Pag-Balik

The Dynamics of Repetition in Virginia Moreno's *The Onyx Wolf*

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Abstract

Philippine serial colonialism left indelible marks in the consciousness of the Filipino nation and thus may be considered as cultural trauma. The large volume of literary works focusing on the issue of colonialism demonstrates the impact of this trauma and exhibits what in trauma studies is called repetition. This study distinguishes the repetition presented in Virginia Moreno's *The Onyx Wolf* because it indicates working-through and appropriates the concept to the Filipino context. The Filipino word *balik* embodies this unique form of repetition. Specifically, the Philippine experience of repetition as displayed in *The Onyx Wolf* involves *pagpapabalik-balik* (going back and forth), *pagbalik* (striking back and giving back), and finally *pagbabalik* (coming home).

Keywords

cultural trauma, Philippine colonialism, repetition, *The Onyx Wolf*, working-through

In the article "Toward a Cultural Theory of Trauma," Jeffrey Alexander posits that cultural trauma "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (307). Along the same lines, renowned Filipino critic Resil Mojares, in his essay "Haunting of the Filipino Writer," claims that "[c]olonialism is the trauma of Philippine literature" (300). Mojares explains that this traumatic historical event so greatly disturbed the community that it caused the dislocation of the soul and the disorientation of the body of the Filipino people (300). He continues that "[c]olonialism created such a divide in our collective consciousness that [Jose] Rizal and the nineteenth-century nationalists lamented the loss of memory of our 'ancient nationality,' dreamed of lost archives, and imagined the long colonial period as a 'dark age' that separated a people from their roots in the past" (301).

Rizal, the Philippine national hero, exposed in his novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* the grim social situation of the country under Spanish colonial rule. Later generations, however, would confront the consequences of the American colonization and the Japanese occupation during the Second World War.

Due to the impact of serial colonization, modern Filipino writers continued to produce literary works which attempt to retrieve the past, reinterpret history, or relocate the nation's soul. In fact, even without counting Rizal's *Noli* and *Fili*, Philippine literature—from fiction to poetry to drama—is composed of many works dealing with the colonial experience and its effects on the country: *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, *Cave and Shadows*, *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, and "Summer Solstice" by Nick Joaquin; *Viajero* by F. Sionil Jose; *Dream Eden*, *The Peninsulars*, and *Three Cornered-Sun* by Linda Ty-Casper; "A Wilderness of Sweets" by Gilda Cordero-Fernando; *The Trilogy of St. Lazarus* by Cirilo F. Bautista; *Walang Sugat* by Severino Reyes; *Kalantiaw* by Rene O. Villanueva, *In My Father's House* by Elsa Coscolluela; *When the Rainbow Goddess Wept* by Cecilia Manguerra Brainard.

The list could go on and on, attesting to the seeming fixation of Filipino writers on the country's serial colonial experience. Indeed, Mojares was right to describe the Philippine experience of serial colonization as trauma for, given such a large corpus of works on the matter, it certainly left indelible marks on the Filipino identity. Having identified our colonial experience as traumatic, the more important question is identifying whether our case is leaning toward the aporetic direction, which sees trauma as endless repetition, or the therapeutic, which shows the possibility of healing.

In trying to answer this question, this paper counts among the attempts to combine postcolonial studies and trauma studies. Undeniably, many post/colonial experiences—racial discrimination, slavery, genocide, forced migration, imposed erasure of native culture—cause repression and trauma on both the individual and the cultural level. Adding a psychoanalytic perspective may expand our understanding of how far-reaching the effects of colonial atrocities could be. Abigail Ward also points to this potential when she wrote that "the application of psychology to the study of post-colonialism offers a deeper understanding of the effects [of post/colonial traumatic experiences] on the psyche" (171). Furthermore, psychoanalytic theories may provide ideas on how to handle these issues not just on a socio-political level but also on a psycho-cultural, or even personal, level.

Yet, as post-colonial critic Irene Visser states, there still seems to be "no consensus about the question whether trauma theory can be effectively 'postcolonialized' in the sense of being usefully conjoined with or integrated to postcolonial studies" (270). There are several reasons why it seems hard to incorporate the two.

First, many important names and paradigms in trauma studies originate from the West. Sigmund Freud, whose works form the basis of many fundamental concepts in trauma theory, is European while Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman, and Dominick LaCapra are American. Many of the seminal texts in the field are about the Holocaust, an event that occurred to Jews in Europe. Also, the paradigm for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is based on the diagnostic manual of the American Psychological Association.

Second, understanding history is important in postcolonial studies while, in trauma studies, the accessibility and reliability of history are usually put into question. Victims of trauma may experience failure to recall certain incidents or difficulty to construct a coherent understanding of circumstances related to the traumatic event. This reason leads to the third point of contention between postcolonial studies and trauma studies: the strong influence of the aporetic stance which highlights trauma's unspeakability and implies that healing is impossible.

Since postcolonialism emphasizes the importance of resistance and agency, its critics will understandably have reservations about incorporating trauma theory. However, I believe that the reasons for contention can be overcome.

In this paper, I aim to appropriate trauma theory to the Philippine experience of trauma. I will explain how certain theories from the West, specifically Freud's "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through," can be applicable to the Philippine experience, making the foreign surprisingly familiar. For the issue of lack of historical referentiality and aporia, I will show how tapping alternative sources and using other modes of articulation can supplement facts and reconstitute history, thus facilitating healing. Using this methodology, I will demonstrate that the Philippine literary output, in general, and Virginia Moreno's *The Onyx Wolf*, in particular, may be leading toward the therapeutic, not the aporetic, direction.

Moreno's *The Onyx Wolf* won third prize in the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Literary Contest for Drama for the year 1969 to 1970 and was staged under the direction of Rolando Tinio on August 27, 1971, during the inauguration of CCP's Tanghalang Aurelio Tolentino (Tiongson 7: 219-220).

Moreno's piece is a play-within-a-play which presents how the theater company of the Director Huseng Batute prepares for their next production: a historical drama also entitled *The Onyx Wolf*. Because of its metatheatrical structure, the play follows two story arcs: the theater company preparing for their production and the narrative of Philippine history pieced together by Huseng Batute, the Director of the play-within-Moreno's-play. Accordingly,

the actors and actresses of Huseng Batute's group take on roles of famous characters or personages derived from Philippine history and literature, making such sources intertexts of Moreno's work. Likewise, the play has two dramatic spaces: onstage for the enactment of the Spanish colonial period and offstage for backstage preparations set during the American colonial period. Throughout the drama, the onstage and the offstage scenes are interspersed, making the exposition of the Philippine colonial experience non-linear.

These non-linear, intertextual, and metatheatrical qualities allow Moreno's dramatic text to exhibit a form of repetition that is not only therapeutic but also appropriate to the Filipino context. To demonstrate how repetition works in *The Onyx Wolf*, I would like to re-evaluate the definition of belated repetition and investigate how such formulations could be compatible with the Filipino experience of repetition as displayed in *The Onyx Wolf*.

The concept of belated repetition, which captures the haunting quality of trauma and the time gap between the event and the recurrence of the trauma, comes from Sigmund Freud. In "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through," Freud formulates the concept by distinguishing it from acting-out; he explains that the traumatized person or entity "reproduces [the forgotten] not as memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it" (150). Understandably, because of the time gap, it becomes a struggle to remember a significant portion of the traumatic event, making the memory questionable, if not unavailable or incomprehensible; hence, the lack of awareness of the repetition on the part of the traumatized.

In a way, the Philippines suffers from this unavailability of the past. Quoting writer-critic Danilo Francisco M. Reyes' introduction for the Tagalog region section for an anthology of Philippine literature:

> The most glaring consequence of this encounter [colonization] is the loss of Tagalog epic literature. Clearly, the experience does violence to the Tagalog's understanding of his life, natural world, and folk experiences as it deprives him of a mythic hero. The Tagalog are eluded by this primordial figure after whom they could pattern their values and visions and from

> whom they could draw a clear code of being. Haunted by this tragic loss of their foundational text, Tagalog writers have created a literature always aspiring to reconcile art with the desire to repossess their ethnicity (a lost sense of the nation) and, in practical terms, to dream up versions and visions of their subdued society (181).

One can deduce from Reyes' explanation that part of the reason for the proliferation of literary works addressing the nation's history may be the loss of critical archival data. This loss may be the explanation why, until now, the writers continue to reinterpret and to fill in the gaps of Philippine history. So, like the traumatized in Freud's formulation of belated repetition, the Filipinos persistently repeat in writing their colonial experience and attempt to make sense of it.

On the other hand, unlike the traumatized in Freud's concept, our writers do know what they are repeating through their writing. The choice of a topic is a commitment that a writer makes. Their literary outputs could even be considered as testimony and processing combined because literature can supplement gaps in history as well as facilitate understanding of cultural issues among many other concerns. As follows, I believe that a more suitable way of viewing repetition, at least in the Philippine literary context, is Freud's definition of the concept in "Repression." Here, he explains that symptoms of trauma "constitute indications of a *return of the repressed*" (4:93; emphasis added).

Repetition, formulated as a return, seems more appropriate to the Philippine context, for it captures the diverse connotations of the Filipino verb *pag-balik*, which plainly means repetition in its base form (*balik*), but could actually capture the implications of the word return when combined with affixes. Consequently, this Filipino word also reflects better the dynamics of repetition in *The Onyx Wolf*. This appropriation finds further validity when one looks up the meaning of the original term used by Freud who coined this concept: Wiederholen. This term is made up of two words, wieder and holen, which, according to the *Langenscheidt's Dictionary*, mean "again" and "to fetch," respectively (Springer 510; 28). Thus, Wiederholen means to get hold of something again. Understood this way, Freud's orig-

inal formulation of the concept of repetition becomes more meaningful. The memory that one repeats is something that one is trying to reclaim or to get hold of again. *Balik* turns out to be closer to the original than initially perceived.

In this paper, I will argue that repetition in Virginia Moreno's *The Onyx Wolf* undergoes three stages, all revolving around the concept of *balik*: a sense of recurrence by way of going back and forth (*pabalik-balik* or in its progressive form: *pagpapabalik-balik*), a sense of response or reciprocation (*pagbalik* which is synonymous to the Filipino word *pagganti*, although the latter has stronger connotations of vengeance), and, finally, a sense of coming home (*pagbabalik* as in *pag-uwi* in Filipino).

Pagpapabalik-balik: Repeatedly Going Back and Forth

In many ways, repetition abounds in *The Onyx Wolf*, most of which relate to or revolve around the character Itim Asu or The Onyx Wolf, a guerilla-like figure whose presence—literally and figuratively—haunts the play. Besides having the text named after her, she appears avenging the brutal assassination of her husband Governor General Bustamante in the 3 middle scenes of this 8-scene play. Even though she dies at the hands of her enemies shortly after killing a priest and leaving his body inside the confessional box, her cause and her anguish live on through other characters which could be considered echoes or mirrors of her.

Primarily, she is Doña Luisa, wife of Governor General Bustamante. Yet, in her daughter's husband, she finds an avenger: Angelito de los Santos y Soliman, heir of pre-colonial Tondo's Rajah Sulaiman. Angelito, because of his cause, becomes a mirror of Itim Asu. By extension, the young actor playing Angelito, for being a real-life guerilla on-the-run, embodies the resistance against the Spanish colonial rulers started by Itim Asu. Accordingly, he creates a link between Itim Asu and the other characters he portrays onstage, all of which subvert colonial rule: Simoun from Rizal's *Fili* and Elias from Rizal's *Noli*.

Another important mirror image of Doña Luisa is the actress who portrays her in Huseng Batute's drama. Literally, she brings Itim Asu to

life onstage. Furthermore, because of her, Itim Asu finds a connection to Angelito's native priestess mother who, all of a sudden, channels the spirit of her ancestor Rajah Sulaiman when the young Angelito's lineage was questioned by the Spanish officials.

Those examples of mirroring may be considered instances of repetition in the sense of *pagpapabalik-balik*. One may ask why I used *pagpapabalik-balik* instead of the Filipino word *pag-uulit*. While *pag-uulit* also means repetition, its connotation is a recurrence in a progression which, when not stopped, may continue until infinity. I, however, do not see the echoes of Itim Asu as recurrences in a timeline leading to infinity. They are recurrences, but their appearance at certain points in time exhibits the dynamic of going back and forth. Moreover, the text is metatheatrical and therefore self-aware. The repetitions are part of the design; they are critical in the text's meaning-making.

One significant example of repetition is the death of Itim Asu and all her mirror images, except the Old Actress, in the story. That each of these images champion resistance as a lone quixotic figure without so much of a sidekick or an army means that, whenever the champion dies, the resistance, in need of a leader, takes a step backward. It only moves forward anew once another champion emerges. Hence, it is more appropriate to describe this kind of repetition as *pagpapabalik-balik* than mere *pag-uulit*.

Moreover, *pagpapabalik-balik* is present in the production team's investigation of history. Drawing from Dominic LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, acting-out and working-through are "intimately related" because they are "parts of a process" (143). LaCapra realizes that a traumatized person will, at some point, need to face and grapple with repetition, but he clarifies that not all repetition is compulsive. Even when working-through, repetition may occur in that the process "requires going back to problems" with the hope of "transforming the understanding of them" (148). He also explains that, in this process, the patient must labor to "gain critical distance" from the traumatic situation and learn to "distinguish between past, present, and future" (143). The research that Huseng Batute's production team does can be interpreted as a process of going back and forth. They dig the archives in

order to create a coherent story out of the fragments of history. Through this process, they can reorganize the sequence of past and present. The result of this process of revisiting and reorganizing history is the play *The Onyx Wolf* which features the repeated appearance of figures of resistance.

Notably, even the order chosen by Moreno displays a going back and forth. It starts with a Spanish event which is revealed to be a rehearsal in the next scene. Then it goes back to the Spanish period of the play-within-a-play then to the American period of the theater company. Finally, it ends with the theater company inviting their audience, the people of Manila, to "come onstage and play a part" (26). Here, Mang Norio—the theater company's spokesperson— extends the duty of understanding and reconstructing history to the people of Manila. This ending is the culmination of Moreno's and Batute's going back and forth in history. Through all of those examples, *pagpapabalik-balik* is exhibited in the play.

Pagbalik: Repetition for Striking Back, Repetition for Giving Back

Looking at the examples of mirrors and repetitions in *The Onyx Wolf*—and even other characters for that matter, one may observe a certain trend. They all manifest the following characteristics either singly or in combination: an experience of oppression or silencing, an affiliation with revolutionary movements against the country's oppressors, and a dual identity which, in one way or another, serves the purpose of the resistance. When seen in the light of the context of these figures in the original text from which they were drawn, these common characteristics become even more evident.

Governor General Bustamante and his wife Doña Luisa fulfill the criterion of silencing because husband and wife have been silenced in real life. Bustamante's character is based on Fernando Manuel Bustamante y Bustillo, Mayor of Txacala in Mexico and later on appointed Governor General of the Philippines on the 9th of August 1717 (Rosca: 5:1241). Owing to his good record, he was given the said position and "was charged with the specific task of putting to order the Public Treasury" (5: 1241). That the Public Treasury

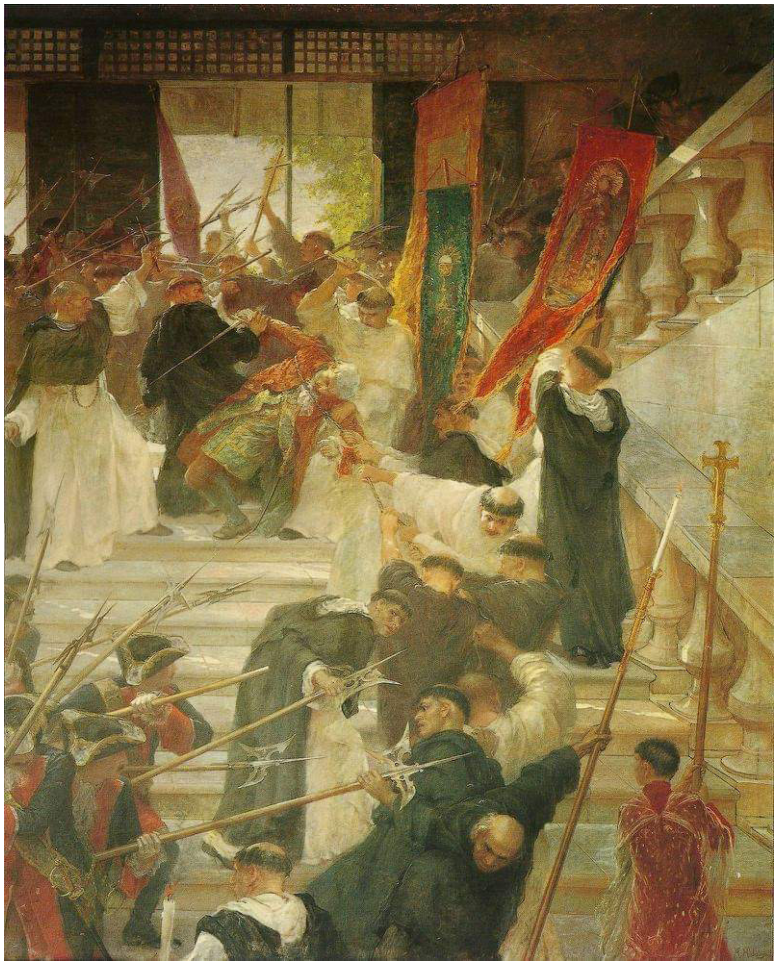

Fig. 1. A faithful photographic reproduction of Félix Resurreción Hidalgo's *The Assassination of Governor General Bustamante*, an oil on canvas painting circa 1904. Public domain. From Wikimedia Commons, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7a/Hidalgo%27s_The_Assassination_of_Governor_General_Bustamante.jpg.

"was in a sorry state" implies that officials could have been pocketing some of the money (5:1241).

Like a quixotic figure, Bustamante fought the whole corrupt system (and that included government officials, merchants, and friars). Once in office, he "seized the goods and properties of rich merchants and others who owed the Public Treasury money" and even "pursued an investigation of the activities of persons who held royal offices in trust before his arrival" (5: 1241). These actions establish Bustamante as an upright official who would not tolerate the shameful customs of leadership practiced by fellow Spaniards.

On the other hand, Bustamante's wife, who later becomes known as The Onyx Wolf or Itim Asu, finds herself homeless after her husband's death. This explains her need to take refuge in the home of Juan de los Santos, Angelito's father. At some point after this, she assumes a dual identity by being a vengeful guerilla known as Itim Asu, concealing her real self as the wife of Bustamante.

The lady's choice of alias is likewise interesting: that of a wolf—"sharp of eye" and "swift of foot" or even "beastly" as the text reveals (Moreno 17). By taking on an alias that connotes a beastly image, she displays how oftentimes the colonized is described as a beast or an animal deprived of human faculties and considered a lesser being (Mbembé 1). This image evokes the primal human desires that are relegated into the unconscious realm which when allowed release may be difficult to control. With all the beastly strength she could muster, she strikes back at her enemies and threatens their position of power. Indeed, Itim Asu encapsulates the vengeful aspect of the return of the repressed.

Then again, the figure of the wolf is not only wild and powerful; it can be nurturing. One of the more evident sources about the wolf's nurturing character is the story of Romulus and Remus, the twins suckled and brought up by a wolf. That myth, however, may be too remote a source for Itim Asu's character. A source closer to the context of Bustamante's wife is the Mexican myth of La Loba. That one of the basis texts of Moreno's drama is the novel *La Loba Negra* only strengthens the need to look at this Mexican source. La Loba is an outlander who reassembles and resurrects dead animals, especially

wolves (Estes 29-30). As Jungian analyst Clarissa Pinkola Estes describes, La Loba takes it upon herself "to collect and preserve especially that which is in danger of being lost to the world" (29). And she does this by singing: "La Loba sings some more, and more of the creature comes into being; its tail curls upward, shaggy and strong… And still La Loba sings so deeply that the floor and the desert shakes, and as she sings, the wolf opens its eyes, leaps up, and runs away down the canyon" (30). Given her ability to revive dead wolves and animals, La Loba lends a nurturing quality to Itim Asu's wolf-like image.

This nurturing quality grants the figure of *La Loba* an alternative kind of power, one that is drawn from magic and the control of life force, making her a character who can transcend death and material limitations. In a way, this is applicable to Moreno's Itim Asu as well. As explained under the heading of *pagpapabalik-balik*, the play-within-a-play is an attempt to supplement the Philippines' gap-filled archives. Itim Asu, being the central figure of the play, alludes to almost all revolutionary characters in the drama, and so exhibits a power to figuratively transcend death and material limits. Likewise, the project of supplementing or reviving history also rests on her centrality in the text because the drama has been named after her.

Picking up from the centrality of Itim Asu, I will now shift my focus on the other characters that mirror her. As explained earlier, Itim Asu is related to the Older Actress who portrays her and to Angelito's mother who channels Rajah Sulaiman. Furthermore, Itim Asu's battle is continued by Angelito who marries her daughter and right after avenges her death. Angelito then connects to the Young Actor who portrays him onstage and who in turn connects Itim Asu to the other roles he plays onstage, Simoun and Elias, and to Sakay whose life is very much similar to that of the Young Actor who idolizes him.

These afore-mentioned characters (the Young Actor, Simoun, Elias, Sakay, Angelito, Rajah Sulaiman, Angelito's mother, and the Older Actress) are all victims of some form of oppression or discrimination and are also revolutionaries living double lives. The Young Actor is secretly part of Sakay's guerilla group. Sakay, on the other hand, manages to evade author-

ities by using his roles as cover and by moving from one theater to another. Elias dies acting as a double for Ibarra while Simoun is Ibarra in disguise. Angelito is also a revolutionary drawn from the character of Emilio Melgar, a wealthy merchant by day and a guerilla leader by night in the novel *La Loba Negra*. Angelito's mother and Rajah Sulaiman are related to each other; the latter's spirit even possessed the former's body. Finally, the Older Actress, like her son, is secretly a revolutionary as hinted by her slip-of-the tongue wherein she accidentally reveals that she knows how to use a real gun.

The reason for these characters' involvement in the revolution is a prior experience of oppression or discrimination. Angelito's lineage has been doubted by authorities. In *Noli*, Elias is depicted as a wealthy man who lost everything once the identity of his real father is revealed. Ibarra suffers a similar fate and so hides only to return as Simoun. Rajah Sulaiman's kingship and the pre-colonial culture preserved by the native priestess ancestors of Angelito's mother have been undermined by colonizers. The Older Actress and the Young Actor are the drama's representatives for the real-life Filipinos who suffered under colonial rule. And, finally, Sakay has been oppressed even as a guerilla leader for he has been labeled as a bandit despite fighting for his country's freedom.

The other characters' and Itim Asu's attempt to strike back at their oppressors are ways of reciprocating the oppression they experienced. In other words, their involvement in guerilla movements and the revolution is their return to the colonizers, their *balik* or *ganti* to them. However, striking back at the oppressors, while empowering and, in some ways, may even be considered a necessary part of the process of working-through, is not supposed to be the end itself. Relating this to trauma theory, the moment of revenge and revolution may be interpreted as a release of the repressed which is understandably angry and uncontrollable for it has been concealed or buried for a very long time. But, returning to the colonial context, the reason for the upheaval is to return a sense of fairness and to reclaim one's rights. The Ilustrados wanted to be treated equally and the Katipuneros wanted freedom from oppressive rule. Simply put, there is a goal other than fighting, that is, to put things to right.

Similarly, the return of the repressed in the form of several characters in *The Onyx Wolf* can be assumed as attempts to put things to right. The repressed is making itself felt in order to finally rest knowing that freedom and equality have been won and, most of all, identity has been reclaimed. This, I believe, is the reason why the play does not end with a revolutionary actively firing shots at enemies and this time winning the battle.

As emphasized earlier, most characters carry on the battle mostly alone. When they die, the revolution takes a step backward before it moves forward again. In order for this not to happen again, the fight needs to reach everyone, thus, the need to perform the drama in front of the people of Manila. Notably, this drama begins with an invitation to "later on come onstage and play a part" (Moreno 26). The embodiment of the dead heroes are onstage and it is clear that they have passed away, but the battle to reclaim one's identity is now being passed on to the people of Manila. This may be the figurative meaning of Mang Norio's line saying that "the heroes now live on you, and you in them" (26).

Nevertheless, there is still a problem. How can identity be reclaimed if there are gaps in history? How will the story be ours if we do not even know the whole narrative? The drama provides a solution to this issue. It may not be the ideal solution, but it's a solution nonetheless: to use artistic imagination and recreate something out of the fragments that we still have. In the play, it is through Huseng Batute's stitching of various historical and fictional events that some sense of coherence is achieved. By putting the fictional alongside the historical, the Director Huseng Batute offers an interpretation of Philippine history and identity. This act relates to the goal of LaCapra's understanding of working-through—one wherein a sense of temporal sequence is regained, one wherein a clearer sense of past, present and future is achieved.

This emphasis on the power of the imagination intersects with the post-colonial project of re-working history which Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins argue in their book about post-colonial drama. They say that "post-colonial reworkings of the European master historical narrative are not always concerned with constructions of history *per se* but with constructing

the self in history" (108). This type of reworking of history is what Moreno accomplishes through the character of Huseng Batute, the director who constructs the repressed into his version of the Philippine narrative.

That said, the play not only reconstructs history based on the fragments but also incorporates the embodiment/s of the repressed in the reworked narrative of the nation. Because of this reworking, Moreno through Huseng Batute owns the fragments of history and in doing so returns not just vengeance but a new imagination of the nation. The narrative ceases to be just an anger-laden *pagbalik*, which in that case is only *pagganti*, but a positive response to an otherwise not-so-ideal situation. This idea leads us to the final appropriation of the concept of repetition, *pagbabalik* or coming home.

Pagbabalik: Repetition as a Way Home

It is important to take note of the event that enables the performance of Huseng Batute's play: the celebration of the naming of the streets of Manila after local heroes. The act of naming is very meaningful for naming is an exercise of power. That the streets of the Manilenyo's home will once again be named after local heroes is very symbolic. It may mean that the people of Manila are now reclaiming and re-familiarizing themselves with their home whose administration had once been taken away from them, making it truly an act of *pagbabalik* or coming home. This idea is reinforced by the theater company's spokesperson Mang Norio who says:

> We have come to celebrate the naming of your streets after the old heroes because they are dead and you now live in them…Since we cannot afford an elaborate stage or rich costumes or pay the real actors—you will recognize them as they face you as your neighbor, your son or your husband, your enemy or your friend but in this zarzuela, all are one.…Afterwards, you might want to come onstage and play a part—to relive those playing tonight. (26)

Clearly, that passage hints that the heroes, while already dead, still remain through the people of Manila who are still living. In the same way, the people of Manila are living on them both literally and figuratively because their homes are now standing on the streets named after the heroes and the

identity the people of Manila have now in a way depends on the beginnings set by the heroes. In more sense than one, the heroes now live in them and they live on their heroes.

I want to highlight the importance of the communal activity presented in the eighth and final scene of *The Onyx Wolf,* a scene so different from all the other ones that came before it. No longer is there a lone quixotic figure singlehandedly fighting the oppressor. Mang Norio, by emphasizing the role of the audience in the play, has broken the fourth wall and extended the battle to the people of Manila. Furthermore, that everyone seems to have a role to play underscores how acting-out can be utilized by drama to lead to working-through. It is not enough for Huseng Batute to just weave a narrative, the theater company needs to act it out onstage to literally and figuratively include the people of Manila.

Although a play is only an act, performing the repetitions in the narrative woven by Huseng Batute becomes a means for the actors to practice until they already understand what is happening. That the play is mostly comprised of rehearsals proves this point. As Ric Knowles, another critic writing about drama and memory, says: "All cultural memory is performative. It involves the transmission of culture through bodily practices such as ritual, repetitions, and habit" (49). The same goes for the people of Manila. They do not have to completely understand initially. It begins with the theater company transmitting their reimagination of the people's identity. The play is the means to transmit it whereas the people's taking part in the performance is the method to inscribe it in their memory. Simply put, the rehearsal becomes the tool to make sense of the narrative and acting-out eventually leads to working-through.

From Mourning to Morning

At this point, only one question remains: what is the purpose of enacting a funeral to begin the performance of the play-within-the-play in the final scene? In fact, all one gets to see or read is the funeral. One does not even get as far as the parts rehearsed in earlier scenes. What could be the meaning of this?

One needs to recall that part of the process of working-through the Philippine cultural trauma is to reclaim one's identity. Simply put, working-through, in this case, is also about remembering. According to critic Jocelyn Martin, "[b]oth remembering and mourning require from the person a two-fold process: firstly, one needs to allow for time to pass in order for remembering or mourning to be fully worked-out; secondly, these two experiences tend to move toward ideal results, namely recognition of reality (for remembering) and acceptance of reality (for mourning)" (105). This statement by Martin draws attention to the connection between remembering and mourning. Remarkably, Philippine cultural trauma, having resulted in a loss of memory, exhibits that connection. The range of the events included in the drama attest to the time that has elapsed. Now, to recognize who we are as a people entails a proper mourning of what has been lost and coming to terms with it.

Applying these ideas to *The Onyx Wolf*, one can assume that the performance of a ritual of burial follows what Michel de Certeau's insight about the interment of the past. In *Writing of History*, de Certeau argues that "[w]riting is a tomb in the double sense of the word in that, in the very same text, it both honors and eliminates [the dead]" (101). In the play, performing the burial honors the dead heroes because the purpose of the play is to celebrate the naming of the streets of Manila after them. Also, the performance eliminates the dead because a burial is an honorable way of putting the dead in their proper place, somewhere different from the space for the living.

In this case, the interment of the dead through the performance of Batute's play-within-a-play organizes the living and the dead. Going back to the idea that the revolutionaries in *The Onyx Wolf* represent the repressed returning, one can perceive the dead revolutionaries as related to the unconscious aspect of the mind. Consequently, the living is related to the conscious aspect. The delineation of the conscious and the unconscious, the living and the dead can, therefore, be considered as a way of acceptance and recognition of the way things should be. The repressed, now recognized and appeased, can be laid to rest. Not to be forgotten again, but to be put in its designated place and properly commemorated, so that the living can continue their lives.

Fig. 2. **The Manunggul Jar, a neolithic burial jar from Palawan. No rights reserved. From** *Wikimedia Commons*, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b5/Neolithic_Pottery_Burial_Jar%2C_Palawan%2C_890-710_BC_%2825144673285%29.jpg.

The understanding of the trauma having been transformed and the memory having been put in its rightful place allow the living to revisit it, but this time with a critical distance. This space to revisit the memory underscores that working-through is by no means linear and absolute. Going back to this memory at times and even acknowledging its impact are in fact part of working-through. What sets working-through apart from compulsive repetition is not letting the future be controlled by the trauma, the struggle to live a meaningful tomorrow despite the trauma.

At the end of the day, history is created through people's lived experience. While the burial in scene eight may refer to a pre-colonial ritual

of interment such as the one depicted in the Manunggul Jar, the scene as a whole may also remind us of the river chase towards the end of *Noli Me Tangere*. Here, Elias tries to boat Ibarra to safety, but realizing that they are being followed, conceals Ibarra and jumps into the river to mislead the constabularies. But before succumbing to death, he says: "I die without seeing dawn's light shining on my country… You, who will see it, welcome it for me… don't forget those who fell during the nighttime." (Rizal 416). That plea, I believe, is akin to the purpose of the final scene. And while Moreno's play ends with the people in awe, still not understanding what is unfolding before them (26), the people's reaction does not leave us with a negative ending. The theater company's performance is not yet finished. It is up to the audience, which in this case includes us, to grant Mang Norio's request that they, or rather we, come onstage and play a part.

The Philippine literary circle has accepted Mang Norio's challenge as evidenced by the number of works discoursing about our colonial history. They prove that colonization did leave indelible marks, both negative and positive, on the Filipino identity, but they also demonstrate the struggle to work-through and make sense of this trauma. Moreno's *The Onyx Wolf* sheds light on this matter. Because of its self-reflexive characteristic, it becomes a reflection of how the Philippine creative arts, specifically the literature, respond to the issue of colonization. Faced with a fragmented past, our writers and artists use creative means to assemble the remaining pieces, even looking at obscure, unorthodox sources. In this case, one can compare our writers to Itim Asu who embodies the return of the repressed. Consequently, they also go through the three-fold process of repetition: *pagpapabalik-balik, pagbalik, and pagbabalik.* Their constant revisiting of the colonial past, perhaps even doing research on it the way Huseng Batute does in the play, can be considered a process of going back and forth, whereas the texts themselves become their response to the oppressors as well as their gift to the people. Finally, the act of writing, being simultaneously a means to eliminate the dead and honor them, is their attempt to put the repressed to its designated place and allow the living to go on with their lives. In other

words, it is what LaCapra calls an attempt to understand the past and gain critical distance from it.

I use the word 'attempt' because the impact and success of each and every work is another matter which requires a more detailed examination. Furthermore, the process of working-through continues. Since cultural trauma involves a community—in this case, a nation—the process is even more complex and multi-faceted. We can only hope that these attempts may eventually encourage more and more people to respond to Mang Norio's call and play their respective parts.

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