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AND PATERNAL HAUNTOLOGIES  
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TALES OF THE PHILIPPINES AND OTHERS***

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**VILLA'S SPECTERS: TRANSCOLONIAL  
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Jose Garcia Villa's sole short story collection, *Footnote to Youth: Tales of the Philippines and Others*, was released in 1933 as his pronounced effort to penetrate the American modernist canon. Villa's literary move was principally characterized by his aestheticist self-fashioning as a "beautiful soul" whose artistic practice transcended his native roots and biographical specificities. This essay suggests that, despite this self-fashioning, the collection ushers in the ghosts of the historical and personal realities that he sought to obscure. First, the essay argues that Villa's intense devotion to the apolitical and ahistorical tenets of aestheticism, or the doctrine of art for art's sake, was in itself conditioned by his biographical circumstances and historical location within the American colonial milieu, particularly by his rebellion against his own anti-American father and against the paternity of his country. Second, it elaborates how Villa's attempt at paternal surrogacy in the United States fed him to the discursive

operations of ethnocentrism inherent in American modernism, and how his choice to work within the mimetic genre of fiction rendered his disavowed ethnic identity bare and vulnerable to the predations of modernist racism. Third, employing Derrida's notion of hauntology, the essay analyzes the collection as conjurers of the transcolonial and paternal specters that haunted Villa's artistic practice.

*Keywords:* Jose Garcia Villa, hauntology, colonialism, art for art's sake, modernism

In 1933, Charles Scribner's Sons published Jose Garcia Villa's *Footnote to Youth: Tales of the Philippines and Others*. The first Filipino-authored collection of short stories to be released in the United States (US), the book consisted of twenty-one short stories set in the Philippines and the US, most of which initially saw print in several American periodicals. The publication of the collection came three years after Villa arrived in the United States, with the intention of leaving behind a relatively successful literary career in the Philippines and penetrating the American literary scene. While the collection was rejected by several publishers and later on greeted with lukewarm critical and commercial response in the US, its publication was celebrated back home as an event that beckoned Villa's entry into the American modernist canon.

*Footnote to Youth* also marked Villa's final foray to fiction. In his essay "The Making of Jose Garcia Villa's *Footnote to Youth*," Jonathan Chua while tracing the book's publication history analyzes how it was published and received within a modernist racialized framework set within the colonial relations between the US and the Philippines. Weaving through correspondences, documents pertinent to the publication of the stories, and the stories in the collection, Chua argued that Villa's work is positioned in

“an ambivalent situation which both challenges and reinforces the colonial condition” (2013-2014, 30). In so doing, he suggested that Villa’s attempt to penetrate the American literary circle by fashioning himself as a universal writer and contemporaneously erasing his socio-political roots was eventually foiled by the collection’s publication.

From this suggestion, this paper argues that the collection works to usher in the presence of historical realities and biographical specificities that Villa endeavored to obscure. The release of these “ghosts” operates according to the deconstructive notion of hauntology introduced by Jacques Derrida in *The Specters of Marx*. Hauntology, or “the logic of haunting” (Derrida 1994, 10), is a modality in which the absence of the unwritten, silenced, or dead returns to haunt the ontological structure that renders the presence of the written, articulated, and alive.

It is necessary to mention here that the hauntological workings in *Footnote to Youth* operated within the context of transcolonial politics. The term transcolonial suggests that “the delineated boundaries of influence by colonial empires were not as fixed as one might believe” (Taylor-Garcia 2011,13). The specters in the short story collection are in fact contingent on the conditions of transcoloniality that afflicted Villa’s milieu, here manifested in the transitions, overlaps, and confluences of the American and Spanish colonial powers in the early twentieth century Philippines, and in the colonialist politics that hounded him and positioned him as migrant colonial subject upon his movement to America.

This essay will present the historical and biographical “conditions of possibility” for Villa’s adherence to a deliberately apolitical and ahistorical literary practice, the

historical cartography of the discursive operations of ethnocentrism in modernism during his arrival to America, and finally an analysis of the collection as conjurer of the transcolonial and biographical specters that haunt Villa's artistic practice—his paternal trauma and his inarticulated engagement with the confluent symbolic powers of the Spanish and American colonizers.

### **The Ghosts of Villa's Self-Fashioning**

Villa's historical exorcism constituted a self-fashioning move informed primarily by the idea that the artist and his practice are divorced from history, a notion integral to the "art for art's sake" dictum. He openly dismissed the socio-political function of art, particularly literature, extolling above all the work's aesthetic virtue and its eternal and universal value. He rejected the integrality of literary practice to the nationalist cause, announcing that "the nation is merely adjectival to true art: the noun is art and ever the universal humanity that it contains" (Villa 2002, 168). When berated by his colleague Salvador Lopez for "having been unmoved by the 'stress of times,'" Villa responded, "I do not mix my politics and economics with my art...I do not believe the economic readjustment of society to be the function of literature" (ibid., 178).

Villa's aesthetic purism must be understood as a disposition haunted by his personal engagements with his socio-political milieu. When Villa was born in 1908, the Philippines had been relinquished by Spain to the new imperial master, the US via the Treaty of Paris. With the country's recovery from more than three centuries of Spanish colonialism subsequently replaced by a new colonizer, the country was positioned within a transcolonial phase. Villa would have been undoubtedly well-acquainted

with the political climate of the era, as his father, Col. Simeon Villa, served as physician to Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, the president of the First Philippine Republic. As recorded in his diaries, the older Villa was part of the company that joined Aguinaldo's odyssey during the Filipino-American War to escape from American forces before his eventual capture in Palanan, Isabela. According to Agustin Espiritu (2005, 76), Colonel Villa was profoundly anti-American, resenting the US invasion of the country.

Villa grew up in a time when Filipinos were engaged in fierce anti-imperial and nationalist resistance against the American military and civilian forces—Macario Sakay's Tagalog Republic, the Moro resistance forces, the Colorum insurrectos, the Sakdalista, to the then newly-established Communist Party of the Philippines. As the brutality against the subversive natives intensified, Manuel Quezon and other members of the Philippine oligarchy sought to assert independence through parliamentary and legal ways, before eventually succumbing to compromises with the Americans (San Juan 2010, 15-16). The struggle for independence also found expression in literary productions, as signaled by the emergence of seditious nationalist works in various genres—political plays of Aurelio Tolentino, poetry of Fernando Ma. Guerrero and Cecilio Apostol, novels by Lope K. Santos and Faustino Aguilar. Subsequently, these expressions of nationalist resistance were contained by the invasive Americanization throughout the country, particularly through public education (Villa 2002, 10).

Public education system exposed the students to Western culture, with literature studied in relation to the history and culture of the Anglo-Saxon world (Hosillos 1968, 39). This consequentially conditioned Filipino sensibilities to regard Filipino literary works with disdain, dismissing their historically conditioned qualities as didactic

and propagandist. Along with the entry of the New Critical framework which focused on literature's autonomy from history, the Filipino student's literary taste was habituated according to Western aesthetic standards. In addition, the mode of American instruction taught Filipino writers a new language, and subsequently, a new direction for literary practice. As such, the emergence of Filipino writers in English like Villa shifted the imperatives of literary practice from commitment to nationalism to the emulation of Western literature and the endorsement of Western literary aesthetics. Nationalist sentiments were exorcised from the province of literature, so to speak.

While Villa can indeed be regarded as what Chua refers to as "the apotheosis of the epistemic reengineering" of colonial education (Villa 2002, 12), his assimilation to American culture could have been possibly furthered by his estranged relationship with his anti-American father. Staunchly antipathetic toward his son's literary interest, Colonel Villa pressured him to pursue a medical profession. The younger Villa submitted to his father's will and enrolled in a degree in medicine, and then in law, without abandoning his literary practice by persistently writing fiction. In the University of the Philippines (UP), he, together with other students, founded the UP Writers' Club, which adhered to the credo "art shall not be a means to an end but an end in itself." From 1927 to 1929, Villa vigorously contributed to the literary section of the *Philippines Herald*, and gradually established his reputation as an influential voice of his generation. However, in 1929, a Manila court charged him of obscenity for the series of poems "Man Songs," published in *Herald* and a short story "Appassionata" which appeared in *Philippine Collegian*. Most controversial in the "Man Songs" series was "Song of Ripeness," particularly with its vivid comparison of coconuts to a woman's breasts. "Appassionata" is a story about a seductress who permits

young men to see her naked body through a peephole. Conceding to the charges for the newspapers' sake, Villa paid a fine of 50 pesos, but eventually had to face a special disciplinary committee of the university, headed by Jorge Bocobo, dean of the School of Law. Villa defended himself in a statement invoking literary license and expressing that there is no connection between art and morality. Villa deemed that "Philippine audiences had misunderstood him," and were too blinded by conventional morality to appreciate his artistic vision (Espiritu 2005, 76-81). Subsequently, Villa was suspended for one year. During the same year, he was awarded first prize *Philippine Free Press* literary contest for the short story "Mir-i-nisa," and used the prize money to migrate to the United States in 1930 and search for greater opportunities as a writer.

These personal predicaments, along with the epistemic conditioning brought about by his exposure to American culture, constituted "conditions of possibility" (San Juan 2010, 14) that elicited his direct disavowal of what he perceived was the "philistine, Victorian society of colonial Philippines" (ibid., 6), his rebellion against his father, and his cultivation of the American dream. Epifanio San Juan, Jr. writes that "his rebellion against god and surrogate authorities, against literal and symbolic patriarchs, and his refusal to belong to any physical/real country may be an expression of his fear, dreams and hope of liberation from all family entanglements and sociopolitical constraints" (ibid., 19). Villa's act of rebellion was clearly an expression of the artist's bourgeois tendency to alienate himself from historical and political realities and to search for a metaphysical self, "a spirit that the human body and worldly reality cannot fully realize" (ibid., 23). Governing this tendency is the idea that "the singular identity of the poet transcends time and space, biographic particulars,

sociohistorical specificity” (San Juan 2009, 18). This is particularly evident in his bio-note in Edward O’Brien’s selection *Best Short Stories of 1923*:

Born in Manila, Philippine Islands. His father is a physician, and wanted him to follow a medical career. He finished his pre-medical course but could go no further..... Was expelled from the University of the Philippines in 1929 because it was claimed, he says, that his writing was immoral..... He is very unacademic because he believes academism cramps the soul. As for the Philippines, he cannot stand the old-maidishness of its outlook on things. (O’Brien 1932, 293)

As Chua (2013-2014, 23) points out that the bio-note, which belied certain facts in Villa’s life, signifies a self-fashioning move to romantically construct the author as “a victim of the establishment,” “a rebel against convention,” and “a vanguard.” His movement to America then was an effort to establish that he did not belong to his country, that his artistic “spirit” transcended the socio-historical realities of his country in particular. In the words of San Juan:

[Villa] struggled to fashion in words and deeds ‘a beautiful soul’ not in Europe or North America but somewhere in between, in the ‘occult zone of instability’ (to quote Fanon) inhabited by diasporic artists, exiles, émigrés, deracinated or déclassé intellectuals wandering the arcades of the metropolises’ culture-industry and subterranean art-world. (San Juan 2010, 6)

Eventually, Villa’s “beautiful soul” would be haunted by the specters of his socio-historical subject-position when

he moved to America, where the seemingly distant colonial realities of his renounced country loomed like a ghost over the ethnocentric logics of modernism.

### **The Colonial Specters of Modernism**

Arriving in 1930, Villa entered the University of New Mexico, which he attended for two years, and founded a short-lived mimeographed quarterly publication called *Clay: A Literary Notebook*, which published the early works of William Saroyan, William Carlos Williams, and Eugene Joffe (Hosillos 1968, 120-121). His attempt to enter the American literary circle was however conditioned by the economic and cultural atmosphere that blanketed American society.

The America that Villa set foot on was being tormented by the damages of the First World War and plagued by the enormous economic slowdown during the third decade of the century. The period of his arrival was also marked by the massive entry of Filipinos in the United States, some were *pensionados* or scholars who came from the local elite allied to the American colonial government, some were self-supporting students like Villa, while the others were blue-collar workers hired to supply labor force in plantations and canneries. These laborers arrived in the US only to experience oppressive labor conditions propelled by racism, inciting them to engage in labor activism. This situation was contemporaneous with the labor unrest back in the Philippines where American colonial intrusion translated to the oppressive restructuring of the local economy. With the closure of canneries, harsh wage cuts, oversupply in plantation labor, and attempts to repatriate Filipino laborers during the Great Depression, the plight of the migrant laborers severely worsened. By

the late 1920s and early 1930s, white hatred toward many Filipinos, whose growing population presented them as competitors for labor, became widespread. Single Filipino men were regarded as sexual threats to white and Mexican women in taxi-dance halls, and violent race riots intended to push Filipinos away from several communities broke out (Espiritu 1995, 11-13).

Racism likewise saddled Villa's attempt to penetrate a highly competitive literary market that was also suffering from the economic crash. Villa, who was then virtually unknown in America and had to compete with established authors, encountered extreme difficulty in publishing his short stories in American periodicals. Despite his signifying moves to present himself as universal writer, Villa could never escape the haunting of his ethnicity. Ironically, his ethnicity conditioned his publishing potential in ambivalent terms. While Kyle Crichton cited his ethnic background as one factor for the rejection of his works in *Scribner's* magazine, the ethnic flavor of some of his stories attracted editors of little, non-commercial magazines. Even more difficult was looking for a publishing house that would be willing to release his first collection of stories. Scribner turned down the manuscript of *Footnote to Youth* several times, until Villa himself volunteered to shoulder the production expenses (Chua 2013-2014, 13-19).

The presence of this racialized violence confirmed the specter of colonialism that hounded modernist thought. Instituted on the liberal philosophy that emerged during the nineteenth century, modernism served as the West's response to the political and economic upheavals during the early decades of the twentieth century. Owing to the Reformation movement's dismantling of feudalism and clericalism, and the consequent discourse that invoked the scientific individual, not God, as the mover of history, the

Western world steered toward the path of scientific progress and massive industrialization. In the United States, the impact of the First World War and the rapid economic growth followed by the subsequent economic slowdown during the Great Depression intensified the impulse to build industries, engage in massive urbanizing projects, and embark on technological ventures. Amidst the speedy operations of industrialization and technologization that enabled Western powers to expand their economic and political exercises across non-Western territories, modernism as a philosophical, political, and cultural framework responded to the imperative of constructing the modern Western self against the rest of the world—an epistemological procedure founded on an ethnocentric ethos that was haunted by the oppressive reality of colonialism.

From its construction in the feudal imagination as the Christian imperative to save the “native heathens from the evils of their godless primitivity,” colonialism was rediscursified by modernism as a remedy to what the West perceived as the backward, uncivilized, traditional character of non-Western societies. Supplemented by the invasive discursive proliferation of the dichotomy between the modern and traditional, the West was constructed in the global imaginary as the center of progress. It was on this modernist imaging of the Western self as the purveyor of civilization that the imperialist discourses of “benevolent assimilation” and “manifest destiny” instrumentalized by the Americans in colonizing the Philippines were predicated.

The ethnocentric ethos naturally found its way in the realm of artistic practice, which was likewise severely altered with the entry of the modernist age. With the diminution of feudalism, Western artistic practice was finally freed from the tradition of patronage. The artist was able

to pursue individual practice, and hence, to engage in artistic experimentation and personalization (Barrett 1997, 20). Moreover, the imperative to create something new surfaced as a response to the changing capitalist market. The modernist artist was promptly disposed to differentiate his/her work from “cheap” popular cultural artifacts consumed by the emerging mass urban society, and to contemporaneously pursue an artistic practice that would never be carried away by the commodifying climate of the period. Such disposition explains the supervening alienation of the artist from the currents of the political and economic situation. The doctrine of aestheticism or “art for art’s sake” thus burgeoned, and the view of “art (or what is sometimes called ‘high art’) as a source of esoteric value, separate from the everyday values of commercialism, morality, and any other sort of instrumental or practical purpose” proliferated (Carroll 2000, 352). In literature, this doctrine found its critical vanguard in the emergence of the new critical framework. This mode of literary analysis was responsible for defining the Western canon on strictly formal, literary grounds. The project of American cultural imperialism in colonies like the Philippines propagated these twin doctrines, hammering in the minds of the native intellectuals the superiority of Western literature and alienating them from their own literary traditions. So to speak, aesthetic standards valorized by the West were universalized as parameters of literariness through the pedagogical and cultural workings of colonization.

Villa’s artistic practice was definitely founded on these accepted doctrines of modernist literature. He in fact turned to Western literary figures for inspirations in his creative and critical ventures. Two of whom were reputedly highly influential in Villa’s literary career: Sherwood Anderson whose *Winesburg, Ohio* (originally published in 1919)

convinced Villa that he wanted to be a writer, and Edward O'Brien, Villa's patron who included his stories in his annual anthology of best short stories and whose critical appraisal of artistic merit influenced the young author in his subsequent critical work (Chua 2013-2014, 14).

Ultimately, despite his attempt to craft universal literature by employing experimentations and emulating the literary techniques of Western writers like Anderson, his first bid for literary fame failed, especially since he chose a literary genre that rendered him vulnerable to the discursive violence of modernist racism—the short story. The genre necessitates the evocation of a fictional world, “a unique system separate from, although dependent on the cultural-historical reality in which it is created and with which it holds more or less obvious affinities” (Ronen 1994, 15). This mimetic quality of the short story was not diminished by modernist innovations, and was even highlighted with the introduction of realism and the decline of romanticism. Any attempt to completely exorcise socio-historical specificities in fiction was thus bound to fail because narration is integral to the genre's mechanism of expressing temporal and spatial reality. As such, the genre is one of “the immanent forms that somehow fail to achieve rising to the level of transcendence” (San Juan 2009, 18) on which Villa's illusion of transcendent artistic destiny was parasitically reliant. In *Footnote to Youth*, Villa transcribed his metaphysical explorations on the meaning of human life in identifiable contexts—the rural outskirts of colonial Philippines and the desolate spaces of Depression-era America. How these mimetic worlds evoked in the stories serve as haunting spaces of Villa's exorcised history will be explored in the succeeding portions of this essay.

### Tales of the Haunted Fatherland

In his introduction to the collection, O'Brien remarked that Villa's literary practice was "deeply rooted in the country life of the Philippine Islands" (in Villa 1933, 3). Villa naturally made maximal use of local ethnographic details as the setting of twelve of his stories in the service of creating a literature of universality. Nevertheless, while his works were propelled by an overt lack of political agenda, these ethnographic constructions brought forth historical specters that he tried to bury under his obsessive adherence to aestheticism.

The agrarian landscape of the rural country against which Villa imposed his existentialist narratives is rendered by him in passionate and romantic descriptions. The tales of the Philippines are indeed brimming with ornate, carefully observed images of the tropical countryside—from the ground "broken up into many fresh wounds and fragrant with a sweetish earthy smell" in the title story, to the field of flowers that "was like a mantle of gold and white...a lake of flowers...revealing dimples of all colors" in "Yet Do They Strife." These are in fact spectral traces of Euro-Hispanic literature that proliferated during the colonial period and wielded an influence on the country's literary productions until the first half of the American colonial era (Lumbera and Lumbera 1997, 89), the eventual haunting of which O'Brien recognized when he remarked "the strong Spanish sense of form and color" in the collection (in Villa 1933, 3).

The spectral mood of Spanish *costumbrismo* hovers over Villa's Philippine stories, smoothening the overall texture of their narrative styles even when they are set in different temporalities spread out across Philippine history. "Malakas" and "Kamya," for instance are set in the distant

past. The first is a folkloric love story apparently situated in the precolonial period as evinced by non-Christian character names that are visibly borrowed from the local creation legend, and, as Timothy Yu (2006, 33) pointed out, by its narration that echoes “the style of a traditional oral performance” even while evincing the narrative aesthetics of Spanish romanticism. The latter period of their early colonial conquests in Manila is also a tale of tragic love temporally structured within a few decades before the entry of Spanish colonial power, signified by the mention of Rajah Soliman who refused to submit to Spanish sovereignty during their early colonial conquests in Manila. The rest of the stories are populated by characters bearing Christian names and structured on Catholic temporal signifiers (e.g., Christmas and Easter Sunday) that situate them within the later colonial epochs.

The reality of Spanish colonialism likewise prowls the countryside of Villa’s imagination through the spectral ushering of the Spanish *reduccion* system. From this spatial technology of colonial power emerged the epistemological production of identities according to the territorial binary of urbanity versus rurality. The *reduccion* discourse ramified the enduring view of the countryside as the space of the *tulisanes* and the barbarians, owing to the fact that the rural landscape is usually the setting of colonial resistance and agrarian struggles. That the stories of Manila-bred Villa are remarkably silent and oblivious about this reality could affirm the workings of *reduccion* discourse in segregating the more “civilized” city dwellers from the rural “barbarians.” Rehearsing his romantic evocation of the countryside from his position as cosmopolitan outsider exposed to the cultural ramifications of American colonialism, Villa appropriated his visioning of the countryside from Sherwood Anderson whose works

exposed the “dichotomy of cosmopolitan/provincial” (Yu 2006, 37) in a manner that privileges character development over plot structure. Attended by his poetic evocation of the pastoral landscape to universalize the narrative milieu, Villa adopted the Andersonian narrative mode with the intention of focusing on universal themes rather than on the material realities of his characters.

In the story “Footnote to Youth,” which Leopoldo Yabes (1997, xxiii) distinguished as “a remarkable example of the Anderson story transplanted to Philippine soil,” a young farmer Dodong asks for his father’s consent to marry the barrio lass Teang. Eventually, Dodong encounters the hardships and sorrows of married life and regretfully realizes that his early marriage has taken his youth away from him too soon. Soon, he finds himself in his father’s position when his eldest son, Blas, decides to marry his childhood sweetheart. Whipped by years of embitterment and disillusionment over his fate, Dodong muses, “Youth must triumph...now. Love must triumph...now. Afterwards...it will be Life” (Villa 1933, 21). Here, the capitalization of the first letters of the words Youth, Life, and Love throughout the story distills universal themes/ideals from the ethnographic specificities occupying the narrative. The emphatic positioning of these ideals as extracted from the rural backdrop, while framed to clearly articulate Villa’s existential statement on the oppressive cycle of human life only highlights the dialectics of the human condition and the socio-economic reality that contains it. In fact, the distillation of these ideals does not really serve to obscure the story’s ethnographic background. What is achieved instead is these ideals acquiring meaning from, within, and through the rural context. As such, while Villa clearly resorted to abstractions and philosophical musings to give shape and weight to the forfeiture of Dodong’s

youth, he, owing to the exigencies of narrative worlding, also rendered these ideals visible and concrete in the episodes of peasant life—early marriage, unbridled childbirth, domestic travails, and hardships of farm work. It is precisely through such narrative and semantic operation that one may fully interpret “Footnote to Youth” as a story of a young man’s confrontation with the oppressive cyclicity of peasant life in the agrarian countryside.

As the reader further moves through Villa’s provincial stories, one encounters characters similar to Dodong in that their existential ruminations are distilled from the material contradictions that afflict peasant life. Nevertheless, as in the case of the title story, these ruminations cannot fully disavow the historical and economic base they are situated in. In fact, Villa’s consistent representation of rural life as an oppressive cycle of birth, youth, marriage, and death is attuned to the repetitive rhythms of agrarian activity in the countryside.

In the second story “The Fence,” Villa made use of the titular image to describe the oppressions wrought by this rural order. A woman builds a fence to isolate herself from the neighbor impregnated by her estranged husband, and in the process, condemns her son Iking to incurable solitude within the confines of their nipa hut. The omniscient narrator alludes to this exile as a behavior corollary of the feudal religion.

His mother would pray. Could she pray? His soul asked... He stood motionless. And then he saw the fence – the fence that his mother had built and strengthened – to crush his soul. He ran weakly, groggily, to it – allured by its forbidding, crushing sternness. (35-36)

Moreover, the narrator mentions this detail in the woman's house: "A *Biblia* was on the table, but no one read it; they did not know how to read" (35). More than imbuing the narrative with the temper of a Christian morality tale, this detail temporally situates the story within the American occupation when Tagalog translations of the bible were finally made available to the Filipinos. The presence of the bible and the mention of illiteracy in the story however release the specters of Spanish colonialism, conjuring the theological and pedagogical machinery of the earlier colonizers. Here, one could detect Villa suggesting the link between rural backwardness and the enduring feudal impositions of the Spanish colonizers.

Villa's anti-Spanish suggestion could be understood both as an effect of the anti-Spanish propaganda disseminated by the Americans toward the end of the nineteenth century, and as a rebellion against the Voice of the Father, as the elder Villa reportedly spoke Spanish and no English (Park 2013, 125). In his renunciation of rural life as a ramification of Spanish colonialism, Villa then spectralized a preferable image that he himself was familiar with—that of the city moving linearly toward the industrializing direction of modernity. In an age when "to be 'Fil-Hispanic' meant being old-fashioned; (and) to speak English, to be 'Americanized,' meant being modern" (de la Peña 2008, 105), this is a modernity founded on the American colonial order—a modernity that moves to exorcise the feudal ghosts of the Spanish colonial system.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of Tona, a mother abandoned by a man who fathered her child in the story "Death into Manhood," this modernity, signified by the public school where she enrolled her son Berto, by the Red Cross pin her son wore, and finally by the *cine* (moviehouse) to where he decides to take his girlfriend Maria, is a cause for

trepidation, akin to her own fear toward her son's eventual journey to manhood. Fearing that Berto might eventually become like his father, Tona approaches Maria's mother, telling her to convince her daughter never to go out with her son again. Here, Tona's anxiety to accept the movement of time—its vertical passage toward modernization—is depicted as a traumatic consequence of the rural cycle. This representation of the rural psyche is undoubtedly consistent with Villa's perception of the conservatism and backwardness of his country of origin.

In this story and in "The Fence," one would notice that Villa's rural female characters are afflicted by a counter-progressive rural mindset. In contrast, his male characters are the ones who leave the countryside for the city, similar to Anderson's George Willard in *Winesburg, Ohio* whose eventual departure from the small town of Winesburg embodies the possibility of escape from the snares of rural life. After the death of their infant, Ponso in a "Given Woman" suddenly decides to leave Flora, a servant woman with whom he lived, to go to the city. Even though unsure why he should leave, he decides to find a surrogate who would be willing to live with the submissive Flora before he takes off. With the city functioning as a signifier historically haunted by the political and economic ramifications of modernity, Ponso's impulse to embark on this journey clearly suggests his infatuation with the cosmopolis, yielding to which entails that he must abandon Flora. In the eyes of Ponso, the woman is the antithesis of the city.

The image of the woman as staple rural presence likewise finds expression in "Valse Triste" wherein the narrator's Uncle Berto remembers Tinang, the woman whom he was forced to abandon in San Diego in order to follow to his father's wishes and study in Manila. When he

returns to the *barrio* years later, the lovers cross paths again and the woman confesses to him that she killed their unborn child. Shocked by her crime, he bids her a sorrowful goodbye, leaving Tinang to realize from this brief reunion that the beloved boy who abandoned her has finally transformed into a man. Evidently, these stories usher in specters of the patriarchal order prevalent in rural familial dynamics, primarily by constructing women as domestic fixtures in rural territories. The female characters in the rural stories are in fact commonly represented in proximal reference to their nipa huts. In contrast, the men are itinerant, capable of moving from the cyclical trap of the countryside to the linear progress of the city. In the case of namesakes Berto in “Death into Manhood” and Uncle Berto in “Valse Triste,” modernity signifies manhood. The masculinization of young Berto’s body becomes his mother’s temporal marker for the entry of modernity (signified, among others, by the *cine*) in their rural community. In the eyes of his abandoned lover in the rural village of San Diego, Uncle Berto’s sojourn in the city and his implied encounter with the cosmopolitan realities of Manila turn him into a man. The urban versus rural binary is hence rendered in heteronormative significations. The city is rendered as masculine space, headed toward the phallic direction of modernity, while the countryside is feminized territory, confined in the cycle of domestic conservatism. Haunting this heteronormative binary is Villa’s transcolonial disposition, in which the backward, feudal patriarchy imposed by the Spanish colonialism is contemptuously contrasted with the favored white male norm of US modernity.

Complementing Villa’s transcolonial imagination of patriarchy is the spectral image of the repressive father that looms over the countryside. From the spectral father who

may possibly haunt his son in “Death into Manhood” to the violent fathers of “Resurrection,” “Story for my Country” and “Yet Do They Strife,” Villa’s regression from his estranged relationship with his father is hauntologically intertwined with the suffocating entrapments of rural life. In some stories, the desire for the ideal father becomes figured in the image of the national hero Jose Rizal. In the “Story for My Country,” a boy named Jose Rosal escapes from the brutal custody of his father. Gazing at Rizal’s monument, the persona, Jose’s younger brother soon imagines his lost brother as the national hero incarnate, spectralizing his older brother in the Rizalian cult. Roughly continuing the trope of escape is the closing story “Yet Do They Strife,” which tells of another boy’s escape from his wife-beating father, leading him to an eventual encounter with a wounded man. This episode is haunted by the narrative of the meeting of Elias and Basilio in Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere*.

As noticeable in these two stories and the other Rizal narratives—“The Son of Rizal,” “Daughter of Rizal,” and “The Man Who Looked Like Rizal”—the national hero becomes positioned as a surrogate for inadequate father-figures. In his essay “Unbecoming Rizal: José Garcia Villa’s Biographical Translations,” Philip Holden (2009, 287) argues that these stories insert the lives of ordinary Filipinos into the official biographies of the national hero “to encourage readerly identifications with their subaltern protagonists.”

Undoubtedly, these narratives conjure and echo the Philippine state’s canonization of Rizal. It merits mention however that Rizal’s official enshrinement in national consciousness is clearly a neocolonial project endorsed by the US empire, as comprehensively exposed by Renato Constantino in his essay “Veneration without Understanding.” In the hands of the Americanized Villa,

the national hero's presence as the surrogate for the brutal father and the proverbial fatherland—specters that condense in the images of domestic violence breaking out in the rural space—merely affirms the hegemonic mystifications of the US sponsorship of Rizalian heroism. The image of Rizal is therefore haunted by the phantom of the “imperial Father.”

The haunting of American paternity, amplified by the insertion of the anti-Hispanic and American-sponsored Rizal, in the Philippine stories possesses Villa's desire to sever his connection with his own country, which shelters the ghosts of Spanish colonialism, as well as his connection with his own Spanish-speaking father. Consequently, the haunting mythified his sojourn in America where he aspired to supplant his renounced paternity with the imperial Father. Eventually, as the following analysis will demonstrate, this attempt at surrogacy would usher in phantoms of the disavowed fatherland.

### **Specters of the Homeland**

In “Untitled Story,” the narrator begins with an evocation of his father's cruelty: “Father did not understand my love for Vi, so Father sent me to America to study away from her. I could not do anything and I left” (in Villa 1933, 73). The father in this story is strikingly similar to the father in “Valse Triste” who sends his son Berto away to Manila to preempt his relationship with a country girl.

This story, together with the other two parts (“White Interlude” and “Walk at Midnight: A Farewell”) of the “White and Blue Flame” trilogy, as well as the other two independent stories of a Filipino writer's migrant experiences (“Song I Did Not Hear” and “Young Writer

in a New Country”) are filled with autobiographical details that conjure the specter of Villa’s father. The narrator, similar to Villa, goes to study in New Mexico. His venture to “the gorgeous purple flower” (80) of poetry is treated as a rebellion against his father who disparages any form of artistic practice. In one instance, the narrator muses “I had no money and I prayed to God to send me money because I knew I could not get it elsewhere. But God never answered” (96), referring to an episode when Villa’s father declined to give financial support to his impoverished son in America (Espiritu 2005, 76). Despite his move to encode his narratives in the stylistic mystifications of modernist experimentations particularly evinced in the psalm-like numbering of paragraphs, the stories visibly resist this poetic erasure of mimesis and release the ghosts of Villa’s history.

The ghost of the father is a bisemic image in these stories – more than a personal figure, it spectralizes the abandoned home country. Every ushering of the father’s ghost evokes the narrator’s distant memory of the country—from the thwarted love affair to anecdotes of domestic cruelty. In fact, this phantom is evoked through romantic significations transplanted from the pastoral landscape of the country. The narrator thus ruminates:

...I took with me the tree of my father, my new love, to the new land – America...In America, I nourished the tree of my father till his love had branches and although I had never played before under the gentleness of his shade now I played in fancy under the coolness of his branches. (94)

In contrast to the spectral paternal hate that floods the rural narratives, Villa’s persona evokes yearning in the immigrant stories. This newfound desire is aroused in the

very moment of his departure from his homeland and his separation from his father:

Before my father touched my hands on the boat that was to take me to America, I was whole. But when he clasped my hands and said, "Good luck to you, son," love flowed from me into the father I had never loved and my wholeness was lost. (93)

The absence of the father, whose presence has been earlier regarded with disdain, now becomes the source of incompleteness. Villa the writer tried to respond to this unwholeness through what O'Brien treats as an effort "to impose the ascetic pattern of the American desert upon his memories and, in so doing, upon his writing as well" (3). This recourse is indubitably haunted by Villa's aestheticist disposition as literary artist, particularly by his faith in the transcendental potential of art to go beyond the exigencies of historical specificities and traumatic biographical memories.

One expression of Villa's recourse to the realm of the imagination is his persona's imposition of the spectral presence of his abandoned homeland against the alienating wilderness of America. He particularly spectralizes his father in the foreign land. For instance, in "Walk at Midnight," he sees his father come to him in the classroom while the professor lectures, the old man apologizing for a previous cruelty (108), while in "Song I Did Not Hear," his Jewish roommate Joe Lieberman transforms into an image of his furious father (246).

Inevitably, Villa's visionary evocation of alienation and yearning in the American landscape registers snippets of life during the Great Depression, as signified temporally

by the reference to then-President Hoover. While his political obliviousness toward the new country is pronounced, as in the line “I saw President Hoover’s home in Palo Alto but I did not care for President Hoover” (74), his observations conjure the specter of this present economic misery—from the image of the crippled street seller, the insertion of a character named David who, unable to shoulder the expenses, leaves school, to episodes of the narrator’s own destitution in the big city. Severely alienated by this atmosphere of economic despair, the narrator is haunted by the ghost of his homeland in “Young Writer in a New Country:” “America is cold, for the moment that is my thought. In the homeland – never any snow. In the homeland, greenness. O green, O warmth, O bamboos unforgotten” (301). Here, Villa’s mythology of American paternity is shattered by his firsthand exposure to the desolation of the new country. The imperial ideal which he anticipated would be a departure from the oppressive confines of his homeland becomes demystified when he realized that America is a wasteland of economic misery.

In spite of his indubitably dismal predicament in America, the persona’s evocations clearly pronounce his desire for assimilation and acceptance in this new country. Imagining such acceptance to be akin to someone picking a handkerchief on the road, the persona, still haunted by the traumatizing memory of his homeland, welcomes the idea of surrogacy, while rejecting the thought of returning to his father: “Who would my picker be? – I want him to have kind eyes because I am hungry for kind eyes, God. Do not let him have my father’s eyes” (97). Moreover, Villa’s persona prefers the “desert of my white birth” over the homeland where “I was young” (303). This contrastive articulation is haunted by the relationship between the Philippine colony and the American empire, as Villa conjured what Neferti Tadiar observes as the colonial

infantilization of the Filipino nation. Since “America, in turn, becomes the Philippines’ masculine ideal” (Tadiar 2004, 47), the imperial dynamics of the US-Philippine relations eventually takes on patriarchal terms, with the colonizer positioned as the doting ‘Fatherland,’ the Filipinos, the ‘imperial sons’ (ibid., 53).

This hegemonic construction of the image of the White Father then becomes, for a colonial subject trapped in the alienating landscape of the empire, instrumental to the discursive operations of paternal surrogacy. Interestingly, for Villa’s persona, the desired American paternity must supplant not just the absence of the homeland and the father, but also the thwarted consummation of erotic desire—the frustrated desire for his childhood sweetheart Vi in the faraway country. Consequently, the persona develops queer desire for the ideal White Male, figured on the character of a poor American boy named Jack Wicken. In narrating the persona’s first interaction with Jack, Villa pronounces the persona’s alterity, and in so doing, immediately positions him within the matrix of racial relations in the colonial center: “There was a boy Jack Wicken ate at the dining hall who would give me ugly glances because I was a foreigner and when I reached home I felt I hated him and could not let him know about it” (99).

Conjuring the reality of racism prevalent during Villa’s arrival in the United States, the persona’s ethnicity signifies his removal from Jack, and in effect, from the possibility of having his adoration reciprocated by the object of desire. The desire for integration and acceptance is visibly impeded, precisely because the persona’s identity as Filipino/foreigner marks him off as a neocolonial subject, nominalized through the spectral reality of colonialism that constitutes the primary encounter between his homeland and the surrogate country.

The racial distance conceived by this colonial condition further intensifies his desire for Jack, until it ultimately becomes articulated in theological significations. In “Walk at Midnight,” the persona confesses that it was his mother who introduced him to the Christian faith: “My mother taught me to pray. I went with her to churches and at night we prayed before the picture of God. God had a beard in the picture but when I was in God’s arms I felt only the warmth and gentleness of His fold, I could not tell if He had a beard” (118).

This memory, a specter of Spanish colonial theology, haunts the dynamics of the persona’s desire. This very image of the bearded God in Christian iconography is the one the persona implores to in his desire to be taken “back into my mother and back into His (God’s) arms so there should be no more loneliness for me” (118). The specter of the Christian God provides the persona with an imagined resolution to his incompleteness, even though the persona’s entreaty takes on a somewhat secular temper with his symbolic non-recognition of the bearded image. This infatuation with the image of divinity is similarly demonstrated in “The Woman Who Looked Like Christ,” a story of a young man who falls in a love with a woman whose face resembles a young Christ. Queerly conjured, the male character’s romantic (erotic) desire is imposed on the sacralized masculine image, prompting the woman to fly into a rage over the comparison to a male face.

Quite amusingly, the persona’s desire for the image of the White Father, Jack, is seemingly reconciled with the specter of the Hispanic God when he implores, “God, let him love me even as I love him” (122). It turns out, however, that Villa’s persona in the autobiographical narratives constructs a modernist theological revision founded on mythifying the figure of the desired White

Father (Jack) as someone “who could crush God’s whisper in his hands” (114), an effort evidently intended to exorcise the obvious theological ramifications of Hispanic patriarchy. The modernist patriarchy, the white male norm of American colonial discourse, therefore displaces the traditional feudal deity in the process of violent hierarchy.

Accompanying this exalting vision of the mythical white male is the persona’s realization that he will eventually have to accept suffering from this unrequited adoration. Nevertheless, upon Jack’s departure, he exclaims, “I want to see Jack. I want him always to be in my life...even if it hurts. I am ready to be hurt” (258). These emotional articulations of the narrator chart the allegorical narrative of the country’s masochistic relationship with the US empire, and more particularly, of the Filipino migrant’s travail in a highly-racialized ecosystem where his desire for assimilation is perpetually foiled by his inevitable identification as a neocolonial subject.

In this penultimate evocation of “Young Writer in a New Country,” the last American story in the collection, the persona, undoubtedly already acquainted at this point with the political, economic, and racial dynamics in his new country, narrates his imagined integration:

Little by little comes my white birth – a cool  
white birth in a new land...

It was then that my stories were born – of the  
homeland and the new land. Some of you may  
have read them – they were cool, a fire with  
coolth.

I, father of tales. Fathering tales I became rooted  
to the new land. I became lover to the desert.  
(303)

In keeping with Villa's aesthetic purism, the persona valorizes his artistic activity as in itself an act of paternity, and a way of resolving the political, economic and racial contradictions that characterized his migrant experience. Reading the writer's self-imposed exile through the psychoanalytic lens, San Juan eloquently synthesizes Villa's recourse to the imaginative realm of literary practice in his attempt to consummate his assimilationist desire amidst the hostilities of the imperial environs of America:

...the crisis of exile...is dissolved by metaphoric sublimation: In his visionary re-presentation of the primal loss (exile as castration; expulsion by the father), the antinomic discourses of place, body, inheritance, and need converge in the self-exiled native being reborn in the desert of New Mexico where the Oedipal trauma (the loss of the mother's/patria's body) is exorcised by a transcendent trope of imagination. Art then functions as the resolution of the conflict between solitary ego and community...between subjugated people and despotic conqueror. (San Juan 1998, 87)

### **Conclusion**

Despite Villa's overt effort to fashion himself as a universal writer, *Footnote to Youth* released the specters of the colonial realities that he did not seek to discuss in his works. In fact, this collection clearly traces Villa's movement in the matrix of colonial relations. He disavowed the Philippines as an oppressive fatherland fraught by the

specters of Spanish colonialism, escaping to the American desert to seek a surrogate White paternity, only to be rejected because of his identity as imperial subject.

Critical responses to the collection were scathing toward Villa's American stories, while registering interest toward the local stories that highlight his native roots. Moreover, many reviews concur that his best stories were those set in the Philippines (Chua 2013-2014, 25) because, "to an American reader, his stories offered variety because they "are news from an unknown country, the Philippines" (ibid., 122). While the book gained some attention, it was simply on the basis of its and its author's alterity. Thus, contrary to the monumentalizing news that circulated in the local literary community, it did not catapult him to his desired place in the modernist pantheon.

Remarkably, Villa, understandably daunted by the lukewarm reception to his American publishing debut, published almost nothing for a decade, until he released the poetry collection *Have Come, Am Here* in 1942. The hiatus, which was clearly an effort to "sever his links to his previous work," apparently paid off, as most reviews of the poetry book "register) no awareness either of *Footnote to Youth* or of Villa's many publications in the Philippines" (Yu 2004, 43). Of his decision to turn to poetry and abandon prose, Villa later on claimed that "a poet is the highest thing, the hardest thing to be" (in Arcellana 1967, 608). But more than his high regard for the art of poetry, it seems possible that "(l)yrical poetry allowed Villa to lift his psychological symbolism to a level of nearly pure abstraction, with its biographical and geographic bases erased" (Yu 2006, 39), and was thus more expedient to his modernist aspiration and self-fashioning as a universal writer.

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