

The Static City: The Portrayal of Stasis in Conchitina Cruz's *Dark Hours*

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The project of this study is to examine the techniques employed in the writing and arrangement of poems in a collection that presents a characteristic societal flaw of a particular place and its representative people and culture. My particular city of interest is Manila, and the particular characteristic flaw of this city that I intend to focus on is stasis.

The primary text I will be analyzing is *Dark Hours*, a collection of prose poems by Conchitina Cruz. The kind of stasis presented in *Dark Hours* is not necessarily a lack of movement; it is principally the city's lack of progress that is portrayed. Although the name of the city in *Dark Hours* is not specified, certain details in the text indicate that the city being written about is Manila. I have chosen *Dark Hours* because its characterization of stasis may be seen not just in the individual poems but also in the way the poems are arranged in the collection. The result is that while in each poem the stasis is presented through a particular situation or incident involving a single character, when read as a collection, the poems form a complete picture of the city's condition as it is influenced by its residents' actions and as it influences its residents' lives.

This issue of stasis is not something that has not been written about. In the case of Manila's lack of progress, many writings have attempted to pinpoint the causes of this stasis. In *The Origins of Metropolitan Manila: A Political and Social Analysis*, Manuel Caoili explains the ironic role that urbanization plays in hindering a city's progress. He quotes Lucian Pye, who states that "any systematic effort to transform traditional societies into modern nations must envisage the development of cities and urban modern societies," and he writes that this process of urbanization "can cause social, economic, and psychological divisions and tensions which can become sources of political instability" (7). This political instability is, of course, a ready source of problems, because "the political organization, to perpetuate itself, must provide a favorable climate for the development of cities" (Gideon Sjoberg qtd in Caoili 3). This constitutes one possible explanation as to the city's lack of progress on a political and social level.

Nick Joaquin, on the other hand, suggests another root of the static condition of the city, this time on the level of the individual. In "A Heritage of Smallness," he discusses the Filipino preference for embarking on small ventures. He discusses the way this is reflected in various endeavors undertaken by Filipinos—for example, Philippine trade (the *tingi*), literature (the development of the short story at the expense of the underdevelopment of the novel), pottery (soft materials are the preferred media), and even movies (formula films, with its tried and tested plots and characters). All in all, he says that the country's lack of progress is due to the Filipino's lack of initiative and refusal to move away from his or her comfort zone.

These are issues which have come to be regarded with indifference, or dismissed as irresolvable. What makes *Dark Hours* effective is that it not simply presents the characteristic flaw of the society; it *re*-presents it, meaning that, it paints a new and clearer picture of the urban conditions that people are familiar with and do acknowledge, or in the case of the residents of that particular city, conditions that they confront and live with everyday.

I will be discussing five techniques employed in the writing of *Dark Hours* which I think are the most effective. These five techniques fall under two categories: the first category includes those techniques employed in the writing of the individual poems, and under this fall the use of specific events and situations, the use of movement, and the presentation of images of incomplete urban structures. The second category includes the techniques employed in the arrangement of poems in the writing and arrangement of the collection, and under this fall the recurrence of characters, and circularity in the arrangement of poems.

I will not be using one specific literary framework in my analysis of the text because the techniques I have enumerated fall under different literary traditions or theories. The presentation of images of incomplete urban structures, for instance, falls under urban semiotics, while the use of seemingly enclosed and static landscapes is characteristic of the *modernista* tradition. My purpose is not to analyze the collection using one particular framework, but to examine some of the possible techniques employed by the writer in the effective presentation of the city and a particular characteristic of it.

Use of Specific Events and Situations

A *schema* generally refers to “a portion of background knowledge relating to a particular type of object, person, situation or event,” and arises from “repeated exposure to similar objects and situations; they are formed by abstracting common elements from different individual experiences” (Semino 124-125). I have already mentioned in the introduction that the problem of stasis in Manila is something that has been written about countless times, and is in fact encountered by the residents of the city everyday. As such, there exists what can be called a STATIC CITY schema, constituted by firsthand experiences of living in the city, and secondary information acquired from various sources.

What I consider to be the key phrase in the given definition of schema is “formed by abstracting common elements”. This implies a compression and distillation of all the schema’s constitutive elements, and offers a possible explanation as to why the problem of stasis, despite the extent to which it can be seen and felt, is often regarded with indifference and dismissed as irresolvable: the gravity of the problem has been played down by the process of schema formation. The borderlines that separate individual pieces of information and experiences become blurred, and all the constitutive elements fuse into one homogenous concept. The term STATIC CITY schema, in this sense, serves as a statement that summarizes the entire city’s condition, and is part of what is called *semantic memory*, or “our de-contextualised memory for facts about entities in the world” (125).

One application of the concept of schema in the study of literature has its roots in what the Russian Formalist Viktor Shlovsky calls *defamiliarization* (the original Russian term is *ostranenie* or “making strange”), which counters the so-called “automatization” (i.e., making familiar) of our perception of the world (Selden et al 33). However, G. Cook argues that the Russian Formalist concept of defamiliarization has been “unwisely limited to the linguistic make-up of texts, rather than being extended to include the extra-linguistic knowledge that readers employ to achieve coherence in interpretation,” and proposes instead that the “literariness” of a text be defined in terms of its “ability to disrupt the ordinary application of schemata and [its] potential for causing schema change” (Cook in Semino 152). According to him, a “dynamic interaction” may occur “between linguistic and text-structural form on the one hand, and schematic representation of the world on the other, whose overall result is to bring about a change in the schemata of the reader,” and that this kind of interaction may produce a

variety of effects on the reader's schema: *schema disruption*, when the reader's schema is challenged; *schema refreshment*, when the reader's schema is changed; *schema reinforcing*, when the existing schema is strengthened; *schema preserving*, when the existing schema is confirmed; and *schema adding*, when the existing schema is modified by addition of new information (Cook in Semino 153).

Within the context of *Dark Hours*, what the collection has to contend with is the automatization of stasis. Schema disruption and refreshment have to occur in order to reinstate the gravity of the problem in the mind of the reader, which may then lead to a possible reassessment of how this problem can be resolved. One technique employed in *Dark Hours* which brings about this disruption and refreshment of the STATIC CITY schema is the use of specific events and situations.

As mentioned earlier, schemata are part of semantic memory. Therefore, the problem of stasis as represented by the STATIC CITY schema is a *generalized* notion and not a *personal* concern; its nature as a personal problem that needs immediate attention disappears as the individual constitutive elements merge into one automatized concept. But the use of specific events and situations in the presentation of stasis counters this by tapping into a reader's *episodic memory*, or "memory about specific situations and events that occurred at a particular time" (Semino 125). This makes the portrayal of stasis more effective because a) it is easier to give a more detailed account of the problem using a specific event that is representative of the whole; and b) tapping into a reader's episodic memory engages him/her into the act of interpreting the text in a more personal level, and given this situation, he/she can better understand and relate to the problem being presented.

An example of the use of specific events and situations may be seen in the *Dark Hours* poem "The Gist of It" ("If you remove the placemats and paper plates") (Cruz 14). The poem portrays a scenario wherein a person is dominated by the feeling of helplessness. One way to analyze this poem is to say that it makes the following assumptions: a) everybody has experienced this feeling of helplessness at one point or another in his/her life; b) this feeling of helplessness is slowly forgotten in the time of peace and stability; and c) in some cases, a sense of complacency is developed, which creates the illusion that life will continue to proceed peacefully.

The image presented in the first paragraph of the poem is that of a table unburdened of the objects that are usually cluttered on top of it:

If you remove the placemats and paper plates, the haggard flowers, the teacup with
an image of a woman in spring, spilled wine, the newspaper, and a ponderous pen,
then you will find it, the round face of the table, placid and certain, ready to bask in
the morning sun. (par 1)

This first image makes use of a familiar situation that shows the nature of everyday living. The unburdening of the table does not seem to have any obvious significance; it is routine activity. When the persona adds in the second paragraph of the poem that "The table knows only joy once uncovered beneath so many objects," it is difficult to see how this "joy" may be felt, because it is located only within the context of everyday existence.

But the writer parallels this with a darker image presented in the last paragraph of the poem:

Think of the table in your time of darkness: on your knees with tears in your eyes,
searching for the familiar face, digging with your bare hands into the rubble. (par 3)

The impermanent nature of the “stability” that is being experienced in the present is given emphasis. This last situation is not as specific as the first, but the fact that the situation presented is not so detailed actually makes it easier for a reader to relate to this situation; what is given is a general picture, but it is able to communicate the specific feeling that it wants to show by allowing the reader to insert his/her own episodic memory—one that fits the given situation—into his/her reading of the poem. In effect, this last image is made specific by the reader himself/herself.

By presenting this last image, the writer taps into a particular memory of the reader in which he/she is dominated by helplessness, and shows that there exists the great possibility of experiencing this helplessness again in the future. The poem, then, is countering the complacency generated by the absence of immediate problems by emphasizing that tragedy always continues to lurk around the corner and it does this by forcing the reader to recall a particular event or situation in which he/she experienced this truth firsthand.

Use of Movement

In the poems in *Dark Hours*, the city is portrayed as something that changes continuously, uncontrollably, and unpredictably over short periods of time. It might seem ironic that the city’s continuous movement is used to portray stasis, but it is actually an effective technique, because the city’s lack of progress is clearly emphasized when an image of this city experiencing a rapid process of urbanization is juxtaposed with an image of it deteriorating instead of developing.

This section of the analysis discusses three poems in *Dark Hours* that make use of this technique to present the city’s deterioration.

In “I must say this about the city” (“The floor”) (Cruz 12), the city’s continuous movement is portrayed by placing emphasis on the barrage of city noises that may be heard nonstop. This continuous influx of noises is mimicked in the poem by omitting punctuation marks. In effect, the poem seemingly wants to be read continuously and without pause. This is, of course, impossible, so it is constructed in such a way as to mask the pauses and create the illusion of continuity, which is best seen when the poem is read aloud.

While the poem appears to have a prose form, it is actually cut into ten lines, with each line stretching almost as long as the width of the page. What must be noted is that the line cuts don’t fall where a half-stop or a full-stop would normally be if the poem were punctuated. For instance, these are the first five lines (actually, the first four lines and part of the fifth line) of the poem as they appear on the page:

The floor is my only friend I press my ear against the wood I put my body to sleep in a
corner hush I say to the floor but it has no control over its utterances it cannot keep

the city’s secrets to itself I hear the coming and going of rain the swagger
of trucks taking pigs to a slaughterhouse the heels of women tapping on a
stage footsteps

on their way somewhere (lines 1-5)

If the logical locations of pauses were to be marked with slashes, this is how the first five lines would appear:

The floor is my only friend / I press my ear against the wood / I put my body to
sleep in a corner / hush I say to the floor but it has no control over its utterances /
it cannot keep

the city's secrets to itself / I hear the coming and going of rain / the swagger of
trucks taking pigs to a slaughterhouse / the heels of women tapping on a stage /
footsteps

on their way somewhere /

If the pauses were at the end of each line, they would slow down the pace of reading, because this would cue the reader to pause for breath. But the way the lines are cut creates a propulsion instead of a pause at the end of each, such that the reader is forced to continue onto the next after the last word of a line is read, thus maintaining the rapid rhythm.

The omission of punctuation marks also places emphasis on continuous reading. Commas and periods signal their reader to pause. While the reader is still inclined to pause at the points where the commas and periods logically ought to be, their absence signals him/her to quicken this pause or to make it shorter than usual. Again, in this way, the rhythm is maintained, and an illusion of continuity in the reading of the poem is created. The "breathlessness" caused by having to read the poem rapidly and continuously captures the taxing effect of the city's movement that drives a person to the point of weariness and non-action. In effect, the stasis being portrayed in the poem is the non-action of the persona caused by the intrusive and overwhelming sounds that continuously bombard him/her.

In "What is it about tenderness" ("Next to herself, the body"), (Cruz 8) the city is compared to a dead body. The character from whose point of view the comparison is made considers the city's continuous and uncontrollable movement as "her greatest fear" and the opposite of a dead body, the parts of which can be learned and mastered.

It is not only the nonstop and rapid metamorphosis of the city that alarms the character; she is distressed by the aimlessness of the changes in the city, because the changes seem to lead towards deterioration instead of progress:

Peopled to the brim and heavy with smog, in the city there were no stars to lend order
to the nameless nights, no traffic lines to follow, no lamps to keep the street signs in
sight. (par 1)

So in this way, the character is commenting on the city's hopeless condition. However, juxtaposing the character's opinion regarding the city with her preference for the dead body she is dissecting creates not only a portrayal of stasis on the level of the city, but also on the level of the individual residing in the city—the character who is dissecting the body. The character, overwhelmed by the rapid and aimless changes undergone by the city, is reduced to non-action.

Because the body is labeled as the "opposite" of the continuously changing city, the implication is that the persona sees the body as something that does not undergo change, and can therefore be mastered. Unlike the city which sprouts too many streets and establishments so quickly that it is practically impossible to know all their names, the names and locations of different parts of the body are constant. However, the last image presented in the poem does

point to the fact that the body is not unchanging: “She looked up, the city moving into her eyes as she brushed the maggots off the body with the back of her gloved hand” (par 3).

This insinuates that there is actually no difference between the deteriorating city and the decomposing body; perhaps the only difference is that the dead body changes at a much slower rate, and as a result its changes are more subtle as compared to those in the city. But the fact is that there will also come a point in time when the parts—and even the overall form itself—of the dead body will inevitably become unrecognizable. The body then, the object that may be taken as the character’s comfort object (because it *is* mentioned in the first paragraph of the poem that “the body was all that mattered to her”), serves as a miniature representation of the city and its deterioration.

Putting the images of the city and the dead body side by side and having the character prefer the latter over the former therefore places the character in a position of stasis or non-progress as well. Her choice illustrates Nick Joaquin’s point in “A Heritage of Smallness.” Lack of progress may be attributed to the preference for small things that are familiar and knowable, and the refusal to move out of one’s comfort zone.

In “Geography Lesson” (“Inside the story is a garden”) (Cruz 9-10), three stories are simultaneously narrated. First, there is the story filtered through the point of view of the main character, a university professor who is conducting a literature class when a group of students stop by to ask for donations and find volunteers to dig for bodies in a dumpsite where an avalanche had occurred. The second story is the one being discussed in the literature class, which is about a woman who discovers that her husband is having an affair with another woman. The third story covers the events happening in the dumpsite.

At first glance, the scene presented in the poem seems static and enclosed, with the three stories delineated in such a way that it is possible to recognize each one despite the simultaneous narration. However, there actually occurs a shifting of character: at some points, it is impossible to tell which woman is being pertained to—the university professor, the woman with the adulterous husband, or a woman in the dumpsite. The process of shifting occurs slowly:

Inside the story is a garden with a pear tree, the view of a house with a staircase and mahogany desks. Inside the house is a woman with her back against the windows, her body bent over her child inside a crib, her body leaning against a table as she fixes the fruit in a bowl. (par 1)

Inside the story is a dinner party the woman hosts, the idle talk of guests, the moment her husband leans toward the body of another woman. (par 3)

Inside the story, the woman cries, what will happen to me now? (par 5)

Inside the story there is a woman, a house, a man, a pear tree. Inside the story is a house, a bowl full of fruit. (par 7)

The woman leans the sadness of her body against the window, tries to look beyond the pear tree. Inside the story, she sees nothing but darkness. She is ungrateful for the luxury of despair. (par 8)

At first, one can state with certainty that the woman in the first paragraph is the woman in the story being discussed in class. So is the case with the woman in the third paragraph. However, by the fifth paragraph, the students who are asking for volunteers have already made their appearance, thus providing another context. The woman who cries, “What will happen to me now?” may be the woman in the fictional story, or a woman in the dumpsite who either

survived but lost her family and possessions, or is buried inside her house and is on the brink of death.

There is a deliberate lack of markers that could serve as cues to the character shifts. One may argue, for instance, that the bowl of fruit is definitely unique to the story being discussed in class, that surely a bowl of apples, oranges, and grapes are something that anybody residing in the dumpsite cannot afford. Perhaps if it were stated in this way—a bowl of apples, oranges, and grapes—then it could be taken as unique to the fictional story. But the bowl of fruit generally recurs as a bowl of fruit—that is, the kinds of fruit are not specified. It is not completely unlikely for somebody living in a dumpsite to afford a bowl of fruit; it all depends on the kind. So in the end, even this small detail cannot be taken for granted.

Even the pear tree cannot be used to indicate which story is being discussed. As with the bowl of fruit, it is at first undeniably connected to the story being discussed in class—there is, literally, a pear tree in the garden of the woman in this story. However, at the end of the third paragraph, the symbolic function of the pear tree is discussed: “...the pear tree outside, the symbol of her life, the tree in full bloom, the tree caught in shadows.” At this point, the image of the pear tree can be applied to any of the three stories presented in the poem, because it has been given context beyond its initial literal form. If applied to the woman in the dumpsite, for instance, the tree can stand as “the symbol of her life”, meaning that she is “caught in shadows” because of the recent tragedy that struck her.

Taking these two considerations in mind, the woman in the seventh paragraph could also be either the woman in the story being discussed in class, or a woman in the dumpsite. Finally, in the eighth paragraph, the woman could be any of three, with the addition of the university professor as somebody who could be commenting on either the fictional story, the events in the dumpsite, or both: “...she sees nothing but darkness. She is ungrateful for the luxury of despair.”

The shift which occurs in the poem may be read within the context of the *modernista* writing tradition. As mentioned earlier, the scene presented in the poem seems enclosed and static. According to Gwen Kirkpatrick, this enclosure and “freezing of time” are important characteristics of *modernista* poems, which enable them to function somewhat like “a museum piece or point of reference” from which the social condition can be assessed (10). She further writes, “[if] order is a necessary precondition for transgression or vice, these static landscapes and enclosed gardens, which seem to offer the reader a single, directed point of view, in effect are engineered for more possibilities. *Their stillness contains a slightly wayward movement or distracting gesture that destabilizes the entire backdrop*” (11, my emphasis). The shifting of characters may be considered as this “backdrop-destabilizing” movement: what at first seems to be carefully delineated stories in fact run into each other and are, in the end, indistinguishable. The poem creates an illusion of order by presenting the three stories as if they are distinguishable from each other, when in fact, it becomes evident that it is impossible to tell them apart.

If the events presented were to be related to the poem’s title, one can get a sense of what the backdrop that is being destabilized is. “Geography” can pertain not only to a physical location; it can refer to what is happening to the political and social landscape—that is, a political geography or a social geography. The poem then may be taken as a representation of the city with its false sense of order: what at first glance seems to be intact and recognizable turns out to be the opposite. Also, because of the shifting movement, the distinction between problems of a personal nature and those falling within the society’s concern is blurred. The problems plaguing society are shown as a conflation of problems of different natures which

cannot be dismissed as beyond the scope of society's concern because they continue to exist in society and do contribute to its current state of non-progress.

Images of Incomplete or Broken Urban Structures

Umberto Eco discusses in "Function and Sign: Semiotics of Urban Architecture" that all architectural structures have a denotative element and a connotative element (61-65). The denotative element corresponds to a structure's conventional "primary, utilitarian function" (61). According to Eco, "*the form of the object must, besides making the function possible, denote that function clearly enough to make it practicable as well as desirable*" (63, author's italics). An overpass, for instance, is a means of crossing the street. The form of this structure communicates its utilitarian function: a person takes the stairs up at one side of the overpass, crosses over to the other side, and descends the steps on that side.

The connotative element, on the other hand, corresponds to "the 'symbolic' capacities of these objects [which] are no less useful than their 'functional' capacities" (65). If an overpass denotes a means of crossing the street, it also connotes a *safer* means of crossing the street. It may also connote several other things, like the level of progress of a country or the concern of public leaders for the welfare of the members of the community. There are a number of ways by which these architectural structures may be interpreted. A popular crack about overpasses in this country, for instance, is that they sprout all over the place come election time as part of a political candidate's campaign.

Up until this point, however, I have been discussing the utilitarian and symbolic functions of architectural structures within the context of whole and complete structures. For structures that are incomplete, broken, or have ceased to exist, there is only an implication as to what their denoted functions are. As for their symbolic functions, these may depend on the process of their breakage, incompleteness, or disappearance. I will now be discussing the static effect produced by images of structures that are broken, incomplete, or have ceased to exist in selected poems from *Dark Hours*.

Besides Eco's essay, I also refer to "Disruption, Hesitation, Silence" by Louise Glück. The works she analyzes in this essay are poems of Berryman, Oppen and Eliot. She examines how "brokenness" is communicated in one poem of each writer, and what this "brokenness" achieves. She analyzes these pieces primarily in terms of how they communicate brokenness through a "fracturing of voice," as in Berryman's *The Dream Songs* (76), and through the way "ideas are held in suspension" (81) and action is stalled, as in Oppen's "Street" and Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." While images that are presented in a poem are my focus, several of Glück's points are applicable to my analysis.

The poem "Now and at the hour" (Cruz 29) contains images that present the condition of a city after an earthquake has "reshaped" its geography, collapsing "what is familiar" (par 1):

...We survey the fallen pyramids of fruit on market floors, the uninterrupted horizon:
buildings and the bodies beneath them succumbing to the pull of the earth. *Where are you?* I don't know, I can't say by the acacia tree, before a neighbor's house, the cracks
multiplying like snakes on the ground. *Where are you?* I am here— (par 2)

From these lines, one implication is that naturally-occurring elements and architectural structures may function as landmarks ("by the acacia tree, before a neighbor's house"). With their destruction comes the difficulty of ascertaining one's physical location in the place. But this

is just on the surface. A second implication is that these structures signify the elements that remain familiar in a perpetually changing landscape. These familiar elements can be considered constituents of a person's comfort zone; if they disappear, the sense of familiarity is lost, leaving behind a landscape that is alien, and, in the case of cities with its many new buildings and major thoroughfares, confusing and imposing.

These symbolic functions are made more obvious by presenting images of destroyed architectural structures. Of the power of a broken image in works of art, Glück writes, "[such] works inevitably allude to larger context; they haunt because they are not whole, though wholeness is implied" (73). The presentation of the broken structures' inability to fulfill their symbolic functions is what highlights the importance of these structures and provides a deeper explanation as to why their destruction produces a disconcerting effect.

In the second paragraph, the last stanza is able to communicate the paralysis caused by the removal of familiar elements in the landscape. The dash at the end of the sentence communicates the desperation of the persona to declare his/her location within the ruins, but the destruction of familiar structures prevents him/her from doing so. On the literal level, this translates to not knowing exactly where he/she is, but on another level, this corresponds to a loss of grounding and balance in a world rendered unfamiliar by disaster. Unsure of where to go, the persona is forced to stay rooted on his/her spot.

If complete architectural structures have symbolic functions, so can incomplete architectural structures. In addition to what has been previously quoted, Glück also writes, "[in] the broken thing...human agency is oddly implied: breakage, whatever its cause, is the dark complement to the act of making; the one implies the other" (75).

The statement "human agency is oddly implied" can also be applicable to incomplete structures; that is, structures whose constructions have not been fully accomplished. Incomplete structures, for instance, may function symbolically by making a commentary as to their incompleteness. Naturally, one aspect of this commentary may be the "human agency" behind the decision to terminate construction even before the project is completed.

"No Rain" (Cruz 50), the fourth poem in the "Disappear" cycle, presents images of such incomplete structures:

I walk one block and pass a series of testaments to failure—the skeleton of a building, a half-built bridge already breaking down. On the dusty metal fence hangs a sign that promises a highway. (par 1)

The phrase "testaments to failure" already makes a strong statement. In one block, three such testaments are encountered. The states of incompleteness of the various structures presented become worse as one progresses down the line: first, there is "the skeleton of a building", then a crumbling "half-built bridge", and finally something that isn't even incomplete, because the process of its construction has not even begun. It is difficult to say whether the first structure is a private or government venture, but the last two are obviously government projects.

These different states of incompleteness presented are already making a commentary on the "human agency" behind these projects. The last image is particularly strong. There is no structure to begin with, only a sign that "promises" the construction of a highway. The verb "promises" is loaded; it not only pertains to the words in the sign promising the construction of the highway, but also to the people responsible for the project whose words these are. There is the implication that the people who planned and are in charge of the completion of these structures are given to abandoning their responsibilities. Given this, not only the city's lack of

progress is shown through the various incomplete structures that may be found in the city; a reason for this lack of progress is also hinted at, one concerning the governance of the city and the people tasked to perform the job.

“Geography Lesson” (“You might want to know”) (Cruz 17-24) communicates incompleteness firstly through its form. This is one of the “footnote poems” in the collection: the entire poem consists of eight footnotes which at first glance seem to not point at anything because, besides the footnotes, nothing else is written on the page. The last footnote encapsulates the tendency of these things to disappear rapidly and without warning: “Such is the curse of this place: if you close your eyes, it disappears” (24).

The poem shows the effect of the continuous changes in the city by alluding to things that have ceased to exist, or still exist but under a different name; hence, the “missing texts” to which the visible texts serve as footnotes. One such effect is the way these rapid changes cause people to lose their way when traveling. One of the footnotes that demonstrates this is the third one:

Within the city, the street bears the name of a prolific translator, best-known for his English translation of the novel *Noli Me Tangere*. Beyond the borders of the city, its name changes to McKinley. Unfortunately, the map does not make this distinction, causing many guests to lose their way... (19)

However, travel and sense of geographical location are not the only things affected by these changes. The poem is also suggesting that the facts included in the history of a specific place are controlled by the ruling class. As a result, the history that is presented is one from which this class benefits the most. The sixth footnote, for example, obviously alludes to the way the Americans packaged Rizal in history textbooks as a peace-loving man with many virtues, because they did not want a national hero who believed that it would take a revolution by the masses for the country to attain freedom: “Has it been said that the novelist believed in revolution and loved white women?” (22)

However, the writings and memoirs of Rizal himself show that his opposition to the revolution of the Katipunan was due to the fact that their planned revolt was not properly organized, and they were lacking in resources (one of the more popular Rizal biographies that show this is Austin Coates’s *Rizal: Philippine Nationalist and Martyr*). This is something that a lot of elementary and even high school textbooks of Philippine history fails to acknowledge.

All these aspects of the poem communicate a feeling of confusion brought about by rapid changes in the city and discrepancies between the “truths” upheld by the ruling class and those advocated by other social groups. These changes and discrepancies affect, as mentioned earlier in the analysis of “Now and at the hour,” a person’s grounding in his/her society, as well as his sense of balance, because of the impermanent nature of the things surrounding him/her and the difficulty in reconciling the different and oftentimes conflicting beliefs of various social groups. Thus, the confusion may cause a person to overstay in one spot because of his/her uncertainty about which direction to go.

Recurring Characters

In the collection, the same character appears in different poems, and when these appearances are taken together, the role they play in portraying stasis becomes evident. More than one character makes multiple appearances in *Dark Hours*, and one such character will be

discussed here – the woman in the laboratory in the two “What is it about tenderness” poems (Cruz 8, 58). The poems in which this character appears may actually not be limited to these two; majority of the poems has a female character who possesses characteristics similar to those of this character. But since these are the two poems which obviously feature the same character, I shall be focusing on them.

I have discussed one of the “What is it about tenderness” poems (“Next to herself, the body”) earlier. This poem tells of how the woman in the laboratory prefers the dead body she is dissecting to the city, because the dead body cannot undergo the rapid and aimless changes that the city does. While body parts can be learned and mastered, the same thing cannot be said of the city which the woman sees as continuously deteriorating. However, it is not true that the dead body she prefers remains unchanging; it is already in the process of decomposing. The body may be taken as a miniature representation of the city and its deterioration.

The second poem (“The dead woman in the laboratory”) (Cruz 58) starts with this paragraph:

The dead woman in the laboratory has lost her heart. Otherwise, she is intact: ribs, muscles, and skin in place. Nothing betrays the emptiness in her chest. (par 1)

On the literal level, the dead woman being pertained to is a cadaver, possibly the same body as that in the first poem. On the metaphorical level, however, this woman may actually be the medical student, the woman in the laboratory who is doing the dissecting. The details which contextualize the metaphorical death of this woman are found in the last paragraph of the poem:

In the dictionary the woman no longer opens, dried petals, the remnants of flowers from a man long gone, mark the pages of her favorite words. Somewhere in this room are the streets where the dead once lives, but there are names that need not be spoken... (par 3)

These details imply the loss of things the character valued in the past, and with this loss comes the “emptiness” mentioned in the first paragraph.

The two poems, when taken together, portray stasis in two ways. First, there is no difference between the character as she is presented in the first poem and as she is presented in the second. There is the same detachment and continuing preoccupation with the dead body and its parts, although in the second poem, she is shown studying only the dissected heart. The lack of a positive change in the behavior and attitude of the character in the second poem from the character in the first shows the stasis.

Second, additional details in the second poem show how the losses she experienced in the past maims her emotionally, causing her to feel an emptiness from which she never recovers. What is implied is that the woman has actually undergone a regression, and this regression has caused her to stay fixed on the same spot. Where the second poem ends, the event of the character’s movement away from this static state is still improbable; either she continues to overstay in this state or her regression continues.

It must be noted that while there are different characters present in the various poems in the collection, they all share the characteristic of not moving away from a static state. The reasons for this non-movement vary per character. For instance, for the woman in the laboratory, the paralysis is caused by the experience of loss, while for the woman in “I must say this about the city” (“The floor”), it is the chaotic quality of the city that forces her to stay enclosed in her own space. This recurrence plays a big part in presenting a portrait of the place in which the different pieces are set, because it establishes a connection between them and

suggests explanations as to why the place that serves as the setting of the pieces fails to progress.

Circularity in the Arrangement of Poems

In saying that the arrangement of the poems in the collection is circular, I am not only pertaining to how the poems progress away from a point of origin and eventually return to it. Another characteristic of this circular arrangement is the way it highlights the tendency of events to repeat themselves upon reaching the point of origin. This demonstration of continuous and repetitive occurrence of events highlights the city's lack of progress all the more, because despite the constant movement, the city fails to advance beyond the static state.

One aspect that shows this circularity of arrangement is the progression from an impersonal presentation of situations at the beginning of the collection to a more personal one towards the middle, then back to an impersonal presentation as the collection ends. The first five poems do begin to portray the stasis of the city and its people already, but in a detached way, much like the view offered by a camera panning the landscape. Three of these first five poems have an omniscient narrator who narrates the events and almost matter-of-factly states what the characters are feeling.

Two other poems feature first-person narrators from whose consciousness the events are filtered, but these narrators are still unable to clearly state how they are affected by the events around them. In "Geography Lesson" ("Inside the story") (Cruz 9-10), for instance, the "I" makes a short appearance in the middle of the poem but disappears towards the end, or rather, merges with the other two female characters in the poem, as I have discussed in a previous section. In the first poem of the collection, "Dear City" (Cruz 3), the speaker is not an "I", but a "we" constituted by "men and women of honor" who "feed [their] children three meals a day" and never miss an election"; that is, inhabitants of the city. These inhabitants are collectively detached from the city, because while they are aware of and acknowledge the city's deterioration, they refuse to take any responsibility and insist that they are not guilty of causing this deterioration. What ultimately makes this poem detached is the way the collective persona lays its judgment on the city as the guilty party and proceeds to consider the case closed.

As the collection progresses, the narrated events and situations become increasingly personal and more of the characters' thoughts and feelings are revealed, either directly through statements or indirectly through actions. For instance, the expressions of the despair felt by characters upon experiencing loss become more specific and elaborate. While "Now and at the hour" shows the presence of an "I" who feels lost after an earthquake demolishes all that is familiar to her, this "I" is only a small part of the poem, one image among a succession of others. As such, only a glimpse of the despair she is feeling is shown. Compare this to the poem "Elegy" (Cruz 35) which is definitely more personal, focusing on the loss experienced by just one person and featuring a persona whose method of narration betrays the anguish she feels after the death of a friend.

The last few poems revert to being impersonal and demonstrate the return to the collection's point of origin. The movement from the impersonal to the personal, then back to the impersonal, implies that the stasis present at the societal level (as in "Dear City") is indeed difficult to overcome, because stasis also occurs on the individual level. And because the individual inhabitants of the city have yet to progress beyond their current static states, the

stasis occurring at the level of society cannot as yet be resolved. Without the intervention of the individual residents of the city, the events surrounding their lives and the city's development (or lack thereof) continue to repeat themselves.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, I chose to analyze *Dark Hours* because the portrayal of the city's conditions may be seen not only in the constitutive poems but in the collection as a whole. I believe that *Dark Hours* is successful in presenting the country's lack of progress because it concentrates on a specific place and a specific perspective. It uses as its setting the nation's capital, and the problem of stasis presented in the collection is emphasized all the more because the poems are set in what is supposedly the nation's center of progress and development.

Also, while others might argue that the collection presents only the perspective of the urban middle-class, the presentation of the problem of stasis from the perspective of those who reside in the capital and experience the brunt of the problem firsthand produces a more detailed and immediate account of the situation. This is in contrast to what Ronald Barthes calls a "blue guide" account that "focuses the traveler's attention on a limited range of landscape features, thereby 'overpowering' or 'masking' the 'real' spectacle of human life and history and simultaneously providing an illusion of cultural stability and continuity" (Duncan and Duncan in Barnes and Duncan 20).

Another reason for the success of *Dark Hours* is that its form—the form of the poems and the arrangement of the collection—contributes to the effective presentation of stasis. Peter Widdowson writes in *Practical Stylistics: An Approach to Poetry* that "poetry is a representation of socially unsanctioned reality through the exploitation of unrealized possibilities in language" (71), and that "[poems] draw attention to themselves by their very oddity, and this oddity implies the new realization of some aspect of reality by which we were previously unaffected or of which we were unaware" (12). This "oddity" is apparent in the footnote poems in *Dark Hours* because the unusual form draws attention to the point that the piece is trying to make, and makes this point accessible through both written and visual content.

Finally, the way the city's conditions are portrayed from the point of view of the characters reflects the characteristic of this group of characters residing in the city. In the introduction to *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan write, "when we 'tell it like it is' we are also 'telling it like we are'" (3). The presentations of the different characters of the problem of stasis based on their personal experiences give hints as to why the problem persists, and how their actions (including their *lack* of actions) contribute to the continued presence of this problem.

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