After Words: Understanding Poetry Through Understanding Comics

Poems happen. To me they happened—"Jolography" happened by will and by choice. The pieces were not accidents, but rather wonderful happenings waiting, shall we say, for an accident, perhaps to explain their fractured shape, the fragmentedness of their speech and utterance, the ellipticals.

They happen in collisions—in the deliberate, in deliberately noticing the collisions and in forcing these collisions to happen. In my head they all happen in a fictional place called "Sabanggaan."

That place is noise. It gathers the heard that one can look at, and what is seen is sound—the visual representation of sound: words. Thus the tendency to lack concrete images, the tangible objects found in poetry that give us clear and vivid scenes from nature, action sequences, evocative pictures of urban living, etc.

In Sabanggaan, the images are the words themselves, most of the time not in what they directly mean, but in how they sound. Then sometimes, in what they sound *like*: homonymity. Words, when they approach us from certain distances at certain speeds will be changed when they reach us, sometimes when we read them. There is also the synaesthetic quality in certain collisions, how certain words on the page sound louder than others, just as certain captions of word balloons had their own various levels of sound. I love poems whose words speak in this manner. Their presence to the eyes had as much presence to the ears—at least, this is how I read poetry. Thus a word comes to me overheard: it might come to me as a different word but bearing the after-images of the other words it sounds like. *Hello. Hilo. Halo. Hollow. Haole. Halo-halo.*

Jolography

Paolo M. Manalo

O, how dead you child are, whose spoiled
Sportedness is being fashion showed

Beautifuling as we speak—in Cubao
There is that same look: Your Crossing Ibabaw,

Your Nepa Cute, Wednesdays
Baclaran, "Please pass. Kindly ride on,"

Tonight will be us tomorrowed—
Lovers of the Happy Meal and its H,

Who dream of the importedness of sex as long as it's
Pirated and under a hundred, who can smell

A Pasig Raver in a dance club. O, the toilet
Won't flush, but we are moved, doing the gerby

In a plastic bag; we want to feel the grooves
Of the records, we want to hear some scratch—

In a breakaway movement, we're the shake
To the motive of pockets, to the max.

The change is all in the first jeep
Of the morning's route. Rerouting

This city and its heart attacks; one minute faster
Than four o'clock, and the next

Wave that stands out in the outdoor crowd
Hanging with a bunch of yo-yos—

A face with an inverted cap on, wearing all
Smiles the smell of foot stuck between the teeth.

Force a word to stop by making it collide with something: a punctuation, another word, a phrase, etc. These words collide in the ear and on the page. The pleasure of writing these poems comes from hearing and seeing these collisions.

1

So words will brake, will often break and lines will be broken. Since words work as images, a broken image may create several other images (independent or codependent of each other) just as the separation of words may produce several words, or maybe no immediate words at all, but in the breaking, there is still a bit of sound: a sound bite. Utterance is still present. In explaining his translation of Roland Barthes, Stephen Heath presents some French words that have often been translated into the English word "utterance." The words *enconcé* and *énonciation* are such words and Heath explains the nuances of the two.

> [T]he first signifies what is uttered (the statement, the proposition), the second signifies the act of uttering (the act of speech, writing or whatever by which the statement is stated, the proposition proposed) (Heath 8).

My use of "utterance" here refers to both, that it is what is uttered and the act of uttering. This collection was written with conscious exploration of utterance. I was trying to find an utterance, not *my* utterance, but an utterance that could be sustained throughout the collection. Usually, through experience with workshop classes in the university and the national workshops in the country, I know that many Filipino writers begin with either the subject matter or image when they write poetry—and in the past I have done so for many poems. With "Jolography" I attempted, as best as I could, to see how the idea of utterance can sustain the vision of the collection. It seems to those that have read the collection, or that know the collection only from its title piece and probably two other poems—"Echolalia" and "Peksman"—that this is poetry in "jologspeak" or written following a "jologspeak poetics." (Tanglao) Perhaps the reader or listener who experiences the entire collection will note that there are more pieces that do not have jologspeak, or that none of the pieces are actually even written in jologspeak. The utterance might provide a context—that place where the poems happen—since most of the pieces require an understanding of

English and Tagalog for the reader to further appreciate the play of languages. Snatches of other languages and registers come into play as well, especially in "The Little Cancer Cells" and "Belongings," yet the collection seems preoccupied with the utterance of a broken main language: English.

Thus the collection happens in these language collisions, in the code switchings that the younger generation of Filipinos, whether they are jologs or not, may or may not be fond of doing. This is but one possibility of reading the whole collection, one that I would privilege as the work's author, but then the author's intention is not the sole determinant of meaning and interpretation.

2

My love for broken images comes from my love for comic books. This graphic literary form has great appeal, especially to young readers because it allows them to visualize the story, its characters and their actions through a pictorial form of narrative that involves the combination of pictures and words within the confines of several sheets of paper that hold together a story despite the brokenness of its images into segments called panels. In these panels, images are further broken, the simplest being the separation of images that are graphic depictions of objects (pictures) and images representing spoken language (words). With the latter, there is even further separation between words in word balloons (that represent the speech of a graphically represented character) and captions (words that intrude in a panel which at most times are used as devices for omniscient narration or commentary).

A comic book requires the active part of the reader to juxtapose these fragments. In fact, in the groundbreaking comic book on comic books called *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud defines the form as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud 9). This same book enumerates the many possibilities of juxtaposition and their effects on the text and the reader. It discusses several strategies of pictorial storytelling that further elaborate some of Will Eisner's concepts, specifically the term "sequential art" pertaining to comics. When a series of pictures are taken individually, these pictures are merely images. When they become part of a sequence, even that of two pictures set against each other, the art of the image is

transformed into the art of comics. McCloud further argues that Eisner's "sequential art" is not exclusive toward a definition of comics, but may include animation and film sequences. He distinguishes one from the other by asserting that animation is sequential in time while comics are spatially juxtaposed. Animation simulates time through a projection of a sequence of images on the same space (i.e., television, movie screen) while a comic book frame must always occupy a different space as the narrative progresses. These spaces are then juxtaposed with each other to form meaning (7).

The most basic example is the two-panel strip that contains a graphic narrative composed of a beginning in the first panel and an end in the last. With two panels, the creator can work out a problem-solution presentation as well as other binary oppositions.

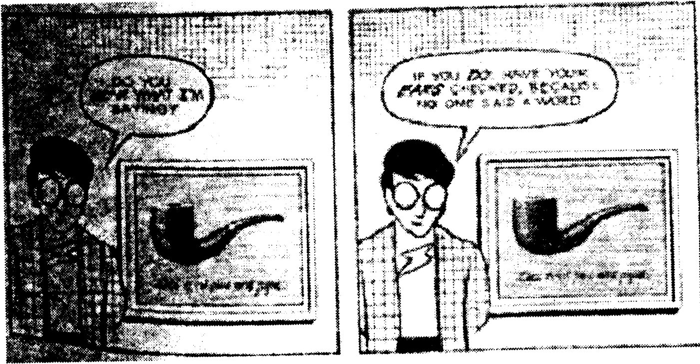

Figure 1: Two panels from Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* with a reference to Magritte's "The Treachery of Images"

However, these beginnings and endings are only temporary and transitional markers for the comic book narrative. This is how I also view poetry: its beginning and ending are also possibly temporary or transitional markers through the overheard. It might be possible, with this idea to create the form of poetry: the amount of the overheard at the moment. Overhearing implies a picking up from the reader at a possible starting point and tuning out at a certain ending. In comic books, McCloud explains, incompletion is integral to the way comic books are read. It is a way of perceiving, relying on an act of faith based on fragments. He calls this "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole" as closure, and survival in an incomplete world depends on closure (62-63). This means

that these two comic book panels present an incomplete world that presents the most visible parts of that world, as well as the hidden portions of that world which are all implied in the gutter. This is the space between panels, and where, for McCloud, transformation from the previous panel to the next occurs. "Nothing is seen between the two panels," he says, "but experience tells you something must be there." (67) In poetry, I perceive the same sense, so that when Louise Glück explains her attraction to "ellipsis, to the unsaid, to suggestion, to eloquent, deliberate silence," (Glück 73) I am in agreement with her but my understanding of it is through the understanding of comics.

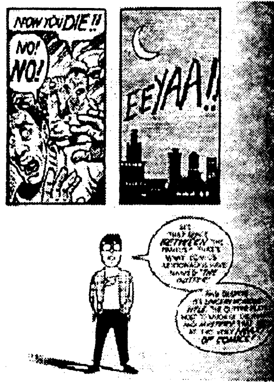

Figure 2: For Scott McCloud "...the gutter plays host to much of the music and mystery that are at the very heart of comics!"

Poetry's equivalent for the gutter is the silence in the work, whether visual or aural. It is the importance of the absent. In her manifesto "Myself a Kangaroo Among the Beauties," Lucie Brock-Broido says: "[t]hat which is *withheld* on the page is equal in importance to that which is Held." A writer must not only be conscious of what is visible on the page but what is invisible to the reader, and work out this relationship. The gutter in poetry is felt in the caesura, lacunae, line break, stanza break or section break, in the same manner that the gutter extends itself from the turning of a page in a comic book to the long monthly wait for the title's next issue. It creates tension. It causes delays.

I love how in certain poems, the silences can create these delays and distances between two juxtaposed objects, or bring them closer when the need calls for it. Just like how a comic book can compress the span of years in a few panels, or bridge the distance through the compression of

space, the silences can extend the utterance for a poem to last more than five pages, as with "The Little Cancer Cells" or limit the utterance to a short compact universe such as in the ten lines of "Yours, Etcetera". (Please see the Appendix for the full text of these poems). The silences can also imply certain hesitations, evasions and disruptions which Louise Glück thoroughly discusses in a chapter of her book *Proofs & Theories: Essays on Poetry* (Glück 73-85). The spoken and printed are thus foregrounded noises and sounds in a silent backdrop; they are also the images and characters themselves.

3

Wasn't it the structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure (961) who said that "language is concrete, no less so than speaking...?" In this collection, I have taken this meaning in the literal sense, that language is concrete as the comic book's visual narrative allows it to be concretized. On the page, language is made concrete for the eyes to perceive, and on the page its conditions can be altered. More interesting is how silence—which is part of language—can also be concrete, can also be altered. It is possible to play with the idea of silence as erasure, as a visual substitution for something discarded, without actually discarding it. Jacques Derrida calls this "not absence instead of presence, but a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun"(Derrida 1978, 295). As Gayatri Charavorty Spivak explains it: "Derrida's ~~trace~~ is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience" (Derrida 1976, xvii). It is playing around with the advice given to beginning writers ("Show don't tell") by actually showing the telling, or rather "showing the ~~telling~~" that simultaneously presents the erased and the erasing, the silenced and the silencing. It is Brock-Broido's Held *with* the withheld.

In "The Little Cancer Cells" I have used this twice: with the words "touch" and "hear" following the command "Do not...." as in: "Do not touch touch" which I imagine that the ~~tracing~~ forces the reader to examine the repetition of the word and to note that in the repetition, the word's condition has changed visually and perhaps aurally. Something has altered the word and it is not the same word visually. Thus does its utterance get altered as well? If so, how to utter it?

These and similar questions bothered me in the writing of these poems. I imagined a word to sound this way, but somehow despite the word's presence on the page, it did not seem its equivalent in weight. Fortunately, the American poet Frank Bidart has already explored this problem. In his unique style of writing he makes good use of the words as they appear as structures on the page as approximations of their movements of the imagined voices. He explains to Mark Halliday how at first, he did not know how to capture the rhythms and tones of these voices. "When I set the words down in the most 'normal' ways," he says "in terms of line breaks and punctuation, they didn't at all look to the eye the way I heard them in my head" (Bidart 224). Bidart said that when he tried to "translate" these phrases into formal metrical or rhymed structures they went dead so he needed to find a structure that could contain it. This structure was achieved through the "'deployment' of words on the page through voice; syntax; punctuation" (Bidart 233). He articulated how I processed the writing in this collection and the need to shift from the more traditional structures of poetry to the immediately perceived fragmented and elliptical structure of this collection. When I wrote some of these poems in the manner I wrote several years back, I just could not sense the immediacy of the relations of the words. Another form was needed to call attention to the concreteness of language. Bidart's explanation of his use of punctuation eventually helped me into imagining the structure I needed for the language I would use for this collection. In his poetry, the deployment of punctuations (which he says is not limited to commas, periods, etc. "but line breaks, stanza breaks, capital letters—all the ways that speed and tension and emphasis can be marked") allowed him to "'lay out' the *bones* of a sentence visually, spatially, so that the reader can see the pauses, emphases, urgencies and langours in the voice." It is a poetry that concerns itself not with the final whole outcome or end product of meaning, but a poetry that highlights the process of an articulation of the voice that the poet is imagining. Perhaps what this collection would like to achieve is to call attention to the flawedness, not to point out problems or mistakes, but how, despite these delays in the uttering because of what breaks or brokenness are embedded, it is still telling.

4

By highlighting the visual word itself, perhaps meaning shifts from the level of the word to the level of the phoneme. This is not to render a word or a language as meaningless. It is probably not possible to leave out

any word's associative weight, but perhaps it is possible to scatter the weight around. The immediate instinct for the beginning writer of poetry is to create order using metaphors since metaphors unite unlikely pairs. They provide wholeness and clarity in their concreteness. Many poems of my classmates and fellows in the national workshops strive for that single-metaphor poem with an insight in the end. I have done several in the past since that was what I believed to be one of the structuring of poetry with the great associative weights of meanings as foundations. In this collection, I have deliberately avoided, if possible, to go into metaphors and have shifted to metonymy. It is a gesture at the moment that continues to fascinate me. Rather than give the reader one whole object that is painstakingly unified and completed by the writer, I ask more from the readers. Please pick up the parts in order to see the (w)holes. Once again, juxtaposition is essential.

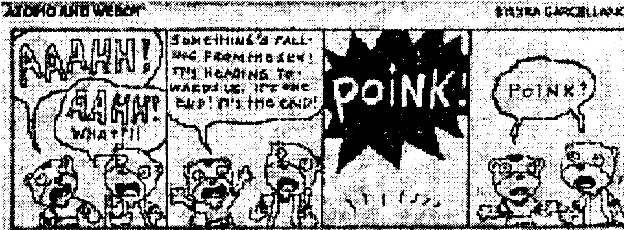

Figure 3: Lyra Abueg Garcellano's "Atomo and Weboy" from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*

The juxtaposition found in comic books implies a certain form of reversal in reading for it to proceed. The comic book asks the reader to constantly check the newly introduced frame against previous frames in the narrative in order for the story to advance. Sometimes this happens immediately. Sometimes it takes time to read a page this way. Contrast this with an animated sequence that relies more on the forward movement of frames projected in a similar sequence to simulate the actual flow of time. Juxtaposition of space in the static confines of the page simulates the time element found in animation. Despite animation's fluidity and simulation of time, the frames are projected unto the same space, thus juxtaposition is not as obvious as in a comic book where the actual juxtaposition of frames takes place in the stretching out of panels from left to right, page to next page, issue to next issue, etc. The difference between comic books and animation is similar to the notion that Lucie Brock-Broido kept telling us in class: that verse reverses while prose proceeds. Good prose seems to propel a text's reading forward by the fluidity of the writing, thus clarity of mean-

ing and brevity are recommended practice. In poetry the language is allowed to turn unto itself—paradoxically, in order to move forward, one must also move backward in poetry. Like in the comic book narrative, the parts are observed in order for the (w)hole to be perceived. As shown earlier, the gutter is also a crucial part of the narrative; silence is part of poetry's reversal.

5

Poetry's form relies on the spaces words occupy on a given page (at least for the poems meant to be read with the eyes) and how these words are juxtaposeable to produce meaning or sense. In metrical verse, lines are juxtaposed to check for their constant rhythm; end words are juxtaposed to check for possible rhymes. Prose however, greatly relies on the continuation of the passage for it to advance and reach its conclusion.

Though it may be argued that prose, as with animation, can also have juxtapositions, these are probably not as immediate as those concerning poetry. A prose piece still works without juxtaposition; a poem, given its form and regard for spaces, requires its words and gestures to be checked against other portions of the text. So in the McCloud's comic book panel that defines comics, one of the characters in the audience argues that by striking out the word "pictorial" in the definition — "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence" — the definition limits itself to that of words, since letters are static images and "when they're arranged in a deliberate sequence placed next to each other, we call them words" (McCloud 9). Then words juxtaposed with other words on the page can be one way of understanding how a poem happens. Words gain meaning, gain sense, perhaps not just through their own presence, but how they relate with other words in a poem.

Comic book juxtaposition is not limited to that of panels, but to the juxtaposition of actual pages of panels, of actual comic book issues that are formed by several pages, of compiled storylines that are composed of several issues, of comic book titles that contain several storylines. This allows a panel in a 1962 comic book to be immediately juxtaposed with a panel in a comic book produced 40 years later.

This concept has informed me of conscious juxtaposition among the parts of a poem: from the smallest unit of a sound fragment to that of

actual segments, and those in between (i.e., strophes, lines, phrases, words). I have also observed that juxtaposition does not work as a one-to-one correspondence between objects but involves several interactions and relations happening at one time. A three or four-panel comic strip such as Lyra Abueg Garcellano's "Atomo and Weboy" from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* may be juxtaposed with another one of its strips for several effects: comparison, contrast, continuity, etc.

For "Jolography," I have also thought of the possibility of the poems being juxtaposeable, thus allowing for further meanings to be gained from the exchanges made between these pieces, no matter how small or how large. For the purposes of this discussion, anything juxtaposeable is considered an "object."

A panel's position becomes important in the whole scheme of juxtaposition for it to be meaningful, just as a poem's position in a collection also adds to both the poem and the collection's meaningfulness. For poetry this means a strong regard for where a sound unit or word unit is placed. During the revisions of certain poems I would actually write certain passages and words on separate strips of paper and process these by switching the positions of certain strips to see how the poem looks and hear how it sounds given its new form. I have imagined these strips to be panels, and later when more writing is done and the contents of the strips are transferred into sheets of paper, I think of the poems as panels and the collection as a whole comic book. These panels then can be juxtaposed with each other controlled by the sequencing of the pieces which adds to the form of the collection. Furthermore, the poems are sandwiched between two pages of quotes, one that serves as prologue and the other that serves as epilogue. The prologue contains three quotations which we may take as three panels of a comic strip. The first quotation is an excerpt from the *Pasyon Pilapil* whose utterance is that of Tagalog during the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines. The second quotation claims to be a jolog translation of the first quotation. It is possible to juxtapose these two quotations to show how one can be the transformation of the other, just like in a two-panel comic of transitory beginning and end. The third quotation from Melanie Marquez, "...and I want to thank God for my long legged," further contributes to the play of juxtapositions by making this a three-way collision of utterances. The mention of God in the third quotation complements the first quotation and yet the ungrammatical speech of Marquez relates to the second quotation in its inaccuracy of translation,

that in its own ungrammatical lines it creates new meaning. This page can then be juxtaposed with the epilogue quotations. There are two. Within these quotations there are already possible juxtapositions. The first is an excerpt of Caroline S. Hau's reading of Jose Rizal and the second is a citation of a quotation, Edel E. Garcellano quoting N.V.M. Gonzalez. Juxtaposing this page with the prologue, one possible reading is that the collection is framed by concerns of meaning and meaninglessness, readings, overreadings and misreadings. The poems happen between these spaces.

They happen here perhaps to show the problems and possibilities of how the English language works with/against a non-native speaker who writes and reads in it in the academe but goes home speaking Tagalog. He is victim of the code switch, exposed to so much of these language shifts that seem to inhabit the every day realities. When Gémino H. Abad says that Filipino poets "had to inhabit the new language; our own way of looking, our own thinking and feeling in our own historical circumstances, had to become the nerves and sinews of that language" since it is "the poet's job of work" (Abad 16), I cannot help but think of the unstable position the young bilingual Filipino writer is in, grappling with the uncertainty of the languages (for Tagalog or Filipino has its own unresolved problems of standardization) and the declining educational system in the country. The new mobile phone technology that has allowed for faster communication particularly through short message services (sms) or texting creates more distortions of language, particularly in spelling. Will this new language be habitable for the young poets? If so, how will it affect their own looking, thinking and feeling? My response is not to offer a solution to the language problem or to strictly enforce "pure English" or shift totally to Tagalog as some Filipino writers have done in the past, but rather to write with the distortions and to explore where this strange, flawed language will take my writings. I take my cue from Ann Lauterbach who does not consider these breaks as distortions or flaws.

6

In Lauterbach's essay "On Flaws: Toward a Poetics of the Whole Fragment," the white tag found in second-hand shops containing the price of the item on sale along with the phrase "as is," is the mark that signifies the flawedness of the merchandise. This phrase, she says, suggests a crack, tear or stain: "the distance from perfection from which the / object

has / traveled" (Lauterbach).

The object, in the case of this collection, is not just a poem or poetry but any actual text—being simultaneously the written language inscribed on the page(s) and the orality / aurality of these inscriptions, the *enconcé* and *énonciation*.

I do not use the "as is" tag as an excuse for sloppy writing. Rather the framing of "as isness" in the text is my attempt at engaging in that play of poetry that shifts away from the mode of writing prescribed by New Criticism. The "as isness" of the text negotiates a place that is both absent and present, broken and fixed, lost and found. This place of "as is" Lauterbach suggests, is a possible poetic methodology in revising the modernist 'fragment.'

> ... The poem now is
> rendered as an address
> which
>
> eschews totalizing concepts of origin, unity, closure and
> completion, and is
> construed as a
>
> series of flaws or openings through which both chance and
> change register a matrix
> of
>
> discontinuous distributions, where contingency itself is
> offered as an affective response to
>
> the "is" as is.
>
> (Lauterbach)

Just like the author's intention, meaning does not become the sole determinant of truth or beauty in a poem but is an unstable relation to objective or subjective value. The arrival at a didactic conclusion, the arrival at the familiar and exhausted insights is avoided by "as is." The poem does not pose questions to which it can immediately answer but rather, even before the questioning, it is a poetry of poses and pauses. Consider the

act of writing poetry as a staging using the flawed utterance, not to show a solution to the flawedness but to see how, given the distortion and incompletion, there is a possible beauty or truth that can be gleaned. This again is opposite the idea of poetry that loves to be clear, precise and concrete in its images, that chooses to explain itself to the reader in order to be more accessible in terms of understanding. Completion, clarity, precision and concreteness do not always make for good poetry, and neither does a poem that has a tendency to explain itself. Louise Glück says that such writing "seems to love completion too much, and like a thoroughly cleaned room, it paralyzes activity" (Glück 29). For the reader/listener, the effect is what-you-see/ hear-is-what-you-get.

As a reader of poetry, I've noticed myself to respond more to poems that are partial to forms of absence and voluntary silence. I enjoy the telling omissions and the enigma these omissions bring. The power of such writing comes from an awareness for the unseen and unsaid, again this is the gutter effect in comics that says more about what has happened when it does not present it. Glück could be talking about the gutter when she says:

> The unsaid is analogous to the unseen; for example, to the power of ruins, to works of art either damaged or incomplete. Such works inevitably allude to larger contexts; they haunt because they are not whole, though wholeness is implied: another time, a world in which they were whole, or were to have been whole, is implied. (73)

Thus it is the fragment and not the image or metaphor which I bear in mind, but rather the sound bite, the tampered quote, the overheard utterance that finds meaning in repetition, or in its sound in another language. The words themselves become the image. I have seen this best exemplifed in music, particularly rap—how a sampled piece of music (from the rhythm of a musical instrument, voice or even noise) is used to collide with another piece of music, thus creating a new lived space, a new song. The language game of rap with its distortions of words, repetitions can be wonderful strategies for poetry to happen.

In "Belongings," I used the fragments to show the displacements in reconstructing a story, the story being the death of a colleague and teacher, the late Luisa Mallari Hall. (Please see the Appendix for the complete text

of the poem.) Attempting to bring together pieces of the story as well as these sound bites from Mallari I tried to write a poem that was following the mode of the narrative with a first person narrator. However, through the process of writing the piece it seemed that it was unnecessary to fill in the blanks or to create a whole story. Originally the poem concerned itself with the "penanggalan" found in the eighth strophe of the final draft but through the process of revising, I discovered that the poem was not about the supernatural creature, nor was it the persona's relationship with the departed. Later on the first person was replaced with the third person, the playful use of homonymity was limited to the second strophe, namely "mourning" and "plain," and other word plays and fragments similar to "casual/ties" in that same strophe were deleted because they were too distracting.

What I found in this poem most successful was the use of the footnote, which allowed me to place the dedication at the bottom of the page instead of the beginning of the poem. I am wary of poems that are epigraph or dedication dependent, especially if the poem is dedicated to a famous person. As much as I can help it, I avoid epigraphs. Instead I treat these utterances as I would treat sound bites and use them as a text that happens within the poem. Without explaining the poem further, I think it is the closest that I have gotten to writing an elegy. The footnote is a possibility of showing another type of juxtaposition on the page that can be used in poetry.

In the title poem of the collection, "Jolography," I have also explored the possibilities of sense in poetry through transliteration since it forces a most unusual syntax in the new language as an approximation of the syntax of the original language prior to the transliteration. Transliteration is a staple skit in old Tagalog movies, particularly those starring the duo of Dolphy and Panchito. One person will sing a few lines of a kundiman in Tagalog and the other will transliterate it with often hilarious results. In present day Filipino television entertainment, the comedians Michael V and Ogie Alcasid continue this transliteration skit in a segment of the popular Friday gag show *Bubble Gang*. In one episode, Michael V sings Aiza Seguera's popular Tagalog hit single "Pagdating ng Panahon." When he gets to the line "...baka ikaw at ako," (properly translated, it should read "...maybe you and I") he sings "...a cow is you and me" since the Tagalog "baka" (maybe) when stressed this way: "báka," is "cow" in English.

The poem "Jolography" starts off with an English transliteration of several Tagalog expressions.

> O, how dead you child are, whose spoiled
> Sportedness is being fashion showed
>
> Beautifuling as we speak—...

The first half of the first line is a transliteration of the Tagalog expression "Patay kang bata ka," while the phrase "being fashion showed" as a close approximation of the Tagalog colloquial term "rumarampa" which implies walking on the catwalk, or strutting around like a fashion model. "Beautifuling" in the next strophe is the Tagalog colloquial "nagmamaganda" or "acting beautifully" which implies someone trying hard to act and feel beautiful. There are several more of these throughout the poem, but it is best not to explain or reveal them. In a chapter called "Paglalaro ng Salita," in the book *Pahiwatig*, Melba Padilla Maggay discusses several strategies of how Filipinos play with their languages (Maggay 103-133). In cases when Filipinos encounter the collision of English (sometimes Spanish) with Tagalog, the English (or Spanish) root words are used but are affixed following the rules of Tagalog thus introducing new words into the latter language. Perhaps this shows that many Filipinos might only have a limited vocabulary in Tagalog and thus forces an English-Tagalog coinage to substitute for their ignorance. In certain cases, it is pleasure with the language play that is at work. Once more, these are the spaces and realities that I considered when I was writing the collection.

7

The earlier discussion presented transliteration—the conscious transformation of one language to another as a strategy for poetry. One poem that was accidentally written used an accidental transformation of language instead of a conscious one: overhearing. The overheard crosses language barriers, and for a bilingual writer who is not a native speak of English, an American English word or phrase might be mistaken as some word or phrase in the native Tagalog. Thus the sentence "To see is to *believe it*" might be overheard as "To see is to *bilibid*." Homonymity forces a relationship between the two utterances, and is a strategy of collision, overhearing (pagkariringgan) that was discovered in the poem "Peksman":

The truth is what was taken
was maybe got, as in the heavy-
pare heavy, mostly labo.

The meaningless "maybe got" in these opening lines might finds its meaning as the overheard Tagalog "mabigat," that is, if the reader understands Tagalog as well. If not, then the collision still has its own music despite its meaninglessness: it is the music of speech, a Filipino language subculture called "coñospeak": this is how the children of affluent Filipino families apparently talk, especially those studying in exclusive schools in Metro Manila. Their speech is so ("Make tusok-tusok the fishballs.") because they are familiar with two languages (English and Tagalog) but have limited vocabularies in both. They have created a language that is grating to the ears of those fluent in either languages because of its aberrant sound — often amusing, most of the time annoying.

Though I have said that poems happen in collisions, coñospeak writing does not automatically make poetry, though the collision provides a space that poetry can explore because of its unnatural state, its artificiality of utterance. "Peksman" is but one of many collisions that happen in "Jolography." These everyday spaces are what the Viennese thinker Ludwig Wittgenstein calls "language-games" that may define multiple forms of lives (Wittgenstein 11). These lived spaces participate in a form of reality that a poem tries to draw out or frame. Poems happen in how these lives interact with each other to create a visual as well as aural picture of the reality of these collisions. In "Jolography," the poems happened with the language games in mind. In working on the collection, the sounds create the pictures, the utterances give the poem its frame, its form. Though it does not seem clear what the dramatic situation in the poem is, the utterances reveal the multiplicity of voices colliding in the poem. There is the more dominant voice that occupies most of the poem, and there is a voice that runs counter in the parentheses. The parentheticals seem to suggest asides that begin actively in the fourth strophe as uncertainty "hilaw?" and "hilo?" as well as a kind of conscience to the dominant—"well, I knew you too," "the number / You dialed" and "maraming namamatay / sa akala" in the fifth strophe—which seems to keep inserting itself or "making singit" in order to assert itself or compete with the dominant for attention. Yet the eighth and tenth strophe might also be read as the voice in parentheticals outside of the parentheses, juxtaposed with the seventh and ninth strophes that have one line each. The structure of these strophes seem to force a

collision of the two voices and to show a kind of blending and difference between the two simultaneously. The slow speed of the seventh and ninth strophes can be contrasted with the speed of the eighth strophe and the eventual slowing down in the tenth. It is one lived space trying to assert itself over another, one Filipino expression: "Peksman, mamatay man ako" colliding with another: "Maraming namamatay sa akala" to sort of suggest that many will bet their life on the truth, many will the die for the truth, and many more will die of false assumptions, false truths. Many die of the overheard.

8

Another possible reading involves the autobiographical "self": the languages I was forced to learn growing up. I refer to English in school, on television, in comic books and other reading materials, and to Tagalog outside the classroom, at home, in church and in the streets. Fortunately or unfortunately, my two siblings, both sisters, are deaf. If it were only one of them, we could call it an accident, but since both are deaf, can we say this is fate? Sign language made the language collisions more apparent because it is visual. My sisters made up noises with their hands. Sometimes we were too lazy to explain which sign was a translation of our spoken Tagalog or English. It became too taxing, especially in urgent situations. After all, "apple" and "mansanas" were the same thing to them, as long as you signed it correctly, forming the index finger into a crook of a key, touching it to the corresponding cheek of the face and twisting the crooked finger as though it were unlocking the cheek. This is the sign. "Egg," however, is trickier. If you sign it wrong, "Egg" can be mistaken for "train" or "name" or "sit." Hence by mistake sometimes I sign: "Eat a train for breakfast," or "Name down."

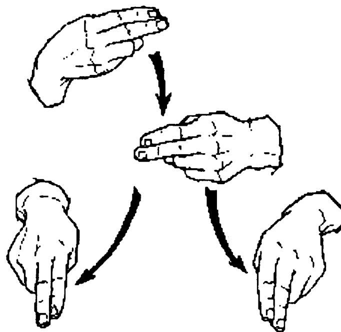

Figure 4—"Egg"

Sometimes, I would deliberately fool my sisters and their deaf friends: "What is your sit?" It makes sense in Tagalog. "Anong upo iyan?" which might imply: "Why do you sit that way?" They do get it, and sometimes shift in their seats, even if I meant it as a joke.

What these conversations have taught me is to be observant of the language of the strange.

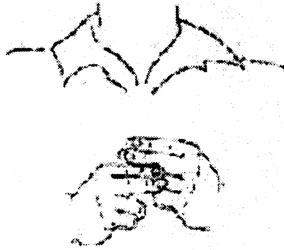

Figure 5—"Name"

9

Though it might be possible to form a collection based on transliteration and the overheard, I felt that such a project would be very limited in exploring utterance given the possibilities of the juxtaposition and collision of two languages. Though some people have thought this to be a new approach that has "refreshing energy and audacity..." (Tanglao), this type of collision has happened before in the poems of our local writers. Many have observed this in the poems of the Bagay poets of the 1960's, specifically in some poems of Rolando S. Tinio. Four in his collection *Sitsit sa Kuliglig* (1972) happen in the experimental language of Taglish. This, however, did not proliferate among the contemporaries of Tinio, perhaps because they seemed more like a novelty and not something Tinio further explored in his poetry; he shifted instead to writing in Tagalog. These four poems seem more like transition pieces from English to the vernacular. Virgilio S. Almario suspects the same thing. In his discussion of one of Tinio's poems "Valediction sa Hillcrest," he notes that the "haluang Ingles-Tagalog ng tula" is proof of the expression that the Bagay poet wishes to prove: "the cultural merging of the alien and the native" (Almario 94). This merging was not further explored by the use of the language game of Taglish, perhaps because it seemed more like a novelty, a language that was outgrown in Tinio's later collections *Dunung-dunungan* (1975) and *Kristal na Uniberso* (1989).

The same can be said of one of Vim Nadera's poems "Caritas" found in his first collection *Alit: Dalit, Galit, Halit, Malit, Ngalit, Palit at Salit* (Nadera 36-39). This complex "pasyon rap" makes use of several collisions: the language games of the pasyon, of Tagalog rap, of the news item epigraph, the collisions of the parentheticals with the utterance outside the parentheses, English and Filipino, etc. "Caritas" itself works like the final panel in a three panel strip since it is juxtaposed with two other poems ("Fides" which uses the Tagalog of the pasyon (31-32) and "Spes" which is a "haikuno" (33-35)) in a section of the book *Halit.*

Other worthwhile poems in the collection that show the strategies I have used in "Jolography" are "Binalagtasan" (68-69) and "Nang Sabihin ni John Cage na Wala Siyang Sasabihin at Sinasabi Niya Iyon (At Yaon Aniya ang Panulaan) Na Napakinggan Naman ni Edwin Morgang Narinig Ko--" (70-72). In "Binalagtasan" the forced juxtapositions are seen in the simultaneity of voices competing for attention in the poem. Amado V. Hernandez's epigraph is juxtaposed with the three other voices of Filipino writers coming from different periods in Philippine history: Gaspar Aquino de Belen, Julian Cruz Balmaseda and Alejandro G. Abadilla. Nadera mimics the registers of these three writers in order to deliver a collision of their ideas in a simulated short balagtasan. Since the balagtasan is in tribute to Francisco Baltazar, through this poem Nadera plays around with the language-games of Hernandez, Aquino de Belen, Balmaseda, Abadilla and Balagtas himself. At the very least, it shows the richness of the tradition of Filipino poetry and the several shifts in the Tagalog language. Meanwhile "Nang Sabihin..." (which is probably the longest title of a poem in Tagalog) works out the visual and aural sequencing of words through an exhaustive repetition to present exactly the premise that the title sets: that when John Cage said that he wasn't saying anything, and he says it (and to him this is poetry) which was heard by Edwin Morga which I overheard. It is a poem exploring the possibilities of transference (of meaning and sense) through repetitions, and it is admirable to see in Nadera an intelligence in playing around with Tagalog poetry, visually and aurally using some similar strategies that I have used in "Jolography." In fact, Nadera's first collection is perhaps the only poetry in Philippine literature that deals with the instability of language in the Philippines through the collisions of several languages and registers and executes it with playfulness and skill. It is an ambitious project though some people have called it difficult to read, unless it is Nadera himself performing the works live, then these people treat it as a spectacle (how Nadera is brought into various

literary and cultural events to make a novelty out of his poems in order to liven up the atmosphere, to shock people, to entertain the unenlightened, etc.).

When poems are called difficult, I think it means that the work is not written in the more conventional and accessible notions of poetry or pagtula, not something that can easily be workshopped because it does not necessarily follow the rules of elements like clarity, conciseness and precision. Perhaps since there are writers, there are poems that follow a different set of rules. L. Lacambra Ypil responds to this by explaining his present concerns in poetry:

> ...I think [this] is what I'm trying to look for in [what I write], and in what I read: it is emotion set in the context of paradox or of irony, not in the context of narrative. Therefore I think it might be branded as difficult because it is not familiar: the way the gestures are not familiar. And people seem to be afraid of this difficulty. But poetry has never been about the simple and about the evidently clear. It's about what's necessary, and I have always been skeptical of the clear, and of the evident (Ypil).

In my case, given my background in comics and sign language, I cannot not approach poetry as the collision of sounds and signs given a temporary and transitional marker. This present collection presents a direction in writing that I pursued given the possibilities of the concepts in comic books and sign language in writing. Of course, if at the very start I had the talent for drawing and illustration, I would have a totally different story and a totally different thesis. But I enjoy what this instability of languages presents as a challenge to the writer who confronts it and discovers "something." Lauterbach asks: What if...the 'aesthetic' is the very site of turbulence and uncertainty through or by which an artist attempts to *come to terms* with the *various fields* of human investment and experience, the choices, decisions and judgments, which ratify a life? The aesthetic would then be the result of complex determinants, not fixed, not pre-determined, not necessarily knowable in the first place, but always, definingly, a place of *discovery* (Lauterbach).

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Notes

JOLOGRAPHY (first published in the *Sunday Inquirer Magazine*)

Jolog is a colloquial term of 90's Manila referring to a person with cheap taste, no breeding and from the lower social classes, specifically a young fashion victim (since there seem to be no old jologs). The word's etymology may come from a) *diyolog*, the acronym for *di*lis (foodfish), tu*yo* (dried fish) and it*log* (egg), the salty diet of people from the lower classes; or b) the Jaloux disco (ca. 1980's Quezon City) which served as the hangout of these fashion victims. Though the term started out derogatory, some people find it cool to be a jolog as it means humility, being down-to-earth and one with the masses.

O, how dead you child are is a transliteration of "patay kang bata ka" which means loosely, "you're dead meat."

Beautifuling is a transliteration of "nagmamaganda" which means "feeling beautiful."

"Pasig Raver" (2001) is song by Andrew E.

Wednesday is known in as Baclaran Day. It's traffic in southbound Manila because of the pilgrimage made to Baclaran Church on this day.

Kindly ride on is a transliteration of "sumakay ka na lang" which means "go with the flow."

Tonight will be us tomorrowed is a transliteration of "ngayong gabi tayo'y magiging bukás" which means "tonight we'll be open."

The 'H' in *Lovers of the Happy Meal and its H*, refers to the fondness for the letter in most jolog and in the names of Filipino squatters: Bhoy, Ghirlie, Bheng, Jhenyfer, Jhoana, Jhayson.

Gerby is taken from the colloquial *gerbs* which is the soft, almost liquefied quality of poo.

The change is all in the first jeep / Of the morning's route is a transliteration of the sign inside most Metro Manila jeepneys: "Barya lang po sa umaga" or "Only loose change in the mornings."

One minute faster / Than four o'clock is the transliteration of "mas mabilis pa sa alas-kwatro" which pertains to being or making haste.

CAN AFFORD (first published in *Tenggara*)
Someone who "can afford" is from the middle or upper classes of society. In Tagalog, "may kaya sa buhay," someone who can afford the leisures in life.

BELONGINGS (first published in *Tenggara*)
The words *hirsute, Dayak* and *penanggalan* are personally associated with Luisa Mallari Hall. "Hirsute," she said, was a word she would never forget when she first learned its meaning in college as a student of Dolores Stephens-Feria. Stephens-Feria was upset at their class because no one bothered to look up the word's meaning in the dictionary. Years later, Mallari found it funny that, in the end, it seemed like it was one of the qualities she looked for in her husband.
The Dayaks are non-Muslim people indigenous to Malaysia.
Penanggalan are the Malaysian "relatives" of the Filipino *manananggal.* Supernatural creatures, *penanggalan* are believed to be mostly women who split from their bodies as a flying head, spinal cord and a trail of innards in search of men or babies that they can feast on. My last conversation with Mallari was a query on the etymology of the Malay term. Her reply to me is broken into the lines: *My education was strictly directed away from the supernatural by both my / secular and religiously conservative mentors in Malaysia.*
Except for Reyes and Hau, the names dropped were, like Mallari, paper presenters in a 1995 workshop on "The Canon in Southeast Asian Literatures" held in the University of London.
Edgardo M. Reyes is the author of *Sa mga kuko ng liwanag*, one of the novels critiqued by Mallari in her dissertation.
Caroline S. Hau is the Kyoto-based Filipino literary critic whose book *Necessary fictions / Philippine*

literature and the nation, 1946-1980 is dedicated "in memory of Luisa Mallari Hall."
The problem is really a conflict / between the forces of national integration and assertion is a broken quote from the Inter Press Sservice quoting Mallari in 1993 when she was in the University Kebangsaan Malaysia.

THE LITTLE CANCER CELLS is for Caroline S. Hau (first published in the *Philippine Humanities Review*)
Most of this is taken from assertions made in Caroline S. Hau's *Necessary fictions / Philippine literature and the nation, 1946-1980* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), although some of the German portions of the text were lifted from the Jose Rizal lecture delivered by Isagani R. Cruz at the 3rd annual Philippine P.E.N. conference held in Dumaguete City (2001).

I thank Josefa B. Schriever for checking the appropriated German and Spanish fragments.
Though the poem uses a lot of fragments of foreign languages, their meanings and translations here will not be explained. It is enough that these fragments carry their own weight on the page.

I

The main concepts taken from Hau's book for this portion are the *narrative:* "Rizal's novels are a kind of 'master narrative' within or against which Philippine fiction attempted to work through a set of unresolved issues relating to the problem of truth and action in a society that was split into different, contending groups for whom 'independence' had always been a tedentious issue." (11); and *excess*: "a term that [was used] to refer to the heterogeneous elements—'the people,' 'the indigenous,' 'the Chinese,' 'the political' and 'error'—that inform, but also exceed nationalist attempts to grasp, intellectually and politically, the complex realities at work in Philippine society." (6)

The singular text says Hau, is the concept used in Philippine literature to valorize the theme of inventing the Filipino. (49)

Moths to the flames refers to the didactic tale that Rizal's mother told to him when he was a boy. The tale is similar to the story of Daedalus and Icarus in Greek mythology. A mother moth warns the baby moth not to fly too close to a lit lantern or it will burn and die. The baby moth finds it hard to listen to its mother's warnings because the light is too dazzling; so the baby moth meets its doom.

Deseando tu salud que es la nuestra, / y buscando el major tratamineto, haré contigo / los que con sus enfermos los antiguos: exponíalos en / las gradas del templo, para que cada persona / que viniese de invocar a la Divinidad / les propusies un remedio is part of Rizal's dedication to the "Motherland" in his first novel *Noli me tangere.*

Guerrero is Leon Ma. Guerrero, one of the translators of Rizal's novels from Spanish to English. His biography on Rizal proclaims the hero to be the *First Filipino* (National Heroes Commission, 1963). Hau says that "[h]aving thus declared Rizal [so] by virtue of his accomplishments, Guerrero feels compelled to add that Rizal 'is also the first Filipino because he is first in the hearts of the Filipinos.'"

Es ist das erste, unparteiische, und kühne Buch über das Leben der Tagalen is taken from Ferdinand Blumentritt commenting on the *Noli me tangere.*

Hier gebe ich Antwort auf alles was über uns geschrieben und geschimpft wurde . . . is taken from Jose Rizal.

. . . sin ver la aurora brillar / sobre mi patria . . . ! is Elías's last words in the *Noli me tangere*, the same words used by Stevan Javellana for the title of his novel *Without seeing the dawn* (Little, Brown & Co., 1947).

Veneration without understanding is the title of an essay by Renato Constantino.

I would consider *"Señores, Yo no escribir en Español. / Pretendo yo, istiro tu,"* to be jolog Spanish. It translates as: "I don't write in Spanish. I'm pretending only, I'm pulling your leg." This plays with the idea that Rizal

wrote poorly in Spanish, and as a review of *Noli me tangere* put it, it had the "crassest ignorance of the rules of literature and especially of Spanish grammar." (Rodriguez, quoted by Schumacher, quoted by Hau, 85).

Des Knaben Wunderhorn is an anthology of German folk poems collected by Achim von Armin and Clemens von Brentano and published in 1805. The quoted couplet in German that follows comes from a song entitled "Verspätung."

II

This portion was inspired by the notion of how our educational system has treated and continues to treat Rizal and his works as ideals, objects of devotion and emulation. "On teaching Rizal" a 1958 essay by Ricardo C. Galang, that is quoted by Hau, says that the Rizal "must be taught as a way of life" by "mould[ing] the pupil in accordance with acceptable patterns of conduct as exemplified in the life and labors of the national hero" (36-7). Hau also observes that despite Rizal's presence in Philippine society, despite the required subjects in high school and college, Rizal's works aren't read: "The sad fact was that Rizal was visible everywhere, but largely unread" (4).

Rizal became known as the Doctor Uliman ("a Tagalog corruption of the Spanish word for German."), a concept that best demonstrates the assimilation of the "modern" world of the West. As Hau puts it in her discussion of the various Doctor-Uliman anecdotes: "Rizal becomes the living proof that one can be both *native* and *modern*." (60)

The use of the ~~strikethrough~~ is to represent the ~~trace~~ which Jacques Derrida defines in his *Writing and difference* (translated by Allan Bass; University of Chicago Press, 1978) as "not absence instead of presence, but [that] which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun."

Es zerfiel mir alles in Teile, / die Teile wieder in Teile, / und nichts mehr ließ sich mit einem Begriff umspannen is taken from Hugo von Hoffmannstahl.

. . . *de sus viajes por Alemania; de sus poder y grandes / influencias en esa nación* is taken from *Época*, the reputable newspaper during Rizal's time (as quoted by Retana, then by Hau, 56).

Appendix

Belongings

When the story was
        buried
There was the waiting for
        to remind us
How easy it was to be at a loss.

That mourning. It came as natural as the need
        to make sense
        of the plain crash. How casual/ties
Can be severed.

There was nobody
        who didn't know her
        who didn't want one
        of her belongings.

A scrap of truth will make a good conversation piece.

Arrangements will be made further

Fitting *wreckage* and *suffering*

To form a tragedy of misreadings.

    Hirsute. Dayak. Penanggalan.

"My education was strictly directed away from the supernatural by both my
secular and religiously conservative mentors in Malaysia."

Locating her (Davao, Diliman, Kuala Lumpur) in the name—
dropping (Salleh, Koret, Reyes, Darma, Hau) in order

To reclaim her from the manifesto.
Would she mind this? To be
Footnote entry*, fellowship grant? To be caught in
Quotation marks—

"The problem is really a conflict
between the forces of national integration and assertion . . ."

—without letting her finish

Can Afford

*

Be reachable.

As the narrative unfolded I was growing up too
Slow because I was caught up/between
Crossing the street and staying
Home. My parents were strict.

*

Be quiet.

Common sense tells me there were erasures.

*

*In memoriam, Luisa Mallari Hall (1963-2000)

Be reasonable.

This was when I discovered I was surrounded.
And things were (child-locked) (tamper-proofed).
The world was sick—everything could be doctored.
"When I grow up I want to be a doctor."

*

Be visible.

Of course we want to be pleasing.
And there I was onstage because of the *just*
Because and the *said so.*
At such a young age, I knew what it meant
To be herd and not scene. There I was part of the wave
Waving.

*

Be consistent.

As I write this someone is looking
Over my shoulder. That certain wait.
I have used this before, to feign illness—
To cause delays in the telling
I would say, "Watch out for
White lies ahead."

The Little Cancer Cells

That which I read but could not contain

*

My happiness
Was in the country

inside the narrative (and in it,
excess)—I did not recognize it and

No one recognized it;—

it was too much independent

Thought: to have a hero
Who could write,

who could think
'He could write'

a singular text:

—a beginning ends an end—

moths to the flames, loves lost
and won, the prodigal
son—

. . . para la generación que ha de venir

*

"They will not get it,—

But I shall be given to them . . .

Unto them

—I shall be required
or they will fail

. . . and if they pass me they will *surely*
Fail."

This is
a true story and it did
not happen

as it should have
happened—

In the instant replay . . .

—Deseando tu salud que es la nuestra,
y buscando el major tratamineto, haré contigo
los que con sus enfermos los antiguos: exponíalos en
las gradas del templo, para que cada persona—

. . . who said it
wasn't real. They gave his name
to streets. They made him statues,—

many statues, as though . . .

—que viniese de invoçar
a la Divinidad
les propusiese un remedio.—

To put him in many places

could give him the presence
of a god.

*

In Guerrero's version
He was the first—, ahead

of everyone

He was the embodiment
Of what it was

to be human

In the Third World

except the Third World

did not yet exist;— it had to be
created in the same way

He was created in order
For the narrative to hold

The country together:—

The islands had to be more than just islands.
Peopled and pieced and pierced for the light

That is, the truth—had to be
Assimilation . . .

Part of a greater whole
To be whole

—the blanks had to be filled in—

. . . para la generación que ha de venir

*

"For whom my writings were based on but could not contain. . .
—and what of errors . . ."

What are they to someone who could make
no mistakes

"What of accuracy."

Who had all the answers
even before the questions were asked

"If I could rewrite it again, I wouldn't change a thing. Es ist das erste, unparteiische, und kühne Buch über das Leben der Tagalen. I would still write it in the original and . . . Hier gebe ich Antwort auf alles was über uns geschrieben und geschimpft wurde . . . "

Who knew several languages and could not
be understood,—who resisted

Translation: was always [sic]

"Even then I knew this was not a reading
public;—they would never be

... refused to be—"

Will wait for the movie adaptation
'Assimilation'

" ... that is why I had to make the hero—ein Muster der Tagalischen Redweise—
familiar

Yet different; I had to hide in plain sight.
They take everything for granted.

They take everything personally.

Based on real life ...

—my life

On the facts ... on the fact that I was a doctor.
That I could heal the sick

Even if I was sick. (The rain in Spain, falls gently ...)
I was entitled—

To die before the end of the year,

before the end of the century—
... sin ver la aurora brillar
sobre mi patria ... !"

*

When he was my age he knew right
Then what fate he had to face,—

The charges . . .

Pretentiousness in the face of adversity.
Attempted murder in a foreign language.
Veneration without understanding.

The retraction . . .

"Señores, Yo no escribir en Español.
Pretendo yo, istiro tu."

. . . and then shots in the back like the little traitor
He'd soon be,—

though he let himself be called Señor Doctor.

Then a change of voice, suddenly singing songs from
Des Knaben Wunderhorn.

"Und als das brot gebacken war
Lag das Kind auf der Totenbahr."

He did not say, "Pronto
Me volvere loco, pero sólo un poco."

He gave his madness to his women.

II

To his credit, there were children
Who were well-read.

They knew the story and its end—

And the parts that they didn't know

they made up

Bluffing their way through school.
Their teachers knew no better,

they were taught no questions

To be asked unless answerable in one-
Fourth sheet of paper: that was all

They could read
Enough of reality for one day.

During recess, they turned him into a monster, and his name scared
The lower grades: the ferocious Doctor Uliman . . .
the F E R O C I O U S

Señor Doctor Uliman—

Who killed
with a drop of his hat

And his overcoat—

his *Ü B E R C O A T.*

It devoured children and anyone
Who touched it.
Such is the fate of one
who would die so young

. . . para la generación que ha de venir—

Do not touch it.

Do not touch ~~touch~~.

*

Once these were hands that needed proof
That the world mattered,—

That it contained . . .
People who mattered, and who could read

'People who mattered'—
In any language, that is

a world where no language would ever be
a foreign tongue. The superhuman ability. . .

(Übermensch with an Übercoat)

To interpret speech and human thought processes, to know *exactly*

what is meant by: "Es ist mir völig die Fähigkeit abhanden gekommen,
über irgend etwas zusammenhängend zu denken oder zu sprechen"—

The truth, that is,

beautiful enough to even
be written down
that it is above us . . .

In a Word Balloon (Wortballon): We know exactly what it is

That we want to say, "And what we can't say
We point with our lips." In a Gedankenballon

All thoughts are ours: (Es zerfiel mir alles in Teile,
die Teile wieder in Teile,
und nichts mehr ließ sich mit einem Begriff umpsannen—)

But his thoughts (the hero's
Thoughts: the Ü B E R M E N S C H) were German, and he would have

written in German if the Spaniards didn't speak Spanish, but as expected . . .

—the Spaniards spoke in a Spanish that was Spanish—

"Is it a crime," he would ask, "to be able to speak German?"

"It is, if you're a Nazi."
Are you a Nazi?

*

He could not answer because
His thoughts were not his, or so

He thought: if the Führer could see him now, he would think they were related:
short with a handsome mustache and funny
walk—

To Bagumbayan:

To the dead distance is all relative,

but with his head hung low, he did not see

. . . refused to see—

"de sus viajes por Alemania; de sus poder y
grandes infleuncias en esa nación"—

To one man, his head was held high and he took proud
steps, directed as though . . .

In a movie: the steps were

His but weren't really; they were rehearsed, certain
in the uncertainty of his spot

Where a sign reads: *Hoc est corpus.*

*

Unable to stand in the clear field
Under the strain of all those lights—

One imagines him to be elsewhere—;

While we fill his shoes, we try
To understudy him, Herr Doktor

Uliman Junior—; we are watching ourselves

—in the shooting of the shooting—

trying to find the best angle
for death; our not looking for shadows

Has cast us the role of our lives...

To have been this close to the hero, larger than any living portrait of him.

The children, and their cries—

Each time shots are fired: it is the sound
He waits for—, the recurring surround

Sound he waits for, even before shots are fired

—before fuego was fuego—.

Do not listen.

Do not hear ~~here~~.

The immortality of repose is what he puts up with
Until the bell rings.

Until a cut is made.

And the children,—

the beautiful well-bred children

—who will die for him every single school day . . . —

How many times did he hear this story end

Its end: "Someone has to die;
Someone has to live in fear."