

Victorian historian Thomas Carlyle characterized history as a palimpsest, a prophetic text which cannot be fully deciphered because its “weightiest causes may be most silent.”<sup>1</sup> This frame of understanding culture and history is fruitful in appreciating the overarching themes of the articles collected in this volume of *Humanities Diliman*. Carlyle’s notion of history as constituted by ungraspable facts hidden in the cracks of silence or thrown away with the torn pages of official chronicles paints a careful distinction between past events and their writing. The past is unmediated and potentially non-referential; it could be lost without our realizing it. However, the moment we recount the past and account for it, we mediate it in historiography and translate it into history.

If, as Carlyle pictures it, history is a palimpsest, it is not the sole gamble of historians. We all carry the burden of history and are responsible for making sense of it, whether in our reading or our writing. In this respect, literary critic Sarah Dillon helps us understand the nature of palimpsests and, by extension, in our context, the multi-disciplinarity of the goal of making sense of history. A palimpsest, she points out, is “not a metaphor of origin, influence, or filiation,” nor are texts superimposed on it derived from each other.<sup>2</sup> Thus, each layer is as much the locus of critics, geographers, and linguists, among others, as it is a space for historians.

The following essays examine texts, enunciations, silences, and perspectives that make up aspects of culture and history. As I suggest below, they are also productive in helping us navigate and interpret the present, whether we ultimately agree with the points raised and methodologies employed by the authors or not.

The first article, Isaac Donoso’s “The Ilustrado’s Orphan: Generational Misrecognition and the Filipino Self,” traces the historical estrangement of Filipinos from the Spanish language, which, before the archipelago’s colonization by the U.S., was its undeniable colonial-national heritage and a defining element of the national subject’s formation. Donoso posits the Filipino self, whose growth from childhood parallels the Philippine nation’s history from a Hispanized culture to its systematic de-Hispanization under American colonial tutelage. Instead of growing up whole, however, the author argues that severance from the Spanish language caused an irretrievable generational break and rendered Filipino subjects orphaned and disengaged from their forebears.

José Edgardo Abaya Gomez, Jr.’s “Ex Libris Ad Urbe: Urban Portrayals in José Rizal’s *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo* as Indicators of Past Landscapes and Affections,” is a literary cartography of the originary novels of the Philippine nation vis-à-vis their geographical referents. Gomez superimposes the “novel city” in Rizal’s literary

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imagination and historical affections with the selfsame spaces' contemporary urban geography. By doing so, the author enlarges our appreciation of the novels. At the same time, his interdisciplinary approach provides historians, urban planners, and heritage conservationists with unique insight into evaluating urban spaces and transformations and their attendant meanings.

The third article is Wiyatmi's "Buru Island and Political Detainees in the Memory of Indonesian Literature," a review essay that offers a reading of Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, *Amba* (2012). *Amba* is centrally set in the historic Buru Island, where political prisoners, many of whom were merely associated with the Communist Party of Indonesia, were exiled during Suharto's New Order era. The novel dramatizes the tragedy that befell individuals implicated in the failed coup attempt of September 30th, 1965. Wiyatmi contextualizes *Amba* in the aftermath of the September 30<sup>th</sup> event, the countercoup that resulted in a power-grab, the massacre of genocidal proportions, and the burying of stories beneath decades of official historiography. The author demonstrates how the novel recovers aspects or textures of memory that may have already been forgotten in time or left unresolved in history and provides a human face to the victims of the past.

"Flogging Freakery: Manix Abrera's *Kikomachine* and Humor and Everyday Life in Philippine Youth Culture" continues Maria Rhodora G. Ancheta's ongoing project of elucidating the many forms and facets of Filipino humor. In particular, the essay examines youth culture in the university setting through Abrera's popular college-themed comic strip. Ancheta analyzes the series' narratives, visual structuring, intertextual codes, and deployment of various forms of humor and how these effectively document the ways young people negotiate the meaning of everyday life and strategically position themselves in spaces of resistance.

Finally, Alireza Kargar and Hassan Abootalebi's "Organizational Lack or Identity: A Lacanian Perspective on Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*" revisits the 1962 countercultural novel and uses it to explain key concepts in psychoanalysis. In their reading of Kesey's novel, the authors illustrate how subjectivity is formed from the paradoxical relationship of lack and fulfillment and the inevitable tension arising from the dialectic of dominance and subversion. Kargar and Abootalebi indicate how the protagonist Randle Patrick McMurphy's identity as a patient is founded on the psychiatric ward's authority. The ward both constructs McMurphy's subjectivity by ironically rendering it incomplete and perpetually dependent and cracks down intolerantly on McMurphy's attempts to question the structure and assert an independent identity.

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2020 will be remembered for decades as the year the COVID-19 pandemic overtook our lives. In the Philippines, it will be marked as the year when the Duterte administration doubled down on its authoritarian practices of sustaining a culture of impunity and extrajudicial killings, curtailing freedoms of the press and expression, weaponizing the law, silencing dissent by repressive means, and revising history. Our cover art series has documented the mood of the times since I began my assignment as editor of *Humanities Diliman* in 2018. The journal's cover for this issue is no exception. It alludes to the landscapes hit by the super typhoons that battered Luzon's southern part during the completion of this issue, a juncture characterized by so much suffering and pain. It is also a tribute to the survivors, the children of the storm, and an expression of defiant hope that all will be well.

Though the articles in this present issue, which is my last as the journal's editor, do not directly address the country's current sociopolitical situation, they provide ample illustration, comparative insight, theoretical resources, and a historical injunction for us to think through what is now at stake. Donoso's and Gomez's articles alert to us the importance of the disciplines in resisting the past's devaluation. Wiyatmi's paper reminds us of the real dangers of "red-baiting," which had caused hundreds of thousands of lives in Indonesia. Ancheta's essay is meaningful when read against the backdrop of military intrusions on university campuses. And Kargar and Abootalebi's article highlights the warped structure's workings and its proclivity to control meaning and undermine or shatter subjectivities to buttress its authority.

We are compelled to admit, as Fredric Jameson argues, that "our readings of the past are vitally dependent on our experiences of the present."<sup>3</sup> In this way, we can say that historiography and culture criticism are not only attempts at historical representation but irresistibly tied up with and articulated as historical interpretation *from* the present. Consequently, we are all ethically duty-bound to knowingly interpret the past and foreground, or at the very least be cognizant of, the framework of our interpretation.

At times, however, our task is more complex and rigorous than simply interpreting; we need "to interrupt the said to reveal the saying."<sup>4</sup> The articles in this volume are interventions in interpreting the past and cultural artifacts of the past. Simultaneously, our situation in the Philippines affords us a vantage point to read these accounts to divine how the present is being engineered and help us act in our context accordingly.

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## Endnotes

- 1 "On History," *The Works of Thomas Carlyle XXVII*, ed. Henry Duff Traill (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 88-90.
- 2 *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (Continuum, 2007), 85.
- 3 *The Political Unconscious* (Cornell University Press, 1981), 11.
- 4 Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas* (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 156.



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