Poverty as Disembodiment: The Enfreakment of Animalized Philippine Bodies in Malou Jacob's *"Juan Tamban"* and Nick Pichay's *"Babaeng Tilapia, Natagpuan sa Coastal Road"*

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ABSTRACT

This paper, in studying Malou Jacob's now-iconic stage play "Juan Tamban" and Nicolas Pichay's "Babaeng Tilapia, Natagpuan sa Coastal Road", a teleplay, seeks to read the presentation of animalized bodies of the poor in the Philippines as tropes of freakery and grotesqueness that perform/shape dis-embodiment. This animalization will indeed be examined as a project of dehumanization and as a campaign to mine both empathetic and antipathetic responses to poverty in Philippine life. However, in tracking the incongruities of animalized, grotesque bodies in Jacob's and Pichay's plays, I posit that depictions of abjection in Philippine plays should not only be seen as mirroring real life poverty in the Philippines, but, as seen in these two "poverty plays", animalization can also be examined as tactics that explore the dynamics and the plasticities of vulnerability, civilization, and mortality within the play as microuniverse, and within the world of the intended or the idealized audience.

KEYWORDS

animalization, freakery, grotesque bodies, disability, normalcy

Poor Bodies, Freak Bodies

In the 2015 report of the Philippine Statistics Office, poverty incidence in the Philippines was estimated at 26.3 percent, meaning that more than a quarter of the Philippine population at that time lived in poverty. Of this percentage, nearly half (12.1 percent) are "Filipinos whose incomes fall below the food threshold" living in extreme or subsistence poverty.

These figures testify to the unabated presence of poverty in the Philippines, even while these government agencies underscore the improvement of these poverty incidence figures compared to the 2012 percentages. The faces and facets of poverty on the ground bear even more evidence that these figures, while seen as "within the target set in the Philippine Development Plan, which is 20.0 to 23.0 percent for the year (2015)", and which stated the notable decline in poverty incidence, with "about 1.4 million less poor Filipinos in 2015 than in 2009" belie the very clear and harrowing hold of privation and indigence in the ordinary lives of Filipinos.

In fact, among the Asian Development Bank's key findings in its 2009 report "Poverty in the Philippines: Causes, Constraints, and Opportunities" is that "*[C]hronic poverty* is a concern, and poverty has become a major constraint on the attainment of high levels of sustained growth and the overall development of the country" (89, my emphasis), which chronicity underscores the continuing scourge of poverty in the Philippines.

It is within this context that the two dramatic works that we are examining here are enfleshed, as these give shape to the depictions of

individuals undone by poverty, and illustrate the real havoc poverty plays in the unraveling of Filipino families in everyday life. Malou Jacob's 1979 PETA play, "Juan Tamban", and Nicolas Pichay's 1999 Palanca-award winning teleplay "Babaeng Tilapia, Natagpuan sa Coastal Road" are read as depictions here not just of the squalor of poverty itself. More keenly, these two dramatic texts show the abasement of the poor not only in the portrayals of literal deprivation, but in presenting the bodies of those who suffer poverty in the Philippines as animalized bodies, as tropes of grotesqueness that perform, or shape dis-embodiment in the incongruous placements and displacements of these bodies in and of poverty.

Freak Studies and "Juan Tamban" and "Babaing Tilapia"

In reckoning with the central characters of these dramas by Jacob and Pichay, I posit that the depictions of Juan Tamban in Jacob's drama and Teresa in Pichay's teleplay are animalized, spectacle-ized bodies, the effect of which is to present poverty and poor bodies as bizarre, and therefore, incongruous bodies.

In situating freakery and grotesqueness as entries to reading new considerations of embodiment in "Juan Tamban" and in Teresa in "Babaeng Tilapia, Natagpuan sa Coastal Road", we read these within the ambit of burgeoning freak and disability studies. Leslie Fiedler provides an early definition of freakery in his book *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* :

> The true Freak . . . stirs both supernatural terror and natural sympathy, since, unlike the fabulous monsters, he is one of us, the human child of human parents, however altered by forces we do not quite understand into something mythic and mysterious, as no mere cripple ever is. Passing either on the street, we may be simultaneously tempted to avert our eyes and to stare; but in the latter case we feel no threat to those desperately maintained boundaries on which any definition of sanity ultimately depends. Only the true Freak challenges the conventional boundaries between male and female, sexed and sexless, animal and human, large and small, self and other, and consequently between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, fact and myth (Fiedler qtd. in Vernon).

Another useful provenance of freak studies is Rosemarie Garland Thomson's *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. The field of freak studies came about as a response to the "reconfigur[ation] of the body during the nineteenth and early twentieth century in America", and factors such as "the standardization of modern life and mechanized labor" buttressed the "unmarked, normative body", while scientific discourse and medical practices "glorified sameness and bodily uniformity" (in Sperling 90).

Garland Thomson defines "the freak [as] an icon of generalized embodied deviance, but also 'simultaneously reinscribed gender, race, sexual aberrance, ethnicity, and disability as inextricable yet particular exclusionary systems legitimated by bodily variation-all represented by the single multivalent figure of the freak'" (in Martin 963). Furthermore, she speaks of the standardized ways of communication and learning, and the glorification of something called normalcy, as just some of the ways in which culture constructs disability as a way to describe (and, more importantly, to discriminate against, ostracize, and oppress) those with bodily, cognitive, or behavioral anomalies… distinguish[ing] the freak not as a 'Freak of Nature,' but as a 'Freak of Culture' … freaks present[ing] 'an opportunity to formulate the self in terms of what it was not' (in Sperling 91).

Susan Stewart furthers this, defining bodies as freaks by locating these within the ambit of the "carnival-grotesque," the grotesque body deployed within the structures of the spectacle (in Solomon 167), which frames the "anomalously shaped others for an observing self" (168). Kimberley Hinton supports this by stating that "a novel body in and of itself does not render a person a freak" (3). She cites Robert Bogdan, who emphasizes that the presentation of freak bodies rests not just

in corporeal anomaly, but in the "*presentation*" (Bogdan's emphasis) of the body as anomalous and disordered, "that is, the *purposeful display of the other-bodied individual*" (3, my emphasis). Rachel Adams avers that "freaks are produced not by their inherent differences from us, but by the way their particularities are figured as narratives of unique and intractable alterity" (in Hinton 3), thus "hyper-dramatizing" the differences in their bodies (Mitchell and Snyder in Hinton 3).

To understand the freak and the disparagement of freak bodies, we have first to note how normalcy became the norm, and what constitutes this normalcy. Natasha Saltes attributes to the nineteenth century the rise of "a positivist understanding of ontological normality" (57). She cites Belgian statistician Adolphe Quetelet as the proponent of the concept of the "average man" as the norm in the 1830s, by creating a statistical process that made possible the relation of individuals to others by illustrating this through the principle of normal distribution. This principle proffered that "the majority of the population should fall below 'the arch of the standard bell-shaped curve'" (Davis qtd. in Saltes 57), and that "individuals with attributes that diverge from the arch are therefore considered 'abnormal'" (Saltes 57). Sir Francis Galton, a British statistician, recognized that not all deviations from the bell curve are necessarily undesirable traits, and so modified the bell curve such that this "would reflect a ranking of desirability" (Davis qtd. in Saltes 57). These quantifications of what constituted the "average man" posited ways by which the body could be compared, measured, and improved to arrive at "a 'normal' way of being" (57).

In addition to these statistical processes, the origin of the normal was also consolidated by the advent of industrialization, urbanization, and new modes of production in the nineteenth century. Economies organized around factory work were buoyed by able bodies, and "disability came to be understood as a functional limitation defined in terms of a deficit or defect and understood through comparative measures as an abnormality that presents a burden to society" (Finkelstein; Thomas; Oliver and Barnes qtd. in Saltes 58). Normalcy is defined in terms of the "proper functioning, deportment and control of the human body" against "illness, diseases, disabilities and behaviours" (Saltes 58). Corporeal incapacity is therefore defined as disability, and is understood as sickness, and disabled people are deemed invalids (Hughes qtd. in Saltes 58).

Jacob's "Juan Tamban"

The provenance of Juan Tamban as "poverty play"

Malou Leviste Jacob's "Juan Tamban" began as an idea for a play suggested by Filipino film and theatre composer Lutgardo Labad, who was with the Philippine Educational Theater Association, then a fledgling theatre company specializing in plays in Filipino "committed to social change" (PETA). Labad read an article on a child who ate cockroaches because he was hungry and wanted attention (Jacob), and as 1979 was designated by the United Nations as the International Year of the Child, he asked Jacob whether she wanted to write the play based on "Estong", the child featured in Lita Consignado's article that came out in the Sunday magazine *Philippine Panorama* in 1978. Jacob agreed, after meeting with key resource persons such as the child Estong's doctor, and with social work experts.

Doreen Fernandez, in her landmark collection of essays on Philippine theatre entitled *Palabas*, lauded Jacob's as "one of the most successful plays in [recent] years", noting especially how the play used expressionism "with special effectivity" (113). This expressionism in "Juan Tamban" was illustrated by dream/nightmare sequences, with the almost surreal effect of huge papier-mache insects mounted on bamboo sticks, amid the blue lighting effects (Chua 138-139).

Evidence of the play's stellar quality is in Brenda V. Fajardo's inclusion of *Juan Tamban* in her monograph, *The Aesthetics of Poverty: A Rationale in Designing for Philippine Theater*, in which she explains how what she called "the aesthetics of poverty" is evinced in her set designs for PETA. More than detailing the scenic design for Jacob's play (18-19), Fajardo's contribution in this monograph is to underscore how this "aesthetics" came about. She emphasizes at many points in her work: "The Philippines is a poor country. This is a reality from which Filipinos should not escape, if only because

its acceptance is the first step to survival… "(3). This, to Fajardo, should be recognized and should create a sense of beauty that evolves from "the quality of life found in depressed areas", expressed now in Philippine theatre aesthetics (21), and encompasses her set designs for the PETA plays she took on, "Juan Tamban" among these. This is salient, because Eugene van Erven, scholar and theatre critic from the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, in writing about the PETA in 1989, took note not only of "Juan Tamban's" "reputation as a modern classic of modern Philippine drama and a landmark in PETA's already respectable career" (20), but more importantly, was clear to emplace this within Fajardo's "aesthetics of poverty" (17). But while all these memorialize Juan Tamban's place in Philippine theatre, it is undeniable that these also foreground the tragic consequences of poverty. Apolonio Chua's "Juan Tamban", a valuable sourcebook that featured Jacob's play not only as script, but in which he included production notes, and commentary and critique of the play's stagecraft, cites Mauro Avena who categorically asserts that "Juan Tamban concerns itself with poverty…drawn from our social reality and reflects on it in the spirit of both protest and challenge" (in Chua 14). Moreover, the Director's Notes in the playbill point to the "conscience, ambition and struggle of the urban poor, particularly the slum dwellers" (134). All these provide a scaffolding for our reading of Jacob's drama as a "poverty play", which term was coined in the light of PETA's advocacy to present socially realistic, socially relevant plays, but is not really used to denote a body of works, or a genre, in Philippine theatre.

Aberrant ingestion, freakery, and disability

"Juan Tamban" revolves around the relationship between Juan, a child runaway, and a social worker, Marina, who takes him on as a case study for her graduate thesis work. It is a harrowing play that begins right off with the spectacle-ization of Juan's freakery. The audience is struck by the fish-name used as the young character Juan's surname in the play, "Tamban", which literally means "herring, sardine," a small food fish so ordinary it is typically deemed poor people's food, a belief supported by the country's Department of Science and Technology- Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (DOST- PCAARRD) which called the "tamban" the "country's cheapest source of protein." The naming of Juan as a fish appears largely coincidental and inconsequential here, but this outright identifier of ordinariness, the name as polyseme of poverty and, later, of bodily grotesqueness.

The play's opening foregrounds Juan as a freak in his own freak show--- he is introduced as a "magician" in an almost hoary parody of any sideshow:

> Come one, come all! Don't hurry, stay, you won't be sorry… Witness the great magician of Sta. Ana in action! See Juan Tamban in his first public appearance… Here he is, here he is, the one you have been waiting for![2] (Scene 1) ['… *Panoorin! Panoorin! Panoorin ang pinakasigang na salamangkero ng Sta. Ana! Panoorin si Juan Tamban! Sa kanyang kaunaunahang pagpapalabas. Ito lamang ang pagkakataon ninyong mapanood siya…'* (Jacob TP 5)].

Juan's literal "carnivalization" here occurs as he also "makes his grand entrance" in the guise of a carnival magician. The locus of this spectacle is as appropriate, as this "act" is set in a literal carnival atmosphere in Quiapo on a Friday, an iconic nexus of the holy and the secular, singing and devotions in the church, set against the bustle of commercial, economic small-time, makeshift businesses in its grounds. And it is at this point that Juan reveals this "magic" trick--- in his box is a lizard and he "proceeds to swallow it". The act that follows this is Juan bringing out a rat from the same box, and with aplomb, "while his assistant makes a rolling sound with his can and stick", Juan puts the rat in his mouth (Scene 1). We are told that "many onlookers [became] nauseous" at this sight, and remark, "Jesus, Mary, Joseph… this child is sick! Don't get near him, he might be crazy!" (Scene 1) [*MGA MANONOOD: (Magkukrus): Hesusmaryosep! Maryosep naming bata ito! Nakapandidiri! Huwag ninyong*

lalapitan at baka sira-ulo! (Jacob TP 8)], to which Juan perversely responds by "open[ing] his shoebox and bring[ing] out a cockroach slowly puts it in his mouth, basking in their attention" (Scene 1) [*Kunwa'y kukuha ng ipis si Juan mula sa kanyang kahon, at ipakita ito sa mga BATA* (sic). *Makaseremonyang ilalapit ito sa kanyang bibig, habang tinutukso siya ng mga bata* (Jacob PT 7)]

We note here the initial conflation of freakery as disease, which we will meet with throughout the play. Later in the play, we indeed will see how Juan's freakish spectacle, the taboo "magic" of ingesting insects or small reptiles or mammals, leads to disease, but disease is configured in a number of dire ways in the play. The initial frame of freakery in Juan is in treating this aberrant behavior as bodily grotesquerie, as disfigurement, as anomalous, as ugly, and therefore abnormal (Ehlers 331). That this is set within the rubric of disability seems almost laughable, as this taboo act of eating what are deemed dirty pests is an ability that is a "dis-ability", and like the original sense of disability as "disfigurement [that] is largely compelled to remain hidden from public view" (331). The exclamation of the crowd about Juan being diseased may not be without foundation, as we shall later see, but abnormality in this first instance is set against the normalcy within societal paradigms.

Titchkosky states that disability has been aligned with deviance in examining "phenomena as deafness, blindness, wheelchair use, stuttering, and physical 'deformities'" (4), what Saltes refers to as "functional limitation" and risky non-normativity (56). Titchkosky emphasizes that disability as deviant is a given, and noted its "obtrusive, worthless, unexpected, unintended deviation from normalcy," resulting in the pity or avoidance cast upon people with evident physical handicaps, treating them "as being apart from other human beings," marking them as "steeped in the condition of lack" (8). That Susan Burch cites Rosemarie Garland Thomson's work on freakery as "one of the standards *in disability studies*" (68; my italics), provides proof of this intersection. Garland Thomson provides support for this view of disability by subsuming it within the continuum of freakery, emphasizing not so much the visible corporeal differences that make for disability, as she does the "ideology that marks the body" (in Burch 68). Garland Thomson's work regards the "extraordinary body" as defined by way of the " narratives by which we make sense of ourselves and the world" (in Burch 68).

Abraham Rudnick cites the World Health Organization's definition of disability as being applicable to all disabilities— physical, psychiatric, developmental and sensory, and states that if general disability can be grounded in disparate conditions, then it is also likely that this may apply to psychiatric conditions. Psychiatric disabilities are "those psychological phenomena that arise from psychiatric illness to block [the] achievement of goals in the key life domains" (109). Using this definition, psychiatric disabilities assume reference to psychiatric impairment, which is marked by the "inability to self-organize on a whole person level" (110).

Freak bodies as uncivil, diseased (dis-eased) bodies

When policemen come to apprehend Juan for his illegal sideshow, they berate him: "You son of a bitch! What's the matter with you?! Are you crazy? *What will the tourists think --- that we Filipinos eat these*? You should be ashamed of yourself! (Scene 1; my italics) [*.Putang-inang bata ito, a! Ano ka ba, ha? Sira ka ba, ha? Baka akala ng mga puti, 'yan ang kinakain mg mga Pinoy. Nakakahiya ka!'* (Jacob PT 7)]

If dis-ability here is aligned with freakery, then freak bodies are "visible symptom[s] of social disorganization and collapse" (Mitchell in Hosey 36), and Juan's taboo ingestion constitutes a threat of parallel disfigurement, too in the presentation of the Filipino as part of the national body. The policemen's admonition is as much a statement of shame, --- that they as Filipinos will be implicated as lizard/cockroach/rat-eaters in the gaze of foreign visitors-- as it is a statement of fear, that they already are seen so. The policemen's desire to bring Juan to hospital to cure what they assume is a diseased individual is an attempt to normalize not just Juan's physical condition, but is a corrective to this vexing state. This desire not just to present the best of one's self, but to be counted as a normal, functioning, and therefore acceptable entity, rides too on the collective memory of the colonized body as victims of shaming and humiliation, noted by Leonarda Carranza as "linked to colonial nation building practices" (10). While humiliation is seen as the "act of making someone feel ashamed and foolish by injuring

their dignity and self-respect" (11), this carries with it the implication of shaming that requires "the circulation and internalization of shame within bodies" (11). More than this, Carranza cites Hook's *The 'Real' of Racializing Embodiment*, who raises Mangany's belief that whiteness is constructed as superior and disembodied, occupying an "upward trajectory of whiteness-mind-goodness-life" (13-14) in contrast to "the downward trajectory of blackness-bodily-evil-death" (14). Carranza posits that in racist systems and fantasies these also represent routes of identification that allow for particular subjectivities to be molded, and worse to believe that black/colored bodies are devalued, deserving of denial and repression through acts of humiliation and shaming (14).

This is what is operative in this berating of Juan by these policemen. Underlying their admonition of Juan as "*nakakahiya*" (shameful) is their valuation of Juan, and Juan's body, as "uncivil", and where civility is defined as self-management and self-discipline (36). Civility is allied to white cultural practice functioning not only as "internal management and self-definition", but more significantly as "a mode of external management, because it gave civil subjects a mandate for managing the circumstances of those perceived as uncivil" (Coleman qtd. in Carranza 36). To avoid the shame of being counted as being "like Juan" --- possibly infected with disease-carrying bacteria, apparently unreasoning and stupid, if not outrightly insane for eating vermin and making a spectacle out of this, they resort to taking on the hectoring, and therefore humiliating, colonial gaze, and attempt to identify Juan's body as "uncivil" and therefore take on, too, the task of mimicking the colonizer's civilizing role (cf. Carranza 36). In a way, "bringing Juan to hospital" is a way of hiding this diseased body, or at least removing this abnormality from such visibility,thus, alleviating the policemen's, and indeed, the spectators, and the society's, disease with such abnormal bodies .

In Scene 2, the Chorus introduces Juan objectively , presaging the clinical examination that the doctors will make of him. The chorus intones: "Juan Tamban. 12 years old. Son of Justino Tamban and Lucia Bernabe of Kapalaran Street, Sta. Ana, Manila" *["…Juan Tamban. Dose anyos. Anak ni Justino Tamban at Lucia Bernabe ng Kalye Kapalaran, Sta. Ana.* (Jacob TP 10)]. The chorus's introduction of Juan is an ironic solemn pronouncement belying the prosaicness of this objective information on Juan as diseased body. This apparent objectivity of presenting Juan as a medicalized body buoys the pronouncement of the doctors who are in the process of diagnosing his condition/s, who take turns following a similar choric rhythm in attempting to identify Juan's diseases: "anemia, malaria, parasites, epilepsy" (Scene 3). When they begin to light upon non-medical causes of Juan's maladies ("malnutrition…, neglect...."), they readily pronounce themselves ineffectual in getting Juan better, "as… the causes of the patient's unfortunate condition are beyond the realm of [our] specialization" (Scene 3), which, while factual in a medical sense, is itself also a show of ineptness contrasted to their earlier confident cockiness.

These latter diagnoses stray from the initial biological adjudications of the interns as "critical biological discourse" (Zuss 794), and Juan is emplaced within the realm of the medical, and his apparent bodily symptoms evaluated by the interns as consequent to, and even symbolically coeval with, the absence of health care and nutrition to which he is subjected. The interns' power over Juan makes itself felt in the form of "normative, official knowledges" (794), and Juan, therefore, is examined dispassionately as a diseased body. But his doctors fail to consider under this scientific purview the ways by which the grotesqueness of this diseased body is evidence of how political economy, historical contexts or individual responsibility are contributive to abnormal bodies of the poor (794), as we see the onus of Juan's background unfolding as the Chorus portends, just before this hospital scene:

Chorus: Juan Tamban
Why have you done this to yourself!
Your father and mother
Where are they?
Your country
Can you count on her?

What have you gotten yourself into?
Where are you headed?
What civilization are you from
Which gives you rats, lizards
and cockroaches to survive on?
Each day you're nearer to your grave
Why did they give you life?
Why did they ever give you life?
(Scene 1).

[*KORO: Juan Tamban*
Bakit ka nagkaganyan?
Ang tatay at nanay mo, nasaan?
Ang bayan mo ba'y maari mong asahan?
Ano ba itong iyong napasukan?
Ikaw ba's mayroong patutunguhan?
Anong kabihasnan ang iyong pinanggalingan?
Ipis, butiki't daga ang pantawid-buhay
Sa iyo'y binigay
Sa bawa't araw ikaw ay pinapatay
Bakit ka pinagkalooban ng buhay?
Bakit ka pa pinagkalooban ng buhay? (Jacob TP 7-8)]

The chorus's questions provide an emotional and social counterpoint to the normative reading of Juan's ailments, which brings us to the way poverty is seen to complicate the presentation of the diseased body. (Note how even in the sparseness of the earlier information on Juan that gives only the most basic of data about him, how the address "Kapalaran" street satirizes Juan's condition. "Kapalaran" may mean destiny or luck in Filipino, and when read in the context of his difficult life, fate here is deemed necessarily ill.)

We have to note that this surveillance of Juan's body comes not only from the medical field, but from Marina Torres, the social worker, herself. Marina's entry into Juan's life is by way of seeing him not as a person, but as a case that holds the key to stature and power, in the guise of academic objectivity and the quest for a worthy solution to the challenge posed by an intellectual enigma. In her conversation with her thesis adviser, Mr. de Leon, her primary consideration is not Juan the child with myriad problems, but Juan the subject, the key to her earning a master's thesis, and thus, the instrument to her mobility. When Juan refuses to acknowledge Marina early in their meeting, she says: "I will solve you, Juan. I will unravel you, I know. I will force your world open. I will cut your heart open, I will shred your mind. Your total being will surrender to me" (Scene 5; my translation) *['Malulutas kita, Juan. Malulutas din kita, alam ko. Pilit kong bubuksan ang iyong mundo. Bibiyakin ko ang iyong puso; hihimayin ko ang iyong diwa. Ang iyong buong katauhan sa akin susuko'* (Jacob TP 13)]. Her mentor, Mr. de Leon, sees Juan as a representative of the multitude of faceless poor people, counting him as part of the millions of impoverished children in the world. But even when he tries to address Juan as a distinct case ("What is the difference between Juan and other children like him?"), and while he alludes to these children as a burden on their consciences as social workers, in the end Juan is Marina's "investigation [that] may give a new direction, some suggestions into what should be done to tackle this problem" (Scene 4). Worse, he unwittingly continues this animalized framing of Juan, when he parallels Marina's examination of Juan's condition with how other organisms are studied by science, saying: "Everything has its own value. *Even monkeys and rats* are important to the scientists who are experimenting with them." (Scene 4; my italics) *['Pero kung tutuusin ang lahat ay may kanya-kanyang halaga. Ultimo unggoy at daga ay importante--- para sa mga siyentipikong nag-eeksperimento.'* (Jacob TP 11)]. This equivalence underscores the worth of Juan within

Marina's, and de Leon's, academic domain. Marina's and Mr. de Leon's apparent concern with Juan is situated within the "realist vision of the urban underworld involv[ing] a disciplinary relation between seeing (seeing and being seen), and the exercising of power" (Selzer in Entin 313-314). Marina's and Mr. de Leon's deep belief in the objective efficacy of their study of Juan and his case as academic inquiry is what Entin refers to as the "project of making-visible… the perfect ordinariness of every body [sic]" (Selzer in Entin 314).

Criminalization of freak bodies

Another articulation of Juan's animalized, freakish body here is seen in the alliance of freakery with criminality. We learn by way of flashbacks in the play, how Juan arrived at this state of vagrancy in which we find him at the play's beginning--- Juan's mother, Aling Lucia, died prematurely, and where she wished for him an education and a life of uprightness, his father, Mang Tino, due to their hunger, tried to push him into petty theft. Juan's refusal to steal is met with physical blows from his father, and this makes him decide to leave home. In leaving home, he lived in the streets as a vagrant. He became a beggar, a "watch-your-car boy" (see Scene 13), and when he was falsely accused of being in cahoots with other young thieves of stealing a woman's bag, was brought to a detention center. At this center, he met with even direr circumstances, as he is toyed with by older boys who, instead of looking out for him, finds out his mettle and initiates him by forcing him to eat cockroaches and lizards (See Scene 14). All these start Juan off into the life of bodily deviance. In Juan's mind, nourishment necessary for survival is conflated with survival in a harsh urbanscape:

> 'I escaped… I begged, I roamed the streets. And there were times *I was very hungry*, I couldn't sleep--- *I started catching insects*. Then I thought, why *don't I become a magician--- like the man who eats fire*. I don't have to beg and I'll have plenty of money. I'll never go hungry again. But nothing happened--- I ended up in [the] [sic] hospital (Scene 14; my italics)

> [*JUAN: Tumakas ako! Nagpalimos, nagpalaboy-laboy. At kung minsa'y gutom na gutom ako. Wala na talaga akong makain--- nanghuhuli ako ng kung anu-ano. Pagkatapos, naisip ko, bakit hindi na lang magpalabas, katulad noong mga mamang kumakain ng apoy. Hindi na ako magpapalimos, at magkakaroon pa ako ng pera… Pero, wala ring nangyari. Dito ako sa ospital napunta* (Jacob TP 57).]

Juan's animalization shares in this temporariness. He continually ingests insects and other small animals to assuage his hunger and thus survive physically, or to use the notoriety he gets out of it as an escape from the humdrum and onerous reality of his young life. However, this illustrates precisely what Steve Baker, in his book *The Postmodern Animal* (2000) avers. In evaluating Kafka's animal stories, he looks at these

> … as fables of "becoming-animal," which is their term for the process of escaping humanness and "all of its associated philosophical and psychoanalytical baggage." In Kafka, they claim that *"[t]o become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves… This sounds grand, but becoming animal* (or insect, as Gregor Samsa does) *can only be a short-lived escape* (in Fisher 256; my italics).

The transformation of Juan here is not a metamorphosis, but a stay---- it stops him from wasting away and dying of hunger, he sees it as preventing him from being apprehended by the law as a juvenile thief, it stops him from having to go back to his life with his father, from having to go back and

endure the inhuman bullying of the older teenagers at the detention center. Juan's "avowal of the (im-) pertinence of the grotesque" (Zuss 791) --- this freakish act of eating grotesquely, and becoming the grotesque, rests on the presentation of abasement, of the abject body, where the "definition of abjection is 'that which draws one toward the place where meaning collapses" (Baker in Fisher 257). Juan's impoverished body is the site of this abjection in his desire for it to generate new possibilities. Juan's grotesque ability "reduce[s the body] to an anti-aesthetic, the satiric, parodic and hyperbolic" (Zuss 794) monstrosity that he tries to perpetuate by eating, over and over, lizards and cockroaches and rats. For the doctors (who report to Marina), these are all just sad attempts by Juan to "stay in the hospital indefinitely", seeing him as just one more patient (Scene 16).

Even the extension of the judgment of Juan as an impoverished body within the realm of law and order provides intersections between "personal and public recognition of one's moral status or moral rehabilitation" (Hughes 23). Even while Juan tells the truth about simply being accused wrongly of snatching Mrs. Reyes's bag, he is not believed by the judge, who orders him to be put back in the detention center. Despite Mang Tino's and Juan's reconciliation, Mang Tino's desire to take Juan home and take care of him, and Juan's similar desire to go home with his father, the judge diminishes this capability for sustenance, and sardonically asks Mang Tino, "How much do you earn a day?... You have a growing child, he needs nutritious food. Don't you honestly think it would be better for him at the center? …Your son got involved [in] crime because of your negligence" (Scene 21) [*'Talaga? Magkano ang kita mo sa isang araw?... ang anak mo ay lumalaki, kailangan niya ng masustansyang pagkain. Hindi ba't makakabuti kung nasa Center siya?... Ang iyong anak ay nasangkot sa isang krimen dahil sa iyong kapabayaan…* (Jacob TP 83)], and later, when Mang Tino raises his voice in frustration and defeat, justifies his ruling by derogating Mang Tino in terms of the stereotype of the poor, that they are "a dangerous lot" (Scene 21). Juan's return to the detention center is not only the attempt to return him to a "transformed, orderly, ethical body", but if this were an extension of his disease/s--- anemia, malaria, parasites, epilepsy due to eating vermin, then we see the criminalized body intersecting with the body that is diseased, "problematized … because it is a sign of weakness, of lack of control, of self-neglect, of a person in moral debt" (Hughes 23). Ultimately, this supports Peter Stallybrass's view that the "very horrible, virtually undescribable [sic] quality of the urban poor" displays "the grotesque, exotic, even unrepresentable quality of the underclasses confirmed the homogenizing gaze of the bourgeois spectator" (in Entin 320). The middle-class gaze that we see deployed by the judge, by the doctors/interns, by the lady who accused Juan of stealing from her, even of Marina herself, fixes Juan's body as grotesque and freakish, and is a gaze unable and unwilling to deviate from the stereotype/s of abjection in the bodies of the poor and the diseased, and, therefore, of the abnormal and abject.

The abjection of freak bodies

Abject, abnormal bodies like Juan's support Julia Kristeva's definition of the abject as "loathing, the state of feeling terrified or disgusted. The abject is that which inspires feelings of horror, specifically, those parts of the body that have that effect and are thus denied recognition and representation" (in Parker 154). In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* , Kristeva propounds the "phenomenon of abjection and abjects as artifacts" within mainly Lacanian psychoanalysis in concurrence with her own semanalysis, using theological and literary texts, but we note here the more significant aspect of this Kristevan study, which is the definition of the "abject," as "that object being opposed to I," that "its ontological status is that it is opposed to a knowing self" (Kristeva in Rossolatos 42).

Kristeva further states that the "condition of abjection is caused by the inability to expel that which arouses horror," and propounds that the abject represents the "improper, unclean, and disorderly elements of corporeality," which have to be expelled or rejected, in order to render the "clean and proper" body required for a subject to exist in the symbolic order (in Parker 154). We are almost certain of the erasure of Juan's self, even as the play simply ends with his forced return to the detention center at the judge's behest because his freakish ingestion of vermin fulfills Kristeva's

categories of the abject, "food, corporeal alteration (feces, corpses), and femininity, particularly signs of sexual difference such as menstrual blood and breastmilk" (in Parker 154). As a threat, Juan is abjected, therefore "found to be loathsome and expelled" (Parker 154).

Rossolatos, in examining what he calls "abjective consumption" provides us an apt explanation of what happens to Juan as consuming body, when he distinguishes "the three conceptual pillars of abjection---irrationality, meaninglessness, dissolution of selfhood" (45). When Rossolatos speaks of "irrationality," he refers to the inability of abjected individuals to "effectively subsume these consumptive acts under a rational calculus," and thus are powerless to consider the physical and mental expenditures attendant to their decisions, surrendering to abjection, in the hope of repeating the affect" or "experiential benefit stemming from being consumed by abjects" (44). We see this so clearly in how Juan is almost unreasoningly drawn to eating insects, and this act of consuming "meaningless objects" carries with it an ironic sense of pleasure (which Rossolatos and Hogg refer to as *jouissance consumption*), the effect of which is a mixture of pleasure and pain that the abjective consumer denies. Rossolatos rightly notes that this irrationality is compounded by the fact that abjective consumption results in unhealthful effects, and that despite this, the abjective consumer pursues this compulsive behavior. This exists side by side the reality that this consumption is taboo, and is deemed so in that they are made up of "mere waste, dislocated from any system of relevances whereby signs assume meaning and value through relations of inter-dependence" (45). This transgression of the taboo brings forth a "revulsion and a feeling of abjection" (Lechte in Rossolatos 45) because this compulsive, uncontrollable habit does not agree with normal, cultural expectations. Consequent to this is a dissolution of the self or the ego "that is carried over in repetitive consumptive acts as slow decay and cadaverous becoming" (45), and this is where we prefigure the likely end of Juan Tamban.

Pichay's "Babaeng Tilapia, Natagpuan sa Coastal Road"

Nicolas Pichay's teleplay, "Babaeng Tilapia, Natagpuan sa Coastal Road" (Tilapia Girl, Found at Coastal Road) (my translation) comes with a parenthetical remark after the title, stating that this is "taken from a true story in the tabloids" (54). While this finds a parallel in the Sunday magazine provenance of Jacob's play, unlike it, Pichay's overt notation already sets the foretaste of the fantastic and the sensational in the drama's plot. Pichay's acclaim lies in his Don Carlos Palanca Hall of Fame status for various plays that have made a mark in Philippine theater ("Pangulo Naming Mahal" and "Psychedelia Apocalypsis"). He also won the 1998 Centennial Literary Prize, for his epic drama, *Almanac for a Revolution* (Santos), and the 2006 Virgin Labfest, for the play first called "Tres Ataques de Corazon" and later titled "The Angina Monologues" (Guerrero) but little has been written in terms of criticism of his dramas. Ancheta examined his play "Psychedelia Apocalypsis," companion piece to "Babaing Tilapia," in her article "Phantasmatic Constructions: Language and Humor and the Interrogation of Identity in Contemporary Filipino Comic Plays" in 2011.

Disparagement of the freak in "Babaing Tilapia"

We are introduced in this teledrama to sixteen-year old Teresa, "Fil-African, black, kinky-haired, the tilapia girl" (54). Teresa's freakish condition is highlighted right at the beginning of the play, when, in inviting possible candidates for the fund-raising beauty pageant sponsored by the public market at which she sells fish, Teresa is mocked by her fellow market vendors:

> Dennis: Magsusuot ba ang mga contestants ng bikini ?
>
> Co-chairman: Hindi.
>
> Bernard: Oo nga naman, kapag sumali si Teresa at magsuot ng bikini***, baka mapagkamalan siyang tilapia.***

(Magtatawanan uli ang mga tao…)

Teresa: Ikaw talaga, Bernard. Wala ka nang nakita kundi ang kulay ko.

Bernard: Sa sobrang itim mo, hindi nga kita makita, e.

(Magtatawanan ulit and mga tao. Masasaktan si Teresa ngunit hindi niya ito ipapahalata.)

Teresa: Hoy Bernard. Hamak naming maputi ako kaysa sa budhi mo. E, kung ipa-inspect ko kaya kay Chairman ang timbangan mo ng karne?

[*D: Will the contestants wear bikinis?*
CoC: No.
B: If Teresa wears a bikini, she'll likely be mistaken for a tilapia.

Crowd will laugh…

T: Bernard, you don't see anything but my color.
B: You are so dark I can't see you at all.

Crowd will laugh again. Teresa will feel slighted, but will not let on.

T: Hey Bernard, I am so much whiter than your conscience. Why don't I get Chairman to inspect the weighing scales you use to sell meat? (Sequence 1, Pichay 55-56; my translation and my emphasis)].

This exchange sets the tone for the way Teresa is presented to us in the play--- she is marked an outsider many times over because of her color. In a Philippines that is apparently largely homogeneous racially, Teresa's animalization as the "tilapia girl" --- which will prove to be her undoing and her salvation in the play--- is circumscribed within a Philippines in which upper- and middle-class Filipinos use race and color to disparage the poor and the lower classes, racializing and treating them "as if they were a different species altogether" (Rafael).

While we take the derisive laughter that greets the possibility of Teresa becoming a beauty contest candidate as an almost negligible and trivial comic effect in this scene, we need to consider the more serious import of this elicitation of humor that occurs in the play every time Teresa as freak body is presented to onlookers. The humor accompanying freakery changes the ordinary and underscores the extraordinary, thus producing a change in situation, a *surrealization* of the real (emphasis Critchley 10), which the surrealist Andre Breton terms "l'humour noir" (black humor) (10). And while we speak of incongruity as the basis of the humor of freakery in this play, we have to acknowledge that we also see a wide streak of disparagement humor deployed in the texts that activate this derisive laughter.

Disparagement humor is defined as referring to "remarks that (are intended to) elicit amusement through the denigration, derogation, or belittlement of a given target (e.g., individuals, social groups, political ideologies, material possessions)" (Ferguson and Ford 283-284). There are a number of reasons cited in this impulse to diminish or to denigrate certain targets, such as a psychoanalytic provision of "an emotional catharsis or [the] release of repressed aggression," humor as a vehicle "for releasing repressed, unconscious, hostile impulses" (284-285). I will, however, highlight another purpose for this kind of humor, which is "the enhancement of self-esteem derived from a "downward social comparison"" (288). This expands the Aristotelian suggestion that people are amused by the weaknesses, foibles, infirmities, or misfortunes of others, whereby laughter is an expression of

derision or malice directed at the less fortunate (Halliwell in Ferguson and Ford 288). Gruner allies this to the enjoyment one feels in a sport or game, and states this thus:

> When we find humor in something, we laugh at the misfortune, stupidity, clumsiness, moral or cultural defect, suddenly revealed in someone else, to whom we instantly and momentarily feel "superior" since we are not, at that moment, unfortunate, stupid, clumsy, morally or culturally defective and so on. To feel superior in this way is "to feel good"; it is to "get what you want." It is to win! (in Ferguson and Ford 289).

The derisive, disparaging laughter of the market vendors, the students at school, even the sardonic treatment by Beth, the half-sister, trained at Teresa, the "tilapia-girl", can be explained and contextualized so. The humor generated marks Teresa as part of a target "out-group", and disparagement humor becomes a response to these abnormal realities to hold in abeyance threats to personal or social identity, and therefore is used to re-establish "positive distinctiveness", enhancing social identity, either individually, or as assertion of in-group pride by devaluing or denigrating the out-group (298).

Teresa's outsider status due to her color and her hybridity is made emblematic by her comparison to the "tilapia." We note how this identification becomes almost totemic, as she sees in the tilapia she sells at the market, her "siblings." She actually calls them siblings, and coos over their prettiness (see Pichay 57). But even in this praise, Teresa acknowledges the expendability of this creature, as she speaks of the inevitable fate of these fish as market ware. In the course of this preparation for market, she finds an albino tilapia among her regular market supply, an albino tilapia that she "adopts" as a pet. But even as she does so, she makes a clear parallel between it and her, underlining how the fish's extraordinary color is the reverse of her own abasement in her world (see 57). In an attempt at playfulness, and a device to exhibit both her innocence and her discernment, the albino tilapia is rescued and takes central place among her meagre possessions, and one which will signal her own disappearance at the end of the play. This identification with the tilapia, both with "regularly black ones," and with this strange "freak" of an albino fish, underscores her profound, and inescapable understanding, of how unwelcome she is in in her world.

It is this ostracism because of her color that runs through the play's narrative. Teresa finds herself having always to find a place for herself. We learn that she is the daughter of her mother, Annie, out of wedlock. Annie worked in Yokohama as an entertainer in her youth, and there fell in love with a black American serviceman, and had Teresa. Like many stereotypical hard luck stories in the Philippines, she was left behind by her foreign lover. Now, Annie is married to her former boyfriend, Roger, who accepted her back, but not her illegitimate child. In the attempt to live a normal nuclear, family life--- with Roger, her daughter Beth (Teresa's half-sister), and herself, Annie resorted to leaving Teresa with her mother, Teresa's grandmother.

Annie, Teresa's mother, lives a fraught life dealing with Teresa. Although she loves her daughter, she is complicit in sustaining Teresa's strangeness---in keeping her literally hidden, first by virtually giving her away to be taken care of by her grandmother (see Seq. 9, 70), not living with her for sixteen years, by keeping her hidden from her husband and child. Annie continues to hide Teresa from Roger to keep the family peace, and she proceeds to give Teresa away again, this time trying to palm her off to her cousin. Teresa actually asks her mother: "Bakit n'yo ako tinatago? Parang imburnal na kailangang takpan? [*Why are you trying to hide me? Like a sewer that needs to be covered up?*]" (Seq. 9, 70, my translation).

A similarly furtive concealment is seen in her mother's lack of effort to enroll her in school, in spite of Teresa's desire to learn. She keeps on saying she cannot find Teresa's birth certificate to which her sister Beth makes a mean rejoinder: "Baka kasi siguro iniluwa ka lang ng lupa" [*You may simply have been vomited out of the earth…*] (Seq. 11, 74, my translation). Teresa's effort to attend school consists of

taking a few hours away from her market stall duties, sneaking into the school by bribing the security guard with coffee, and sitting outside the classroom, "bringing out her improvised desk and chair that she hides by a tree" (Seq. 7-b, 65, my translation). This secretive sitting in is just another manifestation of oppression and suppression. It is at this juncture that we understand Teresa's delineation as "poor." Even while Teresa now lives with Annie and with Beth, as Annie's mother is dead, Beth, and we will learn later, Roger, are resentful of Teresa's presence. Teresa lives at the periphery of her family--- she ends up having to sell fish at the market to help the family out, because her mother keeps putting off enrolling her in school. This points us to the sad irony that while Teresa's family could not itself be deemed poor, her mother, Annie's, tacit shame of her, both in the circumstances of her birth and perhaps due to Teresa's unacceptable appearance as bitter reminder of her failed romance and insupportable past, Teresa has literally and emotionally been relegated to the stature of penury and destitution. Teresa's life repeatedly exhibits these woeful instances of poverty and lack that juxtapose against what could have been a comfortable life, had she not experienced continual peripheralization from her family and her community.

Teresa is left to suffer the literal consequences of poverty--- having to work in the market for a living, and not being able to study because she cannot herself pay tuition, relying on the good will (and amusement) of her neighbors to be able to get the money join the market beauty contest, and later in the play, fishing for food and living on the streets--- because of, and in addition to, her family's unloving treatment of her. Her sister Beth constantly shows this animosity towards her. When Annie tells Beth to pen a letter for her father Roger, who works overseas, Teresa eagerly asks to write to Roger, which Beth scoffs at saying that Teresa is not even related to Roger (see Seq. 3, 58). Beth is as guilty of hatefulness towards Teresa's difference, when she spitefully tells her to comb her hair because her "kinky hair gets into the food," or when she refuses to call her "ate [big sister]" (Seq. 3, 59, my translation), or, when she prematurely reveals to Roger that Teresa is living at their house, leading to the fissure in Roger and Annie's relationship (see Seq. 12, 76). Roger, Annie's husband, is even more unwelcoming and unforgiving toward Teresa. In the beginning, he shows this in the coldness with which he returns Teresa's attempts at affection--- Teresa tries to endear herself to him as a daughter, but he only really sees her as "baluga" --- Annie's "black, half breed daughter" (Seq. 18, 83, my translation). We see his heartlessness towards Teresa when he forces Annie to reveal to Teresa what he thought was her shameful parentage:

> Roger: Gusto kong dito mo sabihin, sa harap ko… Kung hindi… huwag mo nang isiping bumalik pa sa bahay.
>
> Annie: Alam mo, Teresa. Hindi totoong minero ang tatay mo. At hindi totoong namatay siya sa landslide. Noong mag-boyfriend pa lang kami ng Tatay Roger mo, nakilala ko ang isang Negro sa Yokohama. At nang mabuntis niya ako ay hindi na nagpakita uli.
>
> Roger: Pinatawad ko ang nanay mo sa isang kondisyon. Na hindi na namin babalikan ang nakaraan. Ikaw ang nakaraang iyon. Ngayon, naiintindihan mo na kung bakit hindi ka puwedeng sumama sa amin?
>
> Teresa: Oo. Ang hindi ko maintindihan ay kung bakit nagsinungaling ang nanay ko sa akin!
>
> [*R: I want you to tell her, right in front of me… If you don't do it… Don't even think of coming home.*
> *A: Teresa, your real father isn't really a miner. And he didn't die in a landslide. When Roger was my boyfriend, I met a black man in Yokohama. But when I became pregnant by him, he*

disappeared from my life.
R: I forgave your mom on the condition that we will never revisit that past. And you are that past. Now do you understand why you cannot come with us?
T: Yes. But what I don't understand is why my mother would lie to me.]
(Seq. 23, 90, my translation)

In another scene, Teresa's unauthorized sitting in at classes is found out, and she is called "kapre" (a Filipino tree elemental with very black skin), and is stoned by the students (see Seq. 10). We note the implication of ugliness here and the relegation of Teresa to the "super-natural", and, therefore outside the pale of the human, with the actual racial origins of the term "kapre". "Kapre" is actually a derivation from the Arabic "kaffir", referring to an African non-believer. Also, early Spanish colonizers of the Philippines attributed this to dark-complexioned, non-Muslims they saw in the Philippines, borrowing from the references used by early Arabs and Moors in Spain. This was, apparently, a legend circulated by Spaniards to stop Filipinos from offering any aid to any escaped African slaves who were brought to the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period.

This predilection to call Teresa names--- "baluga" (black half-breed), "Kapre", "galing sa imburnal" (emerging from the sewer), to "being given away", to making her feel excluded, emphasize the valence of erasure and of invisibility. In these instances, we note this occult response to freakery and the carnivalesque, but Teresa's freakery as the "tilapia girl" is also showcased as a spectacle, in much the same way as Juan Tamban was, when she joins the fund-raising beauty pageant for market stall owners. Teresa's friend, Madonna, persuades her to join the beauty contest, and even while she initially refuses to be the cynosure of mean jokes, Teresa ultimately agrees so that Madonna could make her over, thus fulfilling her desire to look like her mother. Even as Madonna's "whitening project" goes awry (Madonna uses a tincture that is supposed to lighten Teresa's skin, and suggests that she use straightening lotion for Teresa's hair), Teresa entreats her mother to look beyond her black skin, her large nostrils, her kinky hair, verbalizing her yearning to be loved. Teresa wistfully reveals how she hoped she would resemble her mother not just in the similarity of their voices, allying this desire to look like her mother within the trope of "skin-changing" (see Seq. 16, 80).

This "sounding-alike" appears to be more than in the similar timbre of Annie's and Teresa's voices, but is seen in Teresa's talent for singing, a talent that Teresa inherits from her mother and which ironically wins her the pageant prize. Teresa becomes what Philip Wilson calls "the maternally marked child," "monstrous children" marked by "nature's deviations" (6), markings that are "'corporealized by the imagination' into the 'lineaments of a monster'… a sign of dehumanization… a 'miscreation' of self'" (6). Wilson cites Linnaeus's nomenclature categorizing *homo monstrous*--- "*the albino-negro*" (homo troglodytus), "the tailed man' (homo caudatus), "the mermaid" (homo marinus) (7, my emphasis). Monstrous children "marked by maternal impression are prodigies of nature" (8), and in Teresa, we see a continuation of this monstrosity, her own skin's blackness being her maternal marking. While later "child 'freaks'" were valued because of exceptional skills such as singing or memorization, and thus are moved away from the monstrous or the deformed (15-16), in Teresa, one cannot help but look at her color as deformity, as her freakery. In joining, and later in winning, the beauty pageant, Teresa is given value (almost literally as she raises money though her singing talent), but not before she is enfreaked by it as the only "ugly" contestant. The beauty pageant does make Teresa visible, but she is displayed in it as a grotesque body.

Beauty, freakery, and spectacle-ization

Conor notes that "Beauty contests and culture … contributed to the idea that freedoms could be won through body modification and containment… that inclusion depended upon one's ability to measure up," but "indigenous women… aboriginal women… 'neither occupied the space of the commodity spectacle nor were they able to performatively enact a consumerist subjectivity', and so 'appear as exotic, ethnographic, and primitive spectacles'" (in Tice 153).

Colleen Cohen touches on the reasons why women join beauty pageants: "To ratify or elevate their status in a local social hierarchy, to win scholarships and other prizes… or to advance a modeling, acting, or singing career" but more importantly, "The beauty queen … functions literally to embody what the "national" woman should look like, be, and do" (695). This national ideal, while this varies based on "conceptualizations of how people understand themselves as citizens and as members of ethnically and racially identified communities" (692), also rests on ideals of feminine beauty, that John Glad, citing Cunningham, argues, are at least partially genetic in nature, resting on "symmetry, sexual dimorphism, and averageness" (76). In his study, Glad expands these qualities within the realm of "fecundity," whereby female beauty or attractiveness is explained in terms of the possession of "maximum remaining fertility (MRF)," and this refers to the state of "menarche (onset of menstruation) in combination with neoteny (the retention of immature characteristics into adulthood), thus insuring a maximum remaining fertility span" (77). More specifically, the figuration of beauty privileges "slender, childlike limbs, slight chins, small noses, high-pitched voices, in combination with hormone-swollen buttocks, breasts and lips are the ideal pursued by glossy women's magazines, fashion designers, and plastic surgeons … with the goal of appearing as close to menarche as possible" (77). Glad further notes:

> … But the sought-after look is more than just menarche; it aims at an even more specific target - imitating ovulation. Flushed cheeks, swollen lips, and large eyes set against a backdrop of delicate lace and silk are intended to create an impression of extreme vulnerability. Artificial pheromones - perfume - are added to the recipe to compensate for man's feeble olfactory senses, not to mention his even more feeble resistance to manipulation (78).

Pageant contestants, whether in nationally-sponsored contests, or in small town affairs such as that we see Teresa joining in her local market, all hew to these corporeal preferences. Teresa's body is obviously described within the bounds of the "indigenous" and the "aboriginal", certainly seen as coeval to unacceptable ugliness due to her color. More than this, Teresa is dismissed as not only unattractive but as abnormal and freakish because she is seen as devoid of the fineness of these feminine aesthetic attributes, beauty that would normally be allowed entry into pageants and be given requisite economic reward. Ironically, while Teresa wins the beauty contest, she does so not because of her beauty, but because she is appreciated as a strange, exotic spectacle, a black, ugly contestant with a beautiful singing voice who had the boldness to flaunt this flawed visibility.

Le Roi furthers the meaning of beauty to denote "the absence of genetic error " (in Chemers 89). If we take this to be so, then this points to Teresa's aberrant, deviant body as itself a mutant, whereby "mutations… are errors… that destroy meaning … [and] …damage the body" (89). A useful scaffold to understand mutations as genetic aberrations is to use Goffman's term "stigma", which pertains to " a mark of difference (attribute) … generated between people" (in Titchkosky 5). For Goffman, "a stigmatized person is a *blemished, not quite human person*, who can be categorized as those with "abominations of the body or 'various physical deformities'," those with "blemishes of character or 'weak will, domineering or unnatural' beliefs, values and attitudes," and those who are seen as different because of their 'race, nation and religion'". Stigma can be bound as well to "visible and non-visible disabilities, physical abnormalities, unusual body shape or marks, interactional quirks, mental illness, and depending on the context, aspects of gender, sexuality, race, and class" (in Titchkosky 5; my italics).

We can evidently mark Teresa's body as "stigmatized", based on Goffman's definitions, but more than this, the meanings of her aberrant body are dictated upon and using Le Roi's term, "damaged", by what Goffman calls "the normals", those who "do not possess an obtrusive difference from humanity," those who "notice those who are endowed with an undesired difference" (in Titchkosky 5). Stigmatization is socially constructed, and "normalcy" is the perspective that makes possible the recognition of who or what is stigmatized, the "unmarked site from which people view

the stigma of disability" (in Titchkosky 5). A similarly utile discussion of the mutant/monstrous body whose meaning is more than compromised is in Kelly Hurley's affirmation of the term ""abhuman" in reference to the "gothic body". Hurley defines the "abhuman" as "a not-quite-human subject, is a subject that has morphic variability and is continually in danger of becoming not-itself (becoming "other")" (in Jeon), aligning with Goffman's stigmatized individual. Hurley adds that the prefix "ab" pertains to the "gothic body" as it literally means "[to] cast away" or "the state of being cast off," which is also found in the word "abjection" (in Jeon).

In the end, Teresa leaves home when she realizes her true parentage, when she realizes that she was lied to by her mother for most of her life, and when she resigns herself to the fact that her dream of belonging and acceptance will always be inutile. As a homeless urchin, she tries to recreate family by caring for two young boys, Troy and Ulay ("Inaalagaan niya ho kami doon sa may baybay. Ipinag-iihaw niya kami kung may nahuhuling isda" [*She takes care of us by the shore, and cooks fish for us when she catches some*] (Seq. 34, Pichay 99, my translation), but in the end, she drowns herself, maybe consciously, perhaps in hallucination as she bleeds and contracts a fever after having stepped on glass shards. Annie and Beth learn of the circumstances of her death from Teresa's wards:

> Ulay: Nagising ako. Sumisigaw siya. Isda ako. Isda ako…
>
> Troy: Nahibang lang 'yon. Tatlong araw na kasing hindi kumakain. Pero nandoon na siya sa tubig.
>
> Ulay: Ang buhok niya'y bumuhaghag. Mukha na nga siyang isda…
>
> Troy: Lubog siya, suot pa ang kumot...
>
> Ulay: Hindi naman pala siya naging tilapia.
>
> [*U: I woke up. She was shouting. I am a fish. I am a fish.*
> *T: She was delirious. She hasn't eaten for three days. But she went into the water.*
> *U: Her hair fanned out underwater. She really looked like a fish…*
> *T: She sank still wrapped in her blanket…*
> *U: She didn't really turn into a tilapia…*] (Seq. 34, 101, my translation)

Teresa gets to speak as a literally dis-embodied spectre at the play's end, when she narrates her version of her death, still allying herself to the tilapia:

> '… Pumutok ang baga ko… nakita ko ang sarili kong nakalutang sa tubig. Malansa at walang buhay. Tulad ng mga tilapiang matagal ko ring pinagkakitaan. Pero ngayon pa lang ako magiging ganap na isda. Halikayo aking mga kapatid. Kainin n'yo ako para tuluyan tayong maging isa.
>
> [*My lungs burst… I saw myself floating on the water. Stinky and dead. Like the tilapia I used to sell. But I am transforming into a fish now… Come my fish siblings. Eat me so we can be one.*]" (Seq. 35, 101-102, my translation).

This deliberate doing away of the self, a savagely comic literalization of "joining the fishes" and identifying with her tilapia brethren, whether in water or on land, held no welcome for her.

Conclusion: The agentive bodies of the enfreaked

In "Juan Tamban" and in "Babaing Tilapia," we saw the interwoven fabric of poor bodies as abnormal corpora--- dis-abled, disfigured, incongruous, not fit for appearing. In Juan, and even in his family and neighbors, and in Teresa, poverty and neglect breed the condition of freakery, and poverty itself becomes a state of freakery. Juan's freakish sideshow is a presentation of uncivilized bodies, Juan's way of creating an individualized self. But Norbert Elias sees the process of civilization ---in Juan's case his confinement at the hospital to cure him of the effects of his vermin ingestion, and later in the judgment to stay in the detention center to return him to legal and civil respectability--- as "separat[ing] and isolat[ing] from others" (in Williams and Bendelow 41). We see a similar isolation in Teresa in "Babaing Tilapia," whereby "isolation is an effective tool of oppression…" for dis-abled bodies (and here Teresa is treated no differently as a "half-breed" freak as a disabled person would be), "where disability has often been deployed as a metaphor for general alienation" (Hosey 47).

In reading "Juan Tamban" and "Babaing Tilapia," we have become privy to how impoverished bodies as freak bodies are dis-embodied and erased by their spectators in their constant attempts to stigmatize and exploit grotesqueness within narrow, unthinking, unaccepting normative paradigms, but we have also seen in these plays how freakery and abjection could be interpreted as temporary spaces not for disembodiment, but for alternate embodiment. Hyesook Jeon maintains that "monsters are beings that embody differences from basic human norms, not only as mean deviance and a-normality but abnormality as well." In these plays, animalization in the alliance of impoverished bodies with signifying animals such as the "tamban" and "tilapia" is shown as an aspect of poverty in the Philippines that enflesh freakery and monstrosity. This enfreakment, or "monster-making" is a "process of metaphorization" that is now able to "[transcend] established norms and [transgress] boundaries of the in-between, mixed, ambiguous areas (Braidotti qtd. in Jeon).

The ends of both plays allow both Juan and Teresa (and Teresa more than Juan) to locate themselves in what Grosz calls "the space of the future where all "becoming" is open and deviation from everything that exists is possible" (in Jeon). Juan's avowed desire to escape the detention center where his freakishness will always be seen as abominable is the promise of his liberation from "fixed human-centered identities" (Braidotti in Jeon). More significantly, we mark his embrace of an even darker monstrous impulse--- where he used to eat just vermin to survive, now he threatens to eat these in vengeance. This similarly alludes to eating human flesh, with Juan promising to devour the flesh of those who will imprison him [*Kayo ang kakainin ko! Kayo ang papatayin ko! Mawawala kayo sa mundo! Tatakas ako! Tatakas ako!'*(Jacob TP 92)]. This embrace of the taboo as a sign of real monstrosity is Juan's entry into "things that cannot be named, things that cannot be formed, things that cannot be explained, things that are accidental, things that are unexpected, and things that change" (Jeon), and so depict himself in the zone of the "in-between", projecting an existence opposing "things that are stable and have identities" as a freak entity suffering from exclusion from cultural and social space (cf. Grosz in Jeon). Teresa's end is even more symbolic of this entry into the "in-between" --- her death ushered her into becoming a transmogrified fish-persona, and that state in which she is able to voice her complete acceptance of her ingestion and transformation into fish-life is, as Jeon puts it, "a strange becoming," which hastens all identity, all matter, and all substance." This "in-between" space features dissolving boundaries that "exist in collapsed or dislocated space and time, which can be signified by… posthuman circumstances" (Jeon). At the conclusion of these plays, the affinities to trivial animalization that signify faunal identities that equate these to Juan's and Teresa's impoverished bodies have been transfigured into something more profound and indeed, more consciously frightful. Perhaps even the revilement of Teresa that aligned her with the "kapre" or the "baluga", though hurtful, is now rendered tawdry and shallow, given Teresa's later, almost-literal "sea-change", which deepens and complicates the articulations of freakery and monstrosity in this oppressive Philippine context.

Perhaps a last point to address here is the possible rescue of the stereotypical derision, horror, and pity arising from these grotesque bodies to the interpretation of freaks "not as passive victims of a wholly exploitative freak show machine, but as "active agents" (Conti 504), whereby

the freak is "not merely… voiceless and victimized" (Chemers in Sperling 90). Certainly, we see the liberatory potency of freakery in Teresa , who deemed joining the beauty contest as a way to affirm her talents, even while she is derided for her "thick skin", her lack of embarrassment in even agreeing to be part of the contest. In the end, her death, whether by choice or by illness, was seen to be revelatory of her desire to embrace her "fishiness", and in a sense provides her a clarity about her life that is denied her when actually living. Juan's end is more amorphous and less deliberate than Teresa's, but even in Juan, we see his defiance to the end--- like Teresa, he "fights back", shouting, "You can't keep me here... I'll escape" (Scene 24) when faced with his own dream vision of his animals. But where Teresa coaxes the fish to eat her so she can become one with them, Juan vows that his animal spectres "will not eat [him]" and that "[he] will kill [them] first… [He] will disappear from the face of the earth" (Scene 24) ['*…Hindi n'yo ako makukulong dito! Ako'y tatakas, lalaya! Kayo ang kakainin ko! Kayo ang papatayin ko! Mawawala kayo sa mundo! Tatakas ako! Tatakas ako!*' (Jacob TP 92)].

The agentive significance of Juan and Teresa as freaks is sadly made possible not for themselves, but for people whose lives they touched. Juan and Teresa create "perspectival shifts", primarily in Marina, Juan's social worker, and in Beth, Teresa's sister, which I see as more than just as an acknowledgment of guilt, but which leads to a real anagnorisis, a recognition of the truth of and within the character. Marina ends up seeing Juan as other than a thesis case, or worse, as a strange entity to whom she condescends by giving him a detached charity. Instead, in the course of the play, it is Marina who matures profoundly, as she empathizes with Juan ("You know, I really thought that you'd just be a case to me. But you really got me… I really care for you, Juan. I hope that your disappointment with me will pass. I want to regain your trust" [Scene 23) [*'Alam mo noon, akala ko talaga, isang kaso ka lamang sa akin. Hindi ko akalain na talaban mo ako… Napamahal ka sa akin, Juan. Sana'y huwag kang masyadong maghinanakit sa akin. Sana'y magtiwala kang muli sa akin*' (Jacob TP 91).], and as she questions, and becomes suspicious of, the apparent ease with which she is enclosed by her whole placid, unproblematic middle-class existence. The play's end shows her delivering her case paper about Juan at a convention in which the audience is busy with drinking and eating, and nobody listens to her impassioned presentation of Juan's difficult life, mirrors the life which she now interrogates, and from which she has now awoken. In a sense, this echoes what Jacob herself states in the introductory note to the play when it was published as part of the anthology of her dramatic works in her anthology *Teatro Pulitikal*. Jacob proffers:

> I didn't know I was going to write JUAN TAMBAN. In the first place, I didn't want to write about children. Childhood was not so pleasant for me. I felt that maybe I was not ready for it. But the topic had a soft spot, and it was very interesting--- a child, neglected, an orphan. Besides, sooner or later, I'd have to write about that stage in life--- I might as well do it. So I took the task and did the initial studies.
>
> I really got attracted to the character of Estong--- the helplessness of a child. These are my very personal feelings about children. The part of your life when other people should be responsible for you (TP 1).

Beth, who starts off as selfish, spiteful, and unloving to Teresa, ends up first looking for Teresa when the latter runs away from home, realizing now that she has grown to love her sister (cf. Sequence 24). Even more immense a change is when she arrives at a similar empathy at the end of the play--- Teresa has been dead for some time, and Beth now begins to put away Teresa's things, which consist of a very meagre collection: "two pencil stubs, a hair ribbon, a few odd knickknacks, and a small notebook", which made Beth understand just "how narrow the world was that imprisoned [Teresa]" (Seq. 37, 102, Pichay, my translation). This is a realization that rescues Beth from a similar

ego-constriction, and allows her to emerge maturely and wisely by empathizing with the difference that Teresa had to endure, albeit belatedly.

We can take these to be the final rhizomatic articulations of this gaze at animalized freak bodies in these Philippine plays, that not only the monsters are given access into that "chora space" (cf. Grosz in Jeon), that in-between space. The "normals", to go back to Goffman, likewise are. Garland-Thomson speaks of how "the stare that paying customers direct towards freak show performers is never simply a one-way street, but an intense social exchange in which the "starees" adeptly manage the encounter" (in Duane). In these plays, Marina, Juan's social worker, and Beth, Teresa's half-sister, start off as disaffected or even as hostile "starees", but whose normal and normative gazes are hard to differentiate from those of the other characters in these plays. The agentive potential of freakery is the cultivation of this space of compassion and understanding in at least these two characters---- and through them, in us, the readers---- the blossoming of empathy instead of revulsion or abhorrence, and a comprehension of the "affective work" (cf. Duane) that necessarily complicates our entanglement with the enfreaked, This "affective work" is the dissolution of the boundaries of "constructed abnormality as entertainment" (Chemers in Sperling 90) and the opening of these confines, or at least the desire for which, in both the plays' characters and their readers, allowing a transformation not only of feeling for the enfreaked, but of the acceptance of the conception and the possibility of freaks as being, in so many ways, we, ourselves.

NOTES

1 The poverty incidence figures cited dated 2015 are the latest available, the latest released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). This is corroborated by the report of Undersecretary Rosemarie G. Edillon at the 2017 Socioeconomic Report (SER) Media Briefing held on April 3, 2018 in which she noted that "… data for poverty, rural poverty, and subsistence incidence were not available in 2017. The 2018 poverty data will be released sometime in 2019. After which, the Family Income and Expenditure Survey or FIES will be conducted every two years, which will enable us to monitor these poverty statistics more frequently" (http://www.neda.gov.ph/2018/04/03/neda-undersecretary-rosemarie-g-edillons-keynote-speech-at-the-2017-socioeconomic-report-ser-media-briefing/).

2 I refer to https://www.scribd.com/document/260913214/Juan-Tamban as the source of the English translation of *Juan Tamban* cited in this paper.

The original Filipino text of Malou Jacob's "Juan Tamban" was provided side by side the English translation here for comparative purposes in certain quotations used. The English translation (made by Jacob herself, from https://www.scribd.com/document/260913214/Juan-Tamban) was mainly used in the body of the article to ensure the fluidity of the language of the text, thus it is the dialogue in Filipino that is marked in italics.

3 Pichay's teleplay is only available in Filipino, hence it is this Filipino version that is quoted in the essay. I provided the English translation, which is what is noted in italics.

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