

POSTCOLONIAL PHARMAKON

Traumatic Transmission in Tony Perez's *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*

Ryan Ku
Swarthmore College
rku1@swarthmore.edu

Abstract

Tracing Tony Perez's Filipino modernism in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* to trauma, this article considers whether the novel's processing of psychic trauma also amounts to the processing of national trauma. Seemingly positing representation as the means of traumatic processing, Perez, in distinguishing the unconscious transmission of the traumatic event from the conscious narration of its aftereffects, in fact premises representation on deconstruction. Consisting in the displaced and deferred repetition, or writing, of trauma, this process is facilitated in the novel by three discursive practices—Catholicism, psychotherapy, and creative writing—that are derived from the colonial history of the Philippines. Rather than corresponding to the nation's postcolonial trauma, psychic trauma in the novel is thus processed through the remainders of national trauma. Of these postcolonial legacies that serve as psychic cures, Perez privileges one that causes him to disavow not only the others but also *kapwa*, the indigenous concept of sociality recuperated by *sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology) after independence to counter colonial history. Rather than working through national trauma with psychic trauma, Perez ultimately overcomes psychic trauma through the disavowal and repetition of national trauma, thus potentially inducing further psychic trauma.

Keywords

Catholicism, deconstruction, *kapwa*, modernism, postcolonial, trauma, writing

About the Author

Ryan Ku is a Visiting Assistant Professor of English Literature at Swarthmore College and was previously the inaugural Postdoctoral Associate in Asian American and Diaspora Studies at Duke University. A theorist of Southeast Asian and multiethnic American literatures after World War II, he is currently working on the book project *Imperial Wounds: Filipino/American Novels and Late Modernity*, which puts the internal contradictions of the United States in the context of its traumatic history of colonialism in the Philippines. He spent the first two years of college at the Ateneo de Manila University, where he first read *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*.

The final volume in the urban fiction series that has been hailed as “a body of work without equal in contemporary Philippine fiction” (Remoto 292), Tony Perez’s experimental novel *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* (1995) is set in a post-traumatic world, its plot founded on a crime that took place prior to the beginning of the story. Perez outlines this crime in the prologue entitled “Isang Maikling Kasaysayan Bago Magsimula Ang Nobela” (A Short History Before the Novel Begins): a kid lost his way, a criminal (a pedophile) abducted him, a cop (long on the trail of the criminal) pursued them, the criminal violated the kid, the kid fought back, the criminal killed him, the cop was not able to save the kid, he was killed by the criminal, the criminal killed himself (xii–xiv).¹ This sequence of events is being related by one of three metafictional characters, a storyteller who, faced with the dissatisfaction of his audience with the way that his story has ended tragically without reconciliation, replies, “Di pa ako natatapos” (I am not done yet); “Makinig kayo” (Listen) (xiv). Adding that “the criminal has a child,” “the kid has a sibling,” and “the cop has an adoptee” (xiv), the storyteller sets up the novel as the unfolding of the hypothetical meeting of these heirs. “Kid, Stabbed, Enclosed in a Chest,” the central section of the book, features these relatives—Ike, Cez, and Benny, respectively—their lives intersecting as they remain unconscious of each other’s relations. Throughout the novel proper, the father, the brother, and the foster father haunt the heirs in the form of fragmentary memories, dreams, and flashbacks. Clearly, trauma—transgenerational and intersubjective—structures the book; in fact, its title attributes trauma to the historical milieu. *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* is the name of the route of the jeepney, a Filipino adaptation of the American jeep that has become the primary means of public transportation in the Philippines, that, as implied in the author’s bio, Perez used to take. While the story is set in Cubao, a working-class commercial district of Metro Manila where Perez was living, it is thus linked to Ermita, Manila’s civic center, where Kalaw Avenue forms the southern boundary of Rizal Park, the capital’s main public space named after the colonial reformist who inspired the struggle for independence from Spain, and lies north of the United States Embassy, the present abode of the power that took over the Philippines upon Spain’s departure and where Perez used to work. In its identification with a milieu where the regimes that have ruled the nation—the Spanish Empire, the U.S., and the Philippine Republic—are embedded, the story is grounded not only in the primal scene of the novel but also in the history of the postcolonial nation. Perez, in other words, puts the psychic trauma of survival in the context of national history, which, he implies, is also traumatic in its postcoloniality.

It is indicative that the culmination of the *Cubao* series—the five otherwise unrelated books that, according to Joseph Salazar, were a common reference point for students from the area in the 1990s (Pimentel) even as Perez’s *Cubao*, as Danton Remoto points out, became “a fictional territory all his own” “like William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha country” (290)—leads Perez to relate the psychic and the social, if

unwittingly.² Recounting how until the *Cubao* series, “Perez was largely known as the author of unusually keen psychological realist and existential plays” that “did not bear any explicit nationalist content” while, in line with the nationalist movement, “honing the vernacular as an indigenous expressive medium” (230–231), Neferti X. M. Tadiar puts Perez in the context of the New Society, a “depoliticized, ahistorical, and mythical spatiotemporal order” through which the Marcos regime (1965–1986) isolated the Philippines “from revolutionary nationalist movements erupting in other Third World countries” (157).³ The dialectic in Perez’s work between the apathy toward political nationalism and the desire for cultural authenticity—the intent to “giv[e] more truthful representational form to local experience and affective life [...] and] draw directly from the raw materials of real life” (231)—is rooted, Tadiar implies, in his relation to a “state ideology” that aims at “the sublation of the problem of national identity by humanism,” at the containment of intensifying social crisis through national unity ultimately enforced by martial law (249). In other words, Perez’s literary aesthetic of national form without nationalist content or real experience without political consciousness is national in precisely the sense that was propagated under the most conspicuous administration of the Republic. This is not to say that Perez is not critical of his context; his response, however, departs from “urban social realist literature” (225), the primary form of cultural critique in the Marcos era. “Focus[ing] on the quotidian [as] set apart from [rather than fused with] the catastrophic,” Perez, Tadiar contends, “fashions” characters that “do not typify the ordinary people as oppressed masses” or “resemble the [...] individual middle-class characters of writers in English of the same period” but are instead “the barest outlines of a life holding only a potential for fullness and meaning” (225). Tadiar depicts Perez’s aesthetic tendency as essentially consisting in defamiliarization through imagism, in detaching “suggestions of persons” or “figures of ordinariness” “from [an] indifferent, dissolving” context to realize the “commonplace [...] as a bearer of hidden value” (225).⁴ In breaking with Filipino socialist realism to visualize local reality as experienced by the individual, if also common, psyche, Perez’s aesthetic amounts to modernism in a postcolonial setting.

“A general term applied retrospectively to the wide range of experimental and *avant-garde* trends in the literature (and other arts) of the early twentieth century,” modernism, as Chris Baldick explains, broke with the nineteenth-century realist claim to represent external reality in pursuit of new modes of expression that manifest the workings of subjectivity (“Modernism”).⁵ While modernism may seem like a turn inward, hence away from reality, Perez’s modernist foregrounding of psychic reality entails the more broadly social reality that serves as its context. “Influenced,” according to Tadiar, “by the modernist strains of Western drama translated into the vernacular by [...] Rolando Tinio, his mentor” (223), Perez’s writings are nonetheless, in contrast to the high modernist canon, not cosmopolitan but local. To capture through formal experimentation the psyche of barely

individualized characters, Perez situates them in Cubao, a locale that lends sight of a specific *and* representative fragment of the nation, thereby of the history that Perez does not directly broach but with which postcolonial sites tend to be replete. In tracing psychic consciousness, then, Perez also, against his adopted aesthetic and his immediate context, evokes social consciousness through the insertion of the subject into a place marked by concrete historical conditions. This burden of history that cannot but unfold with mental processes is most manifest in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*. In obliquely alluding, in the last book of the *Cubao* series, not only to the Philippine Republic but also to the colonial regimes from which it emerged, Perez posits the present as postcolonial, the nation as built on the ashes of colonial history that, as the novel's geography intimates, continues to frame it in ways taken for granted rather than comprehended. Perez thus portrays the historical conditions of his traumatic story as likewise traumatic—i.e., as defined by, if not stuck in, a prior event, which continues, and even repeats, in the present in another form. Through its postcolonial context, then, Perez's modernism becomes a means of tracing not only psychic but also national trauma.

This modernist unfolding of psychic *and* national trauma in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* is what I elaborate in this essay. After clarifying the relation in the novel between story and history as one less of analogy than of causality (if involving two levels), I spell out the way that the story is premised on psychic trauma while implying that, since history conditions the story, this psychic trauma is related to national trauma. One means of relating the psychic and the national is *kapwa*, the indigenous concept of relationality recuperated by *sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology) against colonial history that, like trauma, entails subjective contagion. To determine if *kapwa* has been adopted by Perez as a relational logic of his post-traumatic Cubao, I examine how he depicts the processing of psychic trauma in the novel. While it seems that Perez is positing representation as the means to process trauma, in fact representation is premised on deconstruction. This is made apparent by the fact that even as the survivors of the crime overcome its trauma by narrating their relation to it, the crime itself, the traumatic event, is not consciously narrated but rather transmitted unconsciously, in a way that, like *kapwa*, deconstructs the subject. This unconscious transmission consists in the displaced and deferred repetition, or writing, of trauma, a process that is facilitated in the novel by three discursive practices—Catholicism, psychotherapy, and creative writing—that are derived from the colonial history of the Philippines. Rather than corresponding to the nation's postcolonial trauma, psychic trauma in Perez's Cubao is thus processed through the remainders, if not the causes, of national trauma.⁶ Of these postcolonial remainders that are dispensed as psychic cures, Perez privileges one that leads him to disavow not only the others but also *kapwa*, hence, to fail to render the overcoming of psychic trauma also the overcoming of national trauma.

TRAUMATIC CONDITION, LITERARY MANIFESTATION

Articulating through its formal innovation not only psychic processes but also their social conditions, *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* complicates the notion that, due to their lesser degree of integration into capitalism, “Third-World texts,” as Fredric Jameson argues, “necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory” (69).⁷ Rather than separating “in some absolute way” (79) the poetic from the political, the libidinal from the economic (69), Third-World novels, in Jameson’s reading, attribute the story they tell to the nation as a whole (71). Consistent with the analogical, rather than divided, structure of non-capitalist societies (72), in a Third-World text “*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public Third-World culture and society*” (69). Against the “traditional conception of allegory” premised on “some one-to-one table of equivalences” (73), Jameson demonstrates through a Third-World text “the capacity of allegory to generate a range of meanings or messages, simultaneously, as the [...] tenor and vehicle change places” (74). Even as he highlights the “equivalences” posited by allegory between story (the novel) and history (the nation) as being “in constant change” (73), however, Jameson insists that Third-World allegory “dramatiz[es] the identity of the political and the individual” (79). The connection between the psychic and the social in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* does not consist of such identity premised on the analogical, if also myriad and ever shifting, workings of various levels of the nation, including of the relation between characters in the nation’s fiction. Perez’s characters do not each function as segments nor together depict an essential attribute of the nation. The crime that brings them together and gives rise to the story is not a metaphor for the nation’s history but rather one of the things, Perez implies, that happens given that history, a consequence rather than a substitutive representation of national experience. In situating his story in a part of the nation, Perez unwittingly broaches the “objective relationship of politics to libidinal dynamics” (80) that, according to Jameson, defines the Third World; hence, in his “telling of the individual story,” Perez, as Jameson might say, “cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself” (85–86). Uninterested in this laborious telling of the whole induced by his Third-World context, Perez nonetheless unconsciously reflects fragments of that whole. This is oddly reminiscent of Jameson’s account of allegory in Western novels, which he depicts as unconscious (79). Writing in a context in which the social is explicit, Perez represses this social horizon, thus representing it differently through what can only be very loosely called an *allegory*—by indirectly and without analogy implying it as a condition.

Jameson asserts that unconscious allegorical structures “must be deciphered by interpretive mechanisms” that, in the case of Western literature, “entail a whole social and historical critique” of its incorporation into the capitalist world

order (79). In the case of *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*, the psychic and social dimensions of the story are related by, and may thus be deciphered by attending to, trauma. Trauma, in Cathy Caruth’s classic formulation, is induced by unexpected or overwhelming events that are experienced unconsciously, inflict injury, and enact repetition: an experience that insists to be brought into while challenging the limits of consciousness (17).⁸ If not totally unexpected given the pedophile’s cycle of violence and the setting’s dilapidation, the crime designated in the prologue as “history” continues to harm its survivors who cannot have any consciousness of it. Implying through the storyteller’s plea for further listening that metafiction is a means not only of critiquing and revising but also of repairing, or at least of processing, history, Perez depicts trauma as an overwhelming experience that is not contained in the event that induces it.⁹ Qualifying her definition of trauma in elaborating that its surprise rests not on the experience’s content (e.g., the crime), character (its violence or injury), or limit (death) but rather on the fact of “*having survived, precisely, without knowing it*” (64), Caruth suggests that what constitutes a traumatic experience is not only the event but also its survival. Consistently, trauma manifests in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* in the lives of survivors who were not involved in the primal scene but who find themselves replaying it unconsciously, in their memories, and, possibly, consciously, as they meet each other. As much as the foundational and missed event, its unconscious repetitions in psychic and social life not only attest to its trauma but in fact make it traumatic. In deriving the psychological drama in the central section of the book from the suspense thriller in the prologue, Perez turns both into subgenres of horror, thereby pointing to the traumatic continuity between the novel’s “history” and story proper. Stressing this continuity, Caruth refers to the story of survival, the sequel that repeats its origin, as the “history” (11) of the subjects’ “relation” (8) to the traumatic event and to each other. *History* in Perez’s sense thus unfolds in *history* in Caruth’s sense—i.e., in the story. Elaborating the notions of traumatic *relation* and *history*, Gabriele Schwab argues that a traumatic event affects “not only the victim but also the perpetrator” (39) in ways that, rather than manifesting immediately, haunt following generations (5).¹⁰ Perez expands the ways in which trauma cuts both ways and across time—i.e., *intersubjective* and *transgenerational* transmission—by also implicating a third party—i.e., the savior—in the event and positing the story as this event’s repetition in history in which its heirs are rendered each other’s potential victim/perpetrator/savior.

In inducing *structural* and *historical* contagion across individual and temporal boundaries, trauma as it is theorized in the Western humanities implies a subject that, in its sociality, coincides with the conception of subjectivity in *sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology), the movement that, against the Western background of Philippine psychology, developed an indigenous paradigm for understanding the Filipino psyche. Brought to the Philippines “unlike the other social sciences”

not under Spanish colonization (1565–1898) but “during the early part of American colonization” (1898–1946), psychology has produced a variant in the post/colony that Narcisa Paredes–Canilao and Maria Ana Babaran–Diaz describe as “North Atlantic in orientation—German (Wundt, Freud) and/or American (positivist)” (769)—hence rooted in “the common sense concepts and lived daily realities of the white male fathers of psychology” (770). An emic alternative to this colonial discipline, *sikolohiyang Pilipino*, according to Rogelio Pe-Pua and Elizabeth Protacio–Marcelino, provides a “theoretical framework and methodology” based on “the experiences of the people from the indigenous culture” (49) that manifest in its discursive forms.¹¹ Anchored to “a Filipino perspective” (Pe-Pua and Protacio–Marcelino 50), *sikolohiyang Pilipino* was founded by Virgilio G. Enriquez, who draws on Tagalog, the primary component of the Filipino language, to find “the actual core value of the Filipino personality” (*Indigenous Psychology* 50).¹² Enriquez posits *kapwa*, “a core concept in Filipino social psychology” (“Kapwa” 100), as this “super-ordinate” principle governing “Filipino interpersonal behavior” (*Indigenous Psychology* 32).¹³ Translated as “both” and “fellow,” *kapwa* denotes the “other” and connotes “the unity of the ‘self’ and ‘others’” (33). Seemingly entailing abstraction—as when one refers to the other in English as a “fellow man” to displace difference via a common nature—*kapwa*, according to Enriquez, does not treat “the self as a separate identity” but rather consists in “a recognition of shared identity, [of] an inner self shared with others” (33). Arguing that Filipino social interactions are founded on the distinction between “*ibang-tao* (outsider) [and] *hindi-ibang-tao* (one of us)” (32), Enriquez depicts *ibang-tao* as the root of Filipino sociality, which is thereby predicated on difference as it is the *ibang-tao* (literally, other-person) that gives rise to identity via negation—via the prefix *hindi* (not)—which identifies an ostensible outsider as *not*-other, after all. In fact, this relational distinction is rooted in a more capacious category of belonging as “the *ibang-tao*,” as Enriquez puts it, “is *kapwa* in the same manner that the *hindi-ibang-tao* [... literally, not-other-person] is also *kapwa*” (34).¹⁴ Notably, Enriquez binds the same with the other directly—as *kapwa*—without recourse to abstraction—to, e.g., *kapwa tao* (fellow man)—thus asserting relation amid difference (*ibang-tao*). In effect, the “shared identity” that *kapwa* recognizes—the “inner self shared with others” (33)—is something that negation (*hindi*-) qualifies but does not erase.¹⁵

An overarching category that relates the other and the self in their otherness, *kapwa* posits a subject that is not defined by the dichotomies that condition Western subjecthood—most notably, the outside–inside binary. In premising it on *kapwa*, is Enriquez implying that Filipino subjectivity is inherently traumatized, less governed by subjective boundaries due to a foundational violation? Examining the ways that it both “opposed” (52) and “translat[ed ...] Western concepts and methods into Filipino, the evolving national language” (54), E. San Juan, Jr. depicts *sikolohiyang Pilipino* as a “Filipinization [of Western ideas that] requires a recovery of Filipino

'personhood,' [...] which for [it] inheres in language" ("Toward a Decolonizing" 58). "To overcome the limits of Eurocentric neocolonial knowledge by indigenization and cultural re-validation," Enriquez, San Juan elaborates, performs an "emic critique of Western knowledge" while fostering "eclectic opportunism," employing that which he critiques—in particular, "the Enlightenment ideals of freedom, dignity, and justice" (60). "Recuperat[ing]" Filipino indigeneity by "overhauling," thereby using as a point of reference, the Western epistemes that misrepresented the Filipino, Enriquez expands, and to an extent reverses, colonizing Western knowledge as "local [rather than hegemonic] knowledge becomes the matrix for inferring a universalizable concept of personhood" (53).¹⁶ This implies that the experience that serves as the basis of *sikolohiyang Pilipino's* indigenous episteme is less the reality of the Filipino before colonization than, as San Juan puts it, Filipino "response to colonial oppression" (54), which may, of course, draw on precolonial reality but also has to take into account the colonizing other's reality. These origins of *sikolohiyang Pilipino* in, and in fact as, a response to colonization explain the traumatic character of its notion of Filipino subjectivity: its premising of Filipino character on a core value that, rather than implying autonomy and exclusivity, reclaims not only otherness as a given but also subjection to contagion across borders—a phenomenon that Western trauma theory locates in the aftermath of an event that unravels sovereignty—is based on the experience of having to live with colonization as a traumatic precondition.¹⁷ *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, San Juan points out, posits this deconstructive notion of Filipino subjectivity by "deploy[ing] a hermeneutical mode of assaying the vernacular as [consisting in] organic speech-acts conveying" truth about its speakers whose "competence [... is] grounded in their recognition that [...] social actions [e.g., utterances] display specific meanings in determinate contexts" (61).¹⁸ This essentialist methodology, in which the reality of the Filipino is essentially derived from a Filipino "common sense" intimated by the Filipino language, underpins Enriquez's paradoxical proposition that the deconstructive subject *is Filipino*, thereby that cross-border contagion is, in effect, an "essence."

Indicative of *sikolohiyang Pilipino's* constitutive contradiction as a postcolonial formation that appropriates native ontologies and colonizing paradigms as Filipino (an anti-colonial identity derived from colonization, thus not indigenous, strictly speaking, and supposedly not colonizing), this paradoxical reclamation of subjective deconstruction as national essence may well warrant the dismissal of *sikolohiyang Pilipino* as incoherent.¹⁹ In fact, this incoherence is a symptom precisely of *sikolohiyang Pilipino's* post-traumatic nature, its contradiction a necessary result of the attempt to recover indigeneity after its colonial supersession, which, impossible to erase, is instead revised, or repeated differently, so that it can be reversed. Disabled by the givenness of the traumatic event from returning to the indigenous, this reversal instead asserts the Filipino. The *kapwa* that Enriquez

reclaims after colonization as the structural basis of Filipino sociality is thus less precolonial *kapwa* (assuming that *kapwa* was indeed a core value of the cultures in what the Spanish colonizers would call *the Philippines*) than a post-traumatic recuperation of a mode of being that is felt to be different from what the colonizers imposed. Is the purpose of this move to subsume the colonizer's otherness under the otherness that, different from the colonizer's, can be claimed as Filipino—i.e., to reverse the colonial subsumption of indigeneity—so that colonial history can be incorporated as a Filipino experience? In other words, is Enriquez rendering the colonizer *kapwa*, thus asserting postcolonial indigeneity as not only a symptom of but also a solution to the trauma of colonization?²⁰ In *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*, Perez depicts the processing of trauma as proceeding by colonial means—i.e., by the same means responsible for the novel's world, which made the crime not only possible but indeed inevitable. If Perez posits the means by which the Philippines was colonized as a means for the characters to deal with their trauma, is *kapwa* what turns the cause of national trauma into a means of overcoming the psychic trauma that derives from national trauma? The novel traces the intimate bond, indeed the blurring of the borders, between the self and the other—i.e., the bond of the heirs to their predecessors, whose roles they may just replay with each other without knowing which role they are playing—to the trauma of the crime, to foundational otherness. Is this traumatic cause but compounding the fundamental otherness that, according to *sikolohiyang Pilipino*, makes the self and the other *kapwa*? That is, does the setting of the story not only index Philippine history but also imply the relational logic that Enriquez reclaims as Filipino?²¹ If so, then beyond the way that the social serves as a condition of the psychic in the novel, Perez deals not only with psychic trauma but also, since *kapwa* is a post-traumatic response to colonization, with national trauma.²² Significantly, however, the two traumatic levels are not analogical. Indeed, despite his desire for cultural authenticity, Perez is uninterested in the representation of national trauma, which, as Ron Eyerman shows, is a common means to assert cultural identity.²³ Instead, in living through trauma, Perez's characters find themselves on a map where history is not so much represented as embedded as the context of the story.

NARRATIVE REPRESENTATION, DECONSTRUCTIVE TRANSMISSION²⁴

How is the psychic trauma of the crime worked through in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*, and what does this process imply about the more broadly social trauma of the postcolonial nation? Does the processing of the trauma represented in the novel also process the unrepresented trauma of the context, of the psychic trauma's historical condition? By the end of the novel, the characters are shown as having moved on from the primal scene. Despite sexual impotence, Benny, the cop's

adopted son, asks Eileen, his longtime girlfriend, to marry him and they adopt Dading, a street kid (225–226). He thus resurrects the father that he had lost to the crime in himself while giving childhood another chance through somebody else. Cez, for his part, musters up the courage to reread the press clipping of the crime that he had hidden as a child, when he deliberately lost his brother Charlie, the kid, on the streets (236–239). This recovery of an artifact from the time enables him to reconnect with his childhood, thus to take a step toward adulthood: he asks Gina, a longtime friend, out on a date (240). Finally, Ike asks his older brother, who was also abused by their father, to pray for the criminal, suggesting that their seemingly contrasting feelings toward him—his fear and his brother’s anger—are rooted in love (210). They have already forgiven the father, he claims, but have yet to forgive themselves (for loving him?) (211). These analogous transformations—the climax in triplicate that overcomes the suspension put in place in the prologue—are made possible by the characters opening the respective chests (*baul*) that they had kept after the crime occurred. Unopened, the chests hold the survivors back. Except for Cez’s press clipping containing nothing notable, the chests perform a melancholic function: Benny put toys there in an impossible attempt to retain his childhood (224); Cez put his brother there (mentally) to try and forget him (236); Ike put himself there (figuratively) to save the kid, and all children, from his father (208). Repositories of regret (over what was lost along with the father), of guilt (over one’s part in the brother’s death), and of fantasy (about one’s capacity to bear the burden of the father), the chests enable denial of a traumatic reality (the crime). In alluding to the chest in which, as Cez’s clipping put it, the kid was enclosed (238), the melancholic containers also function as material reminders of what they allow the characters to forget. In their contradiction, hence untenability, the chests are a displacement of trauma, which, Perez implies, has to be confronted for the survivors to detach from its cause. When Benny sees the toys in his chest, he realizes that he no longer wants to play with them (224). In his chest, Cez sees not the brother that he thought he had put in there but himself (236)—i.e., his own childhood. Finally, Ike sees that the self that he had shut in the chest has become a corpse (208)—the price of his heroic, but futile, psychic sacrifice.

In suggesting that trauma is overcome by lending the event that induced it meaning—when I lost my father, I also lost my childhood, but I can regain both now that I am no longer a child; in losing my brother, I also lost my childhood, to which I must return in order to no longer be a child; in sacrificing myself for other children, I lost my childhood, which, now that I am a child no longer, I must recover by forgiving myself—Perez seems to conform to the notion of traumatic processing implied by criticisms of Caruth’s trauma theory. Ruth Leys, for example, argues that the definition of trauma in terms of the literal return of pure materiality—i.e., of the repetition of the trigger event in its unprocessed form, as in flashbacks and nightmares rather than in dreams (266)—severs deferral, the belatedness of the

repetition, from “the retroactive conferral of meaning” (270), if not in fact removing trauma altogether from the symbolic, thereby from cognition and representation.²⁵ In effect, Leys criticizes Caruth for theorizing trauma in terms of a stubborn material from the past that activates not *Nachträglichkeit*—a psychoanalytic term typically translated as *deferred action*, the basis of the notion of afterward processing in trauma theory—but repetition as is, in preserved form. This traumatic kernel disables the subject from uncovering or attributing meaning; hence it cannot be acted on or related to differently but instead incites acting out.²⁶ Neglecting the subject’s capacity, if only symbolic, to intervene in an event not only beyond control but also already passed, Caruth, in other words, exaggerates trauma’s materiality to depict its repetitions as imitation rather than representation.²⁷ Caruth illustrates the transmission of trauma as mimetic in her rereading of Sigmund Freud’s analysis (1900) of the father’s dream of his child burning, which he is having as the arm of his child who had just died is actually burning. Symptomatic of the father’s “[inability] to witness the child’s dying” (100), the dream, Caruth explains, is the only way for the father “to see the child’s living vulnerability as it dies,” his missing of the event the condition of survival (103).²⁸ This traumatic witnessing, Caruth argues, signals the imperative “to see the child burning” (104) “from the outside, to leave the child in the dream so as to awaken elsewhere” (105). Leading to awakening, which comes after the dream that is simultaneous with actual happening, witnessing, Caruth suggests, has less to do with actual sight than with the imperative to “tell *what it means not to see*” (105). That is, what happens after the induction of trauma is neither the seeing of the actual event nor the telling of what was not seen but rather only the telling of the fact that the event was not seen—essentially, a reiteration of the trauma of the event.

Consistent with her claim that survival, given its surprise and repetitions, is constitutive of trauma, Caruth depicts the imperative to communicate trauma—what the survivor has to do given what he was not able to—as reconstituting it, implying that such deferred and displaced repetition, happening after rather than during the event in the form of language rather than of vision (much less of action), makes a difference. The traumatic kernel of the experience—“the very gap between the other’s death and his own life” (106) that both enables the father to survive and induces his trauma—is transmitted as the survivor “tell[s] *what it means not to see* [across the gap]” (105) with “words [that] are no longer mastered or possessed by the one who says them” (107).²⁹ Caruth suggests that precisely this detachment of language from the speaker (either the father or the child) enacts “newness” as “the words are *passed on* as an act that does not precisely awaken the self but, rather, *passes the awakening on to others*” (107). In other words, the personal (missing of the) experience is transformed into a collective imperative as trauma gives rise to relations and history, in which one is not so much awakened as entangled with others by traumatic transmission in space and in time.³⁰ What is repetitively transmitted

is less content than the process of transmission itself, which consists in “telling” less a conscious message than an inherited gap: the trauma of survival. In depicting trauma’s induction as followed by none other than its mimetic transmission, Caruth, Leys argues, posits (re-)traumatization rather than trauma’s processing.³¹ The “rememb[rance] and narrat[ion of] the past in a procedure that bears some resemblance to the [psycho]analytic process of ‘working through,’” Leys writes, is supplanted by “a mode of responding to trauma that ensures the transmission of the [...] gap in meaning that constitutes history as inherently traumatic” (269).³² While Leys assumes that traumatic processing requires representation—narrating the past as something being remembered, thus as past, hence detaching from it via symbolization—Caruth implies that trauma is processed via language detached from the speaker, indeed from its content—i.e., by means of unconscious and asymbolic transmission. Despite Leys’s identification of Freud’s notion of *working through* with the process that Freud, in elaborating hypnosis, calls *remembering*, in which the patient distinguishes the (present) act from the (past) content of remembrance (“Remembering” 148), in fact Freud uses the term more capaciously in relation to resistance analysis to refer to what the analyst “must allow the patient to do” to the resistance that previously manifested only as acting out—i.e., as repetition—and “with which he has now become acquainted” (155).³³ Once the patient gains consciousness of her repetition compulsion, she must, according to Freud, continue analysis to overcome repetition by “becom[ing] more conversant with this resistance” (155)—this is what he calls *working through*.

Enabling the subject to detach from repetition, working through in Freud’s thought notably entails intimacy with repetition, consisting not only, as Leys argues, in symbolization (specifically, in narration, in the representation of the past as past) but more broadly in analysis, in which, Freud suggests, a role is played by transference (“Remembering” 154)—a form of repetition mediated by the analyst and limited to the therapeutic session.³⁴ While Leys resists repetition as that which the subject has to overcome by representing the event that induced it, does Caruth perhaps get stuck in repetition, generalizing it beyond the context—i.e., under the guidance of the analyst—in which Freud argues it can serve a purpose? The debate between Caruth and Leys is to some extent also a debate on the function of melancholia. In contrast to mourning, a reaction to loss that is thought to be “overcome after a certain lapse of time” as “libido [or investment in the lost object ... is] withdrawn from its attachments to that object” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 244), Freud defines melancholia as the “identification of the ego with the abandoned object” (249), as the subject’s internalization of the object that it had lost (251). An attempt to make the lost object remain by resurrecting it internally, melancholia seems to define Caruth’s response to trauma as that which has to be transmitted in its literality rather than betrayed in its representation.³⁵ David L. Eng and David Kazanjian resist the pathologization of melancholia by pointing not only to its

“social bases” but also to its creativity (3), insisting that it consists in “not simply a [...] ‘holding’ on to a fixed notion of the past but rather a continuous engagement with loss and its remains” that may make possible “the rewriting of the past” (4). Perez illustrates this creativity of melancholia in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*. While Ike and Cez’s melancholia look pathological—their internalization of the perpetrator and of the victim leading, as Freud puts it, to the impoverishment of the ego (“Mourning and Melancholia” 253)—this melancholia ultimately enables them to look at the past differently. More straightforwardly, Benny’s internalization of his lost father, the savior, enables him to become a father in his own right. However, in having as its receptacle not the self but rather a reminder—indeed, since the chests originate from the time of the crime, a remainder—of loss, melancholia in the novel is, strictly speaking, not an internalization but a displacement, an attempt less to make what was lost remain than to forget it by keeping it elsewhere—i.e., anywhere other than the self—that ironically makes it remain. In their effort to shut off the past, the characters find themselves stuck in it; it is only the reopening of that past that lends them new futures—and in the form of a different repetition of the past. Perez’s depiction of trauma as something displaced rather than internalized, or displaced, thus internalized, hints at its workings beyond melancholia, in the same way that Caruth’s notion of traumatic transmission may be melancholic but also entails more than the internalization of what the subject had to miss to survive.

While trauma is ultimately overcome in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* through a symbolic process of narrative representation, Perez depicts this process as more imitative of the past, more melancholic, than Leys might admit—indeed as premised, as Caruth suggests, on the prolongation of the repetition presupposed in Freud’s notion of working through. Even as they enclose the past in chests that are kept out of sight, the characters are unable to keep other memories, if in the form of dreams or flashbacks, from returning, memories the outcome of which is the crime, the enclosed past. Displacement thus leads not to detachment but at most to deferral: eventually they will have to open the chests, their memories leading them there. In fact, repression seems to be a melancholic means to incite the return of the repressed, which, strictly speaking, is not repressed but unknown. What the chests finally index is the chest in which the kid was enclosed—i.e., the crime, of which the characters (can) have no memory since they were not there. While, as they show once they do open their chests, the characters are perfectly capable of narrating the effect of the crime on them, they cannot narrate what they neither experienced nor witnessed. This they store instead in chests that remain unaccessed, in keeping with the trauma of the event. The narrative that the characters eventually develop about their relation to trauma is thus premised on the displaced repetition—via chests that index the chest—of the trauma of the event. Tellingly, this event is itself finally narrated not after but *before* the characters open the chests.³⁶ This implies that its narration rests not on the survivors’ capacity for symbolization but rather on

the prior process of traumatic transmission, on the melancholic repetition of what cannot be represented. Ironically avowing in its repressiveness, displacement, in other words, is the characters' means of inciting the narration of what they cannot narrate. How exactly is it possible for what was neither experienced nor witnessed to be narrated? Consisting in language detached from the subject and from its object, Caruth's notion of traumatic transmission presupposes Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the sign. Against the privileging of speech over writing due to its supposed proximity to the origin of meaning (presumably, the subject who speaks), Derrida argues that meaning is in fact a product of a process that is more like writing, with its derivative character due to its irreducible spatiotemporal distance from a singular source of meaning. In Derrida's theory of the sign, the origin of meaning is not a sovereign act, is indeed neither an origin per se nor something that has meaning, but is rather repetition itself. This is how trauma is narrated in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*: not through the speech of the heirs but through repetition that does not contain meaning within it—i.e., through writing.

The narration of trauma in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* rests on its mimetic transmission, which, Caruth implies, consists in writing in the deconstructive sense.³⁷ Whereas melancholia falls back on interior psychic space—i.e., on subjectivity, also known as “the self”—to process trauma by *not* accepting it, deconstructive writing, in unraveling Western assumptions about language—of which writing, as opposed to speech, is supposedly but a supplementary mode—points beyond the subject.³⁸ Against the positing of the subject (the “speaker”), of the context (the “present”), or of the sign itself (its “substance”) as the origin of meaning, Derrida argues that a sign gains value through its relation with other signs over time. Derrida calls this relation *différance*, a French term that captures difference in space *and* in time, thereby the spatial interval between signs that renders them distinct from each other, enabling a sign to mean something other than another sign, as well as the temporal trace of these distinctions, the iteration of the differences that render the meaning of a sign conventional. Rather than locating the value of the sign (so-called “meaning”) in a fixed source, Derrida depicts it as the product of a process whereby signs differ from each other in space and in time—i.e., as the result of displacement and deferral. Derrida also calls this process in which *différance* unfolds “(arche-)writing” and clarifies that *différance*, the “origin” of meaning, is less an origin than itself but an effect of “writing,” which makes writing proper the writing of “writing,” the redoubling of the origin.³⁹ Traumatic narration in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* rests on writing in this sense. Rather than originating from the characters (who did not witness the event), from the present (when the event had already passed), or from their chests (signs that hold not the truth but only its traces), the narration of the crime arises out of the relations that the survivors develop with each other over time. Iterations of each other, the characters are distinguished by the different ways that they lost their childhood that is rooted

in the different positions of their precursors in the crime. In enclosing what they lost in their respective chests, thus displacing trauma to defer its unraveling, the heirs unwittingly iterate the relation between their precursors, hence the structural positions of the traumatic event, at another time, outside of the immediate context of the crime, and differently, in precisely their attempt to heal from the collective trauma that the crime had induced.⁴⁰ Embodied by the chests, this displaced and deferred repetition, or writing, of the traumatic structure—i.e., the mimetic transmission of trauma—makes possible the narration of the origin that cannot otherwise be represented. Deconstructing not only language but also sovereignty and history, this writing of trauma suggests that *kapwa*, the deconstructive social logic that is *sikolohiyang Pilipino*'s response to historical trauma, is at work in the novel, or at least entails identity beyond the self and history beyond the immediate. In any case, the subjective and the national are related not by representation but by deconstruction.

MODES OF WRITING, HISTORIES OF COLONIZATION

Consisting in repetition, in the writing of “writing,” deconstruction as a means of traumatic processing seems to merely transmit trauma, if not inducing re-traumatization.⁴¹ Rather than reject this solution for simulating the cause, Perez, against Leys and with Caruth, points to the ways that the transmission of trauma is what makes possible its narration, thus its overcoming. Significantly, Perez represents this working through of psychic trauma in the form of two remainders of national trauma, as if to render explicit an intuition of *kapwa*, which is invoked by his principal protagonist at a decisive moment in the story. Psychotherapy, the more obvious of these legacies of colonialism that become vehicles of traumatic processing, is ultimately disavowed in the novel for the other, Catholicism. The protagonists' paths cross at a boarding house where they end up renting the same room, which is linguistically related to the chest/s as *silid*, Tagalog for *room*, is also the root word for *to enclose*. In this room, Cez and Benny meet Ike, the graduate student of industrial psychology and brother of the Legion of Mary (Perez 3).⁴² Against his father's haunting, Ike sought what can save him: from “fear of the mind,” psychology; from “fear of the heart,” the “love of the Lord” (33). Ike is clear about the priority of these pursuits: he is studying industrial psychology to be “of help to a multitude” despite failing to enter the seminary (123), his desire to do God's “work” (3) what led him to study human behavior as it pertains to work. The underpinning of his life, faith is also Ike's default recourse. When he hypnotizes Cez, for example, and Cez starts sharing memories that match his own, Ike ends the session by counting from one to ten, according to procedure, but manages to stop his own fearful thoughts only by praying the “Lamb of God” (128). Ike finalizes this choice

of Catholicism over psychotherapy, hence repression over catharsis, precisely when he starts to doubt the former. Wondering if “praying over” and hypnotism are in fact one and the same (“*iisa*”), if the Holy Spirit is but a personification of “*autosuggestive powers*” (156), Ike ends up realizing that psychology seeks not the Lord but the human psyche, which is a product of the world that is “Lucifer’s” (158). Having used the same term, “*makapagpapaligtas*” (33), to describe the purposes of psychology and of religion—to *free* versus to *save*—he decides that finding meaning (“*kawawaan*”) in one’s fellow man (“*kapuwa-tao*”) leads only to the liberation of the flesh, to the repetition of Satan’s betrayal of the Lord (158–159). “*Liberation*,” he concludes, “is the absurdity of *Salvation*,” which is “what the soul desires,” what only faith can provide (160). This is the last time that Ike is seen before he opens his chest.⁴³ Benny and Cez likewise make breakthroughs that lead to their climactic scenes by religious means. Benny’s nightmares stop after he experiences the Holy Spirit in group prayer (144–147), which enables him to assert himself without his father. A priest’s confession of ignorance enables Cez to acknowledge his pride, which not only underpins his vocation as a writer but also made him resent, and lose, his younger brother (191–192).

Perez embodies the ways that Catholicism works through trauma in children, who point to what in fact enacts traumatic processing. The crime has centered the lives of the characters around children: Ike fits religious service into his busy schedule because it is for children (Perez 5); Benny takes Dading into his care because he cannot bear the thought of kids living on the streets (48); Cez discerns his pride negatively through visions of children, including of his brother (192).⁴⁴ This preoccupation with children is the survivors’ displacement of their fixation on childhood, the state in which they are left by the crime and the deferred repetition of which Perez presents, through the narratives that the characters tell as they open their chests, as the means of overcoming trauma. This function of children, whom Ike believes are key to religious “*work*,” his means of redemption from the past, because they are “always close to the *Lord*” (4), is rendered explicit as religious in the end, when the protagonists meet at church for a final time and the song of the Sacred Child in the nativity scene, “Peace on earth, and to those people with good will,” echoes throughout Cubao, toward Manila, toward the world (243–244). Embodied by children whose exemplar is the Catholic icon of salvation, religion is thus posited by Perez as the cure for trauma. Religion, however, is not all that children embody. Derrida shows that the Western tradition’s representation of writing as a poison that presents itself as a cure is rooted not only in the suspicion that it is not, as it claims, the solution to forgetfulness but also in the fear that it amounts to the subversion of speech (“*Plato’s Pharmacy*” 77). That is, against speech, whose proximity to the origin leads it to be embodied in the father, writing is said to embody “a desire for orphanhood” (77), the Oedipal desire to make do without the father. Despite the association of children in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*

with Catholicism, do they not in fact, as Derrida might suggest, embody writing, more broadly? This is what is intimated by the appendices that follow the central section of the book that contain the survivors' creative writings. Ike's pair of plays in English feature conversations between two men who, in monologues amidst allusions to past tragedy and ultimate goodness, exchange confessions. Cez's poems in formal, but also playful, Tagalog have titles like "*Tumula Ako ng Tula*" (308), which translates into "I Recited a Poem," except that the verb for *to recite* is formed out of the noun for *poem*, as if the product is a truncated iteration of the act of creation.⁴⁵ Benny's notes in colloquial Filipino consist of recipes, lists, and, above all, jokes, the quintessential literary genre of repetition and difference.⁴⁶ Affixed to the main narrative, these writings are named *dula* (play), *tula* (poem), and *tala* (note)—repetitive signs distinguished by minor material differences.

These writings in the deconstructive sense, whose value ("meaning," including but not only in a symbolic sense) is based on the repetition of formally different elements (e.g., on the doubles in Ike's plays that lead to the truth or on wordplays that multiply meaning in Cez's poems and that lend sense to Benny's jokes), are, it is implied, the work that the characters had to perform so that, given time, they can open their chests and come up with accounts of their traumatic survival. That is, the narratives of the survivors' relation to trauma have as their prerequisite the creative writings, which would seem to be their means of participating in traumatic transmission—i.e., their response to the prologue's call for listening, in which, according to Caruth, consists the only possibility after trauma.⁴⁷ Not only hidden in the main narrative but also ostensibly not having anything to do with the crime (with its parties, content, and setting—i.e., with the original subject, object, and context), these writings (and their writers) are not so much subverting the father as they are making do with orphanhood. Indeed, their distance from and lack of authority on the traumatic event is what seems to have ironically enabled the narration of the crime beyond and before the heirs' accounts of their survival. These creative writings, which Perez identifies—i.e., as *dula* (play), *tula* (poem), and *tala* (note)—in a way that hints at the deconstructive workings of language—i.e., at the ways in which language gives rise to meaning by means of displacement and deferral grounded not in essence at the origin but in repetition—are but the most explicit instances of the formal experimentation that characterizes the novel at large. In fact, the narration routinely defies realism in suddenly turning into a play, a list, or a poetic fragment, indeed into visualization (most notably, in chapter 6, where rain is illustrated by the virgule). Written in Tagalog, the novel is also pervaded by languages that are italicized in their otherness, whether literal (as in the case, e.g., of English, Kapampangan, and Cebuano) or figurative (as in citations, usually of sundry utterances in the background, ultimately of the relatives' firsthand accounts of the crime). As in the appendices, this experimental tendency of the narration would seem to be the manifestation of the unconscious, and not only of

the subjects but also of their world. In that case, the novel's modernism is Perez's attempt to (make his readers) listen to the foundation that cannot otherwise be known and can only be narrated in its unconscious transmission—i.e., in writing. This experimental character of *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* is in keeping with Perez's overall writing style. Described by J. Neil C. Garcia as “credibly pedestrian” (362), Perez's writing, according to Tadiar, brings an “almost ascetic economy of expression to Tagalog fiction” (245) in which words convey less meaning than themselves as “objects,” thus “the very worldly matter of human relations” (246) that, she implies, consists in *kapwa*.⁴⁸

If writing, in facilitating mimetic transmission through its deconstructive workings, enables Perez ultimately to convey not only, as Tadiar implies, the logic that underlies the relation between his characters—i.e., *kapwa*—but also, as he illustrates in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*, the history that structures their relation—hence, trauma—why does he *not* identify writing as the medium for traumatic processing? Denigrated because it is suspected to be a poison, writing, Derrida explains, has been judged by the Western tradition as “no more valuable” as a cure (“Plato's Pharmacy” 99). That is, even when it works, writing is deemed a painful and artificial remedy that tackles not the cause but only the symptoms, its otherness foreclosing its access to the origin even as, in offering a cure, it denies death, the ultimate other. This is the full sense, Derrida points out, of the designation of writing as a *pharmakon*: it is condemned as a poison *and* as a cure, for its detachment from the origin and for its disavowed intimacy with the other. Perez seems to be evincing the same attitude toward writing. Cez, who writes horror stories in pursuit of the “truth” of “life,” which “is not tearful or funny but bewildering—full of mystery and wonder” (Perez 11)—realizes that “man [*tao*; notably, not *kapwa tao*] is not to be scared but rather helped to stand in and aim for dignity,” that “*Imagination* is to yield *Inspiration*” and not the other way around, that “there is something more meaningful”: “salvation” (193). Is it possible, however, that what is being disavowed structures the privileged? Tellingly, it is not only that writing in the novel works as a solitary kind of psychotherapy but also that psychotherapy is a disciplinary form of the writing that the novel performs. This may be why Ike, not unlike Cez, disavows psychotherapy for Catholicism, *which is thereby depicted as itself a mode of writing*. In what sense is this the case? What defines both psychotherapy and Catholicism? Ike's training in psychotherapy is a legacy of American behavioral psychology in the Philippines.⁴⁹ In fact, he draws on B. F. Skinner's *Theories of Learning* to root poverty in “*dependent behavior*” (Perez 118), thus echoing Philippine studies, the postcolonial successor to colonial discourse (9) that, as San Juan explains, ascribed to culture—i.e., to *kapwa*—rather than to colonialism the underdevelopment of the Philippines (8), for which Americanization is offered as the remedy (16).⁵⁰ A legacy of Spanish colonialism, Catholicism has similarly been adopted, indeed adapted, locally. In *Pasyon and Revolution*, Reynaldo Ileto shows that while educated

Filipinos appropriated liberalism to claim independence, social movements with a longer history—active in the Spanish, revolutionary, and American periods—drew instead on religious tradition—notably, on *The Passion of Jesus Christ*.⁵¹ In their transmission, colonial discourses undergo deconstruction, thereby acquiring not only other values but also significance beyond their content (such that the motifs and rituals of Catholicism, e.g., not only become deployed against the order of which it is a part but also work more to forge solidarity than to confirm dogma). Relying on their structural workings as modes of writing, Perez nonetheless elevates one of these inherited practices—the dissemination of the Word of God—as proper and transcendent—i.e., as the mode that provides cure without its poison.

Perez's choice of Catholicism as the cure for psychic trauma entails not only the disavowal of other modes of writing but also the elevation of a part of national history that, on a more broadly social level, perpetuates trauma. The disavowal in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* of legacies of U.S. imperialism—of not only psychotherapy but also creative writing, another U.S. export—strikingly marks a shift in the *Cubao* series.⁵² Tadiar shows, for example, that in *Cubao 1980*, the first novel in the series, redemption, at that point still referred to as liberation, takes the form of “the Catholic God of Spanish rule [...] descend[ing] to earth, sublated by the evangelical Protestant God of U.S. benevolent assimilation” (240–241). This transformation of “Catholic piety” into “Protestant spirituality” that amounted to the privatization of religion through its generalization (251–252) is, according to Tadiar, an integral part of the New Society, which was modeled on and supported by the U.S. (223). Perez's turn in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* away from the postcolonial reiteration of U.S. colonial ideology curiously takes place in its context. While the crime is set in 1964 (Perez xiii)—when the commemoration of Philippine independence was moved from July 4, the day in 1946 when the U.S. granted it, to June 12, the day in 1896 when Filipino revolutionaries declared it from Spain—by 1982, when the story proper begins (1) at the height of the Marcos regime, *Cubao* had, according to B. Carlo Tadiar, “acquired national significance because it debuted American-style malls in the country [... while, along with Ermita at the other end of the Cubao–Kalaw route, providing] a market for male youths” (83–84).⁵³ That the colonial history that Perez is disavowing continues to define the world that he depicts is perhaps exemplified by his presentation of the story in the prologue as the product of what sounds like a creative writing workshop. Perez's move away from one colonial history leads him, moreover, back to another that delimits the form that trauma's overcoming takes. Symptomatically, despite their sexual deviancy—Ike's repression (Perez 122), Benny's impotence (137), and Cez's hypersexuality (166)—the protagonists all end up, after working through trauma, reproducing the heterosexual family.⁵⁴ In fact, whereas the Americanized political order, with its underground economy of youths, constitutes the social context of the crime, the traditional family reified by the Catholic Church as the basis of society

is its intimate condition. Cez's abandonment of Charlie on the streets is driven by a deep-seated sibling rivalry that is rooted in the paranoid space of the family (69–73). Ike's father might not have become a criminal had the (polymorphous child in the) man not been repressed by—i.e., forced to turn into—the father (34–35).⁵⁵ In presenting the overcoming of psychic trauma as the reproduction of the social formation that made, and makes, its induction possible, Perez points to writing, even in its transcendent mode, as a cure insofar as it is poison *and* as poisoning while it cures.⁵⁶

This selection of Catholicism as the privileged medium for traumatic processing in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* is based less on a false identification (Catholicism does enable the survivors to come to terms with traumatic history) than on a constitutive disavowal—namely, the disavowal of the poison that is the other side of the cure. That is, the danger inherent in Perez's choice of cure consists neither in the fact that it is *not* a cure nor in the fact that it is *also* a poison—all means of working through, as Caruth might say, entail re-traumatization—but rather in the disavowal of the poison of cure. This makes possible the exaltation of Catholicism over psychotherapy and creative writing—modes of writing connected to U.S. imperialism in the Philippines—despite the fact that Catholicism also derives in the Philippines from a history of colonization from which it developed its capacities as a *pharmakon*. Warranting the dispensation of a colonial legacy as *the* psychic cure, this disavowal, which rests on the unstated assumption that, unlike American colonial legacies, the most enduring Spanish inheritance of the Filipino can be detached from its colonial origins, leads to the postcolonial continuation of colonization in the psyche.⁵⁷ Strikingly, against not only a more recent but also a contemporary imperialism, Perez falls back on an earlier and longer colonialism rather than, like Enriquez, on the indigenous. As noted above, Ike identifies *kapwa* with liberation, and hence rejects it along with psychotherapy and U.S. colonialism. Also opting for salvation, Cez, as intimated by his excision of *kapwa* from *tao* (man), does not even think of writing as involving *kapwa*. This rejection of *kapwa*, however, implies an intuition of it, thereby a missed opportunity. After all, even as it is described by Enriquez as a value, is not *kapwa*—a mode of relation, thus of transmission, adopted from precolonial times and adapted after colonization in a way that reclaims not only the traumatic history transmitted but also the mode of transmission—also, like the colonial discursive practices explored by Perez, a mode of writing? Is it not, moreover, a mode of writing whose deconstructive capacities are directed toward finding an alternative to hegemonic history, if by “returning” to an even earlier history, one that can be claimed as the colonized subject's own? Had Perez chosen *kapwa* as the means of traumatic transmission in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*, given that *kapwa* is not only a post-traumatic but also a conscious response to colonization, might it perhaps have also enacted the processing of national trauma? Instead, the selection of a colonial remainder as the

cure via the disavowal of its poison leads to the overcoming of psychic trauma in a way that reinforces national trauma, in a way that may, therefore, further induce psychic trauma.

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Notes

1. All translations from the novel, written primarily in Tagalog, are my own. Italicized English words are in English in the original. In most subsequent instances, I translate directly from Tagalog even when I'm quoting directly from the text (as I do in paraphrasing here).
2. The books that precede *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* in the series are *Cubao 1980 at Iba Pang Mga Katha: Unang Sigaw ng Gay Liberation Movement sa Pilipinas* (1992), *Cubao Pagkagat ng Dilim: Mga Kuwentong Kababalaghan* (1993), *Eros, Thanatos, Cubao: Mga Piling Katha* (1994), and *Cubao Midnight Express: Mga Pusong Nadiskaril sa Mahabang Riles ng Pag-ibig* (1995). Charting the previous publication history of the elements that make up *Cubao–Kalaw*, Remoto explains that the novel proper “was a co-winner of the Palanca Grand Prize for the Novel in 1984” and that the two plays that make up one of its appendices also won awards, with “‘Sacraments of the Dead’ [winning] first prize in the one-act play division of the Palanca in 1981 and ‘The Wayside Cafe’ [winning] third prize in the [same category ...] in 1982” (291). I was introduced to *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* in the early 2000s, as an undergraduate in Joseph Salazar’s class at the Ateneo de Manila University.
3. “Perez’s theatrical works of the late 1960s and early 1970s,” Tadiar elaborates, “dramatized the seemingly generic urban themes of alienation, existential loneliness, and individual freedom and identity that could be said to be the other side of the widespread social crisis to which others responded with political protest. Out of this urban social crisis emerges a full psychological subject, one whose potential for individualist freedom and self-determination is founded on the experience of the contradictory processes of social disintegration and reconstruction” that the New Society reordered in a hegemonic way, “into a single national community” (223). Having since the *Cubao* series branched out into yet other artistic pursuits, Perez describes himself on his blog as “a creative writer, playwright, poet, lyricist, painter, portraitist, fiber artist, and psychic journalist and trainer” and as having published “plays, fiction, poems, original knitting patterns, acrostic puzzles, and illustrations,” not to mention “a children’s book” and a “transpersonal psychology series” (on esoterica and the paranormal). “In 2013, [he] decided to post his old and new works in cyberspace” (on his blog). He has also been publishing his collected works (projected to be 40 volumes). “He is one of the 100 Filipino recipients of the 1898–1998 Centennial Artists Awards of the Cultural Center of the Philippines.”
4. A modernist trend, imagism uses precise images and cultivates concision, concreteness, and loose forms (Baldick “Imagism”). See Davidson.
5. While realism fostered a “consensus between author and reader,” given their formal experimentation—e.g., the juxtaposition of multiple perspectives, the density of the writing due to allusions, and the disruption of chronology (Baldick “Modernism”)—modernist texts required active interpretation. See Childs and Winkiel.
6. In this way, Perez complicates the notion of “the isomorphism between psychic and social life,” as Rosi Braidotti and Alan D. Schrift put it—i.e., the assumption “that the structures of the individual psyche are structurally infused by the same forces that constitute the

- social order and regulate its functions” (317)—by defying its implication that the psychic and the social are analogous systems.
7. Jameson implies that this lesser integration is why Third-World novels are still stuck in social realism and have not gone through modernism (66).
 8. Citing Hartman, Paul K. Saint-Amour emphasizes temporality in his summation of “the core paradigm of Freudian trauma studies”: “having arrived early—in advance of its capacity to be received and understood—the traumatic event makes its impact felt belatedly, often after a period of latency, via symptoms that can include the return of repressed memories and the compulsive repetition of behavior, gestures, dreams, and fantasies associated with the traumatic event” (14). This emphasis informs his summation of trauma studies’ prescription that “the work of mourning, remembering, and working through should at least partially restore the pastness of the past and enable the survivor of trauma to reinvest in the present and the prospect of an unforclosed future”—i.e., his understanding of traumatic processing as consisting in “rechronologization—the reopening of the future via the past’s resubordination to the present” (15).
 9. *Encyclopædia Britannica* defines *metafiction* as “a highly self-conscious fiction [...], laying bare its own literary devices, questioning the nature of representation, and often imitating or parodying earlier fiction rather than social reality.” *Britannica Academic*, s.v. “American literature,” accessed April 22, 2020, <https://academic-eb-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/levels/collegiate/article/American-literature/106081#256551.toc>. Amy J. Elias suggests that the aim of historiographic metafiction is to revise “historical practices [...] to include a pluralist view of historiography”—e.g., by including neglected perspectives (24). By *history* here, I mean the prehistory laid out in the prologue, although what metafiction is doing in the novel also applies to *history* in the sense of the reality outside of the text, which, as I argue above, is a cause of the story rather than that of which the story is an analogue. Even though they perform the same function for the story as its traumatic conditions on two different levels, the prehistory of the novel and the national history that serves as the novel’s context are not analogues of each other either. The subjects involved in the crime do not stand in for agents or forces in Philippine history and the crime can only be thought of as a representation of Philippine history in a very loose sense, insofar as Philippine history can be said to be a story of the relation between the victim, the perpetrator, and the savior—i.e., to the extent that Philippine history can be identified with history in general. It is thus more precise, as I argue above, to trace the story as a consequence of history (in the second sense) rather than to render the story and history parallels of each other.
 10. Gabriele Schwab pushed me toward trauma theory, and to write more clearly.
 11. As Virgilio G. Enriquez puts it, *sikolohiyang Pilipino* pursues psychological knowledge with an emphasis on “identity and national consciousness” to derive “social awareness” from “objective analysis” and psychological concepts from “national and ethnic cultures and languages” (*Indigenous Psychology* 21). Even as indigenous psychology presupposes essence, Enriquez rejects binaries that would render essences mutually exclusive, adding that indigenous psychology has “bases and application” in fields other than psychology and the social sciences such as “health practices, agriculture, art, mass media, religion, etc., [...] including [...] Western psychology” (21). More directly, he writes, “Uncritical rejection is just as dangerous as uncritical acceptance of Western theories” (22),

describing *sikolohiyang Pilipino* as “the use of the local language as a tool for the identification and rediscovery of indigenous concepts and as an appropriate medium for the [...] articulation of Philippine realities” (21) and “a call for the exercise of care in the adoption of foreign theories” (22). Enriquez provides a more comprehensive overview of the Western background of Philippine psychology in chapters 1–2. E. San Juan, Jr. describes *sikolohiyang Pilipino* as “invent[ing] a discipline of psychological research and analysis of everyday life and personality of the individual Filipino [...] from indigenous customs and practices [...] throughout the islands,” which it synthesizes as “the foundation for an evolving nationally rooted world-view” (“Toward a Decolonizing” 47). Jay Yacat provides an overview of the theoretical framework of *sikolohiyang Pilipino*, which he defines as “the scientific study of psychology derived from the experience, ideas, and cultural orientation of the Filipinos” (1). Paredes–Canilao and Babaran–Diaz put *sikolohiyang Pilipino* in historical context as one of the “three major indigenization movements that fermented in the main campus of the University of the Philippines” (765) along with *Pilipinohiya* (Filipinology) (based in the social sciences) and *Pantayong Pananaw* (from our perspective) (based in history). Even as they point to its critique of Western psychology’s “exclusions of local and indigenous notions and practices of well-being” (766), Paredes–Canilao and Babaran–Diaz note that “contrary to apprehensions that SP [*sikolohiyang Pilipino*] was an isolationist movement, SP was to establish links with similar attempts in the Third World [...] and to parts of the rest of the world where many Filipinos have migrated [...] to expose the ethnocentric partialities of Western mainstreamed psychology and contribute to the creation of a truly cross-cultural and universal psychology” (767).

12. This move by Enriquez counters the identification of Filipinos with what he calls “surface values” (50)—notoriously, with “*pakikisama* (yielding to the leader or [to the] majority [to avoid conflict])” (48)—to legitimate their colonization. Against “the culture-and-personality school” of American scholars, which “summed up the unifying Filipino ‘value system’ as revolving around the centrality of the extended family and its network of ‘smooth interpersonal relationships’” (“Toward a Decolonizing” 49), Enriquez, San Juan explains, “unveils a thesaurus of concepts that departs from *pakikisama* which [the culture-and-personality school] have invoked as the prime support for the status quo of ‘smooth interpersonal relations,’” laying out “at least eight behaviorally recognizable levels and modes of social interaction,” of which *pakikisama* is only one (55).
13. Hence also governing Filipino subjectivity, insofar as it is the internalization of social relations.
14. Asserting that “the *ako* (‘ego’) and the *ibang-tao* (‘others’) are one and the same in *kapwa* psychology: *Hindi ako iba sa aking kapwa* (‘I am no different from others [in terms of the broader category of which we are a part?’]”) (33), Enriquez nonetheless clarifies that “the idea of inclusion vs. exclusion or membership vs. non-membership is not unknown to the Filipino. [The Filipino] just draws the line in the most flexible manner” (34).
15. Concerned with the Filipino’s depiction as social to the point of submission, San Juan defines *kapwa* more modestly as “an apprehension of commonality,” as “a mode of dealing with others as equals,” as a “model of reciprocity” adaptive to context (“Toward a Decolonizing” 56), in a way somewhat reminiscent of the abstract subject of liberal modernity. He reads the distinction between *ibang-tao* and *hindi-ibang-tao*

as a dichotomy in which the side in which one ends up is based on “contexts and other markers of difference and similarity such as language, religious practice, and other modes of spatiotemporal embodiments” (57). While it is important to also claim the Filipino capacity for self-assertion, Enriquez posits *kapwa* at a level higher than the dichotomies shaped by the power struggle with which San Juan is concerned, hence my reading of it in terms not of abstract commonality—the basis of liberalism’s “level playing field,” a euphemism for the power struggle it fosters—but of relation amid difference—a non-modern notion that premises diversity not on the mediation of difference via abstraction but on concrete otherness, which is attributed to both the other/outside, properly speaking, and the self/inside, and thus serves as the ground for relation and identity. This admittedly poststructuralist reading is based on the fact that *kapwa* is used to refer to the other (the *ibang-tao* to whom one recognizes relation), at most to one *as a part of a group* (i.e., to *hindi-ibang-tao*), but never to oneself (i.e., to *ako*)—in the West the prototype for the essence (e.g., *man*) attributed to the whole group that one supposedly represents.

16. As such, this universal subject, San Juan adds, is “rooted in a historically specific itinerary of struggle” (53). Ultimately, Enriquez, San Juan continues, “strives to attain knowledge of the Filipino psyche by displacing Western epistemes with testable hypotheses based on the life-world and competencies [...] of Filipinos in all walks of life” (60).
17. In unraveling the subject’s pretense to sovereignty through cross-border contagion, is trauma perhaps a means of deconstructing the Western subject—of, as it were, rendering it Filipino, in touch with *kapwa*?
18. In other words, *sikolohiyang Pilipino* derives its legitimacy largely from its (claim of) indigeneity, relying on the recognition of those who come from the same context—the fellow indigenous—that its knowledge is true. “Entail[ing] a subjectivist idealism that eschews the testing of truth claims by a universal logic of inference” and “prioritiz[ing] culture (language, conventional usages) as an arbitrary code that provides in itself the rationale or explanation for difference” (62), *sikolohiyang Pilipino*, San Juan continues, ends up essentializing “the Filipino psyche” via a “closed finite set of rules for social interaction” that surely cannot explain all of Filipino social life and do not “account fully for [...] sociocultural differences” among Filipinos (63). In “risk[ing] a nativist valorization of the mechanical solidarity found in feudal or tributary societies,” *sikolohiyang Pilipino* “obviat[es] the need to anchor the analysis and critique of culture in the underlying mode of production and reproduction [...] that delineates the limits and possibilities of long-range social transformation” (64). In this way, “indigenization [...] is a dialectical reflex of globalizing capitalism” (65).
19. Paul A. Kramer recounts the way that, in the Philippine Revolution (1896–1898), mixed-blood *ilustrado* reformists educated in Europe and native nationalist revolutionaries appropriated the term *Filipino*—the name given to the Spanish born in the colony (i.e. *Creole*), who glided in the middle of a racial hierarchy that placed the peninsular Spanish on top and the native-born *indio* at the bottom (39)—as an “autonomous collective identity” (75) that “cut across Spanish colonial racial lines and territorialized membership in a national polity” (85). *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* may also be undermined by another, perhaps more basic, question: to what extent does *kapwa* underpin Filipino sociality and subjectivity? That is, to what extent is Enriquez’s paradigm indeed Filipino?

20. This would be consistent with *sikolohiyang Pilipino*'s function as an indigenous alternative to *and* appropriation of the colonial ontologies that rendered the native subaltern.
21. While Perez does not invoke *sikolohiyang Pilipino* in the novel, it is likely, especially given his desire for cultural authenticity, that he is assuming *kapwa*, which is as pervasive in colloquial Filipino as "freedom" is in American lingo. Its pervasiveness in the language is, of course, the basis of Enriquez's assertion that *kapwa* is a Filipino core value.
22. Once *kapwa* is seen not as the indigenous essence of the Filipino but rather as a postcolonial recuperation of the indigenous and/or as a post-traumatic reclamation of what colonization has wrought, it becomes clear that if the trauma induced by the novel's primal scene amplifies the way that the characters are each other's *kapwa*, it intimates not that the novel is "authentically" Filipino but that it is post-traumatic, like *kapwa*.
23. Eyerman examines trauma's incorporation into group memory through "delayed and negotiated recollection"—i.e., not through event induction but rather through afterward representation (12). "As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves [...] the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma," in his definition, "refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people" in the context of the larger "society" (2). Focusing less on experience than representation, which "bridge[s] the gap between individuals and between [the] occurrence [of trauma] and its recollection" (12) to "articulate [...] a membership group as it identifies [...] a primal scene that solidifies individual/collective identity" (15), Eyerman notes that group memory is at odds with society's "public memory" (7). Admitting that "social groups" tend to have fluid and shifting borders, Eyerman nonetheless maintains that there arises a "distinctive collective memory" for particular groups, especially those organized by period (10–11).
24. "Deconstructive transmission" is the term that, after reading an early draft of this section from my dissertation, Sarita Echavez See gave to the process that I attempt to delineate here—a trace of the crucial role that she played for me starting in those final years in graduate school.
25. In contrast, Perez does not clearly distinguish between memories, dreams, and flashbacks in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao*.
26. Similar criticisms come even from those who are otherwise influenced by Caruth—e.g., from Schwab, who writes, "Th[e] commitment [to psychoanalysis] frames my approach and defines my key premises. Central among them is the claim that trauma presents an attack on memory and the recovering of memory and concomitant processes of mourning in response to catastrophic loss and injury are a precondition for reparation and healing, however limited the healing may be. But in contrast to theorists such as Cathy Caruth, for example, who insist on the 'unrepresentability' of traumatic experience, I emphasize the often delayed urge toward a recovery of memory and representation, not in a literal sense but in the sense of the creative and integrative writing of trauma that comes with working through an event. The delay in this memory work may indeed take one or more generations. Yet the literature about violent histories that has affected me most and that I [...] testifies to the transformational effect of creative rewritings" (25–26). A more ambivalent criticism can be found in LaCapra and a less sympathetic one in Balaev.

27. Leys locates Caruth at the culmination of a history beset with a contradiction—in the context of the established understanding in psychiatry (established as early as World War I, when hypnosis was developed as a response to shell shock, the symptom that would lead to the psychiatric conceptualization of trauma) of post-traumatic repetition in terms of *both* mimetic emotion (as a crude, because unconscious, repetition) *and* representational memory (as a repetition detached from its origin by symbolic means)—which, according to her, Caruth displaces through literal consistency. This leads to Caruth's theory of trauma as reaching the subject “through the urgency [rather than the content] of an address,” by means of the breakdown of “the referential function of words,” in which language is contagious rather than communicative, “capable of bearing witness only by a *failure* of witnessing or representation” (268). This move in which Caruth deconstructs meaning through trauma rather than deconstructing the unconscious status of the meaning of trauma is, according to Leys, based on the materiality of the signifier, a notion derived, she points out, not from Jacques Derrida but from Paul de Man, *and* from a partial reading of Sigmund Freud that rejects castration trauma (associated with “repression, unconsciousness, and symbolization”) in favor of accident trauma (linked to “temporal delay, repetition, and literal return”) (270). Leys also notes that, in abandoning hypnosis, which he interpreted as “the failure of memory in the cathartic cure—that is, the failure of memory defined as self-narration and self-representation—[... i.e.] an expression of the patient's *resistance* to recollection and narration”—Freud would be led to “unconscious desire and repressed representations” and the talking cure (104); in this way, Leys traces Freud's notion of “working through” as a successor to hypnosis. In contrast, Caruth's theory has parallels, Leys argues, with the scientifically dubious neurobiology of Bessel van der Kolk. In her criticism of Caruth's selectively deconstructive appropriation of Freud, Leys approvingly cites Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, who, she argues, presents another deconstructive reading practice that goes back to Freud himself. Leys implies that it is possible to deconstruct psychoanalysis without rejecting representation altogether, thereby making room for linguistic intervention, if only in the “fictive-fantasmatic-suggestive dimension” (275). I have a different purpose in this article: to pursue Caruth's provocation and show that deconstruction beyond symbolization also enacts traumatic processing.
28. Caruth cites Lacan (1981) in her rereading of Freud. Notably, this experience's various aspects—the content (the burning of one's child), the missing of the event (based on subjective inability and temporal irreversibility), the condition of survival (the missing of what is decisive), and the nature of witnessing (seeing but only in the dream)—are strung together by trauma, which lends the experience coherence.
29. Telling, moreover, has as its content not exactly what happened—possible only if the “living father” was able to listen to the “living child”—and not only its traumatic kernel—the gap of survival—but also the traumatic limit of human experience itself—“the very difference between death and life” (106)—the line that cannot be crossed without overwhelming not only consciousness but in fact existence. What is “told” is thus less the origin or content of trauma than some larger significance, some “truth” about (the limits of) human existence itself—perhaps the “nature” of the traumatic experience.
30. Intersubjective and transgenerational, the imperative that defines the aftermath of trauma is not originated or fulfilled by a subject but rather transmitted historically (in

traumatic history), constituting relations to others founded on trauma (in the extension of the traumatic relation). This is consistent with Caruth's statement in an earlier chapter that "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, [...] history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (24).

31. Caruth herself warns about the danger of re-traumatization, which suggests that she does not think that the repetition of trauma by itself amounts to processing and that her theory does include an account of processing. She writes, "The survival of trauma is not the fortunate passage beyond a violent event, a passage that is accidentally interrupted by reminders of it, but rather the endless inherent necessity of repetition, which ultimately may lead to destruction. [...] Indeed, these examples suggest that the shape of individual lives, the history of the traumatized individual, is nothing other than the determined repetition of the event of destruction. [...] As modern neurobiologists point out, the repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be re-traumatizing; if not life-threatening, it is at least threatening to the chemical structure of the brain and can ultimately lead to deterioration" (62–63).
32. Admitting that "narration risks betraying the truth of the trauma [...] as [...] incomprehensible [i.e., as beyond symbolization]" (269), Leys nonetheless insists that transmission "only within the gap or aporia produced by words that do not simply refer to [...] but performatively convey [trauma] as something that cannot be grasped or represented"—i.e., Caruth's exaggeration of trauma's materiality—renders the response the same as the cause (288).
33. Freud writes, "[The analyst] must allow the patient time to become more conversant with this resistance with which he has now become acquainted, to *work through* it, to overcome it, by continuing, in defiance of it, the analytic work" (155), which earlier he described as also employing, rather than disavowing, the resistance to be overcome (150).
34. On transference—the redirection to, or repetition with, the analyst of emotions that originate in the patient's life—Freud writes, "The main instrument [...] for curbing the patient's compulsion to repeat and for turning it into a motive for remembering lies in the handling of the transference. We render the compulsion harmless, and indeed useful, by giving it the right to assert itself in a definite field. We admit it into the transference as a playground in which it is allowed to expand in almost complete freedom and in which it is expected to display to us everything in the way of pathogenic instincts that is hidden in the patient's mind. Provided only that the patient shows compliance enough to respect the necessary conditions of the analysis, we regularly succeed in giving all the symptoms of the illness a new transference meaning and in replacing his ordinary neurosis by a 'transference-neurosis' of which he can be cured by the therapeutic work. The transference thus creates an intermediate region between illness and real life through which the transition from the one to the other is made" (154).
35. As Freud elaborates, melancholia is rooted in "a strong fixation to the loved object" and the regression of "object-cathexis," or desire that is externally directed, "to original narcissism," the subject's sense of others as a part of the self (249). More general and more ambivalent than mourning in being generated by instances of loss other than death (251), melancholia, Freud adds, may just "empty[...] the ego until it is totally impoverished" (253). See also Kristeva .

36. By convention, each chapter of the novel bears the name/s of the character/s it focuses on as its title; strikingly, the penultimate chapters are entitled “The Criminal,” “The Cop,” and “The Kid” and contain their memories—the writing of which, in italics, leads to the opening of the chests.
37. Curiously, traumatic processing tends to be described in trauma theory in terms of *writing*, indicating that it is the privileged form, even as it cannot possibly be the only means, of trauma’s processing. In foregrounding literature’s capacity to reintegrate traumatic histories, for example, Schwab writes, “Writing helps, but it is not enough” (6). Even Leys, in her critique of Caruth’s rejection of representation, implies writing, if by this is meant a symbolic act. LaCapra (2001) presents a more nuanced notion of writing that incorporates deconstruction. In this group of theorists, Caruth is notable in premising working through on a deconstructive notion of writing. At the same time, even as she exaggerates the extent to which the traumatic kernel resists symbolization, Caruth ultimately depicts its deconstructive transmission as leading to some kind of symbolic meaning. After positing mimetic transmission, she concludes, “Through th[is] act of survival, the repeated failure to have seen in time—in itself a pure repetition compulsion, a repeated nightmare—can be transformed into the imperative of a speaking that awakens others [suggesting that the message ultimately reaches, and is understood, by its destination?]” (108). Against deferral that leads not to meaning, if displaced, but to literal return or to deconstructive transmission, Leys, for her part, posits the writing of trauma, implied as not exempted from symbolization or meaning, as the pausing of deconstruction by means of its narrative representation.
38. In asserting that melancholia “might be said to produce not only psychic life and subjectivity but also the domain of remains,” “a realm of traces open to signification,” Eng and Kazanjian hint at melancholia’s relation to deconstruction, especially when they suggest that melancholia leads to “an extended flexibility” of the signifier, “an expanded capacity for representation” (4).
39. This theory of the sign implies that the sign, or the subject or the context, is *not* the origin of meaning; rather, the differential relation between signs is all the origin there is, from which identity, presence, and meaning derive by means of the repetition of the gap at the heart of the relations. On Derrida’s deconstruction of the sign, see Derrida (*Of Grammatology*), Derrida (“Plato’s Pharmacy”), and Derrida (“Différance”). Helpful secondary criticism include *Jacques Derrida* by Bennington and Derrida, which formalizes Derrida’s formulation of writing in “Plato’s Pharmacy” as supplement of supplement, (graphic) signifier of (phonic) signifier; Moati, a reading primarily of Derrida (“Signature Event Context”) in the context of the notorious debate with John Searle; Gasché, which theorizes how the deconstructive, self-divided “origin” is not a metaphysical origin; Wills, which illustrates deconstructions as deriving meaning from what has none, meaning not only from a different ordering, but of a different order; and Lawlor, which characterizes *différance* as doubly double. On the philosophical history of which Derrida’s deconstruction of the sign is a part, see Colebrook.
40. This deconstructive transmission of trauma in which mimesis consists in *Cubao–Kalaw Kalaw–Cubao* goes beyond Erich Auerbach’s notion of modernist mimesis as consisting in the synthesis of the consciousness of multiple subjects (536). To begin with, *mimesis* in Perez denotes the conveyance of reality (in this case, of the traumatic prehistory of the

- story) while in Auerbach it refers to the way in which literature establishes the reality of its story, the rhetorical move that he calls *representation*.
41. The formulation “the writing of [arche-]writing” captures the way in which deconstruction posits the “origin” as *not* fundamentally different from the condition to which it gives rise, which, in turn, repeats, if to redouble, the “origin.”
 42. Cez and Benny also prove transformative for each other, and for Ike, as when Cez confesses to Benny that he killed his brother (178), Cez inspires Benny to speak up and assert himself as a man (187), Cez lets Ike admit that he’s studying psychology to heal himself (115), and Benny enables Ike to clarify the priority for him of Catholicism over psychotherapy (160).
 43. After his climactic scene, Ike, moreover, writes to his brother and suggests that he resolved his feelings about their father at mass, which inspired him to love like the Lord (210).
 44. In fact, Ike is taunted, “You’re just happy when you’re with the kids” (5).
 45. Cez’s other poems perform similar wordplay: “*May Ika ang Wika*” (310), in which *ika* is taken out of the letters of *wika*, or language, and denotes *sequence* but also *a slight limp*, giving the phrase the ambiguous sense of, “Language has order (or deformity);” “*May Sali sa Salita*” (311), which literally refers to how the letters of *sali* are in *salita*, or word/speech, but implies that *salita* presupposes participation, since *sali* is the base form for the verb *join*; “*Ilapit mo ang Lipat*” (311), or “Bring the Move Closer,” which is made more paradoxical by how the Tagalog words for *approach* and *move*, *lapit* and *lipat*, are, if not for the transfer of vowels, the same words; “*Ulit-ulit*” (309), literally, “Repeat-repeat,” a more basic form of *keeps repeating*; “*Cubao-Kalaw*” (307) and “*Kalaw-Cubao*” (323), which bracket the poems, except for “*Gabi*” (324), or night, which ends the collection, the last word in which is “*muli*” (324), or again.
 46. Benny’s jokes include variants of “Which part of the body ...?”—e.g., “*Aling bahagi ng katawan ang mas maliit sa pusod? [...] Pusod*,” which makes sense linguistically but not logically—i.e., only in Filipino.
 47. Interestingly, in Caruth it is the father who listens to the dead child while in Perez it is the children who have to listen to their predecessors.
 48. Distinguishing Perez’s writing from the “minimalist rendering of a richly textured and profoundly complex reality, in which all but the essentials are stripped from full naturalist and sentimentalist description” (246), Tadiar elaborates that “Perez’s writing is precisely an exercise or practicum in the making of a singular life,” in which “individuation is not however a matter of differentiating oneself from other human beings but [in line with *kapwa*] of opening oneself to and connecting with them, with the self managing as a communicative port through which signifying pieces of other selves might be received and reconfigured” (258).
 49. Enriquez mentions Catholicism and American behavioral psychology as being in conflict at the university (14, 16).
 50. Ike also draws on the Wechsler IQ Test (Perez 119). The hegemony of American psychology in the postcolonial Philippines is, of course, one of the products of the overhaul of the Philippine educational system by the U.S. colonial government. San Juan does not mention *kapwa* in his critique of Philippine studies but does mention related

- notions—e.g., “*hiya, utang na loob, and pakikisama*” (“One Hundred Years” 11)—that Enriquez argues are ultimately rooted in *kapwa* as the core concept of Filipino social psychology. Enriquez elaborates on the colonizing appropriations of *kapwa* that led to the depiction of Filipinos as compliant (*Indigenous Psychology* chs. 4–5).
51. Traditionally, Jose Rizal is taken to be the representative of the educated elites and Andres Bonifacio of the revolutionary masses. Ileto charts the ways in which these popular adaptations put a deceitful surrogate (Spain, America), a suffering true mother (*Inang Bayan*, or the Mother Nation), and a son (the Filipino vanguard) who bears the burden of salvation by religious warfare in a triangular conflict, which is resolved by the mingling of the foreign with the domestic and of the personal with the social. See also Ileto (*Filipinos*).
 52. On the Philippines as a target for U.S. creative writing, see Nadal.
 53. B. Carlo Tadiar is cited by Neferti X. M. Tadiar (238). Consistently, in the novel, Ike and Cez watch a live telecast of Filipino–American Friendship Day on July 4 that culminates in music by the Philippine Army Band and the U.S. Air Force Band in the Pacific (Perez 105). As an observer, Ike could not help but be awed by the technical equipment, artifacts of U.S. modernity that he wishes were utilized to spread the word of the Lord (104).
 54. *Cubao 1980*, which is subtitled “*First Shout of the Gay Liberation Movement in the Philippines*,” is criticized by Garcia for the same tendency, wherein Perez’s goal turns out to be the opposite of what he calls it. By “gay liberation,” what Perez means is the liberation of gay people from their “*kabaklaan*,” or queerness, so that they can attain humanity—hardly a liberation and hardly gay, as Garcia (2009) points out. Against this, Garcia writes, “The most significant realization I ‘received’ from [*Cubao 1980*] is that no matter how much a Filipino gay writer tries to disavow *kabaklaan*—as perhaps a function of his class or religious subject-position—he can only *write from it*” (372). Tadiar interprets this minoritization of the *bakla* as one of the implications of the New Society (249).
 55. This explanation of the father’s crime as rooted in the traditional family is not meant to excuse the father’s criminal behavior, much less to equate sexual deviancy with criminality, which, in contrast, is the form that polymorphous perversity takes when it returns as the repressed. While the family as a social formation does not lead the cop, Benny’s adoptive father, to the crime, Benny’s trauma would not have taken the form of fixation on childhood had he not been solely dependent on the cop, the only family he had in a world where it is of utmost importance (49–52).
 56. This doubleness of the double is what Derrida (*Rogues*) calls *autoimmunity*, the constitutive openness, hence vulnerability, of the One to otherness—i.e., to the *différance* that is its condition and which, as Martin Hägglund elaborates, automatically activates protective strategies (the immune system) that irreducibly include attacks on the self and emulation of the “attacking” Other. That both Catholicism and psychotherapy are underpinned by writing implies that dialectics (the relation between religious and creative/therapeutic writing) is likewise underpinned by deconstruction (the archi-writing that structures both religious symbolization and unconscious transmission).
 57. The dissociation of Catholicism in the Philippines from its Spanish origins is a part of the ahistorical argument that Spanish and Filipino cultures have a natural affinity, that

Filipino culture is more compatible with Spanish than with American culture. Enriquez mentions this argument (*Indigenous Psychology* 14).

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