

Editor's Note

A LEGACY OF ACTIVISM IN THE ARTS

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We are proud to present this DILIMAN REVIEW, Volume 56, Numbers 1-4 (2009) as Anniversary Edition I to celebrate the first anniversary after the 100 years of existence of the University of the Philippines (1908-2008)

The state university, now the national university of the Philippines, has not swerved from its long history of radical praxis, not even during the worst stages of military rule during the Marcos Dictatorship.

This legacy of radicalism is again strongly articulated in this DILIMAN REVIEW collection of creative non-fiction, critical essays, an interview, a play BY and ON "legendary", multi-awarded, recognized activists-artists—LORENA BARROS, LITO CASAJE, REUEL M. AGUILA, MERCEDITAS MANAGO-ALEXANDER—as well as narratives about the lives of our unsung/silenced heroes like the "Filipina maid".

Lorena Morelos Barros (1948-1974) "earned" her legendary status by loudly protesting the dictator at U.P. Diliman as a MAKIBAKA (Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan) founder during the period that included the First Quarter Storm (FQS, 1970) and by going underground in 1972 when Marcos declared martial law. Then she was captured, incarcerated but was able to escape. She was ambushed and killed by the military in 1974. (Concepcion 75). Lorena was only 26 years young.

Mary Grace R. Concepcion in “ ‘WE ARE LEARNING TO OVERCOME’: Transformation and Social Praxis in the Life and Poems of Lorena Barros” does an extensive survey of the historical, biographical and critical literature on Barros (e.g., Ramon M. Bernardo, Alex Dacanay, Maita Gomez, Lilia Quindoza Santiago, Gelacio Guillermo, Alice Guillermo, Jose F. Lacaba) by her comrades and friends in the national democratic movement, as well as those “fellow travellers” /non-ND but anti-Marcos academics/artists like UP Professor, now University Professor Emeritus Gemino H. Abad and the late Professor Ophelia A. Dimalanta of the University of Santo Tomas. (Concepcion 75-81, 100-102)

The other significance of Concepcion’s study is her close readings of the relatively unknown “early” poems of Lorena Barros published in the PHILIPPINE COLLEGIAN as well as her later revolutionary poems. Unfortunately, many of the latter which were being kept by Barros’ mother and sisters were lost when their family home in Muntinlupa was inundated by a flood. (Concepcion 77).

Multi-awarded, activist playwright Lito Casaje shares his “Shooting the Boys”, a finalist in the 1990 Playwriting Competition at the University of Exeter in England, with us through DILIMAN REVIEW. According to Casaje, the play is a critique of the pedophilia/poverty nexus being foregrounded as the thematics of Francis Coppola’s movie “Apocalypse Now” which was being filmed in Pagsanjan, Laguna in 1976. The film made “the lure of child prostitution as the practical answer to feed the immorally hungry community.”

Theater critic Gibbs Cadiz asserts that the Casaje’s play is “a precisely drawn study of how poverty and crime (in this case pedophilia) feed off each other in symbiotic ways... It paints in stark, unblinking pointillist strokes the fictionalist story of John Harvey, a Hollywood actor who blew into town as part of a Chuck Norris movie and chose to overstay in Pagsanjan, Laguna where he maintained a stable of poor kids (often abetted by desperate parents) for his and his clients’ sexual favors. He was eventually deported for his crime” Moreover, Cadiz states that “...as a

document of sordid reality, 'Shooting the Boys' was affecting and eye-opening". (PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER, 5 June 2006).

In 2011, Merceditas Manago-Alexander, a New York-based Filipino ballerina and ballet teacher, will mark her 25th year as a professional dancer in New York, "the dance capital of world". Yet as Philippine-based dance history scholar, Rina Angela Corpus, states in her essay "Merceditas Manago-Alexander: Of Dance and Diaspora"—"Not much has been written about her in contemporary dance history, which is the same predicament faced by many Filipina dance artists who have striven to strike a career in New York and other parts of America, among them Elizabeth Roxas, Kristin Jackson, Marie Alonzo and Paz Tanjuaco".

Corpus in her write-up of her interview with the ballerina, forewards that " Merceditas is part of a number of Filipino dancers who have made a career in dance overseas, enacting the notions of identity, belonging, and citizenship while facing the displacements of living away from their home country, as she (Merceditas) would retell here...". (Corpus 142-143)

Corpus had first met Merceditas in 2007 when the latter performed Malaysian choreographer Joyce Lim's "stolen" of the Dance Space Project at St. Mark's Church in Manhattan. (Corpus 142-143)

Merceditas, who had started formal ballet training at the age of five, then had several years with Ballet Philippines, was recognized when she turned 18 in 1986 by her home university, U.P. Diliman. "U.P. President's Committee on Culture and the Arts gave her the Outstanding Artist Award for representing her country at the Third International Ballet competition in Jackson, Mississippi". (Corpus 144). "The rest is history". (read: It SHOULD be feminist dance history).

Corpus' goals in this dance history research on Merceditas and other "independent women dancers" (found in DEFIANT DAUGHTERS DANCING, 2007, and this DR interview) are to recuperate their voices through Corpus' own work as a scholar

and to encourage other artists-scholars/activists to commit themselves to this significant *makabayan* project (the *bayán* includes those Filipinos in the diaspora). Corpus even provides a materialist feminist framework in her Appendix. (Corpus 156)

"Economic History through the Lens of Literature: A Comparison of the Filipina Maid and her Counterpart in 19th Century France" by Mariam Soraya P. Tuvera, seems like an incredible pairing of two categories that are geographically and historically disparate. However, Tuvera's research into related historical, economic, literary studies (see Works Cited, Tuvera 40-42) gives convincing arguments for structural similarities between the 18th-19th century French maid during the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte and the Industrial Revolution who hailed from rural France and the Filipina domestic /kasambahay of today who works primarily in our National Capital Region (NCR) .

Tuvera's most interesting "argument" of these structural similarities takes the form of her adaptation into Tagalog of Gustav Flaubert's short story, "Un cœur simple" (A Simple Heart). Her essay includes several long excerpts from her Tagalog adaptation.

Flaubert's story is about Felicite, a simple rural maiden who leaves her hometown after being jilted by a local lad with middle class pretensions. This man, after protestations of love over several clandestine meetings with Felicite, convinces her to give in to his carnal desires. He later abandons her when he hooks up with a rich matron. With few opportunities in the city for uneducated young women in workplaces, Felicite becomes a kasambahay and remains faithful to her widowed employer, her two children whom the yaya raises and cares for as her own for 50 years, even after her employer dies. (Tuvera 25-27)

"Sa loob ng halos 50 taon, kinainggitan si Aling Auring ng buong Sitio Muling Pag-asa dahil sa kanyang matapat na kasambahay, si Felicidad. Sa halagang dalawang libong piso bawat buwan, si Felicidad ay nagluto at nag-ayos ng bahay, naglaba, namalantsa, nag-alaga ng manok at baboy, at nanatiling matapat

sa kanyang amo na si Aling Auring, isang taong hindi madaling pakisamahan”.

“The maid is a silent and stoic witness to the vicissitudes of life including personal losses and the eventual death of her employer, who leaves Felicité a modest inheritance. She is sustained by inner strength, profound spirituality, and blind faith in God. In the end, she dies in her employer’s house, deaf and nearly blind, and cared for by someone in the neighborhood where Felicité’s reputation for genuine kindness and fierce loyalty is well known”.

Short fiction also about the adolescent characters – convent-bred colegialas or like those who would grow up to be the employers of kasambahays like Felicite—are the focus of Lauren Dado’s “Best Friends Forever: Female friendship and Gender Performance among Adolescent Characters in Short Fiction.” We shall now have insights into the lives of these women from “exclusive girls schools”.

Using a Butlerian feminist perspective on gender performativity, and applying this to short stories as primary sources, Dado asks; how do the female protagonists perform their gender roles constructed for them by the schools and other institutions; how are differences among women negotiated; are female friendships forged in spite of differences; and in what ways are these friendships exclusionary but also possible sources of female empowerment. (Dado, 1)

Her primary texts include those written by Rosario Lucero (“Tales of a Catholic Girls’ School”), Andrea Pasion (“Vanessa Calling”), Menchu Sarmiento (“The Frog Princess” and Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo’s (“Patriciang Payatot”, “Magic Glasses” and ‘Purita”)

Patriciang Payatot unlike the other female protagonists “who learns to co-exist with mae classmates..” (Dado 6)

"The relations of the female protagonists in the selected texts show two contradictory aspects of female friendships: while serving as a site for growth and emotional support, female friendships can simultaneously maintain borders between girls who embody desirable feminine traits and girls who do not. The standards of desirability are learned through a process of imitation and exclusion within the context of the private school apparatus, the social space where girls of similar age, intelligence, and upbringing are forced to deal with each others' differences and use each other as a mirror for the formation of their gendered identities". (Dado 22)

"Since adolescence is the period where the girl begins to form an identity independent of her mother, the approval of her peers is crucial to how she views and constructs herself. Anna in "Vanessa Calling" is so afraid to be likened to the least desirable girl in class that she betrays Vanessa's trust. Loreta in "The Frog Princess" can never be accepted by her classmates because they follow the lead of their teacher, who declares that she is the very embodiment of what a girl should *not* be like. The relations of these characters show that the maintenance of sororophobia—keeping the Other girl in her "rightful" place within the margins—is one way girls maintain the coherence of their feminine selves. Girls fear the Other because they dread being othered themselves". (Dado 22)

Michael Charleston "Xiao" Briones Chua is a young yet considered foremost historical commentator/consultant of national commemorations in Philippine media today (e.g., "The Bottomline with Boy Abunda", "History with Lourd", "Katipunan" and "Ilustrado".)

In his essay, "Kasaysayan ng Cyberspace, Kasaysayan sa Cyberspace", continues his dialogue with his mentors, peers and students in the academic disciplines of history, journalism and multi media studies.

The context of his “panimulang pagtanaw” is the growing popularity of internet use which started in the 1990s and ballooned at turn of the millennium.

“Sa panimulang pagtanaw na ito, makikita sa kasaysayan ng cyberspace at kasaysayan sa cyberpace ang katotohanan na ang kasaysayan ay para sa lahat. Gayundin ang katotohanan na ang lahat , kapwa ang dalubhasa, may hilig, interes, at estudyante ng kasaysayan, ay may pagkakataong makibahagi sa pagsusulat at paglikha ng kasaysayan”. (Chua 44-45)

Chua undescovers the liberative impulse of cyberspace but also warns that this same openness makes internet users in search of primary sources/ well springs of history also vulnerable to the innocent deconstructions of established “facts” and opinions, as well as malicious acts of distorting histories for personal reasons/gain. (69)

It seems we will need more information about the reliability of digital libraries disseminating primary materials on the Philippine social formation/cultural praxis, especially for those trying to recuperate our narratives—those of our unsung, little known heroes and just those in our network of communities located in our archipelago and in the diaspora.

In the meantime, we will do what another multi-awarded/ multi-talented/revolutionary/ activist—Professor Reuel M. Aguila, Ph.D.—did.

In his narrative ala wall mural Aguila draws sharp details of his lived experiences from the turbulent 1970s in “*Ngunit Wala Akong Litrato Noon Nasa Kolehiyo Ako*”.

No *pangmasang* camera/Kodak Instamatic; much less the more expensive box camera with *Single Lens Reflex*. “*Ngunit wala akong litrato noong nasa kolehiyo ako...*” (Aguila 131-133). That was forty years ago.

Today for reasons he does not understand, suddenly, like an itch that needs to be scratched, because it was vacation time, he went through his files, habitually used notebooks brought everywhere, with some notes teacher made he and his classmates copy, draft of a certain poem, essay, play, short story, souvenirs like a bus ticket and tickets to a movie or play, dried flower, ribbon, candy wrapper, letters, photographs. (loose translation mine, Aguila 133).

"Ayun akong ipinaghehele ng aking ama. Ayon akong tatlong taon at naliligo nang hubad. Ayun akong sa unang bisekleta. Ayon ako sa grade one sa isang munting bayan sa Quezon, bihis na bihis at may kapareha para sa isang folk dance. Ayun ako sa nilipatang bahay sa Sampaloc, sa Cubao, sa camping ng mga Boy Scout, sa birthday ng aking mga kapatid, sa Baguio kasama ang pamilya, sa excursion sa Balara, sa kung anong lugar na hindi ko na halos maalala, kasama na kung sinong marahan na ring naglalaho sa aking gunita...

Biglang lumundag ang panahon. Walang litrato noong nag-aaral pa ako sa kolehiyo...

Wala akong litrato sa panahon iyon ng ligalig at pagmamadali; walang litrato ngunit malinaw sa aking alaala...

Freshman ako ng salubungin, isang maagang umaga, ng mga basa pang pulang pintura sa bawat pisara ng aming kolehiyo.

Mabuhay ang Rebousyon. Digmaang Bayan. Marcos, Hitler, Diktador, Tuta...

...at paparami nang paparami ang aming nakikitang mga tao. Palakas nang palakas ang aming naririnig. Larawan ng isang barikada.

Binarahan ng mga aktibista, isang human barricade, ang University Avenue... isang kotse ang nagtangkang makapasok ...isang kotseng itim, lumang modelo, parang tangke. Tumigil. Bumaba ng nagmamaneho. Kamukha ng aming gurong matanda na mahilig sa babaeng nakaminiskirt. Nagtawanan kaming magkakaklase...

Napaatras din ang kotseng iyon.

Ngunit isang minuto lang ay nagbalik ang lumang kotseng itim...ang nagmamaneho ay nakahelmet na. May dalang baril. Walang kaabog-abog, itinutok ang mahabang baril sa mga nagbabarikada. Lumakas ang pagsigaw ng mga slogan.

Ngunit mas malakas ang putok ng baril". (133-137)

"To be continued." Read p. 137 and following to know what happened next. My fellow UPSCANS (UP Student Catholic Action "theo-libbers") were there near the grassy area leading to what is now College of Mass Communications where we saw a brother of our co-UPSCAN, Arthur Mesina, get hit by one of the bullets. Reuel Aguila's narrative makes me recoil with anger, but also pain, as his words pound on our soul with the memories of the barikada.

The memories of Aguila roll on as he describes the next events in his life—the suspension of the writ of Habeas Corpus; rallies to Plaza Miranda, the US Embassy and Mendiola when he became *ganap na aktibista* with his long hair, sandals and army jacket with pockets for manifestos and pillboxes; his capture and being brought to a "safehouse" and the "kahayupan" of his captors; the torture which strengthened his commitment as he continued to organize with the workers at the guerilla zones; in the midst of this, Aguila notes—

"kaakaiba ang ngiti ng kasama... sindalisay ng umagang nagbubukang-liwayway, laging may tinatanaw na pag-asa ng pananagumpay...

Kakaiba ang ngiti ng organizadong masa. Sa gitna ng gutom at karalitaan. Ang ngiti niya ay sing-init ng rubdob ng paglaya...

Lahat ng mga ito ay nakalarawan pa sa aking kaisipan, at puso. Ngunit walang litrato.

...ngunit higit na mayaman ang mga larawan sa kaisipan; at patuloy pa rin ako sa pagkuha ng mga ganitong litrato". (140-141).

TO BE CONTINUED