POINT COUNTERPOINT OF LANGUAGES: San Juan's Estrangement-Effects

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E. San Juan, Jr.'s latest work is not a polysyllabic, hard-hitting work of critical analysis like those he is best known for. Instead, it is a poetry-filled work entitled *Baljkbayang Mahal/Passages from Exile.* This work is a collection of old and new poems and also includes a long essay on exile and diaspora entitled "Sa Loob at Labas ng Bayan Kong Sawi: Emergency Signals from a Filipino Exile." One of the most striking features of the work is the bevy of languages represented. The poems appear in their original forms in either Filipino or English. A few poems also appear with French and Chinese translations accompanying them, and there are poems in Spanish and Italian. Most of the 35 poems are accompanied by a translation into at least one other language. Some poems, like "Mask of the Poet," appear in English and Filipino with German and Russian translations.

The most consistent features of San Juan's poems are his use of free verse and his gift of allusion. The poetry

reminds one of T.S. Eliot in its deluge of allusions and its use of multiple languages. The author's sweeping knowledge of geography, history, politics, religion, and literature blossoms in poetry. Most of San Juan's work, including his poetry, is political and looks outward upon the world. For example, the poem "Spring in Den Haag, Nederland, 25 March 2007" commemorates the Permanent People's Tribunal's verdict of "'Guilty!' for the U.S.-Arroyo regime" (11). The poem also mockingly contrasts the peacefulness of the Dutch city of The Hague with the "murders and abuses" (11) still found in the Philippines despite the findings of the Permanent People's Tribunal, the subtle point being that the sense of satisfaction the speaker receives from the verdict does not translate into action in his homeland—the verdict does not stop the suffering half a world away. The poem ends with hope: through continued and renewed struggle, justice will be found, "Your lips breaking apart the chains binding the morning's/sunburst—"(12). The Arroyo regime will be defeated, and peace will prevail.

The most enjoyable poem by far is "Vicissitudes of the Love and Death of Vladimir Mayakovsky." In line with the "Slap in the Face of Public Taste" demanded by the Russian Futurist Manifesto written by David Burliuk, Alexander Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Victor Khlevnikov on December 15, 1913, the poem uses as many combinations of "arbitrary and derivative words" (Burliuk et al) as can be imagined. Filled with examples "of the principles that the Futurists worshiped—technology, speed, efficiency, and noise" (Cundy 349) and allusions to Mayakovsky's life and works, the poem races past Mayakovsky's death and projects the Futurist ideas into the future. In the poem, San Juan also creates varied images of Mayakovsky's body joining with a machine, in imitation of Mayakovsky's fascination with the machines: "Among the Russian Futurists, [Mayakovsky] was the closest to the Constructivists and Italian Futurists... he consistently brought machines to life" (Klanderud 41).

Mayakovsky was fascinated with the idea of things coming to life and people joining with machines, and this poem celebrates Mayakovsky in just such a way, as his "submarine catacombs" shoot "neon x-rays," and his "eyes . . . are embalmed gas jets/tied to the radiator of [his] solar plexus" (San Juan 56). The poetic homage to Mayakovsky zips by on the page filled with "ZOOM" and "SOS" in Futurist style.

The final work in the book is "Sa Loob at Labas Ng Bayan Kon Sawi: Emergency Signals from a Filipino Exile." This essay pulls together journal segments "written in the mid-1990s" (San Juan 124) on the meaning of the word "exile." San Juan begins with a brief history of the reality of exile in recent Filipino history. Examples from the Filipino diaspora are linked to history, definitions, and theoretical discussions to examine from many angles what exile means to Filipinos. The essay pauses at one point to demand, "We Filipinos need a cartography and a geopolitical project for the masses in diaspora, not for the elite in exile" (139). But the word exile is slippery. An example of one of the many facets of the word begins with the "Filipino swamp settlers of St. Malo" (140) in Louisiana. This settlement existed from 1825-1915, when it was finally wiped out by a hurricane. San Juan then reports that the Burtanog sisters, descendents of the St. Malo residents, were recently interviewed by filmmaker Renee Tajima. They do not consider themselves exiles or in diaspora, but rather Southern white women of Louisiana. Exile is a complex word, and San Juan's essay analyzes it thoroughly through history, politics, personal experience, poetry, and theory.

"In time of emergency," he writes, "Trotsky's strategic stance of waiting-in-exile proves to be the time of pregnancy, of gestation and the emergence of new things." He continues, "Apart from being a symptom of defeat, exile then can also serve as a weapon of resistance" (147). San Juan is never without hope, and his conclusion reflects that tendency on the part of