

Editor's Note

SEARCHING FOR STRUCTURES OF HOPE FOR 21ST CENTURY FILIPINOS

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Professor Carlos Aureus, in the opening essay of this ***DILIMAN REVIEW*** 2011, volume 58, disagrees with some post-modern theorists/contemporary 21st thinkers who sense a vacuum of meaning and purpose, who believe that since reality is unstructured, fiction is unstructured as well. In contrast, Aureus strongly asserts that fiction is or should be structured and that its structure is comic. The narrative sensibility is purposive and hopeful. It works towards clear/happy endings.

Aureus further defends his choice to search for meaning in human experience in response to those who label this kind of optimism as "wishful thinking" by the "feeble minded" or as "sentimental". He relates an epiphany he experienced on his way back to UP Diliman after one Sunday afternoon walk at Quezon Memorial on a dull day—"the sky was dull, the people were dull, the world was dull, and I was dull". (7) On the way back to the Faculty Center, aboard a *waluhan* jeepney, he placed a baby's feet on his lap to help a young mother who was worried that her baby's feet would be crushed. When she alighted, the young mother gave him "a real smile, a beautiful smile, a certain smile". (8)...

When I looked around, suddenly the dullness had disappeared. The sky was clear, the grass was green, the UP Administration building for the first time appeared in Cinemascope and Technicolor.. I never saw that woman again...What was important was her effect on me. In the midst of ugliness around me, I met a madonna and child. The beauty and sincerity of that young mother's smile of gratitude in a world where such smiles no

longer exist, gave meaning and purpose to my life, transforming a totally dull, purposeless afternoon into one full of meaning and purpose.(8)

This tone is what I too would like to push for writers/artists/performers, social scientists, scientists, architects, engineers, managers, scholars—EVERYONE committed to making sense of the personal and social worlds we live in through our research and work (poetry, plays, paintings, sculptures, dams, buildings, bridges, monuments, GO and NGO programs and projects, investment portfolios, cash management.

For Cyril Conde, the search for meaning of the *ASOG* culture in the *Ibalong* epic narrative of Bikol, particularly where Mt. Asog stands, gave him insights into the modes of “worlding” by colonial Spain of the Asogs starting 1569 and the latter’s mode of resistance. These modes of resistance included the preservation of their oral tradition in the continuous transmission of the *Ibalong* by the Agtas of Mt. Asog through the centuries; the belief that the *asog* had a direct connection to god through *gugurang* rituals and that the *asog* could be female or male although the females were originally tasked to perform rituals. This sharing of women’s religious power by men is not viewed by the Agtas as “homosexuality” (as seen in the western context of sexual binaries) but as men’s flexibility and respect for women’s power.(30)

Moreover, in *Ibalong*, one of the three heroes, Handyong, created “a civilization with just laws, system of writing, invention of household furniture, farming instruments, boats and architecture”.(31) This means that pre-colonial Bikol was not “uncivilized” before the coming of the Spaniards.

Waldo Petralba’s symptomatic reading of Eric Gamalinda’s novel, *Empire of Memory* (Anvil 1992) as “historiographic metafiction” problematizes what positivist historians consider to be their goal – objective, “factual” histories—in contrast to fiction which is a product of imagination. (old pp. 71 & 74/ 1st page and 4th page of article)

Petralba asserts that "In *Empire of Memory*, it is the dictator's (Ferdinand Marcos') official histories manufactured by government agencies and institutions that are exposed as teleological and ideological constructions meant to legitimize the New Society." Moreover, two public relations officers are made to conjure privileged blood lines for the First Lady. (old p. 72 or 2nd page of article)

Petralba's other assertion is that "historiographic metafiction such as *Empire* becomes an effective tool for counter memory, a postcolonial source of alternative truths and identities that undermines neo-colonial and hegemonic assumptions and practices of grand narratives and universalizing epistemologies".(14th page or , old p. 84). Thus, Petralba's project of studying the workings of historiographic metafiction to dismantle western metanarratives and universal knowledge, is an excellent example of how, after deconstructing colonial, neo-colonial "regimes of truth", also self-serving Filipino knowledges, programs and projects, we can retrieve or construct new histories/modes of understanding our personal and social problems that will more effectively humanize us Filipinos.

Grace Subido highlights "the procedural, experimental – and here" (not pre-packaged) poetry of Baguio-based poet, Frank Cimatú (91-92, 3rd and 4th pages of article). Cimatú's poetry exhibit open structures that welcome possibilities, choices and chance. Subido further asserts that the recurring patterns in Cimatú's poems "foreground irony and paradox where the past mingles with the present ...death and destruction slide into rebirth..." (102 or 13th page of article). Subido quotes what Cimatú said in an interview:

I bleed, I find things out, it's me making sense of things that I have no control over and I don't even expect poetry to save me. I know it's not going to save the world, but it's going to tell me who I am, who I was, and it's a way of saying that I exist...

The irony is that although scaling down the western Romantic notion that poets are the legislators of the world whose visions will save it, Cimatu admits that poetry will give him self-knowledge and mark his place in time and space. In a society where some political, religious, academic leaders have no self-knowledge or hide behind their front stage/oftentimes false selves, Cimatu's incitefully-intelligent poems fill us with hope.

"Presidential Sestina aka The Blind Date" play with the names Philippine Presidents up to the present Aquino and has a line that says "Our generation's fascination with presidents is Oedipal...killing his father to save us..." (92-94). "Desaparecido/ Disaparadiso" focuses on the theme of disappearance. (98) "The End" sees a world of uncertainty which could be recuperated instead as "a world of anticipation and possibility". (104)

Noel Moratilla in "Speaking of the Subaltern: Subjectivities and Resistance in the Testimonial Narratives of Workers" asserts that *testimonios* have become an important instrument for the transgressive acts of workers as they speak in their own voice about the real conditions in the work place. These *testimonios* in letter form are "addressed to NGOs or employers themselves". Some letters in the archives of the AMLC (Archdiocese of the Manila Labor Center) exposed the unfair, even "racist" actions of heads of religious institutions like schools managed by nuns.(46). That such acts of resistance by the "subjugated" classes can emerge in a society with a long history of Catholic religious hegemony gives us hope that our working class can fight for their rights.

Many of the narratives reveal firmness, fortitude, and courage in the face of harassment and uncertainty, if only to affirm what is supposed to be right and ethical. This despite the very possibility of losing their jobs and therefore the means to support their families. (50)

Finally, Moratilla asserts that *testimonios* are not merely textual or symbolic. Their "success is measured strategically against normative criteria". The testimonies are not just critical,

these are also liberative. They open spaces which can give a glimpse of the utopian.(60).

"Practical Arts" by Mary Jessel B. Duque seems to say that some people's lives have predetermined ends. Young Lester had a "history" of petty thefts, the most recent ones involving the wedding ring of Twinkle who used to live with Lester's family, the old hubcaps and tires of his father's pedicab which his father and Lester use for their *pasada* and their family' source of income, and several hundreds from his own best friend (this story's narrator) who had always defended him against Uncle Bien, Lester's dad. When Uncle Bien pursued Lester with a screw driver in his hiding place between two walls, Uncle Bien instead punctured himself. The narrator and Lester's mother, Emily, rushed Uncle Bien to the hospital, and forgot about Lester. That same night, Lester figured out which knot was best, then put the knotted clothesline around his neck and unto wooden beams at the side of the house. The 'bad seed' mets his end, the neighbors concluded.

"Starlet Suicide, Splat Theory: A Performance Text" by Yason Banal like "Practical Arts" seems like a dark text , a *mise en scene* One has to read it to appreciate the "performance" of the text. For instance, one can laugh or snicker at Stella Strada's linguistic foible—"IT'S A CRAZY PLANETS !", then explore with Banal the homonyms of the words in that line like IT'S = ITCH, EIGHT, EACH and their intertexts. One can hardly summarize the three suicide notes which Banal forwards with imagined dialogues between starlets and media people and his almost endless allusions to iconic characters of foreign and local popular culture. One just has to experience the text as it splats all over the reader.

What I consider a beam of hope in these two dark texts of Duque and Banal is that both writers are young and have the courage to experiment. They have decades of productive work ahead of them as writers of fiction, scriptwriters for television and cinema, performance artists, faculty of this national university.

May their tribe increase.