

# UNITAS

SEMI-ANNUAL PEER-REVIEWED INTERNATIONAL ONLINE JOURNAL  
OF ADVANCE RESEARCH IN LITERATURE, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY

Of Maids and Tyrants:  
Or the Ethical (Im)possibility of  
Martial Law Narratives in the  
Age of Post-Truth

**KATHRINE OJANO**

Neither Paradise Lost nor the  
Promised Land:  
Anti-Nostalgic and Anti-Utopian  
Visions of Past, Present, and  
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**MONOGRAPH:**

The Vision of Reynaldo Reyes:  
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PORTICOS**



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About the cover: The cover photo was taken by Rae Francis C. Quilantang: A striking sculpture of a woman holding a torch aloft, standing gracefully atop an orb, crowns the obelisk at Plaza Miranda, Quiapo, Manila. A symbol of hope and enlightenment, the sculpture is a poignant memorial for the Plaza Miranda Bombing, which occurred on August 21, 1971. The tragic event claimed the lives of a 5-year-old child and The Manila Times photographer Ben Roxas, and injured prominent political figures, among others. The sculpture honors the Filipino people's courage and dignity in the face of tragedy.

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# APOLINARIO MABINI:

## Ang Mapagpalayang Praxis ng Rebolusyonaryong Sambayanan sa Diyalektika ng Tradisyon at Modernidad

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### Abstract

Distinguished among the 1896-1898 generation that sparked the revolution against Spain, Mabini was the only one who exposed the racist, hypocritical ideology of U.S. imperialism. As an official of the Malolos Republic and later as a deported “insurrecto,” Mabini grasped the politics of the new global order of finance-capitalism foreseen by Lenin. In doing so, Mabini forged the conscience of the race founded on an emergent historical consciousness. He articulated the organic basis of the Filipino nation as a popular-democratic project. Deconstructing the duplicitous *ilustrado* painted by Nick Joaquin and others, we theorize here a contextualized field of antithetical forces in which Mabini emerges as the bold architect of Filipino sovereignty born from defeat and martyrdom. Analyzing two documents rarely examined, the *Panukala* and *Decalogo*, we delineate the process of how Mabini sought to indigenize Enlightenment principles with the communal ethics of the natives struggling to overthrow the legacy of Spanish colonial barbarism while confronting the violence of U.S. “Benevolent Assimilation.” From this dialectic of contradictory forces, Mabini invented the revolutionary subject or agent of a national-popular insurgence that was aborted but remains potent today, even though Mabini’s reputation might have fallen victim to neocolonial and reactionary obscurantism.

### Keywords

rebolusyon, kolonyalismo, kalayaan, kasarinnan, rasismo, piyudal, praxis

*For wherever we turn we are being pursued by race prejudice, which is deep, cruel, and implacable in the North American Anglo-Saxon...And since war is the last recourse left to us for the salvation of our country and our national honor; let us fight as long as there is strength left in us; let us do our duty since Providence has faith in our ability to fight and to protect our country,*

—Apolinario Mabini, “*The Struggle for Freedom*” (233-34)

*Mabini is a highly educated young man who, unfortunately, is paralyzed. He has a classical education, a very flexible, imaginative mind, and Mabini's views were more comprehensive than any of the Filipinos I have met. His idea was a dream of a Malay confederacy...He is a dreamy man, but a very firm character, and of very high accomplishments...*

—General Arthur McArthur, *Statement to the US Senate Lodge Committee, June 1902*

## **Pambungad**

Bagamat bantog na si Apolinario Mabini bilang “Utak ng Rebolusyon,” masasabing hindi pa rin siya kilalang lubos. Oo, nakatanghal ang larawan sa mga salapi, selyo, at bantayog, pero nananatili pa rin siyang aninong mahiwaga. Siya ang ‘Dakilang Lumpo’ na diumano’y ipinahamak ng sipilis, ayon sa bulungan ng mga mestizong ilustrado sa Malolos noong 1898, kaya inilarawan siya sa nobelang *Po-on* (2005) ni F. Sionil Jose bilang paralitikong bagamundo (Ocampo, *Centennial* 229-31). Bagamat binawi ni Jose ang paratang, naganap na ang pagkulan at paninirang-puri.

Intensiyon ng sanaysay na ito ang ilagom sa iskematikong paraan ang ambag ni Mabini sa pagbuo ng kamalayang historikal mula sa interpretasyon ng akdang *Panukala*, “Decalogo,” at *La Revolucion Filipina/Ang Rebolusyong Filipino* (pinaigsing bansag: LRF). Susubuking ihanay ang iba’t ibang ideyang tinalakay ni Mabini upang pukawin, sa panimula, ang sinumang nais imbestigahin kung may sagsay o katibayan ang mga hipotesis at argumentong nailatag ng pagbubulay-bulay rito. Pamanhik ng awtor na itrato ito na isang introduksiyon lamang sa mahabang imbentaryo ng saliksik, suri at pagtatasa sa halaga ng mga nagawa ni Mabini. Sa ano’t anuman, sa paglilimi ng isang kilalang pantas, ang kailangan ay

hindi interpretasyon ng mga nangyari at nasabi kundi tandisang pagbabago ng mundo.

### Katungkulan at Pananagutan

Ang bali-balitang romantikong hampas-lupa si Mabini ay pinalawig ni Nick Joaquin sa kaniyang polemika sa *A Question of Heroes*. Hangad ni Joaquin na sirain ang reputasyon ni Mabini bilang matalinong arkitekto ng rebolusyonyong kilusan. Pagkatapos isakdal si Mabini sa pagtaboy kina Paterno, Buencamino, Legarda at iba pang kasapakat, at sa ambisyong kabigin ang poder, giit ni Joaquin na si Mabini ay elitistang intelektwal na laban sa batas at awtoridad ng Kongreso (tungkol sa hidwaan sa Malolos, sangguniin sina Ocampo, *Two Lunas* 92-96; Constantino, *Philippines* 214-22; Fast & Francisco). Wala raw simpatiya si Mabini sa pesante at proletaryo, laging mag-isang nangungulila, wari bagang isang mysteryosong “sphinx” na nakaluklok sa isang “camera negra.” Opinyon ni Joaquin tungkol sa pagkatao ni Mabini: “The sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued cripple moves behind veils, behind curtains” (139). Walang dapat ipangamba, nasilip ni Joaquin ang katotohanan: si Mabini ang maysala, siya ang dapat sisihin sa kahinaan ng rebolusyonyong pamunuan, hindi si Aguinaldo o Antonio Luna. Bira ni Joaquin, si Mabini ang dapat panagutin sa mga kamalian at pagkukulang na sanhi ng pagkabigo’t pagbagsak ng Republika. Palalong haka-haka ito na pinabulaanan na ng maraming progresibong iskolar (Maramag; Majul; Zaide; Agoncillo; Laurel; Campomanes; Sanvictores).

Bunyag sa lahat ang malisyosong pasaring ni Joaquin. Litaw ang pagkiling niya sa mga burgesiyang taksil. Litaw na ang paglait niya sa katauhan ni Mabini ay bunsod ng pagkawalang muwang sa kasaysayan at politika ng tunggalian ng mga uring panlipunan at, sa kabilang banda, sa matalisik at maramdaming pag-iisip at kilos ni Mabini. Tiyak na hindi nakilates ni Joaquin ang kabuuan ng *Las Cartas Politicas de Apolinario Mabini*, o ang mga akdang nakasulat sa Tagalog bukod sa LRF. Hindi na kailangang mag-aksaya ng panahong sagutin ang tuligsa ni Joaquin. Banggitin na lamang ang pinakamasinop na pag-aaral ni Cesar Majul, *Mabini and the Philippine Revolution* tungkol sa lohika ng saloobing pagnanasa ni Mabini bilang taga-payo ni Aguinaldo at responsableng militante sa rebolusyonyong pamahalaan, Bukod sa saliksik nina Teodoro Agoncillo, Renato Constantino at Ambeth Ocampo, maimumungkahi rin ang ilang pagsisiyasat sa karanasan ni Mabini sa Guam na hindi pa lubos na nalilitis at natitimbang (halimbawa, O’Connor).

Sa pakiwari ko, nakintal na ang kabayanihan ni Mabini sa pambansang memorya. Hindi na maitatangging malalim at masaklaw ang papel na ginampanan ni Mabini sa pagpunla ng binhi ng nasyonalismong yayabong at mahihinog sa popular-demokratikong kilusan ng manggagawa’t magbubukid nitong nakaraang siglo. Hindi pa napapawi o humuhupa ang bisa ng mga kaisipang naihapag ni Mabini bunga ng anti-imperyalistang pagsisikhay ng buong sambayanan. Suysuyin natin ang trayektorya ng isip ni Mabini mula sa *Panukala* at “*Decalogo*” hanggang sa LRF at argumento niya laban kina Heneral Wheeler at Bell.

### Ang Konstruksiyon ng Republika

Sa pagkakataong ito, nais kong idako ang pansin sa isang dokumentong pambihirang mamasid ng mga historyador, ang *Panukala sa Pagkakana nang Republika nang Pilipinas* ni Mabini. Iniluhog ito kay Aguinaldo bilang Presidente ng “Gobiyernong Revolucionario o Pamunoang Tagapagbangong Puri” noong ika-5 Hulyo 1898 pagkaraang iproklama ang Deklarasyon ng Independensiya noong Hunyo 12, 1898 sa Kawit, Cavite. Nagsilbi itong burador ng Konstitusyong pinag-usapan sa Malolos noong ika-21 Enero 1899, bagama’t hindi lubusang natanggap ang kritika ni Mabini laban sa maka-kasikeng bersiyon ni Felipe Calderon (Agoncillo and Guerrero 234-38; Ocampo, *Centennial* 223-28.). Sa gitna ng gera, nais ni Calderong gawing makapangyarihan ang mga ilustrado sa Kongreso na makahahadlang kina Aguinaldo at hukbong binubuo ng mga magbubukid, trabahador, at maralitang gitnang uri—evidensiya na testigo si Mabini sa mainit na tunggalian ng mga uri sa loob ng Republikang sinisikil ng tropang Amerikano.

Ang sustantibong laman ng *Panukala* ni Mabini ay nauukol sa estruktura ng isang pamahalaang batay sa isang kontratang sosyal. Sampung kabanata o “kasaysayan” ang inihanay. Ang unang apat na kabanata ay pagtiyak sa sakop ng bayang Pilipinas, tipo ng republika, at uri ng Congreso (Capisanan) at Senado (Tanungan). Sinundan ito ng mga talakay hinggil sa “Sangguniang cabayanan at Sangguniang bayan,” sa Presidente at pamunuan, sa panihala ng katuwiran, ambagan, lakas ng bayan (*Fuerza militar*), at pagtuturo sa bayan. Sa malas, inilahad ni Mabini ang mga kinakailangang sangkap upang mabuo ang identidad ng lahing Filipino sa paghahati ng lakas-panlipunan sa categorya ng mga institusyong dapat organisahin: ang pamamahala, hustisya, ambagan/buwis, hukbong sandatahan, at edukasyon.



Sa ultimong pagtaya, angkin ng sambayanan ang soberanya. Ang identidad ng nasyon o bansa ay batay sa aktibong pakikipagtulungan at praktika, hindi sa kulay ng balat, wika, relihiyon, o etnisidad. Ito’y isang konstruksiyong panlipunan. Pahiwatig ni Mabini na ang kapangyarihang pampulitika ay nagmumula sa taumbayang nakikibahagi sa lupa at kayamanang-likas na kolektibong pag-aari ng sambayanan. Ang komunidad ng mga protagonistang kalahok sa pakikibaka ang nagdudulot ng identidad sa mamamayan, ng katangiang nasyonalistiko, hindi ang kulay ng balat, relihiyon, etnisidad, wika, o anupamang katangiang biyolohikal o likas (hinggil sa modernong usapan sa koneksiyon ng nasyonalismo at katarungan, konsultahin si Rosaldo).

Bagamat mahusay ang materyalistikong pananaw, malabo ang sipat ni Mabini sa kabuuan. Hindi inusisang maigi ni Mabini ang magkakaibang katangian ng mga uring panlipunan. Gayunpaman, masusing nilinaw niya ang matinding hidwaan ng mayaman at mahirap, ang di-pantay na distribusyon ng yaman ng lipunan upang matugunan ang pangangailangan ng mayorya, ang kontradiksiyon ng proletaryo’t panginoong maylupa. Walang dapat punahin sa punto-de-bista ni Mabini. Sa pagbabagong-buhay, iginiit ni Mabini na kailangang iwaksi ang dating sistema at pundasyon nito. Kung gayon, ang lahat ay dapat sumapi sa isang kasunduang batay sa pangitain o paniniwalang moral-etikal na lehitimasyon ng bagong ugnayang panlipunan ng “bayang Pilipinas.”

Upang maisakatuparan ang hustisya at demokratikong simulain, inihain ni Mabini “Ang Tunay na Sampung Utos ng Diyos” na siyang pambungad sa iskema ng Republika. Naikatha ito ni Mabini sa bersyong “El Verdadero Decalogo,” katambal ng “Ordenanzas de la revolucion,” nang siya ay nagpapahinga sa Los Baños noong Hunyo 1898 (konsultahin ang salin sa Ingles ng Philippine Press Bureau [*Mabini’s Decalogue*]). Inilakip ito sa *Panukala* nang mahirang si Mabini bilang katuwang sa pagsuhay sa kapangyarihan ni Aguinaldo bilang puno ng rebolusyong gobyerno..

### **Konsensiya at Responsibilidad sa Pangagailangan ng Kapwa**

Ang oryentasyon ng politika ni Mabini ay nakapokus sa hinaharap, sa kinabukasan ng bayang napalaya. Paniwala niya na sa okasyon ng pagbabangon at pagbabagong-buhay, kailangan ng bayan ang “pagkaaninaw tungkol sa katayuan at pagkabuhay ng isang bayang nagsasarili.” Layon ng “Decalogo” ang binansagang rebolusyong panloob kaagapay ng rebolusyong panlabas sa LRF (*Philippine Revolution* 13-15). Kagyat dapat atupagin ang

pagbabago ng ugali at asal ng bawat kasapi sa itinatayong bansa, na nangangahulugan na ang umiiral na gawi at asal ay hindi angkop sa inilalatag na bagong ordeng nakasalig sa puri, bait at konsiyensiya ng bawat Filipino (tungkol sa moralidad ng nasyonalismo, tingnan si Mabaquiao). Tanggap na ang basehan ng kolektibong konsensiya ay iguwalidad o makatarungang paghahati ng produkto at lakas-paggawa, sa panahon ng digmaan.

Sa unang sipat, isinaintabi ni Mabini ang dekalogo ni Moses at ang doktrinang Katoliko na batay sa rebelasyon ng pananampalataya. Bagamat itinatampok ang “Diyos,” ito ay hango na sa pormalistang ideya ng Kaliwanagan, lalo na sa Deistang isinusog nina Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, Goethe, atbp. Ang “Bathala” ng Katipunan ay hindi na ang Diyos ng Simbahan (Almario 56-63; tungkol sa humanistikong perspektibo ng Deismo, tingnan si Goldmann). Tandaan na sa unang utos, katalik ng “Diyos” ang “puri”—sa Diyos nakakabit ang katotohanan at lakas, samantalang ang “puri” ay puwersang umaakit sa tao na huwag magbulaan, at “laging matuto sa katuwiran at magtaglay ng kasipagan” (*Panukala* 13). Sariling trabaho at pasakit ang iginigiit ni Mabini na sagisag ng pagkamatulungin sa kapuwa, ang praxis ng bukluran ng mga biktimgang inaapi.

Maisusug dito na ang konsepto ng puri o dangal ay hango sa kodigo ng maharlikang angkan ng mga kabalyero noong medya siglo. Ipinakalat ito sa mga romansang naging popular buhat nang dumating sina Legaspi at Urdaneta, at lumaganap sa mga dulang moro-moro hanggang sa *Florante at Laura* ni Balagtas. Sa piyudalistikong sistema ng kolonyang inugitan ng monarkiya’t simbahang Espanyol, ang pakikisalamuha ay tuwirang personal—ang panginoo ay diretsong nag-uutos sa mga pesanteng upahan—kaya ang puri ng pagkatao ang basehan ng anumang napagkasunduan. Sa pagsulong ng sibilisasyong Europeo sa siglo 1900, obserbasyon ni Maria Ossowska, naghalo ang burgesyang ethos at ethos ng nobilidad at nagbunga ng kategoryang “Gentlemen, “hybrid of feudal lord and bourgeois” (Ossowska 168-69). Naimpluwensiyahan ang mga Propagandista ng gawing ito. Sa kabilang dako, si Mabini ay produkto ng Enlightenment ng masoneria, kaya ang puri o dangal sa kontekso ng “Decalogo” ay nakakiling sa Protestanteng gamit kung saan ang konsensiya ng indibidwal, katalik sa puri, ay organo o instrumento ng Diyos.

Ang artikulasyon ng kodigo ng magkaibang kabihasan na sumasalamin sa realidad ng lipunan nina Rizal, Bonifacio at Mabini, ay

masisilip sa ganitong estilo ng pagsasanib ng mga kontradiksiyon sa diyalektikang materyalistiko ni Mabini. Gayunpaman, nakabuod sa “Decalogo” ang unibersal na mithiing lagpas sa rasyonal na maxim ni Kant at neoliberalismong moralidad, ang pag-ibig sa kapwa, pagmamahal ng ibang personalidad na may natatanging pangangailangan—sa tagubilin ni Agnes Heller: “The other person and their needs... is for me an unconditional value which lies beyond all doubt” (161).

Naimungkahi ni Jovino Miroy ang tesis tungkol sa radikalismo ni Mabini. Hango sa indibidwalismong burgis kaakibat ng simulaing liberalismo sa Espanya circa 1808-90, ang katangiang radikal ay hindi abstrakto. Tumutukoy iyon sa soberanyang hayag sa pagsasapraktika ng mga karapatan ng taumbayan. Ayon kay Mabini, ang katotohanang gumagabay sa kaniyang budhi ay ito: “nasa sambayanan mismo ang lahat ng kapangyarihang nasasaklaw rito” (*Rebolusyong Filipino* xxiii). Sa ibang salita, likas na angkin ng sambayanan ang soberanya. Ngunit ang aktwalisasyon nito ay hindi matutupad sa bisa ng rasyonalidad o pagsampalataya, kundi makataong aksiyon sa pagsanib ng sarili sa komunidad/sambayanan (Miroy 129). Imperatibo ang pagsangkot ng katutubong subjek sa aktibidad ng masa sa proseso ng transpormasyong radikal.

Mauulinigan ang tinig ni Rousseau at ang kaniyang konsepto ng “General Will” o direktang demokrasya sa argumento ng LRF. Sa proposisyong iyon, sa halip na sa pamamagitan ng inihalal na representatibo, tuwirang mangangasiwa ang taumbayan sa praktikang gawain ng gobyerno (Coutinho). Hindi ito mangyayari sa paraan ng diskursong rasyonal o edukasyong moral lamang kung walang kolektibong *praxis*, sipag sa trabaho, pagtatanggol sa karapatan, at sa anumang gawaing patibay ng metabolikong interaksyon ng isip at kalikasan (natural na nilalang bilang *species-being*). Ang kalayaan at buod ng taong maramdamin ay nakasilid sa trabaho, sa produktibong kilos, na siyang nagdudulot ng obhetibong dimensiyon sa esensiya ng taong-nasa-lipunan (Marx 140-41). Masusbaybayan ang paglalangkap ng rason, puri, sigasig sa gawain, at iba pang susing ideya sa sumusunod na pagtalakay sa “Decalogo” at LRF.

### **Inkarnasyon: Tungo sa Espasyong Sekular**

Ano ang layon ni Mabini sa pagsulat ng “Decalogo” at pag-singit nito sa bukana ng *Panukala*? Walang iba kundi ilunsad ang proyekto ng himagsikan: ang paglikha ng rebolusyonyong subjek o ahensiya na tutupad

sa pagtatag ng bagong orden (Majul 126-36). Tangka ng akda na umimbento ng kolektibong subjek ng transpormasyon ng lumang disenyo ng ugnayang panlipunan, ang pagsira sa kolonyal at piyudal na relasyong sosyal. Hangad ni Mabini na mahikayat ang mga kolonisadong subjek na umaklas at palitan ang mapanupil na ordeng piyudal ng bagong huwaran ng makatuwira't nagsasariling komunidad ng mga anak-pawis, ng mga makatarungan at malikhaing kasapi ng bagong Republika.

Sa katunayan, umabante na tayo sa kuwadro ng makamundong modernidad sa bukana pa lamang ng *Panukala*. Nakaharap na tayo sa isang testimonyo sa sekularisasyon ng diwang Filipino, hindi na dumudulog sa mga lumang idolo/*fetish* o hirarkiya ng mga *fraille* at awtoridad ng Bibliya. Subersibo ang prinsipyo na ang awtoridad ay bukal sa puri o dangal, sa bait at kalooban, sa konsensiya ng indibidwal kung saan madidinig ang tinig ng Diyos, hindi sa sermon ng *frailocracia*. Matingkad ang pangaral na maging masipag at pahalagahan ang sariling pagsisikap. Mapipisil ito sa daloy ng ikalawa at ikatlong utos:

2. Sambahin mo ang Diyos sa paraang minamatuwid at minamarapat ng iyong bait at sariling kalooban, na kung tawagi'y konsensiya, sapagkat sa iyong konsensiya na sumisisi sa Gawa mong masama at pumupuri sa magaling ay doon nangungusap ang iyong Diyos.

3. Sanayin mo at dagdagan ang katutubong alam at talas ng isip...sa pamamagitan ng pag-aaral at pagkasakit mo sa buong makakaya ang gawang kinahihiligan ng iyong loob...nang mapasaiyo ang lahat ng bagay na dapat mong kailanganin at sa paraang ito'y makatulong ka sa ikasulong ng kalahatan; kung gayo'y magaganap ang ipinatutungkol sa iyo ng Diyos sa buhay na ito, at kung ito'y maganap mo ay magkakapunan ka at kung may puri ka na'y ipatatanghal mo ang kaluwalhatian ng iyong Diyos (*Panukala* 12-13).

Itambad natin ang panawagang nakakapit sa pariralang ito: “sa ikasulong ng kalahatan.” Itinampok ang kapakanan ng komunidad, ang publiko o sibikong kapakinabangan. Mataginting na aksiyoma ng “Decalogo” iyon. Kapuna-puna ang pokus ni Mabini sa katutubong alam at dunong na kailangan upang umunlad ang buhay sa ibabaw ng lupa, at hindi upang mangarap gantimpalaan ng pagpasok sa Paraiso. Idiniin na naman ang puri, ang kalooban, ang daang makatuwiran. Sa susunod na utos 4 hanggang utos 8, itatanghal ni Mabini ang nakahihigit na halaga ng Inang Bayan, ang pinakaimportanteng mithiing inaasinta ng dekalogo: ang pagpupugay sa

*patria*, ang lunggating pagsasarili ng bayan na ipapalit sa Paraisong mitikal ng relihiyon. Ang teritoryong sakop ng nagsasariling komunidad ang paraiso ng naninirahan at umuunlad dito. Sapantaha kong alam ni Mabini ang “El Amor Patrio” ni Rizal sapagkat kasapi siya sa Liga at masugid na taga-suporta sa *Solidaridad* ng mga Propagandista (Rizal 14-20). Ang lupang tinubuan na nag-aruga sa iyo ang nakahihigit na halagang dapat mahalina at ipagsakripisyo sa ikagagaling ng lahat ng nagpupunyagi dito:

4. Ibigin mo ang iyong bayan o Inang Bayan na kaikalaw ng Diyos at ng iyong puri at higit sa iyong sarili, sapagkat siyang makaisa-isang Paraisong pinaglalagyan sa iyo ng Diyos sa buhay na ito, bugtong na pasunod sa iyong lahi, na kaisa-isang mamamana mo sa iyong mga pinagnuno at siya lamang pag-asa sa iyong inaanak; dahil sa kanya’y humahawak ka ng buhay, pag-ibig at pag-aari, natatamo mo ang kaginhawahan, kapurihan at ang Diyos.

5. Pagsakitan mo ang kaginhawahan ng iyong bayan nang higit sa iyong sarili at pagpilitan mong siya’y pagharian ng kabaitan, ng katuwiran at ng kasipagan, sapagkat kung maginhawa siya’y pilit ding giginhawa ikaw at ang iyong kasambahay at kamag-anakan.

6. Pagpilitan mo ang kasarinlan ng iyong bayan, sapagkat ikaw lamang ang tunay na makagpagmamalasakit sa kanyang ika-darakila at ikatatanghal, palibhasa’y ang kanyang kasarinlan ang siya mong sariling kaluwagan at kalayaan, ang kanyang pagkadakila ang magdadala sa iyo ng lahat mong kailangan at ang kanyang pagkatanghal ang siya mong kabantugan at kabuhayang walang hanggan (*Panukala* 13-14).

Mamamalas na nakatutok na ang diwa sa Inang Bayan na kawangis ng isang Ina o diwang pinipintuho (gunitain na ang LRF ay inihandog ni Mabini sa kaniyang ina). Magkatalik ang sarili at ang bayan. Inihanay ang puri at Diyos sa kapakanan ng lahi, ng henerasyong magmamana ng buhay, pag-ibig at niyaring hiyas. Intensiyon ngayon na rebisahan ang indibidwalistikong tendensiya ng Kaliwanagan na nakulong sa pribadong pag-aari at sa patriarkong pamilya. Hinalili ang oryentasyong sosyalistiko—“kaginhawahan ng bayan higit sa iyong sarili.” Walang identidad ang isang tao na hiwalay sa kinabibilangang lipunan. Sinalungguhan ni Mabini ang birtud ng kabaitan, katuwiran at kasipagan. Praktika at kilos ng lakas-paggawa ang katuparan ng anomang ideya, Kapag maginhawa ang bayan, gayundin ang kasambahay at kamag-anakan at magkakapantay na kaanib sa komunidad—integrasyon ng samut-saring elemento sa masiglang totalidad ng Republika.

## Paglalakbay sa Katubusan

Sa wakas, dumating tayo sa pinakaasam: kasarínlan ng Pilipinas. Iginíit sa utos 6 ang libértad ng bayan kaakibat ng “sariling kaluwagan at kalayaan.” Titigan ang sintesis ng sawing bayan at “kabantugan at kabuhayang walang hanggan” ng sabjek na nagpupunyaging tumulong sa pagbabagong-buhay na ipinatalastas sa unang bahagi ng *Panukala*. Dinulutan ng kaukulang-bigat ang kahulugan ng kasarínlan sa utos 8: ang kasarínlan ay nakasalig sa kapangyarihang magmumula sa “konsensiya ng bawat taong nangungusap.” Naibalik ang papel na ginanap ng “konsensiya” na siyang tinig ng Diyos sa pambungad ng “Decalogo.” Kaya ang kapangyarihang uugit sa Republika ay ipinaliwanag sa artikulasyon ng budhi o saloobin: “ang sinumang ituro at ihalal ng konsensiya ng lahat ng mamamayan ang siya lamang makapagtataglay ng wagas na kapangyarihan” —isang temang umaalingawngaw mula sa konsepto ng “General Will” ni Rousseau (Mabini, *Panukala* 14; hinggil kay Rousseau, konsultahin sina Plamenatz; Masters; Coutinho).

Iniluwal mula sa puri at konsensiyang ipinahayag sa simula, naidako tayo sa paksa ng awtoridad na gumagabay sa Republika. Paliwanag ng “Decalogo” na ito’y nakasalalay sa konsensus o pagkakasundo ng mamamayan sa halalan. Ang pasiya ng mayorya ang masusunod, kontra sa isang Monarkiya na binatikos at itinakwil sa utos 8. Idiniin ni Mabini na ang Monarkiya ay organisasyong piyudal kung saan ang sarili at kamag-anakan ang absolutong naghahari (tulad ng paghahari ng mga dinastikong pamilyang namamahala sa ating gobyerno ngayon). Walang pasubali na ang kaayusan ng Republika ang lunggati ng rebolusyon sapagkat ito ang “nagbibigay ng kamahalan at karapatan sa lahat ayon sa bait nang bawat isa, ng pagkadakila, alang-alang sa kaluwagan at kalayaan at ng kasaganaan at kadilagang tinataglay na kasipagan” (Mabini, *Panukala* 14). Pansinin ang muling tuldik sa sipag, pagsisikap, gawain sa paggulong ng karaniwang buhay sa mundo na magaganap lamang sa kooperasyon ng mga kasapi sa komunidad.

Sa utos 9 at 10, pinahintulutan ni Mabini ang lumang tradisyong taglay ang impluwensiya sa sentido komun ng marami. Inulit ang “Gintong Aral” na matatagpuan sa mga kodigo ng relihiyon: magandang pakikitungo sa kapuwa, lalo na ang kababayan na dapat ituring na kapatid sapagkat nakasuong sa isang problematikang binubuno: ang kabutihan at kadakilaan ng Inang Bayan. Di dapat kaligtaan na binigyan ng realistikong bahid ang “Gintong Aral” sa huling parirala ng Utos 9: kung ang trato sa iyo ay

masama, dapat ipagtanggol ang sarili sa ngalan ng likas-na-batas/*ley natural* na nagpapayo na pangalagaan, ingatan at konserbahin ang sariling buhay, “kaunaunahang utos ng Diyos”—ang *conatus* sa pilosopiya ni Spinoza (Spinoza 37-40, 242; hinggil sa impluwensiya ng Masoneria, referens dito sina Gealogo at Fajardo).

Batid ni Mabini ang kapaligirang kaniyang kinalalagan. Bagamat umapela siya sa unibersal na batas ng kalikasan (*lex natura* mula kina Cicero at Santo Tomas Aquino hanggang kina Hobbes at Locke) sa pakikitungo niya sa mga Amerikanong upisyal, hindi nawaglit sa isip ang tiyak na lugar at panahon ng kaniyang pag-iral. Utang ang intuwisyong ito sa kamalayang historikal na humulagpos sa dogmatismong iskolastiko’t transendental ng Simbahan. Laging talos ni Mabini ang limitasyon ng isipan at damdaming nakakulong sa makitid na pamantayang batay sa etnisidad, relihiyon, ugali ng sinaunang kabihasan kung saan walang pribadong pag-aari ng lupain. Tumiwalag na sa pangitaing transendental at lumipat na si Mabini sa sekular, *immanent* o makalupang pananaw na minana sa Kaliwanagan sa Europa, sa rebolusyong naganap sa Pransiya at NorteAmerika (sinaliksik din ito sa diskurso ni Berlin (333-35) tungkol sa masalimuot na balitaktakan sa paksa ng nasyonalismo).

Dito sa *Panukala*, dinulutan ng determinasyong historikal ang kategorya ng nasyon o bansa. Pagmuniing mabuti ang talatang sumunod sa utos 10: “Kaya’t habang tumutulay ang mga patuto ng mga bayan na ibinangon at inalagaan ng pagkakani-kanya ng mga lahi at angkan, ay sa kanya lamang dapat kang makisama at tunay na makipag-isa sa hinahangad at pag-aari, upang magkalakas ka sa pakikibaka sa kaaway ninyong dalawa at sa paghanap nang lahat na kinakailangan sa kabuhayan ng tao” (Mabini, *Panukala* 15; tungkol sa sari-saring aplikasyon ng batas-kalikasan, konsultahin si Neumann 69-95). Solidaridad at pagtutulungan ang *desideratum* ng pagbabagong radikal.

### Sa Pagitan ng Dalawang Imperyalismo

Umabot na tayo sa asignatura ng pakikibaka upang matamo ang kasarinlan. Kakawing dito ang prinsipyo ng Kalayaan na pumapatnubay sa proyekto ni Mabini: ang paghubog ng kolektibong subjek. Nailunsad ito sa *Panukala* at “Decalogo” sa panahon ng pagtatag ng Republika sa Malolos. Nagsilbi si Mabini bilang unang Ministro ng Republika at Ministrong Panlabas (1898-1899). Panahon iyon ng digmaan, ng madugong pakikihamak laban sa Estados Unidos. Nagapi ang puwersa ng Republika at

sumuko si Aguinaldo na itinuring ng mga palasukong ilustrado na hudyat ng pagtatapos ng anti-imperyalistang pakikibaka.

Subalit hindi sumuko si Mabini. Tinuring siyang isa sa “irreconcilables,” tulad nina Pio del Pilar, Artemio Ricarte, Macario Sakay, atbp. Nagpatuloy ang pakikibaka ni Mabini hanggang itapon siya sa bilangguan sa Guam (1901-03) kung saan naisulat niya ang akdang tumatalakay sa henealohiya ng himagsikan: *La revolucion filipino/Ang Rebolusyong Filipino* (salin sa Ingles ni Guerrero). Sa panahon ng pagkagapi at pananakop ng Estados Unidos, ang tema ng “Decalogo” ng puri at kasarinalan ay inilagay sa internasyonal na kapaligiran. Samantala, nilitis niya ang mga tauhan at pangyayaring nagpasiklab sa puri at konsensiya ng bayan, sampu ng mga kakulangan ng pamunuan ng Republika. Sa pagsusuma niya, naisilang na ang bansang Filipinas sa karanasan ng pakikihamok, at malaki na ang potensiyal na makamit ang tagumpay, dili kaya’t ang paninindigang naipunla noong 1896, kahit na sa ilalim ng rasistang dahas ng mananakop.

Naipaliwanag ni Mabini sa LRF ang dalawang saray o dimensiyon ng transpormasyong dapat isakatuparan upang maganap ang tunay na pagbabago: ang rebolusyong internal at rebolusyong eksternal. Tinutukoy rito ang pagpupurga sa kamalayan at pagbabago sa kapaligiran. Sabayan ito: habang sinisikap baguhin ang sistemang panlipunan, nahuhubog rin ang diwa’t damdamin ng mga protagonista ayon sa hinihingi ng nag-iibang sirkumstansiya. Sa pagsanib ng mga kontradiksiyong panloob at panlabas—ang suhetibo at obhetibong puwersang magkatunggali ngunit magkasanib rin—nailarawan ni Mabini ang banghay ng ating kasaysayan. Naikintal din sa bumabasa ang historiko-materyalistikong pananaw na gumagabay sa mapagpagsuring organisasyon at aktibidad ng mga rebolusyonyaryo.

Nasipat na natin ang kontradiksiyon ng mga uring ibinalangkas ni Mabini sa naratibo ng LRF. Tandaan ang saligan ng pagsasamantala ng kolonyang Espanyol (partikular, ng frailocracia) sa lakas-paggawa ng katutubo na bukal ng kayamanan. Sino ang nakinabang? Unawain na ito, ang walang katwirang distribusyon ng halaga kalakip sa tiwaling ugnayan sa produksiyong sosyal, ang pundamental na batayan ng awtoridad ng Espanya, ng ideolohiya ng mananakop. Dahil dito, minarapat nina Rizal at mga Propagandista, kislap-diwa na natutuhan ni Mabini, na puntiryahin ang ideolohiya ng bulag na pagsunod sa panginoong Espanyol at kakutsabang katutubo. Praktikang mapagpalaya ang kaakibat ng pagbabago ng isipan at damdamin.



Ang tunggalian ng mga uri ay masisinag sa pagtatagisan ng mga protagonist sa dulaan ng himagsikan. Nilagom ni Mabini ang mayamang karanasan ng mga pesante't trabahador na tumutol sa dayuhang mananakop. Iyon ang kabuluhan ng memorya, ng kasaysayan. Gayunpaman, ang pinakamakaturang laban ay sa pagitan ng masang namulat sa himagsikan laban sa Espanya at nakihamok laban sa imperyong Estados Unidos—ang Digmaang Filipino-Amerikano mula 1899 hanggang sa neokolonyang sitwasyong umiiral ngayon. Hindi pa tapos ang laban. Sa paglikha ng kamalayang historikal ng masang nagsakripisyo sa digmaan laban sa mananakop, nabuo ang konsensiya ng lahing kayumanggi sa Asya Naisilang din ang kamalayang pansarili ng sambayanang nakibaka. Tuloy nailuwal ang bansang Filipinas mula sa pagkagapi at pagkaduhagi, mula pagdurusat pagtatanggol ng dignidad, kalayaan, kasarínlan.

Sa paglingon sa nakaraang kasaysayan sa anggulo ng pagkabigo't pagyuko sa lakas ng puwersang banyaga, ano ang leksiyong mahuhugot sa kronika ni Mabini? Huwag nating kalimutan ang konteksto ng krisis, sindak, siphayo, at lagim ng napuksang tropa ng Republika at paghihirap ng libu-libong sibilyan kalahok man o di-kasangkot—1.4 milyong Fiipino ang biktima ng imperyalismong U.S. (Francisco 8-19; Constantino, *Dissent* 92-112). Nasiyasat na ang lagim ng raistang Digmaang Filipino-Amerika ng maraming historyador, kabilang sina Twain, Kolko (na tinaguriang “orgy of racist slaughter” ang gera [287]), Zinn (290-313) at Tan.

Nang ipagdiwang ng rehimeng Ramos ang sentenaryo ng rebolusyon, isinainasanti ang pakikihamok ng Republika laban sa tropang Amerikano, isang maselang pagsuko sa neokolonyalistang amo. Binigyan ng mabagsik na pintas ni Renato Constantino: “In this savage war, which lasted for nearly a decade, the Americans committed all sorts of atrocities in order to crush the patriotic resistance. The Philippine-American War, which established the origins of the relationship between our two countries and exposes not only the savagery of the army of occupation but also American motives for colonization, should not be allowed to recede from our national memory”(21). Sa katunayan, tayo ay natulak sa interlude ng truce sa digmaang ito na nagpapatuloy pa rin hanggang ngayon dahil wala pa tayong awtentikong kasarínlan. Samakatwid, karapat-dapat lamang na idiin ang hindi matatawarang ambag ni Mabini sa pagsusuri sa masalimuot na *problematique* ng rebolusyong saligan ng ating pagkabansa.

## Laro ng Fotuna at Virtu

Marami ang humahanga sa sinseridad ni Mabini, ang kagustuhan niyang magkasundo ang mga Filipino at Amerikano. Masinop ang paglapat niya ng konsepto ng *ley natural*/batas ng kalikasan, kaugnay ng kalayaan na kailangan upang maipairal ang pagkakapantay-pantay ng mga katutubo at dominanteng uri. Sa balik-tanaw ko, ang itinatampok sa LRF ay praktika at pedagohiya ng karanasan, tulad ng pagtampok sa sipag, trabaho at kolektibong pagpupunyagi sa *Panukala*: “Kung nasa pagtutugma ng katwiran at karanasan ang katotohanan, nasa pagtutugma ng teorya at praktika ang birtud” (Mabini, *Rebolusyong Filipino* xxv). Samakatwid, hindi na ang rason o katwiran (sa Tomistikong pilosopiya) ang patnubay kundi ang “birtud,” ang galing, kakayahan at kasanayan—sa parametro ng katutubong kultura, kaakibat ng dangal o puri (Enriquez 46)—na gagabay sa pagsasalin ng teorya/dunong sa sistematikong gawain. Masalimuot at dalubhasang teorya ng transpormasyon ang dulog ni Mabini sa ating pambansang kaban ng pedagohiya at agham.

Sa aking pakiwari, ang “birtud” ni Mabini ay maihahambing sa konsepto ng *virtu* (kakayahang moral) na maiging dinukal ni Machiavelli: mabisang kakayahan o lakas sa pagkilos upang maisakatuparan ang nais, laban sa *fortuna* o tadhanang hindi mapipigil (Seigel 477-86). Bunga ng engkuwento sa nesesidad o *fortuna* ang *virtu*, kaya sa panahon ng krisis at digmaan, ang birtud ni Mabini ay pag-aangkop ng agham at aksiyon, intelihensiya at kalooban, rason at pagpapasiya. Sa konteksto ng diskurso ng Renaissance, ang birtud ay praktikang nilinang para sa kapakanan ng komunidad. Nailuklok na ang katwiran o rasyonalidad sa pusod ng kalooban, sa simbuyo ng pagnanais at paghahangad—ang klasikong kontradiksiyon nina Santo Tomas at San Agustin ukol sa rason at voluntad (Baker 194-200). Sa mapayapang milyu, katwiran at rasyonalidad ang mabisa, subalit sa panahon ng krisis at digmaan, ang kalooban/puwersang mapaglunggati ang nagpapainog sa takbo ng lipunan.

Laro ng *fortuna* at *virtu* sa pagsulong ng kasaysayan ang minamasdan ni Mabini. Kuro-kuro ko na ang estratehiya ng kontra-hegemonya ni Mabini ay umaayon sa demanda ng panahon at lugar: ang situwasyon noong 1901-1903 ay iba na kaysa noong 1899-1900, sa pagputok ng giyera at pagkabuwag ng Republika (tungkol sa hegemonya, tingnan si Gramsci). Saang bahagi ng larangan makakamit ang mabisang resulta ng interbensiyon ng organisadong masang naghihimagsik?

## Paglunsad ng Kamalayang Historikal

Tigil muna sandali ang repleksiyon natin. Sapat na marahil ang nailahad na tentatibong proposisyon hinggil sa kontribusyon ni Mabini sa ating tradisyong mapagpalaya. Hinihikayat ko ang mambabasa na tunghayan ang mga sinangguning awtor tungkol kay Mabini upang maunawaang lubos ang lalim at saklaw ng kaniyang radikalismo't kontemporaryong bisa.

Sa ngayon, nais kong lagumin ang pinakamakabuluhang ambag ng LRF sa kolektibong pakikipagsapalaran. Sa diskursong ito, sumilang ang lahing kayumanggi sa larangan ng modernong heopolitika. Deklara niya sa “Panimulang Pahayag” at sa “Kongklusyon” ng diskurso:

....Sa karaniwan at likas na daloy ng mga pangyayari, hindi itinalagang lupigin ng mahina ang malakas. Sumuong tayo sa digmaan sa paniniwalang atas ng tungkulin at dangal natin ang magsakripisyo sa pagtatanggol ng ating kalayaan hangga't makakaya natin sapagkat kung wala ito, sadyang hindi mangyayaring magkaroon ng panlipunang pagkakapantay-pantay sa pagitan ng naghaharing uri at ng katutubong mamamayan, at hindi mapapasaatin ang tunay na katarungan...

....Huwag kalilimutan kailanman na nasa unang baitang tayo ng ating pambansang buhay, at pinaaakyat tayo at makaakyat lamang tayo kung birtud at kabayanihan ang tutungtungan... At isang tanong sa pagtatapos: Masisiyahan kaya ang mga Filipino kung igagawad sa kanila ang mga repormang malaon nang hinihingi sa Gobyernong Espanol? Lubos na pinangangambahan kong hindi sapagkat ang paghahangad sa Kalayaan, na hindi nila batid noon ay marubdob nang pumipintig ngayon sa kaibuturan ng kanilang mga puso. Ang pagtanggap, mga pagbabanta, at mararahas na hakbang ng Gobyerno [ng Amerikano] ay nag-uudyok lamang na pagtibayin at panatilihin buhay ang damdaming ito” (*Ang Rebolusyong Filipino* xxi, 108).

Ipinunla na ni Mabini sa ating kultura ang unang prinsipyo ng modernong sibilisasyon: ang libertad o kalayaan, na ipinagtibay ng rebolusyong Pranses at Norte Amerikano. Kung wala ito, hindi makakamit ang hustisya, iguwalidad o pagkakapantay, at makatuturang demokrasyang nilalahukan ng lahat. Mababanaagan din rito ang adhikain nina Marx at Engels noong 1848: “Isang lipunan kung saan ang malayang pag-unlad ng isa ay kondisyon sa malayang pag-unlad ng lahat” (53) na preludyo sa antas ng kabihasan kung saan lahat ng pangangailangan ay natugunan, hindi depende sa iyong kakayahan o abilidad.

Kilala ang akda ni Mabini bilang naratibo ng pakikipagsapalaran ng dunong at konsensiya ng isang protagonista sa rebolusyon laban sa dalawang imperyo (Espanya, U.S.). Tanyag din si Mabini sa pagkilatis niya sa mga tauhan at pangyayaring kasangkot. Sa diyalektika ng pagbabago ng labas at loob na naturol sa una, nilikha ni Mabini ang kamalayang historikal, ang politika ng memoryang kolektibo. Iniangkop ang klasikong konsepto ng batas-natural hango sa sibilisasyong Kanluran sa kongkretong sitwasyon ng pakikidigma ng aliping-may-kulay laban sa rasistang Kanluran (lihis ito sa opinyong ortodoks at kombensiyonal ni Reyno).

Hindi napansin ng henerasyon nina Bonifacio at Rizal ang ideolohiya ng “White Supremacy.” Dito sumikat ang mapanuring sensibilidad ni Mabini. Ginamit din ng dayuhang mananakop ang alibi ng “*mission civilizatrice*” at diumano’y biyaya ng Kristiyanidad ng kanlurang Monarkiya. Namumukod si Mabini sa pagsusuri ng rasismo ng Amerika at ang kontradiksiyon ng mga uri bunga ng karanasang limitado ng politika-ekonomya ng lipunan (basahin ang tugon niya kina Heneral Bell at Heneral Wheeler sa Mabini, “In response” 98-101; nasa Mabini, *Letters* 259-63). Dignidad at karapatan ng mga inaping anakpawis ang itinampok ni Mabini sa teatro ng politika at diplomasiyang internasyonal. Maituturing na ang LRF ay isang dokumento ng bayang Filipinas na umalsa upang maipamalas ang natatanging birtud nito: ang mapagpalayang diwa ng lahi na bukal ng makataong dignidad at makatarungang dangal (San Juan, “Sa pagitan”). Dito masasalat ang pambihirang talino, sensitibong budhi, at mausisang ulirat ni Mabini.

### Pagdaramay ng Sambayanan

Dalisay na damdamin at mayamang dunong ang birtud ni Mabini na masisinag sa retorika at imahinasyon ng *Panukala*, “*Decalogo*” at *LRF*. Malahimalang natarok niya ang ayos ng kasaysayan: pinaghalong aksidente at di-maiwasang kapalaran. Alin ang tsyansa at alin ang kinusa? Subalit hindi niya akalaing nagkawing din ang di-sinasadya at ang tiyak na mangyayari. Di nagkatugma ang rason at karanasan. Gawing uminom ng gatas ng kalabaw ang bayani, ngunit di batid ang pagkahawa niyon sa salot ng kolera. Hindi niya alintana ang sitwasyong pangkalusugan ng bayan. Sinalanta ang madlang hindi pa nakaahon sa sakuna ng digmaan. Karamay si Mabini sa paghihikahos at pasakit ng nakararami. Hindi siya nag-iisang biktima. Kahabag-habag. Hindi pa nakaabot sa tatlong buwan buhat nang

makauwi mula sa bilangguan sa Guam, pinuksa ng kolera ang bayani noong Mayo 13, 1903. Tatlumpu at siyam na taong gulang ang nasawing “Utak ng Rebolusyon.”

Paglumiin natin ang huling yugto sa paglalakbay ng determinadong paralitiko. Mahigit 8,000 ang dumalo sa paglibing sa Simbahang Binondo. Sinakop ang buong kapaligiran ng mga kasapi sa Iglesia Filipina Independiente at mga beterano ng rebolusyon (Zaide 287). Bago dinapuan ng sakit, ibinahagi ni Mabini sa bayan ang saloobin sa isang interbyu. Marahil may kutob siya na naghihintay na ang ina niyang nagbigay sa kaniya ng buhay noong Hulyo 23, 1864. Bukas ang kaniyang kamalayan sa harap ng publiko: “After two long years [of deportation], I am returning, so to speak, completely disoriented and what is worse, almost overcome by disease and sufferings. Nevertheless, I hope, after some time of rest and study, still to be of some use, unless I have returned to the islands for the sole purpose of dying” (*Letters* 305-06). Tila nahinuha niyang dumating na siya sa hanggahan ng pakikipagsapalaran.

Kumpisal ni Mabini na walang sagabal ang sakit at dalita, at nais pa rin niyang makatulong pagkaraan nang pahinga at pag-aaral (*Letters* 297-98). Hindi pinahintulutan ng tadhana. Produkto pa rin ng lipunan at rehimeng naghahari ang salot at kapahamakan nito. Mahigpit ang puwersa ng lipunan at kalikasan: ang di-sinasadya at di-kinukusa ay nagaganap, di man pansin ng tao. Nasugpo ng *fortuna* ang *virtu*. Sa paglingon na lamang sa nangyari maaaring matuklasan na iyon nga ang iginuhit ng tadhana. Sa balik-tanaw, lumilitaw na ang aksidente ay siyang pasiya ng kapalaran,

Sa pagsusuma ng kilates dito sa “Decalogo” at LRF, maiintindihan natin na si Mabini ay pambihirang intelektuwal ng kaniyang henerasyon na nakabatid ng rasistang ideolohiya ng imperyalismong Amerikano. Bago makipagdebate sa mga Amerikanong upisyal, nailatag na ni Mabini ang pundasyon ng Republika sa maugnaying diskurso ng *Panukala* at “Decalogo.” Dagdag dito ang LRF, isang masinop na analisis ng trayektorya ng 1896 rebolusyon hanggang sa pagbagsak ng Republika sa pagdakip kay Aguinaldo. Hinimay niya ang tema ng pag-aalsa mula sa garote ng tatlong paring Burgos, Gomez at Zamora, ang bisa ng dalawang nobela ni Rizal (*Noli* at *Fili*), at inaugurasyon ng rebolusyonaryong gobyerno sa Kawit at deklarasyon ng Republika sa Malolos. Pagkatapos masuri ang diyalektika ng paralitikong katawan at masiglang pag-iisip, mahihinuha kung paano sumibol ang matalisik at maramdaming diwang nagsumikap mapagtanto ang

kinabukasan ng bayang naipit ng dalawang imperyo. Matutuklasan sa LRF na hindi lamang bayani para sa atin, sa lahing Malay, at mga lipi sa buong Asya si Mabini kundi tagapagtaguyod din ng programa ng lahat ng nilikhang nakikibaka para sa kalayaan at kasarinlan laban sa imperyalismo-kapitalismong pampinansiyal sa bukana ng dantaong 1900.

Maaring maipagpapatuloy ang pagsusuri sa bahagdan ng mga puwersa at institusyong humubog sa buhay ni Mabini. Mahihimay ang mga kategoryang masisiyasat: halimbawa, alin ang mga pangyayaring determinado at alin ang hindi masasabing itinadhana, at alin ang tsyansa at alin ang itinalaga sa mga pagkakataong idinulog kay Mabini. Tikim lang ito na mga dapat aralin. Mahalaga ang mga pangyayari at sitwasyong kinalagyan niya, na nagdulot ng bisa sa mga tauhang nakasangkot niya sa iba't ibang okasyon at aktibidad, Si Mabini ay isa lamang karakter sa masalimuot na dula ng buhay ng mga Filipino, lalo na sa sigalot ng rebolusyon at sa mapanganib na pagsulong ng bagong bansang kailan lamang nakalaya mula sa kolonyalismo at malagim na panahon ng pagka-alipin. Sa ibang okasyon maisasakaturapan ito. Limitadong pakay ng sanaysay na ito na ilagom ang kontribusyon ni Mabini sa arkibo ng ating kasaysayan na laging pinipintasan, dinuduhagi, nilalapastangan ng mga postmodernong komentaristang dayuhan (halimbawa, Bankoff at Weekley).

### **Pagbati at Pahimakas sa Modernidad**

Napakabata at musmos pa ang ating bansa sa larangang heopolitikal. Asignatura rin ito sa patuloy na imbestigasyon sa makabuluhang abuloy ni Mabini sa ating kultura at sensibilidad ng lahing kayumanggi, ang liping Filipino na natatangi sa gitna ng mga lahi sa Asya at sa buong mundo. Tayo ang sangandaan sa Asya at Norte Amerika-Europa, nakapagitan sa Tsina at Oceania, isang arkipelagong naging daungan ng kalakalan ng Asya at kontinenteng Amerika at Europa. Napakamakahulugang lugar ang mga islang binansagang “Perlas del Mar Oriente.” Maiuungkat: Ano talaga ang ambag ni Mabini sa paghubog ng kamalayang historikal na naunsiyami sa panahon ng pananakop (1899-1946) at lalong sumidhi sa tinaguriang yugto ng sibilisasyon na diumano’y binansagang “postcolonial” na nanaig sa bagong milenyo?

Unang ambag: ang paglikha ang kamalayang pangkasaysayan, ang sensibilidad o saloobing historikal. Ang buod ng LRF, ang obra maestra ni Mabini, ay nakasentro sa balangkas o paradigma ng lohika ng mga naganap, mga pangyayaring umuugnay sa maraming bayan at komunidad. Iginiit niya

sa Kongklusyon ng LRF ang mapanuri at tapat na pagkilates sa kasaysayan: “Sinikap kong maging patas sa pagsulat ng mga alaalang ito na ang tanging layunin ay hagilapin sa nakaraan ang mga aral na lalong kapaki-pakinabang para sa kasalukuyan at sa hinaharap. Sa gayunding paraan, sinikap kong mga pangyayari at hindi mga partikular na tao ang pagtuunan ng pansin” (2015, 96). Tumpak ang pasiya ni Mabini: mga pangyayari ang makahulugang hiwa sa agham ng historyograpiya, hindi indibidwal o puta-putaking ideya. Naipahiwatig din na hindi siya, ang awtor, ang dapat pag-ukulan ng pansin. Naisali lamang siya sa naratibo dahil kasangkot siya sa salaysay ng mga naganap “bilang payak na saksi at bilang aktor sa ibang pagkakataon sa dakilang dula ng Rebolusyon.”

Ang historyador ay pumipili at nag-aayos ng mga datos na maiaangkop sa piniling banghay o kuwadro ng naratibo (Jameson 475-612). Siya ang nagpapasiya at humahatol upang yumari ng isang “balance-sheet” ng mga kahinaan, kamalian, at galing na ipinakita ng bayan. Hindi dapat ikubli iyon upang di magamit ng iba upang siraan tayo. Sa halip dapat ibunyag iyon sa ngalan ng mapanuring lunggati ng agham-pangkasaysayan. Iyon ang layon ng kritika niya kay Aguinaldo. Sa ano’t anuman, magnilay tayo. Payo ni Mabini: “Nauunawaan ko na hindi laging natutupad ang anumang hinahangad” (*Rebolusyong Filipino* 100). Sirkumstansiyang gawad ng nakalipas, ang bakod ng pagkakataon, ang nagdidikta sa lagay ng mga grupo o uring panlipunan. Isadibdib natin ang leksiyong ito ng “dakilang lumpo.” Hindi si Mabini kundi ang lohika ng kasaysayan ang maghuhusga, sang-ayon sa turo ng “sawimpalad na si Andres Bonifacio na wala tayong ibang dapat katakutan kundi ang Kasaysayan; at ang totoo, hindi nagbabawang tagapagmatuwid ang Kasaysayan at kakila-kilabot ang hatol niya laban sa mga lumalapastangan sa kaniya” (*Rebolusyong Filipino* 100). Maantig at magbagsik na aral ito.

Samakatwid, ang kasaysayan ay hindi pagtipon at pagsalansang ng datos o impormasyon lamang. Layon nito ay makabuo ng isang padron ng mga pangyayari na magpapakita ng kahulugan o saysay ng daloy nito. Ang naratibong nalikha ay pagsasaayos ng mga karanasan, ang empirikal na materyal ng salaysay, ayon sa tendensiya ng mga komunidad na nagpursiging umiral sa makataong paraan at mapaunlad ang praktika ng kolektibong kapakanan sa metabolikong ugnayan sa kalikasan. Ang kamalayang historikal ay bunga ng analisis sa estruktura ng relasyong panlipunan na batay sa ekonomiya o pamumuhay, at sintesis nito sa mga adhikain o layunin ng komunidad. Bunga iyon ng diyalektikang metodo ng

paghimay sa mga kontradiksiyon sa bawat tiyak na yugto ng kasaysayan at kalkulasyon kung anong pagbabago ang mangyayari, anong posibilidad ang magiging realidad. Sinuri ni Mabini ang hipotesis na inilahad sa umpisa at sinubok kung tama o mali ang deduksiyon o hinuhang nahugot. Napakaselang hamon ito na tuwirang binalikat ni Mabini at sinikap liwanagin alang-alang sa ikabubuti ng sambayanan.

### Hangganang Abot-Tanaw

Pangalawang ambag: ginamit ni Mabini ang natutuhan niya sa mga Dominikano: eskolastikong pilosopiya. Nilapatan niya ito ng makabagong interpretasyon at motibasyon. Ang batas ng kalikasan ay nakasangkalan sa banal na batas, ang grasya ng Diyos. Nabago ito sa siyentipikong perspektibo nina Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, Leibniz at Kant. Kalikasang sekular ang pumalit sa metapisika ni Santo Tomas. Rason o katuwiran ang buod ng batas ng kalikasan (Majul 79-85). Nakaigpaw si Mabini sa limitasyon ng eskolastikong doktrina at rasyonalistang metapisika ng Kaliwanagan sa paglapat ng lente ng materyalismong historikal sa ating kasaysayan sa tulong ng mga Propagandista, nina Rizal, at Katipunan nina Bonifacio at Jacinto. Mithiin nito ay kasarinlan ng bayang Filipinas at kalayaan para sa sangkatauhan.

Naagnas ang impluwensiya ng mga relihiyosong guro sa bisa ng Liga Filipina kung saan naging sekretaryo siya ng Konseho Supremo noong 1893. Iyon ay bukod sa pagsapi niya sa Lohiyang Balagtas ng masoneria. Matatag ang paniwala niya sa legalidad ng ordeng namamayani. Kaibigan niya sina Numeriano Adriano at mga miyembro sa kapisanan ng mga abogado. Kaya sa halip na pumanig sa Katipunan nang maipatapon si Rizal sa Dapitan, sumapi siya sa Cuerpo de Compromisarios. Sa pagbaril kay Rizal, bumagsak ang tiwala ni Mabini sa *frailocracia* at lumipat iyon sa armadong paraan upang ipagtanggol ang likas na karapatan at kalayaan ng bawat nilalang. Umusad ang dalumat at diwa ni Mabini mula sa antas ng mapayapang repormista tungo sa antas ng armado't makatwirang pakikipagtagisan.

Ang pagbuo ng makabagong konsepto ng karapatang likas o karapatang natural ay nakasalig sa birtud, dangal, katungkulan o responsibilidad. Patnubay rito ang etika ng pagtutulungan at pagtangkilik sa kasiyahan at kabutihan ng kapwa. Ang prinsipyong moral ay hango sa klasikong kabihansan ng mga Griyego at Romano, isinalin ng eskolastikong pilosopo, at ginawang sekular ng Kaliwanagan—nina Hobbes, Spinoza,



Voltaire, Rousseau, Locke—at inilapat sa sitwasyong katutubo nina Jaena, Del Pilar, Rizal at Emilio Jacinto (Almario; San Juan, “Apolinario Mabini”). Umiwas sa panganib ng kontradiksiyon ng burgesyang pananaw ang pangitain ni Mabini sa pagsingkaw ng katutubong espiritu ng damayan o solidaridad ng komunidad sa indibidwalistikong punto-de-bista ng komersiyante at protestanteng komprador-burokrata (tingnan si Marcuse 51-94). Sintesis ng luma at bago, ng kooperatibang etika at mapagsariling sikhay, ang mapagpalayang subjek na inaruga’t sinanay ni Mabini sa ugnayan ng guniguni at rebolusyonyong praxis.

Pangatlong ambag: ang pagdisenyo ng materyalistikong pananaw sa etika at politika batay sa organisasyon ng komunidad at sa adhikaing popular-nasyonal. Nakapokus ito sa kilos at ugali ng taong taglay ang busilak na dangal o puri, sa karakter ng mga pamunuan, at sa pakikipagkapwang humanistiko. Sinikap ni Mabini na itanghal ang puwersa ng kalikasan, ang likas na katangian ng katawan at kakayahang umakto. Sinikap niyang salunguhitan ang papel na ginaganap ng praktika/praxis sa pagyari ng mga pangangailangan ng komunidad, sa pag-unlad ng kabuhayan at kultura ng bawat nilalang. Ang mga hakbang na ito’y kaalinsabay ng daloy ng siyensiya, teknolohiya, at komunikasyon ng mga bansa sa buong daigdig,

Maipapalagay na sa wakas ng imbestigasyong ito, tunay na nakahulagpos na tayo sa maraming balakid. Naikintal na sa malay ang saysay o kabuluhan ng salaysay ni Mabini. Naipaalala na ni Mabini na pumapasok pa lamang ang bayang Filipinas sa epoka ng modernidad, sa pagsilang ng Republika at pagtatanggol ng dignidad at dangal ng Filipino laban sa imperyalistang U.S. (Mabini, “Filipino Appeal”; Mabini, *Al pueblo*). Sa malas, akma at handa na ang sambayanan. Nakapuwesto na ang Filipino bilang bahagi ng lahing Malayo at mga liping-may-kulay sa masalimuot na larangan ng heopolitikang pakikisalamuha sa kasalukuyang yugto ng matinik na globalisasyon at mapanganib na paligsahan ng mga bansang U.S., Europa, Rusya at Tsina. Palarin sana tayo ng mabiyayang Maykapal.

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# Of Maids and Tyrants

## Or the Ethical (Im)possibility of Martial Law Narratives in the Age of Post-Truth

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### Abstract

My paper compares Ninotchka Rosca's novel *Twice Blessed (TB)* and Darryl Yap's movie *Maid in Malacañang (MIM)* based on a similar storyline about Martial Law in the Philippines: even a tyrant and his maid's best-laid plans of staying in power are bound to fail. I focus on two scenes depicted in both accounts that foreground the maid as a key figure: the family gathering and the 1986 People Power crowd's storming of Malacañang. In my analysis, I draw out the element of time to show that if Rosca pictures the scenes through discordant temporalities, Yap encases them in an invariably presentist frame. Specifically, the maid in *TB*, Teresa Tikloptuhod, injects temporal otherness into the empty time of the tyrant, thereby opening up other possibilities beyond the time of fascism. Meanwhile, Biday and the other maids in *MIM* are visually assimilated into the unitary time of the dictator, hence, erasing other lived realities of the Martial Law period and, ultimately, denying the reality of the dictatorship. Thus, in visualizing time as porous, Rosca demonstrates an emancipatory ethics of narrating Martial Law. In contrast, in hollowing out the collective memory of Martial Law, Yap employs new digital filming techniques to cover up fascism's moral bankruptcy.

### Keywords

Martial Law narratives, Ninotchka Rosca, relational ethics, *Maid in Malacañang*

## Almost the Same, But At Odds: An Introduction

Two Martial Law narratives, released 30 years apart, have strikingly identical stories of maids saving their tyrant bosses. My paper investigates this intriguing similarity in an attempt to interrogate the ethical dimension of Martial Law fiction or cinema. In particular, I wish to address one of the provocations of the international conference on Ethical Literary and Cultural Criticism: “Does a literary work, apart from its aesthetic function, serve an ethical content, effects, and function?”<sup>1</sup> Already, I would like to hazard an answer as the premise of my discussion: Literature or culture, as exemplified by two Martial Law narratives, demonstrates that the aesthetic function is concurrent with the ethical content. Here, I posit ethics to be a form of truth-telling with and for others, hence, an ethics of otherness or relationality. Put differently, the specific question I wish to ask is -- when does the ethical content, understood to be an ethics of otherness or relationality, arise or get aborted in Martial Law narratives?

To answer this problem, I compare two accounts about the downfall of Ferdinand Marcos and his family, namely, Ninotchka Rosca’s satirical novel *Twice Blessed* (1992) and Darryl Yap’s docudrama *Maid in Malacañang* (2022). My discussion is premised on their undeniably similar storylines: even a tyrant and his maid’s best-laid plans of staying in power are bound to fail. For my discussion, I will present two set pieces depicted in both accounts: the family-meeting scene and the 1986 EDSA People Power crowd’s storming of Malacañang, both of which foreground the maid as a key figure in saving the Marcos family in their scramble for escape from the besieged palace. Despite being central to both narratives, these set pieces are conceived by Rosca and Yap differently, thereby achieving different effects. Primarily, I argue that Rosca’s depiction of these scenes through discordant time frames and, in contrast, Yap’s invariably presentist framing of the same scenes respectively demonstrate how historical fiction or drama either becomes or fails to be a process of truth-telling. In other words, insight into ethics may be opened up or impeded by the artistic depiction or manipulation of the element of time or temporality.

To understand the artistic approaches of Rosca and Yap in depicting the Marcos dictatorship, a short review of facts from our Martial Law archives is in order. The historical context for both narratives is the snap elections of February 7, 1986, held two decades after Ferdinand E. Marcos’ first presidential term in 1965 and 13 years since he declared Martial Law in 1972.<sup>2</sup> Accounts reveal that Marcos was pressured to call for an election

because of public outcry against his abuse of power as a dictator and of repeated injunctions from the United States to adopt democratic policies (Sanchez; "EDSA"; "The First Election"). However, it must be noted that for years the US turned a blind eye to Marcos' "brutal, corrupt, and extravagant" government (Juego) in order to keep the Philippines as its anti-Communist stronghold in Southeast Asia (Sanchez).

On February 15, when the Batasang Pambansa proclaimed Marcos and Arturo Tolentino as the election winners for the presidency and vice presidency, respectively, people rallied behind the opposition party's presidential candidate Cory Aquino who won with her vice-presidential running-mate Salvador H. Laurel, according to the unofficial tally of poll watchdog National Movement for Free Elections or NAMFREL. On February 22, Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin called on the people to march to Camp Crame and Camp Aguinaldo, along Epifanio delos Santos Avenue or EDSA, to support cabinet and military officials, led by then-Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and then-Army Vice Chief Fidel V. Ramos, who had deserted Marcos. Thus, from February 22 to 25, hundreds of thousands of Filipinos gathered at EDSA, "calling for a peaceful ouster of Ferdinand Marcos" ("Remembering"; "EDSA").

Undeterred, Marcos held on to power, and on February 25, two presidents, he and Aquino, took their separate oaths ("Remembering"). On the evening of the same day, the US forced the exile of the disgraced dictator, together with his family, in Hawaii, where he would stay until his death in 1989 (Sanchez). The people cheered in the streets as "a peaceful protest had just toppled a dictatorship" ("EDSA"). When the Filipinos "stormed Malacañang" later that evening, they would denounce the obscene wealth of the Marcoses in the palace (Sanchez).

Both *TB* and *MIM* depict the days leading up to Ferdinand E. Marcos' complete overthrow by the EDSA People Power Revolution. In both Martial Law narratives, their maidservants are key pieces of the puzzle, given that, as revealed in *MIM*, the real-life maids of the Marcoses were constantly loyal to them. However, I claim in this paper that Rosca experiments with the gendered consciousness of the maid in *TB* to picture Martial Law history as heterogeneous or as a temporal otherness. This way, Rosca's work demonstrates ethical creativity. In contrast, digital media in the age of post-truth, exemplified by Yap's *MIM* exploits the figure of the maid to visualize time as rigid, onedimensional, and even paranoid. In this manner, Yap's attempt is a questionable basis of ethics or morality.

## Toward an Ethics of Otherness

To give more dimension to my questions on ethics, I would like to turn briefly to the 2012 work titled *An Aesthetic Education of Man in the Era of Globalization* by Gayatri Spivak. Given the present and dangerously charged global political climate, reading this work now is a radical act. In this book, Spivak locates and reorients ethics in the enduring wisdoms of peoples in the

Global South, particularly, in the Arabic concept of *al haq* in the Qur'an. Google Translate generates at least three tightly intertwined concepts for the Arabic term “ح ق,” or ‘*haq*.’ At once it stands for “truth,” “right” (in the sense of entitlement, or simply, a birthright), and “what is due or owed,” or, one’s responsibility. A concept and practice that imply a triangulation of right, responsibility, and truth simultaneously are what Spivak calls the “paraindividual structural responsibility” into which, as believed in this wisdom, every living being is born (*Aesthetic Education* 341). In other words, what stands for truth in this Arabic concept is that it is everyone’s birthright or entitlement to be responsible for others.

Here, Spivak notes in *haq* a “catachresis” in that one concept is used to mean another. That is, we have two lexically diverging concepts that mean the same in this Arabic wisdom: on the one hand, “responsibility” (which connotes a going outward, subtracting something, from the self) and, on the other, “right” (which is something intrinsic to, or stays within, the self) are two non-synonymous terms brought together in *al haq*. To say it more pointedly, *haq* “inscribes collective responsibility as a right” (341). As such, we find a concept of truth founded on difference.

According to this Arabic concept, to abide in the truth that one is born with the privilege to be collectively responsible for *others* is not simply to care for the “human community.” To care for “others” also means to live for one’s “human habitation” or “the earth” -- or what Spivak calls the “planetary” (294; 341). For Spivak, the planetary stands for what one cannot fully know. And this unknowable, or the incalculable is the concept of alterity or otherness inscribed in *al haq*. Such is Spivak’s “ethics of alterity” from where this paper comes in claiming an ethics of otherness or relationality. For us scholars in the Global South, this ethics of alterity is a necessary springboard for rethinking our existence or our morality today. What Spivak does is to clear a path to it, with this diffracted genealogy of ethics: one that is both a Eurocentric derivation and an enduring yet pre-capitalist wisdom of peoples of the Global South. And if indeed, there has been, as literary-and-cultural-studies scholars have been claiming, an ethical



turn in the field, then this 2012 book has been directing us more keenly toward ethico-genesis, as it were, that has never been more urgent in the time of globalization.

### Globalization and Post-truth

For this paper, I would like to inflect globalization as a category of time, that is, as our time of post-truth, when, as McKenzie Wark puts it, information or data have become the new commodity (ch. 1). Specifically, the post-truth era is characterized by the use of information and content on social media and streaming or on-demand entertainment for deception, propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation toward the devaluation of the public sphere or democracy. According to Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen, “post-truth politics” is a unique phase of the long history of mass media deception where shared realities comprising our collective knowledge have become eroded or erased by this consensus reality in the virtual realm. In the words of Hyvönen, we see the “devaluation of factual truths in public debate” (48). And as democratic spaces for healthy debate and disagreement come undone, what takes its place is this virtual realm where what Judith Butler calls “degraded speech” (85) proliferates. Here is Butler simplifying this scenario: “When the “no” is taken as “yes,” the capacity to make use of the speech act is undermined” (85). In other words, where lies or untruths are the currency, there is little to no space for agentive speech. By agentive speech, I mean something akin to Butler’s “speech acts” or performative speech which has the capacity to, quite simply, give rise to norms that affirm individual and collective life of humanity (85) and the planet.

The current mass and social media debate on the Middle East perfectly exemplifies this degraded discourse where, for example, anyone demanding for ceasefire or peace is accused of hate speech or anti-Semitism. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister and government officials of Israel dominate media and social media platforms in justifying their terrorist attacks on Gaza and settler violence in the West Bank as democratic and peaceful. The motive of post-truth politics is to saturate and circumscribe our mediated realities with lies so that this virtual economy stays rigidly polarized, confused, and unfounded. Ultimately, according to Hyvönen, the aim is to preempt any democratic sphere or sincere debate from ever emerging (39).

Post-truth politics is the enabling groundwork for movies like *MIM*. Produced by Imee Marcos and distributed by Viva Films, *MIM* is just the first of a trilogy. On its own, this 2022 movie boasts of a star-studded cast

including a surprise appearance of celebrity-politician, Robin Padilla. Its up-and-coming director, Darryl Yap, has been known for his controversial “shock” videos which often flouted common decency and political correctness (Aguila). As to its plot, *MIM* recounts how the maids helped manage the crisis in Malacañang in the lead-up to the overthrow of Marcos. Not surprisingly, *MIM* is not so original. The title alone is an obvious appropriation of the 2002 Hollywood romance *Maid in Manhattan*. But the lack of originality runs deeper given that the same narrative has been written 30 years before by Ninotchka Rosca in the form of her novel, *TB*. At the time of her writing of *TB*, she had been an exiled activist. Before that, she was a political prisoner under the Marcos regime. At present, Rosca continues her feminist activism and is currently based in New York, USA.

### Ethical Impossibility in the Time of the Self

*TB* is Rosca’s thinly veiled satire of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos’ “conjugal dictatorship,” to borrow from Primitivo Mijares (40). But Rosca creates an even more morally rotten fictional world as she portrays the central characters to be twins involved in a secret incest. The twins are Senator Hector Basbas and Katerina Basbas. With them in the Basbas household are the three incestuously- conceived children -- Epee, Ine, and Marmol. There is also Armand Gloriosa, Katerina’s figure-husband who is, as will be eventually revealed, also Hector’s lover. Teresa Tikloptuhod, whom we can consider as the chief assistant to the Basbas twins, is privy to all this wickedness. Smart and unusually highly educated in her time, Teresa is the loyal aide and trusted confidante of the twins. Because she devotes her life to serving the Basbas family, we can consider her as Rosca’s maid figure in *TB*. The story is told from Teresa’s perspective. Through her, we also discover the most disgusting perversion of all: Epee, who is Hector’s secret eldest child -- an adolescent -- is pregnant with her father’s (or Hector’s) baby. This moral depravity, on which the corrupt Basbas leadership is anchored, is what Teresa protects and enables to succeed. So with *TB*, Rosca creates a world devoid of morality -- which is a 180 degree turn from her previous works of fiction (Ojano, “Female Teleological Subject” 154).<sup>3</sup>

A good analogy for the world in *TB* would be an Andy Warhol painting, *Campbell’s Soup Cans*, visualizing for us a world of repetition in the time of consumer capitalism. Meanwhile in *TB*, it is the imbrications of imperialism and feudal-patriarchy that give rise to a world of Hectors or the self. In other words, we have Hector as an autocratic figure who arrogates

for himself absolute control of bodies and creativity. As such, we can describe *TB* as a world of the self, or, a world of sameness.

As to the plot, the story begins with inaugural preparations being led by Teresa for Hector who had just won the country's presidential elections. But things take a turn when Blackie Dominguez, the incumbent president and re-electionist, accuses Hector of massive fraud and cheating. And so, to foil this electoral protest and rally support for Hector, his camp launches mass media propaganda campaigns and large-scale bribery throughout the country. The family-meeting scene, which I will cite shortly, is the part where the Basbas camp will plan out this campaign. But essentially, this is the gist of the novel: the sum of two months' worth of the Basbas twins' scramble for the presidency, punctuated only by Hector's plane crash midway through the plot which ends by coming full circle: Hector, side by side with Katerina, is finally inaugurated into the presidency. As such, *TB* could also be described as the origin story of a future dictator ("Female Teleological Subject" 154-55).

In the book, the family-meeting scene is also attended by Hector's retinue, including not only Teresa but also the Diablos, Hector's private army. It is not mentioned in the following passage but the plan was a sortie where the family, Teresa, and the Diablos would fan out over Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao to bribe local politicians and their constituents with illegal firearms, money, women, liquor, luxury goods, and empty promises (Rosca 67). This family-meeting scene culminates in the following quote in which Teresa's eyes would now settle on her master with awe and adoration:

*In the days to come, they would be grateful for this impromptu assembly. It gave Hector the chance to set down, concisely and succinctly, their guide to action, so that when he disappeared, the organization continued to function though bereft of his guidance. Had they faltered for a single moment, their enemies would have torn them to pieces -- figuratively speaking or maybe not -- and they would've become truly the orphans they felt at the time. Years later, in a foreign land, unpacking and making an inventory of all that she had managed to snatch from disaster, Teresa would recall this moment and her eyes would water when she thought of how magnificent, decisive, and iron-willed Hector had been.* (Rosca 74-75; emphasis added).

At the outset, let me note the economy of sameness which structures the Basbas world through Hector's "guide to action" so that any excess or difference is villainized as "enemies." But to further parse the quote above, I focus on the element of time, indicated by the lines: "*In the*

*days to come...*” “...when he disappeared, the organization continued to function *though bereft of his guidance*” (74-75 [emphasis added]). As I said, this is Teresa’s lens through which we see the family-meeting scene happen. And with the temporal markers I emphasized, it becomes apparent that, as Teresa apprehends the present moment of the family gathering, she also sees into an immediate future when Hector is no longer around. Finally, the last line, while referring to a future, implies that it is a “disaster.”

Specifically, Teresa as she narrates the scene of the family gathering also gestures to a future that, at the same time, has passed. That is to say, she points to a time in the future when the present family-meeting scene is a past and, more importantly, when a certain “disaster” had already transpired. In a way, this is Teresa’s double vision at work in which, first, she is completely riveted by Hector in this family gathering, but, second, she also seems to be aware of a different future where there is no Hector (Ojano, “Female Teleological Subject” 196).

### **Ethical Possibility in the Time of Alterity**

Next, I look into temporalities at work in the second scene. But first, the context: at this point in the novel, it has become clear that Teresa is the brain of the Basbas political camp. Here in particular, when Hector goes missing in a plane crash, she takes the helm of the propaganda campaign, showing herself to be the brawn as well of Hector’s power grab plan. Hence, this scene, where she is airlifted back home from a successful mission in the northern provinces, albeit with a seriously injured bodyguard, San Custodio, one of the Diablos. It must be noted that the love affair that she would have with the comatose San Custodio is hinted at in this passage but this will be a matter for another discussion. Instead, I focus on her vision of a fire which she augurs in the defeated figure of her bodyguard (“Female Teleological Subject” 198):

Teresa glanced at San Custodio propped up and belted on a backseat. Eyes closed, his head rested on his right shoulder -- which was *how he would be*, Teresa saw, until the day, oh how far into the future, the day a torrent of people, crashing through the doors of her home, found him, still asleep, still young, but half aware, as his suddenly upright member showed, of the tremendous excitement boiling in the streets, in the house, outside the door of his vestal room; the crowd, not knowing what to make of this zombie and mistaking him for an inanimate instrument of perversion, consigned him to a bonfire of portraits, memos, cushions, and tables in the yard.... *But in between, through the years...* Teresa took her eyes from the premonition and considered the sky,

which was slowly darkening from blue to gray, as roils of agitated air began to attack the helicopter. (Rosca 125; emphasis added)

Here, we note the paranoia in this world that to Teresa, even the sky darkening and the air getting agitated are ominous threats to it. And of course, we see the real threat in this double vision of Teresa. Specifically the threat is in her “premonition” of this different time of a fire which ties back in with the “disaster” mentioned in the earlier passage. And let’s say it once and for all that this “*day...far into the future, the day a torrent of people [would] crash[] through the doors of her home*” is an obvious allusion to the People Power Revolution, particularly when the crowd marched into the Malacañang palace.

Teresa’s vision is a threat because of one important thing: it is a future where the Basbas rule is already defunct as a result of the anti-dictatorship resistance. This temporal otherness is what the narrative suppresses. But Teresa, despite being duty-bound to Hector, is the one who continually gets diverted to these visions or, to say it another way, the one who involuntarily injects into the present, this “beyond” or “elsewhere.”

To visualize how the time from “beyond” or “elsewhere” bears on the present, I want to quickly turn to the installation work of Renee Green, whose art is one of Homi Bhabha’s examples for his argument that the location of culture -- meaning, the location of emancipatory meaning -- is in spaces or instances of movement and contingency (Bhabha 4). In particular, I wish to take up Green’s art installation “Site of Genealogy” in the attic, which is part of her *Out of Site* exhibition in the 1990s. As an African American, Green often employs her art as a critique of racism in the US. And in the attic, we see such polarities or hierarchies represented by the two flimsy and slightly-curved pillars in the foreground, already being challenged from the get-go (Bhabha 3). That is, tracing these lines of demarcation, we are also simultaneously redirected elsewhere, according to what attaches and detaches to these dividing lines. There is so much motion, fluidity, texture, depth that assail and, in effect, decenter or redirect these divisions or inequalities. And finally there is the light. Sure, there is a lamp that is lit inside the attic but note that there is light coming through the windows as well, as in, light coming from beyond. This is to say then that what is “beyond” or what is “elsewhere” illuminates the present. To put it in spatio-temporal terms, what is elsewhere or beyond is also in the here and now.

Going back to *TB*, we can then say that the coinciding of the future with the present and past as heterogeneous temporal elements is the impossibility that becomes possible in the character of Teresa. Her gendered consciousness is the temporal otherness or alterity that shatters the Basbas illusion of eternal time or the time of fascism. But let us be clear. Teresa is thoroughly culpable for being a hardened Basbas enabler and loyalist. Her name *Tikloptuhod*, a compound Tagalog word coinage of Rosca meaning ‘bended knee,’ suggests her resignation to her unconditional subordination to Hector. But to be cheeky about it, she bends down to Hector but does not bend over, given that she is a resistant gendered consciousness who has this queer grasp of history as difference, as an alterity. As such, we can consider *TB* to be Rosca’s feminist innovation of political satire into a gendered satire. What necessitates the telling of the story of a future dictator is the possibility of transgressing it. This is the emancipatory aim of her gendered satire, which is to make possible a different world beyond the world of fascism in anticipation of true social justice.

From the start, Rosca’s motivation for writing is already an ethical grounding for her creation. Rosca, writing a narrative about oppression from the point of view of the oppressor, evokes Martin Luther King’s exhortation in “Beyond Vietnam” to take up the painful “but no less necessary task [of] speak[ing] for those who have been designated as our enemies,...to understand their feelings even if we do not condone their actions” (King qtd. in Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 324). As Rosca’s readers, we are furthermore challenged to “imagine [a world through the eyes of] the other who does not resemble the self” (*Aesthetic Education* 324).

As I hope to have shown in the process of our reading earlier, when we transgress or breach limits of our understanding or of our political beliefs, when we acknowledge the lives of strangers or enemies, when we submit to what is unsure or unknown -- in other words, when we experience alterity or otherness, all of which are encapsulated in the concept of *al haq*, the truth -- we give rise to an ethical moment or possibility. This is what literary encounter or aesthetic education offers us: ethical possibilities which we can only experience uniquely or as singularities; but moments which cannot be apprehended, calculated, or systematized. Ethical possibilities are “unavailable to evidence but necessary for [a life-affirming existence -- or a life for others --] to be possible” (*Aesthetic Education* 297).

## Of Maids, Tyrants, and Empty Time

I will now turn to an analysis of the scene of the family meeting with the maids in *MIM* in the hope of eliciting the movie's notion of time. Furthermore, I will explore the implication of the unitary or homogeneous time of the world of the Marcoses which *MIM* advocates in a thoroughgoing manner. At the outset, I wish to note here how the movie foregrounds oldest daughter Imee Marcos (Christine Reyes) as the lens through which we see all events unfold. The opening of the movie shows her hurriedly ending the medical trip of her family to Singapore after a worrisome phone call from her father, Ferdinand E. Marcos (Cesar Montano). The scene then cuts to actual clips of the press conference held by Enrile and Ramos, announcing their military coup against Marcos as well as to a footage of Cory Aquino, speaking in front of a civil disobedience rally in Cebu. Conspicuously, this 10-minute opening omits the context of why Marcos was being beleaguered left and right by military defections and public protests.

Subsequently in the movie, Imee upon getting home, immediately accosts her father who is weakly consuming his meal in the drawing room, for being too passive and "trusting" despite the betrayal of his cabinet and military officials. To this, he responds calmly that things will right themselves from then on, as he turns over the control and decision-making to Imee. For historically informed audiences, this scene obfuscates the facts of the post-snap elections of 1986. Instead, the scene diverts the attention to Marcos as this sickly, softspoken, and benign political leader. Indeed, it reduces history to the image of a defenseless Marcos unjustly faced with an imminent ouster by his opponents and his renegade government and military. Only in this manner of mystifying history can the character of Imee assume moral high ground as her father's rescuer.

After this scene of the bequeathing of power from father to daughter, Marcos calls for a family meeting. Noticing that one of the maids is missing, he asks for Biday (Beverly Salviejo) and beckons to her to bring Imee up to speed on the goings-on outside the palace. Biday then cherry-picks details from news she has overhead and contrives an account about an impending takeover by the Aquino family, side by side with the rebellion of the military. The casting of the comedian Salviejo, an Ilocana herself -- including the direction and scoring that surround her acting -- makes it obvious that Biday's ethnic expressiveness, signaled by her Iloko interjections and swearing, mainly functions to give the scene comic relief. It goes without saying that as an Ilocana maid, Biday's class and gendered otherness intersect with her ethnic identity to give the Marcos household the

appearance of being inclusive or even representative of a regional or minority culture. (Interestingly, the acting of Montano fell short of conveying the Ilocano identity of the real-life Marcos). The fact that Marcos defers to her, presumably because she keeps up with radio news and is therefore in the know, makes it look like she has a voice. But on the whole, she provides no more than gossip -- one that is devoid of any historical nuance or grounding in the political and economic catastrophes that characterized the time of the dictatorship.

Far from being agentive, the figure of Biday is empty of the lived experience of poverty and suffering that brought forth the political unrest at the time. To put it another way, Biday is a mere figure or token of otherness, villainizing critics and political rivals of the Marcoses and voicing nothing but her sycophantic praises for her master and the little bosses. Like Rosca's Teresa Tikloptuhod, Biday is an extension of the master or of the self but this time, empty of any historical experience that would give her any independent consciousness. Altogether then, the chorus of the maids led by Biday functions to not only tell but also validate a seemingly impartial victim narrative of the Marcoses. The maid's narrative myopically construes the unrest among cabinet officials, the military, and the people as unwarranted actions against the Marcos family. It leaves out immediate historical facts that led to such unrest, including the fact that the US Senate, through an international fact-finding body, ascertained the results of the 1986 snap elections to be "invalid" because "rigged by the ruling party" ("A Path" 1; "Remembering"; "EDSA").

Adding another dimension to the scene is the camera work, that is, it establishes the temporal dimension in which Yap intends to encase the entire plot. The family-meeting scene begins with a long take of the entrance into the room where the rest of the family and the maids have gathered, as well as of their conversations. Without any cuts, the camera focuses on each family member, on the left side of the screen, and also on the maids, standing opposite the seated family, as they selectively discuss the unrest outside the palace. This non-cut, circling take pulls the spectators, as witness-collaborators, as it were, into this seamless univocal world, where only the time of the self, or the ahistorical Marcos temporality, exists. And when Imee stands up and takes a step beyond the rug to join the ranks of the maids on the other side of the room, she seals the circle. Resolutely, Imee now takes on the helm by proclaiming her debut mission as her father's protegee: vindicating her father against his opponents by expediting his inauguration as the rightful president of the country. Here, we must note that



the drama--of Imee confronting the odds unfairly stacked against her father--openly disregards publicly available facts that Marcos, exploiting his powers as the then-incumbent president, was declared the winner as soon as seven days after the snap elections of February 1986 and that he was sworn into office on February 25 in Malacañang ("Remembering"; "EDSA"). Therefore, to set the record straight, although *MIM* claims that Imee's father was deprived of his victory, the truth was that Marcos "claimed victory" (Sanchez) in the face of the International Observers Delegation's report released on February 19 of the incumbent party's nationwide electoral fraud and cheating ("A Path" 45; "Remembering"). Nevertheless, disinformation is the stuff of this post-truth movie production. With such a spin on Martial Law history, Yap is able to foreground Imee as the heart and brain of the supposed crusade of the Marcos family for justice and vindication.



*Figure 1. "Maid in Malacañang / Behind-the-scenes..." by Viva Films features snippets of the rehearsals and the camera work, resembling the final take of the family meeting scene. Here the camera focuses on Biday in her monologue (00:19:08).*



Figure 2. The camera then circles around the room to the Marcos family, attuned to Biday's gossip ("Maid in Malacañang Behind-the-scenes...", 00:10:58).



Figure 3. Ending the family meeting scene, Imee (Christine Reyes) rises to the occasion to have her father sworn into the presidency. The camera then foregrounds her as the Marcos family's feminist heroine ("Maid in Malacañang / Behind-the-scenes...", 00:00:46).

From the start, with the first of its ten chapters titled “Rebelde,” *MIM* sets out to depict Imee as the figure of the quintessential modern woman -- responsible and loyal but also liberated and outspoken. On the one hand, she appears as this jet-setting mother and wife who tirelessly juggles these duties with taking care of her father. Dressed like “the material girl” Madonna and accompanied in the background by a remake of Sampaguita’s rock song hit in the 1980s, “*Nosi Balasi*,” she is, on the other, spotlighted as this daring feminist heroine of her family’s fight. Unequivocally, *MIM* flaunts Imee as the consummate image of a “rebel” for her cause of reclaiming justice for her wrongfully persecuted father. Thus, the movie tries to pull its audience into the unitary time and univocal narrative of the Marcoses in which they are both victims and heroes in their nation of traitors.

But from a historical perspective, *MIM* is a shameless project in its theft of the vocabulary of the anti-dictatorship resistance. In attributing a *rebelde* status to the Marcos heroine whose cause is to clear the Marcos name, *MIM* arrogates for itself the ideals of the People Power revolution: human rights, social justice, and democracy. Ambitiously, the movie also tries to negate the actual Maoist armed rebellion that formidably fought the US-backed Marcos dictatorship. But as a case of Butler’s degraded speech, where “no” means “yes,” *MIM* has the ironic effect of hollowing out the ideals it steals, thereby becoming, literally, empty rhetoric. On top of this epistemic appropriation, the movie also egregiously omits any reference to the dictatorship and Martial Law, which were, in the first place, the actual circumstances that pushed the Marcoses to such a dilemma!

### Moral Rot and the New Digital Entertainment

I wish to continue with my interrogation of the digital movie elements and techniques employed by Yap in his depiction of the People Power crowd’s march into Malacañang as a senseless raid by looters and rioters. In this case, I investigate how tools for cinematic depiction of history, particularly of mass dissent or otherness exemplified by the EDSA People Power Revolution of 1986, may become or fall short of becoming an ethical production. The scene for analysis happens toward the end of *MIM*. At this point in the movie, Marcos and the entire family are surreptitiously escorted outside of the palace. On their heels are the rioters who would later eventually break into the palace. The last to take her leave, Imee remorsefully gives her final reminders to the maids and the palace attendants who were rounded up in a room. Hysterically, she instructs each

of them to cut a piece of fabric from her mother Imelda's yellow gowns to tie around their heads so that they can blend in with the arriving rioters. As she exits with her little boy in tow, she begs them tearfully and inconsolably to save themselves.

As such, the maids and staff are left in the palace lobby in their last stand. A brief spat ensues between them and the protesters after the latter break into the palace doors. But to allay the suspicions of the ghoulish that they are

“*maka*-Marcos” or pro-Marcoses, one of the maids, Santa (Karla Estrada) yells that they support “Cory!” and raises her hand with the “L” sign. To prove her point, she yanks a rock from the grip of the lead protester and hurls it violently at the glass doors of the palace hall. Finally, as the maids join in the chanting of “Cory! Cory! Cory!”, they also make their way into the crowd and toward their escape.

Such a glimpse into Yap's unintelligent depiction above sums up his attempt to dislodge the event of the EDSA People Power Revolution from history. He erases the democratic nature of this historic and bloodless uprising and, unsurprisingly, creates a Hollywoodized caricature of the People Power crowd as a torch-carrying mob, monolithically dressed in yellow. Thus, the EDSA People Power Revolution is villainized. Meanwhile, the Marcos family appear as the sacrificial victims of the ungrateful Filipinos. One of the impressionistic sequences of this scene amplifies this point. Here, the blissfully waltzing pair of Imelda (Ruffa Gutierrez) and Marcos are layered on top of the yellow-clad rioters turning the palace upside down and, remarkably, smashing a bust of Marcos. In the background, the soft and raspy song “*Traydor na Pagibig*” (Marion Aunor) plays, together with the voice-over of the real-life Imelda. In her voiced recollection of her conversation with her husband, Imelda narrates:

Sabi niya [Marcos], “Now that I'm president, I'll build a house for the Filipino people. You'll make it a home.” Then I reflected, what makes a home? Love.

Of course, from a historical perspective, the irony that Yap signals is unconvincing. It attributes gratuitous violence to the People Power Revolution (known historically and worldwide as peaceful and bloodless) as the Marcoses claim for themselves the values of filial loyalty and integrity, and ultimately, of kindness and love. As such, not only does this movie, as I have shown in the first scene, steal the vocabulary of the anti-dictatorship movement but it also freely deflects the atrocities of the Marcos dictatorship's violence onto the ordinary Filipino citizens. This kind of

dichotomy or logic only works if history is denied. In turn, this kind of historical denialism or distortion is only doable in the era of post-truth when broadcast and post-broadcast media continue to be instrumentalized to, arguably, successfully erase or repress the historical and moral atrocities, injuries, and trauma caused by the Marcos regime and the dictatorship.

In the end, *MIM*, in villainizing and discrediting the People Power Revolution, renders us ordinary Filipinos invisible to ourselves and instead, puts front and center a Marcos figure -- whether Dictator, wife, daughter, or son is a version of the same or of the self -- as the hero/heroine. In this case, *MIM*, epitomizing the mainstream movie industry, becomes a classic form of epistemic violence or a subordination, if not a stifling, of grassroots voices and realities to the twin discourse of the nation-state and imperialism. That is, the post-truth era is marked by mainstream entertainment media serving as the platform for morally bankrupt politicians. In our midst are new forms of deception or artsy dramas about the self and its fascist power in which any acknowledgment of shared history or knowledge or of moral responsibility for others -- that is, of an ethics of relationality -- is unheard of.



*Figure 4. Darryl Yap's caption of the raid of the Malacañang palace scene in MiM as "akyat-bahay 1986, MAGNANAKAW NG KAPANGYARIHAN, AKYAT-MALACAÑANG" is his use of Facebook in tandem with the movie to distort and discredit the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution.*

For good measure, the actual documentary clips of the people pouring into the Malacañang grounds that Yap adds to this montage are meant to corroborate the Marcos narrative. The scenes he culls from this documentary feature the 1986 People Power crowd pushing themselves through the palace gates, climbing over roofs and jumping over a staircase, searching through drawers, a refrigerator, offices, halls, and the entire palace from top to bottom. There is also a clip of people punching and kicking at the portraits of Imelda and Marcos. These scenes are corroborated by a 1986 *New York Times* account of how, advancing into Malacañang, a multitude of people took out their indignation on the couple's portraits and on the luxury and wealth in the palace. The article also describes a man shouting "This [Malacañang] is ours now," pertaining to the people's aim of reclaiming social justice for their fellow Filipinos. Most importantly, the piece takes



note of "little looting or unruly behavior" among the "huge crowd" (Butterfield).

However, it is clear that Yap intends to keep the extracted footages detached from history so that, when juxtaposed with the staged mayhem in *MIM*, the EDSA People Power Revolution will seem like an unprovoked and meaningless barbarity. And yet at one point in the extracted documentary, a protester, eating something from the fridge that he had opened, points to the fridge's contents and looks straight to the camera to say, as if explaining, that "these were stolen from the Filipino people." For a split-second, the fourth wall is broken as an actual 1986 protester speaks to the graft and theft of the Marcoses which is precisely part of the context being repressed by the movie. Contrary to the logic of sameness imposed by Yap, this utterance, albeit fleeting, is nonetheless a different -- because historical -- consciousness that shatters the unitary time of the Marcoses.

Furthermore, there is a quick juxtaposition of two iconoclastic moments that unintentionally fractures the narrative of the self. The first instance is in Yap's dramatization of the Dilawans' wrecking of the bust of Marcos as the couple dances; and the second is the documentary footage of the enraged People Power crowd destroying the portraits of Marcos and Imelda. Here, Yap wishes to dismiss in passing these repeated scenes as nothing more than a show of, according to the background song, "*traydor na pag-ibig*" [treacherous love] and, as I said above, of senseless mob violence. But in that case, he also aligns them with an earlier instance when Yap divests of any meaning the initial shock of the palace glass doors being broken by the maid Santa. Altogether, Yap seems to downplay the two scenes of iconoclasm to the level of feebleness of the maid's fake action. He clearly disregards the historicity of these actions. That is, he seems to think that a movie, as a form of narrative control, can stifle the historical grounding of such displays of mass indignation and irreverence against authority. But what the scenes actually convey is a discerning, meaning, not an indiscriminate, collective will to desecrate and destroy symbols and structures of fascism which, simultaneously, opens up the possibility for political change and transformation. As a commentator on the politics of religious destruction of idols has said, the irreverence and destruction in iconoclasm are also "transformative" and generative (Carnes 753). In a political register, the case of *MIM*, where there is profaning and destruction of what was revered, is also a spatio-temporal rupture toward a new political sphere. Thus, if there is anything of interest at all in this otherwise simplistic and awkwardly acted depiction of the people's incursion into the palace, it

is the insertion of these documentary clips which betray the writer-director's presumptuousness and mendacity in his curatorial choices.

In the final analysis, *MIM* is no more than what Walter Benjamin has called aestheticization of politics (241). Indeed, we see new filming techniques and technology used in *MIM*. However, instead of conveying any emancipatory meaning, Yap employs these film innovations to distract his audience from real-life inequalities, exploitation, and suffering. Put another way, the educational or instructive capacity of art or film is deliberately blunted by new technologies of propaganda. In effect, in Yap's attempt, new digital entertainment becomes another form of curtailment or repression of dissent and decolonizing creativity.

### Ethical Imperative in the Time of Post-truth: A Conclusion

As I hope to have shown above, ethics in artistic and cultural production is a rather straightforward (than esoteric) issue. Spivak's attempt to situate it in the indigenous Arabic concept of *al haq*, meaning, the truth of one's responsibility for others (*Aesthetic Education* 341), reveals its simultaneous simplicity and nuance. Following her point, ethics in art and culture may be understood as the process of coming to truth through an artistic investigation of one's life-affirming relation with others. In my analysis of *TB* and *MIM* as Martial Law narratives, I have demonstrated the striking recognizability of ethical and unethical art in terms of the artistic representation of time. Specifically, Rosca's fictional experimentation with time as heterogeneous is her avowal of her responsibility for others in conceiving of another possibility beyond fascism, and Yap's cinematic manipulation of time as unitary or as a totality forecloses the imagination for social justice and change. Thus, on one level, we can say that the narrative plot about the dictatorship can be told for either ethical or self-serving ends. But on another level, we also see how this--two narratives, 30 years apart, having the same story about the dictatorship--is more than a case of a stolen plot but a testament to how entrenched this decades-long culture industry has been in the Philippines.

That is to say, the Marcos family's instrumentalization of mass media and popular entertainment as forms of mass deception and control was already, in the Martial Law and post-dictatorship years, the problem that Rosca was directly contending with when she was writing *TB*. And according to Jonathan Beller, the use and censorship of art, culture, and mass media for Marcos propaganda is the legacy of the postwar years of the 1950s, when then Philippine Commonwealth imported a US-made mass



media industry and “utilized [it] for the expropriation of the imagination” of its captive audience, the ordinary Filipinos (Beller 38; Ojano, “Myth” 23). In other words, the imperialist weaponization of media continues to this day, only that if in Rosca’s time the government was “waging [a] war with images” against media audiences (Beller 38), then in the post-truth phase of the twenty-first century, the political elite is now waging a disinformation war against digital media consumers.

As the saying goes, truth is the first casualty in any kind of war. We see this unfold in *MIM*, where Yap self-righteously employs digital film aesthetics and techniques to turn the truth of the dictatorship on its head. Depicting the dictatorship as a family drama with the dictator and his family as the protagonists, *MIM*, therefore, stands as a benchmark for mendacity in Philippine digital media in the post-truth age. On one hand, as an informed public, we see through the lies of movie propaganda like *MIM*, obviously intent on increasing the Marcos clout and on discrediting political rivals. As Ambeth Ocampo has argued in his review, *MIM*, justifying itself on the notion of history as *chismis* [gossip], has nothing serious to contribute to debates about Martial Law. But on the other hand, as Hyvönen claims, we cannot dismiss the extent to which “[m]edia... structures our reality” (45). Specifically, media constitutes our consciousness, including our emotional and social attachments. This way, it contributes to the creation of the social (Hyvönen 45) and, in this case, the political.

The 2018 investigative research of Jonathan Ong and Jason Vincent Cabañes, *Architects of Networked Disinformation*, cogently exhibits the Marcos social media disinformation campaign as a case in point for how politicians can confuse and deceive the public and, ultimately, change or discredit collective memory and history. According to Ong and Cabañes, even before the 2016 presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, the Marcos camp’s #IlibingNa Facebook campaign had already been underway as part of the Marcos political “rebranding.” The success of this online image rebranding contributed to the eventual burial of Marcos’ remains in the *Libingan Ng Mga Bayani* or Heroes’ Cemetery in the same year. Despite the strong, nationwide opposition, the burial of “a dictator... as a hero” became a reality as a result of this virtual infrastructure or this disinformation machinery between national politicians and the social media industry (Ong and Cabañes 57).

Subsequently in 2022, Ong and others came out with *Parallel Public Spheres*, another investigation that partly delves into the workings of what the researchers call “influence operations,” masterminded by

politicians who recruited personalities, celebrities, and creative workers in the social media and entertainment industry. The researchers argue that the artistic versatility and eloquence of the new digital content which came out of such “influence operations” not only polarized but also influenced the voting public in the 2022 presidential elections (Ong et al. 8). *MIM*, a result of the collaboration between Senator Imee Marcos and Yap, is a key example in this study. Building upon the earlier disinformation campaign, *MIM* brings to light the evolving tactics of the Marcos-Yap partnership in their venture into digital content and entertainment production which allowed them to side-step fact-checking measures (14). *MIM*, along with Yap’s social media promotional gimmicks for the movie, is a part of this “world-building” phase (Ong et al. 19) or stylizing a supposed “deep story” about Marcos and his family’s untold victimhood in the hands of the political opposition and activists during Martial Law (35). According to Senator Imee Marcos, *MIM* was only meant to let the public hear “their side of the story” (Roper; Ong et al. 35). However, all evidence tackled in this paper, so far, points to the contrary. This is to say that the gradual but complete return of the Marcoses to national politics, culminating in the installation of Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. to the presidency in 2022, was the result of the Marcos camp’s consequential deployment of digital media and entertainment to sway public opinion and legitimize their reclaiming of power.

And yet, not all is lost even in the proliferation of media disinformation that distorts and denies grassroots history in the country; even in the ubiquity of degraded speech in broadcast and social media that justifies the ethnic cleansing by white supremacists. In her solidarity message to Palestinians last February 2024 for the *FORSEA Forces of Renewal Southeast Asia*, Spivak conveys how academic scholarship can help achieve social justice, as elusive and impossible as it may be in the midst of the genocide in Gaza. She stresses, “To effect real change, we must take advantage of every opportunity to make genocide generally recognizable as a historical phenomenon” (“Colonizer’s Violence”). We can take a leaf from her work and, heeding her sobering call to action, continue to strive in making legible the patterns of cultural mendacity of the political elites in the practice of cultural criticism as a social engagement. The task must take on a collective nature, where layers of artifice that deceive everyday media consumers are unpacked and peeled off, revealing the accountability of the “chief architects of disinformation” (Ong et al. 57). “To effect real change,” we must regain our bearings and involve our

communities in the preliminary task of making such epistemic violence “recognizable as a historical phenomenon.”

## Notes

1. This question or issue was part of UNITAS' conference concept for the *Ethical Literary and Cultural Criticism Conference* held at the University of Sto. Tomas in Manila on November 23-24, 2023. This paper is the outcome of the lecture-workshop that I delivered during the said conference. My deepest gratitude to the workshop participants especially to the Literature students of UST, UNITAS editors and reviewers, and the UST Literature Faculty for making this paper infinitely richer. I am also indebted to my graduate and undergraduate students in De La Salle University Manila who have greatly contributed to earlier conceptualizations of this paper. Finally, I also thank the workshop participants in the *Writing the Classroom 6: Never Forget: Teaching Martial Law in Art Classes* held at the De La Salle University, Manila on May 16-17, 2024, where this paper was also presented, with permission from UNITAS.
2. To be clear, Marcos lifted Martial Law in 1981 in response to the international community's pressure toward democratic "normalization." As such he would proclaim his post-Martial Law government to be a "new era" for his "New Republic" (Sodusta and Palongpalong 285). However, the change soon proved to be in name only as Marcos' control and power over the government and economy, civil liberties, press freedom, among others stayed the same. See Jesucita Sodusta and Artemi Palongpalong, "Philippines in 1981: Normalization and Instability." *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1982, pp. 285-299.
3. The passages I cite here and in the subsequent section of this paper, which I mark with the parenthetical page references, are modified versions of parts of my chapter on Rosca's *Twice Blessed* in my doctoral dissertation.

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# Neither Paradise Lost nor the Promised Land

Anti-Nostalgic and Anti-Utopian Visions of Past, Present, and Future in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents*

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## Abstract

Octavia Butler's speculative fiction novel, *Parable of the Talents* is a time-shifting narrative that moves between a fictional near-past (dystopian) and our possible future (disastrous, but then hopeful). True to Butler's own principled ambivalence, her postapocalyptic novel eschews facile and overdetermining ideologies of any sort: left or right, political or religious. The novel's refusal of dominant political ideologies makes it both anti-nostalgic and anti-utopian.

Through the methodology of literary analysis and hermeneutics (interpreting the story against the overdetermining lens of either political ideology), I show that *Parable of the Talents* rejects both conservative and progressive narratives about our past, present, and possible future. Conservative nostalgia for an idealized past that never really existed is negatively depicted in the novel. Progressive utopianism is likewise rejected: first, by depicting the dystopian reality that results from a utopia-promising moral crusade; then, more broadly, through dramatizing the horrific drawbacks of nominally righteous causes.

Instead, by offering dire warnings about a bleak future should current trends continue, *Parable of the Talents* figures prominently as cautionary tale. Fortunately, the novel also provides us with a roadmap for surviving tyranny and creating a freer, more rational, inclusive, and tolerant society in the years ahead.

## Keywords

Octavia Butler, science fiction, speculative fiction, conservatism, progressivism, utopianism



**Neither Paradise Lost nor the Promised Land:  
Anti-Nostalgic and Anti-Utopian Visions of Past, Present, and  
Future in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents***

Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents* is a work of speculative fiction (sf) set in a dystopian near-future. The characters of the novel must survive in a world ravaged by a global pandemic, and in a hollowed-out democracy now ruled by a fundamentalist demagogue. In response to the collapse of democratic institutions and social trust precipitated by the plague, the protagonist, Olamina founds a naturalized religion, one that does not require belief in the supernatural. Around this religion a community begins to form, Earthseed, whose members are diverse, tolerant, and open-minded. For their difference they are persecuted as heretics and cultists. Their sin: refusing to conform to the doctrinaire orthodoxy of religious and ideological fundamentalists.

What is striking about this futuristic novel (published in 1998), is the extent to which the future it depicts so eerily resembles our current reality. In the novel, the trend of rising political and cultural polarization leads to identity-based tribalism, and the persecution of opposing views and religions. The populace in the novel elects an autocratic ruler whose populist campaign slogan is "make America great again" (*Parable of the Talents* 20). Among other current trends coming to disastrous fruition in Butler's fictional universe are the crisis of public schools, the decline of reliable journalism, and surging intolerance of minorities, immigrants, and diverse views. Though a work of speculative fiction, *Parable of the Talents* couldn't feel more real. This in large part because the novel extrapolates from contemporary social, economic, and political trends to depict the dystopian future we are headed for should these trends continue.

However, though reflecting the worst aspects of our polarized politics, socioeconomic challenges, and rising identitarian tribalism, it would be a mistake to classify *Parable of the Talents* as a work of literary realism. Certainly, the novel embodies a gritty-realist aesthetic in its believable action, authentic feel, and psychological realism. It is also sociopolitically realistic. But ultimately, *Talents* stands as a dystopian and postapocalyptic sf novel, a narrative that goes beyond merely depicting present-day sociopolitical trends. More pointedly, *Parable of the Talents* amplifies those trends, extends their trajectory, and dramatizes their possible future consequences for society and humanity.

To invoke an optics metaphor, the novel does mirror our sociopolitical reality, it also *magnifies* troubling social, political, and economic trends in the present—so as to paint a grim, dystopian future. In so doing, the narrative conjures up an imagined dark future, a narrative device for offering indirect commentary on troubling contemporary trends. The novel is thus neither mirror (a “realist,” mimetic, or nonfiction depiction of our actual present), nor crystal ball (predicting—or claiming to predict—an unavoidable future). Rather, it is a magnifying glass, whose concentrating powers increase our awareness of existing social forces and trajectories that we may have become accustomed to, or whose danger we fail to see.

In addition to amplifying present-day trends, the novel also turns its magnifying lens on episodes from the past. For example, *Parable of the Talents* resurrects historical events such as the Crusades, concentration camps, and witch hunts—three of history’s most iconic never-again stories—to further amplify the novel’s social commentary on current social and political realities. These never-again stories from history stand as a warning against troubling trends in our present-day world: such as, rising intolerance and polarization, as well as greater political, religious, and ideological extremism. Thus, *Parable of the Talents* invokes lessons from the past to cast withering commentary on tribalism and intolerance in the world of the novel...but also to warn us (present-day readers) about our possible future should we follow a similar path.

By offering dire warnings about a bleak future should current trends continue, *Parable of the Talents* figures prominently as cautionary tale. However, though warning us about dangerous social and political trends, *Talents* does not pretend to give us all the answers, suggesting instead that there is no one way to fix a broken world, and no one way the future should look. Though anti-nostalgic in its rendering of the past, *Parable of the Talents* also rejects utopian fantasies about the future. True to Butler’s own principled ambivalence, the novel eschews facile and overdetermining ideologies of any sort: left or right, political or religious.

The novel’s refusal to either romanticize the past or idealize a utopian future stands as a realist rebuke to prevailing assumptions—on both the left and the right—about the cultural and political functions of history. Conservative thinkers romanticize the past, urging us to get back to what made us great at some earlier enchanted era, such as the moment of the nation’s founding. In contrast, critical theorists on the far left excoriate the past as a way to romanticize the future, promising a utopia of perfect equality and social justice...if we will just follow the precepts of the right

critical theories, submit to their political views, use politically-correct speech, adhere to ideologically-correct identity narratives—and make related ideological commitments. Succinctly put, conservatives want to take us back to paradise; critical theorists promise to take us to heaven.

Critical theorists on the progressive or far left, such as Frederic Jameson tend to view the interpretation of history as a tool for transforming the present, and thus creating a better future—better, that is, by the lights of their (in Jameson’s case, Marxist) ideological commitments. Emblematic of this view, Jameson writes of the argument and aims of his 1981 book that, “*The Political Unconscious* accordingly turns on the dynamics of the act of interpretation,” and “Interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in *rewriting* a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code.” (*The Political Unconscious* 1937; emphasis added). More to the point, the teleological purpose for deploying this critical methodology—a hermeneutics of suspicion applied to everything from literary texts and culture to the interpretation of history—is to achieve “a dialectical or totalizing, properly Marxist ideal of understanding” (Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 1937), the ultimate aim of which is to “see[s] history in the salvational perspective of some ultimate liberation” (Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 1959). Liberation, one presumes, from capitalism—or perhaps some version of what many critical theorists today might call “neoliberalism”—which may or may not entail associated (if not always intersectional) discourses of power as instruments of oppression and domination.

The countervailing assumption, on the Burkean right, is that the past was better than the present in some sacrosanct way (or at least certain founding, social contracts were), and that we are obligated to the social order that preceded us. For conservatives and reactionaries, utopia is a golden age in the receding past (paradise lost), rather than an idealized future (the promised land). As opposed to the progressive left’s preoccupation with oppressive structures of the past (which have led to a “fallen” present), the conservative impulse maintains a certain reverence toward the idylls (and idols) of the past—whether conceived as a pastoral past, or simply as deference to a preexisting social order.

The preservationist sensibility inclines conservative intellectuals toward a reverence for the selfsame histories, precedents, and continuities that progressives and critical theorists—through a variety of postmodern, Marxist, and related critical methodologies and radical critiques—are intent on interrogating and, in some cases, dismantling. Conservative veneration for the past also inclines conservative thinkers to cite precedent (or a

preexisting social order) as justification for maintaining the status quo. As conservative philosopher Roger Scruton writes, “For conservatives, all disputes over law, liberty, and justice, are addressed to a historic and existing community. The root of politics, they believe, is *settlement*—the motive in human beings that binds them to a place, the customs, the history, and the people that are theirs” (Scruton 2). It is easy to see how conservative sensibilities of this sort would predispose one to romanticize the past, and even to sanctify it.

While conservatives worship at the altar of tradition, progressives adulate (as an absolute good) radical social change. Where the conservative stance cites history, tradition, and a preexisting social order as justification for the status quo (including existing hierarchies of power, wealth, and status), the progressive stance deploys critical theory and critical methods (such as deconstruction or dialectical materialism) to dismantle such justifications—and to offer progressive alternatives. As such, critical theorists adopt a “hermeneutics of suspicion” toward texts, dominant narratives, and the status quo (including existing institutions, structures, systems, and “knowledge”) in general—and in particular toward the conservative tendency to either sanitize or romanticize the past in defense of the social, political, or economic status quo.

Scruton sums up the acerbity of the progressive (and critical theorist) critique of the conservative vision when writing, “And a whole language has developed with which to abuse those who cling to the social order, the inherited hierarchies, the old and tried conventions” (6). Indeed, the appeal of critical theory to activist scholars and the far left, is that it provides them with the conceptual tools for radically (and in some cases with rebellious glee or acerbity) deconstructing and dismantling the existing social order.

Both sides engage in revisionist history, but toward different ideological ends: conservatives to preserve the status quo and certain traditional beliefs (through ideology-serving narratives about the decline of contemporary culture and society relative to an idealized past); progressives to serve the telos of steering a present tainted by the sins of the past toward the promised land of a progressively-sanctified utopian future. Conservatives tell us we must submit to custom, authority, and a preexisting political-religious order—and that failing to do so is the root cause of apparent social and cultural decay. Progressives tell us we must repent of our past sins, and radically change our political views, so that we can achieve utopia for the masses—if we will just accede to the political and moral mandates that follow from a critical-theory interpretation of history.

*Parable of the Talents* rejects both conservative and progressive narratives—speculative fantasies in their own right—about the past, present, and future. The novel rejects conservative nostalgia for an idealized past that never really existed. And it rejects progressive utopianism too. Rather than proffering utopian schemes or would-be saviors, the novel presents readers with messy realities.

By novel's end the marginalized, underdog protagonist we so admire has become a powerful and dominant figure in her own right, and the once-marginalized religion she founded has likewise consolidated political and institutional power. While Olamina's scheme of migration to the stars offers a sense of purpose to her followers—as well as the promise of social change by leaving behind a shattered world—it will be no utopia. That leaves readers to puzzle out things for themselves, and to reject simplistic slogans, impractical panaceas, and reality-denying paradigms.

Fortunately, Butler's work of imaginative fiction also provides us with a roadmap for surviving tyranny and creating a freer, more rational, inclusive, and tolerant society. *Parable of the Talents* teaches us to recognize and reject the idols of worshipping the past, even as it also rejects the false prophets of utopianism. Rejecting such fantasies, the novel depicts a more practical and less partisan way forward: one in which we adopt a reality-based mindset to deal with the complex, social and political problems engendered by the breakneck pace of change, modernity, and technological disruption. It imagines a society in which we work across our differences—the diversity of views, conflicting values, and cultures of a pluralistic democracy—to achieve peaceful coexistence and human flourishing...and to endow each with the freedom and opportunity to pursue their own version of the good life.

## POX AS PROLOGUE: the Apocalyptic Past, and Anxiety about an Uncertain Future

*Parable of the Talents* is postapocalyptic in both the “disaster world” and chronological senses of the word. The story is set after the time of “the Pox” proper (an abbreviated tag for *apocalypse*): the civilization-collapsing time period (2015-2030) of *Parable of the Talents*' prequel, *Parable of the Sower*. (*Sower* was published in 1993, *Talents* in 1998.) There is no single cause (and no straight-line etiology) to serve as scapegoat for the disastrous state of their world. But there can be no doubt that: “We caused the problems: then we sat and watched as they grew into crises” (*Parable of the Talents* 8). As backstory-character Bankole explains, the Pox was “caused by coinciding climatic, economic, and sociological crises” (8). (Bankole is

a prominent character from *Parable of the Sower* who is killed off early in *Parable of the Talents*—but whose memoir, *Memories of Other Worlds*, appears in *Talents* as text-within-the-text excerpts.) Bankole remarks that since he was born in 1970, “education has become more a privilege of the rich than the basic necessity that it must be if a civilized society is to survive” (8). Indeed, free, universal education through public schooling no longer exists in their world. The enumeration of crushing civic decline such as this, along with the apocalyptic backstory, sketches a searing portrait of the postapocalyptic condition endured by the characters in the novel.

In addition to being post- (post-Pox, postapocalyptic), the novel is also pre- (prequel to an intended sf series). In his magisterial literary biography of Butler, Gerry Canavan categorizes *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* as “prequels” to the “space colony narrative” that Butler had intended to write all along (126). As Canavan explains elsewhere, “Butler’s ambition was to use the Missionary stories to tell multiple stories of interstellar colonization, à la the long-running *future-history* ‘saga’ series of Golden Age SF writers she admired, such as Heinlein and Asimov” (35; emphasis added). In short, both *Sower* and *Talents*, though set in the reader’s near-*future*, were intended to describe the fictional *history* of the off-world colonies that would constitute a later timeline in the planned series.

*Parable of the Talents* is set between the years 2032-2090. The novel begins in 2032: our future. When the novel was published in 1998, the fictional Pox years of 2015-2030 (the novel’s past) was still in the reader’s near-future. For those reading the novel in the present day, however, most if not all of the imagined past of the novel (the Pox years) now overlap with the reader’s present (now only a few years shy of 2032...or perhaps past it—depending on when you are reading this). That fact, though perhaps dating the text a little, is not an obstacle (any more than when reading Orwell’s *1984* in the post-1984 present day) to the reader’s sense that the past of the novel could yet play out as our dystopian future. And thus, the backstory to *Parable of the Talents* still figures as our possible future (what Frederic Jameson, as we shall see, might call “future history,” or the *future-past*), and which characters at a later timeline in the novel look back on as their dystopian past. The dizzying time-and-narrative recursiveness of the novel leads the reader to pay greater attention to troubling social and political trends in our own times, their awareness amplified by the narrative’s refraction of such trends through the prism of dystopian literature.

The time-jumping narration of *Parable of the Talents* serves both to juxtapose attitudes and worldviews as they change over time (including the changing beliefs of the same character at different epochs in society, and at different points in their own lives) as well as to emphasize the extent to which our *interpretation of the past* (the key Jamesonian and critical-theory insight) can significantly determine our perspective about the present—and thus our political stance on the future direction we should take. The timeline of *Parable of the Talents* spans 58 years (the imagined-future years of 2032 to 2090), in addition to jumping back to the “Pox” years (2015 to 2030) for the novel’s backstory. Some chapters are separated by decades, though adjacent in the narrative. Through this narrative time traveling, the novel destabilizes the tidy separation of past, present, and future—much as Faulkner does in his oeuvre, and which he memorialized in his famous dictum on the extent to which the past is alive in the present: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

From there it is a short step to a critical-theorist notion of “future history,” a beguiling concept if you’re a critical theorist—or someone heavily invested in progressive utopianism, and reinterpreting the past to achieve a more perfect future. Jameson introduces the term “future history” (in a somewhat cryptic passage) in an essay well-known to critical sf theorists, “Progress versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?”:

We must therefore now return to the relationship of SF and future history and reverse the stereotypical description of this genre: what is indeed authentic about it, as a mode of narrative and a form of knowledge, is not at all its capacity to keep the future alive, even in imagination. On the contrary, its deepest vocation is over and over again to demonstrate and to dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future, to body forth, through apparently full representations which prove on closer inspection to be structurally and constitutively impoverished, the atrophy in our time of what Marcuse has called the *utopian imagination*, the imagination of otherness and radical difference; to succeed by failure, and to serve as unwitting and even unwilling vehicles for a meditation, which, setting forth for the unknown, finds itself irrevocably mired in the all-too-familiar, and thereby becomes unexpectedly transformed into a contemplation of our own absolute limits.

As is clear from Jameson’s use of the term, the critical-theory concept of “future history” is very different from the “*future-history*” that Butler had in mind as a sf book series (and fictional concept). Jameson’s notion of “future history” seems to indicate a literary genre (a speculative fiction variation on historical fiction) and defamiliarizing way of thinking,



to which the critical theorist adds a social and political purpose (and perhaps also a utopian telos, or end goal): to imagine a radically different future, and—as his essay title suggests—thus propel “progress.” Other critical theorists and postmodernist scholars easily expand the suggestiveness of the term *future history* by at times slipping into metaphor, pure theory, or a playful (but antirealist) notion of time. In addition, many critical theorists (especially those heavily influenced by postmodern theory) hold that all human interactions (as well as what we can know of reality) follow the logic of discourse, in which social reality is reduced to narrative and relations of power. Hence, “the imagination of otherness and radical difference,” that Jameson refers to in “Progress versus Utopia.”

Moreover, the impulse to conceptualize the relationship between past, present, and future as a purely narrative one is particularly tempting to postmodern theorists, given that a slippery notion of time (and time travel) is ubiquitous in sf narrative. (Think: the sf film *Arrival*, based on a short story by Ted Chiang, in which humans encounter an alien species seemingly capable of time travel by virtue of the linguistic artifact that their language lacks a distinction between past, present, and future tenses.) While feeling plausible—at the narrative level of reality, such as in sf novels—the literal conflation of past, present, and future no more conforms to the unidirectional quality of time (in the real world) than does the possibility of actual time travel.

But let us entertain the idea briefly. It could be argued that a future history (or future-past) theme plays out on two different levels in *Parable of the Talents*. The first future-past theme plays out through the diametrically-opposed historicizing gestures of the two competing ideological camps in the novel—one promulgating nostalgic narratives (and urging our return to paradise lost), the other promoting anti-nostalgia by either demonizing the past or focusing on history’s worst moments. Through a propagandist interpretation of historical events, both ideologies (right and left) are appropriating the past in an attempt to gain political power and control the nation’s future.

The second future-past theme entails the anticipation and hope—by readers—of a better future (for both ourselves and the characters in the novel), despite historical missteps, wrongs, and trauma from our past. This hope of a better future is imparted notwithstanding the suffering, misery, and felt despair that—as dystopian lit—is also present in the novel. Despite their bleak setting, dystopian novels are not entirely pessimistic. We triumph in the characters’ resilience and ability to survive, despite their circumstances. What is more, the dystopian angle gives an even sharper



edge to the novel as cautionary tale. The cautionary tale serves as a harbinger of hope, if we will just notice and respond to the danger ahead, we may yet escape the folly of our current path.

As Charlotte Naylor Davis neatly summarizes, “In the *Parables* there are two main reactions to the uncertainty of the future and the terror of the past: Olamina and Earthseed’s declaration of adaptability and hope among the stars (a human future), and Christian America’s rigid hold to a ‘traditional’ homogenous Christianity with hope in eternity” (66). (The fictional “Christian America” in the novel are intolerant fundamentalists, an extremist wing of which kidnaps Earthseeders, treats them inhumanely, and imprisons them in a reeducation camp.) Davis is describing the progressive impulse (which is forward-gazing) as opposed to the reactionary one (which is backward-gazing, though sometimes combined with the religious promise of a supernatural afterlife). Davis continues, “The latter has strictly delineated rules it believes will keep it safe; the former has tenets that speak of movement, diversity, and growth in the face of many dangers” (66).

Butler turns that stark contrast between progressive and reactionary impulses into the central conflict of the novel, which she dramatizes as the ruthless persecution of the Earthseed community by Christian America. By the end of the tale, Earthseed’s numbers have grown and it has become a dominant religion, complete with the moral compromises and other tradeoffs that religious and political power entail. The novel concludes in an open-ended way (travel to the stars and new homelands imminent), anticipating Butler’s intention to write a sequel in which the Earthseeders become colonists on other worlds. *Parable of the Talents* thus ends with a forward-looking gaze: leaving the reader on a hopeful note, but commingled with a good measure of pessimism about the perfectibility of human nature.

The fictional Christian America characters in the novel view the past in much the same way that Mark Lilla describes the prevailing sentiments of the reactionary mind: “Hopes can be refuted. Nostalgia is irrefutable” (xiv). They seek to return the world to an idealized pre-Pox past that never really existed. As we have seen, politically they support an autocratic ruler who vows to “make America great again” (*Parable of the Talents* 20). In contrast to this revanchist notion of a lost national past, the journal entries of Olamina, Bankole, and Larkin/Asha describe a harrowing present reality, and a recent past that is even worse. Their orientation toward the past is anti-nostalgic: taking never-again incidents from both the recent and distant past as a warning of what to guard against. Rather than imagining the past

as some *belle époque* we might understandably yearn to recover, they see the past as the anvil of hard experience that teaches us about the worst of human nature, and how to avoid it. The Pox is past now, but it is also prologue: setting in action forces, attitudes, and beliefs that will shape their future. The long reach of that apocalyptic prologue—and the misery, suffering, and psychic trauma it inflicted—still haunts the post-Pox world.

It could be said *Parable of the Talents* resembles historical fiction in its invention of the past. That is, the novel imagines a narrative past that never existed: the backstory of the Pox years. I do not mean to say that historians completely invent the past, in the way that fiction writers create backstories. Far from it. Nevertheless, to an unavoidable degree, what we call history is largely narrative, albeit one woven from historical facts and judged by its overall coherence and adherence to what we can reliably know about the past.

Nor do I mean to imply that historical fiction is wholly untethered from historical facts and the documented events of known history. Just the opposite: it is the genre's basis in established historical events and real-life historical figures (as well as the accurate rendition of a historical period, and authentic-feeling portrayals of a past society) that give historical fiction its appeal and its punch. For the same reasons, memoir packs more punch (such as the poignant life stories told by Mary Karr and Tara Westover) than if the same life story were presented as a novel: because we are told that it really happened...that it is—with minor embellishments—a true story.

In a similar vein, Butler's extrapolation of actual events make *Parable of the Talents* more narratively- and morally-compelling than it would if taking excessive flights of fancy from the real world. Indeed, it is the grounding of the novel in a world that could realistically be our own that makes the novel so effective as a cautionary tale...as Butler intended. Butler even announced her intent in a 2005 Interview on *Democracy Now!*: "I had been doing the two Parable books—*Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*—and they were what I call cautionary tales: If we keep misbehaving ourselves, ignoring what we've been ignoring, doing what we've been doing to the environment, for instance, here's what we're liable to wind up with" (*Conversations* 222-23). It is rare that a "story first" author so clearly spells out the political "message" she had in mind when writing the story. Butler describes herself in interviews as not very political, and she avoids being tied to a particular political or identity agenda. But in the broad sense, she clearly has a political message, and it is clear which current social and political trends she is critiquing.

## PAST: Lessons from History as Cautionary Tales

As we have seen, Butler reaches into our past to paint a possible dystopian future. Particularly striking are the parallels the narrative draws between never-again events in history and the revival of those atrocities in a future imagined by extrapolating from our present. When members of Earthseed are viciously attacked by men in long tunics and wearing “big white crosses” Olamina writes, “This was something new. / Or something old” (18). The something old she is referring to is, of course, the Crusades: the murderous, ideologically-motivated Holy War that Crusader armies perpetrated on a religious Other, often noncombatants. The Crusades stand in our collective memory as an iconic episode of religious intolerance, and that is exactly the association that Olamina intends to draw.

Olamina goes on to draw other parallels from history: the Inquisition, Ku Klux Klan, and Nazi atrocities. Each of these is emblematic of bigotry, intolerance, and a misguided belief in the righteousness of one’s own cause. Trying to figure out just who their new attackers are, Olamina muses, “It sounds like the sort of thing his people might do—a revival or something nasty out of the past....So now we have another group that uses crosses and slaughters people” (19). The “his” in this passage refers to then-candidate Andrew Steele Jarret, the autocratic demagogue who is soon to be elected president on a “make America great again” campaign slogan. It is stunning for us to read these words post-2016—in a novel that was published in 1998. The eerily prescient nature of the passage—seemingly predicting (in 1998) the campaign slogan and MAGA hats of the real-life 2016 and 2024 Presidential elections—adds to the visceral sense that fictional world she is describing could quite plausibly become our reality.

In the dystopian world of *Parable of the Talents*, Jarret’s supporters “form mobs and burn people at the stake for being witches” (19). As Olamina explains, “A witch, in their view, tends to be a Moslem, a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist” or anyone who “doesn’t quite match Jarret’s version of Christianity” (19). Add unorthodox “cultists” to the list of witches to be persecuted and hunted down. That is, not just members of official religions, but also small groups of dissenters, the unorthodox, or those expressing heterodox views. The Earthseed community (“that cult”) is one of the targets of Jarret’s supporters. Earthseed members are being attacked and murdered. Some of their number, including Olamina, are captured and sent to reeducation camps by cross-wearing zealots.

Of course, witch hunts aren’t really about witchcraft. They’re about enforcing ideological conformity and political obeisance by intimidating

dissidents, political opponents, and nonconformists. At their most fundamental, witch hunts, McCarthyism, and other such purges and purity tests are terror tactics deployed with the same end goal in mind: to make an example of those who espouse opposing views or refuse to conform to the prescribed group identity.

Intolerance can come from any ideological or identity position: from the left as well as the right, from secular as well as religious fundamentalists, from a social location of grievance as well as one of privilege. But in the storyworld of *Parable of the Talents* it comes from the reactionary impulse of Jarret's supporters. They believe in an idealized past, and see any cultural, religious, or competing worldview as a threat. Theirs is a reactionary view, and the reactionary narrative follows a common script. Mark Lilla describes the reactionary script as such: "[the] story begins with a happy, well-ordered state where people who know their place live in harmony and submit to tradition and their God (xii-xiii)."

Reactionaries see this perfect past as threatened by change, modernity, and other "alien ideas" that threaten the harmony and social order. The reactionary becomes convinced that society is rushing toward destruction, and that "Whether the society reverses direction or rushes to its doom depends entirely on their resistance" (xiii). Jarret and his supporters fit this reactionary mold to a T. In Olamina's words, "Jarret insists on being a throwback to some earlier, 'simpler' time....He wants to take us all back to some magical time when everyone believed in the same God, worshipped him in the same way, and understood that their safety in the universe depended on completing the same religious rituals and stomping anyone who was different" (*Parable of the Talents* 19). Of course, as Olamina tartly observes of this idealized past, "There was never such a time in this country" (19).

Butler's pessimism about history and human nature is in the same spirit as America's Founders—men such as James Madison and Alexander Hamilton—who were distrustful of human nature, and therefore of overreliance on personal virtue (rather than democratic structures) to keep rulers from turning into tyrants. Their pessimism about human nature led them to insist on a system of political checks and balances and other democratic guardrails, which they saw as essential to preserving freedom and democracy. Such are the benefits of an anti-nostalgic view of history.

Rather than worship the past, *Parable of the Talents* problematizes our narratives of the past. That is, the novel depicts a healthy skepticism toward the myths and other stories we tell ourselves as a people, and through

which we interpret past and present events...and also imagine possible futures. For example, at novel's end, Asha/Larkin questions the mythology and aura of sainthood that surrounds her mother, offering a counternarrative that details what Olamina sacrificed (including losing her own daughter) in the name of spreading her religion and achieving its purpose of travel to the stars.

That is not to say that—given how deeply flawed people and past deeds can be—there is nothing worth preserving from the past. Far from it. Indeed, the Earthseed community and religion passionately preserve a tradition of religious texts and wisdom literature: “a few members of the community stood up to quote from Earthseed verses, the Bible, The Book of Common Prayer, the Bhagavad-Gita, John Donne. The quotations took the place of the words that friends and family would have said to remember the dead” (*Parable of the Talents* 58). The Earthseed religion also readily absorbs wisdom from long-established scientific laws and theories: “the faces of her god are biological evolution, chaos theory, relativity theory, the uncertainty principle, and, of course, the second law of thermodynamics” (46).

As these passages make clear, Olamina and her Earthseed community, though forward-gazing, also strive to preserve the great gems of the world's cultural and intellectual heritage. That impulse to conserve the best of human creativity, invention, and hard-earned wisdom gives conservatism (in the broadest sense) its name. Though in the narrower sense, the question of what to conserve becomes more political, such as when conservative philosopher Roger Scruton writes that “Conservatism is what its name says it is: the attempt to conserve the community that we have—not in every particular since as Edmund Burke put it, ‘we must reform in order to conserve,’ but in all matters that ensure our community's long-term survival” (12).

Our “long-term survival” is exactly the objective that *Parable of the Talents* is seeking to ensure when raising the ugly specter of never-again events (such as in the “Crusaders” passage) from our past. Though not our whole past, the object of critique is clear: namely, violent incidents of intolerance, imposing our group's religious values on others, and the identity-justified persecution of other groups. These are the never-again stories that most galvanize us, and that we tell (and retell) as warnings and reminders to ourselves in a pluralistic society and world: *this*...we must never repeat.

## PRESENT: from Author's Present to Storyworld to Reader's Present

Academic responses to Butler's fiction tend toward affinity with the novel's anti-nostalgic view of the past: inclined to figure the dominant arc of national history as one tainted by colonialism, bigotry, and other systemic ills, rather than as (in the conservative view) a sacred heritage, *belle époque*, or tradition worthy of preserving. But for critical theorists and progressive-leaning scholars, skepticism about romanticizing or looking favorably to the past does not positively correlate with an equal skepticism of utopianism about the future they wish to steer us toward. If anything, there is a negative correlation: for progressive scholars, the upswing of the anti-nostalgia pendulum arcs toward utopian dreams of a more perfect future. However, the progressive impulse is not entirely future-oriented, as the underlying motivation for utopian thinking is often ideologically-driven discontent with the present. The progressive utopian vision often starts with the deeply-felt sentiment that people (or society) have been corrupted (think: Rousseau) or kept from the perfectibility of their nature by an unjust and miseducating society, culture, institutions, and other systemic structures.

Matthew Mullins, for example, argues that "*Parable of the Sower* calls the history of oppression to mind even as it imagines what the United States will be like thirty years into the future" (26). Mullins goes on to argue that *Kindred* and *Sower*, for example, give us "an opportunity to construct an understanding of time in which the past has a tangible connection to the future and the future can be seen as resolutely historical. Butler creates such historicized futures throughout her fiction to help us see that we cannot comprehend and analyze our present world, let alone imagine a future, if we do not have a well-developed historical consciousness" (28). The imagined future that Mullins has in mind is "a positive change" that deploys the well-honed instrument of historical consciousness to critique a present—that is, the status quo—which is inherently suspect for both the existence of existing hierarchies of power and for its connection to never-again incidents in our history (28). Mullins continues: "At the same time, imagining the future is vital to fully understanding the past. Without such a historical consciousness we will not question the status quo, embrace positive change, or value works of art that encourage us to do both" (28).

Certainly, there should be robust criticism from within and without (as critical theory urges) of whatever political system and cultural beliefs currently hold sway. However, the risk of invoking historical consciousness as an instrument of sociopolitical critique is that one may well distort history

(as well as present reality) in the zeal to criticize the present by condemning the past (and anyone associated with it). Likewise, Samuel Delany famously remarked, “science fiction is not about the future; it uses the future as a narrative convention to present significant distortions of the present” (cited in Streeby 18). In both cases (looking backward with a critical eye, or looking forward all glassy-eyed), the actual focus is on the present, and present-day concerns.

In the illuminating “Introduction” to her *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making through Science Fiction and Activism*, Shelley Streeby elaborates: “A good deal of cli-fi works on this principle, distorting our present by representing it as the past of an imagined future, as literary critic Fredric [sic] Jameson says classic science fiction writer Philip K. Dick often does, in ways that can help us think critically about what we need to do in the present to keep the worst from happening” (18). By way of further explanation—and to elaborate on where Jameson is coming from—Patricia Meltzer argues that, “As a genre defined by its relationship to technology as well as by its futuristic framework, science fiction is understood as a cultural arena that explores the anxieties of what Frederic Jameson termed the ‘post-modern condition’” (4).

As readers or scholars of speculative fiction, we must be ever-vigilant against our own utopian or presentist inclinations, as well as remaining cognizant of how sf writers might be distorting the present in service to their own political message or agenda.

To imagine the dystopian world she depicts in *Parable of the Talents*, Butler drew heavily from her own present (in the 1990s), extrapolating from the social, economic, and political trends of that decade. For instance, Butler calls attention to the varieties of neo-slavery to which countless wage workers at the bottom have been subjected, as well the vast inequality at the border after NAFTA, specifically noting the slave-like situation of workers in *maquiladoras* just south of the border:

[I]n *Parable of the Sower* [prequel and backstory to *Parable of the Talents*] I talk about the return of slavery, which is real. I mean, that’s not something I pulled out of history; that’s something I pulled out of the newspapers....[T]hey’ll either bring in illegal aliens and work them and not pay them and forbid them to leave and generally mistreat them...or they’ll do it with Black people who are not well enough educated or connected to get out of there, or they’ll do it with homeless people who, you know, don’t have anywhere to go and are abused. Also throwaway labor....[I]n the Maquiladora Plants in Mexico....where people are worked under horrible

conditions and live under horrible conditions. (1994 Interview with Jelani Cobb; in *Conversations* 55)

Butler was living through the worst effects of a NAFTA-fueled economic order, when globalization and wage arbitrage were creating devastating labor conditions for the working poor in other countries, with spillover effects back home. And that world—our world—is the wellspring from which flows the dystopian world of *Parable of the Talents*. Those capable of shutting their eyes to the inequality and injustices of the present might see the book solely as a warning about our *future*, but in many ways the novel could rightly be called our *present*, given the actual conditions of many Americans and countless global workers since the book was published in 1998.

As for the present of the novel, that is a shifting target, given the narrative time-jumping between entire decades—particularly the years 2032-2090, which bookend the chronological sequence of the novel. The novel is episodic, relating different stages of the early years of the Earthseed community (such as when Olamina’s brother Marc is rescued from slavery), then dwelling for a portion of the narrative on Olamina’s year of imprisonment in a reeducation camp (until her and the other captives make their daring escape), and then—after a few more episodes and incidents—jumping forward to 2090 for the novel’s conclusion.

Lastly there is the reader’s present, which may date anywhere from publication year to the present day. Since many of the social, economic, and political trends that Butler depicts remain salient and very much with us, those aspects of the book continue to engage readers. The key point here is that (to date, in the mid-2020s), the troubling trends of the novel’s near-past are still very much with us. And the novel stands more than ever as cautionary tale.

### **FUTURE: The Extrapolation of Social, Political, and Economic Trends**

The 2007 paperback reprint of *Parable of Talents* includes a helpful “Reading Group Guide,” as well as this illuminating blurb (excerpted from Mike Davis’s *Ecology of Fear*): “[Butler] uses disciplined extrapolation to explore the dark possibilities of the near future” (backside of front flyleaf). Davis is referring to the literary technique of *sf extrapolation* which—as we have seen—extrapolates from present-day trends, culture, technologies, and



political and socioeconomic forces to imagine, “predict,” or at least depict what our future world might look like. That near-future possibility is precisely what makes Butler’s story so gripping, and downright unnerving. The reader very much feels (in a visceral and immediate way) that this could happen to us, that the postapocalyptic world of the story could quite easily become our reality as well. And the reason it feels so visceral and real (and at times prophetic) is that Butler extrapolates her dark world from social, economic, and political trends that we are all too palpably aware of in our present reality.

Among the most salient current trends that Butler extrapolates to paint her postapocalyptic future are: the decline of public education, the political and technological forces threatening reliable journalism, and the widening opportunity gap between the wealthiest few and the rest of us. We readily recognize these trends today because we are currently—agonizingly—grappling with them, and already starting to feel their social and political impact. Bankole’s observation that, in his apocalyptic world, “education has become more a privilege of the rich,” could just as well describe today’s vast disparities between schools in affluent zip codes and those in poor ones. The current K-12 educational trend is one of growing inequality, with differences in school resources and education levels mirroring a growing cultural and wealth divide.

Butler then extrapolates this trend to its logical conclusions: “But these days when more than half the country can’t read at all, history is just one more vast unknown to them” (19). The inevitable outcome of no longer providing free, universal, public education to all citizens is an increasing illiterate and undereducated society. Not only that, but a society divided between those who can afford the high cost of private education, and those who cannot. Butler shows us the civic peril of forsaking public education, not least of which is lower literacy rates and a rising education gap—which only adds to the social-media amplified rise of tribalism, misinformation, and belief of propaganda and “alternative facts.”

Given the sheer degree to which the novel’s extrapolations accurately reflect aspects of our world today, it is no wonder that Michael Brandon McCormack describes *Parable of the Talents* as nothing short of prophetic: “Butler’s prophetic imaginings of possibilities for survival, care, and healing in the wake of violence and death” (209). More to the point, “Butler warns of unimaginable violence unleashed on the bodies of those rendered vulnerable by the interplay between religious and political extremism. Through the violence of Christian America culminates the futuristic modes of enslavement, torture, rape, burning, and slaughter of

‘alien’ bodies” (209). As McCormack suggests, the novel is looking backward (depicting tribalism and fundamentalist righteousness, which is marshalled into Old Testament-style vengeance on anyone holding opposing beliefs) and forward (imagining futuristic forms of oppression and new technologies of control, such as remote-controlled slave collars) at the same time.

As we have seen, proleptic gestures (such as anticipation of our possible future) like these in the novel, are often enacted by leading the reader to reflect on deplorable and iconic events from our past...with the aim of waking us up to present ills or trends that should concern us. Over the course of the novel, multiple interrelated themes of social critique emerge as *Parable of the Talents* plunges us deeper and deeper into its dystopian world.

One of those themes is the vital role of journalism in maintaining an informed citizenry. Because it is neither prolonged nor repeated, the “news bullets” passage can feel a bit like a passing comment at first (81). However, the “news bullets” commentary fits in with the larger themes of civil society and becoming a democracy-in-name-only—and thus adds to the big picture, and overall thematic impact of novel. Also, when we read that the characters “have to make a special effort to get news from outside—real news, I mean, not rumors,” we can’t help but think of the demise of local journalism and objective reporting (and the concomitant rise of partisan infotainment) in our own world today (81).

In its depiction of the complete and total monetization of reliable news coverage, the passage anticipates the present crisis in journalism. Though written almost three decades ago, before the digital disruption of media and journalism, the parallels with the funding challenges facing journalism today are almost uncanny. For example, though it is (or should be) a public good (vital to a healthy democracy), reliable and credible journalism is not publicly supported. The result is an uninformed (and often misinformed) public, because the old business models no longer support “free broadcast radio,” local newspapers, or informing the public in an unbiased way (81). As Matt Taibbi explains in *Hate Inc.: Why Today’s Media Makes Us Despise One Another*, the rise of “free” internet “news” eliminated the revenue stream of paid advertising for objective, credible, and reliable reporting in print or television, pushing media outlets (especially in television) toward the entertainment end of the spectrum...and away from producing informative, substantive, and fact-checked content. This largely explains the rise of partisan infotainment—an even more troubling trend, and a source of propaganda and division. We

live in the age of “fake news,” and are all too familiar with Olamina’s yearning and need for “real news.”

Even more prophetically, Butler predicts the emergence of internet memes, social media newsfeeds, and Twitter-like platforms that thrive on clickbait and divisive content that push our buttons, manipulate our emotions, and drive us into separate information silos. She describes “news bullets” as flashy tweets that “purport to tell us all who [sic] we need to know in flashy pictures and quick, witty, verbal one-two punches. Twenty-five or thirty words are supposed to be enough in a news bullet to explain either a war or an unusual set of Christmas lights” (81). Underscored are the social and political implications of the technology, rather than the geeky specifics of the technology itself. In this case, the implications are revealed by asking the basic question: are we more informed—or are we misinformed—by this new digital media?

In this and other ways, *Parable of the Talents* goes beyond “hard” science fiction’s focus on the novelty and technical aspects of the *tech novum* (the new technology, innovation, or idea), to emphasize the narrower sense of sf scholar Darko Suvin’s illuminating term, (*novum* means “new thing”). Hard sf puts more emphasis on the story’s invented gadgetry, mechanical devices, or engineering marvels. Hard sf also tends to feature “techy” sf tropes, such as robots, space ships, and time travel, as well as a propensity for bending—but not breaking—the laws of physics. For many readers, it is these techy tropes that most distinguish science fiction from other genres. Butler, however, broadens the technique of sci-fi extrapolation, by focusing instead on *social* technologies, such as economic forces, political trends, culture, and belief.

More to the point—while even the hardest sf touches on the sociopolitical sequelae following the introduction of new gadgets, tech whizbangs, or human interaction with other levels of reality (digital, quantum, or alien)—*Parable of the Talents* takes as its primary focus the sociopolitical aspects themselves. While it is fun (as readers of sf) to geek out on the technology (and Butler does give us a few innovative—and horrifying—tech gadgets to ponder), the storyworld of *Parable of the Talents* is shaped more by social and political forces than by any single gadget-type technology. As in our world, sociopolitical reality largely determines how new technology will be applied: whether it will be weaponized for oppression, or mobilized to serve the common good. Arguably, the focus on sociopolitical trends, rather than strictly technical ones, makes the story even more believable (as our possible future) than sf scenarios that rely on less likely (though sufficiently plausible, and still

allowing for the suspension of disbelief) technological devices, such as teleportation and faster-than-light space travel.

Despite many sobering prognostications, the future is not all bleak in *Parable of Talents*. Just the opposite. In the most inspirational passage of the novel, Olamina exhorts us to look to the *future* rather than the past in order to forge a shared sense of purpose:

We need the stars, Bankole. *We need purpose!* We need the image the Destiny gives us of ourselves as a growing, purposeful species. We need to become the adult species that the Destiny can help us become! If we're to be anything other than smooth dinosaurs who evolve, specialize, and die, we need the stars (179).

As Olamina explains, “When we have no difficult, long-term purpose to strive toward, we fight each other. We destroy ourselves” (179). Olamina is expressing an attitude of hopefulness about the future of humanity—but without uncritical utopianism, or otherwise substituting fantasy for a worthy and realistic vision of our collective future.

The Destiny provides this sense of shared purpose and clear direction to our lives without (as organized religions often do) having to supernaturalize some version of an afterlife.” But Earthseed’s promise to the faithful of achieving a better future is a shaky promise at best. For, as Claire Curtis points out, “we know (both as readers of Butler and because Lauren reminds us) that all will not be well among the stars” (184). Curtis’s caveat encapsulates the ever-present, anti-utopian thrust of Butler’s work. What is more, Curtis adds, “if Earthseed is the answer to the social contract—if it is what we are to contract for—then the novel again challenges our expectations by refusing to let us see Earthseed getting to the point where the Destiny might be something reasonable to affirm” (184).

Though *Parable of the Talents* rejects both progressive utopianism and reactionary nostalgia for an idealized past—and though it seems pessimistic about our present and near-future—it ends on a hopeful note about the better future we could be headed toward. Better, though imperfect, that is.

Namely, the direction we could be headed, if likewise guided by a vision of “the Destiny” as peaceable coexistence (despite our differences of identity, religion, and viewpoint) and human flourishing in a pluralistic, liberal democracy. But liberal democracy is hard work, and democratic backsliding a constant temptation. To keep our democracy, freedom, and cosmopolitan society, we must manage to: check our tribal and identitarian impulses; recommit to humanism and the core values of liberalism (freedom, tolerance, and nonaggression); and be ever-vigilant against

authoritarianism, tribalism, the erosion of civil liberties, and other forces of illiberalism.

### CONCLUSION: A Roadmap for Realists

Though easily classified as disaster lit, *Parable of the Talents* also gives us—as members of the reality-based community—a roadmap for averting disaster. By avoiding the delusion-inducing lure of both the nostalgic and utopian impulses, the novel depicts characters facing crisis after crisis, yet remaining resilient and resourceful...precisely because the key characters are realists and political pragmatists rather than ideologues and radical idealists. The novel demonstrates the development of sustainable practices in a world where the effects of climate change have already begun to have severe impacts. It shows us what a naturalized religion might look like, and how secular religion or spirituality can provide shared purpose, meaning, and community in an increasingly secular age.

Butler’s “disaster lit” novel also models how to build a society based on science, reason, and humanism (including tolerance for other views and cultures), necessary virtues in a pluralistic, democratic society. As such, Butler has described *Parable of the Talents* as a “novel of solutions” (“Reading Group Guide” 411). Unquestionably, one of the ways we should approach (and take lessons from) this postapocalyptic novel, is as an imaginative work of possible solutions.

As cautionary tale, *Parable of the Talents* offers a dark vision of our collective future. However, the novel also inspires cautious optimism and hope—though rejecting both conservative nostalgia and progressive utopianism. By warning us, through visceral and dramatic storytelling, of the social, political, and economic trends that pose the greatest threat to a free and flourishing society, the novel inspires hope for a better future—as well as good reason to believe that just such a future is possible. Whether we achieve that better future—or instead fulfill the dystopian destiny depicted in the novel—depends on us. As suggested by the biblical “Parable of the Talents” that the novel’s title alludes to, our future happiness and human flourishing depend on whether we invest wisely in our collective future, or squander our talents and freedoms. What will our actual future look like? That, alas, is up to us.

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# MONOGRAPH

## The Vision of Reynaldo Reyes

### Erudition in Piano Performance and Pedagogy

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#### Abstract

This is a study on the habitus of the late Reynaldo Reyes, a cosmopolitan concert pianist and pedagogue who inspired the lives of countless individuals as a musician, teacher, and friend. It argues that the teaching methods of Reyes greatly enhance stage performance by assuring the excellence of the performer through discipline and a heightened awareness of his/her role. In the analysis, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" used here, defined as a system of acquired habits and dispositions shaped by one's experience in a social setting—is deployed in order to account for the development and practice of Reyes's methods. The pianist's habitus is discussed through his biography, which details his practice and teaching methods, to understand the philosophical principles behind his artistry and pedagogical process. Reyes's technical, musical, and spiritual preparations were geared towards competence in one's craft and are tools for building a healthy attitude towards musical performance. His teachings were meant to build self-esteem through technical and mental discipline so that one can give due reverence to, and deliver the intentions of, the composer of musical works. Ultimately, the complex process of playing on stage entails bridging the gap between composer and audience through a conduit—the performer.

#### Keywords

habitus, cosmopolitan, discipline, erudition, pedagogy



## Introduction

Reynaldo Reyes was a Filipino concert pianist who lived most of his life in the West but generously shared his expertise with the Philippine audience at least once a year through his performances, master classes, and private lessons. His expertise and personality were products of a well-lived cosmopolitan life of training and performances. Reyes entered the *Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris* at age seventeen and imbibed the culture of beauty and enlightenment of the old world in this foremost center of music and art. His residence of seven years in Paris formed much of his attitude towards music and life itself, although he spent the biggest part of his life in the USA where he built an extensive career as concert performer and pedagogue. For much of the Filipino music scene, he was an icon. According to the late pianist Marina Escano,<sup>1</sup> Reyes had performed a piano repertoire enough to last seven lifetimes of a concert pianist. Such an accomplishment might have been the result of pure genius, but it also entailed a healthy work ethic, sheer force of will, a positive attitude, and an undying love for music.

Little is written about exemplary lives in the field of music in the Philippines. By exemplary is meant not just excellence in the field of one's expertise, decorated by awards, honors, national and international recognition, publications, and rave reviews, but, in the case of the late Reynaldo Reyes, also excellence in the field of authentic pedagogy, i.e., the active spirit of passing on optimal knowledge with the genuine intention of empowering lives.

He was a multi-awarded musician, but in my view, awards and honors did not matter to him; only his work did. He loved to play the piano and was always excited to learn and teach new pieces. In June of 2013, he was appointed as a faculty member of the doctoral program of the Philippine Women's University (PWU) School of Music. His students and colleagues wondered how in his eighties, he could still fly twice a year to Manila from Baltimore and teach the way he did, with joy and wit, giving his students even the much-needed artistic and spiritual energy.

Reyes was a cosmopolitan musician with musical education roots in the Philippines and musical training and practice in the West. Being cosmopolitan entails an openness to embrace the culture of the foreign Other but it is usually the privileged few that have economic resources to access foreign cultural capital (Igarashi and Saito). Cosmopolitanism could therefore become an elitist notion; even as children, the economic elite could already have access to foreign cultural capital especially if they were brought up in, or have access to, metropolitan environments. Reyes, though coming

from a landed family in the town of Alitagtag, Batangas, was not exposed to the finer things in life as a child, i.e., regular visits to museums, concert halls, stage plays, and the like. His cosmopolitan outlook in life must have come from the culture of beauty and enlightenment and the power of the classical educational system of Paris. Reyes was cosmopolitan, but he was not elitist at all; in fact, he was approachable and selfless in sharing his expertise. My hypothesis is that Reyes remains to be the epitome of a cosmopolitan musician, being one of those who have added to his habitus a humane aspect to the definition of cosmopolitanism and enlightenment. First, I present a biography of the musical life of Reyes which includes his education in the Philippines, France, and the United States of America (USA). Also included are biographical data about his career as a concert pianist performing around the world and as a pedagogue who touched the lives of countless students in the Philippines and in the USA. Second, I discuss in detail the teachings of Reyes on the art of playing the piano concerning the technical, the musical, and the spiritual preparations for a musical performance constituting Reyes's practice regimen as well as his pedagogical process. Third, I attempt to understand the philosophy behind his teachings.

Much of the discussion in the study, particularly on piano technique, elements of style, and pedagogy, is based on empirical data I gathered through my lessons and private conversations with Reyes. I have known him since 1988 when I entered the Conservatory of Music at University of Santo Tomas (UST) as a freshman. He would come almost every year to give master classes, and I played in every single one of them until I left for Germany to take my master's in piano performance in 1996. In June 2013, I entered the doctoral program at the PWU School of Music where I took lessons with him until he passed away on February 14, 2016.

The discussion on piano technique and elements of style requires musical examples. To this end, I use excerpts from the works I learned under his wing, namely Johann Sebastian Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988 and the *Chaconne in D minor* (arranged by Ferruccio Busoni), Domenico Scarlatti's *Sonata in D major*, L. 465, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Sonata in D major*, K. 576, Franz Liszt's *Six Grand Études after Paganini*, the complete *Preludes* of Claude Debussy, Camille Saint-Saëns's *Piano Concerto No. 4 in C minor*, Opus 44, and Sergei Rachmaninov's *Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor*, Opus 18. These excerpts can provide an understanding of Reyes's approach to learning and assimilating classical piano music. Important aspects of his technical, musical, intellectual, and spiritual preparations for any kind of performance are discussed at length, using small sections of the works cited above as examples.

This study hopes to show how the habitus of Reyes can be essential to the process of making good music, i.e., bridging the gap between the musical score and the audience who perceives it as performed music. The following works illuminated this study: Martin Heidegger’s “Ways of Being” in his book *Being and Time* (74); Thomas Clifton’s process of “possession” in *Music as Heard* (272); Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of “habitus” in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; Jane O’Dea’s concept of “internal goods” in *Virtue and Virtuosity*; Lydia Goehr’s thesis on the role of the performer in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*; and Stan Godlovitch’s *Musical Performance, A Philosophical Study*.

Martin Heidegger’s “Ways of Being” distinguishes between “presence-at-hand” and “readiness-to-hand.” Bridging the gap between written music and audience requires a conduit—the performer. The performer first sees the written music (presence at hand) and assimilates its essence until it becomes “equipment” (readiness to hand) to performance. On stage, the performance of the essence of the music now becomes a set of acoustical events in its “presence-at-hand” mode of being. The moment the audience believes that what it hears is music and processes the performance cognitively as “equipment,” its mode of being becomes “readiness to hand” (Heidegger 74). Thomas Clifton calls this process of listening to music “possession”; he argues that these acoustical events become music only when the audience perceives them on the level of Heidegger’s concept of “readiness to hand” (Clifton 272).

Bridging the gap between the musical score and the audience is a complex process; it requires a performer of very good quality to deliver the true essence of a composer’s intentions. In her book, *Virtue or Virtuosity*, Jane O’Dea talks about external and internal goods in the lives of performers. External goods are rare; they are awards and prizes from competitions, scholarships, teaching posts in music schools, concert bookings, and recording contracts. These are obtained by talented musicians who have finally attained their statures through diligence, connections, and the ability to sell themselves or through the help of agents. Internal goods are the inherent and inculcated spiritual qualities of intelligence, aesthetic sense, intuition, critical thinking, and generosity of spirit that a musician needs to hone his craft. These internal goods could be the means to achieve the external goods needed for even the most banal aspect of survival in the real world, but they should be noble ends in themselves.

Pierre Bourdieu defines “habitus” as a system of acquired habits and dispositions shaped by one’s experience in a social setting (72). I argue that these habits and dispositions are acquired through Heidegger’s “Ways of

Being,” particularly when the subject has already imbibed these habits and dispositions and uses them as “equipment.” The practice and teaching methods of Reyes are manifestations of his highly evolved “habitus” because they are used as “equipment” to assimilate classical music and to influence the “habitus” of his students. Bridging the gap between musical score and the audience that hears it as performed music requires a conduit—the performer, and this performer has to be of good quality. Reyes, through his highly evolved “habitus,” improves the quality of the student’s (and eventually the performer’s) “habitus” by instilling in him/her Jane O’Dea’s concept of “internal goods,” i.e., spiritual qualities of intelligence, diligence, technical proficiency, critical thinking, sincerity, and generosity of spirit. The higher the quality of the performer, the more they can perform their role efficiently.

In this study, I discuss two contrasting schools of thought on the role of the performer, and both point to the importance of a thorough preparation for the complex process of playing on stage. Lydia Goehr’s treatise on the 19th Century concept of “*Werktreue*” or “Faithfulness to the Work” stresses the performer’s duty to deliver the authentic intentions of the composer whereby the performer loses himself in service to the music of the composer. In other words, the performer as conduit is subordinate to the work and composer. Stan Godlovitch, on the other hand, argues that the performer is at least as important as the musical work that he champions on stage. Without the performer’s creative contribution, the musical work remains an abstract set of instructions on paper. In reality, the audience perceives on stage both the essence of the composer’s intentions and the performer’s creative interpretation of them. I argue that the audience deserves to “possess” (using the phenomenological terms of Heidegger and Clifton) the genuine essence of the music, hence the need for thorough preparation on the part of the performer who creatively delivers this “essence” in organized sound events. Reynaldo Reyes’s technical, musical, and spiritual preparations, which were products of his highly evolved habitus, then come to the fore.

The late Reynaldo Reyes’s social, cultural, and economic capital, shaped by his prestigious international education and performance career, significantly influenced various aspects of piano pedagogy in the Philippines, as I will outline in the succeeding sections. His exposure to diverse musical cultures enriched his teaching methods, allowing him to integrate elements from various traditions. My own learning experience under Reyes’s guidance since 1988, including enrolment under him from 2013–6 until his passing away, exemplifies the impact of this capital. After my last piano lesson, I conducted my sixth and final personal interview with

him that completed the data that were essential to this study. The musical examples used for the discussion of Reyes's technical and musical preparations are confined to the repertoire I learned with him in this doctoral program. My access to his expertise and global perspective undoubtedly nurtured a deeper understanding of piano playing, encompassing both technical and philosophical aspects.

Reflecting on my experiences with Reyes reveals how my own background as a musician shaped by diverse cultural influences and academic training intersected with his cosmopolitan outlook. This is evident in his emphasis on not just technical proficiency but also musical interpretation and a holistic approach to performance, integrating elements of Western classical tradition with broader cultural insights. Ultimately, Reyes's social capital not only shaped his own artistry but also enriched the learning experience of his students and left a lasting impact on piano pedagogy in the Philippines

### The Musical Life of Reynaldo Reyes

The biography of Reynaldo Reyes shows, from the awakening of his passion for music to a life of generosity and uncommon creative spirit, how he inspired very many individuals through his playing, teaching, and friendship.

### The Unknowing Child Prodigy

Reynaldo Reyes was born in Alitagtag, Batangas on December 12, 1933; he was the second to the youngest of seven children. His parents, former Alitagtag Mayor Telesforo Reyes and Brigida Gutierrez, were ambitious. They wanted all their children to be successful and had a list of professions for each of them; one had to be a doctor, the other a pharmacist, the next a lawyer, etc. The musician was not on the list, but there was a piano at home mostly for the girls to learn how to play one of the most popular house instruments in the world. Reyes then took his first lessons from his older sisters. Incidentally, my maternal grandfather's ancestral home is on the same street as the Reyes family's, so our families are acquainted. Maxima Recto, an older sister of Reynaldo Reyes, recounted on one of our visits to Alitagtag in 1992:

Rey was truly exceptional . . . I remember teaching him piano when he was four; after a few lessons, he would sit quietly and observe all of us take turns practicing. Then one day, to our horror, he sat at the piano and blurted out, '*Ate! Ate!* Look, I can play your piano piece!' He played without any mistake and then said, '*Look, Ate!* I can play it in another key!' We all wept

in envy! I mean, how he can do so effortlessly what we toiled for hours to practice!

Reyes's first formal piano teacher was Amanda Cabrera who lived in Taal. He and his sisters would walk seventeen kilometers for four hours each way to have an hour of lessons each (Reyes, 25 July 2015, 11.00).<sup>2</sup> During World War II, there was no transportation and even the asphalt roads were destroyed, but Reyes would never be absent for any reason. He loved to play the piano and loved challenges; the more difficult the pieces were, the more he was motivated to study and play them. He claimed that he never knew he was a child prodigy. At that age, even the concept of talent was too abstract for him. Besides, there was no one to compare himself with. All he knew was his obsession to play any piece of music he could get his hands on. At the UST Conservatory of Music

At age thirteen, Reyes entered the secondary school of the UST in Manila and, at the same time, had permission to enroll at the university's Conservatory of Music where he earned at age seventeen his Bachelor of Music degree in Piano Performance under Julio Esteban Anguita. Reyes completed all his coursework in Music even before he finished high school but had to wait one more year to complete his core curriculum courses to earn a Bachelor's degree. Reyes talked about a few of his teachers in UST with fondness. Anguita taught him to dare to do more daunting tasks like playing entire volumes of Czerny études and Bach inventions and taught him the art of always playing with confidence even with little preparation. He would say, "Reynaldo, if you make a mistake, make it convincingly, and do not let the audience notice!"

He also talked about pianist, composer, and conductor Bernardino Custodio who gave him stringent training in harmony, counterpoint, and *solfeggio*. Reyes once remarked, "Custodio was a genius! I first learned about the systems of written music from him that would be useful in sight-reading. In fact, I learned to sight-read and transpose very fast because of him". (Reyes, 22 August, 2015, 12.00) Reyes also cultivated a lasting friendship with Marina Escano who was regarded as the best pianist in UST during their student days. Reyes recalled: "Marina could have been the best out of all of us if only she pursued studies abroad. Rarely do you find a pianist who is so natural; even when she sight-reads, everything is correct! And that technique of hers is flawless!" (Reyes, July 25, 2015, 11.00) Marina Escano also spoke highly of Reyes. She thought he belonged to a rare breed of pianists who can study and perform more than three-fourths of the entire piano literature, enough for up to seven lifetimes of a concert pianist. "And

on top of that, Reynaldo is a colorist! That in itself is rare!<sup>39</sup> Escano added, speaking of him during the time he was still alive.

Reyes was grateful to UST for allowing him to finish a college degree while finishing high school at the same time. Whilst wearing short pants as a high school kid, he was treated like an ordinary college student at the Conservatory of Music. He claimed that the experience had prepared him for the rigid training that he was about to undergo in Paris.

### The French Connection

Reyes was granted a scholarship by the French government to study at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris right after his graduation from the UST Conservatory of Music. He said that the auditions were tough; the age limit was 18 years old. Everybody went through the elimination round, and the few that passed would be made to study a new concert program in two months to be played from memory. For the second round, he sought the help of Russian pedagogue Sergei Postelnikov, a pupil of Rachmaninoff. When Reyes finally aced the second round and was admitted to the conservatory, he would experience some of the most influential years of his life as a musician.

In Paris he studied piano with Jean Doyen and the latter's assistant, Jacques Fevrier. In all music colleges in Europe, the major instrument was not the only important thing; one had to pass the exams in theory, counterpoint, dictation, the *solfeggio*, sight-reading, forms and analysis, music history, and European history before one could even play at his/her graduation recital. Reyes was surprised at how people who played at international competition level would be expelled from the conservatory because they could not pass these exams. Playing one's major instrument was not the only important thing in musicianship. Reyes often said that theoretical knowledge, and above all, the training of good ears for music were essential; if one cannot take dictation, then one's ears are not musical enough for a career as a performer.

Reyes was amazed at the level of talent in Paris. According to him, they all played very well and read very well at sight. The French School is known for its precision in reading and thinking which eventually lead to accuracy in execution, a key ingredient in sound musicianship. It was also in Paris where he began to learn standard repertoire in bulk, such as the complete sets of Chopin's works (24 études, 24 preludes, 4 ballades, 4 scherzi etc.), the complete sets of Debussy's works (24 preludes, 12 études, 6 Images), and so on. He always said, "That's how we did it in Paris, one volume at a time!"





Fig. 1. Reynaldo Reyes in Paris (far right), circa 1951.

Classical education is not just heavy on the training of one's major instrument but also stringent in the training of the mind. In order to be a real musician, one has to be

Well-versed in history for a deeper understanding of the contexts of one's repertoire. The *solfeccio* and dictation are also crucial skills because the most important organ of a musician is the discerning ear. All of these, together with the major instrument, have to be mastered before one obtains the *Premiere Prix*, which is equivalent to a Bachelor's degree or a performance diploma. Still, Paris and France itself were much more than that.

When asked about the most important thing Reyes learned in France, he answered:

“The French are very proud of the beauty of their culture. So, everything that you do is all about beauty! When you play even the simplest of melodies on the piano, it has to be a gesture of beauty. That melody is connected with the beauty of the room, the beauty of the imposing edifice, and the beauty of the street that you are in. In France, even if you are not perfect, even if you have no feet, you are beautiful! They find my brown skin and my flat nose beautiful. They asked me where I was from and I said I am from the Philippines. Is it beautiful there? I said yes. They feel superior about their culture, and they expect you to do the same with yours. They have so much respect for individuality.



Reyes compared that with his experience in America where he always heard the words:

“‘it’s dirty, it’s not perfect!’ But why does everything have to be perfect?”

Then he added:

“In America, they expect you to be like them; I was never white enough and never tall enough, but in France I was beautiful and unique. I stayed more than fifty years in America, and they were surprised why I never applied for American citizenship. I said, I don’t want to be an American citizen! I am proud to be a Filipino! Well, only recently was I forced to accept the American citizenship but only for convenience. In France, obtaining the French citizenship was never an issue. I did not have to become who they were. I just had to be me. Europe is all about individuality in diversity, and people expect you to be who you really are and to be proud of everything about you.”

Reyes continued,

“Many years later I was in Brazil on top of the *Corcovado*, and we were watching the magnificent view of the city. Then a Brazilian pointed out a section of the city where there were slums and said, ‘Look at that! It’s horrible and embarrassing!’ I said to him, ‘Not for a painter, that is beautiful for a painter.’ Only then did I realize that France has truly changed me.”  
(Reyes, 22 August, 2015, 12.00)

### A Career in America and the World

After obtaining his *Premiere Prix* in Paris in 1957, Reyes moved to America to pursue his master’s degree at the Peabody School of Music under pianist and Professor Leon Fleischer. Reyes then taught at Peabody in 1960; and in 1962 took a teaching post at Towson University where he would teach until his retirement in 2015. At Towson he has produced numerous competition winners and was always praised for both his wisdom and sense of empowerment as a pedagogue. Reyes was also a prizewinner of prestigious international competitions, namely, the International Piano Competition in Rio de Janeiro; the International Busoni Piano Competition in Bolzana, Italy; the Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud International Piano Competition in Paris; and first prize in Chamber Music at Radio Stuttgart in Germany. He had concerts in countries like the Netherlands, USA, Panama, Singapore,

Germany, England, Russia, Hungary, Brazil, Canada, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong.

In his time, Reyes was probably the most awarded Filipino pianist with the following honors: Musician of the Year (1957, 1961, 1965) from the University of the Philippines; one of the Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Philippines (TOYM) from the Junior Chamber International Philippines (1967); one of the Ten Outstanding Filipinos Overseas from President Marcos (1972); one of the Twenty Outstanding Filipinos of Canada and the United States, from Fil-American Image Magazine in Washington D.C. (1995); and the Gold Cross Award given by the UST, the highest award given to any of its chosen alumni (Souvenir Program).

Reyes strove to bring classical music to school children in America either as a soloist or as a collaborative artist through outreach programs that were mostly interactive; communication with the audience was very important to him. After the usually warm reception of his performances, people were not abashed to ask questions about classical music. One of his advocacies was making it known that listening to classical music enhances the multiplication of brain cells of children and adults alike; adults may avoid risks of developing Alzheimer's disease by listening to classical music.

Aside from his annual concerts as soloist in the Philippines, Reyes also had a decade-long collaboration as accompanist to Ingrid Sala Sta. Maria in the numerous piano concertos they performed in two hundred concerts around the country. Reyes made it a point to come home to the Philippines not just to give concerts but to give master classes and private lessons to aspiring pianists. He was a favorite of the Piano Teachers Guild of the Philippines (PTGP). The PTGP did not only sponsor his master classes but his seminars as well, e.g., seminars on the thirty-two Beethoven sonatas, the forty-eight preludes and fugues of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and the works of Claude Debussy to name a few. Indeed, Reyes performed all these works and more.

The standard repertoire of Reynaldo Reyes included: (Reyes, July 25, 2015, 11.00)

1. Johann Sebastian Bach (e.g., *The Well-Tempered Clavier Books 1 and 2*, the *French Suites*, the *English Suites*, *Partitas*, *Italian Concerto*, *Goldberg Variations*);
2. Domenico Scarlatti (e.g., most of the 600 sonatas);
3. Ludwig van Beethoven (e.g., 32 piano sonatas, 5 concertos, 7 violin sonatas, piano trios);
4. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (e.g., 19 sonatas, 14 piano concertos, piano trios);

5. Felix Mendelssohn (e.g., 2 piano concertos, *Songs without Words*, *Fantasia*, *Variations serieuses*, *Piano Trios*);
6. Franz Schubert (e.g., 7 sonatas, piano trios);
7. Robert Schumann (e.g., *Carnaval*, *Kreisleriana*, *Symphonic études*);
8. Johannes Brahms (e.g., *Paganini Variations*, *Handel Variations*, *Piano Pieces Op. 116, 117, 118*, 2 piano concertos, complete violin sonatas, piano trios, piano quintet);
9. Frédéric Chopin (e.g., 24 études, 24 preludes, 4 ballades, 4 scherzi, *Sonatas 2 and 3*, complete polonaises, waltzes, nocturnes);
10. Franz Liszt (e.g., 12 *Transcendental Études*, *Six Grand Études after Paganini*, 5 concert études, Hungarian rhapsodies, 2 piano concertos, *Totentanz*, *Annees de pèlerinage*, *Mephisto Waltz*, *Spanish Rhapsody*);
11. César Franck (e.g., prelude, chorale and fugue, sonata for violin and piano);
12. Gabriel Fauré (e.g., sonata for violin and piano);
13. Sergei Rachmaninoff (e.g., complete *Études tableaux*; complete preludes; *Piano Concertos 1, 2, and 3*; cello 1);
14. Claude Debussy (e.g., 24 preludes, 12 études, 6 *Images*, *Suite pour le piano*, *Children's Corner*, *Suite bergamasque*, *L'isle joyeuse*, piano trio, violin sonata, songs);
15. Maurice Ravel (e.g., *Gaspard de la nuit*, *Sonatine*, *Miroirs*, *Jeux d'eau*, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, *Concerto for the Left Hand*, *Concerto in G*, songs, piano trio);
16. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (e.g., 3 piano concertos, *The Seasons*);
17. Alexander Scriabin (preludes, études and sonatas)
18. Camille Saint-Saëns (e.g., *Piano Concertos 1, 2, 5*);
19. Sergei Prokofiev (e.g., 9 sonatas, *Piano Concertos 1, 2, 3*);
20. Charles-Valentin Alkan's études and other works;
21. Isaac Albéniz (e.g., *Iberia Suite Books I-IV* and other works);
22. Enrique Granados (e.g., *Goyescas* and other works);
23. Igor Stravinsky (e.g., *Petrouchka Suite*); and
24. chamber music from other composers.

In America, Reyes felt somewhat constrained by the country's culture of conformity and materialism, where success was measured almost solely on how American one could become. Nevertheless, it was in America where his career as a concert pianist as well as a pedagogue was truly launched. He won competitions in Europe while he was in America and traveled almost the entire globe to perform in concerts in countries where he happened to be. Reyes was an active member of the Baltimore Piano Trio and was official accompanist of the Metropolitan Opera auditions in

Washington D.C. for twenty years. Best of all, he became a well-loved pedagogue at Towson University until his retirement at the age of eighty-two.

### The Influential Teachers of Reynaldo Reyes

When asked to talk about his teachers, Reyes replied, “I had so many teachers, but I cannot talk about all of them because from some of them I learned nothing. Of course there were several who really made an impact on me. It is unfair to say that one is better than the other; I actually combine all the good things from them and use them when I practice and when I teach”. (Reyes, 4 January, 2016, 15.00)

Reyes claimed that his two Russian teachers, Postelnikov in France and Levachev in America, were lions.

“They were not nice, but they really taught me how to practice and made sure that I really understand their methods by practicing in their presence. Anyway, it is not good to be always nice; students have to learn discipline and have to learn to be always on their toes. The Russian technique has always guided me, and it is the best because it is very scientific. The young Leon Fleischer was musically good. He made things really interesting by talking about the music at great length; he always gave me a four-hour lesson! He was a student of Arthur Schnabel and is therefore a product of the German School. From him I have learned intellectual interpretation and that competence in performance is also a product of research; performers need to read and be well-versed in the history of music and art and in the other branches of the arts including philosophy. In Germany I had a two-month course on chamber music with the Hungarian René Sigmondy, and my French teachers were, of course, of great interest. I don’t want to compare and say that one is better than the other, but a few of them stand out. (Reyes, 22 August, 2015, 16.00)

### Marguerite Long and Her Students

Reyes studied with two of Marguerite Long’s students, Jean Doyen and the latter’s assistant Jacques Fevrier. Reyes claimed that he learned more from the assistant Fevrier who actually spent more time with him than Doyen did. Reyes said,

Fevrier was a professor of chamber music. I learned all the difficult stuff with him, like all the three Brahms Violin *Sonatas*, the Franck Violin *Sonata*, and the Faure Violin *Sonata*. He was fantastic! He explained how the music of two or more different instruments could be independent but choose to melt into each other and become one. He even taught me the

connection of chamber music to solo playing and how my experience in chamber music could enhance my solo playing. He was not technical when he taught, but he used vivid images and stories that made everything technically easy. I also brought a lot of solo works to my lessons; I can never forget how he taught me Ravel's *Scarbo*, how he described the images of the mischief and the menace of the goblin! Through all the images, everything became structured and easy. (Reyes, January 4, 2016, 15.00)

While in America, Reyes thought to himself that since he had already studied with Marguerite Long's students, so why not study with the countess herself? He recounted,

Doyen and Fevrier so often talked about Marguerite Long like she was a goddess of art and music that I felt as if I already knew her! So, I decided to go back to Paris and seek her out; it was a good thing the grandson of Alfonso XIII of Spain was a friend of mine. You know, that's how it works, initial contact should be done from one noble to another. That's how I got my five-hour lesson with her, five hours that are equivalent to five years! And I did not have to pay; my friend just sent her a bunch of flowers the next day and that was it. (Reyes, January 4, 2016, 15.00)

I asked what he learned from Marguerite Long and Reyes replied, “. . . that I did not listen, hahaha!” Laughter filled the room, which was not rare. Again, that unforgettable lightness of being of a great man, who always knew how to laugh at himself, came to the fore. I asked him what pieces he played in those five hours and he said, “One Chopin *étude*!” There was more laughter in the room. Then, Reyes corrected himself and said that it was the Chopin *Étude in A flat, Opus 10 No. 10* and the entire *Italian Concerto* of Bach. The then eighty-three-year-old Marguerite Long made him play each hand and told him at every phrase that it was wrong and that he did not listen; she made him sing the notes in *solfeggio* and made him practice per voice, and so on. Reyes continued, “It was like, *bang*! I was with a divine presence! It was like taking lessons with her for five years. To my standards, I never played anything perfectly, except for the two pieces I learned with her. I nailed it!” (Reyes, 4 January 2016, 15.00). After that, Reyes entered the Busoni International Competition and won third prize. He claimed that, in contrast to the intellectual approach of the young Leon Fleischer, Marguerite Long's purely aesthetic approach had a better impact on him.

Reyes also told us with glee how Marguerite Long referred to Debussy as “Claude,” Ravel as “Maurice,” and Fauré as “Gabriel.” She knew

the three composers personally; in fact, they were good friends. Reyes always applauded the aesthetic approach of the countess. Aside from being star-struck with the personality of the dame, he would use her approach as his model for pedagogy.

### **Reyes's Benchmark for Pedagogy: Carl Munz**

After a few moments of silence, Reyes continued,

“As I said, one teacher is not necessarily better than the other; but the one who had the greatest impact on me was Carl Munz. He is from Poland and studied in Berlin with Ferruccio Busoni. Munz taught at Peabody, but he was never my professor in Piano. It was several years after I finished my master’s when I decided to seek his help, and he was there at the time when I most needed it.” (Reyes, January 4, 2016, 15.00)

Reyes then made a bit of a sidetrack and told me the story of Busoni.

“Busoni is Italian, but he taught in Germany for twenty years, in Berlin. His scientific and aesthetic methods were so good that the best German and Russian pianists studied under him, so in effect they were all Busonized! But when the Russians went back to Russia, they claimed his technique as their own, that they were instead Russianized (with peals of laughter and coughing)! (Reyes, 4 January 2016, 15.00)

Reyes claimed that Munz was his benchmark such that he, the former, never taught with so many verbal explanations. When something was wrong with one’s sound, Munz knew right away that there was something wrong with what one was doing physically. It did not matter what composer one was playing; when it sounded good to Munz’s ears, then one’s interpretation was right. If it sounded bad, Munz would examine what one was doing physically and tell him/her what to do with either one’s hand, finger, wrist, elbow, shoulder, or a combination of two or more of these. Munz would never stop until it sounded right! He was patient and always achieved results.

Then I blurted out, “But, Sir, that’s exactly how you teach!” He said, “Yes, that is from Munz. But it is also a combination of the good things I learned in this never-ending process.”

(Reyes, 4 January 2016, 15.00)

### **A Note on Pedagogical Genealogy**

It is interesting to note that Reynaldo Reyes and one of the most prominent Russian pedagogues, Heinrich Neuhaus, had a direct pedagogical lineage to

Carl Czerny who was a pupil of Ludwig van Beethoven. Czerny taught Franz Liszt, who taught Carl Reinecke. Reinecke had two famous pupils, Michalowsky and Busoni. Munz, who was a pupil of Busoni, was one of the most influential teachers of Reyes. Michalowsky’s most famous pupil was Neuhaus. Moreover, aside from Franz Liszt, Czerny had another very famous pupil (Theodore Leschetizky) whose methods were documented by his assistant, Malwine Brée. (*The Groundwork*) Leschetizky’s teaching methods are very much identical to that of Neuhaus and Reyes. His (Leschetizky’s) firm but quiet hand technique, his loose wrists, elbows and shoulders, and his sense of empowerment were all part and parcel of the methods of Reyes and Neuhaus. Lastly, Leschetizky’s pupil Arthur Schnabel taught Leon Fleischer, Reyes’s professor at Peabody.

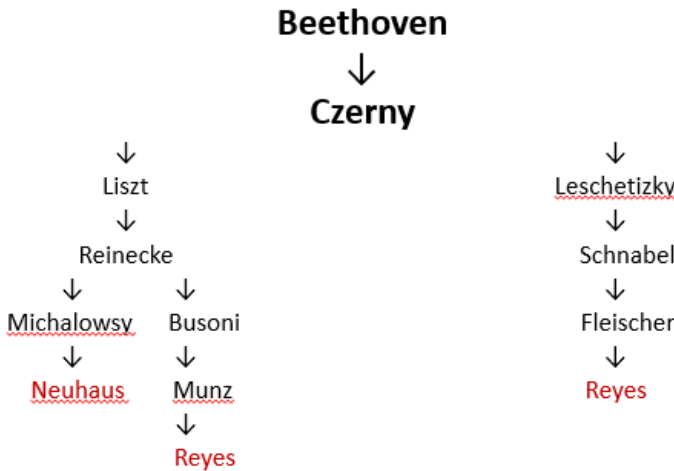


Fig. 2. Cosmopolitanism and Habitus of Reynaldo Reyes

Reyes believed that there was no such thing as a pure Russian, German, French, or Italian School of piano playing. Certain aspects of technique and movement are common in all these schools of thought; musical aims, like orchestral playing, are common to all the schools; and good teachers of all nationalities always tell students to listen and practice not just with one’s hands but with one’s ears. As pointed above, Busoni was an Italian national who taught Russians in Germany. The best Russian pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus was German by blood; Reyes surmised that the Russians must have also “pirated” the best teachers in Germany so they could teach in Russian Conservatories.

Perhaps there are only two types of technique: good and bad. In the end, what matters is that the method really works or when it achieves the aim of systematically making a “healthy sound” which makes intelligent interpretation natural and effortless. In the context of music performance, a “healthy sound” does refer to the specific notes played, but rather to the overall quality of the sound produced. This means a sound that has been balanced across different frequencies. It avoids excessive emphasis on bass or treble and also is free from any unpleasant distortions, static, or background noise that might detract from the listening experience. The intellectual pursuits of all the schools are the same, for music is also an intellectual endeavor; it is a craft for an athlete, a historian, a mathematician, and a philosopher. All of these things are achievable if one has a highly evolved habitus. Bourdieu’s aforementioned definition of “habitus” as a system of acquired habits and dispositions shaped by one’s experience in a social setting (72) is similar to Arwin Tan’s description of Lucrecia Kasilag’s habitus (114–43).

Reyes’s must have been initially formed in his childhood; his parents were very ambitious and wanted their children to be true achievers in life. Life was hard growing up in the war-stricken province of Batangas, so he learned to walk every week without fail despite the great distance and time involved to get to his piano teacher in order for him to learn whatever piece he could get his hands on and make good music. When he entered the UST Conservatory of Music, he was a young teenage boy who did with ease musical tasks for full-grown adults; that is a sign of advanced intelligence.

When he was in Paris, he was exposed to a social setting where everybody had to learn standard repertoire by the bulk so he must have thought that this was normal. Every student in Paris was very good at sight-reading and *solfeggio* and was well-versed in music theory and history. To add to that, he was exposed to a culture of beauty where one was not only taught how to develop aesthetic taste, but was exposed to beauty itself, in the splendor of the city of Paris and all its museums, galleries, and rich musical life. He was also exposed to a cosmopolitan way of thought that respected individuality in diversity and one that saw the good in every individual.

Reyes was cosmopolitan also in the sense of being eclectic, being the product of the French, Russian, German, and Italian schools of thought. He was post-modern in the sense that he did not stick to one method and criticized another, nor did he insist that his method was the best and all other methods were wrong. He knew quite a number of teaching and practice methods, combined them into a coherent whole, and used them prudently. He often told me that methods had to be modified depending on the need of



the student; he kept reiterating that teaching was about the student and not about the teacher. The importance of the highly evolved habitus of Reyes is discussed next.

### Reynaldo Reyes's Habitus in Piano Performance

In order to understand the philosophy behind the teachings of Reyes, we need to go back to the beginning, i.e., to how his habitus was formed. The preceding section established that the loving parents of Reyes encouraged all their children to become real achievers in life. Reyes's childhood was not a sheltered one; the province of Batangas was ravaged by war. Survival was not an easy task, but Reyes was nevertheless determined to pursue his passion for music. Part of this formation was walking an extremely long distance to and from his teacher's home in Taal every week without fail. Reyes later entered the UST Conservatory of Music and despite being just a young boy of thirteen, already performed the musical tasks of full-grown adults with ease. Then, at age seventeen, he studied in Paris, where performing tasks of ex-child prodigies, performing music according to world standards, and living the disciplined life of a concert performer were normal. In Paris he was also exposed to a cosmopolitan life, where individuality in diversity was very much respected and where the appreciation for the beauty of art and life were always in the air.

I argue that the habitus of Reyes was formed through Martin Heidegger's concept of "Ways of Being," as a distinction between "presence-at-hand" and "readiness-to-hand" (74).<sup>4</sup> "Ways of Being" is man's way of filtering the essential from the non-essential: the essential being "the Heideggerian 'equipment' to achieve specific goals." (Heidegger, 272) In the case of Reyes, practice methods and the cosmopolitan life of Paris were "equipment" to making good music and positively influencing the "habitus" of his students.

Thomas Clifton, in his book *Music as Heard*, used Heidegger's "Ways of Being." Thomas Clifton says, "There is no empirical distinction between sound and music, the difference is decided by human acts" (272). To him, the existence of music depends on its listener, on his/her very act of "possession" of organized sounds. One does not have a choice but to hear music. But if it is just a random set of sound events for the listener ("presence-at-hand"), then it is not music. It takes the act of the will to see value in these sound events and to organize them cognitively into one's psyche; only when the audience uses these sound events as "equipment" can they be called music ("readiness to hand"). When we listen to a Beethoven sonata in a concert or from a sound box and decide that the sounds we listen

to are not random acoustical events but something of value, something that we have to organize in our brains, then it becomes music. Organizing these sounds in our brains can trigger emotional impulses. Clifton says,

The self enters the phenomenological world of the music by neutralizing all references to its purely Physical qualities. . . . The self-sphere extends its perimeter to include music. If I become tender and dignified, it is because the music is tender and dignified. . . . In the presence of music, I qualify my own ontology: I am tender and dignified. (281-82)

Reyes did recognize the need for external goods, but he fulfilled his task as a real pedagogue, i.e., to be first and foremost a champion of internal goods. This study includes methods to attain and develop these internal goods. Reyes was not only concerned with the competence of his students but also cared about their mental health. He cared about the health of his students' psyches, how they could attain good taste, and how they lived their lives. Most of all, he gave his students a purpose in life; he showed them that thorough preparation for musical performances is necessary because the act of making music is a complex but very noble profession. He knew that the greater the preparation, the better the performer could perform his role.

Goehr claims that Beethoven has emancipated the role of music after 1800; it has transcended its role as commissioned works for social and religious functions. Music must be appreciated aesthetically for its own sake, like a painting of Michelangelo in a museum or a novel of Goethe in a quiet public library. It was the time when the audience areas of concert halls were already dimmed and the proper concert decorum of silence was observed. Performers began championing composers on stage and drew much less attention to themselves; the performer became subservient to the work and the intentions of the composer (243). The science of Musicology became increasingly important so that both performer and audience would have a better perception of the composers' intentions and a better understanding of the proper contexts of musical works. The performer is not as important as the work and the genius of the composer.

Stan Godlovitch, on the other hand, believes that the performer is at least as important as the work. In his book, he argues:

Creative playing involves adding novelty and variety to performance. Tensions between the work's fixity and performance variety complicate the relation between works and performances. . . . Musicality depends upon the notated work and practice conventions, but extends beyond both to the player's creative contribution. (848)

Without the performer's creative contribution, the music remains a set of instructions on paper; the composer's encoded intentions only become perceivable through the creative contributions of the performer. Clifton's act of "possession" of the music can only happen when the performer competently executes these sets of instructions. In reality, the audience perceives both the composer's intentions and the performer's creative interpretation of them through the production of organized sound events on a musical instrument.

These two seemingly contrasting schools of thought on the role of the performer point to one fact: Performance is a daunting task, and it needs thorough preparation. Bridging the gap between musical score and the audience requires a conduit—the performer, and this performer has to be of good quality. Reyes has three modes of preparation for a musical performance: the technical, musical, and spiritual preparations; these are all discussed in detail in the next chapter. Reyes always told us to practice our pieces by parts and to practice slowly and in slow motion so that we can internalize movements and memorize how these movements feel. Only when these movements become part of habitus could we even think about performing them in public. Mastery of the essence of the music is covered in the technical and musical/intellectual preparations. The spiritual preparation is the conditioning of the psyche; it is the time when we remind ourselves of what we are here for. This is also the period for building self-esteem which is also a product of good technical and musical preparation. It is, in plain language, the process of arriving at a state where one actually knows thoroughly what one is doing and what the music is for. Reyes's concept of spiritual preparation goes beyond technical drills. It is a dedicated time for mental and emotional conditioning. This includes centering techniques like meditation or breathing exercises to achieve laser focus. Performers also probe into the music's emotional core, historical context, and the composer's intentions, bridging a deeper understanding for authentic expression. Building self-confidence, in addition, is also achieved through reflecting on past successes, visualizing flawless performances, and positive affirmations. Crucially, these aspects are interconnected. Technical practice leads to mastery, which boosts confidence. Similarly, understanding the music's emotional core (spiritual preparation) informs phrasing and interpretation (musical preparation). Ultimately, all three aspects work together to create a well-rounded performance.

Only then can one have the courage to go on stage and perform because the audience deserves to "possess," using the phenomenological concepts of Clifton and Heidegger, the true essence of the music. Hence, the

technical, musical, and spiritual preparations of Reyes, which were part and parcel of his highly evolved “habitus,” are of great value to pianists and musicians. His excellent methods, good nature, and childlike wonder at the beauty of life itself formed his “habitus” as a performer and as a teacher. One always felt Reyes’s undeniable joy in sharing his expertise, and he would not stop until the student completely understood and performed his instructions. He also wanted his students to think big in terms of repertoire building, “Aim to study them all so you can play them and teach them!” he would always say. He strongly encouraged his students to be ambitious in conquering big performance spaces. Before he passed on, he wanted to book me to play my third doctoral recital in Jakarta so I could experience playing a professional solo recital in a foreign country. The rigor of his discipline, tempered with his positive attitude, is his legacy. His joy in teaching is infectious; and the great influence of his habitus is what we need to pass on to future generations of pianists.

### The Teaching Methods of Reynaldo Reyes

The empirical materials gathered from my lessons with Reyes, along with numerous clarifications through interviews with him and his students detail the habitus of Reyes in his preparation for a musical performance. To achieve this presentation, I frame this according to Russian pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus’ three modes of preparation: the technical, musical, and spiritual preparations (169).

#### Technical Preparation: Motion and Sound

Reyes always said that if music be the art of decorating time and space or the art of tone painting on canvas that is the air, then technique in music was not how fast or how clean one played but was precisely the art of tone production. It is the art of physically knowing what to do to produce the desired tone at the right time. In effect, every musical problem (e.g., beginning and ending a phrase, sorting sounds on a piano score to make it sound like two or more orchestral instruments, making a *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, etc.) is a technical problem.

#### Russian Technique

Reyes looked up to the old Russian school for the “how” of piano playing; in a nutshell, the Russian school employs the quiet hand technique (better known as the closed finger position), optimum flexibility of the wrists, elbows, and arms for quick tension release and for sound cushion, and the

use of natural weight to minimize the use of force. To explain in detail, we shall examine the parts of the pianist's physical equipment.

### The Five Fingers

Reyes believed in the value of finger strength obtained through five-finger exercises, but the control of finger strength with the minimum amount of energy was for him the most important thing to master. For one, the use of pure finger movement in actual playing will do more harm than good. To maintain the natural position of the hand (its rest position when one lets the arms hang loosely on one's side, all knuckles out) while playing scales, *arpeggios*, and intricate passage-work, one needs minimal aid of the soft cartilage of the wrist to put the hand and fingers into position. For passages of wide stretches (see Notations 1 and 2), one needs the aid of the elbow which could only be activated if the shoulder muscles are relaxed. He believed that the soft cartilage of the wrist should minimally aid in the contouring of a passage, especially if it is a melodic line (see Notation 3). If the wrist muscles are not enough then the elbow comes in to help, but one must think "how little and not how much" one needs of the wrist and elbow for optimum sound. The most important thing in passage playing is to sing the melody of the passage and to have optimal tone in every note.



Notation 1: Rachmaninoff, *Moderato from Piano Concerto No.2*, mm. 91–4 (*Arpeggios*, especially with wide extensions of the left hand with bass notes, are to be played with the rotation of the wrist and elbow following the contour of the passagework.)



In playing two- to four-note slurs, like in this example taken from Mozart's K.576 (see Notation 4), the wrist goes down on the first note and gradually goes up to follow the contour of the slur group, playing the last note of the slur with just the residue of energy from the relaxation process of the wrist smoothly going from low to high. The wrist is also crucial in releasing tension when one plays chords; it is like a spring that instantaneously releases the weight of the arm and shoulder so that the hand and arm can be slightly lifted to free fall to the next note or chord.



Notation 4: Mozart, *Allegro from Piano Sonata K.576*, mm. 36– (Play the beginning of each slur for both hands with a low wrist, and continue by raising the wrist using only the residue of released energy from the first note. Every end of the slur will then be effortlessly played soft.)

Wrist octaves are done with a quiet arm: the hand alone bounces up and down, with the wrist as a hinge. Wrist octaves are used only in playing *leggiero* or in *piano*. For octaves in *forte* and *fortissimo*, the forearm must be used, with the elbow as hinge; the wrists remain loose and the fingers firm, with the second, third, and fourth fingers slightly raised so as not to accidentally hit the black keys. The elbow will be discussed in the next section.

### The Elbow

The elbow, aside from being used as a hinge for the forearm in up-and-down motion, is used for rotation of the forearm in, for example, figurations like *arpeggios* and *alberti bass*. One must remember to use minimum rotation so as not to disrupt the firmness of the fingers. The elbow must be loose at all times so as to keep the entire arm always light and flexible. It is advisable to play away from the piano and to use the torso only in *fortississimo* passages; this gives the elbow more room to move with the contour of any passagework



and keeps the wrists always loose. Playing away from the piano also prevents one from raising the shoulders, a common cause of unnecessary tension.

The elbow is also essential for leaps, e.g., the opening of Liszt's *La Campanella* (see Notation 5). For this technical difficulty, Reyes taught me to play with a level wrist and a quiet forearm. The wrist then moves sideways with the help of a little rotation from the forearm and elbow, approaching each leap with an arch. It is this arch that makes the movement free and relaxed. Heinrich Neuhaus once quoted, "Piano playing defies Euclidian Geometry in that the shortest distance between two points is a curve!" (132).

The image shows three systems of musical notation for Liszt's Étude No. 3 "La Campanella". The first system is marked "Allegretto" and "p" (piano). It features a treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 6/8 time signature. The right hand has a series of leaps, with a circled "8" above the first measure. The bass clef part has a circled "8" above the first measure. The second system continues the right-hand leaps, with circled "8" and "4 8" above the first and second measures respectively. The third system shows the right hand with circled "8" and "8" above the first and second measures, and the bass clef with circled "8" and "5" above the first and second measures. The instruction "sempre staccato e piano" is written below the third system.

Notation 5: Liszt, *Étude No. 3 "La Campanella"* from *Six Grand Études after Paganini*, mm 1–14 (Leaps on the right hand are played with a quiet arm so that the elbow can rotate and the player can approach each leap with an arch with the help of controlled sideways movements of the wrist.)

## The Shoulder

The shoulder is the hinge to the upper arm and therefore, together with the chest muscles, controls the weight of the entire arm. It is very important to keep the shoulder relaxed at all times, never raising it in actual playing. The lightness and flexibility of the entire arm determines one's ability to control natural weight, thereby discerning when to play *forte* or *piano*, with a faster attack on *forte* and a slower attack on *piano*. The speed of the attack on the keyboard determines the speed of the felt hammers striking the piano strings on the sounding board; the faster the speed, the louder the sound and vice versa. Remember to use the torso very sparingly: when one leans toward the



piano all the time, it inhibits the movements of the shoulders, wrists, and elbows.

György Sandor mentions in his book that if, according to Isaac Newton, force is equal to mass times acceleration, to have more force, and we can either increase the acceleration as we discussed above, or we can increase the mass (373–8). I mentioned above that wrist octaves are used for playing *piano* or *leggiero* (see Notation 6); this is logical because the hand is a small mass. To play forte, one can add the forearm for more mass (see Notation 7), and to play fortissimo one uses the entire arm whose hinge is the shoulder (see Notation 8). One should always remember that when using the entire arm, the elbow and the wrist remain loose and the fingers firm. Reyes said to us, “Hang your two arms in the air and move your forearms keeping your wrists limp but your fingers firm. That’s how it should feel when you play octaves.”



Notation 6: Bach-Busoni, *Chaconne in D minor*, mm. 414–3 (The left hand is played with a high wrist loosely hanging from the forearm for as long as the dynamic marking is in piano. The hand quickly goes up and down with the relaxed wrist as hinge. Pure wrist movement is only effective with soft octaves; the entire arm should be kept light at all times.)



Notation 7: Liszt, *Étude No. 2* from *Six Grand Études after Paganini*, mm. 364–2 (For octaves from *forte* to *fortissimo*, more mass is needed so the player uses the forearm, with the elbow as hinge. The wrists should be kept loose, the upper arm light, and the fingers moderately firm. Release of tension in every beat is necessary.)



Notation 8: Saint-Saëns, *Piano Concerto in C minor No. 4*, Op.44, mm. 3973–99 (Octaves from *fortissimo* to *fortississimo* are to be played with the entire arm, with loose wrists, elbow, and shoulders. Remember to release tension on every beat.)

## The Chest Muscles - Thrust versus Free Fall

Free fall is used for playing bass notes in full tone, the height of the hand around 15 centimeters from the keyboard; one simply lets the fifth finger fall freely with the entire arm on the note, landing either sideways (in a chopping motion) or on the fingertip, with the fingernail almost perpendicular to the key for basses in octaves. Again, the volume of the sound is determined by the speed of attack. For full chords, however, free fall may not guarantee accuracy, so it is best to prepare them on the keyboard with zero distance, thus avoiding free fall. As György Sandor puts it, we play them with “thrust,” i.e., with the contraction of the chest and shoulder muscles but with quick release of tension using the same muscles (1081–09). To illustrate the use of free fall and thrust, see Notation 9 below.



Notation 9: Bach-Busoni, *Chaconne in D minor*, mm. 575–8 (All chords in this passage are played with thrust and all accented octaves with free fall.)

### Important Notes on Technique

The controlling idea for the discussion above is that the body should find its most natural art of movement; there should be no pain, and nothing should be forced. After all, a relaxed movement on the keyboard will result in optimal tone, whether soft or loud, big or small. Movements that are natural will bring out the natural sound of the instrument. That is why facial contortions and frenzied movements of the shoulders and torso will only result in either false notes, a banging tone, or both.

Since hand structures are unique, the amount of movement of finger, wrist, elbow, or shoulder will vary from pupil to pupil. The teacher should be aware of the hand structure of the student and should assess her finger strength and level of flexibility of wrists, elbows, and shoulders. Five-finger exercises would help, but Reyes always pushed for the tens of thousands of études in piano literature. He always said, “Do not settle for two or three

études, study the whole volume!” He was brought up that way, so aside from the études of the formative years (Czerny, Cramer, Moscheles, Moskowski, etc.) he studied and performed all the études of Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, Rachmaninoff, etc. How he did it would be the subject of the section on musical and intellectual preparation. But first, here are a number of discussion points regarding other aspects of technique.

### On Rhythm and Technique

Technique in music is not just a thing of the body or the physical equipment, it is also dependent on the inner world of the mind. In fact, musicians have to be trained like gymnasts and mathematicians: without that mental discipline, even the most optimal of physical equipment will not be able to coordinate itself. This mental discipline in music is governed by the ear, the most important organ of a musician. It is the ear that sorts out the different sounds one can produce from the *pianoforte* and tells the brain to encode these sounds in small amounts, like building blocks to an imposing edifice.

In eight out of ten lessons, Reynaldo Reyes would say, “The most basic element of music is not pitch but rhythm! It is so because the existence of music is very much dependent on the element of time!” (Reyes, July 25, 2015, 11.00) Without that pulse and that driving force for motion, there is no music. It is precisely the ear that creates that mental image of sound that the pianist produces even before he plays on the keyboard, and there is no music if the ear does not systematically organize these sounds in time. A good sense of rhythm is indicative of a good ear for music. Reyes once said that even in sight-reading, one reads the rhythm first and lets the pitch fit in the rhythmic patterns that are fixed and immutable.

Rhythm also solves a lot of physical problems in technique, e.g., when the pianist learns something new and forces himself to play in tempo while the piece has just been learned, or when he loses the pace of the music and goes faster than he should, making the muscles contract erratically, thus making them stiff. The problem of focus is also a rhythmic problem; when one loses rhythmic integrity in performance, one fails to keep that structured thinking that is the most important element of mental discipline necessary for music, and even for sports.

### On Pedaling

Reyes often quoted his teachers on the evils of pedaling. He said that one should strive to play *legato* with the fingers and not with the foot! The pedal should be used only when necessary, i.e., when *legato* is impossible in a passage with so many voices or notes. One can use the pedal only at the point

where it is impossible to connect one note or chord to the next. The pedal can also be used to color and to produce a warmer tone especially in sections where the hall is dry. One has to examine the instrument and the hall where one performs.

Again, like rhythm, pedaling is a matter of actively listening to one's playing, and at times a question of having another set of ears to listen to one's playing in the hall where one has to perform. Listening is everything in the process of music-making; most of our practice hours have to be spent on listening to what we are doing and experimenting on different touches and strategies on pedaling until everything becomes organized in our brain. Reyes agreed with Marina Escano when she said that the best pedaling is one that is hardly noticeable; everything is simply connected in the right places, and there is no blurring of chords sounded together, creating murky sounds.

Reyes said that we only use the pedal when needed, or not at all, and most of the time only partially. Full pedal is used only in *fortissimo* passages. For running passages that are mostly scale-wise, there should be no pedal at all except for rare circumstances when the hall is extra dry.

### On Fingering

Fingering depends on hand structure and size. Reyes always made his students experiment on several fingerings especially on difficult passages until ease and comfort were achieved. Like Chopin, he was not against putting the thumb under the fifth finger on rare occasions but only if it was the best option for fluid execution. Reyes was also fond of playing some notes on the right hand with the left and vice versa; he often made use of the "free hand" or the "free finger" for difficult passages so that the student would not spend too much time practicing a passage that could be rearranged accordingly (see Notation 10).



Notation 10: Liszt, *La Campanella*, mm. 22 (The notes marked in red are to be played with the thumb of the left hand.)

### On Breathing and Singing

We often hear from our piano teachers that we have to make the piano sing; we have to play our melodies the way we sing them. A good singing line begins soft, makes a *crescendo*, and towards the end of the phrase ends soft, in resolution to a tonic chord. Lines are shaped this way and this makes our playing interesting like sentences ending with punctuation marks in a coherent essay. Reyes added another dimension to this: “You do not only play like a singer, you also do diaphragmatic support like a singer! Hold the tension in your diaphragm until the end of the phrase, then breathe normally to start the next phrase.”

This does not only add spacing in one’s playing, it also makes it more intense. Also, technically, when one concentrates the tension in the diaphragm, one relieves the tension in the arms and the hands. This is especially crucial in highly virtuosic passages. As an example, Reyes instructed me to play the final bars of the Second Concerto of Rachmaninoff in one single breath, holding the tension in my diaphragm (see Notation 11). He literally pulled my diaphragm as I played it.

Notation 11: Rachmaninoff, *Piano Concerto No. 2*, final bars (To play this passage loud and fast, one needs loose wrists, elbows and shoulders. Keep the arm light and play the whole passage in one breath.)

### The Rachmaninoff Style of Practicing

When I was learning the Second Concerto of Rachmaninoff for my first doctoral recital, Reyes taught me one of his tricks for learning pieces quickly: separate hands, note per note, with a free-fall landing with a low wrist on the note or chord; stay on that note for four counts, then quickly release the note or chord and let your whole arm loosely stay in the air for another four counts. Land in free fall on the next note, and so on. Do this for each hand on the first two pages of the score and then play the entire two pages as written in medium tempo. The results: even the most difficult of passages were so easy to play, and they sounded really good! We called it the “tension-and-release practice.”

Then, I told him, “But I was taught to release tension as often as I can and as quickly as I can!” To which he said, “Good! This is the slow-

motion practice of that!” He learned it from his Russian teacher Postelnikov, the one who prepared him for his auditions at the *Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris*. Postelnikov claimed to have learned it from a colleague who peeped into the keyhole of Rachmaninoff’s New York apartment to watch how he practiced. Reyes told me that if I practice that way even once through a piece, it was like it practicing for two months in one sitting. One actually encodes the score, note per note, into one’s brain.

Then Reyes would say, “This method of practicing is for you to have a good sound that is full but relaxed. If you want to practice speed, you have to do something else—I call it rhythmic practice. This is also Russian, so I think Rachmaninoff did it, too.” Since I refused to do this at home, he made me do it in class with the fifth variation of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* (see Notation 12). One has to divide each group of four sixteenth notes into two. Play the first two sixteenth notes twice in sixteenth notes and the last two once in eighth notes for the entire variation. Then do the opposite: the first two sixteenth notes in eighth notes once and the last two sixteenth notes twice in sixteenth notes. Play the whole thing again, stopping at the first sixteenth note of every four-note group; play the whole thing again stopping on the second note in the group of four; then the whole thing stopping on the third note; then the whole thing stopping on the fourth.



Notation 12: Bach, *Variation 5 from Goldberg Variations*, mm. 18– (Note that throughout this entire process, the notes on the left hand should be played together with the corresponding sixteenth notes on the right. Then, play the entire piece or movement in tempo. Now I was aware of everything that was happening in *Variation 5*, and there was a marked increase in speed and a marked increase in the ease of execution.)



## Gesture and Sound

All the technical aspects discussed so far have to do with gesture. Reyes claimed that it was the gesture that created a *crescendo* or *diminuendo*; the increase and decrease of sound volume were created by the gesture of the entire playing apparatus. It is the motion of the finger, wrist, arm, elbow, and shoulder that influences the behavior of the felt hammers, thus producing more than a hundred shades of sound even on one note. To play a *crescendo*, one needs the gesture of the elbow going outward; when a bigger *crescendo* is required, use a little of the torso to lean forward for more weight (see Notation 8). Only then should one use the torso. When I was playing highly virtuosic pieces like the Saint-Saëns *Fourth Concerto* and the *Second Concerto* of Rachmaninoff for my first doctoral recital, he demanded that I exaggerate these gestures a bit. For one thing, one needs a big sound to compete with an orchestra. More importantly, technically demanding pieces are physically taxing. One has to exaggerate the gestures of releasing tension especially with the elbows. At one point, he actually told me to fly!

All of these gestures are merely a means to an ultimate end: to make physical sense of what is written on the score, to translate into sound the intentions of the composer. This requires not only intelligence but also commitment, and that is the subject of the two other modes of preparation for a musical performance.

## Musical and Intellectual Preparation

Aspects of mental discipline and sophistication in Reyes's art of playing the piano involve the musical ear, the art of nuance that leads to orchestral playing, the *solfeggio*, the elements of style, and the notion of technique as a means and not as an end.

### The Musical Ear

Reyes often spoke metaphorically of the outer ear and the inner ear of medical science.<sup>4</sup> The inner ear acts like a superego, being the all-knowing organizer of the plethora of sounds required by the score; it creates a mental picture of the sound the performer wants to produce even before execution. The outer ear then encodes the task at hand, checks the sound made by the performing apparatus and the instrument, and sends a report to the inner ear for evaluation. All of these happen in a split second on every note or chord the performer plays.

“You can’t get it because you don’t listen!” Reyes would often exclaim. All things being equal, i.e., the performer’s technique is secure and he has done sufficient work in the assimilation of the score, one only needs to actively listen and the body would know what to do (e.g., playing with the finger, releasing tension with the wrist, rotating the forearm, etc.). That is why one cannot survive with mechanical practice alone; it is necessary to practice with the ears at all times.

### The Art of Nuance: Orchestral Playing

Russian pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus wrote in his book that in order to produce something beautiful out of the piano, one has to think of the impossible (136). Reyes and my German piano professor Walter Olbertz practically said the same thing in the same words, although they claimed never to have read the book of Neuhaus. The piano can sound incredibly boring because it cannot sustain a note like the violin and the human voice; it cannot create a *vibrato*, and the sound dies right after the felt hammer strikes the string. Hence, a pianist must strive never to make the piano sound like the piano. It should always sound like something else: an instrumental ensemble, a choir, and eventually an orchestra.

This lies on one’s technical skill in manipulating overtones through touch. Even for one note, a performer can produce at least sixty shades of tone on the piano; plucking with the finger, playing with the wrist, elbow and arm, and striking the keys with different speeds will produce so many different colors on the air canvas. We can therefore talk about sound layers when we begin to learn a score. For instance, the melodic line of a classical sonata could be played by the flute with a bright tone so one should sink more into the keys. The *alberti* bass figures could be played by two instruments: the bassoon plays the bass with a heavier sound so more arm weight can be applied on the bass; the clarinet plays the remaining figures in *piano* so a lighter touch on the other notes after the bass is in order. Reyes would give a note on releasing tension through the wrist right after playing the bass notes.

Reyes gave me some useful advice on how to practice fugues.<sup>5</sup> Play the notes on the G clef with both hands sounding like two separate instruments of different tone colors, then imitate the sound using one hand. Do the same for the notes on the F clef. Now one has three or four instruments sounding together, and all the voices are clear. This is the only way one can make a piano work sound interesting, and this is what makes one pianist sound different from another. The degrees to which a pianist does technical practice and the amount of his intention in doing so are unique; they are

dependent on talent, level of technical security, and mental conditions on the day of the performance.

### *Solfeggio*

When Reyes mentioned during our first group lesson that one of his tasks was to resolve whatever performance issues we have, I immediately told him that I had issues on memory lapses. One of my few excuses was that I have not played a solo recital in years because I was busy teaching full time at the UST and part time at the Ateneo de Manila University. Memory lapses in performance bothered me quite a bit. First, he said that it was psychological, that I should not anticipate it. Then, he asked me, “Do you sing your pieces in *solfeggio*?” When I said no, he said that it was time that I did.

He went on saying that in France, *solfeggio* was an essential part in all musical training. He remembered Marguerite Long telling him to sing the entire Italian Concerto of Bach in *solfeggio*. I tried it with the second theme of the third movement of the Rachmaninoff Second Concerto but had difficulties doing so because there were so many notes. Because I was not used to it, I asked him if I could just sing quietly the bass notes in *solfeggio* to aid my memory of the harmony. He said yes and that I should just do what I could to remember what was going on. Reading the score away from the piano, for instance, also gives us a visual aspect of memory.

#### Elements of Style

The German School comes to the fore through the necessary discussion at this point of form analysis, a working knowledge of music and art history, and readings on the lives of composers that highlight the style of every era.

### The Baroque Period

Reyes, our professor in the coursework on 16th to 18th century music, in one trimester of less than three months, made us learn the *Sonata in D major, L. 465* of Scarlatti, the Rameau *Gavotte* and *Variations*, and the entire *Goldberg Variations* of J.S. Bach. With the Rameau *Variations*, we learned the early beginnings of the variation form, and he chose a Scarlatti sonata with huge leaps that we were to practice with an arch for maximum ease of execution (see Notation 12). It was a prototype of the intention of the composer that these sonatas be *essercizi* or exercises; but we had to remember to play it with a singing tone and to even sing the runs. That was going to be our model for interpreting the sonatas of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.

The bulk of the semester was spent learning Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, a very daunting task. But he said, “It is not as difficult as you think! If you are committed to learning and memorizing five of the thirty

variations per week, then you would have finished all thirty variations in six weeks!” That made sense, but we were teaching full time and were doctoral students with nine trimester units. “Excuses, excuses,” he would say. I was able to study and read through only half of the thirty *Goldberg Variations*, but I learned so much from them.

Reyes stressed the importance of polyphony in the education of a musician, and a pianist for that matter, for only the piano can sound like an orchestra and simulate different instruments sounding together. Polyphonic music, especially the works of Bach (with special emphasis on the *Goldberg Variations* and the forty-eight preludes and fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*), is the vitamin supplement of every pianist.<sup>6</sup> It purifies the mind because it makes one intentionally think linear, that is, in sound layers. Add to that the different modes of articulation (*legato*, *staccato*, *portato*, etc.) and the exploration of the wonders of ornamentation. With the *Goldberg Variations*, we learned practically all the different types of ornamentation of the Baroque Period, e.g., trills in different forms, the mordent, the *praller*, turns, etc.

This art of ornamentation coupled with Bach’s virtuosic writing that he inherited from Antonio Vivaldi reminds us of the dramatic gestures of art in the Baroque Period, an era borne out of Italy’s desire to rebuild Rome on a grand scale after it was sacked by the French. Thus, the word “Baroque” was coined by 20th-century musicologists from the Portuguese “*barocco*”: a beautiful deformed pearl with bubbles as ornaments.

Notation 13: Scarlatti, *Sonata in D major*, L. 465, mm. 768–4 (Leaps in the left hand between the 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> measures are to be made with an arch. The same applies between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> measures, etc.)

## The Classical Period

The Classical Period was born out of the dramatic and ornamental excesses of the Baroque Period; the French Enlightenment of 1740 favored the Classical ideals of naturalness, balance, symmetry in form, and simplicity of expression. The Classical *Sonata-Allegro*, for instance, is a form that strictly adheres to symmetry in phraseology and thematic development. It is a highly cerebral form of composition that is compact with its contrasting themes and how they are fragmented, manipulated, and synthesized in the end as in classical rhetoric.

With Reyes, I had four lessons with the Mozart *Piano Sonata, K. 576*; we discussed all these matters of form (see Table 1) regarding the work. Furthermore, Reyes reiterated that Mozart’s music is all about singing. We discussed that before one attempts to play Mozart’s piano works, watching a decent performance of a Mozart opera is imperative. Only then can a pianist learn how to sing with the piano. The slow, languishing arias and ensembles are perfect examples of the *Empfindsamer Stil* or sensitive style which is expressive but simple and dignified, never vulgar or overly sentimental. The singing runs of the fast arias are perfect models for the instrumental runs of Mozart or any composer for that matter; runs are fast melodic lines and should be played according to their contours. They are phrased and should have a beginning and a resolution that usually ends soft, as one would end a sentence. They are to be played with punctuation marks like the ones in natural speech; regular phrasing is an essential aspect of the Classical ideals of balance and symmetry.

Reyes was also very particular with articulation and with the intentional resolution of phrases. He told me to listen to the Alban Berg String Quartet and notice how satisfying they end their phrases, like actors breathing normally after every sentence. He said, “Without these resolutions and clear articulation (*legato, staccato, portato*, etc.), your Mozart sonata is nothing.”

Table 1.

Mozart, Allegro from *Sonata in D major, K. 576*

(Partial Analysis Using the “Growth” Aspect of the Larue Method)

Large Dimension	Middle Dimension	Small Dimension
<i>Sonata-Allegro form</i> Tempo: <i>Allegro</i>		

<b>Meter: 6/8</b>		
<b>Texture: semi-polyphonic</b>		
<b>Exposition</b>	<i>(D major)</i> Measures 1–9: Statement of the Principal Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in leaps of eighth notes,</li> <li>• sprightly, subtitled “The Hunt” for its chasing quality</li> </ul>
	Measures 10–16: Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• uses fragments of the principal theme on the left hand with counterpoint in running sixteenth notes on the right hand</li> </ul>
	Measures 17–20: Statement of the Secondary Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• melody in sixteenth notes accompanied by broken chords in eighth notes</li> </ul>
	Measures 21–42: Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• variations of the secondary theme</li> <li>• variations of the principal theme</li> <li>• ends in a cadence leading to A major</li> </ul>
	<i>(A major)</i> Measures 43–46: Statement of the Closing theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• melody in eighth and sixteenth note figures</li> <li>• same tempo but more relaxed in character</li> </ul>
	Measures 47–53: Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• uses a variation of the closing theme in running sixteenth notes</li> </ul>
	Measures 54–59: Coda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• melody in running sixteenth notes</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cadence confirms new key of A major</li> </ul>
<b>Development</b>		
	Measures 60–63: Tail fragment of the Coda in two keys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fragment in A minor</li> <li>• fragment in F, the dominant of B flat</li> </ul>
	<i>(B flat major)</i> Measures 64–81: Fragments of the principal theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contrapuntal writing with fragments of the principal theme jumping from one hand to another with counterpoint of running sixteenth notes</li> <li>• transition to F# major</li> </ul>
	<i>(F# major)</i> Measures 82–97: Tail fragment of coda in different keys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transition from F# major to A major: F# major, F# minor, B minor, B major (V), E minor, E major (V), A major</li> </ul>
	<i>(A major)</i> Measures 98–99: Dominant preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in running sixteenth notes leading to the restatement of the principal theme in the recapitulation (D major)</li> </ul>
<b>Recapitulation</b>		
	<i>(D major)</i> Measures 100–107 Statement of the Principal Theme	

## The Romantic Period

The transcendental techniques of Liszt and the Russians come to the fore in 19th century music. Mozart's piano had a range of 5 octaves, Beethoven's was with six octaves and Liszt's (the forerunner of the modern piano) with seven octaves. Quicker action and the expansion of the sounding board from seven to nine feet resulted in a more sonorous sound and in more technical possibilities like fast repeated notes, sweeping *arpeggios*, thundering octaves, and extended chords for huge orchestral sounds. Aside from being a period of excessive virtuosity, it is also an era of breaking away from the musical forms of the Classical Period including its rules for decorum in expression. In all forms of art there is a breaking away from all these rules, and artists as well as composers favored individual paths over conformity. They found inspiration in dark medieval tales, the big dramas of ordinary lives, and the supernatural.

Reyes also talked about the individuality of 19th century composers, beginning with Beethoven who was the first to think out of the box with his sudden or *subito* changes in dynamics, his flair for the heroic in his middle period, and his contemplative style in the late period. This late period also saw forward-looking harmonies that actually predicted the writing of 20th-century composers. This individual style would be emulated by all composers up to this date. Reyes explained to us that the function of music in the 19th century was no longer to fulfill social and/or religious functions but that it was existing for itself like a sonnet of Shakespeare or a novel by Goethe. The composer was now the focal point and the performer was only a conduit. Lydia Goehr talks about this at length in her book *The Museum of Musical Works* (231). The year 1800 saw the establishment of proper concert decorum: lights off in the audience, no noise, no talking, no smoking, and no eating in the hall. The performer emulated the composer more than himself: he became the conduit and therefore the loyal subject and advocate of the master.

I remember playing Liszt's Mephisto Waltz No. 1 in a master class with Reyes in 1989; after going through all the technical details of the work, he said, "After all that technical practice, the most important thing is to play like the devil!" The imaginations of Romantic composers have gone wild, and the performer should do the same. Again, the need for transcendental technique is required because these wild imaginations of composers plus the modern innovations in instrument building have brought us piano works of outrageous technical difficulty. That is why Reyes always recommended the study of the complete études of Chopin and Liszt. No one could ever go



wrong with these; after playing the pieces, the pianist can play anything. When asked how he learned all of them, he suggested that we start with the most difficult ones so the rest would be easier. One has to be determined to learn all of them and to find time to practice, even in the Rachmaninoff style of practicing for quicker absorption. He added that if one would give himself a deadline for memorizing every étude or movement and stick to that deadline no matter what, then learning works by the bulk would be much easier than usual. He advised us to always give in to that obsession, but first we needed to create that obsession in our minds.

I managed to play the six *Paganini* Liszt études along with the Bach-Busoni *Chaconne* and the Mozart *Sonata*, K.576 for my third doctoral recital with only nine months preparation, and I must say, at least for the *Paganini* Liszt études, the Rachmaninoff style of practicing really worked. There was a part in the sixth étude where I had to play difficult octaves and chords in contrary motion, and Reyes advised me to make an *agogic* accent at the beginning of each passage to ensure release of tension (see Notation 14). According to him, this *agogic* accent was peculiar to 19th Century music and was expressive in function, plus, it made the execution easier because one had more time to release tension through the wrists, shoulders, and elbows. Of course, he also advised me to use it sparingly as it may ruin my rhythmic integrity, and it could sound too romanticized.



Notation 14: Liszt, *Var. 6 of Étude No. 6* from the *Six Grand Études after Paganini*, mm. 131–6 (The chords at the beginning of every measure are to be played with *agogic* accents, i.e., with a slight pause. This enables the player to release tension through the wrist, elbow, and shoulders.)

Another technical note for 19th Century works is the exaggeration of gesture. Big sounds need more weight, hence, more gesture in playing with thrust, free fall, and in the quick release of tension is required. I was made to release more with the elbow and shoulders especially for big chords and fast octaves to regulate the blood flow in my entire playing apparatus. Wide stretches and dangerous leaps, like in Liszt's *La Campanella* (see

Notation 5), also required more rotation of the elbows. “It is also visual,” Reyes remarked.

The audience has to see the motion that produces the sound, but it is not for acrobatic effect; it serves a technical and a musical purpose. Finally, Reyes warned us not to use too much pedal in romantic works so as not to compromise clarity; for most of the runs of Saint-Saëns’s *Concerto No. 4*, he made me remove the pedal entirely (see Notation 15).

Notation 15: Saint-Saëns, *Allegro vivace* from *Piano Concerto No. 4*, Op. 44, mm. 478–85 (All runs are to be played without pedal in a hall with good acoustics.)

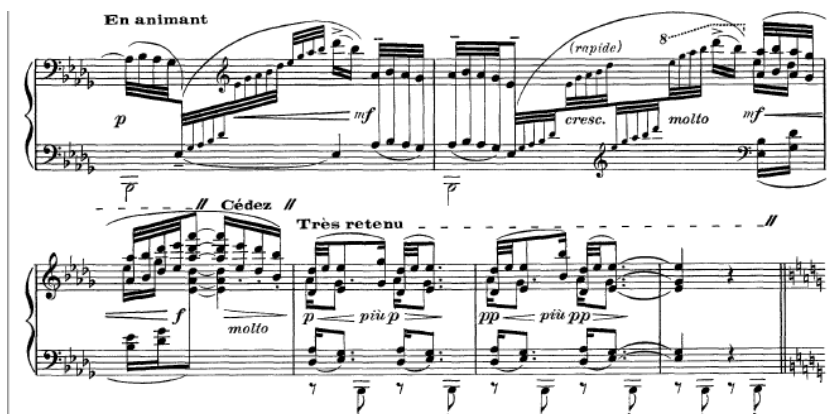
### The 20th Century and Beyond

For my second doctoral recital, I played the complete (twenty-four) Debussy Preludes, and this forms an integral part of my reason for studying with him. “I want to be a colorist like you,” I told him in one of our lessons, and this recital became my favorite. Reyes told me that with 20th-century music beginning with Debussy, we did not attempt to interpret: we just followed what was written on the score very strictly and to the letter. With the Mozart sonatas and the works of Chopin, we make *crescendos* and *decrescendos*

with slow melodic lines and fast runs even if they are not written. It is tradition to sing everything in Mozart and Chopin. But with Debussy, we need to have a microscopic view of the score, i.e., make a *crescendo* and *decrescendo* only if it is written; all the dynamic markings and minute articulations have to be followed.

I have learned in school that Debussy was probably the first composer to write music for the sake of sound. His music has vague philosophical or rhetorical leanings; they are designed to let the performer and the listener live for the moment. Like Impressionistic paintings and Symbolist Poetry, they create images not to describe but to evoke feelings for these images. Reyes said that every chord and every phrase in Debussy's works is an image. Many pianists avoid playing Debussy because they do not understand Debussy's intention; they adhere strictly to the mode of tonality of all homophonic music before Debussy. The composer broke all the rules of classical harmony and counterpoint, using Asian scales, quartal harmony, whole-tone scales, and clusters for the sake of tone color and nuance (see Notation 16). For the composer, there would probably be a loose tonal center, but it is not as important as the feelings the set of images of the work evokes. When Reyes played the 24 Debussy *Preludes* in 1979, he said that they were all amazed at how he did all the coloring especially in soft passages. Then he said, "We both know that it is easy; just help with your wrists and your elbows for a cushioned sound. It is so easy to control tone color that way."

Before he died, he gave us all an assignment to study Carl Vine's *Sonata No. 2*, a 21st-century work. He said that once one was comfortable with Debussy, all things being equal, then one could play any modern work. One would know how to count every single note and rest and follow all the markings of the score to the letter. One could think out of the box of traditional tonal music and learn to think in images instead of in formal structures. Anyway, these images are structured in themselves. Post-tonal and atonal music have patterns too, if one knows how to look for them. These may be difficult to read, but once you have systematically memorized them, these are yours. Reynaldo Reyes said, "It's magic!"



Notation 16: Debussy, “Voiles“ from *Preludes Book 1*, mm. 424–7 (an example of the use of the whole-tone scale)

### Technique as a Means and Not as an End

Classical music is an intellectual endeavor, and much of the work towards its performance is on intellectual sophistication. It is also a complex language, and technique is its grammar. Ideally, good piano technique should be learned before one learns his/her alphabet. The performing apparatus has to be taught natural movement, or if I may rephrase, the child’s mind has to be taught never to go against the natural movement of his/her hands, wrists, arms, and shoulders. His/her mind has to be taught to synchronize movement with the rhythm that his/her ear perceives. He/she has to learn that music, dancing, walking, and even the sounds of nature and the environment are one. All of these are essential parts of technique.

If one did not have the good fortune of a sound music education as a child, one simply has to embrace it and say, “I am going to learn the grammar again from the most basic elements like learning the grammar of a new language in school.” These are the verities of life, and most Filipino musicians who took graduate school in the West had to undergo the same overhaul of technique and learning skills. Reyes said that to learn new things fast, one needed ten percent of talent and ninety percent of patience tempered with open-mindedness and the joy of learning. It is very possible, but one had to learn to forget everything that he/she knew and become a *tabula rasa* (blank slate).

But learning technique as an end in itself defeats the purpose of making music. Technique is necessary, but it is only a means. Like grammar to a professional writer, technique for a musician is a tool to execute with ease whatever one’s creative mind fancies; eventually, it is the physical

means to deliver to the audience the intentions of the composer. To reiterate, in a musical performance the composer is the most important element: the performer is just a conduit, but this conduit has to be of excellent quality. Reyes said that the discipline of classical music required the entire being of the performer. Hence, the preparations of a musician for a performance still requires a third facet: the spiritual.

### Spiritual Preparation

I firmly believe that empathy should be on top of the list of qualities of a musical interpreter. Empathy does not only mean that one cares about how the other feels but how the other thinks; one gets into the shoes of the other and embraces his entire being. Heinrich Neuhaus specifically wrote in his book that in music making, one has the score (the written image of the composer's intentions), which translates into sound, which translates into emotion (7). Indeed, much of the musical training discussed above is geared towards keen sensitivity that leads to empathy with the composer's intentions and with the audience that perceives these intentions.

### The Musician as Mathematician and Philosopher

I already mentioned above that Reyes believed that musicians should be trained like athletes, mathematicians, and philosophers. The athletic training has already been discussed above; the training as mathematician is also quite obvious with regard to precision in rhythm and execution, and the scientific concepts of free fall and the control of weight. Having earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics, I may add a few insights into the mathematical aspect.

The study of a branch of mathematics (e.g., college algebra, calculus, or linear algebra) is cumulative, i.e., it requires comprehension of every single concept in the order that it is given to you by the textbook. For instance, before one can reduce algebraic fractions, one has to first learn to factor algebraic expressions. At the end of the course (especially in higher mathematics, i.e., advanced calculus and abstract algebra) one is required to integrate all the concepts and figure out how interdependent they are with each other. Same as in music, when one reads the score for the first time, one is forced to first master the individual sections (that indeed contain mathematical patterns) before one can play it through and realize that the entire work is an integration of its individual parts. Music is probably the most abstract of all the arts in that it is encoded in abstract patterns and can only survive through the element of time. With literature, one has the physical evidence, the text that is editable. Painting and sculpture can be

changed at any time. Theater, film, and dance have the visual aspect, although they also survive through the element of time. But with music, one is completely dependent on the moment; a musical performer is only as good as that one hour he is given to play his concert. And the integration of sounds that one produces in that one hour disappears after the last note of the performance. What he/she leaves behind is just the emotion or the memory of the emotion that the audience felt in that moment. The emotional response to the music varies from individual to individual. That is why a musical performer has to thoroughly prepare for his/her concert; it is a preparation that requires his/her entire being.

The concept of “Being” is an essential issue in philosophy. Martin Heidegger portrays man as “*Dasein*,” i.e., Being in the world, in his opus on phenomenology *Being and Time*; “*Dasein*” strives to make sense of the world around him, which includes himself, and finds meaning and value in the essence of objects and events that are significant in his life (414–4). Thomas Clifton believes that phenomenology is important to musicians because phenomenological descriptions concentrate not on facts but on essences (81–2). The assimilation of the essence of a musical score is the initial role of the performer; his/her technical, musical, and intellectual preparations are precisely geared towards the systematic execution of this task. Only upon successful assimilation can the performer actually bring the musical score to performance; the music is then brought to life, and the sounds that are brought forth into Being become the new object that the audience can choose to assimilate phenomenologically. The audience’s phenomenological process of listening can only begin when they find value in the music that they are listening to. Reyes constantly reminded us to prepare with our heart and soul so that the audience might truly find value in the music that we played, and that it was our duty to show the audience how beautiful the music was. That is why it was always important to him that we talked about the true essence of the music, its historical context, the tradition of playing the work, and its technical and compositional structures. Philosophy enables us to talk to ourselves and to each other on a conceptual plane so that we may know what music is for and what we musicians are here for (Clifton 67–).

### **When the Pianist Becomes a Musician**

After enjoying such erudite discussions with Reyes, we often went back to the question of technique and talked about performances that were note-perfect. He said that if they were note perfect but cold and unfeeling, or when these performances did not touch on in any way, then they were not

technically perfect because technique was the art of sound production. It is the art of physically sorting sounds in a way that they translate into emotion.

We study music in the university to have intellectual sophistication. We study theory and ear training to understand the written language of music. We study music and art history to understand the sociopolitical, psychological, philosophical, and cultural context of the works we are playing. We study technique to master how the language of music translates into physical movements that translate into sound. We study music literature to have in-depth understanding of style periods including how they evolve as byproducts of schools of thought expressed in art in a historical context.

The integration of all of these things, in addition to our natural intelligence, willingness to learn, and the impact of our life experiences, affects the way we play our music. Reyes said that note-perfect performances in the West were not that rare anymore, but at least half of them were cold and lacking in sophistication. There were many performers who made some mistakes but one heard the sophistication in their music; there was complete understanding of the work, its context, and the composer's intentions. Reyes would rather listen to such performers.

Of course, there are performances that are truly wanting due to lack of thorough preparation, lack of talent, lack of sophistication, a desire to show off, neglecting the intentions of the composer, or a combination of two or more of the above. Also, there is such a thing as listening to a good pianist playing badly; if the intentions are sincere, then the performance somehow touches the listener. The worst thing is to listen to a bad pianist playing badly; thankfully, these are rare, for the career of a musical performer is probably the most daunting that not many have the nerve for it. A pianist becomes a musician when optimal technique and optimal intellectual sophistication enables him/her to deliver the intentions of the composer resulting in a touching performance.

### Music and the Other Arts

Reyes and I used to compare notes on what transpired in my studies in Berlin and in his studies in Paris. The French and the German schools are pretty much similar especially in the sense that one has to take comprehensive exams in Theory, Ear Training, Instrument Science, History of Music, and Forms and Analysis before one prepares for the graduation recitals in chamber music and the memorized solo recitals for the major instrument. The only difference was that Germany's ear training was more concentrated on dictation than in *solfeggio*, and there were two solo recitals (thirteen days apart) for the major instrument in the master's program in Berlin.

European colleges of music expect one to master all these courses before they even hear one play; failure in these theoretical examinations will result in expulsion even if one's playing is at international competition level. In addition (e.g., for the oral comprehensive exams in History of Music) they expect one to have a working knowledge of the music literature even of instruments other than one's own and a working knowledge of European History and Art History. It is expected that instrumentalists should go to the opera and singers to concerts of instrumental or symphonic music. My German piano professor, Walter Olbertz, often reminded me of the first Sunday of the month, when all museums in Germany were free of charge; he stressed that the appreciation of the visual arts was part of my education. He also encouraged me to go not only to the concerts of my favorite pianists but also to symphonic and chamber music concerts and to the opera. Literature was something I had to do on my own, reading German novels that improved my language proficiency. After all, everything in European educational institutions is taught exclusively in the native tongue.

Reyes and I also talked about the unity of all forms of art. There are lines in poetry and musical phrases in music; there is texture in sculpture and texture in music; there is color in painting and tone color in music; there is exposition, conflict, and denouement in fiction and there is exposition, development and recapitulation in the sonata-*allegro* form of absolute music (see Table 1 on page 55), etc. It is perfectly natural for a musician to hear music when he views a painting, for a painter to imagine a plethora of colors when he hears music, and for a playwright to imagine a plot when he hears music. Imagine a film, a dance recital, or even a wedding without music! All the other arts are connected to music, and all the other arts are connected to each other.

### Education as Empowerment

In one of our lunchtime conversations, Reyes mentioned that teaching is a multi-tasking job: one is also a parent, a friend, and a psychoanalyst. In fact, as I have mentioned above, he already said in our first lesson that he was there not just to teach but to address our performance issues. These issues are discussed in this section. Many of Reyes's students in PWU had issues on memory lapses in performance. Memory lapses are a performer's greatest fear; it is usually the reason why public recitals are always postponed and the main reason for stage fright. In our case, it was mainly the lack of preparation due to our full working hours as professors, or so we thought. The first thing he said about the matter is that we should not anticipate memory lapses. "Do not be afraid to make mistakes; the only thing to fear is fear itself!" True, but



then again, he said that to ensure memory and minimize false notes, it would not hurt to do other things like learn our pieces in *solfeggio* and securing our technique so the body reacted naturally and systematically to commands of the brain. All of these have been discussed above in his technical preparation. Our memory issues were resolved to a good extent through all these processes, but there was one other factor that struck me during our lessons—Reyes drove the student to slavery of practice but at the same time made the student feel that he (Reyes) did this because he truly believed in the student.

In one of our sessions with the Rachmaninoff *Second Concerto*, we started talking about my traumatic experiences with one of my past teachers, one who told me to give up hope for graduate studies in Europe because I was too old. He was furious at that teacher and told me never to let anybody do that to me, and that I should never do that to any of my students! He even told me never to tell any student that he/she was stupid even if it was true because he/she would believe it and amount to nothing. We are here to motivate all students, to tell them about the beauty of our craft, not to assert our superiority so we can feed our egos. This was the time when I was doing an old (but already corrected) habit of playing with raised shoulders. This was also the day he taught me the Rachmaninoff style of practicing and that cured the nasty habit. Then one would always hear him say “You see, you can do it!” I never thought that a middle-aged man like me would enjoy hearing those words.

After that session, we had *merienda*. Over coffee, he told me that he was glad to hear my story and wondered about the traumatic experiences of my colleagues. He said, “I wish they would tell me their own stories as you did about yours today. Now I am worried that all of you may have self-esteem problems.” He truly cared. In our next class in 16th and 17th Century Music Literature, he addressed the issue of self-esteem. He even said that learning all the études of Chopin and Liszt was a matter of self-esteem:

You have to tell yourself that you can do it! Do not let anyone tell you that you cannot, and this question of age is nonsense! Never tell yourself that you are too old to do it! I am eighty years old and I still dare to learn new things! If I can do it, then so can you! I know that you are all working full time. I am telling you to please find time to practice your repertoire and find a little time to learn new things. After practicing your doctoral repertoire, if you can read a new étude or a new prelude and fugue by Bach for half an hour, then you have won. . . .” (Reyes, July 25, 2015, 11.00)

Reyes never talked down to us: he was always encouraging and motivating. My colleague Naomi Sison told me that one time, during her darkest hours of preparation for her first recital, Reyes told her, “Naomi, you don’t know how good you are. I wish you could be exposed to an international competition so you would reach your maximum potential!” (Reyes, July 25, 2015, 11.00). I thought to myself, if I fail in my task after this empowerment from a very generous and accomplished man, then it will be entirely my fault. Reyes reminded us of the daunting task of a performer: to bring beautiful music to the audience and make them “possess” the true essence of the composer’s intentions. Of course, this comes in varying degrees depending on the level of talent of the performer and the sufficiency of her preparation on a given time frame. Nevertheless, what was important for Reyes was the determination to compete with oneself in doing the task. To us, his students, what was important was Reyes’s belief that we could do it. In fact, he actually believed in us more than we believed in ourselves.

### **The Concert Stage as a Venue for Spiritual Exchange—The Need for Sincerity**

Reyes made me reassess and confirm my answers to the question “What am I here for? Or what is the real task of a musician?” Musical Performance and Medical Surgery have always been on top of the list of the most stressful professions. Performers would agree with this without batting an eyelash because most of them work really hard for a performance but only very rarely does everything work when one is onstage playing in a concert. The fear of failure is always looming. Reyes would often say,

Conquer your fear! Believe in yourself and dare to perform more often! And spend more time on quality practice—with your ears! You have to believe that you are doing something worthwhile. It is a spiritual exchange with your audience! They have to know that you are present and that you know what you are doing. Believe in yourself and remember that everything that you do should be clear and intentional!” (Reyes, July 25, 2015, 11.00)

With “intentional” he most probably also meant the active delivery of the intentions

of the composer because a musical performance is not just about the performer. We should probably learn to say, “This is not about me, it’s about the music! I am just a conduit, and a good one at that.” Reyes always said,

When you are on stage, always think that all the hard work has been done. Just think that you are the best, believe in yourself! But you are not there to show them how good you are; you are there to show them how beautiful the music is!” (Reyes, July 25, 2015, 11.00)

Reyes believed that this was what intelligent playing is all about. It is based on hard work on the details of the music with the intention of competently delivering its essence to the audience. That would work for any level of competence in music if the willingness is there. If the performer truly knows what he/she can do and is willing to forget herself in favor of empathy for the essence of the music, then his/her playing will be truly sincere.

### Reflections: A Paradigm Shift for Filipino Musicians

The contrasting views on the importance between the musical work and the performer as expressed in the views of Lydia Goehr and Stan Godlovich discussed in the third section of this study find resolution in the philosophy of Reyes’s pedagogical process. Goehr’s thesis on “*Werktreue*,” referring to the faithfulness to the work, is the focal point of Reyes’s technical and musical preparations whereby the student is made to realize that preparation for a musical performance entails the engagement of the entire being of the performer because he/she is championing the work of a composer.

The performer’s temptation to show off and be self-indulgent is hereby controlled, highlighting the value of internal goods as expressed by Jane O’Dea. Reyes’s spiritual preparation, on the other hand, concentrated on the well-being of the performer’s psyche; it is a constant reminder of the importance of the technical and intellectual preparations because music is a spiritual exchange among composer, performer, and audience. But beyond all that, the spiritual preparation also reminds the performer that competence coupled with a positive attitude and a child-like willingness to learn is essential to self-esteem. As expressed by Godlovich, the performer is at least as important as the work in that, without the performer, the work does not come to life and remains an abstract set of instructions. Reyes believed in both the importance of the work and the performer; his unique teaching methods are geared towards building a healthy attitude to making music, where one gives due reverence to the musical work through a disciplined psyche that trusts one’s competence in performing as well as the performer’s important role as conduit between composer and audience.

In Heidegger’s *Being and Time* there is a discussion on “*Dasein*’s” “potentiality of Being,” which is recognized and explored only when

“*Dasein*” listens to “conscience” that brings restlessness until “*Dasein*” arrives at the core of its Being (296). Reyes affirmed the “conscience” in his students and brought them (students) to the core of who they really are, and to the almost endless possibilities of what they could do. The more the student treats the methods of Reyes as equipment in the “readiness-to-hand” mode of Being, the more they become embedded in their habitus and the better they can impart these methods to future students of piano performance.

Reyes epitomized the cosmopolitan musician. He embodied the Filipino performer and pedagogue with numerous international experiences. He systematically and prudently used eclectic knowledge, complemented with a generosity of spirit and love for the beauty of life itself, to teach and make good music. Students learned from him the importance of discipline that is a product of one’s love for music and art. They (his students) saw him as the benchmark of a healthy ego that put the essence of the music first before anything else. As a pedagogue, he also put the student first because of his philosophy that teaching is all about the empowerment of the learner. He had a vision of nurturing Filipino pianists who would become worthy of conquering the international classical music scene, and he knew that a lot work had to be done to achieve this goal. Reyes often referred to Nick Joaquin’s article, “The Heritage of Smallness,” which delved on how the Filipino is brought up to think small; Joaquin reiterated that the Filipino character is clannish and is often drawn to thinking at the *barangay* level (Joaquin, p. 1). The Filipino mentality of focusing on small businesses where everything sold in retail (*tingi*) is typified by the selling of cigarettes by the stick and garlic by the clove. According to Reyes, the Filipino was brought up with a self-effacing attitude of “This is all I have and all that I am, so I can only do so much and should therefore not want more. . .” (Joaquin, p. 4). In other words, the Filipino is brought up with accepting his smallness and that social status is everything; that the poor should not aim for white collar jobs because they belong to the working class and have no right to a college education.

In metaphor, Reyes observed that many piano teachers in the country stuck to outdated methods whereby their pupils only did one thing at a time, such as one *étude* per lesson, and then the same thing for the next lesson, and the next until mastery was achieved. Likewise, the same *étude* was played in the third lesson, if necessary. This is what many piano pupils do, but those who can do much more are often subjected to the same method which greatly stifles talent. Heidegger warned against “*Dasein*’s” tendency to listen to the chatter of the “they” because this greatly curtails one’s quest to realize one’s well-deserved “potentiality of Being” (268). Reyes believed

that teaching methods should vary from pupil to pupil. The teacher should explore and maximize the pupil's capacity like learning three études in one week and another three or more in the next, if possible.

World standards in piano performance are very high. Reyes saw and experienced this all over the world. For example, in the West and in our Asian neighbors, such as Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and mainland China, a student at grade school piano level is required to finish all the inventions of Bach and entire volumes of Czerny études. Moreover, teenagers who pursue piano as a major instrument finish twenty preludes and fugues of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, half of the thirty-two Beethoven sonatas, and all the twenty-four Chopin études even before they are accepted in the Bachelor of Music program. The standards in piano playing increase every year because pianists are learning from the misgivings of their teachers and are combining the best practices of all schools of thought.<sup>7</sup> The piano world is now more eclectic.

Reyes believed that arriving at such standards in the Filipino music scene was possible only if we made an effort to change our mentality. He posed the question:

Why learn two Chopin preludes when one can learn all twenty-four of them? Every pianist should play that, and the twenty-four Debussy preludes, and the twenty-four Chopin études and so forth. That was how we were brought up in Paris! Of course, you cannot expect all your students to do that, not everybody can, but you will be surprised to know that there are many who can. I come to the Philippines every year to give lessons and I know that there are many here who really can do it! How do you find out? Let them all do it. . . .<sup>8</sup>(Reyes, July 25, 2015, 11.00)

Contentment is the key to how much one wants to compete with oneself. Bourdieu's socio-political discussion on the nature of social classes comes to mind in connection with Nick Joaquin's idea of thinking small. It raises the question whether the working class is happy with thinking small. In the case of piano students, are they satisfied with doing just the minimum requirements (e.g., four Chopin études, one Classical concerto, three Classical sonatas, four Romantic pieces, and three 20th-century pieces) for the entire bachelor's program in piano performance of five or six years?<sup>9</sup> It was the hope of Reyes that no professor would be content with minimum requirements. The teacher factor is of utmost importance. Even if the task of a student is ninety percent and the teacher only ten percent, it is still the teacher who provides the impetus, inspiration, and great influence on the

mindset of the student. Thus, it is the task of the teacher to open the mind of the student to all possibilities, to teach the student to explore the vast repertoire of music that will make him/her explore his/her abilities in the process. With the exploration of abilities comes the recognition of weakness, and with the recognition of weakness one begins the process of transcendence. The teacher should encourage and aid the student in this process because it is the only way for the student to reach that goal of an authentic musical performance. The teacher also needs to develop empathy that would make the student deliver the musical goods in their authentic form, so that the process of “possession” in Thomas Clifton’s terms would be satisfying. I believe that empathy is the subject of all art; it is the power to put ourselves in the shoes of the other, thus fully understanding human condition in all forms. It is this human condition, even in a state of ugliness, that the artist systematically portrays in his/her art echoing Clifton’s “possession” as key.

Competition among students, aside from negative feelings of envy and desire for failure of others, is a reality in music schools at some occasion. Reyes, who has taught students with varying degrees of talent, gave each one the same dedication and the weaker ones even more attention. He expressed the same idealism to explore as many repertoires as they could while they still could. He constantly instilled in them the value of internal goods as discussed by Jane O’Dea so that each student knew exactly why they were in the piano department. The advice to young pianists to compete with oneself often works. Many psychologists warn against parents comparing their children; the same goes for students. Heidegger’s concept of potentiality of Being can only be realized when “*Dasein*” retreats into itself to identify exactly which areas of its existence need transcendence (287).

This monograph documents the vision of Reynaldo Reyes, the epitome of a cosmopolitan musician. His wisdom has made me confirm my belief that I should strive to teach in the best way I can so that I can produce students who will be better than I am. World standards of piano performance evolved through the vision of a few performers and pedagogues. Hence, I document the wisdom of a Filipino visionary, Reynaldo Reyes. Now I can tell piano students with conviction that their generation should be better than ours. We all have to take part in the evolution of the Filipino pianist.

## End notes:

<sup>1</sup> Marina Escano was Reynaldo Reyes' classmate in UST who admired Reyes, whom she labeled as "the best pianist in the country" during his time. I had lessons with Escano in UST for two months in 1989 when my piano professor, Fr. Manuel Maramba OSB, was on a trip to Europe. She was the one who first exposed me to the Russian technique which she learned from her former teacher, Dr. Francisco Santiago.

<sup>2</sup> Reyes used to tell this story to his students in the USA who cancelled lessons because of car trouble, especially if they only had to walk a few blocks to school.

<sup>3</sup> Recalling my lessons with Ms. Marina Escano

<sup>4</sup> To explain, Heidegger specifically used the example of the hammer as "equipment." When we see a hammer and recognize its appearance as, e.g., something with a brown wooden handle and with a stainless-steel head, then its way of being is at "presence at hand." Then we realize that the hammer is more than its appearance; we know that it has value and is "equipment" used to build furniture and even houses, but its way of being remains at "presence at hand" if we remain in the act of just looking at it. The moment we actually clutch the hammer and use it as "equipment" in order to build, then its way of being becomes "readiness to hand."

<sup>5</sup> I recall the exact same method was taught to me by Walter Olbertz and Leonor Kilayko

<sup>6</sup> I recall, these are the exact words of both Reynaldo Reyes and Leonor Kilayko.

<sup>7</sup> I recall, both Reyes and Olbertz (my German piano professor), have confirmed this fact.

<sup>8</sup> Then he added, "*How about you, Peter, why don't you do it? I know you can do it!*" These were the words of Reyes in one of our lessons; this is one of the reasons why I decided to play all the twenty-four Debussy Preludes in my second doctoral recital and all the six Paganini Liszt études for the second half of my third.

<sup>9</sup> The Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance in UST has a five-year curriculum which only 10 percent of enrollees finish on time. Some even

finish the study program in nine years because the required proficiency level in piano takes a long time to attain.



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