

# Homoeroticism as the Poetry of the In-Between: The Self-Translations of Nicolas Pichay

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What drives certain poets to translate themselves? In moving between two different sign systems and audiences to create a text in two languages, what are “lost and found” to and from the original and the translated texts? Because such texts defeat standard literary critical and translation theory, analysis can be quite tricky. Jan Walsh Hokenson and Marcella Munson ask in their landmark 2007/2014 *The Bilingual Text: History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation*, “Beyond the literary functions of the bilingual text, why have theorists in translation studies and linguistics paid so little attention to this age-old practice of self-translators recreating their own word?” (2014, 3). Hokenson and Munson propose two reasons. The first is that the keepers of the canon have historically insisted on “the linguistic purity” of the foundational figures (such as Chaucer and Dante) in building up a national canon, although both writers regularly translated their own works for various audiences and purposes. The second is that the future gatekeepers routinely ignored the translation as an awkward appendage of some sort. This, in turn, then influenced the thinking on self-translation as a marginal or esoteric task historically, starting from around the Renaissance onwards and up until very recently. Indeed, one can think of the long legacy of self-translation among such writers as, chronologically, Francis Bacon, Rabindranath Tagore, Stephen Benet, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, and Joseph Brodsky whose works have been analyzed predominantly as monolingual texts. The deliberate self-translation of the latter two writers, however, eventually changed the thinking on this remarkable aspect of literary practice.

The second reason for the neglect or indifference in studying literary self-translation is the conceptual complexity of the task itself. In the words of Hokenson and Munson, “Since the bilingual text exists in two language

systems, how do the monolingual categories of author and original apply?” (2014, 2). They then posit corollary questions: “Are the two texts both original creations? Is either text complete? Is self-translation a separate genre? Can either version belong within a single language or literary tradition? How can two linguistic versions of a text be commensurable?” On the other hand, contemporary translation scholar Susan Bassnett questions whether self-translation practices are, in fact, a form of translation at all. When she says that, “The problems of defining what is or is not a translation are further complicated when we consider self-translation and texts that claim to be translated from a non-existent source” (1998, 38), Bassnett virtually relegates self-translation as one of those problematic types. Then, too, when Christopher Whyte insists that self-translation is “an activity without content, voided of all the rich echoes and interchanges ... attributed to the practice of translation” (2002, 70), he is virtually saying that self-translation is not translation at all in the ordinary or accepted sense of the word.

Poets who self-translate do so for various reasons, although such reasons may ultimately be idiosyncratic. Even though self-translation is generally considered as “something marginal, a sort of cultural or literary oddity” (Wilson 2009, 186), there appears to be a strong impulse among bilingual (and for some, multilingual) writers to explore the potentials of meaning and resonance in the process of recreating their own words in another language. Because self-translation is closely associated with bilingualism per se, the process problematizes certain aspects of literary and translation theory with regard to identity, equivalence, authorship and readership, and of textuality itself. Ghenadie Râbacov, who sees self-translation as cross-cultural mediation (2013, 66), traces two factors that encourage self-translation. The first involves the writer or author, a perfect or near-perfect bilingual, taking it upon himself to weigh the issues between two cultural systems by bringing them together in the self-translated text. In George Steiner’s famous 1998 work *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, he implies that as the perfect translator, the bilingual is one who does not “see the difficulties, the frontier between the two languages is not sharp enough in his mind” (1998, 125).

The second factor, Râbacov advances, is society itself, what he calls “the translated society,” by which he means the sociolinguistic factors that come into play in places where bi- or multilingualism is a fact of life. “Living in a translated society, (self)-translation brings into play some social issues” (2013, 68), whereby the cultural dominance of one language may assert itself in the process. This is similar to what Rainier Grutman labels as “finding symmetry

in an asymmetrical world” (1998, 196). Grutman, who wrote the entry on “Autotranslation” (another word for self-translation) for the 1998/2009 *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* edited by Mona Baker, remarks on the prestige of one language over another when it comes to where the self-translated text is published and read. Here we might borrow Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of “symbolic capital” as a way of explaining why, for example, Samuel Beckett, relocating in France in 1937, consciously became bilingual in his writing. At that time, Grutman notes, literary English had not yet taken off as the linguistic currency du jour, “whose shares on linguistic world markets,” as Grutman puts it would increase only after the Second World War. Thus, there is an unspoken power differential between the languages of self-translators, an asymmetry, which some poets may challenge today, writing in two languages precisely because self-translation may provide a voice to the other, less dominant language.

Which brings us to the 1993 poetry collection *Ang Lunes na Mahirap Bunuin/The Intransigence of Mondays* by Nicolas Pichay, which is also his first book of poetry. While *Ang Lunes/The Intransigence* (abbreviated henceforth) is not wholly self-translated, the four poems that Pichay elects to self-translate also happen to explore homoerotic themes, with some explicit ones at that. Three professional translators, Rosemarie King, Joey Baquiran, and Jerry Torres, tackle the rest of the various poems in the volume. This observation leads us to examine certain aspects of poetic self-translation as they impinge upon (1) commensurability, (2) authorship/readership, and (3) textuality/intertextuality itself, the three elements explored in this paper.

Because the four poems we review here deal frankly with the homoerotic, a few questions immediately pique our interest, the first of which is, why did Nicolas Pichay choose for himself these poems to self-translate, and then leave the others to professional translators? Taking the first stanza of “Maselang Bagay ang Sumuso ng Burat/This is a Delicate Matter, Sucking Cock,”

This is a delicate matter, sucking cock  
 You might not like it right away.  
 Remember not to pounce indiscriminately in the dark  
 Lest you gag with foot in your mouth.  
 Nevertheless, do not deprive yourself blind  
 To the call of truth in thyself  
 Nor accept as gospel truth society’s  
 Definition of what it is to be a man.  
 This is a delicate matter, sucking cock  
 You might not like it right away.

Maselang bagay ang sumuso ng burat  
 Baka hindi mo magugustuhan kaagad,  
 Huwag kang basta mandadakma sa dilim  
 Kung ayaw mong masubo sa alanganin.  
 Huwag rin naman sanang magsisinungaling  
 Sa sariling nakakaalam ng hilig  
 O gumamit ng sukatang panlipunan  
 Nang hindi iniisip ang pinagmulan.  
 Maselang bagay ang sumuso ng burat  
 Hindi parang kaning madaling iluwat

we immediately sense a close and thoughtful rendition of the original. Having said that, we note that the English translation appears on the left page and the original Filipino on the right (113). We assume this to be the original. This is quite unusual. In standard bilingual or translated poetic texts, the original normally assumes a position of importance by being positioned verso, while the translation following, on the right, the recto. This brings to mind the case of Samuel Beckett as the primary exemplum of literary self-translation, whose works, since his immigrating to France at age thirty-one, became decidedly diptych. Grutman then says that after this, “Beckett ended up blurring the boundaries between original and replica, creation and copy” (2013, 196).

It might be that *Ang Lunes/The Intransigence*, being a first publication, was produced bilingually as a career strategy on Pichay’s part, or as a stepping-stone, so to speak, to mark him off as a distinct new voice. The Zamboanga-born lawyer, while known today primarily for his dramatic productions and his translations and adaptations of canonical plays, grew up in Quiapo, Manila’s rambunctious commercial district, and the impetus for writing the city in many of his poems in *Ang Lunes/The Intransigence* maybe sourced from there. Pichay attended the prestigious University of the Philippines (where he studied theater and law) Writers Workshop in 1982 and has become since then, a multi-awarded dramatist, scriptwriter, and translator of various works. When Pichay remarks to “think like a Houdini; a box is something to escape from. You can do anything you want” (Guerrero 2013), he may have grafted a trope for his own self-translational poetics, the blurring of boundaries between original and copy or the cipher, unraveling the myth of poetry’s untranslatability.

In order to study the merits of a diptych literary publication, both from literary critical and translation theory perspectives, a typology of bilingual texts has been proposed by Eva Gentes (2013, 275) so that “further empirical research and theory development” may be advanced. She says there are four types:

- a. *En face* editions
  - Corresponding facing editions
  - Non-corresponding facing pages
- b. Split-page editions
  - Divided vertically
  - Divided horizontally

- c. Successive versions
- d. Reversible editions (tête-bêche)

Most en face editions are published with corresponding facing pages, allowing the reader to compare and switch between both versions conveniently. This, of course, presumes bilingual fluency, or at least reading proficiency in both languages. A result of this arrangement is the creation of a double reading or a combined meaning which is greater than each of the meanings contained in the text, if examined individually (Danby 2003, 84). The reader is then encouraged for “double reading” (Gentes 2013, 276). In reviewing Pichay’s first stanza above, we might ponder on the incommensurability (while apparently retaining equivalence) of the third and fourth lines,

Remember not to pounce indiscriminately in the dark	Huwag kang basta mandadakma sa dilim
Lest you gag with foot in your mouth.	Kung ayaw mong masubo sa alanganin.

where *dakma* is rendered as “to pounce indiscriminately” and the idiomatic expression *masubo sa alanganin* as “gag with foot in your mouth,” in both cases employing what I call rough-and-ready correspondences, but whose independent meanings are totally separate in the cultural worlds of the imagined English reader from that of the independent Filipino reader.

We might make a case for the untranslatability of specific culture-bound words such as the often-anthropologically-remarked-upon vocabulary of “carry” with the use of one’s hands or other body parts: *kipkip* (in or under the arms), *pasan* (on the shoulders), *pangko* (with the arms bent at the elbows to carry whole), *sakbibi* (with both arms), *bitbit* (with the fingers of one arm), *baba* (on the back), *sunong* (on the head), *tangay* (between one’s set of teeth), *pingga* (using a pole over the shoulder), *balagwit* (with a lever or pole), and so forth. The seeming untranslatability of *dakma*, *subo*, and *alanganin* as culture-specific terms are given some kind of equivalence that makes us experience, as proficient bilinguals, Gentes’s double reading with the added dimension of meaning in Danby’s indefinable space of the in-between when the poems are read together.

### The Concept of Commensurability

In translation theory, the concept of commensurability is ultimately allied with the idea of linguistic equivalence, that venerable translation standard which compares the Source Text (ST) with that of the Target Text (TT) by way of semantic, syntactic, and structural correspondence. Equivalence

becomes nowhere as dramatic as when it comes to studying bilingual texts precisely because the authors themselves are the translators. If fidelity is the rule against which equivalence is measured, then we cannot really question any degree of faithfulness (or lack thereof) in the self-translated text any more than we can question the asymmetry behind Pichay's lines 5 to 8,

Nevertheless, do not deprive yourself blind  
To the call of truth in thyself  
Nor accept as gospel truth society's  
Definition of what it is to be a man.

Huwag rin naman sanang magsisinungaling  
Sa sariling nakakaalam ng hilig  
O gumamit ng sukatang panlipunan  
Nang hindi iniisip ang pinagmulan,

where fidelity now plays second fiddle to fluency and resonance in the English translation. Pichay has noticeably taken liberties in the non-translation of *sana*, *magsinungaling*, *hilig*, *sukatang panlipunan*, *iniisip*, and *pinagmulan* and added what was not there in the original, expressions like *deprive*, *blind*, *call of truth*, *gospel truth*, *definition*, and *man*. In other words, the system of significations has fundamentally been altered from source to target.

The idea of equivalence, however, is much contested in translation studies today. While many theorists continue to uphold it for discursive and academic purposes, other theorists like Lawrence Venuti have effectively challenged its basic assumptions, calling it outworn, and had never been an ethical ideal, properly measured only by ingesting the foreign into the domestic so completely that the original is effaced. In Venuti's view, some degree of "foreignization" is purposeful in that the TT is precisely that, a translation. Still others like Peter Fawcett, tired and fed up by the interminable search for equivalence in what are clearly two different texts, would like to set aside the notion altogether or put it to rest, and yet Fawcett himself recognizes equivalence's indelible part in discursive analysis and heuristics for translation theory (1997, 52–63).

If commensurability in and for itself remains a benchmark even in self-translation, then it is difficult to see how we can tease out any analytical framework for poetic projects such as Pichay's. In the second stanza of the poem, the translational asymmetry becomes even more apparent than the first

The mouth must be perfectly shaped  
Incisors are not permitted to claw.  
The larynx must also be open  
So that everything may be taken all the way.  
If by these, he still does not groan in pleasure  
Look again, your bedmate may be a fish.  
Go look for someone else

Dapat tama ang pagkakahugis ng bibig  
At walang tulis ng ngiping sumasabit  
Bukas din dapat ang daang-lalamunan  
Para kung sumagad ay di mabubulunan.  
Pag hindi pa siya mapaungol sa sarap  
Baka naman ang pinapaltos mo'y sapsap.  
Maghanap ka na lang ng ibang maturingan

Our community is full of mermaids.  
This is a delicate matter, sucking cock.  
You might not like it right away.

Hitik ng sirena ang ating lipunan.  
Maselang bagay ang sumuso ng burat  
Hindi dapat inaalok sa lahat.

Linguistic non-equivalence may be seen in such cases as *dapat tama* and “perfectly shaped,” “incisors” and *ngiping sumasabit*, “larynx” and *daang-lalamunan*, and so forth. More so, as we move several lines down, “your bedmate” becomes *ang pinapaltos mo* and in that line “a fish” is proposed as the equivalence of *sapsap*, a particular variety of fish (the pony fish, *Leiognathus equulus*), where hypernymy is the translation strategy proposed. Notice that the rhyme scheme in Filipino for such pairs as *lalamunan/mabubulunan*, *sarap/sapsap*, and *maturingan/lipunan* cannot be rendered in English, a case where symmetry or correspondence is decided on the basis of the particular language’s literary sensibilities. In other words, because much of traditional Filipino poetics enshrines a regular rhyme scheme while current English poetic standards do not, Pichay’s self-translation fully recognizes that source and target have different traditions and imaginably different audiences as well.

The point here again is what Venuti has famously proposed, that translation theory must cultivate a praxis that goes beyond equivalence, since such parameters denigrate the social value of the source and target texts, privileges one over the other and perpetuates the questionable concept of the translated text as degraded, corrupt, or of less value than the original. This is especially true of literary translation where, because equivalence remains the gold standard against which a translation is assessed, a translated text will always be seen, in Hokenson and Munson’s reckoning, “a diminution and a loss, a falling away” (2011, 2). For Pichay to force himself to translate his own work against purely semantic and structural likeness without respecting the sensibility and history of the languages in which he works may be sheer folly, and truncates the genre of poetry as simply something mechanical, or worse, a mere academic exercise such as found in a second language learning class. This brings us back to Walter Benjamin’s 1923 essay “The Task of the Translator” where he remarks, “No translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original” (1923, 73).

In *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, Anthony Cordingley and others underscore the significance of self-translation as a project to explore multilingualism and hybridity, especially as it relates to the processes and effects of globalization as we know it today. Cordingley says in the Introduction that literary self-translation occurs in a world “where every

day, millions of individuals, out of choice or necessity, translate themselves into different cultures and languages” (2013, 6). As such, self-translation in our times can be understood as a means through which writers embrace and give voice to identities that span more than one place, space, culture, and context. The contemporary Australian cultural critic and poet Paul Venzo, speaking of his own practice, writes, “The truly bilingual writer-translator cannot necessarily be said to be more or less original or authentic in one language or another. Rather, his or his skill lies in the ability to move back and forth between languages and cultural identities. In effect the bilingual writer-translator produces two different but interrelated texts-in-translation, rather than separate source and target texts” (2013, 5). In effect, Venzo repeats what Cordingley, Hokenson, and Munson have proposed all along in their studies.

Because many of these bilingual writers come mostly from backgrounds with a colonial history or have otherwise been raised bilingually/ biculturally in immigrant family settings, it does not come as a total surprise that they challenge the traditional concepts of originality and authorship of their own literary texts. By extension, we might state as well that, in their freedom to experiment with hybridity and expression, or to cross cultural bridges, or otherwise to establish new literary spaces for their works, self-translating writers offer a new template for looking at translational equivalence that goes beyond mere correspondence or commensurability. Moreover, these writers extend the idea of translation as a form of negotiation, a concept artfully advanced by Umberto Eco in *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*: “It is the decision to believe that translation is possible, it is our engagement in isolating what is for us a deep sense of the text, and it is the goodwill that prods us to negotiate the best solution for every line” (2003, 192). In Eco’s reckoning, a text contains a “deep story,” that which is to be discovered and respected in translation because it contains a reasonably fixed and believable shared meaning, “even though knowing that one never says the same thing, one may say *almost* the same thing.”

In reading Pichay’s fourth and final stanza of the poem, the self-translation becomes even more dissimilar, this again, if linguistic equivalence were the sole measure of translational worth.

But my leave I give you word  
 A simple advice, do not take offence  
 The severe and mindless trade  
 Of pontificating men “holier than thou.”  
 Because the true mettle of a man  
 In not found in his color, intellect, orientation or looks

Mag-iiiwan sana ng munting habilin  
 Payo lang naman, huwag sanang dibdibin  
 Ang marubdob at itim na paninira  
 Gawa ng santo-santong paniniwala.  
 Sapagkat ang sukatang ng pagkatao  
 Wala sa kulay, dunong or astang pabo.

It is in the purity and sincerity  
Of his dealings with other men.  
This is a delicate matter sucking cock  
A fact that everyone must be made aware of,  
No reason to hide in shame  
Emerge from the dark, my friends!

Nasa pagkabusilak, pagkadakila  
Ng tunay na pagmamahal sa kapuwa.  
Maselang bagay ang sumuso ng burat  
Iyan ang kailangang malaman ng lahat,  
Walang dahilang itago't pandirihan  
Bumangon sa dilim, aking kaibigan!

Without tracing further some of the semantic losses and gains in translation, it should become apparent by now that Pichay's self-translation project deliberately opens up a new space the independent but related texts provide, a space that is at once liminal and revelatory. Liminal because both texts mirror each other not in the optically correct reflection of the other's image, but because of the vague, fuzzy way of looking back or putting it metaphorically, a funhouse mirror of one another. The liminality arises because one cannot really state categorically which one is the original, which the copy. One does not hasten readily to conclude that some distortion in the reflection has happened precisely because there is still some measure of commensurability, no matter how hard-pressed we are to point out what, where and why. This especially arises when one reads the texts *line by line*, the English first and then the Filipino equivalent (or vice versa), rather than reading the poem monolingually all the way through and then reading the other text.

This in-between space is also revelatory because a recognition of simultaneous similarity and difference emerges in the reader's mind. I take this to be what Venzo means when he says "self-translation may result in a new kind of textual territory, a labyrinth but interconnected space in which the hybridity of texts-in-translation reflects the hybrid, inter- and transcultural identities of those who produce them" (2013, 6). This revelation may be also be related to Rita Wilson's concept of "the double" in self-translation. In analyzing the self-translated fiction of contemporary Italian novelist Francesca Duranti's works, Wilson proposes that the self "is not pre-existent, but is constituted in the act of translation. There is a double articulation: knowing and not knowing 'the other'. To translate is to install oneself in the space of divergence and to accept the divergence of the two subjects" (2009, 196). In effect, the doubling of the self in translation illuminates or reveals self-knowledge more than if the text were left alone in the hands of a bilingual writer. If such a double operates psychically in Duranti's fiction, it stands to reason that Pichay may also likewise generate such revelation, if not for himself, then at least for his interacting texts, and maybe as such even extend the revealed liminal spaces of the self and of the text to the readers themselves.

## Authorship and Readership

As we have seen, self-translation lays down a paradigm that allows for dissimilarities within orders of correspondence. It challenges the binary theoretical models of “gaps” (Hokenson and Munson 2014, 4) from one of opposition to another of textual continuity where two cultures are placed side by side to produce a mid-zone of overlaps and intersections. This notion recalls Anthony Pym’s idea of translation as a practice of sociolinguistic “interculture” (1998, 181). Pym explains that translators live and work in a hypothetical gap between languages and cultures but that in the process of translation, they reorder such a gap and allow active engagement between two texts. This then allows for a “stereoscopic reading” of translated texts, a phrase proposed by Mary Ann Gaddis in her book *Translation and Literary Criticism: Translation as Analysis*. Gaddis says that “stereoscopic reading makes it possible to intuit and reason out the interliminal” (1997, 90) and “it is this ‘interliminality’ which is a gift translation gives to readers of literature” (1997, 7). While neither Pym nor Gaddis is dealing with self-translation per se, their thinking brings to the fore the fascinating role authors and readers play in the writing and reading of bilingual literary texts. This observation is especially pertinent to *en face* or side-by-side editions of poetic translations such as in the case of Filipino readers reading *Ang Lunes/The Intransigence*.

Assuming full bilingual competence on the readers’ part, why read both texts in the first place when either original or translation would have sufficed? What psychic, cultural, and social needs are addressed, needs that are hypothetically different than those that reside in a monolingual text? As savvy readers to these texts, how do they deal with or respond to the double reading, one that is marked by opposition in some places and congruence in others? What insights are offered them in the liminal space between the texts? These are difficult questions to answer, in part because these are underexplored in the literature on translation theory, in part because such readers and reading depart from mainstream practice in largely monolingual cultures of dominance such as English, Spanish or French, and in part because they defy facile literary classifications of originality, form (or genre) and the valuation of literature as translated text. At the root of these questions is the audience, and as Hokenson and Munson unerringly ask, “How does one delimit, define, and not the least, interrelate the social groups being addressed by the bilingual text?” (2014, 12).

When Pichay or his poetic persona describes a religious procession of the famed Black Nazarene in “Biyernes Santo sa Quiapo/Good Friday in

Quiapo,” he mixes politico-religious commentary with a “sodomasochistic” and homoerotic reading of himself.

Behind them  
are barking guards  
pretend soldiers  
from an old testament movie  
sprocketed in my mind.  
The armed centurions are  
brandishing whips, wearing sandal laces  
wound into X’s,  
and matching short skirts  
that reach the crotch, never a hair beyond it.

that ends one long stanza later with

My candle is lit  
but not for joining.  
No one finishes this procession  
other than the Ones being borne.

Sa kanilang likod,  
kumakahol ng mga orden  
ng mga bantay.  
Sunda-sundalo  
sa lumang pelikula  
ng aking isipan.  
Mga senturyong nakakutamaya,  
de-haplit, nakasandalyas  
na itinaling paekis,  
at ternong paldang,  
gayong maigsi, ay di masilip-silipan,

May kandila ako, ngunit hindi ako sasama diyan.  
Walang nakakabuo ng prusisyon.  
Maliban sa pinapasan.

The poetic persona comes to the procession not as a penitent or devotee, or at least a member of the faithful, but for another reason: he comes to gaze at the male actors (only males join the procession) playing Roman centurions in their provocative costumes and actions. When, in the last stanza, the persona finally reveals himself as one of another inclination (religious persuasion? sexual orientation?), the inferred reader is torn between reading the English (“My candle is lit”) and the Filipino (*May kandila ako*) which translates simply as “I have a candle” to decide for him- or herself what meaning must occupy the liminal or in-between space of the texts. The English may read as one of religious persuasion, or the lack of it, and the Filipino as one of gender or sexuality, since the candle easily hints at phallic symbolism in the poem’s context. In other words, this is what Pichay is saying all along and is truly reflected in several other poems in the collection: *I am gay, I am different, and you must respect me for it.*

This, in turn, brings us to the concept of inferred or implied readership. In the literature, there is a minor debate regarding the “correct” use of the term to represent the author’s imagined reader: implied, inferred, ideal, imagined, assumed. However, we will not get into that little war since all of these arguments speak in general terms of readers (of literature), not specific to bilingual readers who read bilingual poetic texts. If bilingual authors, consciously or otherwise, address bilingual readers, would the concept of originality matter if in the first place, they gathered a shifting hermeneutic

or a variable reading each text provided? That each text stood on its own, separate but related, within its own merits? I have a feeling that this is what exactly happens in the reader's mind, judging, for example, from the middle lines of the long stanza we skipped altogether above.

Fast prayer is mechanized  
like a McDonald's greeting  
of hello and thank you for buying,  
in a tone as shrill  
as the swigs of a cat-o-nine.

Mabilis ang dasal, magmamadaling kabalalan tulad ng:  
"Welkam to McDonald's,  
Tenk yu por kaming!"  
Sa tonong kasingtinis  
Ng haplit-bubog ng mga nagpapasan.

Here the reader no longer minds the skewed parallel between the texts, with the Filipino version poking fun at the putative manner in which Philippine English is spoken, and with the English remaining uncommitted except at the level of social critique of piety or religious practice. What does the bilingual reader profit from this? The answer, I speculate, is *pleasure*. Pleasure because the way Pichay has brought the two texts together produces a cunning or craftiness in the poetic observation. This not only applies to language as social observation or translation as technique, but also to the very theme he projects in his poetry: that in the undefined social space that he occupies as a gay man, he asks whether in the heteronormative world the members or citizens (such as the devotees of the Black Nazarene) there suffer from no doubts of identity. He's not quite sure; he thinks not. Pichay implies that we (*ng mga nagpapasan*) all carry the same burdens, identity-wise, gay or straight or bisexual.

Such a reading brings us to advance whom Pichay would possibly have imagined for target readership. We propose a very specific and select audience: a group of Filipino readers proficient in both languages, keen in the nuances of translation or translated texts, find pleasure in or appreciate the wit that both texts have wrought alongside the other, find fascinating the divergences and congruencies of the translation, respect the importance of the liminal space that projects as a result of the bilateral placements, and finally the most important of all, that translation itself is a creative form of rewriting that merits its own sense and aura of "originality." We might posit further that beyond the pragmatic goal of reaching a wider audience (a putative foreign readership, for example), the readers identify with the theme or themes of Pichay's poetry in a way where a marginalized or long-silenced voice is given its turn to speak. It does not matter here what group of or from society the voice represents—a minority, the oppressed, women in general, the LGBT community, migrant workers, the poor, etc. And this, not only speaking

it once, but amplifying it double-fold: in the “translation” and in the in-between space that arises between them.

Finally, as we see in “One Villanelle for the Road/Isang Tagay Ng Villanelle,” written in strict poetic form, while ostensibly about gay lovemaking and how potentially dangerous or transgressive it can turn out, this poem proposes a postcolonial reading of translation; that bilingual writers who come from a postcolonial background symbolically invest in the minority or colonized language a form of equality with the “master” language.

The tug of preliminary echoes	Namalayan ko ang tunog ng kasuskos
Like a tikbalang’s silence before the kill.	Nantatabig, nagpapalilis ng kumot, Tulad ng tikbalang kung nanghihilakbot.
I thought the sea had sedated us all In the dark, my embraces yearn for a port,	Akala ko’y napahimbing ang lahat Sa dilim, nangangampit ang aking yapos Namalayan ko ang tunog ng kasuskos.
Contemplating the tarot on my friend’s face, It prodded me to dream secret waves Like a tikbalang’s silence before the kill.	Binaybay ko ang alon sa kanyang mukha Nagbalak sumisid sa sikretong laot Tulad ng tikbalang kung nanghihilakbot.
Native wine spills from two glasses Overturned by the winds from an impending storm, The tug of preliminary echoes.	Nataob ang mga baso ng lambanog Pinagkiskis ng parating na unos Namalayan ko ang tunog ng kasuskos.
The grappling bears nothing but thorns Prodding, piercing at my loins Like a tikbalang’s silence before the kill.	Nagbubunga ng tinik ang aking panimdim Nanunusok, namimilas, nangangalmot Tulad ng tikbalang kung nanghihilakbot.
In the hour of the ocean’s changing and secret urging Drowning in firewater and brine The tug of preliminary echoes Like a tikbalang’s silence before the kill.	Sa hatenggabi ng lihim na paghahangos Sa alimpuyo ng alak at sigalot Namalayan ko ang tunog ng kaluskos, Tulad ng tikbalang kung nanghihilakbot.

Appropriating the unitalicized *tikbalang*, a supreme motif in local folklore and left untranslated in the English text, is an act of translational triumph for itself. With the head of a horse and the body of a tall, thin man living high up in trees, the *tikbalang*’s *raison d’être* is leading people astray. A person who is trampled upon by a *tikbalang* turns blind or sickens violently to the point of death (cf. Damiana Eugenio 2002). An imagined foreign reader will have to construct a meaning for himself the kind of creature that a *tikbalang* is and will probably appropriate some mythic monster, beast or werewolf like the Minotaur in his imagination. It is this very malleability of *tikbalang* that, while ironically is believed to be protean himself as he takes on varied appearances, lends a potency to the reading. The *tikbalang*

is a prime example of “the Untranslated,” Emily Apter’s phrase for ideas or notions in the study of World Literature as a form of literary comparatism where, because different languages and traditions view the World differently, resist any form of translation were World Literature equated exclusively an English, German, or French project. In a globalizing world, including the academe’s tendency to homogenize the World’s plural and irreducible goals and voices, Apter takes the kindred ideas of “non-translation, mistranslation, incomparability, and untranslatability” as forms of resistance (2013, 4) not amenable to fluent or domesticated translation so required in constructing a world literature in any of these hegemonic tongues.

The English text of this villanelle, while remaining “cryptohomosexual”—J. Neil Garcia’s term for the densely metaphoric character of our earlier poetry in English tackling homosexual themes because of the inimical exigencies of the time among such poets as Jose Garcia Villa, Nick Joaquin, and Rolando Tinio (192), places a specific cultural consciousness in the deployment of the poetic situation. Beyond the *tikbalang*, the rendition of *lambanog* as “native wine,” *lilis* as “stealthily lifts up,” *kaluskos* as “echoes,” *binaybay* as “contemplating,” among others—all “untranslatables”—and the very appropriation of ‘native’ as a signification of the local or indigenous, serve to redeploy the English for its own ends as a *Filipino text*, amplifying the original, rather than one meant for a foreign or international readership. Garcia adds that our Anglophone poetry is postcolonial not only because it is written in the colonizer’s tongue, but also because of its “historical reality as an ideological consequence of American colonialism on one hand, and on the other its ironic potentiality to secrete and promote forms of ‘anti-colonial signification’—its ability to move beyond, critique, or ‘post’ the colonialism that made it possible, to begin with” (2014, 12).

In his analysis of Rolando Tinio’s homosexually-themed poem “A Parable,” Garcia proceeds beyond the tendency of Philippine poetry in English to universalize, to deepen it with the interpretation that because this is a marginal or marginalized voice, the act of writing in the colonizer’s tongue is what precisely enables him (the Filipino Anglophone poet) to express what would not have been possible without colonialism. The tongue that so pathologized Tinio’s homosexual condition by “sexologically naming him” (2014, 193) is equally ironic as it is postcolonial in the projection. The very act of translating oneself is a process that inheres in the postcolonial condition, where, without the history of colonialism, translation, and self-

translation would not have not been as significant. If, in Pichay's villanelle we see an amplification of the marginalized voice—because it has taken certain freedoms to expand itself beyond mere linguistic equivalence and a reframing of the sign—then the reader is bound to explore the space of the in-between.

Pichay assumes that the prospective act of two men making love is terrifying (*nanghihilakbot*) not only to the Self but also to the Other, equally as it is fulfilling and ecstatic, “drowning in firewater and brine” (*paghangos sa alimpuyo ng alak at sigalot*), Pichay is making a pitch for homoerotic desire as valid or legitimate and equal as any that transpires in society. Because the villanelle cannot be read in a traditional approach as “original” and “translation,” the double voicing that resides in the text, that in-between space, then we can speculate that Pichay's project in deploying Filipino and English simultaneously is reflective of the postcolonial condition of the Philippines, one where many sectors are continually silenced and marginalized, including that of the gay community. In taking up the cudgels against heteronormativity and homophobia in a seemingly “hypermasculinized” nation as a result of colonialism, Pichay's homoerotic self-translations remind us once more of Garcia's cogent understanding of how gender is deeply imbricated in nation: “The materiality of the sexual and gender questions necessitates both an engagement with the material reality of the nation-state” (2014, 111).

### Self-Translation and Intertextuality

All texts fundamentally relate to other texts in order to derive meaning, value, and purpose. The relationship can be direct such as those found in allusions, references, or quotations, but more commonly, the relationship is more subtle, implied, or general. A speech act, for example, can be said to refer to a previous utterance or language use, or that a literary work can refer to other works of a similar genre to define its structural function. All these constitute and is constituted by intertextuality, the basic idea that texts are relational and inform upon another and thus, ultimately lay down a continuity of forms and practices to establish tradition, purpose, and style (see Allen 2000). Furthermore, the intertextual relationship also forms and informs writers and readers toward a tacit understanding of shared literary and cultural knowledge. This requires that readers themselves possess a critical faculty to assess the significance of an intertextual relation when it appears and locate the tradition in which the text assumes its reason for being. Because intertextuality points to the particular cultural and social conditions in which reading and writing take place, intertextuality imposes a certain

level of competence for reception to become meaningful, or in its absence, a provision for alternative ways of reception, such as those found in explanatory footnotes, definitions, or amplification.

When Venuti explains that “translation represents a unique case of intertextuality,” he presupposes that three sets of intertextual relations are involved: (1) those between the foreign text and other texts, (2) those between the foreign text and the translation, and (3) those between the translation and other texts (2009, 158). These relations are not always neat and clear-cut, and in fact are frequently complex and uneven so much so that in the plurality of losses and gains in translation, the intertextual relations bear such an imprint to produce lay discourses as “lost in translation,” “true fidelity,” or “word for word translation.” Because it is the translator’s chief mission to hew equivalence, he is tasked with the impossible goal of establishing an intertextual relation in the translation while at the same time running “the risk of increasing the disjunction between the foreign and translated texts by replacing a relation to a foreign tradition with a relation to a tradition in the translating culture” (2009, 158). Venuti’s fine observations, however, may need some qualification when it comes to self-translated texts, and in particular of Pichay’s poems, in several respects.

The first refers to distinction between the *foreign* and *translated* texts. As we have already seen, the poems’ imagined readers largely address educated bilingual Filipinos rather than foreigners appreciating his work via translation. As evidence to this, *Ang Lunes na Mahirap Bunuin* was sold out completely within the first year of publication (personal communication with Pichay, May 2016), a remarkable feat in itself for local publishing. This, in turn, relates directly to English as a language in the Philippines, where not only is it recognized officially, but more importantly, considered *not* as a “foreign language” by any means in the national imaginary. While to a lesser extent Spanish and Chinese may share this cachet of “non-foreignness,” a “foreign language” refers only to such languages as German or Russian, languages that played no direct role in the Philippine historical colonial experience. It may be that because Pichay has written in Philippine English, or that which has evolved to be the local variety of English, he has realized what writer and critic Gémino Abad has famously remarked, that “we had to colonize English” (1999, 16). On the other hand, Pichay’s self-translations may also reflect “writing in Tagalog using English words” (attributed to NVM Gonzales) or “in Capampangan using English words” of Bienvenido Santos (qtd. from Patke and Holden 2010, 101). These all amount to the same thing: that the

“translation” into English of Pichay’s works is not a matter of working it along the lines of a foreign language, but into another variant Philippine language.

Consider the sensibility in which the English texts we have read thus far exhibit. Traditional Philippine writing in general is occasioned by three characteristic strains: universalizing, romanticizing, and moralizing. While it is not the place here to elaborate on them, various scholars and critics have consistently remarked on our literature’s tendency to project “universal truth” or validity of the human experience, inhere values of idealism to the point of sentimentality using effusive language and/or dramatic situation and finally, to invest a form of didacticism or moral prerogative as part of its reason for being. These tendencies rest on three major themes: God, nation, and romantic love. While we have largely departed from these strains in our writing in English today (and to some extent our writing in the various vernaculars), they have surreptitious ways of encroaching upon modernity, such as in the case of Pichay’s

Nevertheless, do not deprive yourself blind  
To the call of truth in thyself  
Nor accept as gospel truth society’s  
Definition of what it is to be a man.

Huwag rin naman sanang magsisinungaling  
Sa sariling nakakaalam ng hilig  
O gumamit ng sukatang panlipunan  
Nang hindi iniisip ang pinagmulan,

where the moral prerogative is apparent equally as it pleads for understanding of gay love in a poetic discourse that inheres culture-bound concepts such as *awa* (pity) and *loob* (interiority) in the Filipino text while maintaining a critical “modern” stance toward unexamined piety/religiosity in the English one. While both *awa* and *loob* do not appear in the text, they are written into it and understood intuitively by Filipino readers.

It is interesting to note that in critic and writer Eugene Evasco’s reading of this poem, he focuses his analysis on the Filipino text, conveniently forgetting that the opposite page is a self-translation by Pichay himself. Evasco advances the notion that in contemporary *panulaang bakla* (gay poetry/poetics), three tendencies can be gleaned: (1) “ang tuwirang pagpamukha sa kaakuhan ng kultura ng bakla” (2003, 333), (2) “ang pagkubli ng makata sa kasarian ng kanyang tula” (2003, 335), and (3) “ang paggiit ng makata sa *mainstream* na hindi gumamit ng tiyak na wika ng subkultura kundi ng sentimyento at damdaming bakla” (2003, 336). Evasco uses “Maselang Bagay ang Sumuso ng Burat” as an example of the third tendency, where we are to assume that Pichay is “mainstream” and that the language he uses doesn’t show any trace of camp (flaming or screaming), unlike in the first tendency where “hindi

iniinda ang mga pamantayan ng ‘mabuti’ at ‘dalisay’ na pagtula” (2003, 333). What Evasco wants to show is that Pichay’s style tends to be formal, if subdued, in proclaiming gay identity in comparison with the first (which uses gay language itself) or the second (which avoids it), and which, in Evasco’s phrasing, is “may kaduwagan.” This may help explain what Virgilio Almario expresses in the Introduction to the volume that “Hindi isang sensasyonalista si Nick Pichay” (1993, xiii). Because, if he were so, the title of his collection would have been *Maselang Bagay ang Sumuso ng Burat* rather than *Mahirap Bunuin ang Lunes*. One line later, Almario adds, “Bongga ang dating nito, walang kiyeme, at tumatawag agad ng pansin” almost facetiously, naughtily, appropriating local “gayspeak.”

Evasco observes that in the matter of form Pichay is experimenting, or “nag-eksperimento sa pagtutugma sa bawat dalawang taludtod, at may labindalawang pantig sa bawat taludtod” (2003, 36). “Experiment” is the appropriate word here in three respects: (1) inasmuch as there is both respect for and departure from Tagalog poetic tradition, viz., in the syllabic count, Pichay’s duodecasyllabics has a homolog in traditional octosyllabics (see, for example, Lumbea 1986); (2) the “consistent” end-rhyme scheme for couplets, is not, however, consistently employed because there are several cases of slant or near-rhyme in the first two stanzas (*dilim/alanganin; magsisinungaling/hilig; bibig/sumasabit*, etc.); and (3) Pichay is, in fact appropriating the classical hexameter (double hemiepes, or twelve syllables), of the Latin and Greek elegiac couplet, but with the use of end rhyme, whereas the classical does not (Halporn et al. 1963, 71). The English translation, however, fails to conform to the original form, and may simply be characterized as *vers libre*. What Evasco does not expound, however, is why Pichay uses this particular form in relation to the homoerotic theme (e.g., gay coupling as “tugma”), and simply explains away how the difference in Filipino gay poetry/poetics (compared to tradition) is a form of “umuusbong” and “mapagmalaya,” whatever these may mean.

The formal register of the English (as marked by such words as *nevertheless*, *deprive*, *call of truth*, *thymself*, etc.) is perhaps induced by the text’s earnestness from the Filipino as oratory, but more likely reflects the classroom domain where English is first picked up. Note that while the translation is “written in English words,” the sensibility remains local. This is true as well in the last poem we examine here, “Summer in Our Village/Tag-araw sa Aming Nayon,” a poem about circumcision.

The new arrivals  
Stand under the shade by the river  
They wait for the knife-lick, the moan of gongs

In two's, three's, the cell-mates approach  
Bearing on their palms  
Shrunk beaks.

Perspiring, naked, groaning  
Arm manacled to arm, weaving a rough circle  
Around the old Fire.

A sliver of moon silently scythes  
The scampering crabs  
Face puckered at the taste of leaf sap.

Loincloth, blowgun sting.  
The troop re-groups around a plate  
And the tongue-searing dip of freshly-cut foreskin.

Nasa lihim ng tabing ilog  
Ang mga bagong dating.  
Naghihintay ng tasa ng patalim, gangsa.

Dalawahan, tatluhan, magkakakosang lumapit  
Dala-dala sa kanilang mga palad,  
Mga nanguluntoy na lawit.

Pawis, hubad, umaalulong  
Nagkawing, naghabi ng magaspang bilog  
Sa palibot ng matandang Apoy.

Tahimik ang karit ng pingas ng buwan  
Sa mga nagtatakbuhan alimasag  
Mukha nila'y kulubot sa lasa ng dagta.

Bahag, kurot ng bagong sumpit.  
Nagbalik ang pulutong sa isang platitong mane.  
At sa sawsawang sili na kapuputol na lambi.

While we might read the poem as a critique of circumcision as a gratuitous cultural practice, one that clearly marks the site of gender as performance because boys turn expressly into men, the dramatization of the narrative and the linguistic flourish it employs make it distinctly Filipino in its approach to the subject. The poem, both in the English and Filipino texts, is clearly modern in the sense of imagery, directness, use of sensory language and symbolism, yet it betrays the very modernity it inheres because in exoticizing the alterity of circumcision as a heteronormative project, the poem waxes maudlin sentiment and oratory in the end. We can almost imagine Kurtz's self-delusion in Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* in Pichay's "weaving a rough circle / Around the old Fire," or in the "scampering crabs/ face puckered" an echoic resonance of T. S. Eliot's synecdochic crab "as a pair of rugged claws / Scuttling across the floors." If, as nationalist critic and poet E. San Juan Jr. says that "The Filipino poet has always been the figure of the verbal magician, priest of town-fiestas and crowning of queens; himself at the center of the crowd, moved by it and moving it" (1965, 396), then Pichay is actually performing his culturally-circumscribed role of the poet as social commentator.

The local sensibility of the English texts derive from what Almarico calls "apat na sangkap ng tradisyonal na tula: ang tugma, sukat, talinghaga, at kariktan o kasiningan" (1984, 89). Firstly, while "tugma" is not readily apparent, there are internal rhymes like *wait*, *shade*, *cell-mates*, *naked* or *Fire*, *silently*, *scythes*. As a "modern" poem in English, Pichay eschews convenient rhyming that might impart a sense of artifice. Secondly, "sukat," while

apparently irregular, creates its own metrical rhythm by combining anapestic (*for the knife-, lick the moan, and the tongue*) and dactylic (*bearing on, manacled, silently*) feet. Thirdly, “talinghaga” (which I take to be figuration or metaphorization in general) is clearly marked in the allegorical treatment of circumcision for poetic theme and effect. Finally, the artfulness or lyricism (*kariktan/kasiningan*) in the whole stream of poetic utterance, while not imaginatively “appealing” because of the subject, takes on a particular kind of charm for itself as a result of combining the first three elements. In other words, “Summer in Our Village,” an apparent English text, hews its poetic character from local poetic tradition, rather than from any English school such as Romanticism or Imagism or even Postmodernism.

Because the pastoral quality of the title harkens back to the old folksong “Doon Po sa Aming Bayan ng San Roque” where the cripple danced, the deaf listened, the blind man watched, and the mute one sang, Pichay uses his poem to question the “manliness” that results from circumcision. Does circumcision make a man and his virility, or does it, like the four beggars of San Roque, disable him in the end in a comic/pathetic sort of way? What Pichay seems to be attempting here is not question circumcision per se, but that as a practice that repeats itself summer after summer, the performance of manhood is reified, an idea that Judith Butler so incisively develops in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). The Filipino summer rituals that perform manhood in *tuli* (circumcision) and *liga* (organized basketball competitions among village teams) and womanhood in Santacruzán and Flores de Mayo, leave no place for gay men except as the parodic and spectral exercise of their own gay beauty pageants and volleyball competitions.

Pichay’s ethnological interest in the approach to his poetry (and competently carried over in the ‘translation’) brings us to the conceptualization of “translation as thick description,” Theo Hermans’s rephrasing of Clifford Geertz’s 1973 anthropological proposal (Hermans 2003, 386). Geertz countered structural anthropology’s reductiveness in formulating complex lifeworlds of a given culture as universal schemas and binary oppositions (Geertz 1973, 5–6). He emphasized the interpretive and constructivist nature of the ethnologist’s project, and therefore allowing us to appreciate both similarity and difference, instead of not being self-conscious about how we employ modes of representation in writing down a culture. The point here is that ethnology is an interpretive task, a *translation*, one among potentially numerous interpretations of the microhistories of particular cultural

situations. This, in turn, counters (then) anthropological theory's urge to universalize and essentialize, thick description being a task that prides itself in "the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions" (1973, 25). While "Summer in Our Village/Tag-araw sa Aming Nayon" estranges or exoticizes the familiar to give circumcision fresh meaning, it nevertheless employs particular details, thick description if you will, of the ritual's iconic aspects: the knife, the queuing, the groans of pain, the leaf (presumably of the guava as antiseptic), and the rite itself performed as a collective.

The relationship between the Filipino and English texts is one, to borrow Venuti's term, of interrogation (1995, 159), where the intertextual relation is built up to negotiate the linguistic and cultural correspondence in "the significance that derives from the *recognition* of a connection between the foreign text and another text" (emphasis mine). This recognition is collaboratively worked out not only between the original and translation, but also between the author and the reader precisely because no fixed or essential meaning can be made in the translational act. Because translation is largely provisional, that is, dependent on the context and purpose in which it is carried out, any form of literary translation must account for the in-between, the third space generated between the texts that results not from language alone, but, to use Spivak's memorable phrase, also "beside language, around language" (2004, 389). She alludes to translation as an activity "where meaning hops into the spacey emptiness between two named historical languages" (2004, 389). In *Gender and Translation* (1996), on the other hand, Sherry Simon speaks of "the blurred edge where original and copy, first and second languages come to meet. The space 'between' becomes a powerful and difficult place for the writer to occupy" (1996, 162). Furthermore, Doris Bachmann-Medick argues that "the notion of culture needs to be pushed towards more openness and dynamism, for the 'third space' is by no means simply a place or condition *between* cultures, but is also a strategy of proliferating non-homogenous layers *within* a particular culture" (2009, 34).

While not anyone among these observers situate their analysis in the context of self-translation, their thoughts furnish proof that translation itself is an encounter of alterity, and that in the case of self-translation, the space and position the bilingual writer occupies is a self-reflexive questioning of the vexed conditions of the postcolonial self in dialogue with the other. When Bachmann-Medick argues about the in-between space as a strategy of addressing the non-homogenous layers within, she may be speaking about

how, in the case of Nicolas Pichay's homoerotic poetry, the marginalized position of gay men in Filipino culture is not only given voice, but amplifying it to question the heteronormativity that arbitrarily sets the standard against which all discourses of gender are measured. Pichay's strategies in self-translation—the decided commensurability/incommensurability between texts, the implied address to bilingual Filipino readers (rather than “English speakers”), the intertextuality of original and copy that pushes the edge of translation as cross-cultural mediation—make his project a worthwhile effort in creatively expanding the ways in which contemporary Philippine literature is written. Because the vast majority of Filipino writers today are bilingual or trilingual anyway (even if most prefer to write only monolingually), there is potential and actual value in self-translation, difficult it may seem initially. After all, our long (if intermittent) tradition in it, the *ladino* catechisms and poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the works of Jose Rizal, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Isabelo de los Reyes of the late nineteenth; and the more recent works of Genoveva Matute, Federico Licsi Espino Jr., or Marne Kilates; to name a few, place us all in good hands.

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