

PERSONAL ESSAY

Re-Visiting Diliman Souvenirs: Peirce's Semiotics and the Return of the Suppressed

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ABSTRACT

In the July 1957 issue of *The Philippine Collegian* appeared a poem entitled "Man is a Political Animal," a translation of Aristotle's famous definition of human beings. It was written by an English major, E. San Juan, Jr., who became president of the U.P. Writers Club in 1958 and an instructor in the Department of English, U.P. (1958-60). The poem, a dramatic monologue, was modeled after the Vorticist style of the British avant-garde artist Wyndham Lewis. Objections were then raised by the Dean of the College of Music Ramon Tapales, writer Amador Daguio, and others, who persuaded the U.P. administration to suspend the author from being published. In 2018, the author was awarded a visiting professorship in the U.P. English Department. The institution seems unchanged, but the cultural landscape has incalculably altered. The current president uses foul language (not just "four-letter" words) in public pronouncements with impunity. This essay reflects on that experience sixty-one years later on the failure of communication, providing sociological-biographical context and using Peirce's semiotics to approach possible ways of responding to the speech-act or utterance entitled "Man is a Political Animal" performed at a specific time and place in our history. In this postmodern era, is it self-indulgent to reflect on the complex intertextuality of a literary text to tease out its wider sociopolitical lessons drawn from comparing disparate viewpoints and contexts?

KEYWORDS

interpretant, subject, author, meaning, identity, signifier

It was not *terra incognita*. Returning to the University of the Philippines, Diliman, in January to March 2018 as a visiting professor of English and Comparative Literature has been not only *deja vu* but also *deja connu*. Not entirely, though. One can never return home again. You can never step into the same river again, said Heraclitus, but you can recall or capture the initial shock of recognition enough to hear the water swirling again in its unimpeded turbulence. Perhaps this reminiscence will register a sociohistorical resonance beyond its merely personal or merely local import about controversies regarding language use, reader-response, and ideology-critique.

Teaching again in U.P. has become a re-baptism in the archives first explored in my undergraduate days in the 1950s. Just like my Fulbright lectureship in 1987-88 in U.P., this occasion has been a learning experience for me, as we (teachers and students) re-read Saussure, Jakobson, Lacan, Barthes, Irigaray, Derrida, Said, Foucault, among others in a Literary Theory seminar taught by Professor Ruth Pison. I volunteered to help shepherd the class through the semantic wilderness, hence this note on this experience in relation to an earlier stage of my engagement with readers who were panicked by a poem using "f**k" now a staple of Hollywood conversation, a sign of quotidian modernity, notwithstanding Duterte's unspeakable misogyny (Espina Varona).

Our Western gurus or idols have given us the scriptural idiom for discussing literary matters. These "monsters" or masters of theory have provoked, alarmed, or bewildered our smart co-learners—one of them coming all the way

from Nueva Ecija to attend our Wednesday sessions. If I use the personal pronoun here, please consider it also as an allegorical stand-in for the generation that grew up after Liberation, from 1945 to 1965. We were post WW2/Cold War children exposed to Huk guerilla encounters, McCarthyite witch-hunts, Red Scare epidemic, etc. Maybe post-millennials now, subaltern cyborgs obsessed with Facebook inventorizing, may consider those days quaint, antiquarian, obsolete despite the scandalous red-tagging of academics today.

From Monologue to Colloquy

Of course, the speaking subject here—the “I” as *balikbayan* OFW, for instance, cannot be enclosed in that time-space warp. So it is puzzling who is speaking, who is addressing whom, from the viewpoint of the postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion. One suspects that every act of remembering, especially one linked to institutional memory, like attempts at translation, is an act of betrayal of sorts. As a preface to the event I will recount below, I submit that the concept of the subject/subjectivity here is the central problem in reading and interpreting of any text/speech-act. In contrast to the dominant Cartesian notion of subjectivity that underwrites bourgeois individualism, the self has been “de-constructed” by thinkers ranging from Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Levi-Strauss, and others. The entrepreneurial subject of the capitalist era, eroded by massive forces of alienation and commodity-fetishism, has become a specter haunting the disenchanting halls/groves of the academy, its authority evaporated. In speculating on the end of inquiry, given the loss of belief in substance or intuition, the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce discovered the solitary self as nothing else but ignorance, so that only a community of inquirers can reach truth or agreement on what is real or true. When appearances are taken as facts, valid only for one private self, “error appears ... explained only by supposing a *self* which is fallible... Ignorance and error are all that distinguish our private selves from the absolute ego of pure apperception” (20; see also de Waal 154).

In this context, the “I” here, or any commentator on experience, can only be a sign of an ensemble of participants in the narrative of creating values, meanings, significance. It is already a truism that society is not a collection of egos or floating psyches; it is the dynamic totality of social relations. Thus the narrator of this sequence of events is always a supra-individual entity, a collective subject, not the monadic ego of psychoanalysis. I subscribe to the historical-materialist tradition that posits the subject, “the active and structured unity which makes possible a significant account of the actions of men or of the nature and meaning of the [artistic] work, is not an individual but a super-individual reality, a human group” (Goldmann 135). So, in this essay, the “I” that attempts to narrate events in his life actually signifies a group, say, the petit bourgeois stratum in the Philippine neocolonial formation during the Cold War. We hear the voice of a class-representative mediating the proletariat/peasantry and the comprador/ilustrado/landlord bloc, a figure aspiring to join the elite but also repelled by its hypocrisy and insipidity, and affirming its rebellious, nonconformist, anarchistic stance. One can discern lineaments of this character in the persona speaking in the poem on exhibit here, “Man is a Political Animal.”

Historicizing from the Dustbin

This is not the first time I have engaged in teaching in the U.P. English Department. After I graduated in 1958, the patriarchs of the Department Professors Cristino Jamias and Leopoldo Yabes hired me as an instructor from 1958 to 1960. In due time, the patriarchal order was fortuitously changed; my contemporaries Pete Daroy, Ernie Manalo, Max Ramos Jr., and others departed long ago for the other shore; and so too, mentors like Ricardo Pascual, Alfredo Lagmay, Cesar Majul, Francisco Arcellana, N.V.M. Gonzalez amongst others. After finishing graduate school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I taught again in 1966-67 when world-famous Carlos P. Romulo was president (for a summation of my U.S. experience, see San Juan 3-4). I taught again here in 1987-88 as a Fulbright teaching fellow, and in 2008 shepherded the theory seminar with Professor Preachy Legasto. This may be my last stint, a memorable one, accompanied with our bequest to the U.P. Foundation for the

joint Aguilar-San Juan scholarship awards for deserving majors in the Department of English and Comparative Literature. This is only a slight gesture of acknowledging our indebtedness to the people who actualized the potential of this neocolonial institution.

Just a few snapshots of the fifties may supply part of the context. My first teachers in English I were Professor Elmer Ordoñez whose memorable assignment was for us to comment on Ivan Bunin's classic story "The Gentleman from San Francisco" included in the old WW2 pocketbook collection of short stories; and Professor Franz Arcellana, who wrote slowly on the blackboard, with his left hand, the definition of "precis" taken from the big Harry Shaw textbook in Freshman English. Visitors Bienvenido Santos, Hortense Calisher, William Faulkner, and other famous authors came and said goodbye. We politely signaled our appreciation.

But there is no doubt that it was the textbook *Approach to Literature* by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, the archpriests of American New Criticism, which made a lasting impact on us as English majors then. After that, I switched my interest to philosophy (Alfred Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* and Bertrand Russell's works became our treasured indices of wisdom, which did not prevent us from reading Sartre, Camus, Kierkegaard, Malraux, and others), having made friends with habitués in the Department of Philosophy, in particular Armando Bonifacio, Gerry Acay, and other heretics, whose periodical *Inquiry* published Franz's comment on my poem which I will refer to later (see San Juan, *Toward a People's Literature*).

A short parenthesis: my textbook memories have faded, but one lesson that stuck may be instructive. It was the occasion when N.V.M. Gonzalez (whose creative writing course was dominated by one single book, Herbert Read's *English Prose Style*) took members of the class to attend the Manila Trial Court in City Hall to witness the drama of the libel suit against Estrella Alfon for the obscenity of her story, "Fairy Tale of the City." That excursion outside the classroom conveyed to me the undeniable entanglement of art, disciplinary institutions (aside from the classroom), and the sociopolitical regime affecting human conduct. Later on, when I wrote a somewhat satiric review of *Signatures* (edited by colleagues Alex Hufana and Rony Diaz) at Franz's request, I was threatened with a lawsuit filed by the poet Oscar de Zuñiga who was offended by my unkindly comments. (Later on, Ricaredo Demetillo and Leonard Casper would violently denounce me as a diehard Maoist, communist, etc.) That episode somehow put an end to my imitations of Mark Twain, Henry Mencken, and George Bernard Shaw.

One scenario sticks out from our years of sitting at the table at the far end of the Department: Professor Pascual Capiz, perched at the opposite end, always finding the opportunity to advise me: "Read Spinoza, Sonny, don't forget Spinoza." Four decades after, I read a paper on "What we can learn about racism from Benedict Spinoza" to an audience at the University of Texas, Austin, in 2002 (see San Juan, *Spinoza and the Terror of Racism*). I did not follow his advice until the revival of Spinoza in the sixties and seventies in Europe, Spinoza's monism (adapted by Deleuze/Negri) utilized as antidote to variants of Hegel-Marx's dialectics (Marcuse, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh) in the vicissitudes of Cold War strategy.

Interlude

What intervened after my apprenticeship with formalist New Criticism may be recounted quickly as an effect of indoctrination in the New Criticism. My book on Oscar Wilde, despite the philological-historicist bent of my advisers Jerome Buckley and Douglas Bush, is basically formalist, not really contextualized in the gender wars then brewing in the early sixties--anti-Vietnam War and Civil Rights and Women's Liberation movements culminating in May 1968--as well as the First Quarter Storm, the Diliman Commune, and the imposition of the Marcos dictatorship in 1972. This was followed by my translation into English of Amado V. Hernandez's poems, *Rice Grains*, *Balagtas: Art and Revolution*, and *The Radical Tradition in Philippine Literature*.

The social upheavals worldwide in the sixties may account for my editing of Georg Lukac's cultural criticism in *Marxism and Human Liberation* (Dell). Despite this, my first U.P. Press book, *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle* (released a day or two before Marcos declared martial law),

was still largely a formalist commentary. I had not yet fully understood Lukac's historical materialist approach. Notwithstanding the title of the Bulosan commentary, it was a symptom of a cultural lag, typical of our backward or underdeveloped social formation, unsynchronized with the structuralist and post-structuralist tide that swept the Western academy from 1968 to 1986 (see my new book on Bulosan). Nothing strange for the mute subaltern of the neocolony, not postcolony, experiencing the turbulence of the crisis of global capitalism via the Marcos authoritarian interlude and the implacable toxic plague of the Cold War.

What happened? The influence of the changes that occurred, in particular the revision of the canon, and the transformation of critical frameworks/paradigms--the eruption of feminist, ethnic, and subaltern/people-of-color agencies in the social text--overlaid/reconfigured my previous New Critical horizon. I did not jettison my formalist training--how could one do that? One's consciousness is determined by one's social conditioning. The "I" is a fictional synapse of historical contradictions. Adjustments had to be made, resulting into a palimpsest of texts that requires an inventory (to heed Gramsci's advice), of which this is the latest attempt.

To recapitulate Peirce's caveat: the private self is nothing but error and ignorance. One's identity is always the site of an intertextuality traversing the dialectic of base and superstructure, often overshooting it. Marks of its effect may be found in the much-attacked book from left and right, *Subversions of Desire: Prolegomena to Nick Joaquin* in 1988. Unbeknownst to the public, it was recently reprinted by the Dominicans of the University of Santo Tomas, since the Jesuits are no longer interested in the unorthodox, difficult and eclectic discourse filled with references to Lacan, Foucault, Benjamin, Jameson, Deleuze-Guattari and Kristeva. They prefer the Nazi sympathizer Heidegger and the Jewish mystic Emmanuel Levinas. This will be my excuse, at this juncture, to transit to the problem of semiotics based on the Saussurean premise that orients both structuralist and postmodernist thinking (including postcolonial criticism) so fashionable still, though Derrida has been replaced by Butler, Ranciere, Badiou, Agamben and other European imports to the metropole of the declining but still ferocious American Leviathan of the Trump era. Peircean semiotics remains on the margins of academic discourse, despite the popularity of Richard Rorty, Cornel West, and Robert Brandom, among others. Harold Bloom is dead; long live Zizek, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook!

Signifiers Galore

We are near the final reckoning. Even before May 1968, the deluge of the dancing signifiers had begun to wreak havoc on the conservative bastions of putatively higher humanistic learning. As everyone knows, a crucial event was the 1967 Johns Hopkins Conference on "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," where the archpriests of poststructuralism (Lacan, Derrida, Barthes, Goldman, Todorov, and others) entered the scene, literary theory and criticism suffered a sea-change, as it were.

New Criticism has become old-fashioned, "auf-hebunged." In *After Theory*, Terry Eagleton summed up the historic contexts of 1965-1980--"the age of civil rights and student insurgency, national liberation fronts, anti-war and anti-nuclear campaigns, the emergence of the women's movement, and the heyday of cultural liberation," in which the sensibility of society had "shifted from the earnest, self-disciplined and submissive to the cool, hedonistic and insubordinate. If there was widespread disaffection, there was also visionary hope" (83) in consumerist, narcissistic society of the spectacle. The expletive "f**k" is now only a cute mannerism, a phatic performance.

The present conjuncture seemed then "the herald of a new future, the portal to a land of boundless possibility"--until 1989, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, shock therapy for the Soviet system, followed closely by the Iraq War, 9 / 11 and the global war on terrorism, and the erosion of the Neoliberal dispensation from the 2008 global capitalist earthquake and the explosions in Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria and the entire Middle East. We are still living the aftershock of those events. For

some, the age of identity politics *aka* the culture of neoconservative reaction began, overshadowing the fall of the Berlin Wall, demise of the Soviet Union, Tiananmen Square, 9/11, the 2008 neoliberal capitalist meltdown, and the election of Trump and his neofascist “America First” agenda.

To understand this re-arrangement of the furniture in the landscape, I urged our graduate students to review Saussure’s foundational remarks on the dyadic structure of the sign, and the larger frame of Roman Jakobson’s six functions of language in communication. What has become salient is the arbitrary nature of the signifier-signified nexus, with the inference that meaning is produced by systematic differences. Its divorce from objective reality seems assumed, though parole/speech thrives somewhere out there defying lawful order and any fixed rule. The Russian Marxist Mikhail Bakhtin was unheard of, and Jakobson forgotten. Meanwhile, the enigmatic influence of Lacan signaled the advent of deconstruction, with signifiers shifting over the signified, meaning not only deferred or undecidable, but virtually impossible to pin down. For Lacan, actually, the Name-of-the-Father terminates the sliding of signifiers, thus his infamous phallocentrism overheard in chic salon conversations.

Another parenthesis: when I took a class with I.A. Richards in poetics in my first year at Harvard in 1960—I recall Ching Dadufalza exulting over her acquaintance with the founder of close formalist reading—he of course assigned his book *Coleridge on Imagination*, as expected. But what surprised me was his strong recommendation that we study carefully Jakobson’s 1958 landmark essay, “Linguistics and Poetics,” given at a conference in Indiana University, but only published later in 1960 in the book *Style in Language*, which Richards also assigned. Contrary to the canonical views, Richards was not really a formalist but a neo-Hegelian pedagogue informed by the entire Western heritage and enriched by borrowings from Mencius and then current behavior psychology.

I reminded our students not to forget Jakobson’s linguistic analysis. If Jakobson’s diagram on the functions of language were absorbed and popularized, it would have exerted some brake on the prevalence of Nietzschean theorizing applied by Derrida, De Man, Hartman, Spivak, and their huge academic following. Jakobson’s formula on the axis of similarity (metaphor) imposed on the axis of contiguity (metonymy), remains unexplored. To quote Jakobson: “The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination” (303). But instead of this linguistic knowledge used by critics, it is Lacan’s “floating signifiers” that have ruled the day ever since it was given in 1957 and publicized in translation in 1966. Students’ perplexity over Lacan persists, despite Jakobson and the salutary warnings of the American pragmaticist Peirce.

Mis-recognizing the Speaker

It is no longer news to learn of the author’s demise (announced by Roland Barthes) in between the interstitial locus of *differance*. By author, Barthes referred to the empiricist and rationalist conception of the individual origin of the text, its final signified. This classical idea of the author presumably encloses the text within a single meaning enshrined in the author’s biography, instead of allowing its intertextuality to induce a variety of readers to produce multiple readings. From the modernist, avant-garde perspective, the texts of Mallarme, Joyce, and others are considered the occasions of language, the circuit of signifiers speaking; they are not the author’s psyche, or a representation of its subjectivity, its interiority. Presumably the narrators of Proust’s novel, or of *Ulysses*, are generated by the textual machine without anyone programming it—its DNA is the differential logic operating within it. Conceptual art and its sequel, post-conceptualism, thrives on this axiom.

In “What is an Author?” Michel Foucault has also informed us that the author-function is historically variable. It is defined by a variety of discourses and institutions (for example, copyright laws). Ancient epics or medieval romances do not have authors in the modern construal of individual originators or artificers. Foucault’s argument is tied to the death of the human subject, the Cartesian ego, determined not by conscience but by historically specific structures circumscribing its socio-political existence. Thus writing is not something that can be completed and appropriated but an interminable practice, a postmodern theme epitomized by Samuel Beckett’s character saying: “What does it matter

who is speaking,” someone said, what does it matter who is speaking?” (Foucault 123). Peirce had anticipated this in the 1870s with his anti-Cartesian critique and the inauguration of a triadic theory of language, in contrast to the dualistic one by Saussure and epigones.

On second thought, it matters who is being addressed, who is listening or overhearing these utterances. For now, I will quickly summarize Peirce’s semiotic triad so as to get to the prime exhibit for today, the censored poem “Man is a Political Animal” reproduced below from the *Philippine Collegian* (see San Juan, *Balibbayan Sinta: An E. San Juan Reader*, 249-252).

EXHIBIT “A”

MAN IS A POLITICAL ANIMAL

(Reprinted from *The Philippine Collegian*, 25 July 1957)

Twenty times in an hour, Senator Estampador
Uttered the word: “democracy”
Uttered the word in the snare of a sad snore:
His tongue as a clapper, metallic, on his steeled palate.
Well, I remember one old respectable chap
Who swore by the devil with apocalyptic fire
What damnation claims us all!
A very bitter experience—Tragic, I would say.

In the bed of Procrustes: hardly a mind to matter.

But his speech had imperceptible blasts.
He spoke like a queen of harlots, for, Christlike,
He suffered to be bought and sold by the phallic passions of the herd.

Senator Estampador had exultations.
He fed upon the cunning of impossibility, fed upon
The foul pollution of proletarian insensibility; the foul
Humbug of bourgeoisie incompatibility.
“- Shit to suckers! Shit to capitalist racketeers! ”
Occasions of Christian anguish? Mind you, one can hardly suspect
His party machine was a Roman phalanx.
The gauntlet of propaganda slightly narcissistic.
I remark however in his manner the public darling of Coriolanus.

Senator Estampador had ecstasies.
He entertained a flair for the Supreme, i.e., fasces and swastika.
Obscenities of rabble-rattlers, orgasms on the dungheap of comrades-in-arms
Mephistophelian as they beat hurrah--hurrah, hammer on kettledrum,
The fleshpots, majestic, of a goddamn Utopia!

Go to hell! Gunshot!
That then I curse amid the titillations of this infernal age!
I, loaded to kill --I, with my gunpowder of meter and rhyme--
Exultations, ecstasies: blackout, in the lure of labyrinths--
Yes, surely the newspapers were a bit misinformed:
“. . . exhumed lately from the balloting booth . . . ”

Now, I must celebrate this cathartic progress and fuck a tenpeso whore.

For Peirce, meaning is produced by the triad of signifier (representamen), the object signified, and the interpretant, which connects signifier and signified (Peirce; San Juan). The representamen is something which stands to somebody for something; it addresses someone and creates in the mind an equivalent sign, the interpretant of the first sign, and this too stands for something, namely, the object or idea of that first sign. Communication is the result of the interplay between representamen,

interpretant, and object/idea. This mediating item in Peirce's theory of signification, or meaning-production, namely, the interpretant, is missing or invisible in the Saussurean dyadic scheme. Without this interpretant, it is impossible to figure out what connects the signifier and the hypothetical signified. Robert Scholes remarks that, following Saussure, signs do not refer to things, "they signify concept, concepts are aspects of thought, not of reality." We move then into the realm of thought.

Peirce is recognized as the founder of pragmatism, not the psychologistic version of pragmatism popularized by his friend William James, or the postmodern version of antifoundationalism propagated by Richard Rorty. Peirce's maxim or principle was first formulated in his 1878 essay "How to Make Our Ideas Clear": "In order to ascertain the meaning of an intellectual conception we should consider what practical consequences might conceivably result by necessity from the truth of that conception; and the sum of these consequences will constitute the entire meaning of the conception" (146; see also Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs*). Peirce explained that the "sum of these consequences" is equivalent to a process of rational conduct open to fallibilistic inquiry. The early Peirce may have speculated on infinite semiosis, as Eco and Derrida supposed. Later on Peirce concluded that we should strive for a "concrete reasonableness" and its embodiment in a community of inquirers open to the impact of experience, the intractable factuality of an objective world, the historicity of life, and the influence of traditions" (95).

To go back to the connection between the signifier and the signified, namely, the interpretant, Peirce enumerates three possible forms of interpretant (in his "Letters to Lady Welby"): "the interpretant as represented or meant to be understood, its interpretant as it is produced; and its interpretant in itself" (Peirce 404-06). There are two main kinds of interpretants: the dynamic interpretant, and immediate interpretant. Later in his life, Peirce speculated on the third kind of interpretant, the logical or final interpretant that would sum up the findings of the first two. The dynamic interpretant can treat the sign/signifiers as something the reasonableness of which will be acknowledged; or as an act of insistence; or something for contemplation. Meanwhile, the immediate interpretant considers the signifiers into three kinds: 1) those interpretable in thoughts or other signs of the same kind in infinite series; 2) those which are interpretable in actual experiences; and 3) those which are interpretable in qualities or feelings (for further elaboration, see essays on the interpretant in Muller and Brent).

Examine the varieties of interpretants drawn from the published reactions to the poem in question. If we look at the three interpretants you have, those by Amador Daguio, Ramon Tapales, and Franz Arcellana, the first two can be classified as examples of immediate interpretants: they translate the poem into actual experiences that are morally censurable, invoking convention and disciplinary codes or instruments of punishment. They are limited and inadequate. Meanwhile, the third would exemplify the dynamic interpretant that treat the poem as something reasonable, but would judge its performance as lacking in qualities or feelings--not actual experiences--ascribable to an accomplished work of art. It would invoke the institution of like-minded arbiters of taste. In short, the first two interpretants draw inferences outside the parameter of aesthetics, while the third confines itself to the value of the signifiers/representamen as inadequate to expressing a hypothetical idea of art implied by the critic.

What is decisive, then, in the formulation of interpretants is the sociopolitical purpose framing them and the historical conjuncture underlying the purpose. Contextualizing the act of reading/interpreting is thus imperative to arrive at a wide-ranging, judicious, and dynamic appreciation of a text/speech-act. Otherwise, it would be a prejudiced, polemical or tactically instrumental reading and evaluation of the event/text/utterance—ultimately, a flawed comprehension for a limited audience or community of inquirers.

Differences, however, need not supersede comparison and prohibit judgment. I would like to recommend to readers my earlier reflection on this incident in my book *Balikbayang Sinta: An E. San Juan Reader* (249-252) as one more proof that the subject is indeed constructed through differences. Or, if not bifurcated, the subject-in-question (always identified as error or ignorance) is pluralized by time-

space mutations. The subject speaking/writing in 2008 differs from the subject performing as author/speaker in 1957. Likewise, the subject now speaking today, March 13, 2018, in this lecture for a visiting professor—the original pretext and matrix for this essay—is different from the author revising this text before you.

However, despite these disjunctions and equivocations, this does not imply that meaning is forever deferred. The ultimate interpretant awaits, even though the context is unstable, unfixed, relational, or essentially undecidable. Indeed, one may discern an aporia in the rhetoric of the poem, the rubric “political animal” of Aristotelian origin clashing with the Browningsque dramatic monologue imitated from model poetic patterns of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, editor of avant-garde publications like *BLAST* in the London milieu of the first two decades of last century. Of all the reactors, Franz Arcellana, who never really censored the poem as adviser of the *Collegian* then, was the most disingenuously ironic. Incidentally, Franz confessed to me in 1987 that he was a “fall guy” during that time, as if to exonerate himself from some dilemma. To be sure, I would assert here that he was not responsible for the proscription of the author from publishing for a year; I refrained from putting him and the editors in endless predicaments.

Provisional Epilogue

The event may be trivial for many now except as a means of reviving nostalgia for the presence of Arcellana and Gonzalez in the U.P. faculty. Allow me then to add a footnote here by saying that I am grateful to Franz Arcellana for encouraging me during my undergraduate days, and as a token of this esteem I wrote the commentary on his short story about Christmas, and on “The Yellow Shawl” in the concluding pages of *Toward a People’s Literature* (170-173). Personally I did not associate him at all with my suspension--there was no written statement from the UP administration, except a verbal notice from the Editor that they would not print anything from me for a while--because this whole incident was symptomatic of the religious-secular conflict in the University at that time arising from the role of Father John Delaney and Prof. J.D. Constantino charging Professor Ricardo Pascual and his cohort of agnostics and atheists of Communistic leanings. This is a whole historic period before Martial Law that I cannot review here (see the excellent analysis by Preciosa de Joya). There are other historic pressures one can infer from this complex conjuncture if one considers the institutional function of college newspapers, the selection of their editors and staff, their funding and distribution by an ideological state apparatus such as the University of the Philippines.

In retrospect, the whole affair was a repercussion of the Cold War and McCarthyism particularized in the neocolonial situation of the Philippines during the regimes of Magsaysay and its successors. Indeed, from 1954 to 1960, the Cold War and its local manifestations (the Huk uprising, local McCarthyism, the internecine bloodletting among local oligarchs, the endemic corruption, extra-judicial killings, gangsterism everywhere) constitute the condition of possibility for the poem and its programmed reactions (for a historical overview, see Constantino, *The Philippines: The Continuing Past*, 226-345; Abaya, *The Making of a Subversive*).

One can perhaps locate somewhere the lesson of this incident in this abstract of the talk: With the death of the “author,” the subject-position framed in postmodern critical theory becomes a field of contestation. The linguistic turn in literary studies has made even this subject precarious, reputed to be a victim of the perpetual sliding of the Lacanian signifier. As a performing subject of this public discourse, I hope to recover the position of the “author” by recollection of my U.P. experience in the fifties, specifically as the suspended student-writer of a controversial poem. The narration of this event is mediated through various interpretants. With a slight detour through Peirce’s triadic theory of signs, this brief intervention hopes to rescue the protagonists of that field, temporarily stabilized here, from being swallowed forever in the “vertiginous abyss” of socio-cultural “underdevelopment.” As for the identity of the subject-in-process, or subject-on-trial, as Julia Kristeva would put it, I seek your indulgence in ending this paper with reference to my 1986 comment on the now historic document,

“Declaration of the Coalition of Writers and Artists for Freedom and Democracy” signed by Filipino writers, intellectuals, and bureaucrats allied to the then moribund Marcos dictatorship, a document destined for the fabled “dustbin of history” (for my comment, see San Juan, *Commentary: What Shall We Do with All of Marcos’ Hacks?*).

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