

UNITAS

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

"The Princess and the
Fisherman": A Comparative
Study of Two Francophone
Versions of the Story
by Vietnamese Author
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Moreover, it has been multi-linguistic on the whole, allowing itself to evolve from a journal published purely in Spanish, and then in English, becoming bilingual eventually in the various issues in which articles are written in Spanish and English, or

as has been the case in the last several decades, in English and Filipino. And, of late, **UNITAS** has also published articles in other languages.

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“The Princess and the Fisherman”

A Comparative Study of Two Francophone
Versions of the Story by Vietnamese
Author Pham Duy Khiem¹

Harry Aveling

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Abstract

The tragic story of My Nuong, the princess, and Truong Chi, the fisherman, is well known and widely loved throughout Vietnam. Although commonly considered to be fully indigenous, this tragic story of “The Princess and the Fisherman” actually derives from a Chinese story first recorded by Feng Menglong (1574-1646). Pham Duy Khiem (1908-1974), a Vietnamese scholar and diplomat, includes it in his Francophone anthology, *Légendes des terres sereines* (*Legends from Serene Lands*, 1942) but had first spoken about the tale in a radio broadcast made in France in 1938. This article seeks to introduce the original Chinese narrative and then to compare it with the two versions told by Pham Duy Khiem—a longer version that was the radio broadcast and a shorter, more concise “legend” written in Vietnam in 1942. The article presents for the first time a translation into English of the Chinese source text and of the longer French retelling. It also shows how the length of the radio version of the tale is due to its being aimed at a French audience, with little understanding of or

sympathy for Vietnam. Finally, it suggests that the tighter narrative and gentle melancholy of the shorter version are an indication of Khiem's growth in confidence as a postcolonial writer.

Keywords

love sickness, My Nuong, Pham Duy Khiem, Truong Chi, Vietnamese folktales



Fig. 1. Phạm Duy Khiêm (right) while studying in France; <http://www.phamduy2010.com/>

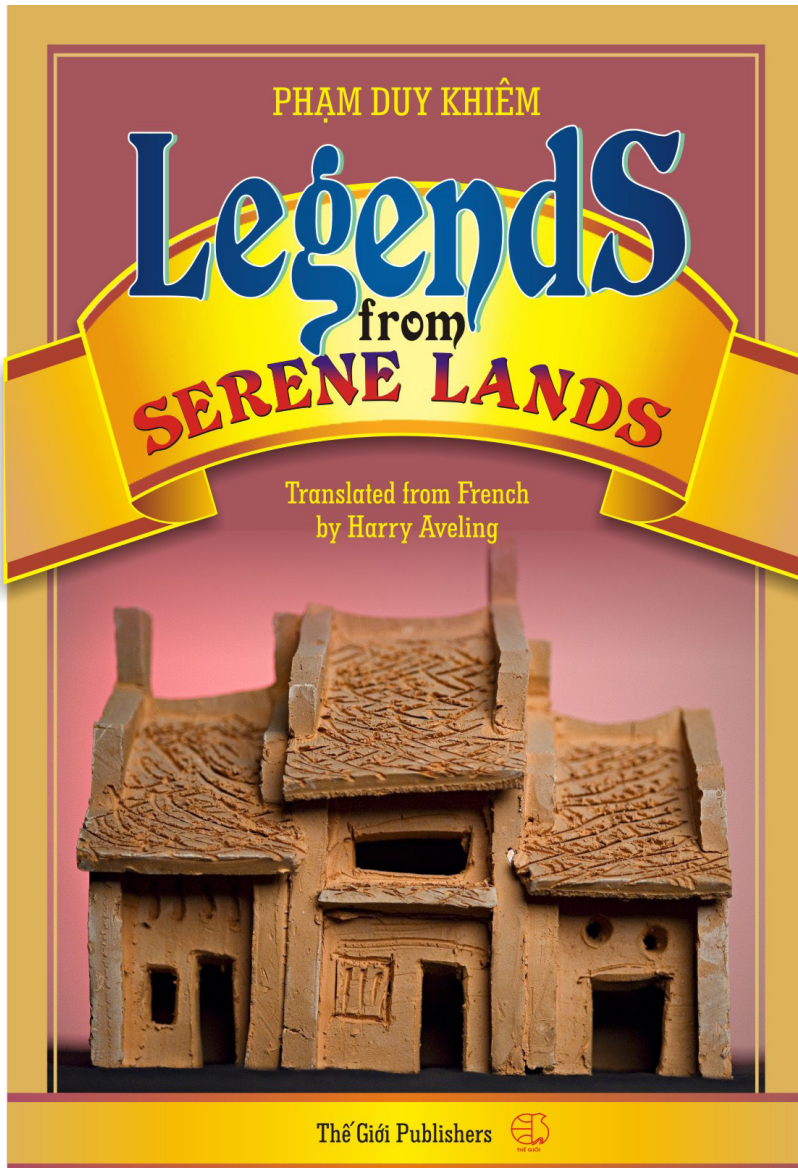


Fig. 2 Cover of Phạm Duy Khiêm's *Legends from the Serene Lands: Classical Vietnamese Stories*, translated from French by Harry Aveling; <http://xunhasaba.com.vn/>

The Original Chinese Story

The story which is the seldom recognised origin of the Vietnamese folktale of “The Princess and the Fisherman” was first told by Feng Menglong, a low-level Chinese mandarin at the end of the Ming dynasty (1368-1662). Although he barely passed the national examination at the age of 57, Feng Menglong was also the author of various collections of popular tales told in a simple colloquial style. One of his books, *Ch’ing Shi (Stories of Love)*, is a collection of 841 love stories arranged in 24 chapters. Some of the chapters are loosely arranged into sub-chapters according to their themes. Chapter 11 is undivided and contains 18 entries on the theme of “Transformation.” In this chapter, love (*ch’ing*), especially that between a man and a woman, is innate and sound but also everlasting and elusive. It is sometimes necessary to cast away the human body in order for love to manifest itself more appropriately and concretely. In these eighteen stories, love variously transforms itself into metal, stone, birds, and plants, and even the wind. Stone and metal are symbols of strong will power, determination, and endurance—characteristics of men and women with strong *ch’ing*.²

The particular story which is the origin of the tale of “The Princess and the Fisherman” uses the symbolism of metal to show the strength of the woman’s love. The story is in the section that follows.

The Transformation of Iron

There was once a travelling merchant who was extremely handsome. On one of his trips, he moored his boat by the side of the Xi River. A beautiful young woman lived in a high tower on the riverbank. For about a month, the merchant and the girl constantly gazed at each other and in their hearts they fell deeply in love. However, they were unable to express their love because they were separated by a distance of ten hand lengths and afraid that every eye would look at them and every finger point. Later, when the merchant had sold all his goods, he left. The girl was so full of “love-longing” that she fell ill and died. Her father had the body cremated, but one part of her did not burn. Her heart was not destroyed and turned to iron. Her father took the piece of iron from the ashes and polished it. It showed an image of a boat and a tower facing each other. In the faint distance one could discern human figures. Her father felt very curious and put it away for safekeeping.

Later the merchant came back again but when he found out that the girl had died, he was very distressed. He asked this way and that and eventually worked out the reasons for the girl's death. He gave the girl's father a gift of money and asked to see the piece of iron. At the sight of the piece of iron, he cried and his tears became blood. The blood dropped onto the iron heart and the heart immediately turned to ash.³

Some Vietnamese Versions

The story is told in Vietnam in a number of different ways. We particularly find it associated with the famous nineteenth century *Tale of Kieu*, although in a rather allusive manner. In verse 710, the leading character, Kieu, laments:

*No tinh chua tra cho ai
Khoi tinh manh xuong tuyen-daichua tan*

The author of one edition of the *Tale*, Huynh Sanh Thong, translates this verse into English and links it to “a Chinese story”:

Till I've paid off my debt of love to him
My heart will remain a crystal down below.

Huynh tells what he describes as the “Chinese story” (source unspecified) in a slightly different way from that of Feng Menglong. In his recollection of the tale, the merchant fails to return for a long time and the girl misses him so much that she dies. The story continues: “When [the girl] was cremated, it was discovered that her heart had turned into a hard rock, like ruby. Upon his return, the merchant wept for the girl. His tears fell on the crystal, and it dissolved into blood” (182n710). The blood and ruby are more graphic than the usual Vietnamese stories; the fact that the metal melts is consistent with them.

Huynh notes that there is also a very different Vietnamese version of the tale (again source unspecified). In this story, the social distance between the couple is greater. The man is a poor boatman, the girl is the daughter of a

king. The narrative ends with a dramatic twist: unlike the Chinese original, the man dies, not the woman. Huynh says:

[I]n his turn, [the boatman Truong Chi] was smitten with the princess and eventually died of unrequited passion. In the grave, his heart was transformed into a ruby, a blood red ‘crystal of love’ (*khoi tinh*), which was later found and fashioned into a drinking cup. The princess received the cup as a present. When she poured tea into it, she saw the reflection of a boatman forlornly rowing his boat. Now realising what she had done to the boatman she wept, and as her tears touched the cup it melted away (182n710).

Another recent version comes from Vo Van Thang and Jim Lawson. Their ending of this story is rather humble: the cup is made of wood, “precious wood” admittedly. The ending is as follows:

One day, [Truong Chi] sang his last song:

Not to be together in this life,
I hope to be with you in the other world.

Then he threw himself into the river and disappeared beneath the silent, flowing water.

His soul entered a tree by the river. It was a tree of precious wood and one day a craftsman cut off a branch to make a set of teacups. The teacups were presented to the father of My Nuong at the time of a festival.

One morning My Nuong poured tea into one of the cups. When she lifted it to drink she saw the image of the fisherman slowly rowing his boat around the bottom of the cup. The sound of his voice came to her ears, loving, regretful and reproaching. A tear from her eye fell into the cup. It shattered into tiny fragments that melted away to nothing (263).

The shape of the Vietnamese stories clearly shows their dependence on Feng Menglong’s original but the details change in various ways. The social status of the two main characters varies—the characters may be either a merchant and a woman of high status, or, a princess and a fisherman. In one version the man dies; in the other, the woman dies. The remains of the

lover's heart can variously become iron, ruby, or wood; all are symbols of resolute and continuing love. In Feng Menglong's version, the iron heart eventually becomes ash; in the Vietnamese versions, it is turned into a cup and finally melts. In all cases, once the offending partner recognises their own fault, some sort of atonement is made and the soul of the other is free to travel on in the afterlife.

Pham Duy Khiem

The story entitled "*Le cristal d'amour*" (*Love's Crystal*) is the first tale included in Pham Duy Khiem's highly regarded anthology, *Légendes des terres sereines* (1942). Born in Hanoi in 1908, Pham Duy Khiem was a graduate of the leading French schools, the *Lycée Albert Sarraut* in Hanoi, the *Lycée Louis-le-Grand* in Paris, and the very prestigious *Ecole Supérieure Normale* in 1935. He published two collections of folktales, *Légendes des terres sereines* (1942) and *La jeune femme de Nam Xuong* (1944), which were both included in a French edition in 1951, similarly entitled *Légendes des terres sereines*. He also wrote a novel, *Nam and Sylvie* (1957), which told of the ill-fated love of a Vietnamese student in France for a French girl during the 1930s. Following the war, Pham Duy Khiem became Ambassador of the Republic of (South) Vietnam to France (1954-1957). He died, probably as a result of suicide, in 1957.

Khiem first told the story of the noble woman and the fisherman in a radio broadcast given in France that was later published in *Le Monde Illustré*, no. 179, May 1938, page 98, entitling it as "*Une légende Annamite*" ("An Annamite Folktale"). The story is deeply embedded in a commentary aimed at Khiem's French audience. The two versions are presented in translation in the parallel columns (the text of the broadcast has not been published in English translation before) that follow.

“An Annamite Folktale”
The Radio Broadcast (1938)

The two versions are presented in translation in the parallel columns (the text of the broadcast has not been published in English translation before) that follow.

<p>1 The folktale I am about to tell you is known to all Annamites. I cannot recall when I first read it, I don't even know if I read it or heard it told, but I have loved it for a long time. I have become an old <i>professeur</i> who teaches Greek, Latin and French to young French students like you and to Annamites of your age; I must, to that end, read many books, but of all the beautiful stories gathered along the banks of either the Seine or the Red River, the one I most prefer is the one that I am about to tell you.</p>	
<p>2 You need to know that in other times the daughters of high mandarins led a cloistered life, without ever going out, without ever seeing anyone. They did not suffer because things had always been this way and that isolation was part of their very condition.</p> <p>The young girl of whom I speak had a minister for her father; she lived in a corner of the palace, in a tower, by the side of the river.</p>	<p>2 There was once, a long time ago, a Chinese mandarin who had a daughter of great beauty.</p> <p>Like all young girls of her estate, she saw no one and lived a secluded life in a high tower in the mandarin's palace. She usually took her seat near the window, to read or embroider, sometimes pausing to look at the river which ran below her, and she dreamed while following it across the plain.</p>
<p>3 From her window, she saw only the monotonous rice-fields stretching to the horizon, and on the calm waters the boat of a poor fisherman. The man sang as he worked. From afar, the beautiful young noble woman could not see his face, she could scarcely distinguish his movements, but she listened to his voice as it rose up to where she was. Every day, she listened to him. His voice was beautiful, but the song was sad.</p>	<p>3 From time to time she saw the tiny boat of a fisherman gliding on the calm waters. The man was poor and he often sang. From a distance, she could not see his face, could scarcely distinguish his movements, but she listened to his voice as it rose to where she was. His voice was beautiful and his song sad.</p>

4	I do not know what sentiments and what dreams the song and the voice made blossom in the heart of the young girl, but we do know that one day the fisherman did not come to the river and she waited for him.	4	We cannot know what sentiments or dreams the song and his voice kindled in the young girl's heart; only that, one day when the fisherman did not come to the river; she was surprised to find herself waiting for him until evening.
5	She waited several days, she became sick. The doctors could not discover the cause of her illness, her parents became anxious, the illness grew worse, then suddenly, the young girl was cured: the song had returned.	5	In vain, she waited for him for several days. She finally became sick from waiting. The doctors could not discover the cause of her illness, her parents were worried, when suddenly the girl recovered: the song had returned.
6	The high mandarin organised a search for the fisherman, he had the fisherman placed in the presence of the girl.	6	On being informed by a female servant, the high mandarin had the fisherman called and brought him into the presence of his daughter.
7	At her first look, something ended in her. She no longer loved to hear his voice ...	7	As soon as she saw him, something in her ended; she no longer loved to hear his voice.
8	But the poor fisherman, himself, received a fatal blow from this manifestation. There is an untranslatable word in Annamite to describe the illness he suffered [<i>Om tuong tu</i>]. In French one says <i>amour-maladie</i> , love-sickness, the love that kills, a fatal passion, a tragic love; but none of these expressions exactly translates the Annamite. I think of Racine's heroines, I think of Phèdre discovering the situation, lost, dying, dazzled by the day that disturbs her so profoundly; she must, if I may say so, poison herself if she is to die, while our poor fisherman loves without hope, can no longer live, falls ill and slowly dies, without having any desire to kill himself, without having been killed by anyone else.	8	But the poor fisherman, he received a fatal blow on seeing her. He was struck down by the disease of " <i>tuong tu</i> ", love-sickness. Consumed by hopeless love, he withered in silence and died, carrying his secret with him.

<p>9 The years passed. In accordance with the custom, the fisherman's family exhumed his remains to take them to another place. They found a crystallised mass in the coffin, a sort of large transparent stone. They attached it to the prow of the small boat, and, one day when the mandarin borrowed the boat to cross over the river, he admired the stone, bought it, had it cut to form a beautiful tea cup.</p>	<p>9 Many years later, his family exhumed his remains to take them to their final resting place. They found a translucent stone in the coffin. Using it as an ornament, they placed it at the front of his boat. One day, the mandarin passed by, and admired the stone. He bought it, and gave it to a craftsman to shape it into a beautiful teacup.</p>
<p>10 Each time one poured tea into the cup, one saw the image of a fisherman in his boat slowly circling the inside of the cup. The young girl learned of this prodigy, wanted to confirm it for herself. She poured a little tea, the image of the fisherman appeared; the young girl remembered him and wept; a tear fell into the cup and the vessel turned to water and dissolved.</p>	<p>10 Each time tea was poured into the cup, one saw the image of a fisherman in his boat, slowly sailing around the cup. The mandarin's daughter learnt of this prodigy, and wanted to see it for herself. She poured a little tea, the image of the fisherman appeared: she remembered him and wept ... A tear fell onto the cup and the cup dissolved.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">***</p>
<p>11 I am sure you can feel how poetic this folktale is. But let me add a few words so that you can better understand it. You will come to know why Annamites love this folktale and you will recognise at the same time a little of the profound soul of that race, who live far from you and who now read the same books as you do.</p>	
<p>12 Normally, an Annamite does not think of this folktale without immediately singing the well-known two lines of the verse that alludes to it. I will tell them to you, then I will translate them. Do not laugh if they sound strange, but wait for the explanation:</p>	<p>12 In a well-known Annamite masterpiece, two lines allude to this legend:</p>
<p>No tinh chua tra cho ai Khoi tinh mang xuong tuyen dai chua tan</p>	<p><i>No tinh chua gia cho ai Khôi tinh mang xuống tuyền đại chùa tan.</i></p>

<p>13 Here is a word for word translation: The debt of love has not been repaid; The stone of love has descended to the land of the nine springs, it has not melted.</p>	<p>13 <i>As long as the debt of love remains, In the Land where the Rivers Rise, the stone of love can never dissolve.</i></p> <p>***</p>
<p>14 The land of the nine springs is the other side, they are the oriental Elysian Fields, the plain of asphodels, the shadow of the immortal myrtles. And this is what the two lines want to say, if one notices the logical connections between the propositions, as one makes the thought more precise, which is what the French language requires.</p>	<p>14 The Nine Springs, or the Yellow Springs, are on the other side; they are our plain of asphodels, the shadow of immortal myrtles.</p>
<p>15 “When” the debt of love remains unpaid (or “if” the debt), the stone of love, even if it descends into the land of the nine springs, does not dissolve.”</p>	
<p>16 One can see that this influences our story. But what is the precise meaning of “a debt of love”? What has not been paid? And to whom must it be paid? A European mind would think: it was the young girl who should have paid the young man, since he died because of his love for her, since – and this is the essential reason – it was by weeping over the tea cup, on dropping a tear over this poor crystallised love, that she made it dissolve. Her pity, her recognition of this love; I want to say that she was conscious of the love to which she had given birth but which she did not recognise, it delivered her, granted her, allowed her to recognise, managed to end the term of her destiny.</p>	<p>16 But what “debt of love” is meant? Who failed to repay the debt? One could think the young girl owed the young man something, since he loved her to the point of death, without being repaid by her. Belatedly, she settled the debt, when by crying over the poor crystallised love, she made it melt. The pity that she felt for his fate; her regrets at having been the cause of his passing, must have appeased, beyond death, the torments of an inconsolable heart.</p>

17 This is a pretty interpretation, but you can also think of it in the following way: the young man was destined to love the young woman, but at first his love was ignored by the young girl, never reached her, was not fulfilled in its natural progression. He “had to love her” and, as long as she did not understand this, accepted it, his debt had not been paid to her. There is a second explanation, no less seductive than the first. And an Annamite will tell you this if you take the trouble to consider his opinion. But I think these distinctions and nuances are useless. Besides this, I don’t know whether, in seeking out these different meanings, I have given way to the oriental taste for subtlety or if I am obeying the occidental desire for precision. What is certain is that, for an Annamite, the folktale that I have just told you is complete. It has to stop where it ends; we cannot imagine that it could be any other way. No one can tell us if the young girl loved the fisherman when she heard him singing without seeing him.

17 To an Annamite, the folktale can signify more than that. He believes that all love is predestined, all unions are the inescapable consequence of a debt contracted in a past life; when two human beings bind themselves to each other, they are only freeing themselves of a mutual burden.

So the beautiful daughter of the mandarin had to have her fated meeting with the poor fisherman, despite all that separated him from her. When she heard his voice rising from the river, when she then thought day and night about the face she had barely glimpsed, their paths searched for ways by which they might join with each other, and their blind hearts beat in accordance with the rhythm of destiny.

But they were never united in his lifetime. The debt remained and the fisherman could not disappear after his death. What was found in the coffin was not only the material remains of a profound feeling which continued after his body dissolved; it was the whole man, his form beyond the grave, the face of an unrealised destiny which necessarily had to crystallise in view of the necessity of waiting.

Further, no one can tell us the nature of her feelings when she wept over the translucent teacup in which the reflection of an indistinct dream glided past. No one can try to make us feel moved by the illness and death of this hopeless lover. No one says anything of his pain. What matters is the meeting of two destinies in the broadest sense of the word, the fusion for a certain time of these two destinies, I do not say of these two human lives, since the tears of the woman did not fall for a very long time after the disappearance of the man. The debt of love is not a debt that the man should have paid the woman, it is not a debt that the woman should have contracted by inspiring the man to a fatal love. But their love is nothing more than a form of their common debt, the human debt to life: each of us must pay it when we pursue the difficult path that we must follow on this earth. Besides, human beings do not live just one life, but submit to a circle of successive transformations. Each earthly life has no meaning only in itself, the destiny of each individual is broader than they are and the union of two beings, a man and a woman, is nothing but the meeting of their two destinies, a moment in a chain, a point on the circumference, which is as incomprehensible to them as is the rest of their ephemeral existence, as inescapable for them as the rest of the rest.

Later, the woman came to lean over the diaphanous cup where there glided the reflection of a beautiful vanished dream. She had an intuition of the debt which bound her to the fisherman; she regretted having become aware of her path too late, at a time when she could no longer find true happiness. But she understood that their union must inevitably be accomplished, beyond their ephemeral existences. Perhaps she sensed that a solemn moment was at hand ...

The cup received the tear which fell from her eyes and melted there in a communion which liberated them both.

19 That is the basis on which this folktale rests. If I were wiser, I would show you that it is inspired by Buddhism, I would speak of the influence of such beliefs on the Annamese people, on their conception of life and of love. But I have only wanted to tell you a beautiful story. At least retain its poetic beauty, love it for all you can feel of its delicate sentiment: the voice rising from the river, the sincere and silent passion that survived the dissolution of his body, the tear which freed him. Think of the melodious fisherman when you see a fine porcelain tea-cup decorated with blue designs. You can say that, for an Annamite, this story is not a folktale, but an historical tale. You can say that this happened in China, a long time ago, but no one will be able to tell you under which emperor, from such and such a dynasty, in this particular place. He believes this more than you believe in Sleeping Beauty. It is not a beautiful folktale to him, it is a true story. For me, even at the age when I scanned the verses of the "Aeneid" in a French high school, I would never have been astonished if I had learned that on the bank of the Great Lake, very near my school, someone had discovered the crystal of love. I would have wondered: "Who will drop the tear which will dissolve this cup?"

Rewriting a Beautiful Vietnamese Folktale

At the end of his broadcast speech, section 19, Pham confirmed his knowledge of the Chinese origin of the tale. (It is perhaps partly for this reason that the future book is entitled in the plural: *Legends from Serene Lands*.) Nevertheless, his broadcast retelling completely follows the Vietnamese form of the story and its interpretation. It also includes an added, elaborate

commentary for its French audience whom he fears might be inclined to scoff at the tale. Certain features remain constant between Pham's two versions (which, for convenience, we will call the Long Version, LV, the Radio talk, and the short version, SV, published in *Légendes des terres sereines*). These common features include the fact that the characters have no names; it is the fisherman who contracts love sickness and dies; his body is dug up for further reburial; a lump of crystal is discovered and made into a tea-cup; the girl eventually receives the cup and sees the boatman sailing around the cup; she weeps and the cup dissolves. The lines from the national epic, *The Tale of Kieu*, are described simply as some "well known verses" being derived from an unnamed "well-known Annamite masterpiece."

There are also differences. They are significant in themselves and also crucial for Khiem's development as a writer.

To start with, SV has no Introduction. In LV1, Khiem creates a narrator's personality for himself which is both French and Vietnamese: "an old *professeur* who teaches Greek, Latin, and French to young students like you and to Annamites of your age." He was thirty at the time but this authoritative position gives him mastery over French pupils (and French listeners in general). It also relates him to Vietnamese pupils, placing the Vietnamese colonial subjects on the same level as their colonial peers. In fact, it elevates Vietnamese culture above French culture because this folktale is "the most beautiful" of all the stories he has heard beside the Seine and the Red River. He is further able to claim a special position with regard to the tale because he doesn't know when he heard or read it, and when he first makes its acquaintance. It is ageless and a part of his very identity. He sees no need to make these claims in the SV.

His authority is strengthened because he is addressing the French in French. LV2 recognises their ignorance. "You need to know . . ." he says. Then he explains the isolation of "the daughters of high mandarins" and justifies the custom: "They did not suffer because things had always been this way and that very isolation was a part of their condition." SV2 (there is no SV1) simply accepts her solitary state and distracts the listener's attention by describing her serious activities: reading and embroidering. She is young, so

of course she dreams while “following the river across the plain.” Another version of the tale, by a French author of Vietnamese descent, Minh Tran Huy (2008), adds other, more frivolous details: she read books of poetry and, while watching the river, “dreamed of following its silvery waters to far-off places and of the people she might meet there” (133). From the start, Khiem’s second version is understated and, like himself, even somewhat ascetic.

Next, LV4 and SV4 both agree on her hearing the song of a poor fisherman. LV4 includes the negative comment that the rice-fields were “monotonous” which he omits from the SV perhaps to avoid offence. The next sections run in a parallel direction: the girl responds to his singing and waits for him. When he does not come, LV 6 and SV6, she falls ill. The doctors could not cure her.⁴

When the fisherman returns, the girl recovers. In SV7, it is the emotional touch of a woman’s intuition that indicates to the mandarin that the fisherman has made an impression on the girl. The father calls the fisherman and, in both accounts, the girl looks at the boatman and no longer loves his voice. It is commonly accepted in Vietnam that the man is not just poor but, in fact, he is exceedingly ugly. Khiem does not introduce this possibility as an explanation; the break is just something that happens. So the inevitability adds to the sadness of the tale in both versions.

The effect of her response overwhelms the man. He is struck down by the fatal disease of “love sickness.” SV9 gives only the Vietnamese term for this condition, *tuong tu*. Although LV9 describes this term as “untranslatable”, it does provide a French equivalent, *amour-maladie*, and glosses over it several times: “love-sickness, the love that kills, a fatal passion, a tragic love.” In fact Khiem goes further which his status as an *agrège* of the ENS entitles him to do. He compares the young girl’s condition with that of Racine’s *Phèdre* for his French audience. Again he matches French culture and criticises it: *Phèdre*’s death is deliberate and unpleasant; the fisherman’s condition is one of slow decline—he does not kill himself and no one else does so either. It is a sad but not malicious or violent ending.

Section 10 deals with the discovery of “a translucent stone” (SV) or “crystallised mass” (LV) in his coffin. The shorter version accepts a cultural

practice that the French might find unpleasant: “his family exhumed his remains” many years later. The custom was to exhume the dead three years after their death, wash the bones, and re-inter them again so that the soul may live in peace (Lamb 195). The LV explains the practice simply as the need to take the remains “to another place,” a sop to the potential revulsion of his European audience. However, in both versions there is no description of the stone but there is no suggestion that it is blood-red.

The mandarin has the stone made into a “beautiful cup” (LV 10 and SV10). Inside the cup, one can see the image of a fisherman in his boat. The girl sees the image, remembers the fisherman, and weeps. A tear falls onto the cup and it dissolves (LV 11 and SV11). These sections, four to eleven, form the core of the story and do not change. The girl finally recognises that she has been frivolous and caused great harm to the man whom she so much admired from a distance and who died because of her.

Again, in LV 12, Khiem recognises the sensitivity of his French audience: “I am sure you can feel how poetic this folktale is,” he says (LV 12), while also indicating their ignorance. His aim is to help them understand “the profound soul of that race who live far from you and who now read the same books as you do”, that is, whose level of civilisation is at least equal to yours but whom you despise. It is a subtle example of the empire writing back.

But the Vietnamese not only share the tale with each other; they also respond to it with poetry. LV13 does not name the source of the two lines quoted. SV 13 attributes them to “a well-known Annamite masterpiece” which he also does not name—*The Tale of Kieu*. As I have mentioned elsewhere, this is rather like describing Shakespeare as “a well known English poet” (Aveling, “The Absent Father” 9). He recognises the French prejudice towards Vietnamese language and literature (LV 13) and cautions his listeners not to laugh if the lines “sound strange” but to wait for their explanation. In SV 14, he simply translates the lines. His audience has changed and the Annamite audience have respect for their own culture.

Both versions provide a commentary on the verse and by implication on the story. SV 14 makes two possible steps. The girl may have owed

the fisherman something but there is more than that. In accordance with Vietnamese culture, all love is predestined. The couple were bound to each other in a past life. Despite their different social statuses, they had to meet. Their love survived beyond the grave and when the girl wept over the cup, her previous loving feelings were accepted and the bond between them was once more affirmed . . . and dissolved.

LV 14 on the afterlife is far more complicated. Like SV 14, it glosses over the “land of the nine springs” in Greek mythological terms: “the other side . . . our plain of asphodels, the shadow of immortal myrtles”. The lines avoid the horrors of the Vietnamese myth of the river which the dead must cross facing the nine vicious hounds of hell and the complex philosophy of the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth. Khiem notes, in passing, the stultifying effect of French rationality, which is implicit in the French language itself.

LV15 continues this exploration of the deficiencies of “the European mind”. The young girl may have been in debt to the fisherman. This is a “pretty explanation.” But there is “a seductive explanation” which the Vietnamese will share “if you take the trouble to consider his opinion.” (Obviously Khiem did not expect that all Europeans would.) It goes beyond “the occidental desire for precision.” The European view is, in fact, sentimental: it imagines what the girl felt, what the man felt, but it does not realise that the story does not describe these. The actual debt is the result of their spiritual condition, what Buddhism describes as the result of endless reincarnations, as souls are born and reborn, meet briefly, then separate again.

Although the radio broadcast is aimed squarely at them, Khiem does not expect his European audience to understand these matters (LV 19). He is pleased if they can just retain its poetic quality—this is what Vietnam has to offer cold rationality. He admits that this is a myth, one that is not true—just as “Sleeping Beauty” is not true, although the *Aeneid* might be! It is the same comment he made in his presentation of another Vietnamese folktale to the French, the story of Tu Thuc (see Aveling, “Shadow” 19-20). He does this for the same reason: to claim equality with the colonial master and then to push for the superiority of a people whom the French may at first consider

inferior to themselves. With an indigenous audience, the telling of the tale is a sharing between equals. The conciseness and gentle melancholic tone is characteristic of Khiem's mature style in the *Légendes des terres sereines*. We may see these as the fruits of a post-colonial negotiation of Khiem's own identity: Vietnamese, French-educated, but the proud voice of his people and their culture.

Conclusion

"The Princess and the Fisherman Love's Crystal" is a variable Vietnamese version of an ultimately Chinese folktale. The long version we have been reading here, a radio talk given in France by the Vietnamese scholar Pham Duy Khiem, was directed towards a French-speaking audience in France. It explains the various details of the story which the French would not understand, and carries the added burden of establishing the narrator as a figure worthy of respect and aware of the lack of respect that the French commonly have towards Vietnamese culture. The short version is concise and assured, allowing the indigenous audience greater emotional freedom as they accept their own culture unreservedly and without any explanation. The two versions conform to Pham Duy Khiem's practice when he rewrites other stories—"The Absent Father" (Aveling, "The Absent Father") and "Tu Thuc" (Aveling, "Shadow"). In each of these tales, Khiem moves from a complex folktale intended to entertain and educate the French readers towards a simpler, more direct style of narration, without condescension or any surrounding commentary. There is a confidence about the story line of the final "Love's Crystal" presented in *Légendes des terres sereines* (1942). Khiem has kept the story, simplified it, added to its pathos, and provided a brief but tragic commentary. The maturity he displays in the book of *Légendes* is striking and depends, in part, on a rejection of the culturally ignorant and emotionally insensitive colonial master.

The message of "Love's Crystal" is one Khiem took seriously enough to make it the final commentary to his one published novel *Nam et Sylvie* (1957), the story of the ill-fated love of a Vietnamese *normalien* for a French girl. They are lovers in Paris but he feels unable to take her back to the

colony because of the discrimination she will meet as the wife of a native. Nonetheless, “[n]othing is ever finished in the world of the heart,” Nam decides. “Or rather it never ceases to be,” he continues, quoting another version of the *Kieu* poem:

Once you have crossed the river together, an acquaintance has been made;
Once you have spent a day together, that creates a debt and a common
fidelity (Pham Duy Khiem 242).

This is the Chinese version of the story and the traveller never returns—as he knew he would not. He may weep but it cannot restore the princess to life. The cup melts forever.

Notes

1. This is a revised version of an article previously published in *Portal*, University of Technology, Sydney, vol. 15, no. 1-2 2018. Reprinted with permission.
2. This paragraph draws extensively on Mowry (1983).
3. This is a collaborative translation. My thanks to Dr. Lintao (Rick) Qi, Monash University for finding the original text, and to Professor Anne McLaren, Melbourne University and Dr. Xu Yuzeng, La Trobe University for helping translate it. On collaborative translation, see my “On Translating from Languages One Does Not Know: Faking the Pumpkin?” in *Translation, Transnationalism, World Literature*, edited by Francesca Benocci and Marco Sonzogni, Novi Liguri: Joker, pp. 45-63.
4. I have taught this story in the SV with Vietnamese students, by the way, and they found the mention of “doctors” strange. But then they found the whole of Khiem’s ‘translation’ unfamiliar and somewhat unpleasant. Today both versions are “exotic” and even the SV is still distant from the familiar story that the Vietnamese know.

Appendix: The Original Chinese Text

化铁

昔有一商，美姿容，泊舟于西河下。而岸上高楼中，一美女相视月余，两情已契，为十目十手所隔，弗得遂愿。迨后其商货尽而去，女思成疾而死。父焚之，独心中一物，不毁如铁。出而磨之，照见其中有舟楼相对，隐隐如有人形。其父以为奇，藏之。

后商复来访，其女已死，痛甚。咨诹博询，备得其由。乃献金于父，求铁观之，不觉泪下成血，血滴于心上，其心即灰矣。

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The Creation of a Japanese Writer for the Global Age

The Case of Haruki Murakami

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Abstract

The case of Haruki Murakami's rise to dominance in both the Japanese and global literary fields is truly exceptional. It is rare for a single author to introduce so much innovation in a literary field in his own lifetime. However, due to the fruitful combination of Murakami's own talent, the cooperation of his literary collaborators, Murakami, Inc., the advancement in technology (i.e., the Internet) that has allowed Murakami to be in touch with his readers, and his exceptional understanding of English, Murakami has contributed much to Japan's contemporary literature in the age of global literature. In addition to these factors, it must be emphasized that Murakami's agency of transforming the conservative literary field of Japan into something more accessible to both the Japanese and the non-Japanese has made Murakami a force that has also transformed Japan's Post-World War, modern literary field into a field that is open to accommodate postmodern techniques in writing, reflective of its historical position or context and global in its reach.

Keywords

global literature, Haruki Murakami, Japanese Contemporary Literature, literary field

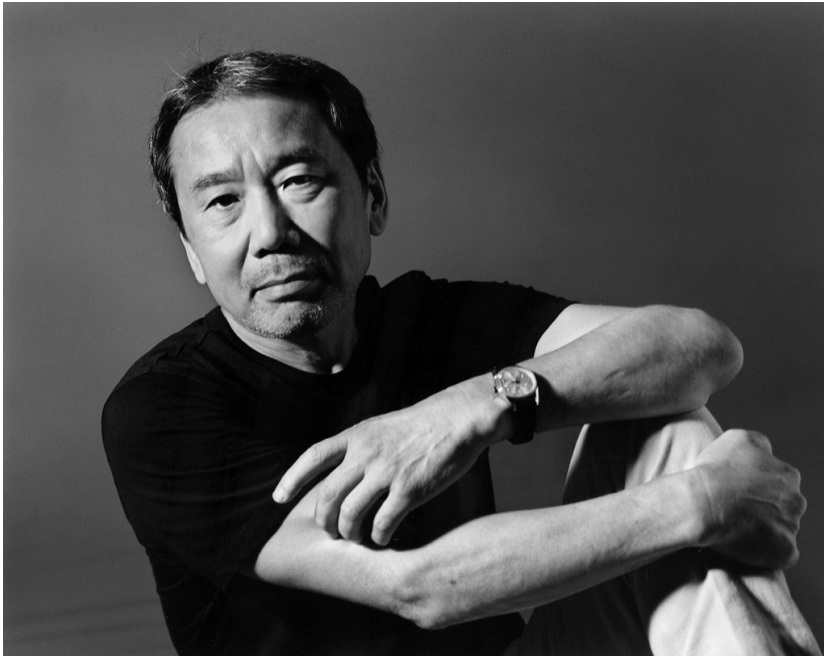


Fig. 1. Haruki Murakami's agency of transforming the conservative literary field of Japan into something more accessible to both the Japanese and the non-Japanese has made him a force that has also transformed Japan's Post-World War, modern literary field into a field that is open to accommodate postmodern techniques in writing; <https://www.nytimes.com/>

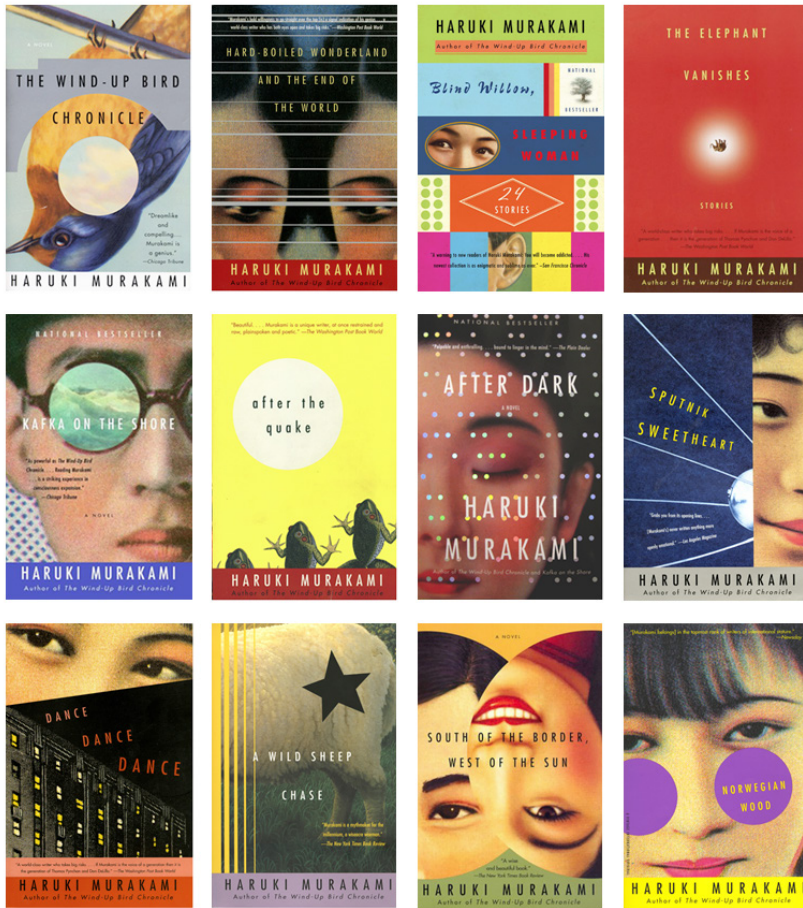


Fig. 2. Murakami paperback covers; <https://images.app.goo.gl/tPJFst4ne6Eq3Ung8>

Haruki Murakami as a Global Writer

The English-speaking world had its first taste of Haruki Murakami's fiction back in 1990 when Plume (a division of Penguin) books published internationally its translation of *Hitsuji o meguru boken* (*A Wild Sheep Chase* [AWSC]). The novel has multiple references to American cultural figures and there is a clear indication that its writing style was inspired by Western writing, particularly that by the novelist, Raymond Chandler. As a result, AWSC did not have the cultural scent that would have easily pigeonholed the novel into the Asian/Oriental/Other classification in which the Western world would have placed texts from Japan and the rest of Asia. AWSC provided a sort of dilemma: it was neither here (Western) or there (Other). It was, in other words, a novel that had a very strong borderless quality that was and still is enigmatic.

How Murakami's fiction was introduced to the West, particularly in the contemporary literary center of New York, has now been a topic of interest since Murakami has become a canonized writer both nationally and internationally. Although Murakami got his break in Japan as the winner of the 22nd Gunzo Literary Prize in 1979 for his *Kaze no uta o kike* (*Hear the Wind Sing*) which later would be published by Tokyo's biggest publisher Kōdansha, Murakami began to accumulate symbolic capital when he broke into the American market.

In Louis Templado's *Asahi Shimbun* aptly titled article, "Teamwork Helped Haruki Murakami Break into American Scene," he quotes Tetsu Shirai, a former deputy executive director at Kōdansha International Ltd. who said that the success of AWSC in the US was a product of the conscientious effort of the publisher Kōdansha International Ltd. to market a then "Japanese writer that the world has never heard of." The publisher put together a team of American veterans in the publishing industry: "[t]he translation, the editing, the publicity and the marketing strategy were all left to their judgment," according to Shirai.

The strategies that Murakami's American team initially used to introduce him in the US truly were so successful that those strategies continue to see Murakami through over two decades of publication in translation.

Over the two decades of having his novels and short story collections translated into English, Murakami has never released a work that did not sell in the English-speaking market. He has developed very loyal readers overseas, while he and his literary collaborators have developed a good understanding of these readers. Recounting the initial strategies that Murakami's US collaborators made use of during the launch of *AWSC*, Templado reports:

[p]ublicity was done New York style, with advance reading copies of the book (which [Alfred] Birnbaum originally titled "Adventures with a Sheep") sent to buyers, reviewers, movie industry people, authors, publishing firms, editors, friends and relatives a half year before the novel reached bookstore shelves. That explains how a NYT (*New York Times*) reviewer met Murakami right as soon as he stepped off the plane, before Shirai and (Elmer) Luke led him around the cocktail party circuit ("Teamwork Helped").

Murakami's fresh talent, coming unexpectedly from a stiff Japanese literary field, along with the expertise of his supporters from the local and US literary fields (which can be referred to as Murakami, Inc.) is the formula of Murakami's success. This affirms what Pierre Bourdieu presents in his book *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1996) where he argues, through his study of Gustave Flaubert's career, that an author's success is not based on his individual talent alone but in the relations the author has within the literary field and the so-called "literary enterprises" that support his works (49). As the years passed, Murakami has established a literary style that capitalizes on almost formulaic surreal plots that loyal readers appear to not tire of.

With English as a primary global language, the extent of Murakami's readership, although not officially tallied, can safely be approximated to be in the millions. In 2016, the Facebook account that one of his American publishers Alfred A. Knopf maintained for him had more than 1.2 million followers worldwide. The hard work that Murakami, Inc. has carried out continues to succeed as there are a growing number of literary awards (what Bourdieu refers to as social capital) that the Japanese literati and international critics have bestowed upon Murakami's works. Recent examples of the

latter include the Franz Kafka award in 2006, the Jerusalem prize in 2009, the International Catalunya Prize in 2011, and most recently, Denmark's most important literary award, the Hans Christian Andersen Literary Prize in 2015. Murakami is also the recipient of honorary degrees from the universities Princeton and Liège. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that in the global literary landscape, Japanese literature's contemporary face is that of novelist Haruki Murakami.¹

Interestingly, Murakami had no close associations with anyone from the *bundan* or the Japanese literary establishment when he started to write. He was not a member of any writer's group and he did not have any acquaintance who was part of the establishment. Yet, when he completed his first novel, he immediately sent it to Gunzo literary magazine that maintains a contest for upcoming writers. In the 1990s, even when he became established as an author, Murakami still chose to distance himself from the *bundan* and the local media.

Murakami has this to say about his early relationship with the Japanese literature of his age: "I had never taken a serious look at contemporary Japanese fiction. Thus, I had no idea what kind of Japanese novels were being read at the time, or how I should write fiction in the Japanese language" ("The Birth" x).² Naturally, without an affinity for Japanese literature, Murakami had to develop a style of writing for his own literary vision. It was this individual literary vision that facilitated his acceptance by the global market.

Murakami criticizes Japanese writing to be "very stiff" (Deveraux, "PW Interviews"). This seriousness is the expectation set by the public for authors. It also appears that the stiffness has something to do with the Japanese language which has a strong hierarchical nature. Therefore, the reason behind Murakami's innovation of the Japanese language is clear—he wanted more freedom in his prose. He said, "I am different in my style. I guess I'm seeking a new style for Japanese readership, and I think I have gained ground. Things are changing now" (DiConsiglio 15). This linguistic style suited the global culture and its readers.

But Murakami sought exile abroad when he became famous in Japan. Murakami's visiting fellowships in universities abroad during that period,

while providing him a more relaxed atmosphere to mingle with the Western literati and thus gain footage in an international network, also created some fear in him. Whether in his country or abroad, he still felt like an outsider in the field of literature. He shares:

I'm a loner. I don't like groups, schools, literary circles. At Princeton, there was a luncheonette, or something like that, and I was invited to eat there. Joyce Carol Oates was there and Toni Morrison was there and I was so afraid, I couldn't eat anything at all! Mary Morris was there and she's a very nice person, almost the same age as I am, and we became friends, I would say. But in Japan I don't have any writer friends, because I just want to have...distance (qtd. in Wray 124).

Does Murakami's resistance to be part of a group and maintain "distance" help him to be a better writer? It is hard to say. Surely, with his collaborators of academic translators, New York and London-based publishing houses from the midpoint of his career to the present, he can no longer be categorized as a peripheral writer. Perhaps the distance affords him his much sought-after individualism that is one of the strongest ingredients of his fiction. Murakami may not have acquired much capital from personal relations with individuals and elite writers but his impact is perceived in terms of his relationships with two of the main sources of literary capital in the contemporary age: his publishers and his sought-after translators of Japanese to English.

Murakami gave his impressions of the American publishing world in an essay found in the Japanese volume of his short story collection "The Elephant Vanishes" where he says:

[They] may have a reputation as being real sticklers for contracts, but I've found that it's mostly a stereotype. From my own experience, most agreements are sealed with a single handshake. It's a world built on personal trust...In fact, I feel that the American publishing world is probably more human than the Japanese one. In Japan editors sometimes come off as 'publishing company employees' who hold adhering to the 'company logic' more dear than their relationship with an author" (qtd. in Templado, "Teamwork Helped").

Murakami's fruitful relationship with his US-based Murakami, Inc. as well as his long relationship with his Japan-based Murakami, Inc.³ are some of the most important aspects of his success that has helped him dominate the literary fields inside and outside Japan. To add more to his literary capital, apart from writing novels, Murakami has not only written short stories, travel writing, a memoir, but has also experimented with a type of non-fiction writing when he interviewed the survivors of the fatal Aum Shinrikyo Sarin gas attack in the late 1990s. He has also been the subject of a BBC One documentary and his fiction has been dissected in varied symposia in universities across the globe. Moreover, he also works as a translator of American literature into Japanese. It is clear therefore that in Japan, Murakami occupies a privileged position as a professional writer who enjoys both a serious (as attested by critical acclaim and awards bestowed upon his work) and popular (as proven by his book sales) position. Outside of Japan, Murakami has become recognized as the leading Japanese fictionist of his age and occupies the unique position of being both a serious author and a popular writer. Mori attests: "...younger readers can enjoy the strengths of his storytelling, and they may even unwittingly absorb some of his masked meaning" (220).

However, distinction for a writer like Murakami who sets himself apart from the other writers or social agents of the literary field comes with attacks from competing players in the game of literary production. In Japan, Murakami's popularity does not spare him from the harsh questioning from the *bundan* for his objectives in writing fiction. Even when he had already established himself as a bestselling author with an increasing number of awards, Murakami's fiction is criticized by members of the *bundan* for its Western influences. John DiConsiglio reports how some critics would refer to his work as *batakusai* which literally means "stinking of butter" or to be more specific, too Westernized or Americanized. This evaluation of his work led him to be ostracized by the literary establishment in the early years of his writing. Murakami shares: "I took a lot of heat when I launched my career thirty-five years ago. "This can't be called a novel," older critics fumed. "This isn't literature!" I found the constant attacks quite depressing, so I left

Japan for a number of years and went to live abroad, where I can write what I wanted in peace, free of the constant static” (“The Birth” 77).

The *Bundan* in the Age of Global Literature

In Hideo Furakawa’s interview with Haruki Murakami, Murakami recalled what the literary establishment was like when he started as a writer:

[i]n those days, writers, critics, and editors all belonged to groups that functioned rather like clubs. If you didn’t join one of these clubs, you inevitably felt a kind of isolation. It wasn’t that I was opposed to this literary establishment, but I disliked the pressure to socialize, so I kept to myself. The problem was in their world you were either friend or foe, whereas my basic philosophy was to seek neither, which meant I ended up surrounded by almost nothing but enemies (69).

From the Meiji period (1868-1912) to the Taishō period (1912-1926) and even to the Shōwa period (1926-1989), the Japanese literary aesthetic was mostly controlled by the *bundan*. El-Khoury points out that the term *bundan* has been used in two different ways:

on the one hand it referred to literary circles in a broad sense and could include anyone who wrote or criticized literature; on the other hand, it referred in a narrow sense to specific literary people, and *bundan bungaku* refers exclusively to works produced by the group. Like *junbungaku*, *bundan* is an elusive term whose meaning must be grasped by gathering fragmentary information from different time periods (37).

Angela Yiu explained that the word *bundan* can be loosely translated as “literary circle.” She said that it is a mostly Tokyo-based group of writers, critics and publishers (magazines included) that set the criteria for literary works. They also promoted certain writers and engaged in a conglomeration of writing activities. Over the decades of its existence, the *bundan* has had many changes in its form and operation. Some of these changes happen incrementally, while others come hastily. Yiu explained that major figures like Mori Ogai (1862-1922) who introduced changes in Japanese poetry,⁴ and the writer Kikuchi Kan (1888-1948) who founded a publishing house

and the magazine *Bungeishunju* which awards the Akutagawa Prize,⁵ are two of the people who directed literary productions for a certain period. Ogai and Kan are therefore individuals who were (almost single-handedly) able to introduce a big change in the literary field during their day. Murakami appears to be the next individual to do such.

With the wave of literary influences coming from outside Japan, the Japanese aesthetic understandably has become a collection of old models and new, appropriated strategies and interpretations that are palatable to the Japanese literati. Due to internationalization, followed by late-capitalist globalization, what then in the Meiji era was a “wave of influence” of outside forms of literature became a hurricane of changes that contemporary Japanese authors and critics had to grapple with. The changes in the literary milieu, of course, take place in a society that also changes. Awards and recognition may still have symbolic value in the world of literature; however late-capitalism has proven that sales have increasingly mattered and become equal with awards.

In the new millennium, Yiu has noticed that the *bundan* is drifting towards popular literature: “in the sense that in order to sell anything you need to reach a large market” (personal interview). This is very different from how traditional support for a literary work is provided. Ideally awards and recognition are given out to writers whose works achieved the standards set by the *bundan*. The standards are interpretations of what the *bundan* calls Pure Literature (*junbungaku*)—a pure type of literature that developed from the cultural specificity of Japanese-ness.

However, today, even Japan’s two biggest literary prizes, the Akutagawa Prize and the Naoki Prize,⁶ have reflected the noticeable commercial thrust of the contemporary *bundan*. Yiu points out that recent winners of the Akutagawa Prize do not represent *junbungaku* or pure literature. A lot of times, she said, it is the literature that appeals to a broad readership that wins the award. Therefore, the distinction between the writers who win the Akutagawa Prize or the Naoki Prize becomes blurred. It can be said then that Japan’s literary field and its key players (which include award giving bodies), just like literary fields elsewhere, have bent to the demands of the

market economy. Changes in the genres and the production of literature are influenced by market forces.

Yiu stressed the importance of publishing houses and the media in Japan's current literary field. She also adds that winning awards is an auspicious situation for authors to increase their book sales:

...the publishing houses and the media... are very important in promoting the direction of literature, and there are also, aside from the Akutagawa and Naoki prizes, there are many, many different types of literary prizes awarded to the new writers or experienced writers. Once you receive a prize the sales of your book go up, at least right around the time that you get the prize and then some people would ride on that moment of success and [as a result] become more successful with the sales of their publication going up. And then for some people it is just a momentary success, so I think that's what you're looking at with the *bundan* (personal interview).

Clearly in the contemporary age, Japanese literary prizes are intertwined with the demands of the market economy. Award-winning authors are not only given the prestige that the award carries, but they are also launched to a public of reader-consumers who are looking for the next big thing in the literary world. If the writers are not able to sustain the interest of their fickle public, the attention and book sales that are provided to them soon dies down and they are replaced quickly by other literary stars.

Murakami was able to sustain a high level of critical acclaim and book sales which continued decades after he started writing. Yet, Murakami attributes his success to his readers more than the publishers and other industry workers.⁷ Moreover, despite the success in book sales he has outside and inside of Japan, he still feels a bit of the isolation he felt when he began his work as a writer. Even today, Murakami laments that he is an outcast of the Japanese literary world: "I have my own readers ... But critics, writers, many of them don't like me. Why is that? I have no idea! I have been writing for 35 years and from the beginning up to now the situation's almost the same. I'm kind of an ugly duckling. Always the duckling, never the swan" (Poole).

Murakami's situation has been described by him as "almost the same" but tracking his career there have been some favorable changes bestowed

upon him, such as the acceptance by one of his former staunchest critics, the Nobel Prize winner, Ōe Kenzaburo. Ōe previously found Murakami and his works too apolitical—to him Murakami’s works then were “sophisticated stylizations of trivia” (Napier 204). To Roland Kelts, the big turnaround in Ōe’s attitude towards Murakami occurred when Murakami wrote and published the novel *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* in the mid-1990s. For this work Murakami received the Yomiuri award for literature, one of the biggest, highly respected awards in Japan, and the award was conferred upon Haruki by Ōe. Ōe praised Murakami when he gave him the award, noting that this is a novelist who is dealing with big social issues: Japan’s war-time history and Manchuria. Heavier historical issues that appeared in that book really changed the minds of certain members of the *bundan* including Ōe, who later in an interview was very extensive in his praise of the work (Kelts, personal interview).

In an interview where Ōe was asked if he felt competitive toward writers like Murakami, he said:

Murakami writes in a clear, simple Japanese style. He is translated into foreign languages and is widely read, especially in America, England, and China. He’s created a place for himself in the international literary scene in a way that Yukio Mishima and myself were not able to. It’s really the first time that has happened in Japanese literature. My work has been read, but looking back I’m not sure I secured a firm readership, even in Japan. It’s not a competition, but I would like to see more of my works translated into English, French, and German and secure a readership in those countries. I’m not trying to write to a mass audience, but I would like to reach people (Fay, “Interview: Oe Kenzaburo”).

Ōe’s acceptance of Murakami and his pivotal role in Japanese literature has signaled an important change on how the *bundan* views acceptable literature. From the interview it can be culled that Murakami’s mass readership, a sign of his being a popular author, does not diminish his role in being a representative of contemporary Japanese literature. Although Ōe himself does not want to be a popular author, he is clearly astounded with the global influence of Murakami through his international following.

With his acceptance by Ōe, Murakami himself recognizes that the Japanese literary field has come to change over the decades. He recognizes that the literary game played in Japan is different from the literary game outside of it. He states: “[b]ut I think, in a sense, we are playing different games...I began to think that way. It’s very similar, but the rules are different. The equipment’s different, and the fields are different. Like tennis and squash” (Fay, “Interview: Oe Kenzaburo”). Indeed, Murakami’s strategy in playing the literary game is quite different from Japanese writers who only seek to be read by national readers. Clearly, Murakami’s strategy in playing the literary game is to gain some influence or capital within and outside the Japanese literary establishment. To a large degree he has accumulated capital through his texts being translated into English, yet he still encounters stringent critics whom he still was not able to appease over the years.

Asked by an interviewer if winning the Nobel Prize would solve his problem with his Japanese critics, Murakami humorously replied: “...I don’t want to speculate... That’s a very risky topic. Maybe I would be hanged from a lamp post. I don’t know!” (Poole, “Haruki Murakami”). As Tim Parks writes, “the [Nobel winner’s] status is transformed, and his work transfigured from contemporary to classic” (“The Nobel Individual”).

In Bourdieusian terminology, the Nobel Prize is the ultimate symbolic capital that authors may receive in their lifetime.

Winning the third Nobel Prize for Japan may be the ideal of many Harukists (Haruki readers or fans), but the ultimate international literary award does not resonate with what Murakami wants for his own literary career. For one, he is known to value his readers’ expectations more than his critics. Part of his agenda when writing a book is to be read by a mass readership (which today gives his works a high commercial value), hardly the goal of a serious literary author in any national literary field (Kelts, personal interview). Nevertheless, with the changing times even the Nobel Prize may soon find itself swayed by the forces of market economy just like what happened in so many national literary fields such as the case of the Japanese literary field that has gone through monumental changes after the Second World War.

The Nobel Prize for literature has always been associated with a slew of controversy in relation to its choice of winner. In 2011, the former chair of Nobel Prize in Literature and Nobel committee member Kjell Espmark discussed the Nobel selection process in a forum hosted by Harvard University. Espmark told his audience that the criteria for selecting the winner has changed since the Swedish Academy began to award the title in 1901. There was a period when the committee chose popular literature and, in another time, they chose a writer who had a literary humanist idea. Espmark emphasized that the committee is not swayed by politics in the selection of the awardee; he cited the instance of the writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn who won the award in 1970 despite the protest of the Soviet Union (Chen, “Author Demystifies”).

As much as the current Japanese literary field would welcome another Nobel winner, Dreux Richard does not believe that it is Murakami who should be the chosen one for the award. Richard writes that Murakami:

...has avoided the difficult, unrewarding work that surmounting cultural barriers demands: writing multilingual texts that defy commercial literary paradigms. This has been left to Yoko Tawada, Hideo Levy, Minae Mizumura and Lee Yangji, among others, all of whom have labored under the sign of Japan’s last Nobel caliber author, the late Kenji Nakagami (“Why Haruki Murakami”).

For Richard, just like Murakami’s other critics (which includes the literary critics Masao Miyoshi and Yoichi Kimori and the philosopher Kojin Karatani), he is not Japanese enough; moreover, he is too commercial. These criticisms have been constantly hurled at Murakami since the start of his career and yet Murakami has prevailed over the decades as a writer of Japan and as a translated author overseas. This is because Murakami and his fiction resonate with today’s notion of what literature is.

Murakami as a Japanese Writer in the Global Age

Tim Parks in his article “The Nobel Individual and the Paradoxes of International Literature” shares the following about literary success today:

[a] novelist is not famous today unless internationally famous, not recognized unless recognized everywhere. Even the recognition extended to him in his home country is significantly increased if he is recognized abroad. The smaller the country he lives in, the less important his language on the international scene, the more this is the case. So, if for the moment the phenomenon is only vaguely felt in Anglophile cultures, it is a formidable reality in countries like Holland or Italy. The inevitable result is that many writers, consciously or otherwise, have begun to think of their audience as international rather than national.

What Parks discusses here is the marked growing consciousness of writing for an international audience by contemporary writers, especially those writers from “smaller countries”—and by this Parks means not only in size but also in terms of capital (“The Nobel Individual”). Thus, to write for an international or global audience increases the chance for the writer to receive distinction as a writer. What Parks has pointed out describes the current global literary field where translation into a highly regarded language such as English is of primary importance. Parks wrote his article for *The Times Literary Supplement* in 2011. Yet, interestingly, it is this model of global literature described by Parks that has been followed by Murakami as early as the 1990s when his works were first translated into English. This model that addresses an international or global audience rather than just a national one has served Murakami well. He is able to earn distinction from his Japanese audience since he is still a Japanese language writer, an increasingly highly regarded one at that; and then, he is a translated author with a solid support group overseas—his US-based Murakami, Inc. The critics in both literary fields indeed have noticed his contribution to both Japanese and Global literature.

The more awards Murakami amassed, the more he asked himself questions about his role in the literary fields of Japan and the world. He began to reflect on his choices as a writer, whether he would just maintain commercial sales as the indicator of his success or whether he would probe deeper and look for other areas of literary legitimation. He shared,

...I myself have [a] hard time understanding how I made it this far. I didn't have my heart set on becoming a novelist when I was young, nor did I follow a series of steps to earn my spurs—no special studies, no training, no piling up of notebook exercises. Like so many things in my life, events seem to follow on their course, pulling me along. Luck played a big part too. It's rather unnerving when I look back now, but there's no way around it—that's the way it was" ("So What Shall" 68).

Murakami's popularity and critical acclaim can then be a sign of an emergence of a new age of Japanese writing. What exactly did Murakami introduce? For one, Murakami's Japanese writing style is more colloquial and makes use of a lot of borrowed English words (making his works easily accessible to the Anglophone translator); second, his writings contrasted heavily with popular writing of the 1960s and 1970s because he did not pursue the realistic mode and opted to use fantastic elements in his stories; and third, his early writings appear to be apolitical and individualistic. Although Murakami had a growing following in Japan and (although with some hesitation from some members of the *bundan*) literary doors were opening for him, Murakami felt constricted in Japan and decided to continue writing abroad where the global literary field, beginning with its located center which is the US, welcomed him. In 1991, Murakami and his wife left Japan for the US where he became a visiting writer at Princeton University.

At this point it must be noted that when Murakami left for the US he was already a writer with distinction. He was an upcoming writer who sold millions of copies of his *Norwegian Wood* and at the same time he had some critical acclaim. When asked why he had to move to the US where he chose to live and write he said that he wanted to escape Japan particularly its literary establishment: "[a]t that time, the literary establishment in Japan still exerted considerable influence. They had...how shall I put this...the power to lay down the law, so to speak, and if you went against them, well, they could make things pretty difficult. I get the feeling, though, that the situation has changed" (Furukawa 69).

The move to the US, although risky, helped him gain more symbolic capital as a writer and it also allowed him an entry point to gain prestige

in the bigger US market. It can even be said on hindsight that Murakami's calculated risk of entering the bigger global literary establishment spear-headed by the US literary workers, while maintaining an ambivalent relationship with his local literary establishment, was unconsciously strategic in creating his name in the global literary field.

Murakami did not completely disengage himself from Japan though. For him the year 1995 was life-changing. He was living in the US at the time and interestingly he compares his experience to that of F. Scott Fitzgerald when the Great Depression hit the United States. Fitzgerald was then in Paris and he made the decision to return to America because he felt it was his responsibility as an American to return to the United States when it was suffering; Murakami felt very much the same way about Japan when the Kobe earthquake and the Sarin gas attack occurred in 1995 that he went back to Japan to try to understand what was happening (Williams, "Marathon Man"; Brown, "Tales of the Unexpected").

His two-volume nonfiction *Underground* or *Andagurando* is the result of his decision to be in his home country during a time of social crisis. The work involved interviews he conducted with his fellow Japanese who were either the victims of the gas attack or the perpetrators of the attack. The latter were part of the *Aum Shinrikyo* (Supreme Truth) cult. Murakami said that the experience of writing that book really changed him as a writer and as a person—as a Japanese person. He shared: "[t]he victims were hard-working people who served their companies... For a long time I was not interested in that kind of person, but after those interviews I sympathized with them. I could understand what they are and how they live. That recognition changed me somehow" (Williams, "Marathon Man"). In addition to producing his nonfiction *Underground*, his research on what happened, especially on the cult, would later figure in his novel *1Q84*.

Conclusion: Overcoming the Murakami Brand of Literature

The case of Haruki Murakami's rise to dominance in both the Japanese and global literary fields is truly exceptional. It is rare that a single author has introduced so much innovation in a literary field in his own lifetime.

However, due to the fruitful combination of Murakami's own talent, the cooperation of his literary collaborators, Murakami, Inc., the advancement in technology (i.e., the Internet) that has allowed Murakami to be in touch with his readers, and his exceptional understanding of English, Murakami has contributed much to Japan's contemporary literature in the age of global literature. In addition to these factors, it must be emphasized that Murakami's agency of transforming the conservative literary field of Japan into something more accessible to both the Japanese and the non-Japanese has made Murakami a force that has also transformed Japan's Post-World War, modern literary field into a field that is open to accommodate post-modern techniques in writing, reflective of its historical position or context and global in its reach.

The success of Murakami's fiction has resulted in his acquisition of different types of capital and an expansion of his habitus. He has become an author of the emerging global literary field. As a testament to the effectiveness of his "branding" as a global author, he has been the subject of both academic and popular media's inquiry. He also has been legitimized as an author through the awards he has been given.

What began as a fascination for Western fiction which Murakami tried to mimic in his own writing over the years gave birth to a writing style now described as Murakamiesque. This Murakami style of writing (which is captured even in translation) along with Murakami's trademark themes of alienation, historical revisionism, the critique of urban life, and the unmasking of society's dark side have become Murakami's literary contributions that aim to capture humanity's ethos in the twentieth to the early twenty-first centuries.

Murakami perfected his Murakamiesque style which gave his literary works a "brand" that his loyal readers support in terms of book sales. Thus, Murakami through his style and content was initially able to create a specific literature which made use of similar postmodern techniques from Anglophone writers. This Murakami brand of writing is still evolving especially since Murakami has been consciously putting in more Japanese social issues in his fiction. With his comprehensive novel, *1Q84*, for instance, Murakami began

making his Japanese identity and concerns more pronounced while synthesizing these with his Murakamiesque style.

Unlike earlier writers of serious Japanese literature who looked at their writing as an art form, Murakami sees his writing life as a profession. Although Murakami clearly writes serious novels, he targets the literary taste of his readers as the standard of his writing, rather than those of the award-giving bodies for legitimation. That he writes for his reader's appreciation and entertainment is a claim that Murakami often makes. Thus, it makes sense that Murakami would see his stories and himself as an author as "assets." Unlike writers from the *bundan*, Murakami does not hide the fact that he is a professional writer concerned with book sales.

While Murakami was writing his Western-influenced fiction overseas and was accumulating literary capital through awards and book sales, Japan as a nation had its own issues to contend with. On a national level, the 1990s brought about Japan's biggest economic recession; it also was a time of social unrest heightened by the religious cult Aum Shinrikyo's gas attack that proved that Japan's prosperity was not able to address issues pertaining to the psyche of the Japanese people. Postwar Japanese are perceived to lack a deeper purpose in their lives after they have reached economic prosperity. The old community spirit has been abandoned in the impersonal big cities such as Tokyo. Murakami was quick to sense this and used his fiction to unveil often hidden aspects of Japanese society and history.

As of this writing, Murakami remains a formidable force in the world of literature and yet the literary world must overcome the enigma of Murakami. Young writers must challenge Murakami's legacy. This is what Murakami did himself when he started writing, he challenged the *bundan*. Now, as expected, Murakami has become part of the very institution that he challenged decades ago. Young writers, may they be Japanese or from around the globe, must continue Murakami's legacy and overcome it by creating their own identity.

In his own country, literary workers are busy looking for the next big thing after Murakami. Contemporary Japanese writing is fighting an uphill battle to be recognized outside of Japan. Thus, the Japan Foundation has

come up with a list of literary works that they are promoting overseas in order for translators to pick up new works. The booklet called *Worth Sharing: A Selection of Japanese Books Recommended for Translation* has been published annually since 2012. It is indicated in the booklet that translators may receive support for their translation work “provided the translations are of adequate quality and appropriate plans are submitted” (1). Below is how the Foundation explains the need for such a booklet of recommended works for translation:

In 2012, we undertook a new initiative aimed at giving people overseas a better understanding of contemporary Japan through recommendation of selected outstanding books for translation. Creating these lists is a way for the Japan Foundation to help spread the word about brilliant books that depict what the nation is like now, providing readers with authentic views of Japanese society and its people. Our lists are drawn up around general themes, providing perspectives on social and cultural undercurrents, making them guides to writing in Japan that are accessible even in regions and languages in which contemporary Japanese books are not particularly well known. When Japan is viewed from multiple perspectives or angles, it offers up new dimensions and colors. Our goal in creating these themed lists is, over time, to convey aspects of culture and society that cannot be grasped through a one-dimensional approach (1).

One of the committee members who selected literary works for inclusion in the booklet is Nozaki Kan, a professor at the University of Tokyo. Nozaki in his introduction to the list states that: “[t]here are no works by Murakami Haruki, but this is simply because he already has an overwhelming level of international recognition. Readers will likely come to a vivid realization of the diverse brilliance of contemporary Japanese literature that lies hidden in the shadow of Murakami’s immense popularity” (3). Kan is correct; for Japanese literature to thrive in the global age, Japanese literature must overcome Murakami’s legacy.

Overcoming Murakami’s legacy appears not only of interest to the remaining Japanese *bundan* or literary workers for the benefit of their fellow Japanese. It appears that the Japanese *bundan* has now taken interest in actively engaging or educating foreigners toward a better understanding of

the pillars of Japanese literature before and beyond Murakami. Yet, for now, they are capitalizing on the popularity of Murakami to create and enrich interest, not only in newer texts and authors, but older texts and authors as well. A recent example of such an initiative is *The Asahi Shimbun's* call for entries to an international essay contest on Natsume Soseki. According to the contest notice:

The Sōseki International Essay Contest is inviting entries on the continuing appeal of his works among foreigners. Sōseki, one of Japan's most famed and popular authors, lived in the period of transition to the modern society... *Sōseki's works had a major influence on Haruki Murakami, who is a representative author of contemporary Japan* (italics added).

It appears that Murakami has already reached the level of Sōseki in terms of his impact on Japanese literature. Will he have a long-lasting impact on global literature? Murakami has already reached global recognition that may have already cemented his status on a national level in Japan. In time it will be recognized whether Murakami's works will endure globally to reach the level of the classic. What is assured right now is that Japanese literature of the late twentieth to the early twenty-first centuries will always include in its discussion the fiction of a writer from Kobe who wrote his early novels on his kitchen table.

Notes

1. Murakami has spawned a dozen novels, three short story collections, travel writings, and non-fiction prose, in addition to numerous translations. However, it is his work as a novelist that has reaped him consistent recognition.
2. This was changed in the latter part of his literary career. In 2006, Murakami wrote an introduction to *Rashomon and Seventeen Other Stories*, by Ryunosuke Akutagawa showing that he in fact continues to read and actively participate in discussions on Japanese literature. The collection was translated by one of Murakami's own translators, Jay Rubin. Here, according to Mori: "Murakami considers which writers qualify as the ten most important 'Japanese national writers' since the Meiji Restoration in 1868..." (215).
3. Although he criticizes the Japanese *bundan*, Murakami has a long-spanning relationship with its members. He himself, as Prof. Angela Yiu mentioned in a personal interview, is in fact part of it already. Interestingly, his novel *1Q84* also contains multiple references to the *bundan* and how it operates.
4. Ogai composed 232 *kanshi*, or Sino-Japanese poems, that were published in a two-volume anthology. These poems show his provocative use of literary devices, particularly, allusion. Moreover, these poems show his mastery of kanji (Wixted 89).
5. "The Akutagawa Prize, named after the fictionist Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, is one of the two most prestigious literary prizes in Japan. As of 2011, 260 prizes have been awarded officially for *junbungaku tanpen*. Though in reality short novels/novellas win most often (El-Khoury vii).
6. The Naoki Prize is another literary prize founded by Bugeishunjū Ltd., in commemoration of novelist Naoki Sanjūgo (1891-1934). This award is given to promising writers of *taishu bungaku* (popular literature) (El-Khoury viii).
7. Venuti states that "various factors play into the reception of any book, in addition to imponderables which guarantee that any prediction of success or failure can never be certain" (162).

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Is The Nation Still Imagined?

Re-imagining the Filipino
in the Age of Facebook in
Joselito Delos Reyes' *iStatus Nation*

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Abstract

The late historian and theorist Benedict Anderson posits that the nation is a “socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group”—that is, the members of a so-called “nation” simply embrace a mental image of their kinship since they neither interact with nor know each other. However, in today’s age of digital globalization, where people from within and outside a community interact with each other via social media, one cannot help but ask the question: “Is the nation still imagined?” This paper attempts to answer this question by examining the relationship between nationalism and the Filipino identity in the age of Facebook as re-imagined and (re-)presented by Joselito Delos Reyes in his collection of Facebook-posts-cum-personal-essays, *iStatus Nation*.

Keywords

Benedict Anderson, Joselito Delos Reyes, imagined community, *iStatus Nation*, Facebook

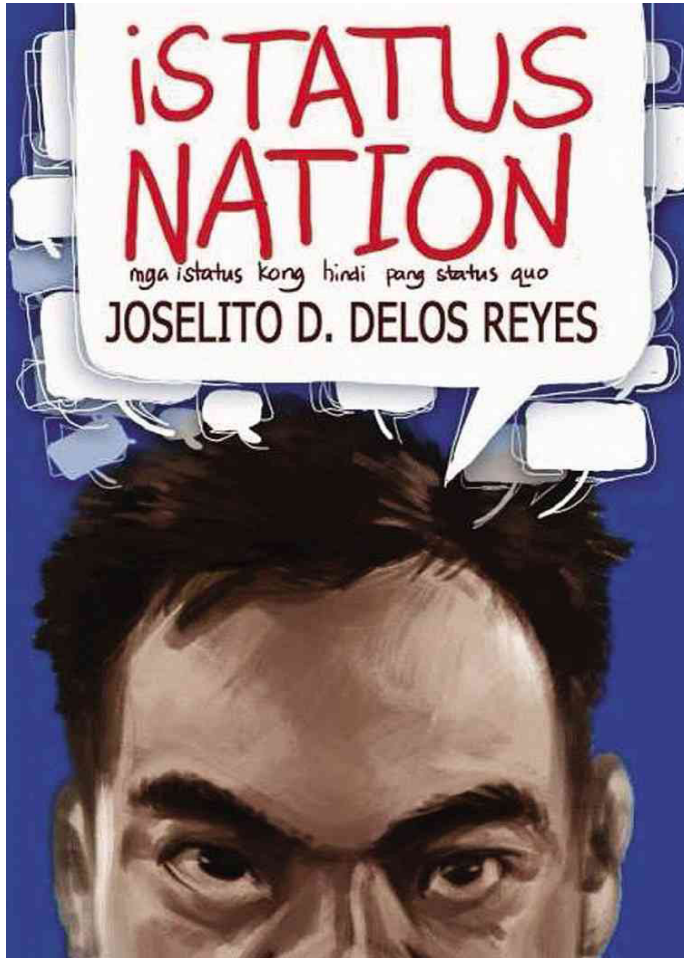


Fig. 1. Cover of *iStatus Nation*, Joselito Delos Reyes' collection of Facebook posts-turned-personal essays; <https://www.goodreads.com/>



Fig. 2. Joselito Delos Reyes; <https://varsitarian.net>



Fig. 3. Benedict Anderson, best known for his 1983 book *Imagined Communities*, which explored the origins of nationalism; <https://www.nytimes.com>

Introduction

The 2016 national elections saw the emergence of Facebook as a battleground for many Filipinos expressing their support for their preferred candidates and their disdain for other candidates whom they believe would be detrimental to the country's progress. The heated disputes amidst a politically fractured Philippines did not just unfold via street protests and national debates on television but, in fact, also transpired online, particularly in the most popular social media platform: Facebook. In light of this, it is interesting to inquire and discern how Facebook, which has now become a ubiquitous means of communication and a predominant apparatus for discourse, has shaped the nation today—more specifically, how it has managed to fashion the identity of the modern Filipino concerning his relationship to the nation.

To examine this query, I felt compelled to look at Joselito Delos Reyes' *iStatus Nation: Mga Istatus Kong Hindi Pang-status Quo*, which won the 2015 National Book Awards for Best Book of Essays in Filipino. I believe that the distinctive form and nature of the book—a collection of the author's Facebook posts or statuses on various personal and social issues—make it a relevant and viable candidate for this examination. For this paper, I will look at *iStatus Nation* in conjunction with two pertinent texts: Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* and Loreto Camiloza's paper, "Redefining Filipino Nationalism."

Rethinking the Imagined Community

Historian and theorist Benedict Anderson theorizes the nation as an imagined community thus:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion . . . it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (6-7).

Anderson posits that the nation is a socially imagined community borne simply out of its members' imaginings largely due to non-interaction. In other words, the nation is, in essence, a mere image—or to use Jean Baudrillard's term, a simulacrum¹—of their communion or kinship. That the members of the community do not know and, thus, do not interact with each other is the basis of Anderson's theorization of the nation. I believe this is the interstice at which a rethinking of the nation as an imagined community lies. We presently live in the age of information and digital globalization where we are now able to communicate and engage with other people from everywhere in the world via social media. In this respect, the question begs to be asked: in the age of Facebook where members inside and outside a community can now interact with one another, is the nation, then, still imagined?

In their introduction to *Critique, Social Media and the Information Society* (2014), editors Fuchs and Sandoval postulate that “media, knowledge work and information technologies play a certain role in many contemporary societies and that the notion of the information society should therefore not simply be rejected, but critically assessed” (1). Facebook falls under the categories of “media, knowledge work and information technologies”; we can, therefore, deduce that it is a contributing factor to how the nation is now imagined or shaped. In our so-called “information society,” I argue that the nation is no longer just imagined since it is now also physicalized in virtual spaces such as the various social media applications we presently have and partake in. In other words, Facebook has now become a tactile representation—a virtual microcosm—of the nation.

With this essential reshaping of the concept of the nation in the age of Facebook, how then do we reshape and re-imagine the Filipino? In *Necessary Fictions: Philippine Literature and the Nation 1946-1980*, Caroline Hau suggests that it is in literature where we go about preserving and reshaping Filipino culture:

Literature came to occupy a mediating position between the “universal” ideals of freedom and nationalism, on the one hand, and their realization within a specifically Philippine context, on the other hand. Literature assumed a mediating function precisely because Rizal's novels served as

artifactual concrete examples of a “Filipino culture” that was conceived as the sum total of all the products of a society’s creative labor and aspirations. At the same time, these works were the means by which other (later) Filipinos could acquire, preserve, and reshape such a culture (2-3).

Thus, I turn to the literature of Joselito Delos Reyes’ to acquire some insight as to how the Filipino is reshaped by the “information society.” As earlier mentioned, his *iStatus Nation* is an ideal case study for this inquiry as the book is a collection of essays collated from the author’s very own Facebook page—as far as I know, the first of its kind in the country.

In the book, Delos Reyes writes with both humor and insight about the allures of his everyday life, choosing as subjects the following: his family, his profession as an educator, Philippine politics, and popular culture. In these Facebook-posts-cum-personal-essays, he not only entertains, informs, and provokes, but also manages to re-imagine the Filipino of today vis-à-vis his/her attitude toward nationalism.

Re-Rooting Filipino Nationalism

In his paper “Redefining Filipino Nationalism,” Loreto Camiloza argues that Filipino nationalism is confusing to Filipinos because the experience of decades of colonization has distorted their consciousness in that their principles, ideas, and lifestyles have been based on a Western perspective (35). Thus, he attempts to

redefine the meaning of Filipino nationalism by considering some aspects that are significant to its realization in the consciousness of the Filipinos such as Filipino nationalism in the context of imagined community, *Filipino nationalism in relation to the development of print-language*, *Filipino nationalism in the context of blood relation*, and *Filipino nationalism in the context of virtue* (3, emphasis added).

These contexts will serve as the framework of my examination of Delos Reyes’ attitude towards nationalism in *iStatus Nation*. However, since I have already discussed Anderson’s theory of the imagined community earlier, my discussion henceforth will focus on three questions that are based on

Camiloza's redefinition of Filipino nationalism in the contexts of print-language, blood relation, and virtue:

1. How does print language, now embodied in the technology of social media, advance Filipino nationalism?
2. Do Filipinos still view nationalism in relation to blood or kinship to *Inang Bayan* (the Motherland)?
3. Is nationalism still considered a virtue amongst Filipinos?

This paper endeavors to answer these questions by analyzing the content of the book and extrapolating some insights on how Delos Reyes negotiates these questions.

(Re-)Presenting the Filipino Netizen

That *iStatus Nation* is neither fiction nor poetry but a work of creative nonfiction is pertinent. Much like those of millions of Filipino Facebook users, Delos Reyes' Facebook statuses are written observations on the events of his everyday existence. What sets his Facebook posts apart from that of the average user is that his are thoughtfully written and often humor-laden. Nonetheless, because his book is grounded in the real, it is poised to represent the daily plight of the common Facebooking Filipino.

The book is sectioned into four parts: Pop, Pol, Ser, and Emo. Each part concerns subjects or issues that are communal fixations of the modern-day Filipino: popular culture (Pop), politics (Pol), work or employment (Ser)² and relationships (Emo).³ On Facebook, it is common to see Filipinos sharing humorous memes about popular culture that would potentially become viral, ranting about the failures of the government, complaining about or extolling their line of work, and expressing their feelings, either positive or negative, about a loved one. Because his statuses are able to capture the interests of Filipinos on Facebook, Delos Reyes thus becomes a representation of that social-media-savvy citizenry.

Clearly, *iStatus Nation* invokes issues that concern the nation. Particularly noteworthy is the title itself as it carries a play on words that operates on three levels: it is a direct description of the Philippine nation in relation to the popularity of social media; it is a critique on the Filipino's materialistic inclinations and obsession with social hierarchy; and, lastly, it is a self-reflexive statement on the status of the Philippine nation. It is, in essence, a pronouncement of three things:

1. the Philippine nation is composed of citizens who are fixated with posting their status on Facebook;
2. Filipinos seem preoccupied with social status; and
3. the book itself embodies the status of the nation—a wordplay on the State of the Nation Address (a. k. a. SONA).⁴

Judging by the book's pregnant two-word title, Delos Reyes makes a statement about the Philippine nation—immediately and urgently so. However, the subtitle—*Mga Istatus Kong Hindi Pang-Status Quo*—quickly counters, with irony and humor, the title's multi-layered statement. Humor and irony notwithstanding, the book just with its title, promises among others, references to, if not all-out discussions on, the nation. In fact, almost every page of the book exudes nationalistic sentiments—from ruminations about the plight of the Filipino teacher to a letter addressed to Janet Napoles to complaints about the ludicrously high 32% tax that Filipinos were forced to bear during the leadership of Former President Benigno Aquino III. Like many of his fellowmen, Delos Reyes takes to the convenient platform of Facebook to express his concerns about the ills of society and engage other Facebook users who share, or disagree with, his sentiments.

Considering the notion of the nation as an imagined community, Delos Reyes, in *iStatus Nation*, re-imagines and (re-)presents the Filipino as a socially-engaged *netizen* in a Philippine nation no longer just imagined, but, in fact, physicalized in the virtual space that is Facebook. He not only *re-imagines* Anderson's member of a community as a *netizen* with a virtual identity engaging with other netizens in a simulated space, but also (*re-*)pres-

ents them. I include the parenthetical (re-) in “(re-)present” to emphasize that Delos Reyes does two things here:

1. he *re-presents*—that is, presents in a new light—his re-imagined Filipino as a netizen (appropriating Anderson’s *citizen*); and
2. at the same time, he *represents*—that is, assumes the role of a representative of—this re-imagined Filipino.

In his (re-)presentation of the Filipino netizen, Delos Reyes negotiates Camiloza’s conceptions of Filipino nationalism in relation to three contexts—print language, blood relation or kinship to *Inang Bayan*, and virtue—by way of characterizing the modern Filipino thus:

1. acquiescent to the advancement of technology as an apparatus for social engagement and change;
2. inquisitive about the curiously and seemingly faulty machinations of the *Inang Bayan* as manifested in the nation’s customs, traditions, and political governance; and
3. still fundamentally adherent to the notion of nationalism as a Filipino *virtue* that needs to be upheld.

The Filipino in the Age of Facebook

Anderson cites the newspaper and the novel—both products of print-capitalism—as contributory to the emergence of the nation. Of print capitalism, he writes, “Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (36). What are perhaps the primary products of both print-capitalism and “information society” now are the gadgets that most of us use which can operate numerous social media applications—laptops, smartphones, tablets, and so on. With the popularity of social media apps like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, it is clear that the masses

embrace, with much fondness, this new technology (relative to the newspaper and the novel).

The Filipino netizen, as (re-)presented by Delos Reyes, is no different. In his Facebook entry “Migration,” Delos Reyes writes:

Tungkol ito sa ating lahat na sumasandal na sa teknolohiyang kinakatawan ng mga gadget. Tungkol ito sa pag-iwan sa komportableng buhay mo sa isang lumang gadget patungo sa mas bago, makabago, at masakit sa ulong i-operate na gadget. Migration ang tawag sa pag-iwan at pagtungo sa panibagong teknolohiyang mangangailangan ng panibagong kaalaman (73).⁵

Here, Delos Reyes (re-)defines the word “migration” in technological terms, which includes both physical and sociological transference from one gadget to another—from the old to the new. The acknowledgment of this so-called “technological migration” establishes the value that the Filipino netizen places on new technologies. While Delos Reyes expresses his frustration over the occurrence of this new type of migration by describing the process as complicated and headache-inducing, he ultimately recognizes the need to acquiesce to this migratory advancement by suggesting that the Filipino netizen, in order to progress, must not be impervious to new knowledge.

In “Facebooking,” Delos Reyes traces the journey of his migration from Friendster⁶ to Facebook. A friend set up a Facebook account for him in May 2009, but he admits to not touching the strange application with the new interface until months later. It was only in December 2009 that he actually started using Facebook—studied its workings, uploaded a profile photo, liked other Facebook users’ posts and photos, and posted his own statuses. Eventually, he learned to appreciate and enjoy Facebook as other users began liking his witty and humorous statuses, family photos, poems, and shared links—whether the posts were sensible or silly did not matter to the likers. He even confesses that Facebook was particularly helpful to him in completing his graduate thesis (16-17).

Delos Reyes’ personal account of his migration to Facebook speaks of the Filipino netizen’s eventual discovery of Facebook as a refreshingly social, albeit synthetic, space. The once-solitary nature of computer technology is

no longer so; through social media, it is now socially vibrant, stimulating, engaging, and interactive. The Filipino netizen cannot help but yield to the allures of Facebook; he embraces this new technology as it appears to curb loneliness and isolation, and offers a welcome escape towards social engagement and productivity.

Sending Tough Love for the Motherland

What is perhaps most fascinating about Filipino nationalism is its perceived subjectivity. Camiloza, in his study on the nature of Filipino nationalism, provides some insight thus:

Filipinos establish and found [sic] community as the basis or foundation. Filipino nationalism is not only known; it is also deeply felt and acted out in the spirit of blood relation . . . Symbols, myths, values, memories, attachments, customs, religion, laws, institutions, routines, and habits are intrinsic aspects that make up our blood relation and the complexity of the Filipino nation (41).

Camiloza adds that Filipinos are inclined to regard the nation as *Inang Bayan* (the “Motherland”); Filipino nationalism is therefore deeply entrenched in the relation between “the nation as a mother and Filipinos as sons and daughters” (41). The personal nature of this mother-and-son relationship between the nation and the Filipinos manifests in the way the latter affects, with much fervor, the former’s governing mechanisms—e.g., the government, laws, customs, traditions, values, and so on. Because nationalism, to the Filipinos, is about identity and survival, they are passionate in their stand against faulty elements of the Motherland that pose a threat to the integrity of the nation. A resounding case in point would be the People Power revolution that toppled the oppressive regime of President Ferdinand Marcos.

In the age of social media, we still see the same passion and urgency to right the wrongs of society, albeit taking on the forms of comments, rants, and memes in the walls of Facebook. Regardless of the form, however, the impassioned nature of Filipino nationalism is still alive today; and Delos Reyes, as representative of the Facebook netizen, exudes this nationalistic

spirit by questioning the operating mechanisms of *Inang Bayan*. In the book, he comments on, contests, and critiques the Motherland's government, as well as her customs and traditions.

As of this writing, "Dear Janet" —Delos Reyes' most famous and most shared Facebook post—has garnered 334 comments, 25,000 likes and 35,094 shares. It is an open letter written in August 2013 to Janet Napoles, a businesswoman who had scammed, in conspiracy with numerous politicians, mostly senators and congressmen, the Filipino people of their taxes in the billions. Delos Reyes writes:

... susulat na lang muna ako. Ito ang kaya kong gawin. Kaya hindi muna ako makakalimot. Iuukil ko sa sinumang makakabasa at makakarinig sa akin na pwede ba, huwag muna tayong makalimot. May oras at araw kayo. Huwag munang makalimot hanggang dumating ang araw ninyo. Darating ang araw ninyo kapag sinabi at sineryoso na nung nakatira sa Malakanyang,⁷ yung tao na laging nag-i-invoke na ako ang boss niya at dapat maglakad ako sa kaniyang tuwid-na-daan,⁸ na parusahan kayong makulong sa tunay na kulungan at hindi sa resort na kung tawagin ay St. Luke's o Veterans⁹ (163).¹⁰

It is no surprise that the above Facebook post went viral as it has touched a chord in the Filipino people with its combination of humor, wit, and zeal. It embodies a voice that shares the sentiments of many irate and flabbergasted citizenry who felt swindled both by Napoles and the government. More than just a letter to Napoles, it is a critique of the government's ineffective leadership, a statement against corruption, and a resounding reminder to the Filipino people not to fall victim to social amnesia. After all, a crime of such magnitude should never be forgotten.

What the letter-cum-Facebook-status also highlights is the power of both writing and social media. Delos Reyes manages to use this Facebook post as a potent tool—a kind of manifesto—to decry corruption, and thus incite social engagement and, hopefully, change. That the post has attained internet virality through likes, comments, and shares is a testament to the existence of Facebook nationalism. Delos Reyes, by calling out the faults of the nation's government, and the other Facebook netizens, by participating in the discourse, show no reluctance in challenging the Motherland.

Questioning her, particularly the inefficacy of her fractured system, is, after all, intentioned with love and concern.

If in “Dear Janet” Delos Reyes criticizes the government, in “*Manahimik Na Lang*” (“Just Shut Up”), he calls out fellow Filipino netizens whose line of reasoning he deems flawed. I will quote the post in full:

Nagsimula ang line of reasoning na ito noong isang linggo. Iyong “manahimik na lang” tapos sasamahan ng variant na “tumulong ka na lang kesa mag-rant” at “Ikaw, ano ang naitulong mo?”

Hindi ko gustong isipin na spin ito ng mga nakatira sa malaking gusali malapit sa Mendiola (hindi Beda, hindi CEU, starts with the letter M¹¹ [sic]. Sablay naman kasi talaga. Kaya to prevent the popularity nose-dive, kelangan ng counter propa. Yes, propa.

Pansinin, sa dami ng nagra-rant, ganoon din ang nagsasabi ng manahimik na lang. May kakaiba ba rito? Oo, yung nagsasabing manahimik at tumulong, sila yung nakatutok sa mga nagra-rant, consistent. Rant sa rant. Ano? Bantay sa mga kritiko? Para ma-sanitize? Yung nagsasabing manahimik, hindi rin tatahimik.

Protektado ng Konstitusyon ang karapatan kong mag-rant sa fb. At ang pagtulong? Hindi ako naniniwalang dapat ipinagsasabing nakatulong ako. Mag-rant tayong pareho o manahimik tayong pareho (134-135).¹²

“*Manahimik ka na lang!*” pervades the comment sections of controversial posts of Filipino netizens who are fearless in giving a piece of their mind on contentious issues hounding the nation. In his entry, Delos Reyes condemns this kind of argumentation that is clearly devoid of logic. He critiques the Filipino’s propensity for crab mentality, where one derisively regards views opposed to him as inferior and attempts to demean the opponent through lies or other malicious means. He also upholds the basic human right of freedom of expression; and ranting on Facebook, he reminds us, is covered by that Constitutional right.

In today’s information society, the Facebook netizen, as represented by Delos Reyes, expresses his commitment to and concern for the nation—the Motherland—not only by highlighting its strengths but also by bringing

attention to its weaknesses—be it the ineffective governance of its political leaders or the flawed traditions and practices of its citizens.

Is Nationalism Still a Filipino Virtue?

It is said that love for one's nation translates to love for one's neighbors; thus, it can be said that nationalism is akin to altruism. In his study, Camiloza posits that "Filipino nationalism is a virtue that cannot be divorced from the Motherland's goal, which is the source of her survival as a nation" (42). He further writes:

Filipino nationalism is a commitment and willingness to live, to think, to judge and to sacrifice one's self for the common good of the Motherland. As a virtue, it is perfected through constant commitment of the will not for one's own sake but for the good of all Filipinos. It is a virtue for it directs every Filipino to act towards the good, the common good (42).

The Filipino brand of nationalism as a virtue is highlighted by selflessness and sacrifice for the common good. In *iStatus Nation*, Delos Reyes exemplifies this practice of selflessness particularly in his profession as an educator. In "*Bakit Ako Naging Titser?*" ("Why I Became a Teacher?"), he posts:

Sa pagharap ko sa mga mag-aaral, pakiramdam ko, may hindi kayang ibigay ang bayang ito na tanging guro lamang ang makapagpo-provide. Basta ganun. Pakiramdam ko bayani ang maging guro (na totoo naman sa dami ng gawain at liit ng suweldo). Pero hindi agad ako naging guro. Not in the strictest sense though.

Pakiramdam ko, if you could make a dent out of not [sic] this wretched world, somehow, you make this world a better place to live in. Contribute ka lang. Kaisipang "solusyon ako at hindi problema." So hanggang ngayon, bitbit ko pa rin ang prinsipyong iyan. Saang paraan ka magko-contribute to make this world a better place to live? Ang maging titser ang pinakamagaling. Kaya ako masaya (222).¹³

In this Facebook entry, Delos Reyes espouses teaching as a noble but thankless (monetarily, at least) profession. He describes this line of work as

somehow able to provide something to fill a void that the country cannot fill. For him, teachers function with the right kind of mentality—becoming a solution rather than the problem. Despite enduring a heavy workload and meager pay, teachers nonetheless find joy and fulfillment in their profession. This is where self-sacrifice comes in: teachers work tirelessly and selflessly to educate the youth despite limited financial rewards. Teachers think of the nation first and foremost, and themselves only second. In this regard, it can be inferred that, for Delos Reyes, teaching is an act of nationalism embodying the virtue of selflessness and the practice of self-sacrifice.

In “Group Work,” Delos Reyes shares his philosophy on assigning group activities to his students. He tells his students that all members of each group will get one and the same grade. Though some of his students would complain that it is an unfair practice since some of the group members don’t pull their weight and only rely on others’ efforts, he stands firm with his rules on group work. He rationalizes this by explaining to his students that, beyond the school grounds, in the real world, we don’t get to choose whom we work with; rather, we make the best of our situation no matter how unfavorable it might be. We learn how to deal with difficult circumstances; and work involving group activities in school is good practice. In addition, he maintains this philosophy as it upholds the virtue of sacrifice as well as the principle of karma:

Nasa kakayahan ng iba na magtrabaho para sa walang ginagawa. Ang nata-mong higit na kakayahan habang binabalik ang isang pabigat na kasapi ay sobra pa sa makukuhang marka. Put premium on experience (mas maganda ang termino sa Filipino, “danas”) para gampanan ang gawaing hindi pang-isahan. Paniniwala ko, ang pakikitungo sa inutil hanggang mahikayat mo siyang makipagtulungan ay malaking pakinabang na sa paghahanda bilang propesyonal, bilang maaasahang mamamayan ng bansang ito (189).¹⁴

Here, Delos Reyes emphasizes the value of sacrifice in the context of group work, particularly the willingness to perform extra work to compensate for a group member’s lack of effort. He highlights the fact that doing temporary sacrifices can lead to even bigger rewards in the future such as the valuable

experiences and additional aptitudes gained. In fact, these rewards would even prepare a person for the professional world and transform him or her into a responsible citizen. He adds that the law of karma works, too: temporary sacrifices promise future successes, and, later in the essay, laziness and irresponsibility eventually result in unsatisfactory comeuppance such as losing opportunities for being notorious as a slacker. This Facebook entry punctuates that self-sacrifice is deeply ingrained in Filipino nationalism—that choosing to work for the common good eventually pays off not only on a personal level, but also on a bigger, societal level.

Instant Authors and Fake News: Ramifications of the *Re-Imagined Nation*

What is arguably the greatest achievement of social media is the democratization of publishing. Anybody with a Facebook or Twitter account can now self-publish—and with incredible ease and immediacy at that. One needs only a gadget with internet access to be able to put out a piece of writing, a photograph or a video onto the virtual space shared by a group of people. In Anderson's *imagined community*, print language costs serious money and takes a long time to produce. Information needs to be researched and synthesized into organized texts, which then need to be written, collated, and edited before they can be turned into books and subsequently released to the members of the community for consumption. That is the case for both novels and newspapers, although in the case of the latter, the process is much shorter and quicker since newspapers are published on a daily basis. But just the same, gathering and disseminating news take time, money, and manpower before they can reach the reading public.

In Delos Reyes' *re-imagined nation*, however, the process of publishing is faster, cheaper, and more dynamic since print language has been overtaken by social media. Any netizen has the capability to publish and share his or her thoughts, opinions, and sentiments on a particular issue instantly via social media apps like Facebook. There is no need to painstakingly craft a manuscript and submit it to a publisher for publication. There is no need to spend a great deal of either time or money just to express one's views to be shared

to the rest of the community. And once a netizen posts his or her thoughts and opinions on social media, other netizens may instantly like, comment, and share, making way for a more interactive and dynamic virtual space. In other words, since social media has now afforded members of a community a convenient and practical platform that enables them to instantly interact and become *instant authors*, what he have now is a nation that is no longer imagined, but *re-imagined* or, in fact, real.

If there is one thing that significantly differentiates the *re-imagined nation* from the *imagined community*, it is the combined sense of ease, immediacy, and interaction in the distribution of information that privileges members of a community with instant authorship. That is the biggest appeal of social media: everyone is able to exercise their freedom of speech and expression—and with this, the possibility of internet virality and thus, instant fame. While this is a boon for the exercise of the freedoms of speech and expression of the individual, this also poses a big problem: the disintegration of moral and ethical responsibilities and standards in the handling and sharing of information.

What Anderson's *imagined community* carries is a paradox: on the one hand, the downside of the production of print language is its tediousness and limited accessibility; on the other hand, however, it is also an advantage in that information is regulated and controlled. The creation of print language involves a process of policing, whereby editors and publishers screen, edit, fact-check, and proofread all the information that go into the manuscripts and drafts before they get published into books and newspapers. In other words, what ends up in the hands of the members of the community for their consumption are accurate information that passed professional and ethical standards.

This, however, is not always the case in Delos Reyes' *re-imagined nation*. Because all netizens can become instant authors in social media, information, at times, gets shared and passed around irresponsibly and even maliciously. We see this happening in the country at the moment with the proliferation of *fake news* where information, quite disconcertingly, is wantonly weaponized to malign, offend, and destroy. Facebook now sees the explosion of trolls and

attack dogs who are compensated to conduct historical revisionism in order to push a certain agenda. Ordinary netizens naturally react and take sides; many engage, not in calm and sensible discourse, but in hateful arguments peppered with false claims and ad hominem attacks.

Social media has certainly democratized publishing; unfortunately, it has also led to the normalization of hate speech, where netizens with a misguided or misplaced sense of nationalism fall prey to both misinformation and disinformation. Sadly, this malicious handling and manipulation of information has caused divisiveness in the country—the exact antithesis of what Anderson theorizes and upholds in *Imagined Communities*: the communal effort of a group of people to come together, despite non-interaction, to form a united nation.

Conclusion: The Rise of the Facebook Nationalist

In this paper, I have tried to argue that, in the age of Facebook, the nation is no longer just imagined since it is now also physicalized in a virtual space—that Facebook has now become a synthetic microcosm of the nation. In addition, I have also posited that, in *iStatus Nation*, author Joselito Delos Reyes re-imagines and (re-)presents the modern Filipino as a socially-engaged netizen who embraces new technologies that further social engagement and change, who inquires and questions the faulty workings of the Motherland, and, lastly, who still considers nationalism as a Filipino virtue.

I began this paper with a discussion of Facebook as a kind of combat zone for many politically passionate Filipinos who express either their support or contempt for certain political leaders. I wish to conclude this paper in the same vein. For what this nation has witnessed of late is a phenomenon that is both fascinating and troubling: the apparent rise in number of what appears to be Facebook nationalists. *Fascinating* because we now see Facebook as a convenient avenue for certain groups to self-organize and self-mobilize. It is now easier to start petitions for social change via social media, and to take to the streets to protest and fight for what people think is right. It is all well and good if what is being fought for is, indeed, what is right. However, the rise of Facebook nationalists is also *troubling* because, as we are all well aware,

nationalism, when placed in the wrong hands, has the potential to cause social fracture and fuel, once again, the death of a nation's freedom.

Notes

1. See Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994).
2. A Tagalized version of the English word "Sir," a common address to male teachers.
3. Short for the word "emotional." In Philippine popular culture, "emo" refers to someone who is more emotional and gets easily attached to things than others.
4. An annual speech delivered by Philippine presidents to inform the public of the country's current economic state relative to goals previously set.
5. Translation:
This is about all of us who rely on technologies embodied by gadgets. This is about leaving the comforts of an old gadget towards a new, headache-inducing, more complicated gadget. Migration is what you call your desertion of an older technology in favor of a newer one that requires new knowledge (73).
6. A popular social networking site in the early 2000s.
7. Referring to Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, whose official residence, as former President, should have been Malacañang Palace but who chose to live in *Bahay Pangarap* (or House of Dreams) inside Malacañang Park.
8. President Noynoy Aquino often referred to the Filipino as his "boss." He called his political platform as "*Daang Matuwid*" or "Straight Path."
9. St. Luke's Medical Center and Veterans' Hospital, where several politicians found guilty of graft and corruption stayed after feigning sickness.
10. Translation:
. . . I will just write. This is what I can do. So I will not yet forget. I will force upon anyone who can read and hear me that we not forget. Your time and day will come. Do not forget until that day comes. That day will come when that person who resides in Malacañang, that person who always invokes that I am his boss and that I should follow the straight path, finally takes his job seriously and proclaims that you should be punished and sent to a real jail, not to a resort named St. Luke's or Veterans (163).
11. "Beda" refers to San Beda College, CEU is Centro Escolar University, and the building that starts with the letter "M" is Malacañang Palace. All establishments are situated in the same vicinity.
12. Translation:
 - a. This line of reasoning started last week. The "Just shut up!" then followed by a variant of "Why don't you just help out rather than rant?" and "How about you, what kind of help have you given?"

- b. I don't want to think that this is a spin by those people who live in the big building near Mendiola (not Beda, not CEU, starts with the letter M). It's just so messed up. To prevent the popularity nose-dive, there needs to be counter propaganda. Yes, propaganda.
 - c. *Get this, the number of people of those who rant is the same as the number of those who say "Just shut up!" Is there something odd here? Yes, those who say "just shup and help" are the very same people who are after those who rant—consistent. Rant for rant. What, they are guarding the critics? To sanitize them? Those who say "shut up" will never shut up.*
 - d. *My right to rant on FB is protected by the Constitution. And the act of helping? I don't believe that one should brag about the fact he has helped others. We should both rant or we should both shut up. (134-135)*
13. Translation:
- a. When I face the students, I feel that there is something that this country cannot provide that only teachers can. Really, it's like that. I feel that teachers are heroes (which is true with their heavy workload and small salary). But I didn't become a teacher right away. Not in the strictest sense.
 - b. *I feel that if you could make a dent out of this wretched world, somehow, you make this world a better place to live in. Just contribute. The mentality that "I am the solution and not the problem." So until now, I still carry that principle with me. In what way will you contribute to make this world a better place to live in? To be a teacher is the best. That's why I'm happy (222).*
14. Translation:
- a. *Some are capable of also doing the work of those who do nothing. The extra abilities gained while shouldering the work of a lazy freeloading group member are much bigger rewards than the grade received. Put premium on experience (the Filipino term is better, "danas") in performing group work. I believe that the ability to work with an inutile member until you are able to encourage him to share the work is a big advantage in preparation for becoming a professional, a dependable citizen of this country (189).*

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Oriental Ecofeminism

Contrasting Spiritual and Social Eco-femininity
in Mitra Phukan's *The Collector's Wife*
and Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape*

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Abstract

As a theoretical conjecture, the inception of ecofeminism in the vista of oriental environmentalism can hardly be traced back beyond the present century. Ideologically, it concerns itself with the ceaseless persecution and consequent subjugation of both nature and women since these two are contemplated to be identical in terms of their propensity to nurture life. However, this supposition has its own diverse ramifications which have been probed by contemporary Indian English fiction writers from unprecedented frames of reference. The association of nature and a woman's pursuit for selfhood has been surveyed very exhaustively at the beginning of the twenty-first century by two eminent Indian women novelists—Mitra Phukan in *The Collector's Wife* (2005) and Manjula Padmanabhan in *Escape* (2008). The former, set in the highly realistic background of 1970-80s Assam insurgency, obliquely formulates a spiritual alliance between the natural world and the protagonist in terms of their interdependence to ensure existence, whereas the latter, a futuristic dystopia, recounts a social issue which concerns the quantitative and qualitative decline of women and nature correspondingly. The protagonists belong to completely different backgrounds and timezones, but both of them undertake a parallel mental voyage to unearth their true self, their respective identity as an individual in a world that is characterized by anomalies in environment as well

as in humanity. In addition, the novelists also make an endeavor to study major eco-critical issues like “eco-ambiguity,” “ecocide,” and “ecophobia” which show the readers the way to interpret the texts through the lens of “environmental humanities” as well.

Keywords

identity crisis, Oriental ecofeminism, science fiction, social ecofeminism, spiritual ecofeminism

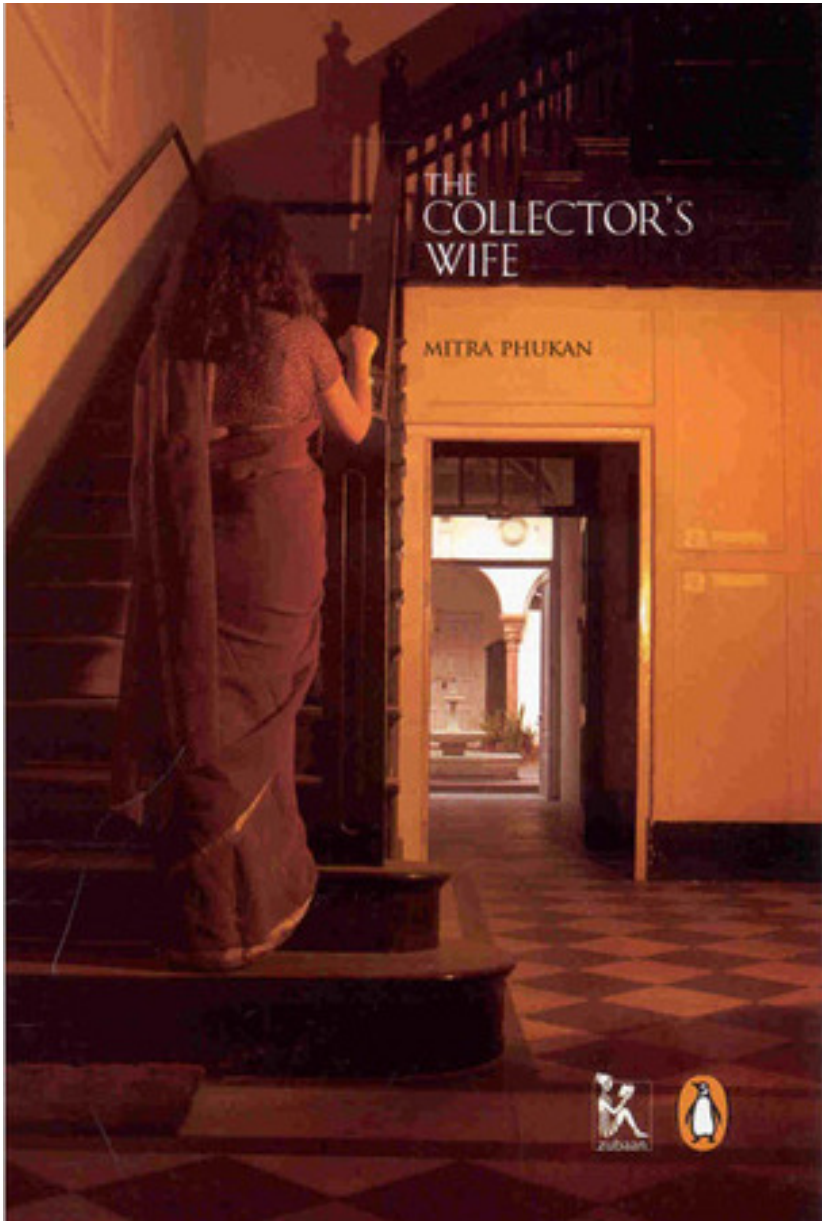


Fig. 1. Cover of *The Collector's Wife* by Mitra Phukan; <https://zubaanbooks.com/>

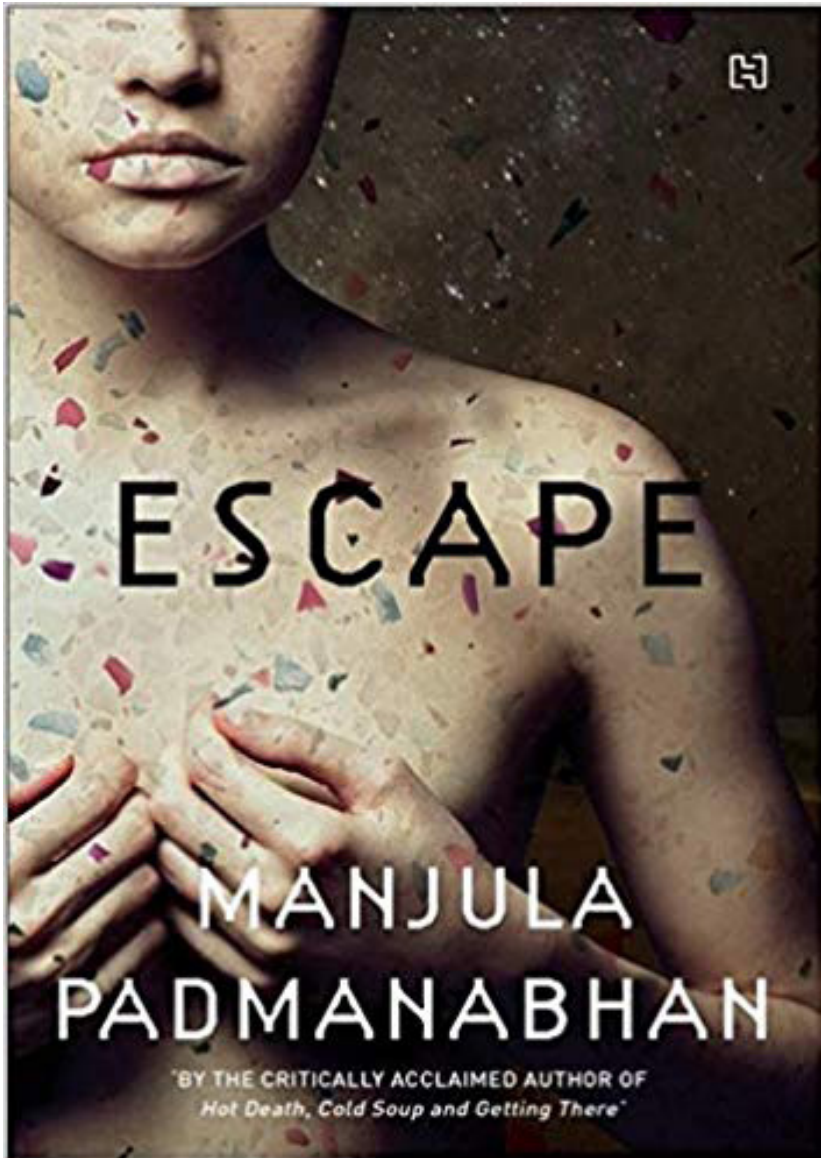


Fig. 2. Cover of *Escape* by Manjula Padmanabhan; <https://www.goodreads.com/>

Introduction

Derived from the Greek word “oikos,” the term “ecology” concerns itself with the harmony of human, animal, and plant life on earth. It evokes a sense of celebration of the natural world. However, the advent of the twentieth century marks a colossal advancement and consequent maltreatment in the domain of science and technology which quite predictably wreaked havoc on the environment. The corresponding literary creations of this era also demonstrate an urge to address the alienation and exploitation of nature wrought by technology. In connection to this, a slow-paced radical ideology, popularly recognized as “ecocriticism” emerged, which “might succinctly be defined as a study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (Buell 430). Cheryll Glotfelty, too, in her seminal work *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, delineates the cultural criticism from the environmentalist point of view as “the study of relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). In fact, ecocriticism is not merely about direct representations of environmental damage through literature; it is also about the whole array of our everyday life which reveals the implicit attitudes in our surroundings that have environmental consequences. Although the depiction of nature’s blessings and sublimity has been integral to literature since antiquity, the endeavor to generate awareness through literary productions about the depletion of the environment due to unrestrained capitalism, excessive exploitation of nature, and atmospheric hazards is a relatively fresh addition. The tone and stance towards nature in most of the literary masterpieces coming from the oriental context have been largely panegyric; however, “worries of a lack of resources, of a decreasing number of species, of a booming human population, and of an overall place to live have been great concerns in the highly destructive civilization which we live” (Ambrosius 1). That is why the new millennium has exhibited an initiative among literary writers to engage their works with the destruction inflicted on nature by humanity. Such an addressing quite naturally facilitates the necessity of raising awareness about the deterioration of the environment. Nevertheless, the beginning of the twenty first century attributes

prominence to a number of literary masterpieces that scathingly criticize the morbid lifestyle of the contemporary generation and put in question the sustainability of ecological harmony, thereby playing a major role in shifting human orientation from an anthropocentric view to a biocentric one.

Development of Ecofeminism

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the ecology movement mutually reinforced its goals with a number of other socio-economic apprehensions, such as race, class, gender, and colonialism, of which the one that is lately crafting the utmost stir is the integration of the two social movements—environmentalism and feminism—from which emerged “a new term for an ancient wisdom” (Mies 13)—Ecofeminism. According to Carol J. Adams, “[e]cofeminism addresses the various ways that sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism are informed by and support speciesism and how analysing the ways these forces intersect can produce less violent, more just practices” (1). In other words, as a doctrine, ecofeminism takes a standpoint that is starkly in contrast to the anthropocentric and androcentric approach toward human existence. For critics like Tollefsen, “ecofeminism is ecological because the preservation of ecosystems is a prime objective, and feminist on the basis that it offers up ways to recognize and counter male favouritism” (91). The theoretical exploration of “oriental ecofeminism” has gained prominence quite recently even though the revered tradition of respecting women and worshipping nature can be traced back a long way:

... the world is produced and renewed by the dialectical play of creation and destruction, cohesion and disintegration. The tension between the opposites from which motion and movement arises is depicted as the first appearance of dynamic energy (Shakti). All existence arises from this primordial energy which is the substance of everything, pervading everything. The manifestation of this power, this energy, is called nature (Prakriti) 1. Nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos; in conjunction with the masculine principle (Purusha), Prakriti creates the world (Shiva 37).

Oriental ecofeminism attempts to address ideas like nature, wilderness, natural science, and spatial environment. That is why a number of literary offshoots of the current century from the Indian sub-continent have drawn “on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism” to suggest that “the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (Gaard 1). However, according to Karen J. Warren, “[j]ust as there is not one feminism, there is not one ecofeminism or one ecofeminist philosophy. Ecological feminism has roots in the wide variety of feminisms . . . Ecofeminist philosophy extends familiar feminist critiques of social isms of domination to nature” (4). Ranging from early rural to the modern urban proposition, ecofeminism has branched itself in a number of distinct streams—radical or cultural ecofeminism, spiritual ecofeminism, social ecofeminism, ecofeminist theology, and so on. The ensuing discussion proposes to unravel a comparative study between the treatment of two of these branches—“spiritual ecofeminism” (Tollefsen 91) and “social ecofeminism” (Merchant, *The Death of Nature* 194) explored in the novels of two widely acclaimed Indian English authors—*The Collector’s Wife* by Mitra Phukan and *Escape* by Manjula Padmanabhan respectively.

Spiritual Ecofeminism in Mitra Phukan’s *The Collector’s Wife*

The North-Eastern part of the Indian subcontinent is quite rich in biodiversity as it has an immensely rich archive of some rare species of flora and fauna, mineral resources and subsistence livelihood. Thus the literary fabrication coming from this part of the country, a region that is also a unique assortment of cultures, traditions, languages and dialect, will always be the most prominent propagator of the co-existence of the natural world with the human race in general and women in particular. Even though many of the predominant themes in the literary creations produced by the North-Eastern fiction and non-fiction writers are that of violence, insurgency, political upheavals, and social justice, the relationship between nature and man has invariably been a major thrust in those inscriptions. In a distinctive oriental ecofeminist tone, there has been a celebration of the beauties of nature and

a depiction of people as intimately connected with the natural world. On the one hand, they promote the idea of living together peacefully with nature and maintaining a balance in the entire ecosystem; on the other, due to the recent growth-oriented development paradigm which is posing serious threat to ecology, there is a deep consternation in the writings regarding the degradation of environment and the condition of women. In the writings of most of the North-East authors, an ecofeminist perspective has always been used consciously to attain an identity—an identity for the creator, the protagonist, the people, and for the region in general.

One of the most prominent literary voices in English from North-East India, Mitra Phukan demonstrates a strong eco-consciousness and an equally sensitive attitude towards the insecurity of women spawned from the age-old legacy of deprivation in her novel, *The Collector's Wife*, one of the first generation novels in English written by an Assamese writer. In spite of portraying the violence and terror that characterize the troubled political situation in the small district town of Assam named Parbatpuri, the novelist does not shun from critically focusing at the representation of nature, landscape, and the attitude of the masses toward the environment. Along with this concern for nature, Phukan quite evocatively merges the identity crisis that a woman experiences in a world where insurgency and terrorist activities loom large. Narrated from the perspective of Rukmini Bezboruah, a part-time teacher of English literature in a semi-urban college who is also the District Collector's (DC's) wife, the novel recounts the experiences of the protagonist who lives a desolate life because of the assumed sense of superiority that normally characterizes the DC's wife. Being geographically as well as psychologically segregated from the residents of the small locality, Rukmini gradually seems to be unable to find her distinctiveness as an individual. The constant threat of extortion and kidnappings by the terrorist organization "Movement for an Exclusive Homeland," better known as MOFEH, and the political instability due to a full-blown insurgency keep Rukmini's husband, Siddharth, the Collector of the district town, constantly on the run. This obviously adds to the void in Rukmini's life. Childless even after ten years of marriage, Rukmini is thoroughly dissatisfied even with her vocation as a lecturer who "did not

enjoy presenting the tortured soliloquies of Hamlet to small town teenage minds, or Jane Austen's polished prose to those whose knowledge of English grammar was, at best, merely adequate" (Phukan 27). However, seemingly unintentionally, Rukmini finds herself in due course getting involved in an adulterous relationship with a distant acquaintance, Manoj Mahanta, who to some extent tries to mend the emptiness in her life with his companionship and physical intimacy. A bond like this invariably generates a strong sense of culpability in Rukmini for betraying a ten-year-long relationship but in turn, she too comes to know about the perfidy that her husband, Siddharth, is perpetuating on her through his adulterous relationship with Rukmini's colleague, Priyam. In spite of such a development, Rukmini manages to reach a mental poise when the pristine beauty of the surrounding nature endows her with clarity and prudence, and thereby culminates her search for the self, an identity that will substantiate her existence as a self-contained entity. She gets an epiphanic vision towards life which comes to pass only when she allows herself to get immersed in the natural surroundings to which she has so long been associated with:

The complications and complexities of their lives, the hatred, the violence, the suspicion and pettiness that coloured Parbatpuri, were dwarfed in the face of this marvelous, all-encompassing melody all around her. And all she had done was to leave her house, take just a few steps down the road, in order to see things with such sudden clarity (Phukan 262).

The relationship that Rukmini shares with her husband after her revelation in the lap of nature is apparently depicted to be one of silence and detachment, but even then, the silence does not fall short to speak volumes, as both Siddharth and Rukmini come to realize the worth of life in a world that is ripped apart by hostility and demolition. Rukmini thus turns out to be a true envoy of "ecospirituality" that evokes the "manifestation of the spiritual interconnection between human beings and the environment . . . [and which] engages a relational view of person to planet, soul to soil, and the inner to outer landscape" (Lincoln 228). The forest where she takes resort for a brief period of time to organize her thoughts hints at this eco-spiritual

association. “The place was as peaceful now as any ancient sacred grove. The quietude settled softly on her, soothing her agitation . . . As her focus shifted from herself to her surroundings, she became aware of the vibrant, lively atmosphere . . . This was a joyous celebration of life” (Phukan 261). Thus both Rukmini and the natural world that rears her, cast a silent yet positive effect on the people who encircle both of them. The final dénouement in Rukmini’s life, however, surpasses all the troubles and tribulations that she has encountered so far, as the terrible insurgency-driven social situation snatches the lives of both her husband and her paramour, the father of her unborn child. In spite of being disgruntled with her subsistence, Rukmini nonetheless draws a healing sensation from her intricate bonding with nature and ultimately makes a decision that the reader hardly expects—the resolution to nurture the life that she is carrying in her womb. Through this decision of the protagonist, Phukan, in effect, undertakes an attempt to manifest Nature as a living entity and thereby touch upon the theme of fertility. Fertility stands for survival and sustenance and this substantial reference to fertility indicates the author’s intention to show that both Nature and woman, no matter what catastrophe befalls them, are here to survive and remain fertile. This bestows upon the novel a sense of universality in spite of the specificity in time and place. Rukmini’s sense of belonging and responding to the cosmos perhaps have some correlation to Ursula Heise’s understanding of “sense of place” as illustrated in her book, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. “Sense of place” refers to the particular experience of an individual in a particular place which gives the setting a special personality. In fact, in Phukan’s novel, it is Rukmini’s propinquity with the world of flora and fauna that escorts Rukmini to take up “the challenge . . . to shift the core of cultural imagination from a sense of place to a less territorial and more systemic sense of planet” (Heise 56). Thus she effortlessly comprehends her exact place in the universal ecosystem and thereby successfully apprehends the value of being able to procreate.

Despite the fact that the natural world has been invested with multifaceted dimensions in the literature coming from North-East India, there is hardly any acknowledgement to the reality that the region has also a long

account of transforming and exploiting nature. Karen Laura Thornber, in her book, *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literatures*, discusses environmentalist literature coming from the eastern part of Asia in which there is a celebration of the beauties of nature and the intimate association of the people with the natural world; but those writings have barely any reference to the devastation perpetuated on nature by the same masses. Mitra Phukan, in *The Collector's Wife*, very subtly touches upon a similar facet of ecoambiguity by providing a detailed description of the history of the small district town of Parbatpuri. She highlights the abuse of nature by presenting the contemporary scenario which necessarily involves dirt and squalor, an inevitable outcome of urbanisation. For them,

[t]he metaphor of the earth as a nurturing mother was gradually to vanish as a dominant image as the Scientific Revolution proceeded to mechanize and to rationalise the world view. The image of nature as disorder, called forth an important modern idea, that of power over nature (Merchant, *The Death of Nature 2*).

Living in the “residences-cum-offices perched on hillocks that lifted, symbolically as well as literally, high above the ‘native’ masses below” (Phukan 18), Rukmini had the rare dispensation to the “heart-stopping views of the surrounding landscape” (Phukan 19), which “cosmeticized Parbatpuri’s dirt and squalor, while the abundant plant life that sprang up from every available surface, served to discreetly cover its numerous shanty-slums and run-down neighborhoods with a tracery of delicate green” (Phukan 21). The characters in the novel are depicted to be conscious of the necessity of natural preservation, but are at the same time not active enough to put their thoughts into action. Even a social activist like Priyam Deka, Rukmini’s colleague in D.S. College, who has “several ‘causes’ to fight such as AIDS, the environment, and child prostitution” (Phukan 39) does not hesitate for a moment to crumple a used paper tissue and “toss it carelessly out of the window. It sailed some distance down the road and landed by the side, an incongruous, bright-pink scrunched up object amidst the mud and the slime” (Phukan 187). With a tinge of humour, the novelist draws attention to the

hypocrisy of the environmental-activists of Parbatpuri and the Forum for Citizens' Rights who "periodically made noises about the alarming rise in the environmentally-hazardous practice of using non-bio-degradable bags, (but) the citizens of Parbatpuri always pestered their shopkeepers to give them a couple of extra bags free with every purchase that they made" (Phukan 33). Such a perfunctory stance brings into discussion the concept of "tokenism" since it focuses on the display of customary concern on the part of the citizens of this slowly developing town towards environment, camouflaging the innate attitude of sheer nonchalance.

Along with these environmental concerns, the novelist makes an attempt to lay a hand upon the threads of ecofeminism, too, but her treatment of the theory is exceptional. Though traditionally ecofeminism equates the oppression of women to the devastation of nature, Phukan's treatment of spiritual ecofeminism "draws on various expressions of 'nature religion' involving the worship of immanent forms of the feminine divine, one of the most significant traits of oriental ecofeminist concern. This is a source of women's empowerment as well as a strategy for environmental protection" (Tomalin 214). She offers a subtle layer to the conventional approach and lends an elevated status to her protagonist by equating Rukmini to nature, although not in terms of their oppression; rather she allots a spiritual association between Rukmini and the natural world. Such a treatment undoubtedly justifies Besthorn and McMillen's definition of "spiritual ecofeminism" which believes in ". . . the resacralization of Nature, of the divine feminine inherent in all living beings. It is seen as part of a process of reconnection, a re-establishment of ways of knowing and being in the world that have been lost in the history of patriarchal domination" (qtd. in Tollefsen 91). Unlike a radical ecofeminist who contends "that the dominant patriarchal society equates nature and women in order to degrade both" and "encourages the exploitation of women and nature for cheap labour and resources," Mitra Phukan turns out to be an oriental spiritual ecofeminist who "has roots in nature-based religions and goddess and nature worship as a way of redeeming both the spirituality of nature and women's instrumental role in that spirituality" (Miles, "Ecofeminism"). Whatever mental mayhem the protagonist

goes through in the novel resonates in the natural world. That is why each stage in the life of the protagonist corresponds to the diverse phases of nature that surround her. Her infertility becomes synonymous with the scarcity in nature; the relief of her mental agony through her adulterous relationship is reflected in nature when it ushers rain to spurn the suffocation of summer. The tragedy in her life is also unfortunately invoked by nature when both her husband and the father of her unborn child fall victim to the insurgency and their death is facilitated by the topsy-turvy conditions in nature. But it is undoubtedly her inherent womanhood that enables Rukmini to come spiritually close to nature and realize the sacredness of humanity, her connection to everything living, and thereby accommodate herself accordingly. Thus nature forms an integral part of Phukan's writing in as far as the background and the stream of events are concerned. In fact, the landscape functions not merely as a framing device, setting, background or symbol, but as a presence that begins to suggest that the course of human action in the novel is implicated and determined through the flow of the natural world. To put it more succinctly, the novel bestows renewed spiritual sensitivity on the natural world, and thereby justifies the spiritual ecofeminist bent of the novelist for whom an individual's experiences of awe and wonder in relation to nature is what defines ecofeminism. Spiritual ecofeminism, for Phukan, is a form of "geopiety" which "connotes action and notions of responsiveness towards a place that is regarded as sacred . . . a person's special attachment and reverence for particular places or locations in the environment: places that have specific, highly personal meaning" (Knowles 9). It is nothing but a divine perspective towards the immense beauty and elegance of life on earth—natural existence that is bequeathed with an ethereal and almost intangible connotation.

Social Ecofeminism in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape*

In contrast to the pragmatic account of Mitra Phukan, we have Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape* which gives an elaborate shape to the form of postcolonial feminist dystopia. The novel very gracefully touches upon the issue of the alarming decline in the sex-ratio of an imaginary civilization, "a wasteland

presided over by Generals who reject uniqueness and individuality as well as the natural processes of birth and death in favor of genetic engineering and cloning” (Dasgupta, “Future Imperfect”). It presents a horrifying vision of the future where women have been completely exterminated. *Escape* moves from its fundamental premise of the subjugation and exploitation of woman to the relationship between woman and modern state to a collective proposition of the communication between the individual and the nation-state in the era of technological precision and consumerist globalization. The setting can be quite distinctly interpreted as India from the detailing of some culturally and linguistically unique words like *veena*, *lassi*, *paratha*, *bulbul* etc. Meiji’s uncles eat *rotis* and brinjal curry, bathe in rosewater, milk and steam, wear *mulmul kurtas* and *pyjamas*, eat *paan* from lotus-shaped containers and use spittoons. However, in spite of the numerous Indian references, it is quite evident that the country and government in *Escape* satirizes modern nation-states in general which demonstrate marked signs of the despotism of the dominant. The story of how a free country can become an absolute autocracy ruled by a collection of merciless Generals is a warning for modern-day democracies. The novel speaks of a nation where

. . . technology and a phobia of women have combined to create a country in which all females have been exterminated and a ruling class of cloned Generals keep a . . . grip of surveillance on the populace. Women are no longer needed for reproduction since men can clone themselves whenever they wish. They are not required for sex as homosexuality has replaced heterosexuality as the norm (Chandra, “Desire Unfulfilled”).

Escape provokingly appropriates the style, motif, and references of the science fiction genre. According to Parvathi,

Manjula Padmanabhan belongs to that generation of Indian women writers in English who have boldly stepped out of conventions that define respectability to address issues of gender, woman, her body and its behaviour, its exploitation in a family and social setting . . . Manjula Padmanabhan has opened a fresh dialogue on a new angle of feminist concerns (136).

Works of science fiction written by women have often seemed to be an imitation of the traditional women's fiction with an alteration in space and time: the "sweet, gentle, intuitive little heroine solves an interstellar crisis by mending her slip or doing something equally domestic after her big, heroic husband has failed" (Russ 88). *Escape* has often been considered as "one of the few works of modern Indian science fiction" (Joseph, "Manjula Padmanabhan's") since it opens "a room for plurality and multiplicity to provide the reader not only with entertainment but with tools to debate on post-humanism, environmentalism, gender, class and religion, among others" (Agraso, "Feminist Science"). In terms of vision, Padmanabhan has marked a paradigm shift from the science fictions of 1950s and has successfully defended her claim made in the introduction to her short-story collection *Kleptomani*a where she categorizes science fiction as a literary type which

. . . offers a writer the opportunity to go directly to the heart of an ironical or thought-provoking situation by setting up a theoretical world. It's a bit like writing a problem in mathematics, reducing reality to a tangle of pipes and cisterns or a group of three people travelling at varying speeds up a mountain, in order to reveal the relationships between matter, time and space (Padmanabhan viii).

A close analysis of the novel fairly predictably directs the reader to infer an obvious implication to the notion of "anthropogenic ecocide," where the populace of a particular territory devastate with their own hands the natural environment in which they dwell: "The word *nation* is made ugly on account of its association with *nativity*, with *birth*, with *nature* and, by association, with excess. Nature is excessive and I abhor it for that reason" (Phukan 80). Such a vile perception is further intensely reflected through the family of the three brothers, Eldest, Middle, and Youngest, who has very discreetly protected a young girl, Meiji, the only surviving woman in a land which has, with the aid of ultra-modern science and technology, banned each and every association of women whom they consider as "the Vermin Tribe," a community that is expected to be "servile, dumb and deaf" (Padmanabhan, *Escape* 237). just like the mechanical drones. The readers here get a glimpse of Margaret Atwood's

The Handmaid's Tale where the women are forced to act as handmaids who are “de-sexed, dehumanised and are forbidden choice and desire. They are not supposed to think and feel” (7). In *Escape*, Meiji is kept on artificial hormonal supplements which has restricted her bodily development, and that is why, even at the age of sixteen, she is physically and psychologically stuck somewhere in her childhood. The solitary means of recreation that she has been sanctioned to rejoice is her game of role-playing through which she gives vent to her embryonic dilemmas vis-à-vis her way of life. The three brothers have made impenetrable arrangements in some secretive cell to guard their “treasure” from the incessant surveillance of the Generals but are still under constant threat of being discovered. In this context, Padmanabhan drops a minute hint of the concept of “ecophobia,” precisely referring to the fear of getting acquainted with the natural surroundings advocated by David Sobel in his largely celebrated book *Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education* (1996) through Meiji’s initial reluctance to familiarize herself with the real green world—

Meiji had rarely been out of doors. She could not remember ever having seen an open field . . . She had never been directly connected to such a vast space. The urge to run back indoors to safety and familiarity was turning her legs to jelly . . . The grass was wet with dew and clung to her as she moved through it. “I don’t like this, Uncle,” she said. “I don’t. I want to go back” (Phukan 66-67).

As Meiji advances towards her puberty, her guardians apprehend the necessity of moving the girl to a place which might understand her worth, and thus begins Meiji’s voyage with her youngest uncle through a terrain that has been annihilated by atomic radiation and is now nothing but a “smouldering wasteland” (Padmanabhan, *Escape* 25). Here Padmanabhan portrays in vivid detail a glimpse of that world which unrestricted ultramodern technology, if not checked immediately, might present us with in the near future “a featureless wasteland, with no cultivation to be seen, no farms, no villages” (*Escape* 112). The two wanderers, in the course of their journey, pass “through a region so toxic that birds used to fall out of the air, dead”

(*Escape* 124) since “the air was thick with diesel fumes” (*Escape* 143). The reference to the Generals and their unintelligent soldiers named “Boyz” who at the moment dictate over the nation by maintaining a constant vigil on the activities of the inhabitants, instantaneously reminds the reader of George Orwell’s literary masterpiece, *Nineteen Eighty Four*, where a similar “Dynamic Surveillance team” called “Big Brother” monitors the conduct of the citizens and “seeks power entirely for its own sake. It is not interested in the good of others; it is interested solely in power” (272). In short, they represent technology which when not controlled, “erase history, geography, whole generations of people” (Padmanabhan, *Escape* 125). Under the garb of imagination, Padmanabhan directs unflinching questions at the ignorance of the contemporary generation towards the issues of “the extermination of women, the cement-rot bacterium, the bombs” (*Escape* 324). In fact, according to a census report published in *The Times of India* on March 31, 2011, there has been a clear indication of “a continuing preference for male children over female children—the child sex ratio in 2011 is 914 female against 1000 male—the lowest since independence . . . a matter of grave concern” (“India’s Population”). However, an alarming situation like this can no longer remain exclusively limited to a particular geographical territory.

Both her uncle and Meiji undergo a route of self-discovery which confers upon them an understanding that is at once authentic yet unfathomable. The girl becomes conscious about her womanhood, a realisation that has remained uncharted because of her association with an all-male world. It is only after her alliance with the elements of the natural world that Meiji starts openly exhibiting the nurturing self of her existence: “You will climb out of this safe, underground seed case in which you have been germinating for so long, push your two little green leaves up out of the soil, raise your head to the sun and—thrive. That is what we all hope for you” (Padmanabhan, *Escape* 89). Through her, the novelist ascertains her conviction that it is women who after all, are the carriers of human emotions, unlike the impassive “Boyz” and the Generals who inhabit the world of her narrative. That is why, in spite of leading a life that has throughout been associated with mechanical, emotionless drones, Meiji harbours emotions perhaps biologi-

cally, just like her mother did by displaying an unprecedented valour when she did not hesitate even for a moment before burning herself alive, only to protect her little girl child. The world that is ruled merely by scientific domination and technological tyranny is certainly deficient in emotional exuberance. The young dog that Youngest hands over to Meiji at a certain point of their flight also brings forth her womanly instinct of fostering. During their stay in the City, when Meiji stumbles upon “slender-bodied and surgically enhanced transvestites, swaying on high heels, wearing clothes with plunging necklines” (Padmanabhan, *Escape* 384), she retorts with repulsion. She realises “that those boys are dressed in the way that I’m supposed to look” (Padmanabhan, *Escape* 386). Moreover, while undertaking a part of their journey on water, Meiji encounters a brutal murder in a desolate island where a man is literally burnt by a group of castaways in a mood of perverse pleasure, an incident that leads her to hurl the most crucial and relevant question that ultimately justifies the standpoint of the novelist:

This afternoon . . . I almost jumped into the water near the island. I wanted so much to save that man. I hated leaving him behind like that . . . even though he didn’t see us and no-one knows we were even there, we know and we can suffer the memory Is that how it is then? . . . We help no-one and no-one helps us? (*Escape* 359)

Meiji’s sense of concern for the dying man is not merely reflective of her feminine urge to save and nurture all life; it is also a definite cry for help for a society that is increasingly impatient with the needs and stories of the “other.” Padmanabhan exhibits her uneasiness with this disturbing social trend and very subtly brings to the readers’ attention the phenomenon of social ecofeminism which is “a coherent, rational, democratic, and libertarian alternative to mainstream ecofeminism” (Biehl 5). As a theory, social ecofeminism:

. . . accepts the basic tenet of social ecology that the idea of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human. Only ending all systems of domination makes possible an ecological society, in which no states or capitalist economies attempt to subjugate nature, in which all aspects of human

nature-including sexuality and the passions as well as rationality—are freed (Merchant, *Radical Ecology* 194).

Taking a cue from this definition, Padmanabhan indisputably evinces her anxiety regarding a social subject like female foeticide and the consequential decline in sex-ratio: “Were women always so unwanted in a country which is supposed to revere them? . . . A much quoted traditional blessing from the *Atharva Veda* states ‘Let a female child be born somewhere else. Here, let a male child be born’” (Aravamudan 50). Ernest Callenbach, in his influential novel, *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston*, speaks of an imaginary society where “what matters most is the aspiration to live in balance with nature, ‘walk lightly on the land,’ treat the earth as a mother” (32). In stark contrast to this perception of “Ecotopia,” *Escape* stirs up Padmanabhan’s struggle with a civic principle that in the long run will inexorably derange the environmental equilibrium of this green planet—

. . . I belong to a place that is no longer mentioned outside our borders. That’s the price we paid for what was identified, by...the United Nations, as the ‘most extreme crime against humanity our planet has ever yet acknowledged.’ The very name of our country has been deleted from the record of the civilized world. So if they’re going to recognize anyone from here, on compassionate grounds, it’ll only be you. That’s a woman. Not a man. Not any men.... You could say it’s a kind of reverse justice (417–418).

Rupali Palodkar, in her article “Ecofeminism in India: Disappearing Daughters in Padmanabhan’s *Escape*,” beautifully sums up the social ecofeminist concern that involves a sinister and sordid disruption in the ecological as well as human world surveyed by Padmanabhan in her novel:

In Indian society, the ownership of women’s body and sexuality and that of land (nature) has continued to rest with men since ancient times. Of all places in the world, it is in India that sex-selective abortions are practiced on a wide-scale . . . There is a need to find an alternative to men’s exploitation of the earth . . . and to discover an ecologically sound way of life that would not threaten the existence either of the earth or of women. That is why women writers like Manjula Padmanabhan are turning to ecofeminist

thinking and is writing about the consequences of degradation of nature and woman (60-61).

Thus the novel, *Escape*, through its socio-ecofeminist concern for both nature and women, emphasizes the necessity of self-awakening of the oppressed who desperately need to give voice to their perennial subjugation.

Conclusion

Taken together, *The Collector's Wife* and *Escape* reject the notion that human being's ". . . freedom and happiness depend on an ongoing process of emancipation from nature, on independence from, and dominance over natural processes by the power of reason and rationality" (Mies 6). On the contrary, the novelists, through the course of their narratives, consciously or unconsciously, substantiate the claim made by Kellert and Wilson which introduces "Biophilia Hypothesis," a concept seminal to the theory of "oriental ecofeminism." According to this concept, there has always been an inevitable attachment between human beings and other forms of living organisms. In fact, human beings are at all times driven by a subconscious biological "urge to affiliate with other life forms" (Kellert and Wilson 416) and with nature as a whole. The protagonists of the two novels under discussion also demonstrate an intrinsic inclination to acclimatize with the world that surround them, and that is why their search for individuality is perpetuated with authenticity only by coming in close proximity to the natural world. Even though both women belong to two completely different backgrounds and timezones, they are hinged at the point of a particular search—a search to identify one's own self. In the process of this probing, what they have in common is the struggle a woman undertakes and the pain she endures to realize her individuality, her identity as a human being, and the role nature plays in shaping and revealing that selfhood.

Such a treatment of the various environmental dimensions predominant in the oriental scenario by Phukan and Padmanabhan in their individual works bestows substance to the concept of "ecological humanities" which originated "through the confluence of simultaneous developments during

the 1970s and the 1980s in departments of literature, philosophy, history, geography, gender studies and anthropology” (Emmett and Nye 3). Both the novels take into account an interdisciplinary study of several issues related to the natural world that has emerged in the last few years and thereby validate Carson’s view:

We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost’s familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been travelling is deceptively easy, a smooth super-highway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road—the one less travelled by—offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of the earth (277).

However, the two novelists discussed here address ecofeminist concerns differently. While social ecofeminism distinguishes itself from spiritual ecofeminism in that the latter concedes a divine relationship between women and nature and wishes to unshackle them both at a go, the former envisions a society in which women surface as emancipated accomplices with the ability to restructure the oppressions inflicted by patriarchy and state on both environment and the female sex. Incidentally, the journey of both Meiji and Rukmini is loosely akin to the concept of “monomyth” or “the hero’s journey” as propounded by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, where “a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: . . . the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (23). The protagonists in both these novels undertake a voyage too, and in a decisive crisis, win and emerge as thoroughly transformed self-sufficient individuals. In the case of both Meiji who is part of a futuristic narrative in a dystopic world devoid of any touch of pragmatism and Rukmini who is a flesh and blood character belonging to a highly realistic milieu, the realization of containment is achieved only after both of them pay a heavy price for it—Rukmini by losing her husband and the father of her unborn child, and Meiji by thoroughly crushing her previous existence and association and becoming a full-grown woman with a thorough sense of her distinctiveness. The insight that both

these women achieve comes from their respective alliance with the world of nature. Mother Nature offers solace to the confused, muddled souls of these women and thereby enables them to accept with regards whatever comes their way. Hence these two apparently dissimilar literary creations with a wide temporal disparity can be said to pay a collective homage to the infinite scope of ecological femininity through the fascinating characters of Rukmini and Meiji respectively.

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Ilang Tala Hinggil sa *Narkotiko at Panganorin*

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Abstrak

Ang koleksiyong *Narkotiko at Panganorin* ay isang mahabang poetikong sunuran na pumapaksa sa mayamang pagpapakahulugan sa gabi sa kulturang Filipino. Tinitipon dito ang iba-ibang personal at pampublikong salaysay na nagpapakita ng dahas sa kamalayan ng pagkagambala ng mahimbing na pamamahinga dahil sa pribado at kolektibong ligalig. Isinasaakto ng mga tula kung paanong ang poetikong pamamaraan ay pangangapuhap din ng etikal na espasyo ng pakikipagkapwa sa gitna ng sigwa at pangamba. Ang pagsulat ng mga tula sa koleksiyong ito ay naging aralin mismo sa pagtuklas ng panlipunang dimensiyon ng pagtula. Kinailangan kong higit na maging malay sa pahina bilang espasyo at sa abot-tanaw sa paligid nito bilang sityo ng posibleng pakikipag-daupang palad sa kapwa. Ang pagtula, sa ganitong paraan ay hindi na lamang ekspresyon ng sarili kundi paraan din ng pagbibigay-puwang sa kalooban ng iba sa wika. Pagdadala ito sa sarili sa kalagayan ng kahandaang magambala o mapatahimik. Higit pa sa proyektong poetiko, naging pagkakataon ang pagsulat nito upang maipamalay sa akin na hindi lamang ako

gumagawa ng tula kundi may ginagawa rin ang pagtula sa akin. Kung paanong makikita na walang pagkakaiba ang pagkakaanyo ng tula at ang anyo ng pakikipamuhay sa kapwa.

Mga Susing Salita

etika, gabi, kapwa, poetika, tula

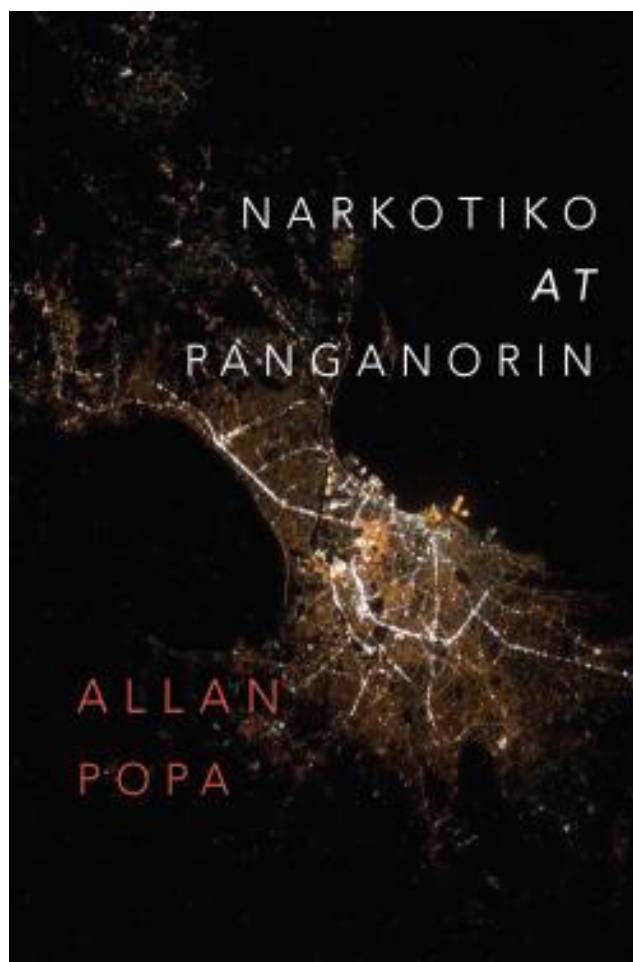


Fig. 1. Cover of Allan Popa's *Narkotiko at Panganorin*; <http://www.ateneo.edu/ateneopress/>

May pahayag ang Amerikanong makatang si Susan Stewart na naghawan ng landas ng proyektong *Narkotiko at Panganorin*. Mula ito sa aklat na *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* na bumalangkas sa ilang susing kaisipan na nais ko ring talakayin sa mga tula. Napakayaman ng magkakasalungat na pagpapakahulugan sa gabi at dilim sa kultura at panitikang Filipino. Sa isang banda, nagbibigay rin ito ng kalinga at pahinga ngunit nagdudulot din ng matinding pangamba. Ang kalakhan ng kadiliman na bumabalot sa tao ay kapwa pina-paksa at puwersang nakadiin sa kamalayan na nagbigay-anyo sa mga tula.

The cultural, or form-giving, work of poetry is to counter the oblivion of darkness. To make such a statement may seem more fancifully “poetic” than true. But it is precisely in material ways that poetry is a force against effacement—not merely for individuals but for communities through time as well. The task of aesthetic production and reception in general is to make visible, tangible, and audible the figures of persons, whether such persons are expressing the particulars of sense impressions or the abstractions of reason or the many ways such particulars and abstractions enter into relations with one another. As metered language, language that retains and projects the force of individual sense experience and yet reaches toward intersubjective meaning, poetry sustains and transforms the threshold between individual and social existence (Stewart 2).

Naging higit na malinaw rin ang layunin ng koleksiyon nang mabasa ko ang sinabi ni Allen Grossman ukol sa gawaing kultural ng tula. Sa kanyang pagbibigay-katuturan sa tula, hindi ang mga pampanitikang aspekto nito ang binigyang-pansin niya kundi ang naisasaaktong paninindigan ng tula laban sa paglaho upang maikintal sa alaala ang hulagway ng pagkatao. Sa tula, nagkakanawan ang mga tao sa magkakaibang panahon at lugar, kung saan maaaring magkadaupang-palad ang manunulat at mambabasa, ang kapwa, at ang iba upang alalahanin ang isa’t isa.

Poetry is a principle of power invoked by all of us against our vanishing. The making of poems is a practice—a work human beings can do—in which civilization has invested some part of its love of itself and the world. The poem is a trace of the will of all persons to be known and to make known and, therefore, to be at all. Insofar as love wills the existence of what it loves, the principle of poetry is a collective and perpetually renewed act

of love that brings the world to mind, and mind to mind, as the speech of a person—at the moment of the vanishing of world and persons, which is every moment of conscious life. Poetry is one means by which human beings engage, as they can, in the maintenance of a human world in which they can meet one another, affirm one another, remember, see, and foresee one another (Grossman ix).

Bago ko pa man simulan ang proyekto, nilinaw ko na sa sarili ang ilang bagay. Alam kong kailangang magsilbing sanggalang ang moda ng pagtula na mapipili ko sa materyal na lubhang personal at napakalapit sa akin upang makita ang mga limitasyon nito at mapalawak pa ang saklaw. Nais kong matiwalag sa karanasan sa pamamagitan ng anyo upang mas mahimay ang mga puwersang kumikilos dito.

Malinaw sa akin na nais kong magsulat ng mga tulang sumusuri sa mapaniil na mga puwersang panlipunan na pumupuno sa gabi ng sari-saring ligalig. Higit na publiko ang larangan ng mga tulang nais kong sulatin. Pakikilusin ko sa mga taludtod ang puwersang moral. Nais kong paganahin dito kung ano ang iniwasan ko sa mga nauna kong koleksiyon. Pakiramdam ko, hinihingi ng mga tula rito ang dulog na mas didaktiko upang magkabisa. Ayon nga kay Oren Izenberg sa sanaysay na “Poetry in and out of School”:

Poetry, if it is to have any value, must contribute to our capacity to bear conditions of being that are as inescapable and as unresponsive to choice as the force of feeling in one’s own heart —“to obtain for everybody one kind of success at the limits of the autonomy of the will.” Among those limits are mortality, the solitude of the mind’s private experience, the violence of history, and the blankness of a bare object world (192).

Ang magbigay-lugod at magturo—ito ang tinatanggap na dalawang pangunahing layunin na umiiral sa tula. Ngunit hindi maikakailang sa kasalukuyang estetikong panlasa, lalo na ng mga pinalalaganap ng kawal ng sining ng pagtula, mayroong pagdududa sa isa sa mga itinuturing na bisa nito: ang magturo ng aral. Kung pakikinggan ang mga puna at payo sa mga kabataang manunulat, madalas sabihin ng mga eksperto: “Iwasang maging didaktiko.” Masasabing nagmumula ito sa akalang inaagawan ng didaktikong

tula ang mambabasa ng layang magpasya para sa sarili. Tila ba sinasabi na sumasalungat sa lugod na hatid ng sining ang kagustuhang magpaunawa ng aral. Pinuna ito ni Oren Izenberg:

If the delight of poetry was once seen as “the first light-giver to ignorance,” a privileged vehicle and prerequisite for the preservation and transmission of other “tougher” forms of knowledge, then our present moment regards the pedagogical imperative in art more suspiciously: as a dulling of our pleasures, as a descent from art’s higher calling, or as laying bare its bullying or “palpable design” upon us. The terms of art for poetry’s traditional pedagogical genres and modes—sententious, moral, rhetorical, satiric—have been transformed into terms of abuse by generations of critics moved by Romantics’ “abhorrence” for the didactic (Shelley), their preference for power over knowledge for “the tigers of wrath” over “the horses of instruction” (187).

May mahabang tradisyon sa ating kultura ang ganitong moda ng pagtula. Mula pa sa mga salawikain, mga naitalang pinakamaagang halimbawa ng maikling tula sa *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala*, mga tulang relihiyoso, mga tulang romantiko, at moralistiko, hanggang sa mga tulang propagandista at rebolusyonaryo. Naging napakahalaga ng ganitong uri ng tula sa pagpahayag ng saligang mga pagpapahalaga na naging pundasyon ng ideya natin ng bayan. Sa ganitong mga tula, ginamit ang poetikong pamamaraan upang mas maipadama ang mga kaisipang nais ipaunawa. Madalas na gamitin ang nali-likhang ambigwidad upang mapadanas sa mambabasa ang isang suliranin at matulungan siyang magpasya na pumanig sa pinaniniwalaang totoo at wasto batay sa kolektibong pagpapahalaga. Higit na rasyonal ang kilos ng isipan sa mga tulang didaktiko at may layuning mapanumbalik ang ipinapalagay na konsepto ng kaayusan. Madalas na nasa tinig ng awtoridad ang nagsasalita sa mga tula. Nais kong magamit ang ilang aspekto ng ganitong moda pero sa paraang may paggalang pa rin sa ahensiya ng mambabasa na magsuri at magpasya para sa sarili. Paano ba ito magagawa habang binubuwag din ang posisyon ng awtoridad? Kailangan ko ng distansiya ng perspektiba.

Sa simula, inakala kong dokumentaryong pagtula ang angkop na dulog kaya’t napakaraming kaugnay na materyal mula sa iba-ibang larangan ang

binasa ko at sinaliksik. Umasa ako na makahahanap ng estruktura kung saan maihahanap ang mga interesanteng kaalaman hinggil sa paksa upang mapalalim ang pag-unawa rito. Nagmumula ang udyok na ito sa kagustuhang sumubok ng naiibang estilo sa pagtula na malayong-malayo sa nakasanayan. Para sa akin, isa sa mga nakasasabik na hamon sa kontemporaneong pagtula ay ang makahanap ng poetikong danas maging sa wika ng mga larangang hindi inaakalang magtataglay nito. Nakasasabik ang ganitong posibilidad pero hindi ko narinig ang sarili sa bunton ng wika ng pananaliksik at katunayan. Hindi ito gaanong nangusap sa akin ilang ulit man akong sumubok ng bagong kombinasyon at kompigurasyon ng mga sipi. Walang nalilikhang sapat na enerhiya ang banggaan o ugnayan sa pagi-pagitan. Walang napukaw na hiwaga.

Kaya naman naging mahalaga sa akin ang mga aklat ng makatang si George Oppen sa pagsulat ng manuskritong ito. Nabigyan niya ako ng halimbawa kung paano magpatuloy. Kung paano hahawakan na may sapat na layo ang materyal. Nakatulong ang pagsusuri ng makatang si Louise Glück sa akin sa pag-unawa sa bisa ng panulat ni Oppen:

Moral passion usually manifests itself in decisiveness, which becomes a compulsion to take sides. But a mind either intensely religious or unusually open may invest such passion in acts of speculation. These poems speak a moral language, a language of salvation and contempt. They have the force of true passion, but none of the smarmy definitiveness, none of the self-righteousness. Their beauty has always seemed to me the beauty of logic, the 'virtue of the mind' whose end is vision (9).

Sa pagbabasa ko sa mga aklat ni George Oppen, partikular na ang *This In Which at Of Being Numerous*, nahihikayat ako na pahalagahan ang katahimikan sa pagi-pagitan ng mga taludtod na kasimbigat din ng mga salita. Napawawari sa akin ang mga puwang kung saan nananahan ang pagkatala ng tula—sa mga bitak ng tula dumadaloy ang puwersa ng tula. Bilang mambabasa, inilulugar niya ako sa posisyon bilang tagatanggap ng puwersa ngunit hindi pasibong tagatanggap. Ang pagpapadaloy ng puwersang ito ay nangangailangan ng aktibo kong pag-iisip at pagdarama, ng pag-uugnay at

pagpansin sa kaibahan. Kailangan nito ng aking presensiya at pinupukaw nito ang aking presensiya.

Masasabing ang tula ay lagi't laging nasa bingit ng pagkakabuo at pagkakalansag. Sa isip at pandama ko hinahawakan at pinakakawalan ang doble-karang katangian na ito. Para akong mala-barista na hindi maaaring hawakan nang ganap ang isang patalim dahil babagsak ang iba pa at masi-sira ang palabas. Kailangan kong matutuhan kung paano magkasabay na pakakawalan ang bawat hahawakan upang mapanatili itong nakalutang—kung paano manahan sa kawalang-katiyakan. Ang bawat posibleng pagbasa sa pag-iilang-diwa ng tula, ang mga magkakatanggaling puwersa, ang mga balintuna at parikala ay isinasaalang-alang nang hindi kailangang magpasya kung alin ang tama. Naturuan ako nitong bumitiw, na hindi panghawakan nang labis ang pag-aari, na pahalagahan ang humigit-kumulang, at pagkahigit ng kakulangan.

Sa mga tula ni Oppen, nakahaharap ko ang isang kapwa na laging nire-rebisa ang sarili, na nililitis ang sariling mga palagay, na may kakayahang gambalain ang sariling mga katiyahan. Para bang napapadanas sa akin lagi ang isang kamalayang nasa bingit ng pagbabago ng isip, puno ng pag-aalangan at pag-aatubili ang mga hakbang, puno ng kontradiksiyon. Hindi pa buo ang loob pero may mabigat na niloloob. Nararamdaman ko ang pakiwari niyang nakikiraan sa pahina dahil dama niya ang kapwa sa kaligiran ng tula. Dama niya rin ang aking presensiya.

Ang kamalayan na ito sa espasyo ng pahina bilang espasyo ng negosasyon sa pakikipag-ugnayan ay bunsod marahil ng karanasan ko sa pagtuturo ng panitikan sa unibersidad. Bilang guro na rin ng pagbasa at pagsulat ng tula, naging hamon na sa akin kung paano mapalalawak ang pag-iisip ng mga estudyante hinggil sa lugar ng tula sa lipunan. Hindi upang mahanapan ng praktikal na gamit sa buhay ng mga estudyante (naniniwala ako na tumututol ang tula sa mismong ideya ng pakikinabang) kundi upang makita nila ang ugnayan ng pagkakasantabi nito sa maaaring bisa ng sining na ito. Gusto kong mainitindihan nila kung bakit kailangang maging masalimuot ito.

Nakatutulong ang mga ideya ni Theodor Adorno na ipinahayag niya sa “Lyric Poetry and Society” na nagpaliwanag ng halaga ng pagiging-nasa-labas

ng tula sa lipunan. Ang kahirapang naipadaranas ng tula sa mambabasa ay pagtutol ng tula na maipaloob sa kalakarang namamayani. Ang pagkatiwalag nito ay ang sityo ng politika na paninindigan at mapanuring pag-iisip ng tula na nakapaloob sa mismong anyo ito.

Ito ang pangunahing argumento ni James Longenbach sa kanyang aklat na *The Resistance of Poetry*. Para sa kanya, ang bisa ng tula ay nasa mga pagtutol nito na nakapaloob sa taludturan at iba pang pamamaraang ginamit. Tila ba ang mambabasa ay laging nananahan sa pagitan ng paghinto at pagpapatuloy na epektibong nakakasangkapan ng makata para mapawari ang mga suliraning pantaong inihahayag at isinasaakto rin nito. Ngunit ang pagtutol na ito ay di lamang pormal na estratehiya kundi paraan din ng pagkuwestiyon ng tula sa sarili nitong awtoridad.

Maaaring iugnay ang pananaw na ito ni Longenbach sa mga pangunahing kaisipan ni Allen Grossman na lalong naging impluwensiyal sa akin sa paglalata ng mga bagong proyekto. Nang makaharap ko ang mga sanaysay sa aklat niyang *The Long Schoolroom: Lessons in the Bitter Logic of the Poetic Principle*, napamalay sa akin ang bisa ng kabiguan ng tula sa nais nitong magawa. Inuugat niya ang hangganan na ito ng tula—ang puwang sa pagitan ng layon ng tula at sa kayang maisakatuparan sa wika—sa nakapaloob na kontradiksiyon sa kalikasan ng tula. Ayon sa kanya, ang sinusuri at tinutuligsa ng tula na mapaniil na sistema ay bahagi ng mismong kayarian ng tula na pinanday rin ng kasaysayan ng sining na ito at posibleng napalalaganap sa pamamagitan ng tula.

Nagdala sa akin ang ganitong mga pagpoproblema sa kalikasan ng tula sa pag-iisip hinggil sa panlipunang aspekto o gawain ng pakikipag-kapwa ng mga pamamaraang pampanitikan. Ano nga ba ang nagagawa ng imahen sa tula sa pagpapaigting ng pakiwari natin sa panahon? Sa mga gambalang dala ng mga putol ng linya, paano ba nagpapamalay ng salungatan ng kaisipan na kapwa totoo at hindi kailangang ipawalang-bisa ang isa't isa? Ano nga ba ang nagagawa ng kakayahan nating guni-gunihin ang suliranin ng isang persona sa kakayahan din nating maisip ang mga buhay na iba o malayo sa atin (sa lugar man o panahon)? Sa ganitong paraan, tila nabubura ang kaibahan ng mga papel na ginagampanan ko sa buhay bilang manunulat, mambabasa,

mag-aaral, at guro ng tula dahil bahagi ang lahat ng aspektong ito ng pagiging mamamayan ko.

Nasasabi kong ang tula ay may puwersa ng tinig na nagsusumamong marinig kung napadarama nito sa akin na kailangan ako ng tula para ito mabuo. Para bang nasa hinagap na ako ng tula kahit pa hindi ito tungkol sa akin o para sa akin. Sa halip na sabihing nakauugnay ako sa tula, mas angkop na ilarawang nasasangkot ako sa tula. Panandaliang nabubuo ang loob ko sa tulang binabasa ko upang muling malansag. Panandalian ding nabubuo ang loob ko sa pagsulat ng tula bago muling malansag. Ang tula ay lagi't laging nasa pagitan ng pagkakabuo at pagkagalansag. Sabi nga ni Carl Phillips sa aklat na *The Art of Daring*:

We make of the fragments of self a form that holds, briefly—that's the poem—then we watch it shatter again—which is, I suppose, that space that the poem fooled us into believing we'd left behind us, for a time, world of fragmented selves, hard truths, glinting ambiguities to be negotiated, navigated through as we make our disoriented way forward, or what we have to believe is forward. Like being mapless in tough territory, and knowing, somewhere inside, we'd choose this life, and this one only, if in fact we could choose (72).

Malaki ang naituro ng ganitong paglulugar ng sarili bilang mambabasa sa proseso ko rin ng pagsusulat. Tinatawag ko itong etikal na pangangapuhap. Sa ganitong pagtula, itinuturing ko rin ang pahina bilang pampublikong espasyo kung saan nagtatagpo ang pribadong sarili at ang posibilidad ng publiko. May kaakibat itong negosasyon ng pakikipag-ugnay sa kapwa—kung saan ako nagtatapos at kung saan nagsisimula ang iba. Nagpapamalay ito ng ideya ng hanggahan hindi bilang hindi-matinag na linya kundi okasyon para mawari ang presensiya ng kapwa. Hinihingi nitong mabuksan ang isipan at pandama. Dinadala ako sa estadong ito ng binabasang mahusay na tula na kinikilala ang aking presensiya. Ito ang estado na kailangan ko rin upang makalikha. Ang pagkabukas ng isip at pandama. Ang pagtataya ng sarili ay pagbubukas ng sarili sa bigay ng mundo at sa kusang maibibigay mo sa anyo ng lilikhaing sining. Si Ann Lauterbach sa aklat na *The Given and the Chosen*:

I was interested then, as I am now, in asking questions about the possible relation between forms of life and forms of art. At the time, I was concerned with individuals, persons, identities; I wanted to know if the sequence of choice, decision, and judgement in one's quotidian life might have some bearing on that same sequence, choice, decision, judgement, in making art. Was there some innate tendency or even habit in both domains that could be discerned, so that a work of art somehow captured the essence of a person? Contrarily, could the process of making choices, decisions, and judgements in art-making in fact condition and shape a person's life? Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the figure that came closest to resolving this conundrum for me was John Cage. In Cage, there seemed to be a continuum between the given and the chosen so closely calibrated as to be indistinguishable, seamless. One sense in Cage an active receptivity that reconfigured desire into a form of waiting or listening; that reset choice into operations of chance. Somehow, Cage had found a way to convert life into art and art into life; this seemed to me an emblem or personal contentment that might extend into the world as an ethical proposal (13).

Paano nga ba ilalagay ang sarili sa paraang bukas sa mga posibilidad? Paano itatrato ang pahina bilang larang ng potensya? Paano ba maihahanay ang pagkamalikhain sa kakayahang isaalang-alang ang kapwa? Paano pata-talasin ang pandama sa presensiya ng iba na nasa ligid ng pahina? Paano mananahan sa kahandaang magambala ng iba? Paano ba itataya ang sarili sa puwersang maaaring magdala sa bingit ng pagbabago? Paano maghahawan sa wika ng danas na pupukaw sa isipan at pandama ng mambabasa? Paano maninindigan sa kahandaang matiwalag sa kinatatayuan? Sa ganitong paraan ko inuunawa ang kakayahan ng tulang magdiskaril at magdala sa hindi inaa-sahan. Nasa kahandaan nitong magbigay sa alteridad. Hindi ito pagsuko at sa halip, aktibong pagpapatalas ng pakiwari sa iba na tanda rin ng sariling presensiya.

Is that really, though, what a poet wants, an erasure of estrangement, speech between two people? Or is the effort . . . enough? Inadvertently, I think, we speak from our own hauntedness to the hauntedness in others, those readers with whom our private poem, as if magically, resonates—that stranger who, having read the poem, says: “I have been there, known that place, though I did not know it entirely, or not at least like this. And I have felt the same.” But again, this resonance—which is a form of response—is at

best the hoped-for but not exactly expected result of a dialogue that's inadvertent; it's not the reasons for writing, or it isn't for me, at least. I think I write not to understand struggle and to somehow by understanding it come to some sort of peace with it, but to understand just enough to know how much more there is, still, to be understood; not an end, then, to struggling, but a stepping more deeply into it (Phillip 69).

Ang piyesang “Wikain Mo” ang unang nasulat kong tula sa koleksiyong *Narkotiko at Panganorin*. Itinakda nito ang tinig na susundan ko sa pagsulat ng mga kasunod na tula. Inilalarawan dito ang proseso ng pakikinig sa wika ng tula na nag-uudyok ng tugon bagama't hindi talaga matukoy kung saan o kung kanino nagmula. Hindi rin alam dito kung saan patungo. Bulag ito sa pangangapuhap ng susunod na salita upang makausad. Tatanggapin nito ang kasangkapan na maiaalay ng mundo at magkakasya sa hubog ng kanyang kamay upang makapagpatuloy.

Nang marinig ko sa wakas
ang mga salita na higit
sa mga salita

Hindi, hindi wika kundi
himig na marahan
ang diin sa pandinig
dahil walang bibig.

Nasabik ako nang “marinig” ang himig ng panimulang mga linya ng tulang ito dahil bago sa akin. May naipadama sa akin ang kibot sa pag-uulit na “salita/salita” at “Hindi, hindi.” May partikular na diin ito sa pandinig na dama hanggang sa ubod ng kamalayan. Tila inilalarawan ng mga taludtod na ito ang sariling pagdating sa aking kamalayan. Napakarahan pero may pagsusumamo ang tono. Napakapayak, napakaliliit ng mga salita. Wala halos imahen, ngunit ang tono, taglay ng tono ang pinagdaanan ng tinig. Waring naapuhap ko ito sa guho. Parang may guwang sa loob. Naiparinig nito ang katahimikan bago namutawi ang unang salita. Naiparinig ito ng katahimikan. Ramdam na ramdam ko ang diin sa tagpuan ng salita at katahimikan.

Nang itala ko sa papel ang mga salita, hiningi nito ang maiikling linya na walang bantas. Maliliit na hakbang ng pag-usad. Marahan. Pero may pigil na bigat. May alinlangan ngunit bukas. Alam kong may nasimulan ako sa mga linyang ito ngunit hindi ko maaaring madaliin. Napakahina pa ng tinig. Hindi ko alam kung may mabubuong pangungusap. Kailangan kong maghintay. (Kung may malinaw na naituro ito sa akin, ito ay ang sining ng paghihintay.) May kutob ako na may maipauunawa dahil may nais itong maunawaan. Kung susundan ko lang. Kung hahayaan.

May magagawa ang pagpapaubaya. Tila ito maingat na paghahanay ng mga bato upang maanyayahan ang tubig na dumaloy. Bagama't wala kang hawak kundi mumunting salita. Hindi tubig ang hinihintay na dumaloy ngunit may kakayahan ding magtighaw ng malalim na uhaw kung mapadadaloy. Kung hahayaan ko itong baguhin ako, kung handa akong mabago, magbabago ang tungo nito.

May lugod na nadama
sa pag-aantala
at pagtitig sa mga kamay
na nasa bingit ng
pag-abot sa katam kung
karpintero.

Nang maidugtong ko ang mga linyang ito, tila may mali na narinig ko bilang tama. Alam ko na noon na mayroon akong natumbok na paraan ng pagpapatuloy. Natuto akong manahan sa kawalang-alam. At magtiwala. May karununganang taglay ang wikang ito. Alam kong may magagawa ang bagong wika na ito sa loob ng wikang alam ko. Alam kong may magagawa ako sa wikang ito. Sabi ni Robert Frost sa sanaysay na "The Figure a Poem Makes," *kailangang magpadala sa sariling tunaw.*

For myself the originality need be no more than the freshness of a poem run in the way I have described: from delight to wisdom. The figure is the same as for love. Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting. A poem may be worked over once it is in being, but may not

be worried into being. Its most precious quality will remain its having run itself and carried away the poet with it (132).

Tila kayang gambalain ang anumang katiyakan ng tonong iyon. Tila makapagdidiskaril ng pahayag upang dalhin ang kaisipan sa hindi inaasahang kabatiran. May pangako na makapagbubukas sa marahang paraan ng nagkukubli sa rabaw. May dalang kalinawan ang mga taludtod na iyon. May kagaanan na maaaring magpakilos ng bigat ng nais kong masabi. May tiwala ako na may mapasasaling itong damdamin kahit na gumamit ng abstraksiyon.

Lungsod ang lunan ng karamihan sa mga tula. Mga kalye. Paupahang mga silid ng gusali. Makasaysayang baluarte sa gitna ng Maynila. Pagawaan. Nangangayayat na baka sa bangketa. Bahay-ampunan. Sanglaan. Bangko. Jeepney. Ospital. Sinehan. Paliparan. Telebisyon. Radyo. Hindi matulaing mga lugar. Lunan ng prosa ng araw-araw. Iba't ibang tauhan. Iba't ibang salaysay. May nasaksihan. May nasaliksik. May nakuwento lang. May nabasa sa nobela. May napanood. May napakinggan. Maraming bata. Naparaming mga bata.

Ang tinumbasan ko ng mga salita ay pakiramdam na nasa himig, hindi ang kaisipan. Ngunit naipadadaloy ang kaisipan. Sinundan ko ang tulak ng pangangailangan. May kakayahang bumigay sa diin ang mga taludtod na ito. Nagkakauka ang wika hindi dahil sa diin mula sa labas kundi dahil sa kabig mula sa loob na dala ng matalas na pakikiramdam sa abot-tanaw ng pahina, sa abot-dinig ng kamalayan. Kakaiba ang naging pagdaloy ng mga taludtod. Pagdaloy sa kabila ng alinlangan, pagdududa, pag-aatubili ngunit itinutulak ng kagustuhang magwasto sa kamalian. Hinahayaan kong mabago ang tinutungo nito. Lagi kong ginagambala. Sinusubok kung magagambala. Nagagambala ako kasabay ng pagkagambala ng wika. Hindi pagkamatatas kundi pagkautal. Iyong kalinawan na nasa dulo ng dila na hindi maiwika.

Napatalas ng pagsulat ng mga tula sa koleksiyong ito ang kakayahan kong makinig. Ang pakikinig, kung matututong makinig ay pakikiniig. Ngunit sino nga ba ang pinakikinggan sa katahimikan? Ano nga ba ang sinikap marinig? Ang dinidinig ko ay taimtim na pakikinig. Ang pinakikinggan ay ang ipinalagay na nakikinig sa katahimikan. Naghihintay. Kung gagambalain ko ang

pakikinig na ito, anong sasabihin ko? Sasabihin ko ba ang hinihintay niyang marinig? Ang kamalayan sa posibleng makaririnig ay may puwersang pumi-pigil sa mga salitang bibitawan. May kakayahan itong baguhin ang daloy ng pahayag. Ang tula ay nagkakaanyo sa pagitan ng dalawang pakikinig.

Ako ba ang nagsasalita sa mga tula? Tinig ko ba ang narinig at pina-kinggan? Hindi ito ang tinig ko na naririnig kapag nagsasalita. Tinig ba ito ng isipan? Tinig ng kalooban? Ano ang kaugnayan ng tinig na ito sa pagsasalita ko? Ito ba ang sarili kong kaibahan? Hindi ko masabi. Ang alam ko lang, bini-bigyan ako ng tonong taglay ng tinig ng sapat na agwat kung saan ako tatayo. May paa ang tinig (kahit walang katawan). Hindi tunay na paa kundi pakiramdam na may paninindigan. May kinatatayuan sa lupa. Hindi nakalutang. Ako na hindi ako. Ako na nagsasaalang-alang sa iba. Ako bilang iba. Ako na kailangang manahimik upang marinig. Ramdam ko ang layo. Ramdam ko ang kailangang tawirin. Bakit kailangang bigyang-diin ang layo? Dahil hindi tiyak kung makararating. Wala talagang bisa kung tutuusin. Walang naga-gawa kundi pukawin ang pakiwari. Hindi upang makapangyari. Hindi upang magbigay ng kalutasan. Kundi upang maiangat ang hintuturo.

Binitbit ko ang tinig na ito. Pinangalagaan sa isip. Naglakbay ako. Binitbit ko ang kalagayan, ang mga palagay, at pakikipagpalagayan. Binitbit ko ang mga talaan at panulat. Binitbit ko ang mga sinusulat. Binitbit ko ang hindi ko pa naisusulat. Binitbit ko ang aking pag-iisa saanman magpunta. Binitbit ko ang katahimikang hinuhubog ng aking silid. Binitbit ko ang aking silid. Nakapaligid ito sa akin. Kung gaano katalas ang ligid na ito ng pakiki-ramdam. Kung gaano kahandang tumugon. Kung gaano kabukas tumanggap ng wala sa hinagap. Kung gaano kabukas sa estranghero. Kung gaano kahan-dang mabago. Kung gaano kahandang malagos o maging lagusan. Ito ang aking ahensiya. Ito ang aking pagkukusa. Ito ang aking pagpapaubaya.

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Mga Tula mula sa Koleksiyon

WIKAIN MO

Nang marinig ko sa wakas
ang mga salita na higit
sa mga salita

Hindi, hindi wika kundi
himig na marahan
ang diin sa pandinig
dahil walang bibig

May lugod na nadama
sa pag-aantala
at pagtitig sa mga kamay
na nasa bingit ng
pag-abot sa katam kung
karpintero

Ang martilyo ay martilyo
hanga't hindi nahahawakan
ang sarili sa sariling init

Pero ang tinig
na nakaaantig, nakatatagpo
hindi man patuluyin
ng hindi alam na siya
ay naghihintay
sa hindi alam.

LIWANAG AT DILIM

May oras kung kailan
higit na malaki
sa mga bata
ang kanilang anino.

Hayaan sila sa labas
sa sirkulo ng kanilang laro
habang pilit na
inaaninag sa pagdilim

ang nabuburang mga hanggahan
na binakas ng mga daliri
dahil nariyan na bago pa sila
tumuntong sa lupa.

Ang paglahuin ang mundo
ang layon ng laro
upang walang malabi sa isip
kundi alituntunin
at mga guhit na naghahati
lagi sa dalawang panig.

Walang ibang
makapagtuturo
kundi ang takipsilim
upang mamulat ang katawan
sa paglawak ng mga hadlang
tungo sa paglaho
at pagbitiw sa kamay ng kalaro.

SA LILIM NG KULAMBO

Kung pagmamasdan
ang mundo mula
sa loob ng kulambo
higit tayong magiging
mapagpatawad.

Kung hindi tuwiran
ang pagbubunyag ng liwanag
sa mga pagkukulang.

Bigyan ang isa't isa
ng distansiya ng
punto de bistang
hindi nakaaalam ng lahat.

Kay gaan ng laylayan
na laging nasa bingit
na hawiin tulad ng belo
para masilayan
o mahagkan.

Ngunit hahayaan
ang kalabuan sa pagitan
ng pagdapo ng antok
at ng lamok.
Tandaan: hindi ito lambat
na panghuli ng panaginip.

Bigyan ng sapat
na anino ang mukha,
sapat na mga tuping
mapagkukublihan
ng alinlangan.

Walang hiwaga
ang gabi, ang hiwaga
ay may apat na pako
sa mundo na kinatatalian
ng kulambo.

RADYO

Kasama natin sila sa paglagos
dahil lagusan ang lungsod
na nagbibigay-
pakiwari ng pag-unlad
maging sa naiiwan ng pag-unlad,

kasama sa pag-aabang sa kanto
sa pagtatapos ng araw
ang mga hindi pinatulong
ng sariling pag-aabang
na makatulog.

Para sa mga parusa
ang gabi
ang paglalapit ng tenga
sa radyo ay hindi nalalayo
sa paglapit ng bibig
sa dilim ng mga butas ng telepono
upang may maibulong
sa handang makinig.

Gasa para sa sugat
ang malumanay na sagot
ang payo
na hindi para sa akin
ngunit akin din.

Nanimbang ang mga daliri ko
sa tinig sa talapihitan.
May bagal ang pananalita
na nagsasabing
hindi kita iniwan
kahit hindi mo na ako naririnig.

Patay na si Kuya Cesar,
patay na si Tiya Dely.
Higit na tahimik
ang gabi ng libo-libong tagapakinig
na patuloy sa pakikinig.

JOHNNY MIDNIGHT

Isa ang nanay ko sa kanila,
sa mga gumigising
bago maghatinggabi
sa simula ng Dekada 80
para buksan ang radyo
at iparinig sa tubig
ang tagulaylay na nanginginig.

Wika ito ng pananampalataya
na walang nakauunawa
sa panahong walang makapitan
kundi pananampalataya
at tubig.

Alam ng mga ina.
May karamdaman
na hindi matukoy sa katawan
ngunit malinaw na nariyan
dahil nabibigo ang mga salita
na pangalanan.

Tinatanong niya ang bata
sa kanyang bisig
kung saan ang masakit
ngunit wala itong maisagot
kundi iyak nang iyak.

Walang pumupuno
sa mga nakangangang sisidlan
kundi matining na tubig.
Maiinom mo ang sariling tinig.

Thomistic Elements in Constructivism and Learner-Centered Teaching

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to present the philosophical underpinnings of Learner-Centered Teaching (LCT) using the philosophy of education of St. Thomas Aquinas and determine the possibility of how a philosophy of education can expand the limits of learner-centered pedagogies. LCT is a teaching pedagogy based on the theory of Constructivism. This paper is an attempt to give a philosophical standpoint to the practice of LCT so that LCT could expand its function in academic institutions from classroom scenarios to a more profound role in a learning environment. In a nutshell, this paper will discuss the nature and practice of LCT—the essential premises of this practice that yield specific teaching pedagogies. The focus of LCT will be on the Five Dimensions of LCT by Maryellen Weimer. For this attempt to be successful, a discussion of Constructivism logically comes first to present the main epistemological theories behind LCT that made it one of the most dominant and talked about teaching pedagogies in educational psychology.

After Constructivism and LCT have been presented, this paper will proceed to a discussion of the philosophy of education of St. Thomas Aquinas focusing primarily on commentaries on the *Summa Theologiae* and his *De Veritate*. Using Aquinas' theory, this paper will demonstrate the Thomistic elements of Constructivism in general and LCT in particular. Most criticisms

on Constructivism and LCT are only based on psychology and psychometrics, thus making this study worthwhile in expanding the strengths and weaknesses of the practice of LCT based on a strong philosophical paradigm.

With the advent of the K to 12 Basic Education Program, the rise of Outcomes-Based Curricula, and the declaration of schools, colleges, and universities espousing learner-centered pedagogies, it is not enough for educators, especially philosophy teachers, to focus on the how and what to teach. An emphasis on the “WHY” of teaching and learning is a crucial reflection to determine the development of civilization. Nations prospered and declined due to the emphasis they have given to their education system. The role of philosophy in this setting is to become a critique of the current situation and, if it can, redirect the status quo towards a future that befits all. This paper is a humble contribution to a much larger goal. Using philosophy as a compass, education theories and pedagogies ought to be evaluated and re-evaluated to understand better the final outcome of teaching and learning.

Keywords

Constructivism, Learner-Centered Teaching, Outcomes-Based Curricula, philosophy of education

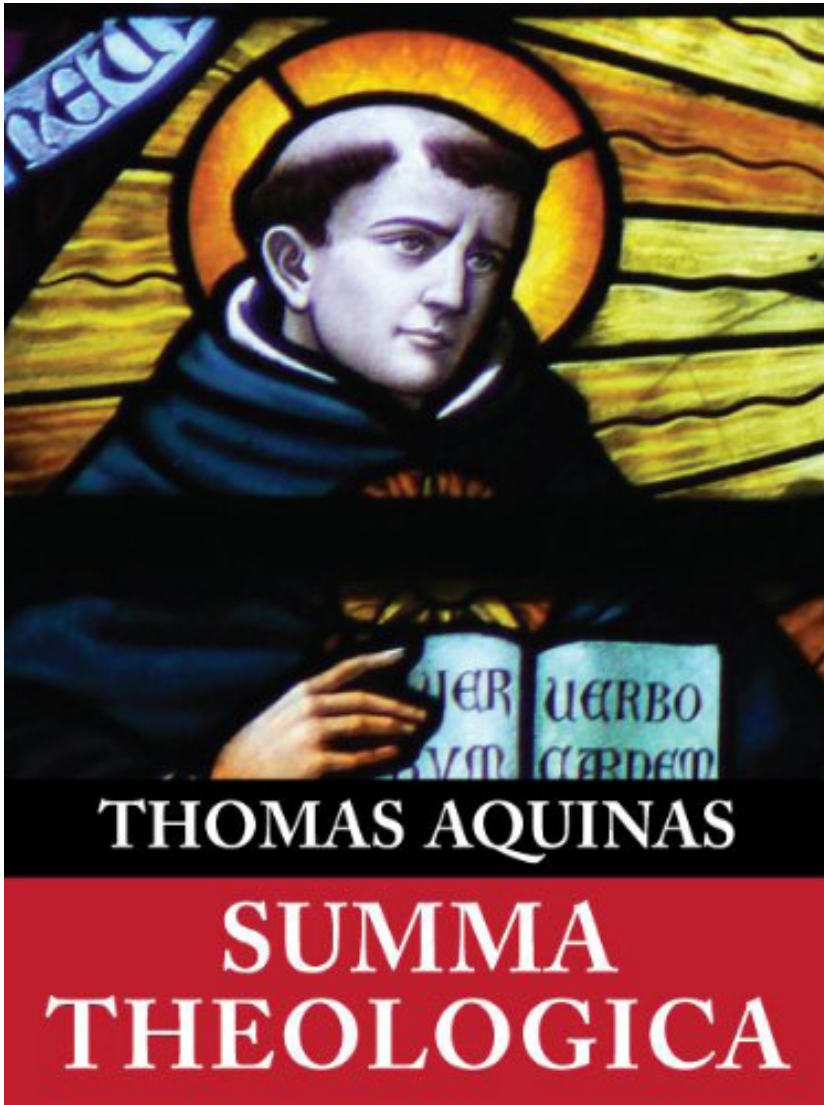


Fig. 1. *Summa Theologica*, the best-known work of the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas; <https://www.amazon.com/>



Fig. 2. Maryellen Weimer, author of *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*; <https://www.usc.edu.au/>

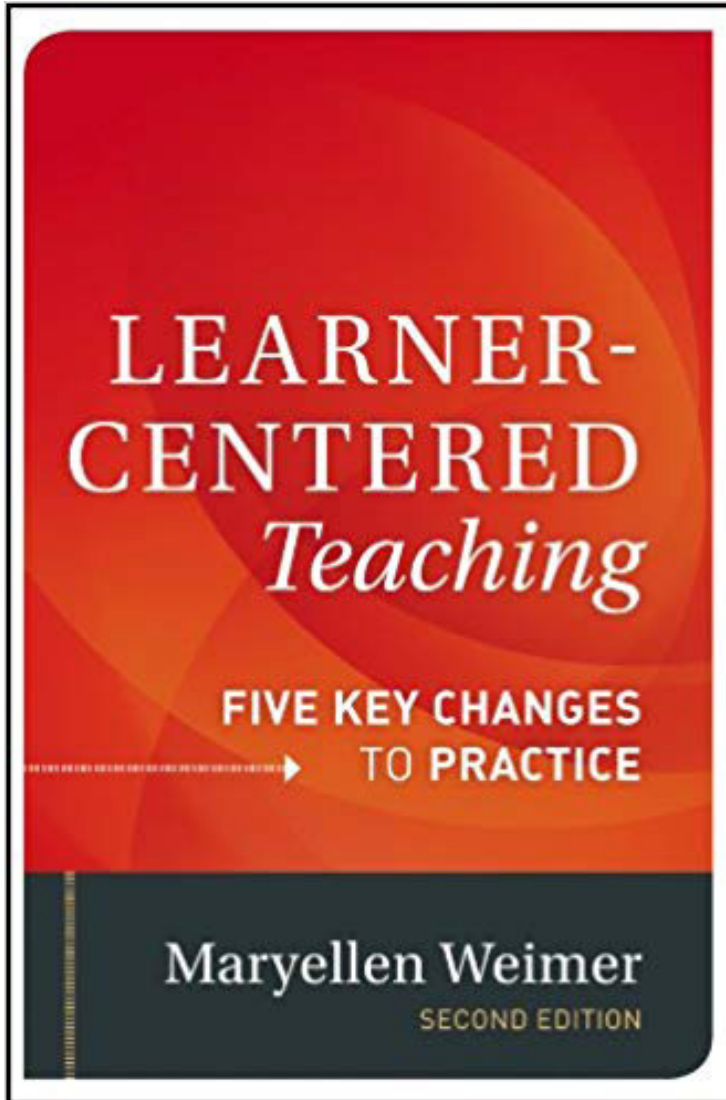


Fig. 3. Cover of Weimer's *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*, Second Edition, published by Jossey-Bass; <https://www.amazon.ca/>

Constructivism and the Pedagogy of Learner-Centered Teaching

Learner-Centered Teaching (LCT) is a teaching practice or pedagogy following the tenets of Constructivism. LCT, therefore, is the application of Constructivism. The constructivist view is that knowledge claims are *justified* if we agree that they are useful in reaching our practical goals—rather than *verified* by proving that they correspond to reality (Colliver 49). As a learning theory, Constructivism shifts the paradigm of the teacher as the source or center of knowledge (objective) with that of the learner (subjective):

Constructivism in effect reverses the adage “knowledge is power” to say that “power is knowledge.” The point is that knowledge is determined by social and political factors in addition to logic and reason, and even logic and reason are determined by social and political factors—further undercutting the idea of knowledge as an accurate representation of reality (Colliver 50).

Fox summarizes the elements of a constructivist stand point in learning:

(1) Learning is an active process; (2) Knowledge is constructed, rather than innate, or passively absorbed; (3) Knowledge is invented, not discovered; (4a) All knowledge is personal and idiosyncratic; (4b) All knowledge is socially constructed; (5) Learning is essentially a process of making sense of the world; (6) Effective learning requires meaningful, open-ended, challenging problems for the learner to solve (Fox 24).

To make meaning or sense to the world and making knowledge open-ended show the pragmatic and progressive elements of constructivism. As knowledge is constructed, it is constructed for the practical purpose of the learner—on how this knowledge can help the learner survive and progress in the world he/she lives in. These same reasons make constructivism attractive to societies geared for economic and social development.

Being learner-centered focuses attention squarely on learning: what the student is learning, how the student is learning, the conditions under which the student is learning, whether the student is retaining and applying

the learning, and how the current learning positions the student for future learning (Weimer xvi). Being learner-centered in teaching means that the teacher should not just focus on the different content or skills that is being taught to the students, but also that the teacher needs to be mindful of the students' needs, prior knowledge, talents, interests, social orientation, linguistic abilities, and cultures (Brown 100).

Learner-centered teaching is opposed to the traditional teacher-centered approach. In LCT, the teacher ceases to be the source knowledge, and is transformed as a mentor or advisor. Learner-centered teaching emphasizes the students' intrinsic motivation to learn and the development of their abilities to acquire appropriate techniques in problem solving (Weimer, xvii). In addition, LCT utilizes the 14 Psychological Principles divided into four factors formulated by the American Psychological Association (1997), to wit:

A. Cognitive and Metacognitive Factors:

1. The Nature of the Learning Process
2. Goals of the Learning Process
3. Construction of Knowledge
4. Strategic Thinking
5. Thinking About Thinking
6. Context of Learning

B. Motivation and Affective Factors:

1. Motivational and Emotional Influences on Learning
2. Intrinsic Motivation to Learn
3. Effects of Motivation on Effort

C. Developmental and Social Factors:

1. Developmental Influences on Learning
2. Social Influences on Learning

D. Individual Differences Factors:

1. Individual Differences in Learning
2. Learning and Diversity
3. Standards and Assessment

In a successful LCT strategy, it is not required that all these 14 principles are immediately followed in the entire duration of a class session. However, the APA strongly suggests that these principles ought to be the guide for teachers in making their strategies learner-centered.

Learner-centered environments are designed to help students make connections between previous knowledge and newly acquired knowledge (125). LCT focuses on the learning process more than the content of learning. To make knowledge meaningful for the learner, LC educators place the condition of the learner in forming new knowledge. As pressure continues to mount on teachers to ensure the students' success in learning, many different approaches to teaching are being recommended (Brown 104). Learner-centered environments provide a wide array of teaching styles that can address the diversity of learners.

Sharon Colley follows Barr and Tagg (1995), Doyle (2008), Fink (2003), Gardner (1994) and Weimer (2002) in stating that learner-centered approaches to education have been shown to lead responsible, active learners who demonstrate higher levels of achievement than those taught with traditional teaching methods (229).

Much has been said about LCT, but the question remains, as a practice of teaching: "How is LCT done?" Weimer in her groundbreaking book, *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*, states that there are Five Dimensions of transforming Traditional Teaching to Learner-Centered Teaching: The Balance of Power, the Function of Content, The Role of the Teacher, Responsibility of Learning, and Purposes and Processes of Evaluation.

The Balance of Power

When teaching is learner-centered, power is shared rather than transferred wholesale (Weimer 28). In LCT, the teacher still controls the key elements of the learning process considering that he/she is the expert or the master of the content that is to be taught. However, in LCT, some of the elements in the learning process can be shared or transferred to the learners. By doing so, a learning environment that is safe for the learners is created, and the

learners become more active and responsible players in the learning process. The goal of balancing power is to equip the students with learning skills so sophisticated that they can teach themselves (Weimer 29).

By balancing the power scheme in the classroom setting (or laboratory), students develop higher confidence and become more motivated in participating in the learning process. According to Weimer, the sharing of power does not only benefit the learner, but the faculty members as well because this promotes more active and responsible students in the class. When power is shared, every member of the class, including the teacher, becomes co-owners of the knowledge gained in every session:

Learner-centered instruction involves a reallocation of power in the classroom. It requires that faculty give students some control over those learning processes that directly affect them. And this reallocation does require a change (45).

The Function of Content

A lot of educators are very much focused on the content of the course or subject that they are teaching. The reason is simple—students need to know the things in the course or subject because the test will focus on the content of the course or subject. This is very much evident in the licensure examinations that most countries conduct. Most examinations are about content; hence, the natural tendency of educators is to focus on the content of the course. But how much content is enough?

Strong allegiance to content blocks the road to more learner-centered teaching (Weimer 46). Educators who focus too much on content end up with students knowing things that are not significant for them. At most research universities and in some other types of institutions, the faculty can commit many pedagogical sins and find forgiveness so long as their course has rigor and standards (Weimer 47). In a traditional instructor-centered course, the focus is on covering the content and helping students to build a knowledge-base, or use content to solve problems, or both (Blumberg 73). So, content-based instruction is not necessarily bad; it can give students

a large knowledge foundation that can actually be useful in their future careers. However,

[t]he learner-centered instructor helps the students engage with the content and apply the material, in addition to building a knowledge base. Learner-centered instructors help the students learn why they need to know the content, convey an appreciation of the value of content to students, and help them learn new content in the future (Blumberg 73).

So, in a learner-centered environment, covering the content is not the focus. The content is also used for other functions to improve the student's learning skills.

The Role of the Teacher

When power is shared and when the functions of the content vary, it is a logical necessity to posit that the role of the teacher will also change. Instead of being the source of knowledge, the teacher becomes a facilitator of knowledge. The learner-centered teaching role has been compared to that of a guide (Weimer 75). As a guide, the teacher allows the students to discover for themselves the knowledge that they need to know. There are other metaphors to define the role of a teacher in an LC environment: a coach, a maestro, and even a midwife. The reason that these roles work is simple and obvious: when the focus is less on teaching and more on learning, learning is not assumed or presumed to happen automatically (Weimer 77).

The Responsibility of Learning

Since LCT focuses more on the learning compared to traditional teaching styles, not only the role of the teacher changes but so too with the burden of responsibility for the learning process. In LCT, more responsibility is given to the learners. This involves developing the intellectual maturity, learning skills, and awareness necessary to function as independent, autonomous learners (Weimer 95). Weimer further notes:

When teaching is learner-centered, the classroom climate changes in ways that accomplish two objectives. First, faculty aim to create a climate conducive to learning, meaning that they work to establish an environment that positively affects how much and how well students learn. Second, faculty aim to create environments where without (or fewer) rules and requirements, students do what they need to learn effectively, develop themselves further as learners, and act in ways that support learning efforts of others (99).

Student participation in the learning process is essential in LCT. It is the students themselves who will give meaning to the knowledge they construct. Brown follows McCombs (2001) and Stroh and Sink (2002) in observing that, in learner-centered classrooms, students must be actively involved and they must be provided with opportunities for hands-on learning. They must be allowed to act on their environments and construct their own knowledge (Brown 101).

The Purpose and Processes of Evaluation

In traditional teaching styles, more often than not, assessment methods are used to test the students' knowledge of content, on how much they can remember what is instructed to them. Grades play a huge role in student assessment simply because teachers are required to submit grades. In this mindset, students' learning is not really being measured. However, learner-centered teaching does not deny the importance of ascribed grades (Weimer 119). But the focus should not be on the grades per se.

In learner-centered teaching, assessment is made *of learning* and *for learning*. In a nutshell, assessment methods can be utilized to help in the learning process and not simply to make grades. Moreover, different assessment methods such as graphic organizers, reflection papers, role playing, project-based activities, aside from the traditional pen and paper tests can address the different learning styles of students and provide a wider range for assessment and evaluation.

In an LC environment, assessment is not only the responsibility of the teachers but also of students. Evaluative assessment can be used to motivate students to do better and improve their skills and mastery of the content.

St. Thomas Aquinas on Teaching and Learning

Aquinas as a teacher was very much like most of us present-day educators. He had a class where he had students who sat down awaiting instruction on philosophy and theology. As Davies puts it, Aquinas' job was to teach people face-to-face (631). Though primarily Aquinas was a theologian, he saw the importance of philosophy in enlightening the mind towards Divine Knowledge. Though Aquinas spent most of his time in his different treatises and of course in writing his *magnum opus*, we can imply that he understood the needs and challenges of teachers in the process of instruction.

Aquinas' philosophy of education can be seen in his different writings. Unlike other philosophers of education like Rousseau, Dewey, and Freire, Aquinas did not write one singular treatise on his ideas about education. One must also look at his *Summa Theologiae*, *De Veritate*, and some of his different commentaries on different issues or topics.

On the Possibility and Purpose of Teaching

Commentators on Aquinas regarding his idea on teaching seem to converge on this first question, "Can anyone teach?" The reason for this question, though we might find this strange to ask, is that Aquinas quotes a passage from the Gospel according to Matthew (23:8): "You are not to be called *rabbi* (teacher), for you have one teacher and you are all students." This passage was significant for Aquinas for the simple reason that for him, education is geared towards moral theology. Davies explains why Aquinas wrote the *Summa Theologiae*:

Moral Theology is at the center of work (*Summa*), but not as if in a vacuum. It is presented by Aquinas with a work-up to it in which he writes about the nature of God, the nature of human being as things falling under God's providence, and human perfection in general (633).

Hence, Aquinas posited this inquiry in Question 1 of his *De Veritate* and in Article 1 of Question 117 of the *Summa Theologiae*: Is it possible for one person to teach moral theology to another? This question, in fact, is a pedagogical one as much as it is epistemic. By citing the Gospel according to Matthew, Aquinas implies that only God can teach if we consider teaching as to one causing someone to gain knowledge. Davies quotes Aquinas in *De Veritate*:

Teachers do nothing to their pupils save to put certain signs before them which signify something either by words or gestures. Now one cannot teach others, causing knowledge in them, by putting certain signs before them. For either one proposes signs of objects that are already known objects, then the ones to whom the signs are put already have the knowledge and so do not acquire it from the master; if they were unknown objects, they cannot learn anything at all from them (634-635).

So, if God can be the only one to teach, if teaching is to cause knowledge to someone, what happens now to human teachers? Vivian Boland provides a twofold answer to this dilemma:

One important distinction, he (Aquinas) says, is that between principal and instrumental causes. An instrumental cause is efficacious in producing the effect it does only because it is within the power of the principal cause. A pen may be said to write but only because it is in the hands of the writer. It is always to the principal cause that the effect is attributed even when an instrument is used. In this sense, God alone as principal cause can be said to teach but the instrumental cause may also be said to teach while acknowledging that its contribution to the effect is completely within the power of the instrumental cause (“Truth, Knowledge and Communication” 289).

As the pen is to a writer that cause the writing, the teacher is to God that causes knowledge. Aquinas sees the teacher as an instrument in fulfilling God’s ultimate goal for man. As it is common knowledge for students of philosophy, Aquinas was strongly influenced by Aristotelian philosophy when it comes to the teleological aspects of man. The teacher, therefore, must be consistent in using his/her skills in bringing knowledge of God to

the learner, as God is man's ultimate happiness. The teacher, then, participates in the learning process by which the learner gains from God as God is the source of knowledge and wisdom. Secondly, Boland writes:

A human being can teach in these ways, by presenting something immediately intelligible, and so leading (*ducens*) a person to knowledge, and by bringing (*manuducatur*) the learner from what he knows already to what he then comes to know. Such teaching among human beings, is not by way of illumination as it is among angels, but by way of speaking (*per modum locutionist*) ("Truth, Knowledge and Communication" 290).

Boland's second point emphasizes the primary idea that teachers are not sources of knowledge but rather instruments by which the learner forms knowledge. The general idea behind this argument is that students can only learn if they already know somehow what words signify, in which case they are not really learning when their teachers talk to them or present them with illustrations or examples and the like (Davies 635).

Based on the following points, i.e., 1) teachers are instruments of learning and 2) students' pre-knowledge of things, we can conclude that the entire learning process is a responsibility not only of the teacher but also of the students. Students must contribute to their learning by bringing some knowledge with them as they are schooled, while the teachers can lead people to further knowledge by presenting them with certain data, with new things to consider, and by drawing their attention to logical consequences and connections that students might not have been able to notice on their own (Davie 636).

As a theologian, Aquinas made clear that moral theology is the ultimate end of education thus, Davies says that the *Summa Theologiae* is a treatise which tries to present Christian teaching and to locate moral theology accordingly (633). This theological dimension is articulated in the opening paragraphs of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* where Aquinas says that the ultimate end of the whole universe is Truth and this is also the aim of the wise (Ozolins 10). All the different disciplines and sciences, for Aquinas, are

geared towards one particular end, and that is Truth. Teaching, as an art, is also for the ultimate purpose of attaining Truth.

On the Process of Teaching and Learning

To be very clear, the teacher for Aquinas is not the source of knowledge but an instrument by which knowledge is formed by the learner. So, we then posit the question, *how does one teach?* As a scholastic, Aquinas followed the standard practices of the medieval universities: reading (*lection*), disputation (*disputatio*), and oral repetition (*repetition* or *praedicatio*) (Boland, *The Healing Work of Teaching* 35). This kind of method of instruction is still very much present today. Teachers assign reading materials or texts to be read by the students, which is followed up by a class discussion that culminates with some form of an assessment wherein the main points of the topic are repeated. In Aquinas' time, master and students engaged secondly in disputations where questions were considered dialectically, and positions were refined through the presentation of evidence and in the progress of logical argument (Boland, *The Healing Work of Teaching* 36).

The class set-up which Aquinas probably used was a three-step method—that of reading, dialogue, and repetition. But Aquinas stresses that it is in the second step that the best teaching is done rather than the first. Boland compared the format of the dialogue of the *Summa Theologiae* to that of other works in dialogue form like those of Plato and Boethius. According to Boland, the arguments that were presented in the Objections in the *Summa Theologiae* were real arguments. So, even when written down, his way of learning and teaching is dialectical (Boland, *The Healing Work of Teaching* 37).

This dialectical process of the teaching-learning activity cannot be achieved without certain conditions. First, a teacher who loves his/her subject and who is enthusiastic is far more likely to capture and retain the attention of the learner than those who show no commitment to the educative task (Ozolins 11). Though we have admitted that the teacher is an instrument of learning, the teacher still affects the learning process. Aquinas really does think that teachers can make a difference to people in helping

them to come to know what they did not previously grasp (Davies 636). Aquinas did use the term *doctor* to mean teacher, probably to emphasize the deep passion of the teacher towards the subject he/she is teaching. A teacher is required to have mastery of his or her content to deliver the best form of dialectic with his/her students.

The second condition pertains to the student. Ozolins writes:

The pupil, on his or her part, begins by having faith that what the teacher is about to impart is trustworthy and that the teacher is knowledgeable about the subject. Faith is required not just for religious belief, but for scientific understanding as well, for as Aquinas says, we could not live in the world at all unless we are prepared by faith (11).

Aquinas emphasizes the necessity of trust and faith in the teaching-learning activity, thus underscoring the importance of the relationship between the learner and the teacher. The teacher needs to be sincere in his/her role to connect with the learner; to make the relationship distant between pupil and master will not facilitate learning. By having faith in the teacher, the student develops trust and opens himself/herself to the learning process thus developing in him/her the love for learning. The educative process as Aquinas sees it is one which enables the relationship between the teacher and the student to facilitate learning (Ozolins 11).

Aquinas follows Aristotle in this idea of relationship existing between the teacher and the student. Aristotle's concept of Friendship of the Good is the best circumstance by which the learning process can fully bloom. It is when the teacher and the student both work together to attain certain truths that true learning is produced.

On Knowledge and Truth

Aquinas' idea on human knowledge follows strongly from Aristotle's in which human has the capacity to grasp the essences of things through abstraction. Since man is a composite of body and soul, of matter and substantial form, man has the innate capacity to learn both the accidental and substantial features of things. However, the realities we are best equipped to know are

the realities of this world that are susceptible to empirical investigation and are capable of being rendered intelligible (Boland, *St. Thomas Aquinas* 59). However, all knowledge must develop from the data of sensuous perception, and it is only through inferences and indirectly that it can rise to immaterial notion concerning the immaterial world (van Becelaere 617-618).

Aquinas' epistemology is grounded on both psychology and metaphysics. Psychologically, knowledge is formed through the senses and is abstracted by the intellect. In this area, the forming of knowledge is indeed in accordance to the knower: by the perfection of his/her senses and by the capacity of his/her intellect. Whatever is received, is received according to the mode of the receiver. On the other hand, Aquinas' epistemology is also deeply grounded on his metaphysics. Aquinas holds that all being are a composite of matter and substantial form. The substantial form of things is that which allows things to be known and for man to know. But there is a far greater Metaphysical concept in Aquinas' epistemology, i.e., Truth. However, Ozolins reminds us that:

despite the apparent acknowledgement that to some extent knowledge is constructed, Aquinas rejects a relativist view of knowledge and argues that human beings can discover the truth about the nature of the world and of themselves. That is, Aquinas rejects the view that individuals construct knowledge which is idiosyncratic, since the quest for knowledge is the quest for truth and whether something is true or not is not determined by individual whim (12).

Aquinas was a realist in that he believes that there is truth about the world and that the human being is equipped to discover it (Boland, *St. Thomas Aquinas* 63). Thus, Truth, *Veritas*, is something that Aquinas holds to be Absolute and Universal. Truth is linked with being as one of being's Transcendental Properties (*Unum, Bonum, Verum*). Apart from *Unum, Bonum* and *Verum* (Good and True) are defined in a positive way. The Good refers to the soul corresponding to the soul's powers and apprehension; and the True refers to soul's coinciding with all being through the power to apprehend

(Boland, *St. Thomas Aquinas* 64). Therefore, if Knowledge is only knowledge if it is true, it can be equated that knowledge is also that of the Good.

Thomistic Elements in Constructivism & Learner-Centered Teaching

Before proceeding to the Thomistic elements found in Constructivism and LCT, let us first present the main principle that is not found in Constructivism and LCT. By doing so, we can focus on the main topic of this paper with much clarity and rigor.

As stated in the first part of this paper, Constructivism (and LCT by implication) does not adhere to claim any metaphysical foundation of knowledge. The concepts of the Absolute and Universal which are inherent in Thomistic philosophy cannot be found in the tenets of Constructivism. Constructivism is not an epistemological theory that requires a metaphysical foundation; rather Constructivism is a Learning Theory in which knowledge is said to be *justified* rather than deemed to be true or false or *verified* against a metaphysical principle. With this distinction out of the way, let us proceed with the main issue.

To present the Thomistic elements in Constructivism, we shall use Fox's (2011) summary of the elements of a constructivist standpoint in learning:

1. Learning is an active process. This element of Constructivism is also found in Aquinas' principles of learning and teaching. Aquinas strongly affirms that the dialectic approach is far better as a teaching strategy than mere reading. Secondly, Aquinas presents that the student and the teacher form a mutual relationship to actively engage in the learning process.

2. Knowledge is constructed, rather than innate, or passively absorbed. With certain limitations, Aquinas presents the same principle. Knowledge is constructed in as much as the learner forms his understanding of things through the assistance of the teacher, but idiosyncratic constructs of knowledge for Aquinas is absurd. Just as a teacher participates with God in the teaching, so does the student participate with the teacher in the learning process.

3. Knowledge is invented not discovered. Again, with certain limitations, Aquinas probably will also accept this principle. Knowledge is in a way invented in as much as the teacher must invent and reinvent methodologies to assist the learner in the learning process. But it is not in a way that a learner invents knowledge from nothing, for only God can do so *ex nihilo*. Since for Aquinas Truth is something universal and absolute, knowledge is discovery of such truths. But we might, with limitation say that the process by which we learn is an invention or reinvention of the teaching-learning activities.

4a. All knowledge is personal and idiosyncratic. In the first case, Aquinas supports this principle as the learner forms his/her understanding of things. Knowledge is personal because the student brings with him/her his/her own prior-knowledge of things that allows him/her to discover things he/she did not know. But the second case is unacceptable for Aquinas. As stated above, there exists Absolutes and the Universal in Aquinas' metaphysics.

4b. All knowledge is socially constructed. Again, with certain limitations, this might be acceptable for Aquinas. Aquinas points out that learning in the classroom setting involves the interaction of the teacher with the students and the students with each other, thus creating a social setting by which learning is facilitated. However, Aquinas also presents that knowledge can be obtained by meditative and contemplative exercises of an individual wherein truth is revealed to him by God through Faith.

5. Learning is essentially a process of making sense of the world. Learning for Aquinas is a movement from potentiality to actuality as part of man's ultimate end. Aquinas postulates that the end of education is moral theology, in which man attains knowledge of the Absolute through reason and faith. Learning, therefore, makes sense of the world for man because it allows man to move closer to the Divine.

6. Effective learning requires meaningful, open-ended, challenging problems for the learner to solve. Using the *Summa Theologiae* as a primary example, Aquinas presents the idea that the teacher ought to present the issues or topics that are relevant and significant to the learner.

The format of how the *Summa Theologiae* was written presents a discourse of ideas and concepts by which the learner investigates, with the guidance of the teacher, the necessary truths implied in the learning process.

To present the Thomistic elements of LCT, we shall use Weimer's (2002) Five Dimensions of Learner-Centered Teaching:

1. The Balance of Power. As presented above, Aquinas does not see the teacher as the source of knowledge in the learning process. Instead, Aquinas argues that the teacher is an instrument of God in forming knowledge in people. The teacher's duty is to provide guidance, mentorship and instill morality in the student. The student is not to be considered a *tabula rasa* but is gifted with powers and capabilities for him/her to grasp knowledge. The learning process for Aquinas is a tripartite activity between God, the teacher, and the student.

2. The Function of Content. Aquinas argued that learners should not be over burdened with so much ideas or theories. Aquinas observes that students are reading too much philosophical and theological text but does not help the student attain the ultimate purpose of education. Aquinas wrote the *Summa Theologiae* so that learners may be able to contextualize his learning to bring about a more organized understanding of things. Thus, Aquinas promotes the importance of the learning process more than the content of what is being learned. This is consistent with LCT.

3. The Role of the Teacher. This concept is probably where Thomistic philosophy and LCT strongly converge. In both LCT and Thomistic Philosophy, the teacher is viewed not as a source of knowledge but as an instrument to facilitate learning. Both Aquinas and LCT promote the idea that teachers are supposed to be mentors, guides, and midwives who assist the learner in the formation of knowledge.

4. The Responsibility of Learning. In LCT, the students are expected to develop an internal motivation to enhance learning. In like manner, Aquinas posits that the learner must have faith and openness for him/her to be guided in the learning process. Also, both LCT and Aquinas agree that teachers ought to have mastery of the subject that he/she is teaching to effi-

ciently guide the learner. Both teachers and students are expected to form mutual trust and friendship, passion and desire for learning, and to have a strong moral foundation as learning progresses.

5. Purpose and Processes of Evaluation. At this point, Aquinas is silent for the simple reason that in medieval times, the same assessment tools that we use today were not available. However, it may be safe to say that Aquinas would agree to use evaluation tools as instruments for learning since the teacher is expected to find ways and methods to make the facilitation of learning effective and efficient, meaningful and purposeful, and morally sound.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to present some elements of Thomistic Philosophy in a postmodern theory of education. It does not suggest that Constructivism and LCT have their roots in Thomistic Philosophy. Aquinas and the proponents of Constructivism and LCT are centuries apart; in fact, we might not fully comprehend how the ideologies of teaching and learning have evolved throughout this time. However, the third part of this paper has made it clear that there are elements of Thomism found in the tenets of Constructivism and LCT. But what does this prove?

First, it proves that Aquinas was ahead of his time. The findings of this paper show that Aquinas has not limited himself only to the philosophical discussion of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and theodicy for which he is well-known in the world of philosophical discourse; but his ideas about education, teaching, and learning have relevance and significance in our postmodern times.

Secondly, this paper has shown that there is truly a need to revisit theories of education and ground them on philosophical precepts to develop a theory of education suited for our needs in this society. Theories of education rely heavily on psychology, sociology, and political perspectives; but Aquinas presents us with metaphysical and moral foundations for learning.

Implications

Learner-centered teaching promises to produce dynamic, engaged, and independent learners. However, as pedagogy, LCT is constrained within the classroom setting. LCT uses psychological principles backed-up by psychometrics to show proof of transformative or meaningful learning using varied forms of teaching styles, classroom activities, and assessment tasks. The constraint of LCT within the classroom is essentially within its main purpose; but if we look at the education system, LCT practices may be in peril if learning institutions do not create the necessary learning environment consistent with what is being produced in learner-centered classrooms. Learning is a social process, and the classroom ought not to be the only social medium for learning in schools.

Most learning institutions, even in higher education, are organized within a hierarchical structure that limits, or even prevents, the democratization of learning. There is a false assumption that is probably in the minds of people that education is concentrated within the four walls of the classroom; on the contrary, real and meaningful learning happens in actual real-life experiences. Therefore, it is not enough to transform the classroom setting into one that is learner-centered; it is now necessary to transform the entire learning institution (as a whole) into learner-centered. But learner-centered principles alone cannot take on this task of transforming institutions since it is neither normative nor prescriptive.

Here we find the value of Aquinas' concept of education. First, for Aquinas, education's primary goal is moralization. Though Aquinas looks at moralization within Catholic concepts, we can at least safely posit that for Aquinas, moral actions come from a person's intellect and free will. Therefore, institutions of learning (especially in higher education) should allow the nurturing of the students' intellect and will for them to be engaged more in the schools' functions such as policy-making, financial decisions, and student welfare. If schools remain orthodox and hierarchical, the engagement process becomes limited or even suppressed limiting the students' ability to maximize the potentials of their intellect and will. LCT practices produce students who are supposed to be active learners; it is now

therefore the moral responsibility of schools to allow these active learners to have meaningful and transformative engagements within the entire learning community.

Secondly, Aquinas emphasized the need for dialogue in the learning process. Consequently, dialogues ought not to be constrained in the classrooms, but rather it must be expanded within the learning community. The moralization of education in schools is best practiced, in my opinion, through developing a culture of dialogue in the institution and not by the imposition of rules and regulations by authorities. Aquinas himself investigated different perspectives from the ancient Greeks to the Arab thinkers when he wrote the *Summa*; he presented their thoughts, challenged them, and gave his own answers to the questions at hand. Learning today is no longer discipline-based; learning is interdisciplinary and contextual making it reasonable to assert that institutions of learning promote this concept within the learning community.

Learner-centered pedagogies are indeed promising and can produce better citizens capable of improving society in the future. Developing our education system should not just be about looking at education within the microcosmic structure of the classroom; we also need to expand its development within learning communities such as schools, colleges, and universities so that eventually, the development of the system itself may come to fruition. This is a huge task, and it will take time and a lot of effort to do so. But the first and most crucial step is to open ourselves up to the possibility of grounding learner-centered pedagogies on a philosophy of education such as that of St. Thomas Aquinas.

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Social Media and the Hermeneutics of Participation in the Digital Culture

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Abstract

The pervasive social media and the mobile technologies today, with their features of connectivity, interactivity, participatory, and user-productivity, have provided us new ways of relating with one another and with the world. The participatory culture that social media have helped form stirs up new forms of political participation, economic production, and sociality. However, this also brings about fresh anxieties, tension, and conflict of interests. Critics doubt the optimism and ask whether the goods that social media brings in fact just screen the real negative effects upon our individual character and the social order; thus, their call for a critical theory of the digital culture. In that light, this paper studies the structure of participation in and with social media as part of the hermeneutic phenomenon. Concerned with the status of human understanding, philosophical hermeneutics presents a concept of participation that is integral in the notion of understanding as conversation. The paper also highlights the contrasts between the manipulative tendency of the technical reason and the involved and deliberative character of human practice (*praxis*). Philosophical hermeneutics, then, as practical philosophy, combats the notion of understanding and participation that is dominated by instrumental and tech-

nical interest. Thus, in trying to make sense of the participatory aspect and the technological aspect of the social media, there is an emphasis on the element of critical participation in the practice of understanding.

Keywords

connectivity, conversation, critical, hermeneutics, participation, practice, social media



Fig. 1. The pervasive social media and the mobile technologies today, with their features of connectivity, interactivity, participatory, and user-productivity, have provided us new ways of relating with one another and with the world; <http://kodaheart.com/>



Fig. 2. The social media, collectively, is a kind of technology that provides opportunity for its users to interact among themselves in a new way, mediated only by the Internet and the Web; <https://www.amnesty.org.au/>

Introduction

We are users of tools, and we have come to think that technology serves as a tool at our disposal. But what happens when technology becomes comprehensive and encompassing (or perhaps overwhelming) such as the case of Information and Communication Technology [ICT]? “In fact,” says Luciano Floridi, [the ICTs] have become environmental, anthropological, social, and interpretative forces. They are creating and shaping our intellectual and physical realities, changing our self-understanding, modifying how we relate to each other and ourselves, and upgrading how we interpret the world, and all this pervasively, profoundly, and relentlessly” (6). After a relatively brief span of time from the time when the computer was huge, the ICT seems to have receded into the background as it now becomes ordinary and commonplace. Mark Weiser in 1991 wisely presaged the scenario: “The most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it” (94). Humans continually upgrade the ICT, and this in turn has constantly formed our social and technological surrounding through the “particular set of technological affordances, a particular set of business models and corporate practices, a particular set of organizations, and a particular set of cultural habits, practices and expectations” (Meikle x).

All these pertain to the *social media* that now has occupied a big role in what we do and how we do things. The social media, collectively, is a kind of technology that provides opportunity for its users to interact among themselves in a new way, mediated only by the internet and the web. The emergence of social media is integrally associated with the rise of Web 2.0 which is basically a dynamic and interactive web compared to the html-based static version when it began in 1991. Comparing the two, Jose van Dijck says, “[w]ords like ‘interactivity’ and ‘participatory’ described Web 2.0’s potential to ‘talk back’ and send messages instantly, whereas previous media had wielded power over their one-way publishing or broadcasting channels” (10). The “traditional media,” like the newspapers and television as well as the commercial companies and organizations that utilized this early form of the web (often later referred to as Web 1.0) produces the content

(media, products, services, information, among others) that are distributed throughout the web, creating a top-down process of delivery and dissemination. Powered by Web 2.0, the social media (classified as “new media”) provides the platforms or software that allow their users to produce content, needing very little technical skills. This time, the inhabitants of the internet, elated over the connectedness, are turned into creators and consumers themselves and become the wellspring of materials that get circulated in cyberspace. In that sense, cyberspace becomes a cultural space and a public sphere where the users’ participation is an inherent element for its being. But Web 2.0 is for business purposes, too; it is basically a business model responsible for powering the successes of online commerce after the dotcom bust in 2000.

This development brings about a complex reality where the apparent positive features, like communicating and exchanging documents and objects online, and others simply provide ways to exploit activities in the web for profit. There, questions and issues begin to emerge. Thus, this is not an ideal sphere; the rapid change brought about by the social media “brings fresh anxieties”—like the “anxiety about the authenticity of with whom we may communicate in online networks” (Meikle viii). For Geert Lovink, one of the persistent critical theorists today, “the participatory crowds suddenly find themselves in a situation full of tension and conflict” (*Internet Without 1*). Second thoughts about the forged connections and online encounters among distant users crop up amidst the shallowness and addictive distractions. Thus, given the phenomenon of the social media today, the embeddedness of these technologies reveals a condition wherein the users’ self-understanding is greatly implicated by their participation and their finding of meaning. If we agree with Floridi’s profound observation, then we can say that ICT and those that stem out of it, like the social media and the smart handy devices, conjure up the issue of understanding and interpretation. In other words, within the digital culture, the ICT, in spite of its power and promise, is not a transparent reality but still a hermeneutical phenomenon—that is, a situation where the status of understanding is critical in the question of what it is to be human.

This paper deals with the social media, the structure of participation and hermeneutic understanding. Hermeneutics takes as its point of discussion attempts at bringing into our understanding (or realm of familiarity) unfamiliar situations. Hermeneutics could be an account of bridging the gap between the alien or strange that we strive to understand and the familiar that we already understand; thus, it also encompasses conversations as they involve at least two people trying to make sense of what each other is saying. As is often the case, conflict of interpretations happens in conversations and the need to come to an agreement constitutes a hermeneutical exigency. A hermeneutic understanding involves a recognition that those who participate in the conversation already share a common understanding before they get (or fail) to have a consensus. Advocates of social media studies and users believe the participatory nature of this technological innovation, but critics doubt their use and notion of “participation” that neglects other aspects like decision-making, class and democratic participation (see Fuchs 2014). Philosophical hermeneutics as a philosophical activity is also praxis, an understanding that is expressed in real life and action.¹ As emphasized by Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica, “the broad hermeneutical aim is to make such understanding meaningful for life and thought” (*Hermeneutics* 4). Thus, it is under this view that notions of participation and understanding in the context of the social media and the wider world of the digital culture shall be analyzed.

The Social Media

The convergence of the internet and communication has led to tremendous advances in connection, communication, and automation (computer technology) that has brought about significant consequences in the production, distribution, and management of information. All these help create the digital culture, wherein its material artifacts include computers, smart mobile devices, digital media, networks, data warehouses, broadband connectivity, among others. The integration and complementarity of these things, not to mention their overlapping developments, shape the new technologies that impact on our social reality. For these are not mere technologies; they entail

social relations and processes, promptly transforming the character of our culture today. They usher in new spaces for interactions and mediations that challenge social theorists as well as corporate thinkers to reflect on social change and the consequences for development. In particular, an important thing that emerges in this digital age is social connectivity or online sociality that draws many users into creative and persistent interactions, unhampered by physical distance and occasion (maybe an executive is in the middle of a formal meeting but occasionally sends messages to his mechanic regarding the repair of his engine; or likes a Facebook post of his girlfriend, and others). These interactions take along myriad of possible artifacts—from personal, religious, cultural, economic to social and political—that get shared in multiple directions and in a fast pace. Thus, forming a new dimension in human sociality—where the online and offline blend—serves as context for self-understanding, inasmuch as the new digital media technologies have emphasized their participatory aspect.

People's practices that are mediated by digital technology have changed (not to say advanced) in just a short period of time. One highlight of the digital media is its salient features compared to the old broadcast media.² The social media is an online media and is interactive owing largely to its being hypertextual and hypermediated. The prefix "hyper," though originally coined to refer to being linked or having a link within the web, means "excessive," perhaps precisely because a text or medium leads one to another text or medium, then to another, and to another, and others creating rhizomic movement that leaves no center and remains open-ended. However, the social media, even goes beyond the "hyper" feature. In social media, the users have the ability to produce content and spread it. In the internet "media spreads," say Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, as they argue for the spreadability model in describing how content within the network get created, remixed, reframed, or shared, and others. "If it doesn't spread, it's dead."³ They claim that the rapid and widespread circulation of media content is based largely on the "social motives of those who are actually doing the spreading," and in the process of being distributed from culture to culture, the same content is being remade, reinterpreted and transformed (Jenkins,

Convergence Culture 296). In this environment, brand producers or companies need to understand the new dynamics of production and consumption where the grassroots now have leverage in the overall process of content creation. As the emphasis on the customers or audiences' big role in the production and circulation of media is clearly pointed out in the book, it can be said that even technological innovations, like the media platforms, are shaped in large part by grassroots movements and perceived desires. In the new media ecology, spreadability provides diversified meanings and experiences and reflects practices of participatory culture. Thus, this also increases the opportunity for opening up to new perspectives and developing empathy for perspectives of others (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 304).

The status of being at the same time producer and consumer is the result of the blurring of boundaries between producers—creators of content and cultural artifacts—and consumers, the users, audience or buyers of the products. In *The Third Wave* (1984), Alvin Toffler already coined the term “prosumers,” referring first to people who consume what they themselves produced, such as what occurred in the First Wave, then to users of the kind of products like the DIY (Do-It-Yourself) in the Third Wave. In the context of the new media technology, Alex Bruns' complementary term “produsage” is meant to break away from the “producer → distributor → consumer dichotomy” inherent in the industrial economic model, to present an appropriate term that fits the informational economic models. Bruns says that:

[I]n such models, the production of ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers and instead enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge, or what I have come to call *producers* (275-284).

Bruns emphasizes not only the role of users as producers, but also the elements of collaboration and continuous building and extending of existing content, like in the case of *Wikipedia* and multi-user games. The new concept (or even already a phenomenon) produsage, just like any other neologism, helps in the understanding of the internet in general and the social media in

particular as it highlights several processes. First, greater consumer influence is manifested as feedback processes between producers and consumers are encouraged. Second, the more innovative communication and information technology favors the “information pull” method of access to information which in turn encourages produsage. Third, through the new media platforms, the production and distribution of information and cultural artifacts are much more widely available or democratized, as also noted in *The Spreadable Media*. Fourth, more networking sites enable a collective means of organization and engagement. And fifth, content is digital which is easily produced, reproduced, remixed and distributed or spread; and it can be endlessly used by all (Miller 87).

These processes are manifestations of the convergence that has fundamentally characterized the coming together of communication, information, and computer technology. Conceptual models such as “spreadable media” and “produsage” in understanding the digital culture present an opportunity, wider role, and greater agency of the users. Now, they are not merely passive receivers of products and services; they are also determinants of the overall content of the internet. In a way, the digital culture has become a gigantic factory which does not have a central authority but an interplay of interests and technological enablement. Its great impact upon capitalism in the post-industrial economy has been duly noted by critics. Many say that changes in the production opportunities ushered by the information technology do not really substantially break-up the capitalistic structure and agenda; but some also point out that the shift to a network structure of the economic enterprise and the lessening of the direct control by the capitalist upon production and distribution already constitute a significant change. Joe Karaganis’ descriptions for search engines and digital technologies, in general, equally apply to social media. Using Deleuzian concepts, he says:

[d]igital technologies are powerful forces of *deterritorialization*—of disembedding knowledge and culture from existing institutions, practices, and geographies—but they are also tools of continuous social and political *reterritorialization*, as borders are redrawn, new institutions and structures emerge, and new forms of control are established (11).

Although it has all the qualities so far attributed to the digital media, the social media, Graham Meikle points out, differs from the digital media in general for it includes the “dimension of *personal communication* that is so central to social media” (6). With a social media account, the user connects with others and let others interact with her personally online. Since each has her/his own network of friends or contacts, her/his personal communication with any of them generally generates visibility thereby making it public communication as well. This description of personal communication that converges with the public puts the likes of Wikipedia outside the category of *social media*. A trivial differentiation in so far as the discussion here is concerned, however, it points to what is essential—which is the sphere in which interactions and conversations can happen—when Meikle defines social media “[as] networked database platforms that combine public and personal communication” (6). The emphasis on the added feature of personal communication and public visibility highlights the cultural pattern that blends the personal, private, ordinary with the professional, public, and formal. From one perspective, this is a kind of widening of the socio-political sphere, encouraging and enabling free expression, creative imagination, new associations, and conversations. But from another view, this can also be another occasion for exploitation of unpaid labor, or economic opportunism.

Jose van Dijck’s discussion in the *Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* presents another aspect that needs to be highlighted in the understanding of social media. Van Dijck uses Haenlein and Kaplan’s definition which says that social media is “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (4).⁴ While Web 2.0 platforms are user-centered and facilitate interactivity, collaboration, and communal activities, they are also coded systems that automatically manipulate connections. The technical aspect of social media cannot be downplayed insofar as “sociality coded by technology renders people’s activities formal, manageable, and manipulable, enabling platforms to engineer the sociality in people’s everyday routine” (van Dijck 12). The conflation of human connectedness and automated connectivity has also shifted the basis

valuation from quality (the kind of friends and intimacy developed) to quantity (the sheer number of friends). Online sociality is in fact techno-social where platforms are the conditions for social interactions. Apparent in van Dijck's presentation is the clash between user tactics and platform strategies. Thus, from all indications, defining social media is not an easily settled issue; the varying points of view, exhortations, and criticisms reflect the still ongoing debate.

Participation in Social Media

According to Nico Carpentier, a professor in communication studies, "the concept of participation is one that emerges throughout the social." He locates the articulation of participation in democracy, development, spatial planning, art and museum, and communication (10). What Carpentier asserts is true whatever he means by social. Among many things, Carpentier's bold assertion is that participation is really about power. In the political order, the relevance or importance of participation goes back to its political root. Participation is legitimate and important because the imbalances of power between the ruler and the people can be minimized by the logic of participation. An authoritarian regime concentrates power in the ruler and participation of the governed is almost absent. The maximum participation is when each individual has equal power to determine the outcome of one's decision. When power is absent, then there is no participation to talk about. The notions of access and interaction are differentiated from participation because the first two do not involve an act from the participant to effect a change upon the other party. Participation involves co-deciding with others. Such a framework, when applied to media (broadcast), presents a situation wherein audience-participants need to negotiate their way within the balance of power usually determined by structure (of the media) and the privileged status of the professional practitioners. Accordingly, Carpentier states that: "The power play that is seen at work in a highly fluid and contingent context creates the need for constant negotiation and care in order to protect the vulnerable power equilibrium between media professionals and participants" (425). Obviously, Carpentier's case reference could not be

made to refer to social media where the structure of audience engagement is significantly different.

In his *Convergence: Where the Old and New Media Collide*, Henry Jenkins illustrates how media transitions from the broadcast media toward convergence brought by the cultural process alongside the development in communication and digital technology. In his book, he argues for the new trend for technology, media industry, audience, content creators with respect to how media content flows—Convergence. “By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want,” states Jenkins (2). Brought about by this new phenomenon is the participatory culture which “contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship” (3). Here, the roles of media producers and consumers are not separate but rather they converge. The words prosumers and producer reflect this convergence which promotes participation more than spectatorship. In general, we consider the users as participants who interact, collaborate, engage, and others, according to a set of rules different from what we have known. Jenkins talks of the collective intelligence, a term by French cybertheorist Pierre Lévy, as product or process wherein participants get to interact, confer, discuss, or converse with one another. He claims that collective intelligence is an alternative source of power which plays a great part in the meaning-making in the popular culture.

In *Spreadable Media*, Jenkins, Ford, and Green talk of the “spreadability as the potential . . . for audiences to share content for their own purposes . . .” (3). This notion connotes more the act of circulation rather than distribution of media. Accordingly, “audiences are making their presence felt by actively shaping media flows, and producers, brand managers, customer service professionals, and corporate communicators are waking up to the commercial need to actively listen and respond to them” (2). This view takes note of the growing prominence of the “grassroots audience,”—the usual, ordinary users—and its role or part that get the attention of the media owners and creators within the dynamics (or logics) of the digital environment. We can

relate to this the rise of social networking platforms that facilitate greater flow of sharing and exchange. Jenkins, Ford, and Green note that “. . . networked participation also forces media companies and brands to be more responsive to their audiences” (175). Thus, even in the sphere of audience and technical creators, participation has led to not only to concrete results (creating and innovating digital tools) but also toward mutual recognition. Part also of the argument, with the model of spreadability, is the emphasis that participatory culture should not be understood as being determined only or largely by the technology, say of the social networking sites. The argument points more to the logic of the interaction and relation and the practices that emerge. Thus, participation is not limited to creating and circulating artifact; it also involves reading, commenting, sharing, and posting.

The Social

A critical look upon the concept of “social media” can turn to the meaning and significance of the word “social.” Does it hold a great significance that fosters greater solidarity and critical engagement? Basically, *media* in general are social inasmuch as they are invested with human labor and concerned with social matters—that is, issues that touch upon the people and their relations. There was a time when the social was related with the expression of power, class struggle, and protest. The social was a word used in line with politics, interests, work, class awareness, and emancipation. Today, the social is more connected to the techno-cultural not to a revival of the social in the revolutionary era. According to Geert Lovink, “nowadays, the social manifests itself in a network form. Its practices emerge outside of the walls of the twentieth-century institutions, leading to a corrosion of conformity. The network then becomes the actual shape of the social” (*Social Media Abyss* 16-17).

Here, the social is more about the quantitative (counting “social facts”), about how much the network has reached and carried the users into its fold. People count their followers in Twitter, their likes and friends in Facebook, their contacts in email. Lovink also asserts that,

[t]he term ‘social’ has effectively been neutralized in its cynical reduction to data porn. Reborn as a cool concept in the media debate, the social manifests itself neither as dissent nor as subcultural.... The social is precisely what it pretends to be: a calculated opportunity in times of distributed communication (“What Is the Social”).

It appears that the meaning of social media involves the tension between the building of social life guided by the ideal of the common good and the fact of technological culture hinged upon the power of the technology of information and communication. This dual aspect is evident in the way van Dijck describes the meaning of “social.” He says, “The meaning of ‘social’ hence seems to encompass both (human) connectedness and (automated) connectivity—a conflation that is cultivated by many CEOs....” (12). The question whether the advancement of technical ability and the increase in information necessarily lead to the strengthening of the social reason is very important.

Hermeneutics: The Problem of Understanding and the Notion of Participation

In philosophical hermeneutics, dialogue, understanding, participation, and practice are key concepts in articulating how human persons make sense of their relationships with others and with the world. In elaborating this philosophy, Hans-Georg Gadamer asserts that hermeneutics is basically an art of interpretation and understanding which has its beginning in the interpretation of the bible, law, and literary texts. Noting these early forms of hermeneutics, Gadamer then traces hermeneutics’ development through the establishing of its universal or philosophic character to its ontological foundation as influenced by Heidegger’s “hermeneutics of facticity.” Rather than follow an intellectual or epistemological notion of knowledge, Gadamer takes understanding more as a practical know-how, a sort of skill when one makes one’s way through life; a practical knowledge of a being which is, in Heideggerian terms, “a being that is always concerned by its own being.” He argues that hermeneutics is a practical philosophy based on the notion of philosophy by Aristotle. Gadamer explains how Aristotle considers philos-

ophy as practical philosophy as opposed to the mathematical knowledge which is the theoretic knowledge or *episteme* for the Greeks (*Reason in the Age of Science* 89). For Aristotle then, philosophy is also political philosophy which is essentially a practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in that it is concerned with articulation of the life in the city (*polis*) with power to decide or to make “preference” (*prohairesis*) with respect to the good. Correlatively, the concept of practice (*praxis*) is not to be opposed to the concept of science and *theoria*, but perhaps to the acquired skill of the expert which is referred to as *techné*. Gadamer often emphasizes that the modern notion of practice or practical as some sort of application of a general theory (that is often formulated in pure science) is not what Aristotle nor even Plato teaches.⁵ Practice always begins with what is, just as understanding does not begin with zero or pure innocence. Thus, hermeneutics, inasmuch as it is a practice of understanding grounded in life’s concrete situation and to which it is repeatedly transposed, is practical philosophy. Gadamer claims that it is the task of philosophical hermeneutics to disclose the full scope of the hermeneutical dimension of human understanding as well as to present its significance to our understanding of the world in all the forms this understanding takes—

from interhuman communication to manipulation of society; from personal experience by the individual in society to the way in which he encounters society; and from the tradition as it is built of religion and law, art and philosophy, to the revolutionary consciousness that unhinges the tradition through emancipatory reflection (*Philosophical Hermeneutics* 18).

Therefore, it is then within its scope that with philosophical hermeneutics, one could undertake a hermeneutical reflection upon the phenomenon of social media and its effects on our self-understanding as users or participants in particular, and, as social agents in general. The basic question that we bring up with respect to social media is this: What is the status of understanding in which our social being is brought to greater light and which builds the social reason?

Geert Lovink laments how critical studies cannot keep up with the fast changing information technology. With the IT, the society is way ahead of

its theorists (including Lovink, as he admits himself). The object of study, he says, is in a constant state of flux:

The realization that theory in the form of detailed case studies is condemned to history writing can induce a state of depression and drag us further into a pharmacological state of mind, as Bernard Stiegler calls it. Along with the demise of French theory, there is a clear lack of guidance (*Internet Without a Cause* 7).

But the need for theory is still the urgent call in our situation today. The same is echoed by Christian Fuchs in his books asserting that understanding social media requires asking and engaging with many theoretical questions: “Social theory not only allows us to understand the meaning of concept, it also allows us to ask important questions about the world and it can be fun to theorize and to discuss theories with others” (*Social Media* 7). But the peril in burrowing into social media studies, warns Lovink, is that: “the networks without cause are time eaters, and we’re only being sucked deeper into the social cave without knowing what to look for” (*Internet Without a Cause* 6).

With regard to Lovink’s warning, Gadamer’s take on “theory” is very helpful. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is both theoretical and a practical task because it plays a role in every instance of the desire to know (theory or science in general) and the demand to bring about an understanding with others in the community (*praxis*). The universality of hermeneutics involves the task of integrating all the sciences and deploying them wherever they may be applicable. “It has to bring everything knowable by the sciences into the context of mutual agreement in which we ourselves exist” (Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science* 136). The usual contrast that we are used to between theory and practice is misleading; they are not exactly opposite nor opposed. When Gadamer traces the idea of theory, a word which has gained fame in relation to science, there he finds that participation is an essential task of it. *Theoria* is “witnessing;” it is about being a witness in a festival as participant and validating it. According to Gadamer, “[i]t seems helpful to recall here the original Greek sense of theory, *theoria*. The word means observing (the

constellations, for example), being an onlooker (at a play, for instance), or a delegate participating in a festival” (*In Praise of Theory* 31).

So, participation is integral in human studies where truth and meaning emerge from the thoughts and activities of the community. The ideal of knowledge for modern science is objectivity which is essentially standing apart from its object but also overcoming and dominating it. Its opposite, the ideal of participation, is one where prior relations with their object remain essential for the human sciences. Likewise, in understanding social media, one cannot not ignore the fact that participation is a much contested aspect of its nature. In the case of social media, the technical structure opens up a big possibility for practice in the working up of “social reason.” There is often an interplay between the technical reason and practical reason. Programmers of platforms draw their ideas from the desires and movements of the users of media, both online and offline. They do not begin from scratch for otherwise their project will flop; and with this, they need to be keenly observant. Their creative imagination is stimulated and inspired against the background of shared aspirations. Simulation, a process of imitating the user’s usual movements and habits, is essential to coding because the appeal of the platform is its being “user-friendly,” meaning, the user can easily appropriate it to their quotidian habits. Thus, while in a way social media directs the users to activities that are not merely channeled but “programmed” with a specific objective, social media platforms themselves are already negotiated coding that relies on the desires and actions of the users, and the same platforms cannot not remain static since the movement of sociality is dynamic. Eventually, one platform will get rejected or abandoned by users when it cannot cope with the changing culture, or replaced by a much better one by virtue of adaptability. The idea of participation here is all over the place for the programmers as well as for the users.

Online, and even offline, we encounter new vocabularies, like “googled,” “netizen,” “facebook,” “youtube,” and others. What this practice reveals is that inventions or innovations are not completely novel but always connected to the tradition and to the language that people speak. This presupposes that creators of platforms and media participate and are dependent upon the

ongoing movement of understanding. Inasmuch as the technical terms that they construct can be anything since meaning can be entirely arbitrary, they may ~~could~~ have created words that are totally unknown or foreign to anyone else. That the terms such as those mentioned above are what they have come up with betrays their dependence upon the linguistic tradition they share with others. Nicholas Davey explains that with regards to participation in hermeneutics,

[a] principle of original dependence is asserted: on the one hand I could not utter the word I do were it not for my dependence upon linguistic frameworks that transcend my individual consciousness; on the other, those meanings whose extent transcend my awareness cannot maintain their being unless I participate in their play (103-104).

Thus, a computer geek, even though how odd her/his appearance is, does not really break away from the reach of tradition which is the language that she/he speaks.

Conversation and Participation

Gadamer's model for hermeneutic understanding is dialogue or conversation. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer insists on the dialectical nature of understanding. Understanding or the discovery of truth is not one which can be mastered or captured at once. Understanding can be obtained through the dialectic of question and answer which properly takes place in dialogue. For Gadamer, understanding is always coming into agreement or an understanding about something. This process is not a matter of knowing one another's inner thoughts and then one understands the other. Since understanding is always an event, it is in fact a conversation which, says Gadamer, is a process of coming to an understanding (*Truth and Method* 385). Social media presents us various innovative ways of bringing people into conversations. The versatility of these apps (i.e., applications or software programs) provides some impetus for their users to be creative or adaptive to the apps' limitations, like Twitter's 140-character limit.

But is there really genuine conversation in social media? Surveys provide the dismal fact that a big percentage of the posts or interactions is “garbage.” But so are a lot of interactions or “talks” of people outside the online setting. In other words, chatters, jokes, idle talks, and others can happen anytime where there is reciprocal interactions between people. However, even in those cases, subjective agency only comes after the “lure” or “intimidation” of the subject matter. Certainly, there are matters that get discussed in social media; there are also occasions where real conversations take place. Protest movements such as the Arab Spring in the 2010s and Occupy Wall Street in 2011, in which social media was said to have had a role, certainly involved participants that listened to and talked about issues. This is the age of Anonymous, Wikileaks, Snowden, Malware attacks on network companies, Presidential election campaigns, trolls—all of which draw global attention and certainly stir up conversations in social media.⁶ “To conduct a dialogue,” says Gadamer, “requires first of all that the partners do not talk at cross purposes... The first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us” (*Truth and Method* 375). In real situations, conversations can take place in not so specifically-defined roles: online activists may be on one side but it is not easily clear who is on the other. What is more important in a true conversation is that each one is open to the other. No one has control of the conversation. In conducting a conversation, what really happens is that the flow of conversation lies not so much within the will of either partner since, as Gadamer says, a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct (*Truth and Method* 383). Thus, participants in the conversation cannot rightly claim that one sets the direction of the conversation with the other forced to abide by it. Rather, while it is possible that a participant dominates the conversation and one gets the answers that one wants from the other, we may doubt whether there is real conversation. So in that case, it is doubtful if both participants ever come to an understanding about their issues. “To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented” (*Truth and Method* 383). Real conversation is one when partners or participants are carried away by that about which they come to dialogue

in the first place. The centrality of the subject matter (*sache*) in the conversation shifts the notion of knowledge from the dominance of the subject or of the object. Thus, it cannot be said that one participant can direct the conversation to the course that one prefers thereby dominating the other participants. The dialogue will then be based on the aggressiveness, strategy, position, and others, of the one partner with respect to the other.

The picture of online discussion in social media easily comes to mind. This discussion would be between the followers of a certain political figure or platform, or maybe of users with common opinion about a case shown in the CCTV video and one or two users holding a different, opposite opinion. As is often the case, the dominant and aggressive posts come from one party by their sheer number trying to overwhelm or drown out the other to the point that one's contention would not be heard or taken into consideration. The end result is that the majority or dominant users only hear themselves and never the other. Worse still is the case of fake accounts. Ressa's investigative report, "Weaponizing the Internet" series, unravels the menacing effect of fake accounts that are used to advance propaganda and fight perceived political opponents.⁷ The report says:

One account alone we determined to be fake was connected (as of October 6, 2016) to about 2.9 million members of various overseas Filipino groups associated with Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr, and other hobby groups. Another fake account was linked to over 990,000 members of groups supporting President Rodrigo Duterte, and still another was connected to an estimated 3.8 million members of various overseas Filipino organizations and buy-and-sell groups.⁸

Once the fake account sends a post, it will be delivered to thousands of Facebook accounts and can create a false account of reality, thereby, damaging the conduct of understanding for many.

From the point of view of hermeneutics, fake accounts like these do not belong to the practice of conducting a conversation. Are they participants in the real sense as featured above? Rather than real participants, they are disruptors—they disrupt real conversations, thus ultimately, understanding

too. Fake accounts are there not, as earlier described, for a true conversation but for something materially rewarding, or even for something that borders on *unreason*. But they can be employed to serve some goals connected to interest for power in which they function like bots, similar to what has been happening in Philippine society since the Presidential election in 2016. The internet is also populated by mischief-makers and deviants like the trolls, spammers, flammers, hackers, identity thieves, groomers, sock puppets, stalkers, and pirates (Brabazon 11). Fake accounts can be handled by any of these deviants, but especially by the trolls and sock puppets.

The Digital Culture: The Question of Practice vs. Technique

We can employ the notion of practice that Gadamer wants to rehabilitate and which has changed with the modern notion of science. As Gadamer wrote in the late '60s and early '70s, he did not see the growth of information and communication technology that we have today or even a decade ago. But he had caught some of its early manifestations. He noted the fact that it was no longer the age of massive machines, but “the age of cybernetics, of regulative systems, of self-steering systems” (*Reason in the Age of Science* 84). He mentioned of many other advancement in technology whose power overextended to the point of threat to human existence on earth. The general experience vis-à-vis such threat appealed to practical reason to make us aware of “the limits of our technical rationality: the ecological crisis.” Gadamer is critical of the technical reason and its manipulative capacities. If he had stayed much longer to witness the progress of information technology and the emergence of the social media, what would have been his reflections on all these? Perhaps it is our task to surmise the answer based on our knowledge of his ideas and the leads that he had issued.

The lead is about what he said regarding the technical rationality, the rationalization of our lives in the society and the notion of practice. According to Gadamer, the technologizing of nature leads to the rationalization (also in Weberian sense) of our social life. Rationalization of society consists in technical ordering of lives, technocratic control by experts to whom people have recourse and to whom they look “for the discharging of

the practical, political, and economic decisions one needs to make” (*Reason in the Age of Science* 72). Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg apparently felt this role when he told his audience at the South by Southwest Interactive Festival in 2008: “There are a lot of really big issues for the world to get solved and, as a company, what we are trying to do is to build an infrastructure on top of which to solve some of these problems” (qtd. in Morozov ix). The social media phenomenon, given its and ICT’s technical aspect, would more or less fit the description by Gadamer. The fully technologically-mediated social interactions maybe very attractive for social management and for economic production in Capitalist society, but the increasing technical ordering of such interactions may actually weaken them, as well as, the community. Digitization is almost tantamount to fragmentation of meaning and symbol, thereby, threatening the possibility of interpretation or understanding. According to van Dijck, “*Connectivity* quickly evolved into a valuable resource as engineers found ways to code information into algorithms that helped brand a particular form of online sociality and make it profitable in online markets...” (4). Data mining, “the process of sorting through large data sets to identify patterns and establish relationships to solve problems through data analysis,” dominates the practice of experts that is making its way to economics, politics, and even education. Eventually, as what is now gradually happening, personal and institutional decisions will be largely defined by data analyses. Behind our gestures and searches in the internet, apps and browsers gather and record data, and these are best captured in social media where we are most expressive and open about our desires and tendencies. These are all incorporated in the concept of “big data,” which is introduced to make “sense of the large datasets to identify social patterns in order to make economic, social, and legal claims” (Barassi 138). Many advocates of participatory culture in social networking sites, or social media platforms, need to realize that in spite of the affordances that these sites provide, the complementary limiting and restricting features of these technologies prevent real practice and participation. One way or another, digital technology as a whole (mobile devices included), wipes out the “flexibility in our interchange with the world” and with one another. Gadamer had also

warned about this as he stressed: “Whoever makes use of technology—and who does not?—entrusts himself to its functioning” (Barassi 71).

In contrast to the technical, Gadamer’s hermeneutics articulates and promotes the practical. While the technical automates, assures accuracy, secures objectivity, and predicts results, the practical requires participation, involvement, deliberation, interpretation, and subordination to common ends. The accuracy and objectivity of technical knowledge are often de-contextualized and therefore, taken out of the context of participation. While the practical may not attain accuracy and objectivity, it proceeds by building upon the “self-evidence” of the concrete whose inner clarity we all share. Practical reason does not proceed with well-thought-out plans, unlike the technical reason that executes a program with determined reactions and results. Practical reason builds upon itself from within but grounded in *ethos*. Thus, practical knowledge is something we grow within ourselves along with others with its indetermination and prejudices. Practical wisdom is not teachable unlike as scientific or technical knowledge is; it **but** can only be learned or formed in oneself in *praxis*. Furthermore, it is capable of questioning its own presuppositions and prejudgments while remaining open to other matters as it participates in the event of tradition. Just as a person in the practice of understanding needs to participate in the subject of investigation as well as in its meaning, so too with her engagement in social media. Learning the ways of the gadgets and the particular apps may be provided by a manual that can be used over and over by different users; but learning the ways of life to become an experienced person cannot be captured by any manual or textbook, nor can experience be completely taught by the master. Rather, in *practice* alone can it be learned.

Critical Participation in Social Media

What is then supposed to be our engagement with social media and with others in these social networking sites? First of all, as the techno-optimists and the users rejoice over the re-energizing of the internet after the dot com disaster, as the Web 2.0 platform of platforms brings about the now much-celebrated social media, are we not actually being drawn into the age of

what Lovink calls the “platform-capitalism”? Or perhaps “digital capitalism” (Fisher 2010; Barassi, 2015)? Lovink himself calls for “a critical theory of intermediaries that is technical, cultural and economic in nature” (3). Others take the forms of network studies, platform studies, internet studies, and social media studies, depending on the focus guided by what is viewed as the most crucial phenomenon confronting us. Second, within social media, one gets to participate in and experience constant interactions of varied forms like sharing sentiments and opinions with those having the same interests, contributing one’s ideas on art works, commenting on blogs or news items and answering others on certain political issues, engaging other users in a debate about religious practices and beliefs or about political policies or laws. At a certain point, one has to realize that in most cases, experience in social media is an experience of the foreign, of the Other, contrasting and challenging herself, her beliefs, and ideas. One may ask oneself, do I have to consider them as other or just an aberration, an irrationality that must be stamped out because they are dangerous or simply wrong? If one is ready to defend her political or even intellectual convictions and also determined to destroy the wrong beliefs and invalid claims of others, then one can get really embroiled in the discussions in social media. It seems, one might think, that there is a huge chance to bring change considering that social media produces a multiplier effect. After all, one is already involved when one chooses or happens to read blogs, read posts in Facebook, in Twitter, or register in Disqus or other comment-hosting apps. In this case, a critical stance toward participating in social media is just a proper attitude. A critical attitude and a critical mind will be needed to make one’s way in social media or the internet, in general, for apparently everything that comes down into it is not what it seems.

So in both cases cited above, social media as the techno-phenomenon, as a form of “platform capitalism” or “digital capitalism,” and the world of interactions as one participates in social media, one must always have critical understanding. In philosophical hermeneutics, the critical element is immanent within the process of understanding even as Gadamer emphasizes that understanding is always a dialogue with tradition. Although social media

cannot be easily regarded as traditional, nevertheless it comes down as part of the overall heritage or legacy, although it is itself already a critical appropriation of the tradition. Social media platforms are themselves a form of interpretation, that is, by their programmers as they participate in ongoing dialogue with users, stakeholders, and the business climate in general, as indicated above. Critical reflection consists of clarifying and negating false prejudices and settling with matters that answer prior questions. By being aware of and putting this particular phenomenon in the dialectic of question and answer, the users may be emancipated from the effects of the instrumental rationality that works in these digital platforms. It is inherent in hermeneutic understanding that it involves “critical appreciation” that guards us from being bewitched into laziness and getting blindly accessorized. In this way, it can be readily acknowledged that these platforms are meant to advance a value or to eradicate anomaly while at the same time drawing back behind that which works as its ideological grounding since nothing can be fully transparent. Thus, the whole thing is always an ongoing process, wherein each time understanding occurs, it is a particular understanding attributed to the interpreter, or, particularly in this case, to the user.

Notes

1. This was further elaborated by Gadamer in “Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, translated Frederick Lawrence, Massachusetts Institute of Technology P, 1979, pp. 88-112.
2. See Vincent Miller, *Understanding Digital Culture*. (London: Sage Publications, Ltd. 2011).
3. See Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (Postmillennial Pop). Kindle ed., New York UP.
4. See original source: Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, “Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media,” *Business Horizons* 53, 2010, p. 61.
5. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, translated P. Christopher Smith, Yale UP, 1986.
6. In Linda Herrera, *Revolution in the Age of Social Media: The Egyptian Popular Insurrection and the Internet*, Verso Books, 2014, the author debunks the claim that the Arab Uprisings are “Facebook revolutions”; but instead she claims that “the generations coming of age with social media, virtual values, and virtual intelligence have a great capacity to unlock the mechanisms of ideology” (qtd. in Geert Lovink, *Social Media Abyss*, p. 192)
7. Visit <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/148347-fake-accounts-manufactured-reality-social-media> and other linked pages.
8. Visit <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/148347-fake-accounts-manufactured-reality-social-media> and other linked pages.

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Zeitgeist through the Eyes of Felipe P. De Leon (1912–1992)

Musical Nationalism and the Cultural Environment of the 1930s

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Abstract

Zeitgeist in this article is a reconstruction of an era built from historical accounts that lead toward and around Felipe P. De Leon—reconstructing and interpreting his ideas regarding that which could be extrapolated through his musical works, writings, and campaign for cultural literacy. De Leon echoes “the general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of an era” of the 1930s. A significant side of De Leon is his sense of history seen through his chronicles of musical events and his various views and perceptions of the Filipino audience’s reception. His writings, his musical expressions, and his interactions with fellow artists coagulate with a certain degree of interdisciplinarity to reflect the spirit of the era. Reconstructing the zeitgeist considers the tensions that exist between music histories (the practice of music such as performances) vis-à-vis music theories (the concept or constructs of tone engineering in terms of context). As articulated by Weber in “Beyond Zeitgeist: Recent Work in Music History” (1994) and seen through the eyes of De Leon, nationalists are concerned then at creating an inclusive culture, weaving a web of meaning that

unites the sometimes splintered populace by asserting cultural independence during the politically volatile 1930s.

Keywords

cultural, cultural environment, musical expressions, reconstruction, zeitgeist

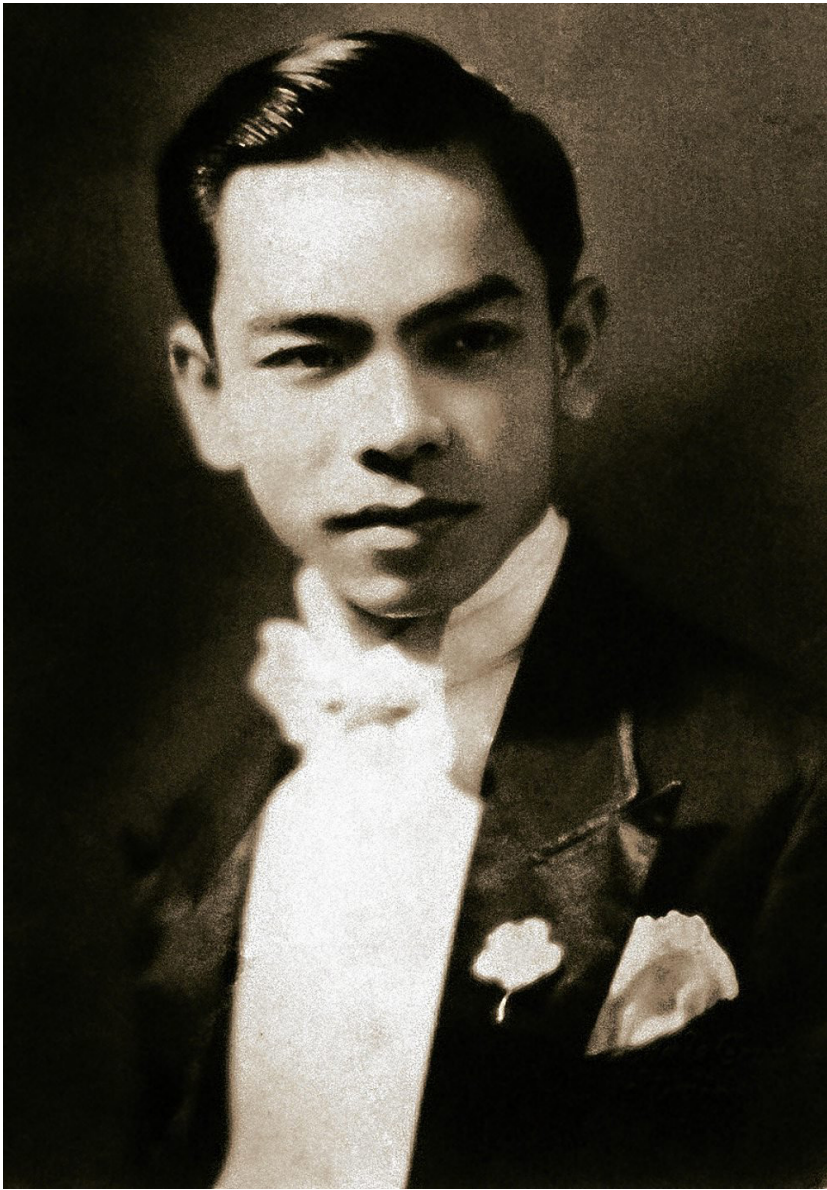


Fig. 1 Felipe Padilla de León was a Filipino classical music composer, conductor, and scholar; <http://en.wikipilipinas.org/>

Felipe Padilla De Leon, Sr. (1912-1992), posthumously bestowed the National Artist for Music Award in 1997 and known for his popular Christmas carols such as *Pasko Na Naman* and *Payapang Daigdig*, lived a long life extensive enough to witness the unraveling of eight decades in Philippine history. He was born after the beginning of the twentieth century and died eight years before the next century. His lifetime spanned various periods of Philippine history with crisscrossing layers of narratives on cultural, social, and political history. His life-work focus was on musical nationalism within the background of the Filipino's quest for recognition in all aspects of the nation's existence—economic, socio-political and, most importantly for him, cultural. This particular period in Philippine cultural history shall be looked into through the lenses of the Maestro's life.

Zeitgeist here shall be borrowed to mean two things: first, a reconstruction of an era built from historical accounts that lead toward and around De Leon; and second, a reconstruction and an interpretation of De Leon's ideas regarding that which could be extrapolated through the ideas behind his musical works, writings, and campaign for cultural literacy. De Leon echoes how the Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary defines zeitgeist as “the general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of an era.”

Political eras shall just serve as chronological markers or time frame references. For example, by 1934, the American Congress had passed the Tydings-McDuffie Law granting independence to the Philippines after a period of ten years. The law preceded by the Jones Law of 1916 aimed to establish a stable government with the transfer of political power from the Americans to the Filipinos. It was a marred negotiation as the American colonizers laid down the rules to the detriment of the Filipino interests. In the midst of the lopsided agreement between the Filipinos and the Americans, a politically-charged era of asserting Filipino nationhood ensued. With the uneven political and economic negotiations, the cultural component of Filipino nationalism must have been the only non-negotiable component left.

Cultural nationalism through musical nationalism has been the crux of De Leon's life. His ideas, incubated at an early age, surfaced in the 1930s.

De Leon, as a composer, has become a historical agent chronicling his own experience and the collective experiences of the times.

Academized Art and Nationalist Expressions

There are at least three kinds of experience in artistic creation. First is the artist's, which he aims to communicate; second is the objectification of the experience or the process of creating the work of art; and lastly is the gratifying experience of having produced a significant work (Ortiz 9). Another kind of experience related to art is that evoked in the perceiver of the work—be it a song, a painting, or a play.

The community of artists in the 1930s found diverse media in expressing nationalism through their various disciplines, whether they be writers, composers, painters, actors, and so forth. It was an era ripe for a consolidation of the “commonwealth of the arts,” to borrow the title of Curt Sachs's 1946 book, in facing the challenges of the 1930s on how to define a nation. It was an era when so many artists began expressing their ideals recognizing their commonality and diversity in expressing one's culture and shielding it from the threat of American colonial cultural impositions.

Even though American stewardship was a lopsided deal, particularly the political and economic components at recognizing Philippine independence, the reactions were quite extensive in the cultural aspect. The need to define what is “Filipino” bloomed and inspired a call for action from the artists. By the 1930s, the fruits resulting from the introduction of formal training were ripe. It facilitated articulateness in artistic expressions. Paraphrasing Teodoro Agoncillo, it was an era reminiscent of the earlier century's continuing “self-assertion of becoming” (Hila 34). The idealization turned into action.

Filipinism Shield and Jorge Bocobo

With the growing concern over the stark contrast in the changing political environment of Americanization or imposition of cultural hegemony vis-à-vis the flames of nationalism, cultural practices like music served as a potent medium for shielding the thin layer of Filipinism, or Filipino cultural

nationalism, for concerned artists like De Leon. Resil Mojares, in a concise statement, said, “[n]ationalism was the dominant discourse in the first quarter of the century” (17). This cannot be overemphasized enough because similar to what was happening in many regions of the country, an artistic explosion of zarzuela productions came about as mentioned in the works of Patajo-Legasto (2000) and Tiongson (1986).

Mojares also wrote that early twentieth-century Filipinism was defensive, revivalist, and reactive to the advance of Anglo-Saxonization. Anxieties over the inroads of foreign influence fueled an interest in the preservation of local and indigenous traditions. It was not until the Commonwealth period that Filipinos took over the leadership of Public Instruction with the likes of Sergio Osmeña and Jorge Bocobo (9). During his incumbency as University of the Philippines President from 1934 to 1939, Jorge Bocobo (1886-1965), initiated what could be termed as the Filipinism shield. Bocobo took concrete action and launched a nationwide research project on dance and music, led by Francesca Aquino (1899-1983) and Antonino Buenaventura (1904-1996). Both artists would eventually be bestowed the National Artist Award for Dance and Music, respectively. These research endeavors on the part of the state university pioneered in the work of documenting and preserving vast cultural heritage of oral tradition.

In the whirlwind of nationalistic expressions of the 1930s, De Leon was caught between utilizing folk materials (songs, dances) and adopting the newly acquired Western classical music idioms and traditions. He then decided to appropriate Western classical tradition while retaining much of the popular or native traditions.

De Leon was instrumental in concretizing the ideals in what Benjamin Curtis calls “the making of the (Filipino) nation” in his *Music Makes the Nation: Nationalist Composers and Nation Building in the Nineteenth-Century Europe* (2008). The 1930s were dynamic years of cultural nationalism. Contemporary fellow artists in the various artistic disciplines, whether in literature, the visual arts, or the theater, were active in sustaining the momentum of the era.

The Theatrical Arts

Philippine theater, for example, illustrated nationalistic assertions. Clearly exhausted from the efforts since the Philippine Revolution, the American authorities posed a very serious challenge. About them, Agoncillo wrote:

In 1901, they passed the Seditious Law, which made uttering seditious works, delivering speeches, and publishing works that contained libelous remarks against the US government a crime. Despite the threat of imprisonment, some dramatists presented a number of “seditious plays” (22).

Referring to the work of these dramatists, Nicanor Tiongson wrote:

With the ‘seditious’ dramas, for the first time, one encounters a true and disturbing representation of the Filipino struggle against the Spanish and American colonizers. Here one finds plays, which sought to enlighten and exhort the masses to support the revolutionary movement based in the mountains, and thus prevent colonization by another Western power (*Tuklas Sining* 85).

Music, too, and other artistic endeavors became the medium of resistance to the cultural imperialist. The American occupation constituted a radical paradigm shift affecting the social and cultural life of the Filipinos. Although cultural policies seemed benign or not causing immediate damage, “cultural imperialism” was a major concern then. In the Philippine education system, for example, Raul Navarro pointed out that “[m]usic education (primary and secondary school) has been utilized as a major component in the cultural homogenization or Americanization of Filipinos” (1). Music was utilized to proselytize the merits of Americanization. Songs about things that were beyond the common reach of ordinary school child (e.g., snow, white Christmas, Halloween, and other things peculiar to American cultural practices) were sung. There was enough reason for concern.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the prevailing practices concerning musical art forms, except the liturgical, encompassed theatrical performances such as operas. There were secular localized performances and other forms of social gatherings for a performance like the *tertulia* (house concerts). The

perceived threat of losing one's being a Filipino was a grave concern of the times. The inclusion of formal music training as introduced in the American education system at the University of the Philippines (Conservatory of Music established in 1916) and by the earlier German Benedictine Tutzig sisters at St. Scholastica's College (Conservatory of Music established in 1907) were novelties, for these new opportunities augmented means of cultural expressions beyond entertainment and folk, traditional, or indigenous music. De Leon has been described as:

one the most prolific composer[s] of musical masterpieces that express the Filipino nation's ideals, historical experiences and glorious destiny. For his immense contribution to the cultural advancement of his country, he may well be considered the greatest Filipino composer of the post-war era, and certainly the most well-known. De Leon did not spare any vehicle—musical, literary, print and broadcast media, academic, civic or governmental—to fulfill his unwavering commitment to the development of Philippine music and its appreciation by our people, promotion of nationalism and advancement of the Filipino musician's welfare (Beltran 111).

Very few artists in Philippine history have been accorded a patriotic citation. Prominent musicians are held in high esteem either for their superb performances or original works, but are seldom acknowledged for their campaign towards nationalism. Earlier recognized musicians in history were Marcelo Adonay and Julian Felipe. Heroism has always been attributed to successes in frontal warfare. Jose Rizal is one of the exceptions, as explicated by Renato Constantino in his landmark lecture, *Veneration Without Understanding* (1969). Nationalistic endeavors, mostly deeds with political implications, are the usual considerations of historical significance. There seems to be a huge gap in the portraiture of artists' contribution to nation building. Subsequently, a few musicians were conferred the National Artist title not just for their artistic output but also for their artistic philosophies as fruitful responses to historical challenges.

De Leon's legacy could be attributed not only to his extensive artistic output but also to his capacity, for example, to appropriate Western musical idioms. Appropriation of Western idioms did not make him less national-

istic. Appropriation does not only meet the formalistic component of art for art's sake. Together with his fellow musicians and artists, appropriation became the means to manifest in their works their authentic desire for a truly Filipino nation. They aligned their individual efforts to building national sensibility through their art.

Literature

In literature, De Leon consciously located his artistic ideology in his article, "Poetry, Music and Social Consciousness." He juxtaposed Filipino artists from this side of the continent, such as Pedro Gatmaitan, Benigno Ramos, Lope K. Santos, Julian Cruz Balmaceda, Patricio Mariano, and Amado V. Hernandez with poets from the West like Yeats, Blake, Auden, and Arnold, giving testimony to the fact that art can function as a social conscience without forfeiting intrinsic aesthetic considerations. His list included the poems of Epifanio San Juan, Jr., Florentino Daus, Jolico Cuadra, Serafin Lanot, R. Zulueta da Costa, and Ricaredo Demetillo.¹ Toward the 1930s, nationalism in Philippine literature was intense. Much of the works were set to music. The Filipinos could not fight the much-advantaged Americans frontally; thus the struggle was continued or carried out through art forms, the musical arts included. Familiarity was a key word. De Leon, paraphrasing T.S. Eliot, wrote:

The music of poetry must be a music latent in the common speech of the poet's place... It is the magic of familiarity which must permeate the very soul of one's work if he should be attributed with a high degree of social consciousness and task himself with not only making his music familiar but also, the familiar meaningful (*Poetry, Music and Social Consciousness*).

Visual Arts

De Leon regularly hosted gatherings of visual artists such as Carlos "Botong" Francisco, H. R. Ocampo, Cesar Legaspi, Guillermo E. Tolentino, and Demetrio Diego to preview his work, *Cry of Balintawak* (played on the piano), and an on-the-spot painting session. Subsequent artistic works related to

this theme followed with a group art exhibit—a direct synthesis of music, history, and the visual arts.

Since De Leon's early Peñaranda (Nueva Ecija) days, the town's environment nurtured him with rich folk and popular traditions like band music and the zarzuela, which he imbibed at an early age. He honed not just his musical skills but also his other interests like the literary and visual arts. He was a man rounded in the humanities. De Leon believed that only when his roots are in his native culture which then nurtures the aspirations peculiar to his people can the Filipino composer create authentic Filipino music. De Leon has consistently based his compositions on:

the essence of such folk traditions such as the *balitaw*, *danza*, *kumintang*, *taguyulaylay*, *dalit* and *kundiman*. Hence, in all of his works, there is an unmistakable Filipino spirit, even when he uses Western instruments, techniques and genres . . . by appropriating practically all the serious musical genres, including opera, he carried to the highest peak of fulfillment the task of incorporating such folk and traditional materials, termed here as *Filipinization*, with 'serious' classical Western music traditions auspiciously begun by Dr. Francisco Santiago, Nicanor Abelardo, Juan Hernandez, and Antonio Molina. No other Filipino composer was more thorough going in carrying out this task (Beltran 114).

Music

De Leon, together with the Creative Nationalist Lucio San Pedro, continued the nationalist tradition espoused by their mentors Santiago, Abelardo, Molina, and Hernandez and filled in the gaps between mimicry (blind utilization of folk materials) and appropriation (adoption of Western forms and expressions), with an extension to shades of early modernism.

By the 1930s, liturgical music, on which Philippine musical traditions of the previous centuries were anchored, had waned together with the vestiges of the Spanish Empire. During the period of Spanish colonization, "music was utilized as an attractive cultural ritual and social practice, which was adapted by the religious. It was likewise utilized for assimilation with the adoption of pre-existing rituals and 'Hispanizing' them to fit Christian rituals" (Irving 111). A point of view was that Christian rituals were Filipinized. Looking at

De Leon's subsequent efforts, Western classical music, therefore, could be Filipinized without prejudice to its being foreign.

Para-liturgical music, on the other hand, particularly that of the indigenous lowland Christian traditions (*subli*, *salubong*, and so on) sustained, if not regained, its popularity for the simple reason that the practices were widespread, popular, and accessible. Culturally, the practices were deeply rooted in folk Catholic practice and anyone could participate in the tradition. Walls y Merino was critical that these musical practices were vestiges of Spanish culture.²

The grand traditions of the opera and classical music, like the symphony, remained popular and must have been a cultural practice widely accessible and not limited to the *ilustrado* class. The house concerts or *tertulia* remained at the turn of the century, mostly as a social ritual, for entertainment.

What was new and explored as “academic” art; the media of the various arts became a cultural concern in the search for a deeper value, a *raison d'être*. This formal aspect in music instruction paved the way for introspection on the direction Filipino music was taking and how its expression, utilizing the conventions of classical music, could proliferate and be accessible.

One prominent genre prevalent then was band music. The narrative of the huge success of the Philippine Constabulary (PC) Band must have left an imprint on the young De Leon (Talusán 2004). He could not have missed such a narrative from the town *maestro*, particularly that of meeting a retired PC Band member, Potenciano del Rosario, who was at one time conductor of their band. It is a narrative about Filipino musicians achieving a level of artistry equaling, if not surpassing, that of their American counterpart (Osit 35).

Although the PC Band has been historically assessed as one of the most successful products of the United States policy of “benevolent assimilation,” it cannot be denied that the PC Band propagated a musical practice that nurtured and impacted awareness on a national level. The roster of members of the PC Band illustrates a long familial lineage of musicians up to the present.

Again, the time frame surrounding the 1930s abounds with socio-political underpinnings focused on cultural nationalism. Although responses were geared towards national implication such as national cultural policies, the means to realize the much-desired assertions in music were slow and tedious. With reference to local and microhistory, the dissemination and accessibility of compositions were limited to local audiences despite the advent of radio broadcasting. Sustaining positive reception continued amidst a fluid and volatile shift in musical tastes. National Artist for music Ramon P. Santos, in hindsight, wrote:

all-important works were either based on a Filipino folk melody or bore quotations from such as thematic materials. However critical, a lack of a much deeper perception of native musics³ in relation to their specific cultural and social environments as well as their functional and linguistic context produced a mostly peripheral view of their musical significance in the compositions, except as structural or thematic materials . . . It was only Nicanor Abelardo who may have hinted at exploring more deeply the “nativist soul” embedded not only in the melodies but also in the forms and modal constructs of the traditional materials; e.g., *comintang*, *awit*, etc. (136).

Santos was referring to the isolation of music from its larger use in Filipino cultural practices, especially indigenous music and orally-passed practices that have sonic components (e.g., rituals, rites of passage, festivities).

Nevertheless, “nationalism and indigenization provided the principal motivation in the campaign to *filipinize* music production in the country” (Santos 136). Santos spoke in general terms of methods of composition, referring to Abelardo as an exception. Abelardo and his contemporaries were the first generation of what could be called formally-trained musicians in the context of the establishment of the UP Conservatory of Music.

Regarding the pioneering efforts of nationalist composers, Santos mentioned⁴ that the nationalist fervor in music could have been stimulated by the lecture “Filipino Musical Instruments and Airs of Long Ago” delivered by Justice Norberto Romualdez in the 1930s.⁵ Abelardo, together with Francisco Santiago and their other contemporaries, were mentioned because

they were pioneers in the so-called “academized” art as contrasted with folk or traditional art. To bridge the two polarities, between 1931 and 1934, then University of the Philippines President Jorge Bocobo commissioned the collation of folk traditions and encoding them into a notation as references for future re-creation. He wrote:

It is hoped by this means to preserve this artistic inheritance of our people and to have the same become the foundation of future musical compositions that will reflect credit to the country As the years lapse and more facilities and better opportunities are given for the writing of original compositions inspired by these Filipino folksongs. In this way, the Filipino people may contribute to the musical art of the world (13).

It was such a significant effort to encode these oral traditions, which included 238 folk dances and 189 folksongs (Bocobo 13).

Like pioneering mentors such as Nicanor Abelardo, Lucio San Pedro (1913-2002) and others, Felipe P. De Leon stands side by side with the other stalwarts of Filipino nationalist composers. Taking up where Abelardo left off with his demise in 1934, Antonino Buenaventura (1904-1988), together with another UP mentor Hilarion Rubio (1902-1985) continued Abelardo’s tutelage espousing musical nationalism. Buenaventura, who participated in the commissioned project of collating folk materials, imparted to his students his ardent passion for the utilization of folk materials that they did extensive research on.

San Pedro’s Julliard School of Music years, on the other hand, proved enriching in defining his nationalist philosophy expressed in his symphonic works—his *Suite Pastorale* of which “Sa Ugoy ng Duyan” was a part of. It was for this latter melody that the late National Artist Levi Celerio shall subsequently write some fitting lyrics. Another of his monumental symphonic work is “Lahing Kayumanggi.” Like San Pedro, De Leon explored the much expansive symphonic medium incorporating Filipino idioms into this largely European tradition.

Picking up the cudgels of pioneer nationalist musicians, Eliseo Pajaro (1915-1984) and De Leon, who were contemporaries, went into diverse

paths as composers. Pajaro went deep into further exploring currents in modernism most likely acquired in his studies at Eastman School in Rochester, New York. De Leon, on the other hand, went outward expanding his vocabulary of folk idioms and practices, incorporating them further in his craft. All these composers echoed what Pajaro wrote with much concern that:

the Filipino composer should lead his people in developing a feeling of national consciousness and pride. He should likewise utilize the potentialities and richness of his country's musical resources, his heritage, history and tradition that it may become the composite voice of his people in its quest for a national music identity (3).

Another urgent concern that Pajaro raised was that one could not find anything Filipino in his music,

having been under foreign domination for many centuries . . . that almost all of the music our people have been exposed to is borrowed music, whether on television, radio or in the concert halls. Our children have been taught from early childhood to sing foreign songs and to play foreign pieces. Is it any wonder then that our young people have become alienated from the cultural traditions of their country? (3)

He continued, “[m]usic from such amalgamation of influences since the Spanish colonial era and the prevalent sense of alienation of young people from Philippine cultural traditions call for a review of the music education system” (3).

In fact, Pajaro came short of saying that one is challenged at identifying the Filipino in prevalent musical practices. This concern seemed to be common in the other artistic endeavors as well. Versed in the vernacular, familiar with the power of symbols visual and ideal, and a witness to historical challenges and opportunities, De Leon produced an enormous output filling in the vacuum engulfing music's demand to answer this concern. His answer came with the use of Western classical music conventions but not toward “modernism” as Pajaro did.

Santos' perspective, as mentioned earlier, regarding the lack of a much deeper perception of native music in relation to their specific cultural and social environments, except as structural or thematic materials, must be half-true. Much of the social context associated with the so-called "native airs" (a much larger and encompassing term covering folk and popular tunes) are very distinct from the "indigenous." Indigenous practices are ethno-linguistically bound whereas "native airs" have a wider scope. There is a huge gap between the two and the indigenous; all these comprise Philippine music.

De Leon never got deeper into the musicological underpinnings of his materials, which explains Santos' assessment on musical materials—that "their functional and linguistic context produced a mostly peripheral view of their musical significance in the compositions" (45). He was, however, very much aware of the potential of music as a mode of expressing nationalist sentiment.

Regarding theatrical works, for example, *La Tagala* (1910) *Tanda de Valses* from the zarzuela *Filipinas para los Filipinos* was a much-performed Filipino overture until the '80s. Jose Estella utilized the waltz with a Filipino flavor eliciting much popular appeal. The song, "Ang Maya," for example, besides showing virtuosic prowess from the singer, is a metaphor of the nation caged like the bird *maya* calling for self-rule. Political undertones, like satire, were once more utilized. One could also recall M.H. Del Pilar's (1850-1896) satire *Dasalan at Tocsohan* (1888), written for *La Solidaridad*.

Theatrical presentations where music was a dominant component were prevalent. From 1900 to the 1940s, the *sarswela* (zarzuela)⁶ like *Dalagang Bukid* (1919) by Hermogenes Ilagan and Leon Ignacio was popular. Santos wrote:

In general, dramas and sarswelas represent a significant development if only because they pioneered in a more realistic portrayal of Filipino life. Unlike the colonial plays, these dramas and sarswelas trained their sights on current issues . . . although their dramatic resolutions were to a fault simplistic (26).

De Leon was not known to be a *zarzuela* composer although he composed a few in this genre. He later discontinued writing in the idiom of the *zarzuela*

and explored the larger genre of the full-scale opera. Arias and the incorporation the recitatives were novel in Filipino works then, an appropriation from the ever-popular European operas regularly presented then.

In formalist terms, the musical components of the *zarzuela* are still tied to something written by the Spaniards in a sense that these are song forms in the European convention. Subsequently, to indigenize these forms, Filipinos started to perform and eventually compose the *sarswela*, incorporating Filipino idioms in the native literary and musical expressions with its distinct melodic contour, harmonic progression, and utilization of adapted rhythmic elements (as synthesized in the various writings of Antonio Molina on Philippine rhythms); and of Santiago and Abelardo's melodic and harmonic elements as well. The text-music relation might appear to have been "simplistic" in literary terms, but as in the previous centuries, the resulting incorporation heightened the music's appeal to Filipino sensibilities.

De Leon as Cultural Chronicler

A significant side of De Leon is his sense of history through his chronicles of musical events and his various views and perceptions of the Filipino audience's reception. It was through his chronicles that one reader could somehow grasp the spirit of the era. Since his early years, the then 24-year-old De Leon was part of the university's publication, *The Philippine Collegian*, not only as a contributor from the Conservatory of Music, but also as part of a Department staff assigned to write in the vernacular (De Leon 8). By 1938, he wrote extensively for his *Art and Music* column in the *Collegian*. The publication had its first Tagalog section in 1928 also upon the initiative of Jorge Bocobo.

In his columns, De Leon was generous in his praises but critical in his assessments. He guided his readers with explanations, especially the laymen who were unfamiliar with the music jargon. He educated them in music history and updated them on the latest trends in music performances and practices overseas.

Chronicling included composing for the theater. De Leon wrote ten *sarswela*. His first, "At Sa Wakas" was written in 1928 and his last "Malapit

na ang Umaga” in 1942. However, after a gap of a little over a decade, he tackled the genre of opera.

The formation of his artistic philosophy, his humanism, and the road map he would subsequently take, are reflected in his writings as a 26-year-old man idealizing on the power of the musical craft:

Music is an important intellectual and sociological force and there is no other force which can socialize, energize and guide the emotions of masses from childhood to maturity than good music (*The Philippine Collegian*, September 1938).

He was vocal in asserting the need to place music education in a “very distinct place” in the public education system. He was on the defensive over the prevailing questions about the need to teach music to people never intending to become musicians, responding that,

[i]f this is done, the efforts employed by our leading educators in developing those mental habits, traits and characters, and social and civic ideals which contribute to the development of an industrious, useful, happy, and desirable citizenship will be minimized to a better and desirable result (*The Philippine Collegian*, November 1938).

It was a call, a vigorous campaign to utilize the fine arts on an equal footing with other disciplines for nation building.

It was also around this time that De Leon, using the pseudonym *Fedella*, took the opportunity in presenting articles pertaining to music. It was the first time, he acknowledged, that he wrote notes about the UP School of Fine Arts, of which the Music Department was once part. He rhapsodized on the Filipino *kundiman*, its form, on Epifanio de los Santos’ theory on its etymology, *kung hindi man* (if not meant to be). He wrote about the sonata and opera, defining them for lay persons and juxtaposing them, using Filipino examples, like “Nasaan ka Irog,” as well as Rossini’s “Poet and Peasant Overture.” He was all praises for Francisco Santiago’s *Remembrance*, emphasizing its recognition by the *Chicago Daily News* which awarded him a prize in the competition they sponsored. He even wrote about decorum

for concertgoers and updates on society events (De Leon, 1938). These and many more demonstrate the diverse scope of his chronicles.

Worth noting are his significant ideas and campaign on the use of the national language and on Rizal's heroism. He regularly posed the question, "What is national music?" and lectured on the merits of Filipino music (*The Philippine Collegian*, 1938). With President Quezon's proclamation encouraging the use of the national language, parallel assertions were made by De Leon about music:

As local vernacular writers and noted scholars are now very busy studying the aspects of the Tagalog language and how it can be taught to the different institutions, our leading musicians and composers on the other hand are leaving no stone unturned in creating a music that is distinctly Philippine from the vast treasures of folk-songs of our country by President Bocobo's committee assigned for this purpose. Pioneers in this connection are Dr. Francisco Santiago, director of the U.P. Conservatory of Music, Lt. Antonino Buenaventura, Prof. Juan Hernandez. Others that can be mentioned are Prof. Hilarion F. Rubio, Prof. Ramon Tapales, Prof. Jose Estella, Prof. Bonifacio Abdon, who also employ native airs as themes to their compositions, thereby nationalizing our own music and making it easily recognizable from the music of other countries (*The Philippine Collegian*, September 1938).

One subsequent implication was the widespread utilization of folksongs.

Zeitgeist and Reconstructing History

Reconstructing zeitgeist considers the tensions that exist between music histories (the practice of music, such as performances) vis-à-vis music theories (the concept or constructs of tone engineering in terms of context). The central tenet of renowned cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz is that

in order to understand individual human action we need to interpret the cultural context from which they arise. And in applying it to musicology, Tomlinson reveals a central tenet that musical art works are the codifications or inscribed reflections of human creative actions, and hence should be understood through the similar interpretation of cultural context (2).

However, this author is cautious not to cross too excessively the boundaries towards semiotics and sustain “traditional” historical narrative on musical practices. The historian’s task is to make sense of the rational and irrational actions, out of the internal and external circumstances and the winds of changes that coagulates everything:

Society is not a unity but an amalgam of interlocking spheres: what is context for one is focus for another. Tomlinson suggests that the process by which music historians search for context is ‘a reciprocal one in which art work illuminates the context as the context illuminates the art work’; but he also points out that this process must work within the inherent disorder of culture (Tomlinson 356-357)

Political eras shall just serve as chronological markers or time frame references. Family history and microhistory attached to institutional and local history, as the case may be for De Leon, hold potential in the brick-laying of history. Personal histories, intertwined with narratives of local, institutional, and national scope strengthen any study toward the author’s goals.

Extant and majority of the prevailing writings as well as chronicles in Philippine music history, particularly that of the musical performance art, without asserting general prejudices into the canons of previous writings, tend to look at musicians and musical practices in relation to their epoch. These musicians and their practices are also looked at as isolated or interesting incidents and peculiarities of amazing divas and virtuosos, ingenuous composers and their “popular” songs. It is therefore a task of music historians to collate these facts into a perceivable whole, a *Gestalt*—the sum of the parts is more than the whole. To simply narrate things, interpret without distortion, exaggeration, deletion, or omission, is enough for the reader to understand and not tilt towards extreme value judgment.

Reception history, as described by Dahlhaus, is a significant component in reconstructing zeitgeist (150). Much challenge, however, lies in its attached conclusion, which tends to border on grey areas that would eventually require much validation. For example, it entails a compendium of what

the press has written. Where did the initiatives come from? Who were the target audiences and listeners if they were a radio broadcast? How many people came (to the concert) and from what orientation? A parallel between political and cultural or social history could utilize some connections, direct or otherwise, as well as contextualization. All these questions, without claims of comprehensiveness, continuously seek answers in the reconstruction of the zeitgeist.

It is worth mentioning here Ernest Gellner's conceptualization of the role of culture in nationalism:

[C]ulture replaces structure as the source of a person's identity in the modern world ... In the modern world, people are loyal "not to a monarch or a land or faith ... but to a culture. This is the unifying national culture also orients people toward a polity. This goal is of course based on the assumption that every nation is entitled to rule itself. The national culture, then, both fuses the populace into a whole and delimits who belongs, in many senses it is the actual basis of the imagined community (169).

To put the above passage in Philippine context, the structure of musical eras as represented in the popular genres (e.g., church music, secular theatre music, revolutionary music) are, with the homogenizing goal and subsequent effect, both intended and unintended, of the American colonization, set the Filipino into a search for refuge to protect his identity amid changes brought about by an imposition of a new cultural perspective. Again, music, not only as an art form but also as a cultural practice, has been a constant refuge, whether as an escape or coping mechanism, whether for leisure or for other functions.

After the 1930s, De Leon's other efforts and campaign are manifest in his subsequent post-war radio programs, illustrating efforts to protect his Filipino identity. His radio programs were broadcast to a wide audience in the Philippines from Batac to Davao and many other places reached by radio.⁷ When De Leon wrote or talked about music, he was fully aware of his nationalist tone. Generally, De Leon, along with his mentors and other contemporaries, created and campaigned for the recognition of Filipino-

ness. Consequently, they, as nationalist composers, applied culture with their claims that their art represented their nation's inherent values, character, and cultural aspirations. They created not just art but also social products with artistic as well as political goals. De Leon's works are rich with allusions to either significant historical events or personal sentiments on nationhood. This confirms what Benjamin Curtis articulated:

to be genuinely *national*, culture must be monopolistic, as the exclusive, unified high culture associated with a particular society and polity. It is assumed to belong to all members of that society and polity . . . they are concerned with creating that culture, with weaving the web of meaning that unites the (sometimes splintered) populace. Nationalist artists are typically most concerned with making it a 'high culture'. Though they do not reject the need for the 'lower' elements of a national culture, they attach the most value to the higher realm for reasons of prestige and for its supposed power to educate the populace (25).

This explains the campaign of De Leon in all forms of media. The mass distribution of American music, for example, was considered an affront to Filipino values. Philippine music, as well as classical music, which were much cherished, faced a perceived threat. Nicanor Tiongson, an authority in the Filipino *zarzuela*, said:

In the field of theater, the Americans introduced two important types to the Philippines: the *bodabil* or stage shows and the so-called "legitimate" plays . . . these shows transport audiences into American dreamland through the songs, dances, comedy skits and production numbers on stage . . . Finally, because of their proven effectivity in Americanizing Filipinos, *bodabil* and "legitimate" plays certainly help make more palatable to the Filipino America's continuing presence in the Philippines . . . On the other hand, although the Filipino was Americanized in thought, taste and temper by these plays, so was he equipped by them with many, new dramatic theories and styles that opened new avenues for growth and expanded the horizons for theatrical expression of Filipino playwrights, directors, actors, designers and stage managers (*Tuklas Sining* 85-86).

The prevalent fear among nationalists and “high art” musicians was accurately described as the “worst prediction of a commodified and commercialized culture, with differences flattened into global uniformity as a bad western pop universal superseding Adorno’s good classical version. Such a view of homogenized and commodified culture has however been contested as arguing for *oppositional popular possibilities*; Shuker suggests that to consider the popular music audience “a mass of passive recipients is totally at variance with contemporary audience studies” (Leyshton et al., 428). Popular music, defined here as “music that was most popular in measurable terms... a continuation of nineteenth-century popular music, which was disseminated and consumed in the form of sheet music...” (Hamm et al., 126). Commodification and commercialization, music’s existence solely for entertainment, were anxieties prevalent among academics who were likewise nationalists like De Leon. Sustaining the prestige of “Filipinized” classical music remained an imperative.

De Leon’s thoughts amplified his efforts for Filipino compositions to be popular. Efforts were exerted for his craft to be popular, in the realm of folk-related tradition, enough for the ordinary, everyday Filipino to appreciate and participate in. In an age of a great paradigm shift—politically, socially, economically, and culturally—manifestations in musical expressions have a place, too. In an era when postmodernism was not yet a familiar theory, De Leon must have been anticipating this place in the spectrum of historical narrative through his music since postmodernism places “the artist within a socio-economic and political system with its own overriding reality, which subsumes the individual. With its advent, the concept of the avant-garde comes to a halt. Modernism and avant-gardism have, of course, been categorized as of the *same ilk*, as they both refer to art as highly specialized, quite hard to understand, and only a small segment of the audience knowledgeable about modern history and theory can only understand. Pop art, on the other hand, is comprehensible to the ordinary people who enjoy reading comic books” (Kurtz 13-14).

In terms of musical output, the De Leon’s exploration of several genres can be classified as follows: major works like his two operas *Noli me Tangere*

(1953) and *El Filibusterismo* (1970), orchestral works, compositions for bands, theater works (*zarzuela*), religious and secular hymns—including his popular Christmas carols like *Payapang Daigdig* (1946) and *Pasko na Naman* (1965)—marches, chamber music, and countless songs. His works constitute as musical representations or frames of references, text from which the composer’s individual ideas and collective experiences could be extracted, interpolated, and interpreted.

De Leon’s actions in the context of Philippine history also confirm what William Weber posited as a fresh perspective on the “rethinking of Zeitgeist and the place of music within it”:

On the one hand, historians must come to recognize music as a vital aspect of general history; and that the “two complementary points emerge from the rethinking of zeitgeist advanced here and the place of music within it.

On the other, music—indeed, any art—must be

approached in terms of its own traditions. We can thus see that, since music held a central place in public life, it can serve as a useful vehicle through which to gain an understanding of class structure, the political community, social values, and ways of life. That can be achieved, however, only by working within an awareness of the social structures and intellectual practices particular to musical culture (though not necessarily by intention) toward building bridges with historians (Weber 344-345).

The travails of De Leon’s life journey were like his shadow cast by the light of Philippine historical experiences. He assumed the role of both the musician and the historical character of the musician.

Notes

1. Felipe Padilla De Leon. *Poetry, Music and Social Consciousness*. TS, composer's personal copy.
2. See Manuel Walls y Merino, *Popular Music of the Philippines*.
3. The German language has a plural form for music and the plural form of English pertains in this usage pertains to the diverse contexts of cultural expressions.
4. Renato B. Lucas, interview with Dr. Ramon P. Santos, 12 Sept. 2014.
5. Lecture delivered at the Conservatory of Music, University of the Philippines on 25 Nov. 1931.
6. The word *sarswela* is an indigenized variation of a form of Spanish musical theater called the *zarzuela*.
7. Digital copies of the radio programs are with the University of the Philippines Center for Ethnomusicology.

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