry and fiction; the UMPIL Distinguished Writer Award in 1984, Outstanding Educator of the Year at the National Gintong Sipag Award in 1985, Philippine National Book Award, Progress 2002 Famous Fifty in Iowa City. She writes fiction, poetry, nonfiction and literary criticism. Her books include *The Sea Gypsies Stay*, *Flying Over Kansas: Personal Views*, *Mountain Sacraments: Selected Poems*, *Upon the Willows and Other Stories*, and *The World Comes to Iowa*. Her works have been translated into numerous languages, including Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Hebrew, Russian. She and her husband Lem live in Iowa City.

**JOHN JACK G. WIGLEY** is the author of *Falling into the Manhole: A Memoir* (UST, 2012) and co-author of *In Synch: Edith Tiempo Made Easy* (UST Varsitarian, 2009) and *Philippine Literatures: Texts, Themes, Approaches* (UST, 2008). He is the Director of the University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, a full-time literature professor at UST College of Rehabilitation Sciences and Faculty of Arts and Letters, and a resident fellow of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies. He finished the following degrees: AB English (Holy Angel University, 1989), MA Literature (UST, 2004) and PhD Literature Cum Laude (UST, 2012). He served in the 2013 Silliman University National Writers Workshop panel and was a fellow of the 2013 UP National Writers and 2012 UST Creative Writing workshops.

**JANUAR ERENO YAP** is currently teaching at the University of the Philippines Cebu. He is also page editor for *Sun.Star Cebu* and writes opinion columns for the same paper. He has an MA in Literature and is finishing his

Ph.D. in Media Studies. His short story "Ang Suhito" won the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature in 2001. He was a recipient of the Ubod New Writers' Series with his short story collection *Ang Aktibistang Gi-Syphilis*. He was a fellow to various workshops, including the National Writers Workshop in Dumaguete City and the Cornelio Faigao Memorial Writers Workshop.

**ANNA YIN** was born in China, and immigrated to Canada in 1999. She won the 2005 Ted Plantos Memorial Award, 2010 MARTY Award (Emerging /Literary), honourable mention for The 2013 MARTY Awards for Established Literary Arts and other awards. She has three chapbooks and a collection of poetry *Wings Toward Sunlight* (2011). Her new book *Inhaling the Silence* will be published soon by Mosaic Press. She is a full member of the League of Canadian Poets and a Director of the Chinese Cultural Federation of North America.

**ALFRED A. YUSON**, nicknamed Krip, has authored 26 books to date, including novels, poetry collections, short fiction, essays, children's stories, biographies and coffee-table books, apart from having edited various other titles, including several literary anthologies. He has gained numerous distinctions, including the 2009 Gawad Pambansang Alagad ni Balagtas from UMPIL or Writers Union of the Philippines, the Patnubay ng Sining at Kalinangan (Stalwart of Art and Culture) award from the City of Manila, a Rockefeller Foundation grant for residency at the Bellagio Study and Conference Center in Italy, and the SEAWrite (SouthEast Asian Writers) Award from Thai royalty for lifetime achievement. He has also been elevated to the Hall of Fame of the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, the Philippines' most prestigious literary distinction.

#### ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

**MAY TOBIAS-PAPA** is a published writer and illustrator of children's books, and has worked as copywriter and art director for various organizations which include The Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, The University of the Philippines Press, ABS-CBN Global, and some of the country's top advertising agencies. She attended the Silliman University National Writers Workshop in 1997.



# SILLIMAN JOURNAL

Volume 54 Number 2 2013

# SILLIMAN JOURNAL

A JOURNAL, PUBLISHED TWICE YEARLY, DEVOTED TO DISCUSSION  
AND INVESTIGATION IN THE HUMANITIES AND THE SCIENCES

This special literary issue of the *Silliman Journal* honors the legacy of two giants in Philippine letters, both Outstanding Sillimanian Awardees in Literature and Creative Writing and founders of the Silliman University National Writers Workshop: S.E.A. Write Awardee Edilberto K. Tiempo, in honor of his birth centenary in 2013, and National Artist for Literature Edith L. Tiempo, in honor of her second death anniversary.

## EDITED BY

Anthony L. Tan  
Marjorie Evasco  
Grace R. Monte de Ramos

## WITH A PREFACE BY

Rowena Tiempo-Torrevillas

## FEATURING THE WORKS OF

Anne Carly Abad	Priscilla Supnet-Macansantos
Gémino S. Abad	Lorna Peña-Reyes Makil
Ceres Y.C. Abanil	Seann Tan-Mansukhani
Merlie Alunan	Hansel B. Mapayo
Adlai Amor	Peter Zaragoza Mayshle
Ronn Andrew Angeles	Timothy R. Montes
César Ruiz Aquino	Homer Novicio
Corin Arenas	Corinna Arcellana Nuqui
Cirilo F. Bautista	Carla Pacis
Randy Bustamante	Allan Pastrana
Erin Cabanawan	Myrna Peña-Reyes
Elman S. Caguindangan	Victor Peñaranda
F. Jordan Carnice	Mary Ann E. Pernia
Ian Rosales Casocot	Noel P. Pingoy
Albert Casuga	Dinah Roma
Thomas David F. Chavez	Melissa Salva
Elsa Martinez-Coscolluela	Allen Samsuya
Jhoanna Lynne B. Cruz	Nadine L. Sarreal
Vida Cruz	Trish Shishikura
Alice Sun-Cua	Jojo G. Silvestre
Zaldy Dandan	Charrie Sing
M. Protacio-De Guzman	Joshua Lim So
N. Adrian de Pedro	Victor N. Sugbo
Ricardo M. de Ungria	Brylle Tabora
V.I.S. de Veyra	Michelle T. Tan
Simeon M. Dum Dum Jr.	Roberto Klemente Timonera
Felix Fojas	Joel M. Toledo
Armand Gloriosa	Deedle Rodriguez-Tomlinson
Michael Aaron Gomez	Tim Tomlinson
Asterio Enrico N. Gutierrez	Denver Ejem Torres
Antonio Hernandez	Renz Christian Torres
Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo	John Jack Wigley
Susan S. Lara	Januar Yap
Francis B. Macansantos	Anna Yin
Alfred A. Yuson	