

leg, head down,
—before
the ending shot

We gather papers and wrap
them in rubber-
bands & with
Post-Its mark
their importance:

saying without saying it—
“*I love you.*” Now
I leave this to
you to remem-
ber me ... as you go on

Such words speak of a man at peace with himself, who lets us in on the conversations he is having with himself and with whatever fixes his eye and heart. They may seem to be simple ruminations but there is nothing simplistic or, for that matter, pretentious about them. The discerning reader will note the underlying craft, and the deployment of a poetics that subordinates sense or meaning to a poetic sensibility without the poem’s being the less clear for that. These are the lyrics of a true poet, and in a quiet way they rage against the dying of the light.

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THEATER

Lorenzo. Written by Juan Ekis and Paul Dumol, with Joem Antonio. Music by Ryan Cayabyab. Directed by Nonon Padilla. Green Wings Entertainment. SDA Theater, College of St. Benilde, Manila. September 5–14, 2013.

At the center of the new rock opera *Lorenzo* is the diaspora experience, represented by two figures who live centuries apart. The premise of the story is simple

enough: Laurence, an OFW on death row somewhere in the Middle East, dictates the libretto of a musical he has written about San Lorenzo Ruiz to a reporter from Manila. The “play within a play” schema juxtaposes the lives of the two characters. Their stories are interwoven into a mesh of emotional and psychological dialogues within the space of a modern musical that is potentially relevant, poignant, and aesthetically sound.

A major theatrical work about the first Filipino saint is no longer a surprising venture. One can even ask why it took this long for anyone to produce something of this magnitude. Like all cultural products, especially one that has the life of a saint for its subject, this play has an evangelical goal. This play, however, recasts the myth-making process involved in the pursuit of that goal; it introduces a social intertext, one that anchors it in the modern world. The success of the discursive connection/negotiation between “Lorenzo” (the saint and martyr) and “Laurence” (the imprisoned OFW) is, of course, a matter of approaching the work outside of its obvious didactic impulses. There is nothing wrong with such impulses, but maybe the viewers need to go beyond those to account for all the layers of the work.

First of all, this is as much a story of Laurence as it is of Lorenzo. In many cases, one may see the play, including the religious angle, within the social context of various displacements: the colonial project, exile, immigration. The OFW character presumably finds guidance, inspiration, and eventual redemption in the life of the saint. Laurence’s conversion has more levels to it than one is allowed to imagine. His story, which inevitably represents the material conditions of migrancy that have persisted since the dawn of late capitalism, oftentimes compels viewers to see multivalent interrelationships that transcend the moral dilemma and the spiritual moorings of a religious play. His intrusions as author, albeit made to rhetorically call attention to the saint’s story, bring to the fore the materiality of the immigrant condition as consequence of neocolonialism.

The play’s “imaginary” permits the perpetuation of an intermediary space between Laurence and Filipino diaspora. Paul Dumol claims that Laurence’s story is embedded in Lorenzo’s story. However, while Laurence dictates the libretto to the reporter, it is his agency, not Lorenzo’s, that is enacted. By casting Lorenzo’s story as a text within the framework of a musical, the play unconsciously foregrounds the OFW’s tale, not the saint’s. Lorenzo as text, then, becomes a representational myth for a residual history of oppressions. Laurence’s moment of provisional agency empowers the migrant worker to tell the tale just before his imminent death. In the process, the victim accounts for the remainder or anomaly, and allows it to surface from homogenous determinations of the grand narratives of world history and economy.

The multi-layered references in *Lorenzo* can be too formalistic, too rhetorical and organic to a fault. The play tries too hard to become literary. Everything, but

primarily the parallelisms (from the stories of the main characters to the juxtaposed scenes, down to the smallest detail like the naming of the OFW character), was too neat and hence, limiting. The rhetoricism in Ryan Cayabyab's music, though, is just right, and it is balanced with his natural gift for melody and execution. It is a perfect complement to Paul Dumol and Juan Ekis's text. There is nothing fancy or complex about the music; nonetheless, it is proof of how brilliant a melodist he can be. The rock idiom surely plays a big role in supporting that required intensity for many scenes, but the poignancy of Cayabyab's melodies is what provides the necessary perspective to make sense of the emotional arch of the play. Most of the actors, fortunately, understand the correspondence. Lorenz Martinez's Lorenzo is consistent and confident. OJ Mariano as Laurence is luminous, both his acting and singing heartbreakingly memorable.

Nonon Padilla's direction is, in more ways than one, a lucid conversation between affect and effect. It is a poetic vision realized within the equally poetic spatio-temporal platform designed by Gino Gonzales, where truth or reality (as well as their transfigured Other that we call human imagination), past and present, all engage in a more dynamic and ambivalent (thus ultimately better) understanding of ourselves as Filipinos.

In the end, *Lorenzo* makes for entertaining theater, despite being sidelined by agendas, questionable representations, and whatnot. These views about the play are not meant to undermine Lorenzo's role within the play or in real life. On the contrary, they try to relocate him from his token position as the first Filipino saint to a more central position, as the patron saint of OFWs. His story can be contextualized within contemporaneous and contemporary resistances against myopic appraisals of national and personal histories existing outside of hegemonic enclosures and imaginings of universality.

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