

**TAGAY-TAGAY POETICS AND GENDER
IN CEBUANO VERSE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an introduction to a Sugbuanon poetic tradition, the *balak*, and to the *tagay*, the socio-cultural context that has spawned its birth, shaped its development, and which, to this day, continues to provide the backdrop for its expression. A Cebuano word referring to a gathering, often exclusively of men, for the purpose of drinking, *tagay* is also the occasion for literary discussions as well as poetry reading. Because of its association with male bonding and poetry, *tagay* is widely perceived as a nurturer of Cebuano verse and male poets, through a system by which the young writer may receive mentoring, inspiration and affirmation, and critical attention from his peers, who provide the audience for his poetic endeavor. In this sense, *tagay*, offers a glimpse of the communal processes where Philippine creative life thrives freely and naturally, most notable of which are the intellectual and aesthetic pleasures that are so much a part of this gathering, albeit governed by the peculiar ethos of male engagement.

However, this paper explores not only the poetry that has come out of these occasions but the asymmetries in the gender structure entrenched in our culture as they are displayed in this exclusive male gathering and as they are embodied in the themes of the *balak*. For noteworthy is not only the absence of women poets in the body of traditional Cebuano verse, but also the absence of the female voice and the dominance of the voice of the male in the *balak* tradition.

The *tagay* is a gathering for the purpose of drinking, a popular and absolutely common activity among Filipinos, so common indeed that it would be quite easy to ignore it as antecedent of anything more serious than a hangover. In the

annual NCCA Writers Conference held in Bohol last January 2000, the young Cebuano poet, Myke Obenieta, refers to the *tagay* as the veritable stewpot of literature in the Visayas. The *tagay*, Obenieta claims, nurtures Cebuano verse.

He describes in rollicking style how, as a young poet, the *tagay* provided him with the mentoring and affirmation he needed to persevere in writing. The monumental headache of a hangover the day after seems little price for the opportunity to commune with older and wiser postulants to the muse. Indeed the smoky and beery atmosphere of the *tagay* seems to be an excellent place for encountering one's creative daemons, and other humans similarly affected.

Until Myke called our attention to it, it was difficult to imagine something as ordinary as the *tagay* as a generator of serious poetics. But Myke speaks from direct experience, and shows understanding about how it works. His playful reference to the "spirit of the glass" deserves a second look (Obenieta, 2000). He reprises his own adventures thus:

I was just 23 years old when I wrote and published my first Cebuano poem entitled "Balibaran Ko Ikaw sa *Balak*"...¹ Earlier that poem became finalist in a poetry writing contest sponsored by Cebu's leading newspaper, *SunStar Daily*, and by the Doña Modesta Gaisano Foundation. I was the youngest finalist. Two Cebuano poets [whom] I had met earlier at the awarding ceremony of the Cebuano poetry writing contest, Ernesto Lariosa and Pantaleon Auman, asked me to join a post-congress powwow with a rowdy bunch of *bisdaks*² with *tuba*³ and Tanduay.

Tasked to be the *tigtagay*,⁴ I passed the glass around in awe and amusement as the members of the Bathalad⁵ ... reeled me over in a binge of Cebuano songs, poetry, and tall tales, sousing me up in its undercurrents of folk wisdom

and wise crack. It was there that I heard Temistokles Adlawan ... waxing whimsical about his misadventures as a tricycle driver; Pantaleon Auman with a glass of Tanduay in his hands ardently [singing], *Bulan pagkatahum mo, sama ka sa maanyag nga bulak akong gimahal*⁶ ... ; Ernie Lariosa, a big mole nestling on his upper lip, hushing us down with roaring voice and robust gestures. Do you know how Sitio Panadtaran in San Fernando [his hometown] got its name? ... Ernie would [then] narrate the legend of Juan Diyong, a farmer who spurred the folks into a relentless rampage against the invaders in the olden times. With such energy, too, did he keep us awake, knocking the bottles off the tables at Bayanihan Beerhouse while stressing the prerequisite of the four S's in writing poetry—Sound, Story, and Social Sense. And because the waitresses don't care a bit about the gist of his CCP-prize winning essay in Cebuano poetry, his baritone would be tender enough with *Patayng Buhi*⁷ dedicated to them." (Obenieta 2000)

He cites two other groups where the *tagay* tradition among Cebuano writers lives. There was a poetry group in the 60s consisting of the writers, Melquiadito Allego, Urias Almagro, Romeo Virao, Sozimo Cabuñal, Ernesto Lariosa, Edfer Rigodon, and Antonio Villaveto, and later on Marcel Navarra, Laurean Unabia, and Diosdado Alesna. As a matter of fact, the group's name (ALVICALARIVI) comes from the first syllable of the respective names of the founding members. Then there is the Bathalad, one of the largest aggregation of writers in Cebuano. The tradition continues to the Tarantula, a group of the youngest generation of Cebuano writers, namely, Januar Yap, Adonis Durado, Corazon Almerino, John Biton, Dindin Villarino, Ulysses Apparece, Noel Rama, Ronald Villavellez, Joshua Cabrera, Orly

Cajegas, Delora Sales, and Myke Obenieta himself. *Tagay* remains unchallenged as the institution where the passions of poetry and the ways of writing in general are handed on.

The *tagay*, Myke points out, "is replete with discussions, literary or otherwise, [and] poetry reading." His paper reaffirms his own irrevocable entry into the circle of initiates to both *tagay* and poetry. He says, "I know the Bathalad writers and the ancestral voices that passed through them are pleased as punch, seeing we don't cower at the table of tradition as they pass on the torch to us. Yes, along with the glass" (Obenieta, 2000).

Social dynamics of the *tagay*

The *tagay* is an almost exclusive male activity, for the simple reason, it might seem, that drinking is a pleasure allowed mostly to men. The woman who drinks is still frowned upon, though in these recent times, women are seen to hit the bottle just as gallantly as any man. The *tagay*, however, remains preeminently a site for male bonding. It may take place at home in sight of every member of the family, but men frown on their wives and daughters sitting in on these sessions. In these exercises of male bonding, confidences may arise, man to man, so to speak, that are not for women's ears. They may be on call, however, to bring out the *sumsuman*, replenish the ice, or furnish more cola for the *tuba* or the rum.

The young human male's acceptance into a *tagayay* signals his acceptance into the world of real men. Here he learns how to drink, finding out by example or direct instructions the ethics of drinking as well as the dangers of liquor. Here he might get really soused up for the first time under the good-natured surveillance of his seniors. The fellow who can hold his liquor well is admired. On the other hand, there is much tolerance for the fool who does not know his own measure and embarrasses himself by throwing up or becoming nasty as he digs into his cups.

The *tagay* as site for male bonding, is also venue for much display of machismo. Drinking quantities of liquor without toppling over is one of the *tagay*'s grosser displays of machismo. Or the participants could get into an argument and try shouting one another down. The one with the bigger voice, right or wrong, takes command. The happy occasion could deteriorate into a brawl if nobody yields. Machismo may also take other forms such as the exercise of wit calculated to up one's status over another, a display of argumentative brilliance, for example, or cleverness, or learning, all designed to project oneself as the focus or center of the gathering. I have observed this process of gaining dominance as a fundamental part of male culture. We shall have occasion later on to see this as an element of Cebuano poetics. We shall have further reference to this later in this paper.

I have sat at the edge of many a *tagay* session with some of the gentlemen Myke mentions. A number of them are personal friends. Like him I have enjoyed the complex and exhilarating discussions that could happen in a *tagay*. Though I am not much of an imbiber of spirited drinks, I do appreciate their power to set the mood for the kind of spontaneous intellectual free-for-all that he describes. The topics may range from politics to poetry to good old gossip. Inebriation can be real, caused by the liquor itself, or figurative, brought on by the stimulating conversation going round the table along with the glass. Differences of opinion is rampant, hence there could be noisy arguments, not always friendly, nor logical, nor sensible.

I enjoyed Myke's paper very much for its appreciative presentation of the communal processes where Philippine creative life thrives freely and naturally. It corresponds to my own knowledge and experience. However my reactions to it may not be entirely the same as Myke's on account of gender.

The gender question

Post-session *tagay* is an inevitable part of any writers' workshop in Cebu to which I get invited on occasions. I get to gatecrash these affairs as an "honored" member of the critics' panel. Here my status and position subtly change. My opinions, accepted and valued in the sessions, lose their edge in the *tagay*. I am transformed into the "muse" of poetry, or something similarly frivolous. I am no longer a coeval, a fellow creator as they are all striving to be. The men reserve the honor of creativity for one another. As "muse," I become their "inspiration," I rise to "supremacy," albeit opinionless now in their midst. I become somewhat like the *hara sa karnabal* whose main role in the festival gathering is supposedly to be beautiful and to inspire those around her with her charms.

Once one sees past the ritual with which these social interactions are observed, it becomes easy to see that male gallantry on these occasions is purely a cliché and therefore meaningless. Both the men and women understand this tacitly. The transaction may start with a few loose complements and mild teasing, and progress to outright flirting as the drinkers' cup deepens. The unsolicited attention could get more outrageous as the night progresses. The only reasonable option for the woman who cannot brave the brawly, bristly, bawdy dynamics of the *tagay* is to leave, for there is nothing to gain by quarrelling with drunken fools. Her necessary—and expected flight—excludes her then from sharing in the intellectual and aesthetic pleasures that are also so much a part of the gathering.

It seems that men of a certain age (past forty and over?) react to the presence of a woman in these social occasions by reflex, almost as if there were no other way to deal with a woman in their midst except to treat her as a sexual object. Could this be, I had often asked, a subtle form of reprimand to women who intrude into what is traditionally considered male

turf? She then has to suffer the role that women play in gatherings of this sort—as servant and entertainer. There are a number of taboos operating against women in the *tagay*. First, nice women are not supposed to drink. Second, nice women do not expose themselves just like that to the presence of men. Third, it is unwomanly to be assertive. Fourth, the woman of quality is humble and prudent and does not flaunt herself and her abilities in public. Both men and women understand these taboos and obey them as an implicit part of the social order.

The poetic uses of the *tagay*

One may note first of all the general aridity of the Philippine literary landscape. There is so little understanding and appreciation of the value of literature to individuals and society. Venues for publication of the works of the imagination are still hard to come by. The landscape is even bleaker for off-the-mainstream literary productions. These are the works written in languages outside English and Filipino, the languages of academe, politics, and commerce. The language situation in the Philippines has invested non-mainstream language with a sense of inferiority. The low status of literature in the home grown tongue is bolstered by the formal academic curricula which have consistently and deliberately kept them out in favor of materials drawn from English and Filipino resources.

Balak is the Cebuano genera for verse. Resil Mojares points out in his introduction to the first volume of *Sugbuanong Balak* the broad uses of the *balak* in the social formation. “Poetry permeated local life: there were verses for practically every occasion and everyone was a poet” (Alburo, Bandillo, Dumdum, and Mojares, 1988:3). Versification is a public act and serves many social functions. Hence it is an activity reserved for men. Inured to privacy and silence, women kept out of it almost as a matter of course. The man’s claim to public self-expression

parallels the woman's habitual inhibition and self-effacement.

It occurs to me that the poetic tradition of Sugbuanon is shaped by the durable tradition of the *tagay*. It devises a system by which the young writer may receive mentoring, inspiration and affirmation, and critical attention, all of which he needs to persevere in his poetic pursuit. It provides the audience for the poetic endeavor. As poets recite or read their verses to one another while passing the cup, the *tagay* also functions as a most accessible venue for "publication," or bringing to public attention one's literary efforts. The rowdy and rambunctious comments he receives from his peers might be as much mentoring and criticism as he will ever receive in his career as a *magbabalak*.⁸

Myke describes how older poets pass on the flame and passion of poetry in the *tagay*. We dare not dispute the verity of this first-hand experience. We can only affirm it by suggesting that it might be responsible for a number of factors characterizing Cebuano literature in general. One may note, for instance, the near absence of women poets in Cebuano poetry. The twin volumes of *Sugbuanong Balak* issued by the Cebuano Studies Center of the University of San Carlos in 1988 bear this out. The first volume of this collection includes popular folk forms and the *balak* up to 1940. The book presents a total of thirty-three poets, of whom, only one is a woman.⁹ The second volume showcases 44 poets, of which only three are women.¹⁰ Could it be that the exclusion of women in the *tagay* is related somehow to their absence in literature?

We have earlier mentioned the *tagay* as a venue for "publication" of literature. The *tagay* upholds the tradition of orality. It is the perfect setting for showing off one's skill in the *duplo*¹¹ and the *balitaw*.¹² The raconteur finds an audience for his tales in the drinking round. These activities

are important to an ethno-linguistic culture deprived of opportunities for print. By being excluded from the *tagay*, women have no chance at all of participating even in this informal mode of publication.

The poetry of *tagay*

It is not only the absence of women poets, however, that we note in the body of traditional Cebuano verse. It is the absence of the female voice and the dominance of the voice of the male that we consider noteworthy in the *balak* tradition. The situation seems to confirm the idea that Obenieta has so enthusiastically advanced—the *tagay* as the nurturer of Cebuano verse and of male poets.

We are prepared to go further than this, indeed to see the *tagay* also as the precursor of the poetics characterizing the traditional *balak*. These characteristics are implicit in the dominant male voice and the scope and range of its preemption. There is the primary claim to power which the male speakers use to construct the world and coerce the listener's or the reader's perception. The cold and heartless beauty, so common to early examples of the *balak*, is a poetic conceit.¹³ In real life, women are kinder and not so demanding and are certainly not so gullible. The poor, suffering lover [read: man] deliciously languishing in the bathos of unrequited squalor is another conceit. Most men in real life are taciturn and inarticulate and strive to win their women by other means than inundating her with pretty speech.

The lushness and floridity of the traditional *balak* is part of that claim to power. It is a claim exercised within the very frontiers of language itself. Mastery of language is a given of the male culture. The ability to articulate one's feelings and thoughts with elegance is a desirable trait for the male who seeks to get ahead in the world. The one so gifted gains distinction among other men and ostensibly wins the women

too. Language is one more field where the human male may make his display and show his authority.

Other elements may be mentioned too. One is the blown up or hortatory tone common to the *balak*. The persona never just speaks; he declaims or orates in the most emphatic fashion. The poem might be addressed to one person, yet the tone is more suited to public delivery. The diction strives for elevation in keeping with the tone. The most successful usage of this expressive mode achieves what Mojares observes as “genuine impulses within native poetry: the values of play, fancy, incantation, and orality.” At its worst the *balak* becomes synonymous with *balaknon* or ‘poetic’ which means “purple speech, ‘sentimental,’ declamatory and biased in favor of certain modes of diction and sentiment” (Mojares in Albuero, *et. al.*, 1988, vol. 2:4). Mojares himself takes no note of gender considerations as a possible precursor of this poetic impulse.

The *balak* seems preeminently a product of the *tagay*, that great social institution which we have earlier pointed out as a site for male bonding and display of machismo; where, as Myke Obenieta points out, the young poet receives instruction on the process of getting besotted in both alcohol and poetry. We shall now sample a few lines from the *balak* to illustrate our point.

Power play and display in the *balak*

The ability to use language in the way of the *balak* is the poet’s extraordinary claim to power. The poet is charged with the potency of the word. Words used well can move the heavens as in a prayer. Words instruct men and women on the right moral sense, set the path for the humble, and clear the way for the dreamer and the adventurer. The man who can use words effectively has in his means the power to influence events.

Amoral

Man-woman relationship comprises a large portion of extant Cebuano poetry. The *balak* is essentially a love poem. It is an instrument of choice for the courtship game. The well-spoken word can win a woman's love. Or alternately, it could punish her for being cold, unfaithful, or hardhearted. The lover's suit is colloquially (and appropriately, we might say) termed *amoral*.¹⁴ The floridity of the *amoral* is intended to turn a woman's head and make her receptive to the man's pleas. The *amoral* may praise her beauty, or it could avow a man's undying love, or lay out grand promises to convince the woman of his affection and seriousness of purpose.

*Saloma*¹⁵ is an example of the *balak amoral*. The poem declares a man's passion for a cold and unresponsive woman. Here are some sample lines:

*Tapat ako magsakay sa mabalod
Nga dili sa dagat nga malinaw
Kay sa unos dili ako malunod
Malunod ako sa kamingaw.*

*Ang pagpungasi sa Habagat
Gipangahas ko pagpamaroto
Kay bisan ako tabunan sa wakat
Antuson ko, Inday, tungod kanimo.*¹⁶

(Alburo *et. al.*, 1988, vol. 1: 22-25)

The man brags about his suffering and his willingness to undergo hardships for the sake of the beloved. Impliedly, the woman is cold and indifferent, or she could just be playing coy. The lover's task as the poem implies is to dissolve the coldness through elegant language, that is the *amoral*.

Interestingly, the cover design of *Sugbuanong Balak* Volume I depicts the towering figure of a woman, her

resplendent hair spreading around her like an aureole. She is surrounded by dwarf figures of men in supplicant postures. Male swaggering of the *Saloma* type finds its counterpart in the *duplo*,¹⁷ a poetic joust, usually on the theme of love. Here it is the woman's turn to do some swaggering of her own:

*Kung matuod kang nahigugma
Sumalom ka sa ilalom sa linaw
Dili ka gayod mutunga
Kung dili mo madala ang gamot sa Adlaw.*

*Kung buot ka, Iyo, mangasawa
Atuay balay namo ayuha
Ayaw pagtagkusa sa ulay
Tagkusa lamang sa imong laway.*

*Kung buot ka, Iyo, mangasawa
Atuay balay namo ayuha
Ang atop niya kugon
Alisdi sa pako'g alimukon*

*Kung buot ka, Iyo, mangasawa,
Atuay balay namo ayuha
Ang salog niya pulos kawayan
Alisdi sa lunsay bulawan.¹⁸*

(Alburo *et. al.*, 1988, vol. 1: 22)

Students of Cebuano culture note that the flamboyant metaphors in the form are stock phrases available within the culture. They are taken from the popular reservoir and are familiar to performers as well as their audiences.

Within the matrix of the social convention in which the *balak* subsists, men talked and listened to one another. The women stayed in the sidelines overhearing the conversation, thinking their own thoughts, and keeping their own counsel.

On the few occasions when women allow themselves to share their thoughts publicly it would likely be to say what they are expected to say. Women are well schooled in the texts of their culture and will not deviate from their rote out of a sense of self-preservation. The utterances of women, even in the *duplo*, are derivative and cannot be said to reveal what they really think and feel.

The *balak* as site for male display

A 14-quatrain, 56-line poem by Vicente Ranudo (1936) entitled *Hikalimtan?* talks about a disdainful beauty who shuns a lover's offering. The rejection casts him in the throes of delicious suffering. He speaks extravagantly of the woman he ostensibly adores, but his praises of her refracts self-consciously on his own performance as a virtuoso dealer of words. The poet is enamored of his own cleverness. He is engrossed with his own wit and adroitness. He skims over the surface of the emotional field, staying clear of the depths.

The last two stanzas prove the tension between sincerity and irony. Beneath the glib posturings of grief, we sense the clever and deceptive rake whose suffering is merely at the tip of his tongue.

*Dili mahimo nga ikaw hikalimtan
Akong Bathala sinimba sa tago,
Kay kun wa ka sa sulod ning dughan,
Unsa pay ako, Inday, unsa pay ako?*

*Silaw sa bulan, tipik sa bituon
Nga nagpabilin ning yutang malaay,
Kun daw buot ka nga dili simbahon,
Iuli sa langit ang imong panagway.¹⁹*

(Alburo *et. al.*, 1988, vol. 1:186-189)

Bugal-bugal

The girl who proves resistant to the *amoral* may become subject to *bugal-bugal*,²⁰ a kind of speech dripping with irony and sarcasm, intended to deliver insult for insult. The *bugal-bugal*, however, could be disguised in pretty words which makes it difficult to counteract. Note Leonardo C. Dioko's *Inday* (1959). Here the male persona addresses the girl:

Buot ko ikawng hubaron sa mga pulong
 Buol kong and imong mga hiyas hugpongon
*Tunawon sa tubig ug imnon.*²¹

(Alburo *et al.*, 1988, vol. 2 : 84-85)

The lover seeks mastery of the object of his affection. He reduces her into a substance that water would melt. Then he could drink her up and thus transform her completely into himself. He admonishes her to guard her heart carefully and not to entrust her affections to just anyone,

Kay daghan
Ang mga kawatan sa pagbati,
Daghan ang hakog sa kalipay
*Ug buta sa kaanyag.*²²

He then proceeds to declare his intentions, which the girl impliedly rejects. He hits back by asking her forthrightly:

Ako na Inday ang imong kaanyag
 Kay akong tunawon sa usa ka tasang kalipay.
 Saglan sa gugma ug paghalad
 Ug isula ko sa tinapay,²³

He asks the girl for her beauty which he would then melt in a cup of joy, to which he would add love and adoration to accompany a diet of bread.

It is hard to fathom what the persona really wants to say. However, one cannot miss the air of condescension in the speaker's attitude towards the woman that he addresses. He projects an awareness of his dominance in the social construct. The woman he addresses is defenseless against his verbal display. His rhetorical adroitness drips with sarcasm, proof of his superior wit. Who is the woman who can stand up to his whimsical display? He builds her up one moment, then demolishes her with triviality. Dioko's *amoral* descends into *bugal-bugal*, so expertly couched that no retort seems possible. Dioko may actually just be taking a swipe at the bombast in the traditional *balak*. But if he is, it seems rather unfair that he would hone his wit at the expense of the speechless Inday.

Slick surfaces and shallowness

We might observe that in general, the dominant male voice in the *balak* makes women mere creatures of masculine caprice. Male personae adopt the worshipful stance and install women as objects of seeming idolatry. This ploy sets the psychic space from which men could maneuver for emotional control. Then they did not have to deal with the reality of woman, her true nature, and her right to a quality of personhood all her own. In the same way, the male personae did not have to consider the complexities of love and desire, the pain of loss, infidelity, rejection in a more personal way.

The poetry of worship is simply an exhibitionist performance, glib, shallow, facile, and cold. In his foreword in Volume 2 of *Sugbuanong Balak*, Resil Mojares takes Carlos P. Garcia to task for being what he calls a poet of the mundane. "Garcia took his listeners on a tour of the familiar, and even then archaic ground, instead of bringing them to a new level of speaking about themselves and their society" (Mojares in Alburo *et. al.*, 1988, vol. 2:4). The mellifluity of Garcia's poetry

is insufficient to make up for its empty triteness, as for example in the following lines:

*Ug kung si Adlaw sa kasadpan molundag
Ug si Bulan magdumili sa pagsanag,
Kita ko gihapon ang nindot mong larawan,
Sa bughawng langit sa akong dalindaman.²⁴*

The poem goes on for many more lines and ends thus:

*Ug kung kanako isalig mo ang palad mog kinabuhi,
Dad-on ko ikaw sa akong payag
Ug didto sa salag sa akong gugma
Ikaw bugtong mutya ko ug hari,
Imong kasalo pag-inom sa alak sa kalipay,
Ug imong kaunong paglad-ok sa apdo sa kasakit,
Kauban mo pagpanaw sa kahayag ug kangitngit,
Hangtod atong makab-ot ang sidsid sa langit.²⁵*

(Alburo *et. al.*, 1988, vol. 2:74)

In Garcia's poetry, the very slickness and extravagance of the language calls attention to itself. There is no need to go beyond the surface of the words. If one does, however, one would find the words eroding their own meanings in the very act of utterance because they are not anchored to some objective or concrete human situation. In the hands of the men, Cebuano verse or the *balak* seems not to have grown in perceptiveness, insight, and breadth of understanding of the human condition. It remains afflicted by a kind of self-absorption over the very idea of maleness and the habits of thought and feeling they engender.

Male fantasy of female desire

In 1985, Don Pagusara wrote *Balitaw sa Bag-ong Rosas Pangdan*. Pagusara locates the poem within the sensibility of a female persona. It is doubtful, however, whether

women will recognize themselves in Pagusara's Rosas Pangdan, a prostitute who talks about her sexual adventures with extreme candor. Here the supposed female persona is raving about her white male partner's sex:

*Ug ang iyang kuan?
Pagkalalim sud-ongon!
May senyal nga dolyar
Sa balhiboong punoan!
Labi na gyug iya ka nang dalitan
Nianang ... Wow, puthawng hinagiban!
Makalimot ka gyug kagahapon, karon ug kaugmaon!
Makasinggit kag Bahala nag unsay dangatan!
Bahala nag mangabitas akong kuan!²⁶*

(Alburo *et. al.*, 1988, vol. 2:156)

The poem is less about a woman's true feelings as it is about a man gloating in the power of his maleness and his imagined sense of conquest with the weapon of his sex. Is this how men fantasize about how women should react to a desired male? But not all, surely, only women of a certain kind! The prostitute persona in Pagusara's poem may well represent the male fantasy of a sexual partner with whom one may have fun but to whom one owes no responsibility. The prostitute is a facile means to construct a subject for the poem's purpose, a feminized instrument to glorify the male's self-concept. Its insight is not about women hungering for men, but men wanting to be desired a certain way by women.

The focus of the exchange is physical and rooted in the trite concept of the superior male with his all-conquering penis. Even granting that the speaking female is a prostitute, the language is still all male. It reflects the male gloating over his own sexuality, the penis, "*puthawng hinagiban*,"²⁷ and other resources of male power, wealth. The white male's penis carries the dollar sign: "*May senyal nga dolyar / Sa*

*balhiboong punoan.*²⁸ For this the woman will do anything, even brave the danger of disease. The commerce in conventional gender relations demeans not only the woman but also the man. The allusion to race, though lightly handled, lends a touch of bitterness to the tone and strengthens the idea of a male disguised as a female speaking in the poem. In sum the poem is a high-handed tirade against whoredom from a disguised male point of view. The attack is done without compassion and understanding of the conditions that precipitate women to this terrible choice.

Poetics of the *tagay*

The *tagay* is a humble and democratic vehicle for all kinds of transactions which social interaction may smoothen. It is accessible to all levels, both the high rollers in big finance and politics, and the ordinary folk. Whatever the occasion might be or the setting, the fundamental dynamics would remain imaginably similar. The participants would predominantly be men, and the rules of interaction governed by the peculiar ethos of male engagement.

The theme of the *balak* is not limited to love. As in any body of poetry, the *balak* may strive for serious and profound notes on morality, patriotism, life and death, God and nature. It is important to note the broader themes of the *balak*, for even here, where man-woman relationship is not at issue, one may still note the male propensity for assertiveness and aggression. The first volume of *Sugbuanong Balak* carries Vicente Padriga's *Palabilabi* (1940).²⁹ The poem deals with the error of arrogance or pride, which, the poet claims, is God's most hated sin. He shows how arrogance is punished and humility rewarded through the allegory of a *lawaan*³⁰ tree and a *manan-aw*³¹ fern. The tall and proud *lawaan* tree is felled by a storm and people cut it into lumber. The lumber was made into a lowly floor that people step on everyday. On the other hand, the lowly *manan-aw* fern growing on its trunk was

carefully removed and made to adorn the window of a caring maiden. The poet forces this lesson upon his audience:

*Ang katahum sa langit nga way tupong,
Ang tanaman nga wala sa atong yuta;
Tanaman nga nagtagik ug mga sugilanon,
King tanan didto gayud akong makita.³⁴*

(Alburo *et. al.*, 1988, vol. 1:184)

This sentiment is a verity of the popular imagination, stock of ordinary everyday thought. The idea could imaginably arise in any serious or light conversation, be it among peers or other forms of group combinations. The allegorical presentation and the rhyme and verse patterns create the poetic effects. It is certainly good stuff for display of verbal adroitness and high moral sense in a *tagay* session.

In Ignacio Fernandez's *Hunahuna* (1933), height is alluded to as a symbol of human pride. The poet's concern is hubris of the imagination. Pride compels the poet to build a fort "*Sa tumoytumoy sa hataas nga panganud*"³³ from where he could see both heaven and earth, all the things of creation and even those devised by the imagination:

*Busa dili, dili gyud maayo
Nga ang palabilabi pagahimoon,
Kay si Bathala dili makaako
Nga ang timawa daugdaugon.³²*

(Alburo *et. al.*, vol. 2:150)

But the pleasure of dreaming contends with life's realities. In the end the poet submits to actuality and admits that the ladder he uses to get up to his cloudy heights "*Binuhat sa bakakon kong hunahuna*."³⁵

Emiliano Batiencila's "*Pagkaligong Way Tubig*" (1932)³⁶ turns upon an analogy. The act of bathing is used as a

metaphor for consequences of certain human acts. The achiever or the successful man bathes in the praises of his peers; the person who attends to his friends in the expected manner bathes in their smiles of approval; living in harmony with others allows one to bathe in the dew of laughter. But this pleasant order hangs on a fragile balance. You could tell your friend that you are on the brink of suicide and you will surely bathe in the shards of gossip. Treachery in friendship will choke with weeds the way of your relationship, problems will come your way and you will then bathe in the chill of the night. The concluding stanza goes thus:

*Duna ka nay madungog nga unsa dinha,
Mga paglibak til-as sa hunahuna;
Maugkat na ang mga ginamos unya
Nga gikaligo dugay na sa suka.³⁷*

(Alburo *et. al.*, 1988, vol. 1:186)

None of the figures used in any of the poems above may be said to be original. They are drawn mainly from popular resources, used and reused in poem after poem and by writer after writer. The words may vary but the concept remains the same.

Rote seems to play a large part in traditional Cebuano verse, whether oral or written. Poets have resorted to stock methods, themes, figures, and even phrases common in the social milieu. In 1965, Ricardo Baladray was still using the same technique in *Ang Liso*,³⁸ proof of the durability of these materials in the Sugbuanon imagination. It might also signify the observation of Mojares that "Cebuano poetry seemed mired in tradition" (Mojares in Alburo *et. al.*, 1988, vol. 2:3). About this time, however, Cebuano verse has entered another phase of its evolution in the works of college-bred writers who no longer depend on folk resources for their creativity.

We are closer now to the poets who have acted as gurus to Myke Obenieta's generation, Ernesto Lariosa, Junne Cañizares, Pantaleon Auman, Rogelio Pono, Temistokles Adlawan, Robert Lim, Leo Bob Flores, and Ricardo Patalinghug, to name a few. The themes, methods, and subjects of the *balak* have become more sophisticated, infected, one might say, by western models. The *tagay* remains alive as the locus for passing on the reason and rhyme of the poetic passion. But the ghosts around the circle of the cup are no longer just the faceless, and often nameless bards of the tribe. There are strange guests haunting the mind and the imagination, speaking in other tongues, in accents so inviting and profound. Some of these guests are women.

Women writing

It may be impossible to prove that the entry of women writers has strongly affected the landscape of contemporary Cebuano verse. But it is important to note how women writing brought in new dimensions of thought and feeling to complement the literature of the canon as we might refer to it in general. More women have entered the literary mainstream over the last fifty years. Predictably, the women have their own things to say at last. The silent or silenced woman has broken through and discovered that she has something to say of her own—thoughts, feelings, and experiences that had been ignored or set aside as unimportant because they dealt only with the private and intimate world of domesticity and childbearing. After centuries of modeling after the men, the women might be coming into a usage of language distinctively their own. Thus, women writing has broadened the contemporary literary terrain in both style and content.

Today women no longer have to sit at the edge of the *tagay*. They have learned to form circles of their own, not necessarily around whisky or tuba, but around work which women do by virtue of their sexuality or gender. The women

have arrived, full-throated and with a new confidence in their own ability to harness the power of words.

Women writing in Cebu

The number of women poets writing in Cebuano has been steadily growing. But my own introduction to Cebuano women poets came in the works of Ester Tapia and Erlinda Alburo. A few notes first on these two poets.

Ester Tapia started writing, small poems of exquisite lyricism in both English and Cebuano. She was married then to the poet Vicente Bandillo. For many years she played the role of the self-effacing wife. Hence some of her earlier works were published in her byline of Ester Bandillo. When her marriage to Bandillo was annulled she reverted to her maiden name which she has been using ever since.

Erlinda Alburo holds a Ph.D. in English from Silliman University, one of the country's first institutions of higher learning to set up a Creative Writing Program. Since finishing her degree in the late 80s, she had gone on to work extensively on Cebuano Studies at the University of San Carlos, concentrating on Cebuano Literature and cultural history. She also began writing poetry in Sugbuanon.³⁹ Alburo writes in the folksy style, using traditional rhyme and measure. But the humor and irony in her treatment of her themes give her works a contemporary flavor.

In earlier times women writing have limited stylistic options. Male prerogatives have dominated the literary canon for as long as anyone can remember. If this is so in a general sense, it is even more so in the love poem, whether in Cebuano or in English. There is no tradition of women writing love poems in Cebuano. While the men have ranted, raved, and pulled through decades of the *tagay*, *balak*, *amoral*, and *bugal-bugal*, women have kept their thoughts mostly to themselves. They wrote letters or kept diaries and journals but hid these

works from the public eye. Filipino women writing in English have the entire Western tradition from which to validate their works. Women writing in the native language hardly had anything within the culture to provide a back up of tradition.

The early Ester Tapia did not write love poems. She wrote short lyrical pieces which have a dreamlike or surreal quality. Though her works may not have anything directly to do with man-woman relationship, they do provide a key to a woman's innerscape. In *Nanalingsing ang ulan*,⁴⁰ she writes:

*nanalingsing ang ulan
ibabaw sa atop ug nanggamot
ania kita sa kadahonan sa ilawom
sa lasang so katulogon
ang atong buhok nagtubo
ang atong mga kuko migimok
sa tabunok nga sabakan sa ulan⁴¹*

(Tapia in Alunan, 1999)

The tone is soft and the rhythm is irregular, the flow and the pauses are indeterminate as in the ebb and flow of consciousness and sleep in the dream state. Yet even in this semi-conscious state one catches hints of a lively sensuality:

*sa kasikas sa sandayong
ug mubong mga balisbisan
may mga langgam mikapakapa
ang iyang balhibo
nangatagak sa atong mga palad.⁴²*

The poem reveals an inscape of sounds. So delicate and intense is the sensibility of the female persona that sound becomes tactile, the unseen birds fluttering in the eaves are apprehended as intensely as feathers falling on the open palms. In *Ang Banga*, Tapia evokes the sense of water, wetness, the sound made by water inside a jar, water weighing on every

strand of hair, water in the very fibers of the fabric coiled to support the jar on her head:

*Gisapwang ko sa akong duha ka palad
Ang hagawhaw sa napukawng tubig
Ang hinaganas sa ilang kahimungawong⁴³*

(Tapia in Alunan, 1999)

The overwhelming clarity of this sensation is the poem's epiphany. The world is brimful with water, the jar on her head, her hair, her clothes, the road floods with water at her every step. Tapia's persona evokes a fully aroused female sensibility responding to both an inner and outer state of being. She does not make any hard-fisted attempt to confine the poem's meaning to a sharply etched idea, but leaves the images to dissolve and fuse into the sensations they evoke so powerfully.

If Tapia is preoccupied with the inner landscape of the psyche, Albuero is more concerned with the social scene. Her poem *Padulong sa Baybayon*⁴⁴ is uttered by a wife who has seen better times:

*Kagabii dihasa nayunyon tang higdaanan
sinalipdan sa naya'yang tabil sa tamboanan
mihagawhaw kag sugyol sa sinayon
nga mangikyas kita sa baybayon
diin ang dila sa hangin maparatparat
dayon sa dagat kita manglayat*

*manginhas kasag ug tamala nga makilaw
didto sa landong sa lubi diin way kisaw
magtiniil kita, sumala ba, sa kainit sa balas,
bisan kon ta-awon mora' nya ta'g ihalas.⁴⁵*

(Albuero in Alunan, 1999)

Lovers must eventually contend with social and economic realities. Love must be won against circumstances inimical to it, such as poverty and illness and environmental degradation. The wife's honesty cannot be bent, it sees clearly into the straitened conditions of her life. But her memory is alive with remembered pleasures such as the salt taste of the wind, walking barefoot on hot sand, even a sexual romp behind a big rock once upon a time. Without rancor and bitterness, she accepts what she has to bear and remains loving despite her circumstances.

*Dinhi na lang la sa barong-barong mangiyawat
Manursi sa gugmang buhi pa bisag nagkabayat⁴⁶*

Uttered without fanfare, the statement hews close to women's realities and provides a glimpse of the complexity of their attitude towards their relationships. Severely unromantic, the poem dramatizes without straining the barriers of credibility the strength and loyalty of a woman's love.

We have not encountered love poems by women in Cebuano parallel to those written by men, say the kind written by Carlos P. Garcia in his heyday. Not until the 90s anyway, and certainly not in Garcia's style. In the past women wrote, if at all, about home, children, friendship, church, and country. They kept their lust and their anger out of print. Generations of men celebrated in verse the beauty of women, or mourned their lost loves. They ranted about cold-hearted women, their shallowness, vanity, and pride. The world took for granted the silence of women as the normal order of things, in the same way that it took for granted their absence from the drinking circle.

Both Tapia and Albuero might have sat at the fringe of many a *tagay* in which their men were participants. But in dealing with their own materials they had an entirely different frame of reference to work from. One of this is the taboo against

expressions of female sexuality. Good women do not talk about such things, whatever they might feel. Restraint is a good thing after all and demonstrates its virtue in the subtleties of Ester Tapia and the down-home tone of Erlinda Alburo. The poetics influencing these women derive more from the particularities of their own experiences than from the clamorous tradition of the *tagay*. They are either privately apprehended, or are shared from the larger tradition of women writing in general.

Alburo's *Akong sonanoy* is a 14-line adaptation of the sonnet, although it fails to approximate all other requirements of the form such as the linear syllabic count and the rhyming pattern. Still, the attempt at form yields admirable economies in the text, seldom encountered in the self-indulgent excesses of the *tagay* tradition. Note the following passage:

*May adlawng modagsa ka ra gayud
Tinawag sa nagtingal nakong pangandoy
Magdalag sulo nga mao gayuy mohaling
Ug mopa-agiw unya niining nagsampong
Sa buot nang mobangon kong kasingkasing.⁴⁷*

(Alburo, Almerino and Tapia, 1999)

The poem is about unrequited love. A bit of hyperbole in the tone and imagery gives the poem a gentle irony that distinguishes it from the usual run of poems about loss.

Sinug-ang

Younger women poets are less restricted than either Tapia or Alburo. Sometime in the mid-90s Catherine Viado writes,

*Natanggong taliwala
Sa dalan
Gigakos ko ikaw
Sulod sa akong hunahuna⁴⁸*

(Viado in Alunan, 1999,)

Such frankness had never been exercised before. It is only a matter of time before Corazon Almerino enters the scene. In 1999, Alburo, Tapia, and Almenino came out with a collection of poems in a volume entitled *Sinug-ang*, a book concept derived from the *sug-angan*, the traditional three-legged native stove or the tripod. The three poets are the three legs of the tripod or three stones of a hearth. They each produced poetry for 21 large themes. Almerino's *Tubag sa Manananggal (Human Hukmi sa Ginoo)*⁴⁹ truly expresses the liberation of women from the imaginative shackles of the earlier conditions in which women thrived.

*Tam-is ra ba
Kaayo ang akong pagkahinanok,
Kay layo ang kab-ot sa akong
Mga pako. Walay manghulga nako
Og asin o abo. Walay holy water
Nga molimpyo sa akong lawas.*

*Lami kaayo ang mga tawo,
Ug tanan kabahin nila.
Lami kaayo. Kana bang kagumkom.
Aslom-aslom. Parat-parat. Tam-is...*

*Mananggal bitaw ko, Lord.
Akong mga pako makakab-ot
Og mga bitoon. Akong dila
Motila sa kinahiladmang dapit.*⁵⁰

(Alburo, Almerino, and Tapia, 1999)

In this poem Almerino tackles the issue of female sexuality and sensuality and claims fearlessly as her human right.

In effect she rejects the taboo on women's expression on matters of love and sex. This taboo might also be responsible for the silence of women in the game of love poetry. But the *Manananggal* poem also doublespeaks. This is not just about female sensuality, but about the fight of women to liberate themselves from the basic domesticity in which they had been trapped for generations, and to participate in the creative process. Almerino claims for women the freedom to use language to express their desire. The woman, too, may celebrate humanity in verse, and especially her own.

A tentative proposition

The entry of women into poetry in Cebuano balances the codes of poetic expression. Listen to Almerino toughing it up as she grieves for a lover's departure:

*Oy, oy, ayaw'g patuy-asik
 Anang imong mga saad,
 Nga mosuwat ka, mobalik ka
 Dinhi sunod tuig, ug uban pang
 Padugang sa pusta.
 Maayong masayud ka
 Nga kanang tanan nalista
 Na sa akong pahak.
 Sa akong bahin
 Dali ra kang kalimtan.
 Ihubog-hubog ra na nako,
 Ug sagunsong yuppyup
 Sa sigarilyo. Erase dayon.*

Sayon ra lagi na!

Bitaw, tingalig sayon ra.⁵¹

(Alburo, Almerino and Tapia, 1999)

Myke Obenieta has this very tender love poem, *Sa Atong Panagkuyog, Ug Nganong Dili Ko Usahay Moagbay Nimo*. It is short enough to be read in its entirety.

*Ayaw kahibuong nganong sa atong
panagkuyog kutob ra ko's honghong,
nganong ang akong bukton
sa iniong abaga dili motugdon.*

*Kini kay kasingkasing mo hugot kong
gikuptan sa tuo kong kamot
samtang ang pikas gasukod,
gadangaw sa gilapdon sa panganod.*

*Kon bug-at og kamot ang mangangayam,
kining gugma ko gaan samas' langgam.⁵²*

This is no longer the overpowering voice of the male remorselessly possessing and constructing its subject. The persona exhibits both humility and sensitivity, and a genuine and carefully restrained tenderness, a new note in Cebuano verse. Does this imply that Myke has been listening to other voices, his mother's perhaps, and other women poets who have led him to other terrains of sensibility than those he would find at the *tagay*?

A poem by Adonis Durado entitled *Balak Alang kang Yana* deals with his anticipation of the birth of his firstborn. We discover a rare note of tenderness in this poem, more remarkable for the reason that it comes from a father. Durado's persona contemplates the renewal that comes with the birth of a child. Even old routines take on a new meaning; random events prove meaningful in hindsight; we gain a second chance; we learn new ways to utter love. We experience rebirth, the dead returning to reclaim everything in life that they had left behind.

*Sa imong pagbutho, dungan ba sab kahang
 makaplagaan sa himungaan
 Ang gapiyak-piyak, nagkatibulaag niyang
 mga piso—sa wala pa ang takna
 Nga gidahik sa mananagat ang baruto niyang
 gituya sa bag-ong taob?
 Human, sayod ka, nga sa di mo pa malitok
 ang unang uha, uban sa paglunga
 Sa unang hinog nga kaymito nga namituon
 sa ngiob niini nga punuan,
 Gaapong kanunay ang akong mga palad
 alang sa imong pagkapungga.⁵³*

‘Upon your arrival, will the hen find / her crying scattered chicks before the time / the boatman drags in his boat rocked by the new tide? / Well then, you must know that before you could utter your first cry, along with / the first ripe *caimito* sparkling in the shadowy tree, / I wait eagerly, open-palmed, for your falling.’ (Trans. Alunan)

We sense in Durado’s poem a new depth of feeling and sincerity. One may argue that the work comes at another time and shares from other influences aside from tradition. On the other hand, we may consider the possibility of women writing as an influence in the new voices that we are hearing these days from our poets, men and women both.

May we attribute these positive developments in literature to women writing? This paper does not really try to prove it. It does, however, suggest its possibility. We should be reading more of these changes as women move confidently into the mainstream of literary arts, form circles of their own around drink, or food, or fire and shelter, playing their own rituals of pleasure and joy and pain, to which they may or may not invite the men. Should it be a man’s fate to sit within or out in the fringes of these circles, may he too learn the wisdom and

humility that had stayed women through generations of silence, from which, patiently and purposefully, they devised the courage and the means to free the words in their own mind and heart.

Tagay niining malipayong hitaboa! Og padayunon ang pagmugna sa balak sa tinuboang dila! Drink to this happy event. And go on writing/crafting the *balak* in the native tongue.

Notes

- ¹ I'll say no to you in a poem.
- ² *Bisayang daku* or true-blue Bisaya
- ³ Coconut palm wine
- ⁴ The drinking buddy tasked to keep the glasses filled
- ⁵ Acronym for *Bathalan-ong halad sa dagang* (trans. 'Divine offering from the quill'), largest aggrupation of Cebuano writers coming from as far north as Manila and all the way to the far south in Mindanao
- ⁶ 'Moon, you are beautiful, just like the maiden I love'
- ⁷ Title of a song, trans. 'Living dead'
- ⁸ Poet, maker of verse
- ⁹ Gardeopatra Quijano, "Kon," *Sugbuanong Balak*, Vol 1, p. 208-209
- ¹⁰ Hilda Montaire, Fe Remotigue, and Ester Tapia Bandillo
- ¹¹ Cf. 17, below
- ¹² A musical joust, very often, on the theme of love.
- ¹³ Elegant speech or expression. It could also refer to a person who knows how to use elegant language.
- ¹⁴ *Amoral* —a barrage of florid speech commonly found in the popular *balak* or in love letters
- ¹⁵ A form of Cebuano folk poetry
- ¹⁶ 'I'd rather ride the waves, / not the peaceful sea / The storm could not drown me / But loneliness surely will. // The violence of the south wind / I gladly brave with my boat / And if I am covered by seaweed / I will bear it, *Inday*, for your sake'
- ¹⁷ *Duplo* is a poetic joust on the theme of love. The jousters take traditional roles, the man plays the role of the aggressive lover

arguing for his love, the woman raises arguments to counteract the man's advances which the man attempts to overcome with more arguments of his own. Basically spontaneous, the *duplo* relies for effects on familiar phraseology shared by the joustors within the culture.

- 18 'If you truly love me / Plumb the deepest of a pool / Not coming up until / You can bring up with you the root of the sun // Uncle, if you want to marry me / There's our house, fix it / Don't use rattan as binder / Use instead the power of your saliva // Uncle, if you wish to marry / There's our house / It is roofed with cogon / Roof it now with dove feathers // Uncle, if you wish to marry me / There is our house / It's floor is made of bamboo / Change it with pure gold.' (Trans. Alunan)
- 19 'Impossible for me to forget you / Goddess whom I worshipped in secret / For if you are not inside my heart / I'll have nothing at all. *Inday*, I'll have nothing at all // ray of moonlight, shard of a star. Left to stay in this dreary world / If you wish not to be admired / Then to heavens your beauty return.' (Trans. Alunan)
- 20 *Bugal-bugal*—ironic and sarcastic speech intended to insult or demean its subject or the addressee
- 21 'I wish to unravel you with words / I wish to put your charms together / To melt it in water and then to drink.'
(Trans. Simeon Dumdum)
- 22 'Because / There are many thieves of affection / There are those hungry for joy / And blind to beauty.' (Trans. Alunan)
- 23 'May I have, *Inday*, your beauty / I will melt in a cup of joy. / Add to it lots of love and devotion / And then I'll drink it with bread.' (Trans. Mojares)
- 24 'Perchance the sun might leap down to its doom / and the moon might refuse to shine, / I still would see your lovely image, / in the blue heavens of my daydreaming.' (Trans. Alunan)
- 25 'If you will give your hand and life to me / I will carry you to my hut / and there in the nest of our love / you, my lone muse and king, / will drink love's wine of joy with me, / together we will

drink the bitter bile of pain, / companions always in light and in darkness, / until we come to the very edge of heaven.'

(Trans. Alunan)

²⁶ 'And his thing? / What a sight! / It bears the dollar sign / By the hairy root! / Especially when he offers you / That ... Wow, weapon of steel? / You'll forget all about yesterday, today and tomorrow! / You could cry out, I don't care what may happen! / I don't care if it tears my uhrmm!' (Trans. Alunan)

²⁷ Literally, 'iron sword,' referring to the penis in erection

²⁸ 'Carries the dollar sign/ At the hairy base'

²⁹ 'Arrogance, pride'

³⁰ Philippine mahogany

³¹ A tree fern with broad sword-like simple leaves endemic to the tropical forest and much appreciated in the Philippines as an ornamental plant.

³² 'Therefore it is never never right/ To act in arrogance and pride / Because the Lord would never allow / The poor to be downtrodden.' (Trans. Alunan)

³³ 'At the highest point of a cloud'

³⁴ 'Beauty of heaven beyond compare, / A garden not found on earth / Garden that weaves stories, / All these will greet my sight.' (Trans. Bandillo)

³⁵ 'Made by my deceitful mind'

³⁶ 'Bathing without water'—figuratively it means being caught or immersed in an overpowering situation.

³⁷ 'You will then hear all kinds of talk, / Backbiting, which are worms to the mind; / *Ginamos* taken out at last / That had long been bathed in vinegar.' (Trans. Alunan) Ripened *ginamos* or salted fish gives off a rotten smell; hence it is an apt and popular metaphor for unsavory secrets exposed. One way to eat *ginamos* is to season it with vinegar—an irresistible combination to the connoisseur. The last line implies that gossip is like feasting on other people's rotten secrets.

³⁸ 'The seed'

³⁹ Sugbuanon and Cebuano are terms used alternatively in this presentation. They may refer to both the language and the widespread ethnolinguistic culture it covers. Cebuano or

Sugbuanon is spoken not only in Cebu but also, with some dialectal variations, in most places in Mindanao, all of Bohol, parts of Negros Island, Leyte, and the Biliran Islands.

⁴⁰ 'The rain sprouts'

⁴¹ 'The rain sprouts / on the rooftops / here we are among the leaves under the forest of sleep / our hair lengthens / our fingernails quiver / in the rich womb of the rain.' (Trans. Alunan)

⁴² 'In the rustle of rainspouts / in the low eaves of houses, / there are birds beating their wings / their feathers / flutter into our open palms' (Trans. Alunan)

⁴³ 'On my two palms I hold / The whisper of roused water / The rush of their awakening' (Trans. Alunan)

⁴⁴ 'Going to the beach'

⁴⁵ 'Last night there on our sagging bed / shielded only by the window's ragged drapes / you whispered, sort of, a wild invitation, / Let's go to the beach / where the tongue of the wind tastes of salt / then into the sea let us jump, / gather sandcrabs and *tamala*, eat them raw / under the shadow of a coco tree where everything's still, / we shall walk barefoot, shan't we, in the heated sand.' (Trans. Alunan)

⁴⁶ 'Let's just make the best of things here in our hut / Mend our love, still alive although in tatters.' (Trans. Alunan)

⁴⁷ 'The day will come when you will be washed in / Summoned by my dying dreams, / Carrying a torch that will ignite / And burn to ashes these barriers / To my heart as it strives for resurrection.' (Trans. Alunan)

⁴⁸ 'Stranded in the midst / of the Avenue / I embrace you / in my mind.' (Trans. Alunan)

⁴⁹ Trans. 'The *manananggal* answers God (after the Judgment)'—The *manananggal* is a mythic creature. It has a regular human form but when it wishes to fly, it detaches the lower half of its body from the waist down (root *tanggal*, 'to remove') and hides it. Just before daylight, it goes back to its lower half and reattaches itself to it. To prevent a *manananggal* from returning to its lower half, one may sprinkle it with salt or ashes, or holy water.

⁵⁰ Trans. 'So very sweet / my deep slumber / and very far is the reach / of my wings. / No one to threaten me there / with salt or ashes. No holy water / to cleanse my body. // The human is so

delicious / every part of it / is tasty. So crunchy / sourish, salt,
sweetish. // True, I am a *manananggal*, Lord, / My wings can
reach / for the stars. My tongue / can lick the deepest parts.'
(Trans. Alunan)

⁵¹ 'No, do not patronize me / With promises / To write, to return
/ Next year, don't call my bets / And raise the ante. You should
know / All this is written / In my jaded brain. / For my part, /
You're so easy to forget— // Drown myself in drink, / take
endless drags / of this cigarette. Erased instantly. // It would be
easy! // True, I hope it'd be easy.' (Trans. Alunan)

⁵² 'As we go together, why don't I put my arm around your
shoulder / Don't wonder why, as we go / together, all I could
do is whisper, / why upon your shoulder my arm / never falls /
/ This is because your heart I hold // tightly in my right hand /
while my left is measuring, / spanning the breadth of clouds. //
If the hunter's hands are heavy, / my love for you is as light as
a bird.'

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