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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Lives Away from Home and Precarious Writing as Life: Reading Bienvenido Santos's *Postscript to Saintly Life*

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Abstract
Towards the end of his writing career, Bienvenido Santos published two autobiographies, *Memory's Fictions* and *Postscript to Saintly Life*—a departure in a writing life mostly devoted to penning fictional works. This paper focuses on the last autobiography which mainly looks at Santos's experiences as a *pensionado* in America. It pays attention to how Santos writes about his Philippine home while in exile, taking part in a program that is part of the American colonial period. The range of Santos's emotions—with shame and pride on both ends—while abroad is also examined. How these emotions were manifested in the book served as springboard to analyze Santos's thoughts about his pensionado experience and locate hints of his insights regarding the fraught post-colonial relationship between the host-land America, and his homeland Philippines. The paper takes off from, and engages the postulations of Timothy Bewes about shame in postcolonial writing, and of Dylan Rodriquez about the violence inhering in the US–Philippine relations. The paper concludes by highlighting how Santos reaffirms the material force of writing, especially in the context of an exiled writer ceaselessly conjuring his native land, and pining for his return.

Keywords: Philippine–American relations, pensionado system, diasporic writing, autobiography, post-colonialism

In opening the chapter "Autobiography and History," Caroline Hau quotes Linda Ty-Casper who wrote that "If a country's history is its biography, its literature is its autobiography." She then annotates that this remark "bears out the auto/biographical dimension of nation formation in the sense that telling the nation's "life story" is an intrinsic aspect of constituting the nation as a specific form of community" (Hau 107). Taking off from this, I can proffer the slightly oblique inversion that any auto/biographical endeavor has a national dimension, or any larger dimension where both the autobiographical work and its writer are located. Put differently, the writing of a personal life story inevitably—wittingly or not—touches on the story of a larger community, and thus can be read alongside these lines.

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As a seemingly trivial, but in fact rhetorically significant gesture, I would like to cue this early how Linda Ty-Casper's husband, Leonard Casper figured as well in Bienvenido Santos's *Postscript to a Saintly Life* (hereafter, *Postscript*). In the essay "Trips, Mostly with My Daughter," Santos described Leonard Casper as his "favorite critic," one of the Filipino critics who gave a "tepid and often cold reception" to Santos's *Robert Taylor* novel (Santos 59). The irony here previews the point about humility to be tackled below. In pursuing this preliminary analysis of Santos's second and last autobiography, I will be mostly relying on this method of convening statements and ruminations scattered throughout the book and building from them the themes that can be read into this work. Applying this kind of constellational reading to the twenty-one essays, the paper wishes to discuss three, interrelated main themes: (1) the intertwined matters of home and (being in) exile, being a pensionado and a Filipino in America (2) the range of feelings vacillating between shame and pride and (3) the efficacy and power of writing as conceived by Santos.

Together, these themes offer glimpses of how Santos navigated his way from being a public school teacher in the Philippines, and then a pensionado abroad to someone who has an ambivalent attitude toward the entire experience of being far away from home, constantly seeking it, and as the essays here show, conjuring it in his writings.

This discussion will simultaneously be guided by, and engage, Timothy Bewes's and Dylan Rodriguez's elaborations on the post-colonial situation. Speaking about "writing after colonialism," Bewes notes the "shame in the gap between the impossibility of speaking and the impossibility of not speaking," the gap between the obligation to write and the impossibility of writing (42–5). He pronounces this while talking about "Postcolonial Shame and the Novel," after developing his three preliminary theses: (1) Shame is not a 'subjective' emotion (2) Shame is not an 'ethical' response and (3) Shame is ontologically inseparable from the forms in which it appears (Bewes 23–41). The Deleuzian strain clearly undergirds Bewes's propositions: favoring becoming over being, "'the molecular sludge of matter" and 'the disbodied' exhilaration of vehicular movement" over the body's unity and organicity.

I wish to engage Bewes's Deleuzian propositions by infusing them with a materialism more historically grounded and socially palpable. I can extend Bewes's third thesis for instance, by attempting to concretize the "forms" he speaks of. I turn to Franco Moretti's description of "forms as abstracts of social relations," which he made in the context of the European novel's "importation" into colonized countries (65). Not only does shame materialize in literary forms or forms of writing, shame can also bring to the fore the historical relations and social events which surround its formation. Thus, I wish to inflect Bewes's tone, closer as it is to the side of the negative, the mere recognition of failure—the very materiality of writing rehearses its inadequacy, " literary eloquence" gasps for air in the face of "inconsequence" (65). I will attempt to read into the supposed failures of, the "gap" embodied by, postcolonial writing—whether novels or autobiographies like Santos's *Postscript*—and point to the social contradictions arising from the postcolonial encounter as the conditions of possibility for these writings. These conditions in turn can be acknowledged, and then open the very possibilities for their transcendence.

The same acknowledgment and possibility for transcendence are gestured in Dylan Rodriquez's *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition*. Here, he repeatedly calls for different disarticulations that can rupture projections of universality, unity, and homogeneity (including Filipino–American allegiance to the US nation-building, a mystified Asian pantheism (178 and 179), and most familiarly, the colonizers' smooth handing over of the reins to the colonized indios after the period of "tutelage"). He draws a parallel between the contemporary "labors and imaginations of Filipino–American communion" with the "incipient colonial civil society enacted in the early twentieth-century U.S. program of 'benevolent assimilation'" (97). Santos's experiences in, and with, America occupies the middle of the timeline implied in the previous sentence: the post-colonial mid-20th century superseding the turn-of-the-century occupation, and preceding the 21st century's aspirations to be integrated in the American multiculturalist dreamworld.

Santos's autobiographical articulations can be used to disarticulate, or at least problematize—both towards historicizing—the colonial and post-colonial ties between America and the Philippines. As a piece of writing, *Postscript* is mostly devoted to Santos's time away from home, in America, first as a beneficiary of the

pensionado system, and eventually as a legal citizen. At the risk of bifurcating, shame gravitates more to these two events that pulled him toward America, while pride is more reserved for recollections of, and experiences in the Philippines. The next sections shall detail and complicate this bifurcation further.

In Exile, A Pensionado

It is hardly surprising that Santos's musings on the experience of being away from the Philippines recur throughout the autobiographical work. He spent a considerable portion of his life in America, notably as a pensionado at the onset, and eventually acquiring US citizenship. Part of the American colonial program, the pensionado system sent Filipino scholars abroad to train them in various professions—from urban planning and public administration to the arts and education. The program aligns with American "benevolent assimilation," readying Filipinos for self-governance by making them adopt American models and value systems.

The final essay in the book, however, details Santos's visit to Lubao after nearly seven decades, before making clear in the short conclusion that he was able to actualize what he earlier dreamed "of one day going home to the Philippines and settling down for good" (131). It must be noted as well that Santos's exile was less due to compulsion than his choice—having participated in the "constitutional mandate" (83) that is the pensionado system—although he recalled one instance when their regular visit to the Philippines had to be postponed because of the imposition of Martial Law (10). Writing in America, and about his experiences in this foreign country, Santos constantly recalls his homeland, attaching his experiences and memories there to his life abroad.

In the recollections and connections made, we can see the range of emotions and attitudes Santos had about his life in exile. In "Chicago! Chicago!," he wrote of how "it was so much more peaceful and sweet and uncomplicated at home at the foot of Mt. Mayon. What was I doing in Chicago?" (41), the explicit questioning hinting at a more profound sense of longing for the homeland. A slightly different emotion—or affect—can be sensed in what he wrote about a party in the essay "Honolulu…Manila": "What I remembered best of that occasion were the members of an all-Filipino band composed of old timers, one of them in a wheelchair. They looked like the grandparents I had known and loved in my childhood in (Tondo) Sulucan" (44). Here, there is less a possibly embittered questioning than a heartier observation, seeing the links between encounters in America and in the Philippines.

In the face of the teetering emotions and attitudes toward a life in exile, one solid thing arguably stays unwavering: not just the thoughts about the homeland, but the desire to return. As Santos wrote in "Mortality: Death of Dear Friends," "All exiles want to go home. Many of the old Filipinos in the United States, as in these stories, never return, but in their imagination make the journey a thousand times, taking the slowest boats because in their dream world time is not as urgent as actual time passing, quicker than arrows, kneading their flesh, crying on their bones" (133).

Santos's words have affinities with a statement of Mariano Ponce, a 19th-century *ilustrado* and "considered one of the [Propaganda] movement's 'great triumvirate' together with Jose Rizal and Marcelo del Pilar" (Mojares 155). Having lived through the 20th century, unlike Rizal and del Pilar, Ponce also saw the various shifts the movement has undergone from its reformism during Spanish occupation, to the short-lived Philippine Revolution, and the first years of American colonization. Mojares notes not just Ponce's broad contributions to the movement but also the travels he extensively did in the process: "through these shifts, no one of his generation was as actively engaged in the international work of the Philippine campaign, writing propaganda, soliciting assistance, and building alliances" (Mojares 155). Later in the same essay, Mojares quotes Ponce's description of the exile's yearning for the homeland: "all that their eyes see take on the hue and scent of the native land, named by the names one first learned from a mother's lips. All flowers become sampaga, kampupot; all mountains become Sinukuan, Mayon, or Makiling; the rivers Seine, Thames, or Kamogawa take on the appearance of the Pasig" (Mojares 176). Santos speaks of imagined journeys to the homeland; Ponce, of the homeland invading one's vision, as if inducing hallucinations.

This quick comparison with Ponce's descriptions can now signal a broader comparison to Santos's exile and that of his predecessors, the Ilustrados. In turn, this can help in historicizing the exiles of these Filipinos from different generations, and under different colonial regimes—one Spanish, the other American.

It is a lovely, coincidental turn-of-phrase, Santos's use of the words "slowest boats" in the above quote. That description resonates with the literally lengthy travels from Philippines to Europe based on what was technologically available during Rizal's time.[1] The journeys made in different contexts are distinct from each other: the Ilustrados during Spanish colonization endured not only lengthier travel time, but generally more desperate conditions. Meanwhile, pensionados like Santos had it easier because of the reduced travel time and the fact that their travels abroad were sanctioned, institutionalized by the host country, which also happened to be the new colonizer.

In the essay "The Travelling Filipino," Mojares presents a table totaling the amount of time to reach Cadiz, Spain from Manila—with at least six layovers—to almost 44 days (Mojares 145). What differs is not only the modes and lengths of travels but also the overall texture of the journey and what it says about the colonial regimes and how the Filipino exiles positioned themselves there. While Santos acknowledged, and took advantage of the pensionado system as a "constitutional mandate," Ilustrados like Rizal and Ponce were operating under a less amicable colonial context. The Ilustrados not only pursued things that have broader significance—for being anti-colonial in character, and as an indirect result, postulating the possibility of a(n independent) nation—they also did so in the face of a less liberal, more restrictive colonial setting. The same cannot be said of Santos, whose participation in the American pensionado program, can be read as his latent acquiescence to, if not approval, of the colonizer's nation-building of the Philippines. In Santos's context then, there was already a "nation" formally existing, and there is lesser urgency not just in what drives one to travel abroad, but also in what to give back to the nation when one returns.

Mojares turned to the Malay *rantau* in describing Rizal's travels: "a journey to a distant land to seek a fortune (wealth, skills, knowledge), that one brings back to one's village and kin" (Mojares 149). The same can be said of Santos's travels, both in what he sought abroad and the desire to give back to the community where he came from, only that what constituted the latter is not something as magnanimous as "freedom," or "independence," however bordering on the abstract, and thus clamoring for concrete actualization. Instead, what he gave back is best exemplified by his books, his writings, with that touching reunion with his cousin Pacing serving as an encouraging episode at the book's end. Culminating the essay "Lubao Revisited After Sixty-seven Years," is Pacing showing Bining (Santos, as Pacing fondly called him) all his authored books "wrapped in cellophane and looking as new as when they were published" and Bining autographing them, one by one, in Capampangan, as Pacing requested (Santos 168–9). Hence, both the Ilustrados and Santos "gave back" books (and other writings) to the homeland, only that, again, the vital difference is that the former wrote to help in positing and creating the nation against direct colonization, while the latter wrote with the encouragement of the new colonizers who also hijacked for their interests the inception of Philippine nation-building.

A pensionado, Santos was a direct beneficiary of the more underhanded and benevolent brand of American colonialism. At least in this collection, there was no explicit textual evidence of Santos being critical of the American colonial government. At most, there are hints of ambivalence: at most, little jabs at the American way of life, even though they come more in the form of personal plaints rather than direct critiques of the system. He shared, for instance, how he knew he was back in the US because it takes months before medical appointments can push through. With no direct statement from Santos, we are left to read this anecdote symptomatically, as suggestive of the quality of healthcare in 'First World' America. Elsewhere are glimmers of pride: he shared several instances when he participated in American civil service or in national events connected to the Philippines. From joining "Philippine–American celebrations of Philippine Independence Day in Washington, D.C." (46) to "visit[ing] schools and communities all over the continental United States on instructions from the Office of Special Services (later CIA) with the cooperation of the Philippine Government in Exile in Washington, D.C.… (28). These glimmers of pride square with the two "broadly pitched desires" Rodriquez mentions in the context of post-(1946) independence Filipino–American aspirations: (1) civil recognition and (2) cultural valorization (34). More of this will be tackled in the next section, but it suffices to say for now that pride and shame equally figure in *Postscript*, manifesting its ambivalent attitude.

Memory's Fictions, Santos's first autobiography, includes one anecdote which underlines and extends the idea of ambivalence. Here, Santos recalls an

incident when he submitted an essay for his English composition class, then handled by an American high school teacher. The teacher was not convinced that it was really Santos who penned the essay given the quality of the output (*Memory's Fictions* 43–4). It is perhaps either eerie or irritatingly unsurprising that around half a century later, another Filipina–American writer,[2] Elaine Castillo would write about a roughly similar experience: "Teachers in the Mountain View/Los Altos region of the Bay Area where I attended junior high and high school—significantly whiter and wealthier than the Milpitas schools I attended throughout elementary school—often seemed threatened, occasionally enraged, by the idea of a smart, bookish, and vocally irreverent Filipinx kid" (*How to Read Now*). Both anecdotes foreground a racially colored disjunct, inviting denialism: you cannot be this good at writing in English, you're a Filipino, this must not be your work. You could not have read these many books—and the classics, at that—you're a Filipina, you must be lying when you say that you've read Plato's Symposium. White people are the one speaking, making judgments, evaluating the capacities of the nonwhite body (and intellect).

The ambivalence, if not tension, being highlighted in the anecdote from *Memory's Fictions* is intensified by the fact that it took place in the Philippines, hence, before Santos's pensionado days in America. In a way, he was shamed in his country, in a public education setting where ironically, American teachers are in charge, as if anticipating what he would experience abroad. Zeroing in on that incident further would recall and magnify the familiar post-colonial relations between America and the Philippines, or more accurately, the face of American colonization's "benevolent" assimilation. It is the same and continuing post-colonial relations that are differently magnified in Castillo's anecdote: the experience of Filipina–Americans in a country marred both by its internal racism and its empire-building elsewhere (including the homeland Philippines).

The anticipations mentioned here thus link with the meat of Rodriguez's provocations: against the aspirations encapsulated in late 20th and 21st century Filipino–Americanism, there is the "constitutive alienation," the ineradicable irreconcilability between Filipino diaspora and violent US nation-building (Rodriguez 11, 26). This gives a more material face to Lukacs's "transcendental homelessness" Bewes repeatedly invokes. The anecdotal anticipations from Santos's autobiographies can hint a discussion on any traces of Santos's reflexive thinking about his position in the context of a new colonial period in his beloved homeland. At best, I can echo what I said above that *Postscript* alone does not provide much of a textual support to talk about Santos's explicit stance. Alternatively, I can harp on this absence—deliberate or not—and read it as emblematic of recognizing the dispensation instituted by the new colonizers. Yet another, more considerate view could point out that politics, conceived in a narrower sense, does not interest Santos (131, 135), as he himself wrote at least twice here, and that perhaps in keeping with certain preconceptions about the autobiographical genre, he sought to zero in more on the personal. And yet again, another retort waits in the offing, insisting on the intertwinements of the personal and the political, the individual being indivisible from the community where they belong, as Terry Eagleton reminds us (34).

This cues another set of comparison, involving a contemporary of Santos: Carlos Bulosan. Fittingly, Bulosan appears in the book, in the essay "Trips, Mostly with My Daughter." On the same part where he called Leonard Casper as his favorite critic, he spoke of another critic who called him "a cry baby compared to Bulosan" (59). Santos then added that "it hurt very much because perhaps it was true. I knew Carlos Bulosan; I knew him well" (59). In her introduction to the book *Carlos Bulosan and His Poetry*, Susan Evangelista said something about Bulosan that can be sharply contrasted with the tendencies evinced in Santos's *Postscript*. Evangelista noted Bulosan's "comprehensive understanding of the political and economic forces" undergirding historical events "so that even the racial discrimination he faced as a Filipino in California was not a personal matter but a stage in history, a part of the historical struggle toward liberation" (1). Such historical awareness seems to be lacking in *Postscript*, and in its place are musings and the uncovering of emotion and feelings.

The autobiographical works of later writers can further illustrate how the relationships between the political and the personal are explicated in autobiographies. In his Introduction to Lualhati Milan Abreu's *Agaw-dilim, Agaw-liwanag*, Ramon Guillermo differently rendered the dialectical relationship between "personal" and collective or social histories. He emphasizes the former more, but only to show how they can be infused with politics, and made more

meaningful in a larger contextualization: "Malinaw na hindi nakasasapat ang purong kasaysayan lamang ng mga puwersang panlipunan, pang-ekonomiya at pang-organisasyon. Dito makikita na ang maipapalagay na labis na personal na bagay ay maaari ding magkaroon ng malalim na dimensiyong pulitikal" (Abreu xii). A relational and dialectical view would strive to look for, and establish the connections between minute details or mundane events, and not only their larger social placements but also the discursive and institutional forces that give them meaning, that make them possible.

Such approach can be mobilized to read into the spectrum of feelings, or affects manifested in *Postscript*. Diametrically opposed in this spectrum are feelings of shame and pride, tangled with a cluster of events both in the Philippines and abroad, from marrying his wife Aquing and deciding to be a pensionado, to representing the Philippines in writers' events abroad and eventually becoming a US citizen.

Shame and Vulnerabilities: Economic, Intimate, Structural

Perhaps one of the fundamental questions in writing an autobiography is concerned not yet with artistic or curatorial decisions—as in, what parts of my life will I write about, how will I write about them?—but with questions on personhood—how much of, or what facets of myself do I want to share in writing this autobiography? Writing about one's life—a subject matter that is replete, and at once intimate, and yet by virtue of the inevitable recollections, also distant—thus poses the challenge of selection. One can easily focus on the highlights and the triumphs, or the travails and how one superseded and learned from them. No matter the apparent effort to project a desirable self-image, the very act of deciding to do an autobiography can also be read as slightly against the common attribution of self-centered navel-gazing to the genre. Doing an autobiography implies a decision to be vulnerable, not least because of the attendant self-examination and sharing to the reader whatever one finds.

It is in this light that I generously appreciate the underlying humility in Santos's *Postscript*. This humility is constituted not so much by self-effacing as by openly admitting and sharing the author's insecurities. This was best evidenced in Santos's descriptions of his relationship with his wife Aquing (Beatriz Nidea), their eventual marriage and having a family and ultimately, his decision to apply to become a pensionado. Severally, Santos mentioned how Aquing used to receive higher pay, how she was one of the topnotchers in a test he failed (68) and how even one time, "she had a job and I had none" (9). These worries began intensifying when their family life started. That is when "he realized that my wife Beatriz would have to work all her life to help me raise a family and send our children to college" (79). Paragraphs later in the same essay, "Pensionados to the USA," Santos hinted at the coupling, and eventually the transcendence of, shame with a growing sense of responsibility. He wrote, "They looked so smart, my daughters. … I had to have enough money so that together, Aquing and I could give my daughters everything they need" (80). This spelled the primary motives for his application to become a pensionado, not as historically grand as what compelled the Ilustrados to travel abroad but tenably no less well-intentioned.

Part of what drove Santos then to subscribe to, and apply under the pensionado system is "the silent compulsion of economic relations" (Marx, quoted in Ebert and Zavarzadeh 73). Economic exigencies, tied to the growing needs of his family and his sense of responsibility, led Santos to America. The conditions where Santos made his decision were similarly not far from what Ebert was discussing: the workers' situation of "in-between-ness: the situation in which the short-term contract places the subject of labor between having a job and losing it. The laboring subject remains constantly 'uncertain' and thus becomes acquiescent" (72). In a way, Santos was in a worse state since he was unemployed, not even in a contractual job position. This comparison shall reaffirm that even knowledge workers—including professional teachers—are workers too, and that despite the residual belief in the distinction between manual and mental labor, the two kinds of workers have more commonalities than differences. More, what drove Santos to apply to the pensionado system—and thus be implicated in this neocolonial project filled with tension—is a quite literally domestic unease, stemming from the self-expectation that one helps in providing for one's family.

Once in America, the feelings of shame and insecurity did not entirely go away; they were still creeping in here and there, gnawing at Santos as he performed what was expected of him. He differentiated

himself from his fellow pensionados, especially those who appeared to be "so sure of themselves." Contrarily, he described himself as "the insecure pensionado from the slums of Tondo, Manila; I can say that in all those years I was never really alone because the fear of failure kept me company" (83–4). The feeling of shame had its peak expression, ironically in a 1986 program that was part of celebrating the bicentennial independence of America. Part of the program was honoring "the most distinguished from among the hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the Philippines to the U.S.A. who had become American Citizens" (73). Along with a Judge and another who worked with the Small Business Bureau of the U.S. Federal Government, Santos was honored ten years after becoming a US citizen. He shared the "most memorable question asked" of them three: on whether they felt guilty when they decided to become a US citizen (75). As Santos wrote, "The Judge admitted he felt guilty, but was eloquent in explaining why he had to be an American citizen. I had trouble explaining because, at that time, I was overcome by shame, which, however brief and passing, somehow put a damper on my defense. Mr. S. never felt guilty about it. He had always wanted to become an American citizen. And now he was. An honored one at that. I envied the man. I still do." (75). That is how that essay "Awards and Distinctions," ended: with the admittance of shame and envy almost in a single breath. Somehow, an essay that was supposedly about gaining accolades did not end up effusing excessive pride and self-absorption, but quite the opposite. There is something admirable not just in Santos recognizing these feelings but more so in disclosing them in this book.

Anecdotes like this are laden with contradictions, inviting interventions to flesh out both the underlying intricate social relations and one's way of processing them. One can easily go on denouncing how Santos has swallowed, and bowed to the American dream—even while forgetting to examine the structural sources of the appeal of this dream instead of individualizing those who succumb to it—but his writings about it reveals no milk and honey. Even at the moment when he officially and legally became an American citizen, it was not complete pride and reassurance that engulfed him. There will be no dearth in the moments of pride and confidence, but they derive not from one's American citizenship or one's immersion in this foreign land, but from one's lingering relationship with, and pining for the Philippines, mainly forged through the material practice of writing. Before I dwell into this concluding point, I would like to bring up again the idea of vulnerability.

I mentioned above how vulnerability can be expected in the autobiographical genre, even as this association is interrogated to not appear automatic, a given. A quick discussion of other Filipino writers' autobiography is in order. Like in *Postscript*, feelings of shame abound in Rene O. Villanueva's *Personal*. In the book's first part, "Matris ng Memorya," which mostly revolves around his childhood, Villanueva shared how he was ashamed of his father's work as a caminero/streetsweeper (Villanueva 6, 13). He also felt shame when his father got paralyzed and he had to take care of him. He does not want to be seen near his father not just because of shame but also because of his vexation at people who kept asking about his father's condition when it is made plainly visible by his very body (Villanueva 21). In the second part of the book, Villanueva would talk about shame in the context of his adolescent, sexual awakening: when he was sneakily reading "bomba" komiks or watching such films in parts of Manila.

In Abreu's *Agaw-dilim, Agaw-liwanag*, both "shame" and "vulnerability" seem to take on greater magnitude given the events told here, and the author's place in it: the Oplan Missing Link (OPML) and the Kampanyang Ahos (Kahos) that victimized Abreu, but which she also survived. OPML and Kahos were committed by certain section of the Communist Party of the Philippines and whose errors are rectified, and whose lessons are summed up in Party documents published in the 1990s.[3] The words "humiliating" and "vulnerability" may fall short in describing what Abreu and her friends and comrades suffered during the implementation of OPML and Kahos. Abreu herself distances from these attributions or readings, instead linking what she personally suffered to a larger, systematic error, so that what was supposed to "shame" her and rendered her vulnerable—the perpetrators of OPML and Kahos—were also exposed, put up for historical evaluation. But the end here is not mere denunciation, the throwing of judgments of condemnation. In a characteristic phrasing, Abreu ties herself with a larger movement: "Salamat, pero ayoko nang awa. Ang gusto ko—at ang nararapat—ay matuto sa aming karanasan ang sinumang babasa: kadre man o masang aktibista, legal man o andergrawnd, organisado man o simpatisador, o maging sinumang mamamayan

na interesado sa kilusang rebolusyonaryo" (xvi). The "shamed" individual, made vulnerable by torture and psychological manipulation, musters enough courage to talk about what she suffered and how she survived. Not only courage, but keen, objective insights were gathered so that lessons can be learned from a horrendous episode not just in an autobiography, but a political movement's history.

Finally, Jun Cruz Reyes "authobiographical" novel *Ang Huling Dalagang Bukid at ang Authobiography na Mali: Isang Imbestigasyon*, plays around, if not combines, literary genres like the novel and the autobiography.[4] In "Ako ang Mali," he spoke of the idea of the "unhappy childhood" usually mobilized in autobiographies and listed several Filipino authors and the "unhappy childhoods" contained in their autobiographical writings: from Ricky Lee's aunt being physically abused, Eugene Evasco being made servant by his grandfather in its poultry, to Jose Rey Munsayac being orphaned at an early age, and yes, Rene O. Villanueva having no permanent home when he was young (Reyes 89). He then used them as points of contrast to forward an observation: Reyes did not exactly have an "unhappy childhood"—although he recalled overhearing adults that he will die early mainly because of his physical constitution, the same condition which made his parents "spoil" him—and yet he can write a deliberately misspelled, and erroneous "authobiography" out of his equally rich experiences and encounters from childhood. Having an "unhappy childhood," or experiencing any shameful, or excruciating or traumatic event is thus not a prerequisite for autobiographical writing. Put differently in the context of *Postscript*, and following Bewes, "shame" resulting from an unhappy childhood or any prior experience is not some ontologically stable subject that can be readily expressed, if at all. Instead, shame takes life in its "subtractive effect" (Bewes 118), permeating the entire writing, so that the "fundamental dissonance" (Bewes 116) trumps any attempt to impose any form of coherence. Shame is not some preexisting feeling or emotion that needs to be expressed, if not processed and resolved, through writing.

It is both interesting and telling that Santos was not included in the writers Reyes mentioned above, and I suspect that this is because Santos's childhood was not significantly covered in his autobiographies, at least in *Postscript*. The first part of Reyes's postulation—the "unhappy" in "unhappy childhood"—does not exactly apply with Santos's *Postscript* as well. While the economic impetus for Santos's decision to apply as pensionado has been tackled in the book and furthered in this essay, it was not presented like an immensely tormenting episode in the former. If anything, what it signaled is not despondent hardships but admirable foresight and a sense of responsibility. It was certainly a challenge that bothered Santos, but it was hurdled, especially with the strong support of his wife, Aquing, who encouraged him to take the examinations. Hence, focus was given more on the resolution rather than the constraint, properly paving the way for the pensionado experience which is in the heart of *Postscript*.

Prideful Writing: In Exile, Back at Home

In teetering between shame and pride, the latter is mostly ignited by identifications with the Philippines. Such identifications occur in formal ceremonies, wherein Santos was a participant or just an observer. In Bangkok for the Asean Write Award, he called the attention of the organizers to the incorrect name of the country opposite his name "embossed on a side wall" (54). He also admitted to "get[ting] all soft inside" when he saw "a 'Miss Philippines' crowned 'Miss Universe' twice in recent years" (76). Again, these episodes betoken pride for, no longer just Santos's longing to return to, his homeland. The vital difference here is that the longing can sometimes verge on the melancholic and the debilitating and while pride can be unhealthily expressed, what the above experiences showed is Santos's proactive attitude, as if proudly claiming his identification with the Philippines. The longing can express dismay at the present position—being abroad, not in one's native country—as if the writer is impaled, helpless. On the contrary, pride gives off a sense of acceptance, no longer bemoaning one's being abroad, and thus enabled to take active pride.

Writing as material force plays a huge part in such distinction. It is not only that writing can recall and conjure the homeland being pined for; it can be an instrument in making sense of the distance, reversing the relationship so that the writer beckons the homeland, instead of the other way around. It is such beckoning that is repeatedly mentioned in the book, with Santos ceaselessly professing his desire to return to the Philippines even as he continually did good in what brought him to America, ultimately earning him a

legal citizenship. Playing a huge part in this privileged position, writing enables the exiled writer to navigate and make sense of his conditions.

Here, we circle back to the constant in *Postscript*: the Philippines as muse, as material space, as the homeland that beckons. This is where Santos ended his book, with the Conclusion dated May 02, 1994, and written in the Brothers Community, in the De La Salle campus at Taft. This also paves the ground for the conclusion: the power of the "written word" Santos exhibited in this work, the world he has made through it—"through invention or imagination" (104), and if I may add, through recollection and memorialization—as he patiently awaits the opportunity to return home, realizing when that time arrived that he has "quite a bit of writing to do and I intend to do it, here in my old sad house if Mayon would spare it again" (171). He has been doing his writing elsewhere, away from home, so one can feel the pulsating tone in expressing that intention: here, I am back at home; here, I will write and write. Again, he conveys humility in describing the state of his house, and in acknowledging the precarity of his writing practice, given his home's proximity to an active volcano. Such admission of precarity can offset any romanticization of writing. Too, it points to the concrete in painting writing's precarity: it is precarious not just because of the continually troubled process of signification, and the "inadequacy" of words, but also because of the material environment where writing transpires. Writing takes place in the concrete: near subways, inside university offices, away from home, near an active volcano, always possibly preparing for eruption. Humility coupled with a grounded conviction, he wrote, "This is where I can write the way I want to as if I were the only writer left in the world who has come home at last. As if my writing were life…as if the written word were life itself. It is" (171). Through the written words he has assembled and left behind, Bienvenido Santos lives. His life reaffirms and renews a cliché: a life characterized not so much by impeccability and just its glorious moments but by the all-too-human acknowledgement of one's vulnerabilities and shames, and using them as lovely springboard for the creative endeavors one doggedly pursues, from provincial Lubao to gregarious Greeley and back home to the Philippines, in Mayon.

Endnotes

[1] Here is both a complement and a "counterpose" from Bewes: "Correspondingly, for Gilroy, the slave ship should be counterposed as an image of modernity to the modern nation state. Ships, he writes, "were the living means by which the points within [the] Atlantic world were joined…As such, ships emblematize the possibility of a nonidentitarian relation to identity… (Bewes 49). In contrast, ships—no matter lengthy the travels they facilitated—were highly crucial in the rudimentary efforts to establish a national identity. Arguably therefore, the ships of the 19th-century ilustrado were not yet about any "nonidentitarian relation to identity" but the slow crystallization and construction of an identity.

[2] Although I am fairly certain that Elaine Castillo would rather be identified as "Filipinx." Such preference, and the very existence of a new term of identification reveal changes in the diasporic experience in general, and in Filipino–American identities in particular, as informed and refracted by US–Philippines relations. There are other layers of specificity: how Fil–ams, or Filipinx, make sense of, and perform their identities, and how they situate those in the fraught and linked histories of these two "nations," postcolonial theory's homeland, and hostland.

[3] Laurence Castillo's "Fictionalizing Error in Edberto Villegas's *Barikada*" centers "the idea of errors as experiential resources" as seen in Edberto Villegas's novel *Barikada*. Even in different literary genres and points of view, both Villegas's novel and Milan Abreu's autobiographical work arguably share the same project: confront, and keep open, a historical episode marred by highly consequential errors ("hindi ito dapat sarhan, na ang ibig sabihin ay kalimutan na ito nang tuluyan" (Abreu xix)) and "assess the events, and abide by the imperative to continue and strengthen the revolution, this time, bearing the lessons gleaned from the errors (Castillo 44).

[4] An equally meritorious "label" would be U Elizerio's "metafiction."

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