

A TROPICAL TRAUMATURGY

Rereading the Folk in “May Bagyo Ma’t May Rilim”

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Abstract

As a counterpoint to the foremost understanding of the poem dubbed as “May Bagyo Ma’t May Rilim” (lit. “There may be storm and dark”) (1605) as an articulation of an unnamed native’s submission to Catholicism, as well as a testament to their then unwavering faith, the present essay attempts to reconsider the poem through a comparative reading alongside folk poetry wagered to have come from earlier times. In other words, the poem is reread through a temporal realignment of it in the conventional periodization of Philippine (literary) history, moving it from its frequent grouping among texts from (early) Spanish colonization and toward an assemblage with the so-called precolonial texts, such as the folk *bugtong* (riddle), *salawikain* (proverb), *dalit* (octosyllabic quatrain), and *hudhud* (an Ifugao epic). In reinscribing the poem with these texts, the aforementioned understanding of the poem as merely an affirmation of Catholic faith is then eluded, allowing instead the emergence of a certain folk traumaturgy, that is, a trauma-work that recognizes *súgat* as a wound whose arrival is most accepted and anticipated, if only to transfigure it as well as an opportunity. This traumaturgy intuited from the poem is therefore perceived to be an embodiment of tropicality, not on its reliance on the “precolonial” folk sensibility that is yet to be tempered or colonized, but in its demonstration of a turn that poetically attenuates terror and transforms it as a moment perhaps of the erotic.

Keywords

Philippine folk poetry, tropicality, trauma, vernacular, *súgat*

Bionote

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I.

At the end of Fray Francisco de San Jose's *Memorial de la vida cristiana en lengua tagala*, a book written to explain to the Filipino natives the basic principles of the Catholic faith, an unnamed Tagalog poet, simply described as "Una persona tagala," responds to the friar's teachings and expresses approval of the book through a supposed verse of praise ("respondiendo / a esto, en aprovacion del libro, / dijo asi en verso suyo") ("reponds / here, in approval of the book, / said so in verse") (451; translation mine):

May bagyo ma't, may rilim
 Ang ola'y, titiguisin,
 Aco'y, magpipilit din:
 Acquiring paglalacbayin
 Toloyin cong hanapin
 Dios na ama namin.

Say it is stormy and dark
 The rain shall I contain,
 And I, too, shall contend:
 I shall go on a journey
 And persist my searching
 For God who is our father.

Cun di man magupiling
 Tocsong mabaomabaoin,
 Aco'y, mangangahas din:
 Itong libro'y, basahin,
 At dito co hahangoin
 Acquiring sasandatahin.

Say it cannot be laid to slumber
 This tremendous temptation,
 Shall I brave then to do so:
 That this book, to have it read,
 And from here, that I shall take
 The weapon which I will wave.

Cun dati mang nabulag
 Aco'y, pasasalamat,
 Na ito ang liuanag
 Dios ang nagpahayag
 Sa Padreng nagsiualat
 Nitong mabuting sulat.

Say before I was blinded
 I can only now give thanks,
 That this is the light indeed
 That God himself proclaimed
 To the priest who has revealed
 This good testament.

Naguiua ma't, nabagbag
 Daloyong matataas,
 Aco'y magsusumicad
 Babagohin ang lacas;
 Dito rin hahaguilap
 Timbulang icaligtas.

Say I am tossed and grounded,
 And the waves far too great,
 Shall I flounder then my legs,
 And rekindle my strength;
 Here too shall I pursue
 The buoy that will save.

Cun lombo ma't, cun pilay
 Anong di icahacbang
 Naito ang aacay
 Magtuturo nang daan:
 Toncod ay inilaan
 Sucat pagcatibayan.

(de San Jose 451-452)

Say I were crippled or limping,
 What for would I not tread
 When this, too, shall I carry
 To point me the way:
 A staff that has been made
 Enough to brave.

(translation mine)¹

According to Bienvenido Lumbera, “the poem has remained buried for more than three centuries and a half since its publication, unnoticed by scholars” (39)—that is, until his inclusion and reading of it in his 1967 foundational study on Tagalog poetry during the Spanish colonial era. The rediscovery of the poem was crucial to him, for more than being the purported “first example of written poetry by a native Tagalog poet,” he also considers it as “a fine specimen of early Tagalog poetry for which the author richly deserves to be celebrated,” describing it as “a carefully crafted poem that transcends its prosaic subject matter and becomes, through the use of evocative imagery, a touching affirmation of Christian heroism” (Lumbera 39-40; see also Lumbera and Lumbera 37-38).

In his reading, Lumbera underscores the “self-contained” quality of each stanza in the poem, which he notes to be a testament of its “very definite affinities with folk poetry” (42), that is, to the single-stanza poems such as the *bugtong* (riddle), the *salawikain* (aphorism), the *tanaga* (heptasyllabic quatrains), and the *dalit* (octosyllabic quatrains) (see 3-19; 32). At the same time, Lumbera remarks that in the case of the poem, the self-contained stanzas are particularly unified, too, “through the use of a central motif” (43)—namely, the journey of a supposed devoted Christian persona toward “God our Father.” This perceived “organic unity”² in the poem is crucial for Lumbera, for while it differentiates the journey undertaken by the Christian hero of the poem from those undertaken by the folk heroes of native epics—which often accommodate multiple detours, digressions, and repetitions³ instead of merely having a direct movement toward a certain goal, such as being with “God our Father”—the aforementioned unity is also asserted to “mark the beginning of a break from the improvisational freeness of oral poetry toward the tightness of written poetry” (43; see also Almario, *Taludtod at Talinghaga* 200-202).

Lumbera’s reading can be considered as the foremost understanding of the poem, as it has significantly set the tone for the succeeding critical engagements with it. For instance, while the poem is simply titled in Fray de San Jose’s book as “Una persona tagala respondiendole a esto, en aprovacion del libro, dijo asi en verso suyo” (“A Tagalog person responds here, in approval of the book, said so in verse”) (451; translation mine), it has come to be known under the title derived from its

first line, namely “May bagyo ma’t may rilim.” As Virgilio Almario notes, such reference to the poem even to this day can be surmised to have emerged out of habit (“nakagawian”) (*Kung sino ang kumatha* 55), the origin of which can be traced back to Lumbera’s initial use of the said line as a provisional title for the poem (39).⁴

Furthermore, Lumbera’s attribution of this perceived organic unity of the poem to the supposed unwavering faith of its persona also shaped the primary understanding of it: after his reading, the Christian hero in the poem is anticipated to uphold a certain unchanging devotion, ultimately leaving no time for a moment of doubt, regardless of the events that might take place on the journey toward “God our Father.” Indeed, as Rebecca Añonuevo remarks, “the poem has become a vessel for the laments and desires of the native spirit: it has blaze, it has boldness, it has faithfulness, it is ready to weather the storm and struggle to attain the light and peace promised by the Word of God” (“ang tula ay naging sisidlan ng daing at adhika ng katutubong kaluluwa: may alab, may tapang, may katapatan, nakahanda itong suungin ang unos at makipaglaban para makamtan ang liwanag at kapayapaang pangako ng Salita ng Diyos”) (75; translation mine). With such consistent appraisal of the poem as a “touching affirmation of Christian heroism,” the said faith has then seemingly become the main, if not the sole turn traversed in the journey that is the poem, and by extension, the reading of it; simply put, its meaning has been regimented according to this same worldview imposed by Spanish colonialism itself, centuries ago (Tolentino 90). This way, the habitus by which the natives were subjected to think, feel, and move then is practically extended even to the present times, via the similar manner of reading.

In other words, the violence of Catholicism—and therefore, of coloniality too—is practically sustained, if not furthered by the unvaried readings of this poem as merely a lyrical testament of religious heroism. It is from this perpetuated violence, and the contemporary decolonial imperative to refuse it, that Almario has attempted to reread the unnamed native’s poem through syncopating instead on its subjunctive rhetoric (“retorikang pasakali”), that is, its potential as a mode of imagination: according to him, one can sense the subversion (“pailalim na pagsalungat”) at work in the repetitive use of the conjunction *kung* (“if”) and the adverb *man* (“though”) that demonstrate how the poem ultimately offers purely theoretical instances in which Catholic teachings can be reevaluated, if not destabilized (*Kung sino ang kumatha* 56). He remarks that the “more practical considerations on the purpose of San Jose’s writings beat in the verse, forcibly relating it to particular problems and experiences in life, so that the exaggerated faith is countered...” (“tumitibok sa taludturan ang higit na praktikal na pagtuturing sa silbi ng sinulat ni San Jose, iniuugnay pilit sa mga tiyakang suliranin at karanasan sa buhay, kaya’t nasusubhan ang eksaheradong paanalig...”) (56; translation mine). With such rhetorical strategy, the “central motif” in the poem that is the bagyo or the storm is then intuited to

be there not so much to be overcome by the assumed heroic Christianity of the persona, and to finally become a testament of its strength, than to be underscored as a practical concern that one should also consider in the journey toward “God our Father,” figured as it is in such maritime terms. In this sense, the storm in the poem is recognized to be an opportunity, too, to reveal the possible material limits of the sheer reliance on faith during such perilous ventures.

Almario’s critical attention to the rhetorical strategy of the poem, however, confines his own attempt toward a decolonizing reading of it. For when considered in relation to the material context in which the poem has emerged, Almario also seemingly concedes that the subjunctive mood of the poem only remains as such—no more than an imagined disposition—as the poem is still perceived to be ultimately complicit to the violence of colonization, most especially because it appears to simply allow a glimpse (“magpapabanaag”) of such hostile subjugation (*Kung sino ang kumatha* 56). Resistance, if there were any, is implied to be coopted at most by the dominating power: after all, as Almario also argues, the very inclusion of the poem in Fray de San Jose’s book renders it to be inevitably subjected to the same violence, since “the placement of the poems inside the book can be read as signifying of valorization of the texts according to the standard of the colonizers” (“ang naging lunan ng mga tula sa loob ng aklat ay maaaring basahing sagisag sa balorasyon ng mga akda sang-ayon sa panukatan ng mananakop”) (56; translation mine).

One can therefore say that despite Almario’s recourse to the subjunctive rhetoric as to essay a preliminary refusal to the colonial forces at work in both the poem and its canonical reading, the assumed imaginary disposition has not yet been, in fact, imaginary enough, incapable as it was to envision an alternative that could allow a departure from what has been insisted on the poem historically. It is then from this implication that the present prose attempts to reconsider the poem by the unnamed native through what I wager as a coincidental reading of it (see Benitez, “On the Weariness” 211n3), that is, alongside folk poetry wagered to have come from earlier times: the poem, in other words, is to be reread through temporally realigning it in the conventional periodization of Philippine (literary) history, moving it from its frequent grouping among texts from (early) Spanish colonization (see for instance Almario, *Kung sino ang kumatha* 43-58; Deviles 37; Lumbea 22-48 and Tolentino 75-93), and toward an assemblage with the so-called “precolonial” texts, such as the folk bugtong, salawikain, dalit, and hudhud.⁵ This realignment is crucial in the imperative of rereading the poem, as it immediately disrupts not only the canonical appraisal of the text, but as well as the established demarcations in Philippine history writ large, which has been primarily cleaved and categorized according to the most traumatic of events, among them the Spanish colonization. Therefore, through this manner of rereading, the poem is rendered

to be an embodiment of the thinkable coincidence, in fact, of the periods typically labelled as “precolonial” and “Spanish colonial” (see for instance Devilles 33).

In such reinscription of the poem with the “precolonial” folk texts—and by extension, into their worldview—the aforementioned understanding of the poem as merely a “touching affirmation of Christian heroism” is then aspired to be eluded, to let the emergence instead of a certain folk traumaturgy, that is, a trauma-work that recognizes *súgat* as a vernacular rendition of the wound whose arrival is most accepted and even anticipated, if only to transfigure it as an opportunity. In other words, in the present rereading, the described endurance in the poem against the storm and the dark is attributed less to the persona’s supposed devotion for “God who is our Father,” who is also believed to be the destination of the journey, than to the persona’s own dexterity that permits the possibility of a movement from pain to healing. As such, this traumaturgy is therefore intuited to be an embodiment of tropicality, not merely in terms of an imaginary of a “precolonial” folk sensibility from the tropics that is yet to be tempered or colonized, particularly by the Spaniards, but as demonstrative of a turn that can poetically attenuate terror and transform it as a moment perhaps of the erotic.

II.

Tropicality as a discursive quality is most instructive in the attempt to reread the poem written by the unnamed Tagalog poet. While commonly understood to simply be the characteristic of the region residing between the 23.5° latitudes north and south of the equator (see, for instance, “Trópikó”), scholars such as David Arnold crucially assert that tropicality must also be considered as an attribute of a “conceptual, and not just physical, space” (*The Problem* 141-142). Such conceptual spatiality of tropicality renders it to be, more than anything, “a discourse,” one that is particularly “shaped by distinctions between temperate and tropical lands, with the temperate world routinely exalted over its tropical counterpart” (Clayton and Bowd 209). This way, similar to Edward Said’s understanding of the Orient, tropicality is grounded on “knowledgeable manipulation” (55) that has been projected on this worldly zone throughout history.

The discursive intuition of tropicality can be further delineated from orientalism through considering the trope, from which the term *tropicality* has been primarily derived. According to Hayden White, the trope, rooted from the classical Greek word *tropos* meaning “turn,” is “both a movement *from* one notion of the way things are related *to* another notion, and a connection between things so that they can be expressed in a language that takes account of the possibility of their being

expressed otherwise” (“Introduction” 2). In other words, for White, the trope is both a turn toward and away from particular ideations, the simultaneity of which only emphasizes on the specificity of a present discursive moment: an event can be articulated through many different manners, and therefore any moment attempting to express the said instance is ultimately enthememically rendering as well of other possible expressions regarding the same matter. Irony is thus intuited to be at the core of any discursive gesture: “constantly asking if logic is adequate to capture the essence of its subject matter, discourse always tends toward metadiscursive reflexiveness” (4)—if only to assert that the manner and method of the discourse, and not merely its subject, are arguments in themselves, as in fact, the very choice of the former elements is considerably an initial moment already of discoursing.

Through White’s formulation, tropicality then can be understood as not only pertaining to the worldly zone found along the Equator, but also to an “attitude” that “emerges from the comparison” engendered by tropes (Jacobo, “Mood of Metaphor” 22). In other words, tropicality is that quality of being *tropical*, or the quality of being *tropic*, that is, being subjected to the tropes or such discursive turns. And as already mentioned, these two definitions for tropicality—the worldly and the discursive—find their critical intersection in terms of colonial discourse: tropes as discursive weapon—as “psychological mechanism of defense” (Bloom 91, in White, “Introduction” 2)—are crucial in facilitating the ideological constructions of that worldly zone that was severed into parts, as to become the colonies of various temperate empires. It is tropicality that has constructed—indeed, naturalized—the tropics to be imagined as that “self-contained environmental paradise where a perfect (generally leisured) life may be enjoyed... [as] it has been elaborated in novels, films, tourist advertising and ‘reality’ television” (Cosgrove 212). Therefore, tropicality can also be recognized as the subjection—the very tempering—of the natives residing in this particular part of the world to imperial imaginings: tropicality is that discursive construction of these people as, for instance, savages that need salvation, in aspects spiritual and otherwise.⁶

And yet, at the same time, the trope’s “deeply ambivalent discourse, with positive and negative strains” (Clayton and Bowd 209), must also simultaneously suggest opportunities to turn against the violence of colonial insistence that has uttered it in the first place. For while a given discursive moment indeed gestures toward a certain direction, one can also interpret it contrapuntally, that is, to understand it instead in terms of its opposite yet often understated directions. Therefore, such text as the poem written by the unnamed Tagalog poet, despite its canonical—and hence seemingly resolute—turn toward submission to the teachings of Catholicism, is definitely and always possible to be read as well in manners different, and perhaps even contrary, to its foremost and dominant interpretation. In other words, through such rereading, one effectually embodies what Walter Benjamin calls as material

historicism, whose primary “task [is] to brush history against the grain” (257) of the most violent storm he names *Progress* (258), especially in its brutal expression as colonialism (see McClintock 36-39). In taking up such task of brushing against the grain, it can then be argued that one has already begun embodying, too, the similar moment in the unnamed native’s poem, where an impending storm is beheld, albeit now for a different purpose: not to overcome the tempest as to purportedly demonstrate the imposed heroism of the Catholic faith, but to actually encounter such disturbance, atmospheric and beyond, if only to let another appraisal of the same poem emerge anew.

Tropicality, in other words, permits a rereading of the mentioned poem by the unnamed Tagalog poet: that instead of merely letting it turn once more toward the canonical understanding that has been repeatedly imposed upon it—that is, its supposed “touching affirmation of Christian heroism”—a reconsideration can turn the attention instead toward the immediate critical moments in the described journey, such as the native’s being blind (“nabulag”), the capsizing of their vessel (“naguiua ma’t nabagbag”), and their becoming limp, if not altogether crippled (“lompo ma’t, cun pilay”). This way, what becomes underscored in the rereading of the poem is not the native’s expected, if not obliged, overcoming of the harshest adversities toward the successful pursuit of “God our Father,” but the turns themselves that happen during the pursuit itself—the very instances of wounding incurred from—if not incurred *as*—the journey that is said to take place.

At the same time, it is also by the virtue of tropicality that the poem of the unnamed native poet can be temporally realigned in the conventional periodization of Philippine (literary) history. Such gesture is intuited to be possible due to the perceivable ambiguity of any discourse, that must also evoke then the potential to read the said poem against the grain, as to alternatively coincide it with texts that have been commonly severed from it as per the traditional historical periodizations. In other words, it is by tropicality that the unnamed native’s poem can be sequestered from other religious poems produced during the early parts of Spanish colonialism, so as to assemble it instead among folk texts that have been wagered to “precede” it, that is, texts that have been frequently categorized under the so-called historic period that is the “precolonial.”

This latter categorization is, of course, taken with utmost suspicion. As Nick Joaquin underscores, “before 1521”—before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores on the shores of what would become the Philippines—the archipelago “could have been anything and everything” (21). By extension, the same ambiguity can then be also remarked on the thinkable time “before 1521” that has been conveniently named as “precolonial.” Furthermore, it is also crucial to note that the presently included texts that are commonly modified by this stand-in adjective of “precolonial” were

also obtained through colonial duress, one way or another, and thus can be classified as well under the name “colonial.” Therefore, in citing the folk texts considered in the present essay as “precolonial”—and by extension, even the figuration of the “folk”—what is induced is the common, if not idiomatic, dissemination of these keywords in contemporary Philippine scholarly landscape: as a considerable trope in itself laden with trite conceptions of the archipelago “before” its colonizations, the term “precolonial” and the figure of the “folk” are then harnessed here as an opportunity too from which the task of reading against the grain might begin. At the very least, the terms must reveal the artificiality of periodizing time, as in what has been frequently imagined of Philippine (literary) history: that such divisions are ultimately shaped by tropes, and so, given the ambiguity of these turns, capable as well of being reconfigured to turn toward other, and perhaps more generative, directions (see White, *Metahistory*).

In performing this contrapuntal reading of the unnamed Tagalog’s poem, what is desired then is not a recovery of a “folk” sensibility that can be heralded as uncontaminated by coloniality, for the nostalgic drive that underlies such aspiration would only dangerously duplicate the imperial tropicalizations of the Philippines. Instead, what is proposed in rereading the poem is its possible movement toward yet another direction, which in turn asserts another imagination, an alternative to what has been canonically believed to be already known and understood, if only to ultimately introduce a different opportunity through which one could reconsider the archipelago. It is here that the erotic potency of the poem can be intuited—in the “astonishment” that lies in the chance of the poem to be reread again, as to once more “begin to plumb [its] unsuspected enormity” (Mathews 19), which is also a form of refusal to the similarly projected trope of the Philippine “heritage of smallness” (Joaquin 351-370).⁷ In other words, it is through rereading in different terms the poem supposedly written by an unnamed native that resistance is to be presently perceived as happening, too, even in the slightest of turns such as the trope, centuries before—and possibly, even after—what came to be known as revolutions.

III.

The task of rereading the poem by the unnamed Tagalog poet can begin by turning to a folk poem found in Fray Juan de Noceda and Fray Pedro de Sanlucar’s *Vocabulario de la lengua tagala*:

Ang sugat ay cong tinangap
di daramdamin ang antac,

The wound, if accepted,
would not be felt in its pain,

ang aayao at di mayag,
galos lamang magnanacnac.

(Noceda and Sanlucar 193, 334, 409)

to those who resist and refuse,
even a scratch would fester.

(translation mine)⁸

While its octosyllabic measure and being a quatrain formally qualifies the poem as a *dalit* (Eugenio et al. 260; Almarino, *Pag-unawa sa Ating Pagtula* 91), Lumbera notes that it also shares the tendency of the *tanaga* for “an emotional and intellectual expressiveness” (16).⁹ Indeed, as Almarino notes, the poem is forthright as “a philosophical view on any problem (‘sugat,’ i.e., ‘wound’) or hardship in human life” (“isang pilosopikong pagtanaw ito sa anumang suliranin (‘sugat’) o hirap sa búhay ng tao”) (*Taludtod at Talinghaga* 112; translation mine): one’s resolution to confront a *súgat* or wound is supposed to ironically incur less pain than an attempt to evade it. As such, one can easily relate the *dalit* back to the unnamed native’s poem, understanding the latter now as a demonstration of the same “live ironic regard to... whole-hearted acceptance to literal and metaphoric storms” (“buháy [na] maparikalang pagpapahalaga sa... maluwag-sa-loob na pagtanggap sa mga tunay at matalinghagang bagyo”) (Sanchez, “Palaisipan 6”; translation mine).

And yet, lest the understanding of such acceptance of the wound regresses to the colonial project of submission, a critical attention to the tropicity of this *dalit*—that is, the discursive turns through which the poem conveys its perceived wisdom—can alternatively underscore a mode of action that could characterize instead a folk relationship with trauma: with its key verbs such as *tanggap* (acceptance), *aayao* (resistance) and *di mayag* (refusal), one can intuit in the *dalit* a certain circulation at work, particularly between oneself and the wound suffered, as if it is a thing separate from the body. Here, one can recognize that the locus of the *dalit* is not so much on the instance of the wounding per se, but on its aftermath, as to how one might possibly react to this traumatic event. This way, in the folk poem, the primary occurrence that has instigated both the wounding and the response to it is ultimately displaced, as to tend in its place the phenomenology of it.

In this particular problematization of the *dalit* regarding one’s relationship with the experience of a most wounding event, an intuition toward a possible trauma-work or traumaturgy can be derived from the poem, and articulated by way of its apparent tropes of circulation. Jaya Jacobo lucidly explicates on such folk traumaturgy as follows:

In the poem, the wound (*sugat*) is a gift upon the condition (*cun*) that it will be received (*tinanggap*). Suffering (*dusa*) here is not one to be avoided, but welcomed, so that one will be able to weather other kinds of pain (*sakit*). To receive the gift of suffering is to

strengthen one's inner self, to fortify the fortress of the kaloóban. The negation (*aayaw*) and the refusal (*di mayag*) of the gift only cause the body to malfunction and err in matters of surviving. In the poem, pain is a rupture that must be internalized and accepted as a total experience. To transcend the hurt, it needs to be contained. Once one realizes this, the sufferer self-heals. The traumaturgic is the threshold to the thaumaturgic. One needs to know that the body is capable of activating built-in mechanisms of passive resistance. It is here that suffering, following Patrick Flores, becomes sufferance: "The term sufferance is favored than suffering as it stresses the politics of overcoming a problematic site of pain in the same way that grievance reworks grief" ("Makulay na Daigdig" 7). This activation of a dexterity is the point where we locate *the trope that desires to move from pain and emulate its acts of healing*. ("Mood of Metaphor" 94) (last emphasis mine)

In her relocation of the tropes of trauma to an ecology of exchange that is gift-giving, Jacobo is able to recognize the agency of the wounded in an acknowledgment of their "built-in mechanisms of passive resistance." Since acceptance is ultimately perceived as a movement too in itself, and thus critical to and constitutive of the object to be received as much as the very gesture of giving, it then permits one to possibly transfigure the taken wound as a gift as well, thereby receiving it as "a total experience" whose limits can encompass even a subsequent "transcend[ance from] the hurt."¹⁰ In such a transformative acceptance, it can be construed that indeed, as Jacobo posits, "the traumaturgic is the threshold to the thaumaturgic": it is at this point of acceptance as an embodiment of trauma-work that one can move, as if magically, through and past the painful laceration, eroticizing it by way of accepting its totality, "plumbing its unsuspected enormity," which can then ironically allow its eventual turn toward the potential "emulat[ion of] its acts of healing." In other words, this is a traumaturgy that truly accepts the wound, to the extent that it is also able to deeply understand its most tropical capacity as to even sway it toward other, counterintuitive directions.¹¹

The thaumaturgic effect of this folk traumaturgy, however, does not immediately or necessarily equate to an absolute healing: just as how the gift cannot be—and indeed, must not be—countered with a presumed equivalent,¹² the critical gesture of acceptance asserted in the poem does not also promise a thorough elimination of the trauma. Instead, the trauma-work only suggests a technique for reducing the phenomenon of hurt of the wound ("*di daramdamin ang antac*"), that in itself can be crucial toward the possibility of recovery. In this sense, the folk traumaturgy pronounced in the poem can be considered as akin to what Dominic LaCapra describes as the process of working-through, which "does not mean avoidance, harmonization, simply forgetting the past... [but] coming to terms with the trauma, including details." (143-144).

It is in this possibility intuited from such folk traumaturgy that its mechanism can be appreciated for its utmost tropicity: for while it does turn toward the wound and yield to its most painful existence, it simultaneously turns away from it and move toward other directions, including perhaps the futurity that is healing. And as far as the folk is concerned, there is no other way to tend one's wound—for if one is to insist otherwise, that is, to immediately, and forcefully, lead oneself toward complete healing, the assumed directness of the movement can only digress, yielding instead what could be most contrary to what one actually desires: the festering of what actually is a mere scratch (“galos lamang [na] magnanacnac”). Healing then, like any other *panahon* or time for the folk, is intuited to be an event that cannot be compelled, only encountered, and so entails one the necessary patience (see Benitez, “*Panahon and Bagay*” 2019, 471-479).¹³ As a salawikain articulates this ironic phenomenon:

Ang sugat na pinalamnan,
gumaling ma’y balantukan.

(Eugenio, *The Proverbs* 646)¹⁴

A wound that is stuffed
may seem healed but fester
underneath.

(translation mine)¹⁵

IV.

When the folk is able to activate this traumaturgic dexterity, and to embody it even as a “pervasive aesthetic” of sorts, with a “discourse of melodrama,” “attendant excess,” and “hysterical expressiveness” (Flores, “Postcolonial Sufferance” 107-8), it is only conceivable that over and through time, the folk can cultivate this trauma-work as a habitus as quotidian as any other gesture. In other words, in repeatedly harnessing this trauma-work, the folk is capable of becoming a playful thaumaturge, a figure who is most adept of accepting the wound not so much as a threat than an opportunity perhaps to tropically eventuate transformations. Such thaumaturgic figure can then be imagined as the one who is able not only to take the wound, but as well as to anticipate its very arrival, as described in the following bugtong:

Malayo pa man ang sibat
nakanganga na ang sugat.

(Eugenio, *The Riddles* 427)¹⁶

Though the spear is still far
the wound is already agape.

(translation mine)

In this riddle, the answer is the mouth, as in during an instance of feeding, when the said orifice is willingly opened in anticipation of the food to be consumed, imagined here to be brought with the utensil represented by the spear (“sibat”). However, instead of the usual comparison of the orifice with topographic objects such as a well, a brook, a pond, a ricefield, or a cave as in other bugtong pertaining to the same body part (see Eugenio, *The Riddles* 422-424), this particular riddle peculiarly pertains to the mouth as an agape wound (“nakanganga[ng] sugat”), as if it were a feature that is foreign to the body. In this troping, the mouth is then deduced to be imagined as inorganic, “external... [as] an element that can harm the body” (“eksternal... [bilang] elementong maaaring magbigay ng sákit sa tao”) (Sanchez, *Aralin at Siyasat* 220; translation mine), and can only be possessed after the most violent of encounters, instead of a given part in one’s physique. In other words, the bugtong transfigures the mouth into something that the body can—and in fact, must—do without, what the body actually heals of itself in due time in order to regain its health.

At the same time, another solution can be proposed to the same bugtong: if one is to perceive the poem as double-entendre by the virtue of its tropical ambiguity (Hart 27-28), one can assert instead that the orifice pertained here is in fact the female genitalia, as in during sexual intercourse. A Kankanay and an Isneg riddle both seem to substantiate this erotic suggestion, in their similar description of what is identified to be the tili or oki, that is, the female genitalia:

Binetbet di Kabunian
adin kapeypey-an.

(Eugenio, *The Riddles* 458)

Cut by Kabunian
it cannot be healed.

(translation mine)

Attab dato manaam
maddi mapipiyanan.

(Vanoverbergh 20)

Slashed by the wise,
it cannot be cured.

(Vanoverbergh 57)

As given by the wise Kabunian, believed by the Cordillerans to be one of the divine creators of the earth (see Eugenio, *The Myths* 50-51), the foreignness of the wound that is the bodily orifice is now perceived to be endemic, a part of one’s physique, designated as it is to the native by the divine himself. And in such figuration, the wound is then implied to be incapable of healing or curing (“adin kapeypey-an,” “maddi mapipiyanan”) even by itself through time, precisely because the wound

must be retained in its being a wound, that is, in its being cut and slashed, especially since it has been divinely gifted. In other words, as intuited from these *bugtong*, the wound is the rule, and woundedness is the condition of being. After all, even life itself can be intuited as such wounding, being a gift that is also most unexpected: life is born and raised from that traumatic moment between giving that is also a severance from its giver, as metonymized in the cutting of the umbilical cord or even in the secretion of the bodily fluid that sets the process of conception into motion; and receiving that is an enduring, too, of the recipient to this life so sudden and without any apparent reason in its donation.¹⁷ Indeed, as Jacobo succinctly puts it, “nativity is the wounding” (“Mood of Metaphor” 21; emphasis mine).¹⁸

With such regard to the wound as a necessary condition for being, the first riddle concerning the mouth can then be understood differently: as a bodily feature, the mouth is not only similar to any wound, but to a wound that is particularly most anachronistic, in the sense that it has already anticipated itself even before the arrival of the laceration—in the case of the *bugtong*, a cutting spear (“*malayo pa ang sibat*”)—that supposedly instigates the trauma into existence. In other words, the wound as the mouth is already agape (“*nakanganga*”) even when the spear is yet to strike the skin because the presence of the mouth itself—indeed, its being carved on the human head—was made possible by similar preceding acts of cutting and slashing, which has also given this gift of wound-life in the first place.¹⁹ Therefore, in the same *bugtong*, the opening of the wound that is the mouth can be understood as simply an activation of one’s traumaturgic dexterity: since one has already accepted the trauma—and by extension, one’s being—one can only be most capable of anticipating another wounding, too, and even turning it into whatever one desires—as in, for instance, the wound agape even at the prospect of another striking; or, as in poem of the unnamed native, beholding an impending storm, and then willingly persisting through and past it.

V.

The tropical traumaturgy described thus far can be further demonstrated through the *Ifugao hudhud* of *Aliguyon*, as sung by *Hinayup Bantayan* of *Burnay* and transcribed by *Pio Abul* (*Mariano* 14). In this epic, the aforementioned hero from *Hannanga* wages war against another hero, namely *Pumbakhayon* from *Daligidigan*, with whom he shares a long-standing conflict inherited from their fathers, and implicitly, from their earlier ancestors, too. Therefore, warfare, however divisive it may seem, is understood to be a way for these heroes to live up to their places in their respective clans, as sons of their own chief fathers; it is the very wound, so to speak, that makes the condition of their being possible, namely as folk heroes.

In the case of Aliguyon and Pumbakhayon, however, their most identical strengths and skills in wielding the spear has rendered their war into a deadlock: when one throws his weapon, the other merely catches it, making their fight last for years, moving from one place to another, without any indication of ending. This way, the warfare has seemingly turned into a choreographed play: with the perfect parallelism between the heroes, the prospect of danger seems to have been already elided; the spear, from being a perilous weapon, has turned into a plaything to be thrown and caught between each other. The wounds of the war—and the wound that is the war—has become banal and ceased being traumatic, in the sense that nothing seemed to happen anymore then, not a single “shock” that could “break in the mind’s experience of time” (Caruth 61), and thus rendering it as a time “homogenous [and] empty” (Benjamin 264).²⁰

This repetitive, if not monotonous encounter of the two heroes culminates with the arrival of a third: Daulayan, Pumbakhayon’s prospective brother-in-law, who intervened in the fight out of his desire to help Pumbakhayon finally put an end to the war. Moreover, Daulayan was also motivated by his own intention to prove himself worthy of the hand of Pumbakhayon’s sister Bugarin in marriage (see Mariano 45-50, lines 610-722). Daulayan, however, did not have the same strength and skills the two heroes possess: when Aliguyon threw his spear once again, Daulayan was unable to catch it, inadvertently letting the sharp edge of the weapon strike his legs instead. Daulayan was then mortally wounded, suffering for an entire year and a half, and implied to have eventually succumbed to death. Meanwhile, from Daulayan’s failed intervention, Aliguyon and Pumbakhayon came upon a realization: as heroes of equal strength and skills, they were the only ones who could possibly match up against each other, and therefore most worthy of becoming each other’s kins. This then prompted the “invariabl[e] end” (Revel 59-60) of the hudhud: the two heroes marry each other’s sister, effectively ending the war and uniting their clans at long last.

Despite his seemingly futile intervention in the war between Aliguyon and Pumbakhayon, Daulayan’s figure deserves utmost critical attention, for while his appearance might simply give the impression of foolish arrogance, it must be noted that it was also only through his presence that a different turn finally became possible for the hudhud, as to ultimately arrive at its culmination: without Daulayan’s seeming weakness compared to the two heroes, the traumatic moment would not have been possible, thereby retaining the monotonous rhythm of the war. Here, it can be recognized then that Daulayan’s wound is peculiar for it is a wound that has been virtually cut open even before his intrusion and Aliguyon’s spear had been thrown, given that he has been prior designated imaginably to break apart the repeating narrative. Before the said traumatic moment, an exchange between

Daulayan and his mother Magappid already preempts the arrival to the former of the wound he has to bear:

Hapit Magappid, “Daulayan, an
binuhbuhku
Manditake pe an binuhbuhku,
Ya oppya makikieta ot ya abu
Munkabla bullaki;
Te kinoknongku Aliguyon, nak Amtalao
Ot makanali.
Pakaalaka minalina,
Daulayan, an binuhbuhku?”

(Mariano 45, lines 599-605)

Magappid says, “Daulayan,
my child
It is better, my beloved child,
That we remain in peace, live with
Your friends who are rich like us;
I heard that Aliguyon, son of Amtalao
Is a great warrior.
Can you match him,
Daulayan, my child?”

(translation mine)²¹

Daulayan, as his mother Magappid clearly reminds him, is barely a warrior of reputation, especially when compared to Aliguyon, and thus to Pumbakhayon too; as his mother herself describes him, Daulayan was of high stature deemed to be more suitable to remain in peace (“makikieta”). By then, it was already made implicit that it would be more than unlikely for Daulayan to interrupt the on-going war and the existent equilibrium between the two heroes, and to actualize his desire to emerge as the saving third figure. One can then deduce that from the very beginning, Daulayan’s fate was already set, given his place in the social order: his mortal wounding is a trauma whose eventuation must have been previously anticipated as soon as he made the decision to intrude in the war that was not his to partake in the first place. The ultimate wound, therefore, is in Daulayan’s resistance and refusal to accept his supposed significance in the collective at large, as suggested by his own mother. It was only understandable then that what was a mere scratch for Aliguyon and Pumbakhayon—a spear thrown into the air—already became a festering wound for Daulayan, precisely because it was never his weapon to bear in the first place.

Or perhaps, to turn the trope the other way around, it can also be construed that being struck by Aliguyon’s spear and his eventual death was truly Daulayan’s fate, his own wound to bear; in other words, one can also intuit that possibly, Daulayan was supposed to intrude in the war of the two heroes, not despite but especially because he does not possess the necessary strength or skills to triumph in this interruption. For in doing such an interruption, Daulayan permits the turn through which Aliguyon and Pumbakhayon would finally realize a resolution to their own wounded conditions that is otherwise unimaginable between the two of them alone.²² Read this way, the epic heroism of Aliguyon and Pumbakhayon

are then understood to be no more than Daulayan's anticipation and acceptance of his fated wound: that traumaturgical gesture that would then transfigure him as a hero of utmost significance similar, if not greater, to the former two—although his was a heroism not of superior strength and combative skills, but of “throwing himself, so to speak, in order to win himself” (Horkheimer and Adorno 38). Simply put, without Daulayan's sufferance, his willingness to endure his wound, time itself would not have happened: Aliguyon and Pumbakhayon—or at the very least, their succeeding generations—would have been still at war, perhaps even until the present day. (And in this sense, too, Daulayan had to bear the wound for the epic to be *an* epic—that is, a text that is otherworldly because it is severed from the living earth, in the present time, itself.)

Daulayan then can be heralded as a traumaturge whose anticipation and acceptance of his wound has allowed time to happen, to turn itself again toward other and different directions: that beyond Aliguyon and Pumbakhayon's repetitive and violent exchange of spears over years, was still a future of unification between their clans. Ironically—or one might even dare say, *tropically*—it is then in Daulayan's seeming embrace of his defeat that he himself has also successfully emerged as a hero of epic scale, albeit in a quite unconventional sense in the realm of folk imagination: his supposed embodiment of “a critique of men's weaknesses” (Del Rosario 140) is, in fact, where his potency lies.²³ What is Daulayan's submission then but a substantial insistence that is just as stubborn—if not as strong and skillful—as those made by the other two male heroes, in their most physical expressions: Daulayan's sacrifice of himself, indeed, “appears as a human contrivance intended to control [even] the gods” (Horkheimer and Adorno 40), cunningly capable as it was of finally overturning what seemed to be, at first, an endless warfare.

VI.

From the tropical traumaturgy drawn thus far from the selected folk texts, the poem written by the unnamed Tagalog poet can then be reread now in different terms: turning away from the canonical appraisal of the poem as a supposedly “touching affirmation of Christian heroism” and underscoring instead the journey imagined to be undertaken by the persona, one can easily observe the similar traumaturgical instinct in the utmost willingness of the folk persona to persist through and past the trauma they are most likely to suffer—for instance, to be *naguiwa* and *nabagbag* or to have one's ship tossed and grounded, that are peculiarly mere phonemes away from being *nahiwa* and *nabugbog* or to be cut and beaten. And as previously outlined, it is only through this acceptance of wounds that the persona is also able to thaumaturgically overcome the most violent of adversities, indeed not because

the “God our Father” is believed to provide the persona the necessary strength and skills to survive one tragedy after another, but because the traumatic instance is encountered most intimately, plumbed in its unsuspected enormity, which then allows suffering to be transmuted as sufferance, and thereby transforming wounds tropically as possibilities for what one might desire. Through this traumaturgy, it can now be understood that in the said poem, the folk persona does not simply succumb to the imposed Catholic teachings, praising and worshipping “God our Father” through avowal of exaggerated gestures of faith; instead, in and through the poem itself, the folk is perceived to be insisting of themselves, demonstrating what is in fact their traumaturgic dexterity, reminding of that vital “precolonial” worldview: that the body is most capable of bearing wounds precisely because it *is* also a wound—and is wounding—in itself.²⁴

While Almario critically notes that the subjunctive rhetoric of the poem renders the precariousities described—and implicitly, by extension, the traumaturgy that is made possible through these dangers—as merely imagined (*Kung sino ang kumatha* 52), the tropicity of the poem must also allow the opportunity to contend otherwise: for as evinced by the construction itself of various empires on the discourse of tropicity, tropes are materials that have the potential and the potency indeed to materially shape as well reality itself (see Arnold, *The Problem* 141-168.). This power of the poem and its tropes can be further asserted when considered in relation to “precolonial” regard to words as possessing of “evocative power” (Pettazzoni 15, in Demetrio 7), as in the case of epics, riddles, and other verbal aspects of rituals that are believed to make these customs more alive and effective (see Tambiah); such power becomes more immediate when one also takes into account how the Filipino language has long been observed as onomatopoeic, with words sensorially permitting meaning to arrive most viscerally (see Santos)—as in the word *súgat*, whose first syllable animates the mouth in a narrowing that seems to slice toward the second syllable, which opens the mouths until punctuating to the *t*-sound that necessitates the blade of the tongue behind the teeth, momentarily cutting the airflow. In this sense, the seeming divide between the “real” and “unreal” that Almario underscores in his noting of the subjunctive rhetoric of the poem dissipates, because even the imagined virtually possible becomes affectively actual, if not fated,²⁵ once materially spoken and most decisively so. And in the instance of the poem written by the unnamed native, upon the recitation of its verses, regardless of whether one faces at the time of utterance an impending tempest, the power of the tropes permits one to experience its turbulent phenomenon all the same; in other words, like the Catholic “God our Father” himself, the folk persona might say, “there is a storm and the dark” (“may bagyo ma’t may rilim”), and by the devotion on the material thaumaturgic capability of these words, the aforementioned disturbances could be deemed then to be just as present. As such, there is then an intuited traumatic materialism at work—a “move[ment] beyond mere referencing

of events to gesture at something unspeakable beneath the everyday trauma” (3), which is perhaps the undeniable loomingness in the tropics of such traumatic occurrences.²⁶

And so, when the folk persona enumerates the traumas they are most likely to suffer in their imagined journey, the precarities described in the poem are evoked and then perceived to be just as palpable and real; this way, the folk traumaturgy that accepts these wounds is experienced as a performance that is just as legitimate, particular in its rendition as such verbal utterance. Here, a comparison can then be made between this poetic rehearsal and the instance of wounding portrayed in the abovementioned riddles regarding bodily orifices: one might consider the latter as a similar traumaturgical anticipation of the trauma, which is also an admission of woundedness as a given condition for one’s being. To put it another way, in the poem written by the unnamed Tagalog, the folk persona as a traumaturge is indeed willing to endure the harshest of adversities precisely because these events are, in reality, most expected anyway in the tropics.²⁷ Therefore, as the folk traumaturge declares in the final moment in the poem that “Say I were crippled or limping, / What for would [they] not tread... / A staff... has been made / Enough to brave” (“Cun lompo ma’t, cun pilay / Anong di icahacbang... / Toncod ay inilaan / Sucat pagcatibayan”), what is pertained here is not necessarily “the strength that God’s light gives” (Lumbera 42), but perhaps an actual walking stick that one could easily improvise, provided with the materials from the immediate surroundings—and thus, a considerable demonstration, too, of the intimacy of the folk with the tropical environment itself.²⁸

Here, the verbal potency of the poem can be critically connected to a peculiar, if not erroneous, identification of its form by Añonuevo (74): as a *dalit*, a native poetic form listed in Noceda and Sanlucar’s *Vocabulario* (166), and further described by Fray Gaspar de San Agustin as a poem that is “graver and more sentencious, in the manner the Greeks and Latins called epic-dithyrambic” (“El otro llamado *dalit* es más grave y sentencioso, al modo de los que los Griegos y Latinos llamaron *épico-ditirámbicos*”), and where natives “expound and extend serious arguments” (“*dilatan y espacían en argumentos sérios*”) (152; translation mine). According to Almario, de San Agustin’s comparison of the *dalit* to epic-dithyrambic forms can be read as his desire to emphasize more the “noble and emotional quality of poetry, qualities that are clearly shown in the tone and metaphorizing in the examples of *four lines with octosyllabic measure* in *Vocabulario*” (“*marangal at madamdaming katangian ng pagtula, mga katangiang malinaw na nakatanghal sa himig at pananalinghaga ng mga siping apat na taludtod at may sukat na wawaluhin sa Vocabulario*”) (*Kung sino ang kumatha* 36; translation and emphasis mine; see also *Pag-unawa sa Ating Pagtula* 90-104). These stanzation and measure have then become the common technical definition for the said poetic form, especially with

the existence of a poem in octosyllabic quatrains written by Pedro Suarez Ossorio, found in Fray Alonso de Santa Ana's *Explicación de la doctrina cristiana en lengua tagala*, explicitly labelled as a dalit (xi-xii; see also Almario, *Pag-unawa sa Ating Pagtula* 94-96).²⁹

However, Añonuevo's peculiar remark on the unnamed Tagalog's poem as a dalit is still worth considering, keeping in mind the rest of San Agustin's description of the form—as a poem that is “graver and more sentencious” and where one can “expand and extend serious arguments,” all of which the unnamed Tagalog's verse certainly features, with its fearless, if not ominous, insistence, as well as its utilization of multiple stanzas to further persist its traumaturgic case. In such reclassification of the poem—and simultaneously, reconfiguration on the definition of the form of the dalit itself—its aforementioned potency becomes more comprehensible, as especially instructed by another bugtong that specifically pertains, too, to the dalit:

Ang dalit ay masarap
cun ang basa,i, di tilar.

(Noceda and Sanlucar 166)

The dalit is pleasant
if its reading does not stutter.

(translation mine)³⁰

According to Noceda and Sanlucar, “this means that the couplet [that is the dalit] pricks like a lampoon” (“Quiere decir que pica la copla como un pasquin”) (166; translation mine); in other words, the dalit is able to effectively tease, cut, and eventually hurt another if one simply reads the text in a manner as resolute as a piercing poisoned arrow.³¹ As instructive then for understanding the dalit that is the poem by the unnamed Tagalog, one can intuit that the latter's evocative power is revealed to be in its boldest utterance—in the unfaltering articulation of the possibilities of traumaturgy as depicted in the verse, no matter how apparently violent the described imaginary instances are. This way, the dalit as the wagered form of the poem underscores the criticality of its embodiment in reading—a gesture that effectively lacerates it from its purported staticity as a printed material supposedly made solely for Catholic didacticism, and performatively harnesses instead the folk traumaturgic dexterity outlined in the same text. Similar then to the folk persona in the poem, a reader is also encouraged to engage intimately with this verse, in their own ways of encountering it, if only to somehow draw from the text an opportunity toward traumaturgic intuitions that can be wielded against the worst of thinkable woundings—including perhaps the utmost brutality of the empire, whose tempering discourse initially serves as the material locus of this poem, but can also become the site from which it departs and turns away.

In this sense, the weak resistance that Almario perceives in the poem is not so much as the shortage of the poem in refusal to the colonial duress at the time, but a pivotal textual space that demands of the readers their own encounter with it, in their own time—even centuries after it has been written by the native. It is then here that one can recognize that as a text that is found in the penultimate part of a catechetical book, the poem only critically reminds the natives in the end of the folk traumaturgical wisdom threatened to be eradicated in the arrival of the storm that is so-called Progress, brought by the empire onto the tropical archipelago: the poem warns the natives, “you shall be blind, your vessels tossed and grounded, and your legs limp, if not altogether crippled”—but “say it is stormy and dark... / [you] shall also persist” (“may bagyo ma’t, may rilim.../ [Ica]’y, magpipilit din”), for such is a survival that folk traumaturgy can engender. The poem was already a crucial foretelling then, as early as 1605, how this native traumaturgy would allow the Philippine tropics to endure centuries of suffering, as to eventually revolt against the Spanish colonialism—if only to endure further, and worse, periods of sufferings, and then insist calling for other revolutions that will also be left unfinished each time (see Iletto, *Filipinos and their Revolution 177-202*); it might as well be read as the Philippine history condensed, as if various storms contained.

VII.

The present essay has been an attempt to reread the dalit by an unnamed Tagalog poet, considered to be the first published poem written by a native, found in Fray de San Jose’s *Memorial de la vida cristiana*. In rehearsing such rereading, a recourse has been made as to syncopate on the tropicality of the poem, which then allowed a realignment of the poem from its common categorization under the Spanish colonial period and toward the period that is generally supposed, albeit rather hastily, as “precolonial.” In doing so, the poem is then read coincidentally with the folk bugtong, salawikain, hudhud, and dalit, so as to let emerge a certain tropical traumaturgy in lieu of its canonical understanding as a “touching affirmation of Christian heroism,” in which the wound is perceived as an instance from which one can initiate opportunities toward directions other than merely suffering—including the possibility of healing itself. It is this tropical traumaturgy that reconfigures the understanding of the poem as an embodiment of folk insistence, and thus a form of refusal to the colonial duress.

As a way to conclude this essay, a final turn hazards this tropical traumaturgy as a dexterity that maneuvers in the wound an opportunity for “an outward thrust from an interior”: a palabas that is, according to Patrick Flores, both “spectacle and appearance,” “(dis)guise and manifestation,” that is “because... tactical... is

also corruptive [where] semblance is [now] always elusive” (“Palabas” 9). In other words, what is suggested here is an intuition of this tropical traumaturgy as also “modern to the degree that it is reflexive, a mediated exposition... in relation to a premeditated exposure” (9). Such deliberate outward thrust is crucial in the traumaturgic discourse because the wound, perceived as a gift that is essentially indeterminable, can then be turned and projected into whatever the traumaturge desires. This way, the wound as a gift is intuited to inevitably become a present, in the sense that its woundness is always exposed in the manner by which one chooses to accept the trauma. It is in this presentation that the wound, now as whatever it has been turned into by the traumaturge, can be recirculated back to the ecology of exchange, this time as something to be given as well.³²

With these exterior mechanisms of tropical traumaturgy, the wound can then be intuited to possibly become a trope in itself, too—indeed, a “psychological mechanism of defense” through which one can also turn to another, if only for a specific time and place, with somehow akin wounded conditions, as to imagine an opportunity for an erotic encounter. In other words, it is here that it becomes thinkable for the trauma-work to be indeed *folk*, in its promise of simultaneity with others, no matter how temporary (see Benitez, “Tungo sa Dalumat” 370-3). While primarily intuited thus far as an antithetical metonym to the Christian heroism that vanguards the colonial project writ large, the category of the folk must also be considered in terms of political intersections it offers: in the aforementioned Kankanay and Isneg riddles, for example, the traumaturge figured is particularly female, whose experience of wounding designation of the sex is inclusive to gender nonconformity and even transness.³³ In the case of Daulaya in the Ifugao hudhud, his stature as being rich enough to possibly choose isolation and yet not powerful enough to be deemed equal to the folk heroes can be recognized as analogous to the precarious situation of the modern-day middle class; in this sense, his often overlooked traumaturgic propelling of temporality in the epic speaks then to the central, albeit subdued, role that this specific social class plays in the empty and homogenous time of the present global capitalist system.

Extending its potential, this ideation of the folk can then be imagined to encompass as well discourses planetary and contemporary in scope: for instance, the name of the poetic form of dalit specifically brings to mind the people from South Asia who are given the same name—the Dalits, considered to be at the lowest rungs in the Indian caste system. Following this term further to the Sanskrit *dalita*, which means, among other things, the condition of being “scattered” and “dispersed” (“*Dal*”), connections to discourses on the diaspora and the refugee crisis can thus be construed, rendering the initial poem by the unnamed Tagalog native to be most resonating even, say, to the present experience of those who travel by boat, if only to finally seek an asylum in a foreign country, since “the water is [now

deemed] safer than the land” (Shire).³⁴ And so, what these possible courses of relay suggest is an intuition that the folk here can only be multiple, planetary in range and its sympathetic depths, with the wounds afflicted by the banality of evil as a chance to simultaneously initiate a suturing solidarity with others:

Ang palar cong nasaconâ,
ipinagtatanong co ngâ,
cun sinong cahalimbauâ,
nasa cati nagiginâ.

(Noceda and Sanlucar 204)

My disastered fate,
I shall ask around,
who are like me,
ashore, atilt.

(translation mine)³⁴

Perhaps, it is in such a communal moment of asking about each other’s woundedness, of becoming vulnerable enough to apportion oneself, that the traumatic—and the catastrophic, even (see Yapan, “Desakralisasyon ng ‘Sakuna’”)—can also be seized as, somehow, transformative, thaumaturgical.

Notes

1. The featured translation of “May bagyo ma’t may rilim” in this essay is ultimately after Bienvenido Lumbera’s existent English translation of the poem, as “Though it is stormy and dark” (150-151). Although the procedure of (re)translating the poem in its current version merits a separate and lengthy exegesis, it suffices to underscore in the meantime that the revision done here primarily accounts for more concrete equivalents of the original Tagalog figures, such as “rain” for *olan*, instead of the outright metaphorized “tearful complaints” in Lumbera’s translation. The same can be said to the rest of (re) translations provided for other poems.
2. Lumbera’s reference of the term *organic unity* reflects his declared “critical roots” that is New Criticism (see Brooks). Of these roots, Lumbera admits that he “had absorbed [it] while doing graduate work in the United States” (ix), the ultimate product of which is his dissertation that would become the monumental *Tagalog Poetry 1570-1898*. While ultimately necessary for “establishing [the] artistic worth” of the poems from his studied historic period, Lumbera also discloses the limits of such critical roots, noting how it may have lacked further demonstration of “the dynamic interplay between the text and its sociohistorical context” (ix). And in the case of the poem written by the unnamed native, this limitation resulted to the oversight of perceptible traces of “precolonial” sensibility—and not just form—in the text.
3. For instance, see the hudhud of Aliguyon (Mariano 19-62), to be briefly discussed in the following parts of the present essay. Although Isagani Cruz identifies among Filipino epics common episodic movements—what he calls as *andá*, from the Filipino *andar*, meaning “to move”—that structure rather linearly the journey that takes place in the said form, Yapan argues that these episodes tend to parallel, if not repeat, each other in the epic, as exemplified in the aforementioned hudhud of the Ifugao (“Ang Bisa ng Pag-uulit” 49-52). In other words, for Yapan, contrary to Cruz, the journey that takes place in the folk epic is structurally more cyclical than linear.
4. Here, it is crucial to note that the inclusion of the same poem in Lumbera and Lumbera’s landmark textbook *Philippine Literature: A History and Anthology* also helped in the perpetuation of calling the unnamed native’s poem as “May bagyo ma’t may rilim.” As Gary Devilles notes, the said textbook has “a great contribution in designating the literary canon or foundation” (“malaking ambag... sa pagtatalaga ng kanon o muhong pampanitikan”) (2; translation mine).
5. Although Añonuevo briefly cites the unnamed native’s poem in relation to existent folk poetry, she clusters them together as a sort of proof for the “divine movement” (“galaw ng banal”) in early Tagalog poetry—a divinity which Añonuevo attempts to render in terms supposedly prior to Catholicism, and yet whose rhetorical strategy remains to be perceptibly Catholic (see 72-76; translation mine). Meanwhile, in Louie Jon Sanchez’s reading of the same poem, he also mentions a native dalit (also to be read in the third part of the present essay), which he values as a proof that “it is in the body that the strength of faith, the truth, is measured” (“sa katawan sinusukat ang tatag ng paniniwala, ang tunay na katotohanan”) (*Aralin at Siyasat* 220; translation mine). This way, although the

poem by the unnamed Tagalog poet is juxtaposed with a “precolonial” text, the latter is regarded still in relation to perceptively Catholic faith, perhaps more akin to Iletto’s and Rafael’s articulation of folk Catholicism during the Spanish colonialism.

6. Studies that demonstrate the role of tropes in the particular context of Philippine colonial experience include those by Jacobo (“Homo Tropicus”; “Mood of Metaphor”), Aguilar, and Lucero (22-40). For further instances in other global contexts, see for instance the works by Hulme, Aravamudan, Arnold (*The Tropics*), and McClintock.
7. Smallness as a trope has been noted to be frequently utilized in colonial discourse, mainly as a justification for the violence of the empire, effectually veiling it as a form of benevolence—as in the American “benevolent assimilation” or the Spanish rhetoric of Catholic salvation to the Philippines. In the case of Polynesia and Micronesia, in particular, Hau’ofa emphasizes that in the “belittling view that has been unwittingly propagated... the small island states and territories of the Pacific... are much too small, too poorly endowed with resources, and too isolated from the centers of economic growth for their inhabitants ever to be able to rise above their present condition of dependence on the largesse of wealthy nations” (150). To elude then the violence of such a trope, Hau’ofa proposes a movement away from naming the Pacific as “islands in a far sea” and toward “a sea of islands” (152).
8. Compare with Lumbera’s translation: “When one submits to a wound / he does not feel the pain; / to one who resists it, / a mere scratch becomes a sore” (16). Meanwhile, San Juan translates the poem “freely” as follows: “When one submits oneself / to wounding / the intensest pain is bearable; / when one is unwilling, / even the merest scratch / can fester” (229).
9. It is interesting to note here that Lumbera himself does not classify this poem as a *dalit*, but simply describe it as “octosyllabic” that is “likely...influenced by Spanish versification,” as in the “*octosilabo* [that] had acquired in Spain the title of ‘national meter par excellence’ during the Siglo de Oro” (16). For the significance of the aforementioned Spanish versification, Lumbera cites Clarke (293).
10. Derrida’s wager on the gift is most instructive in understanding its totality of experience: according to him, “for there to be a gift, *it is necessary* [*il faut*] that the donee not give back, amortize, reimburse, acquit himself, enter into a contract, and that he never have contracted a debt... It is thus necessary, at the limit, that he does not recognize the gift as gift. If he recognizes it as gift, if the gift *appears to him as such*, if the present is present to him *as present*, this simple recognition suffices to annul the gift” (13, qtd. in Jacobo, “Mood of Metaphor” 17). It is from this purported aleatory quality of the gift that for Derrida, “the gift only gifts to the extent it *gives time*” (41). For the intertwining of the ontology of the gift as a *bagay* or matter in relation to time, see Benitez (“*Panahon and Bagay*”).
11. One can then intuit the similarity of this folk traumaturgy to Barthes’s *jouissance* or bliss, that he deems to be ironically characterized by “shock, disturbance, even loss, which are proper to ecstasy” (19).
12. The impossibility of reciprocating a gift can be understood through the Filipino idiom of “utang na loob” (lit. “a debt within”); for a particular delineation of the idiom in the context of Catholicism under the Spanish colonization, see Rafael (28-30).

13. This tension between the seemingly healed surface of a wound and its festering inside is explored in Centeno's short story titled after the proverb, "Maghilom Ma'y Balantukan."
14. In Eugenio's compendium, the proverb lacks the article *ang* ("the") that is presently supplemented at the beginning of the first line, as to retain in this version of the poem an octosyllabic measure (*The Proverbs* 646).
15. Compare with Eugenio's translation: "A wound that is made to heal prematurely / will always hurt" (*The Proverbs* 646). In the present translation, *balantukan* is transposed to English by way of explanation, especially since the term is commonly defined as such seemingly healed wound ("Bálantúkan").
16. The riddle presented here is supplemented with the adverb *man* ("though") in the first line, as to retain an octosyllabic measure. Other variations of this riddle in other Philippine languages also cited by Eugenio appear to have a consistent syllabic measure between their two lines: in Pampanga, "Marayu ya pa ing sibat / makanganga ne ing sugat"; and in Pangasinan, "Arawi niy sigbat / aralem lay sugat" (*The Riddles* 427).
17. Hence, the common association of the incommensurable gift, that utang na loob which cannot be fully repaid, with the relationship between parent and child; see, for instance, Rafael (128) and Jacobo ("Mood of Metaphor" 76-80). According to Demetrio, this suddenness and lack of any apparent reason for the gift of life cultivates the "fear... lodged deeply in man's being [that is also] a manifestation of the fundamental character of his being which is... contingent" (19); this, in turn, propels the creation of texts informed by tropes, such as the bugtong, in order to create a sense of the world and oneself. As Hornedo puts it, these texts act as a kind of "science... concerned... with making sense of phenomena and protecting [one's] consciousness from the threat of absurdity" (4).
18. Jacobo further asserts that "to be born and raised from the womb of the earth is also to be taught one's difference from it: as life, as indignation, as insistence" ("Mood of Metaphor" 21). Such regard for the condition of being in terms of the wound is intuited by way of Heidegger's conception of a purportedly inherent strife between the earth, in its most insurmountable materiality; and the world, in its anthropocentric constructions (15-86). It is from this perpetual tension between the two forces, insistent as they are of their being against the other, that life is perceived as possible.
19. In folk riddles, the head is often referred to as an object—such as guava, coconut, stone, or even hill or island—punctured with seven holes; see for instance Eugenio (*The Riddles* 384-388).
20. While this "homogenous, empty time" has been often associated to the experience of temporality in the "modern" world (see for instance Anderson 22-37; and McClintock 36-39), the contrary is postulated in the present argument: that indeed, time could have been just as hollow during the "precolonial" period, perhaps even millennia prior to what is commonly dubbed as "modernity." The Filipino rendition of time as panahon appears to indicate just as much: with its etymological relations to nahon (opportunity) and taon (encounter), panahon is experienced primarily through "the assembly of the bountiful many" (Benitez, "*Panahon and Bagay*" 477), the absence of which—as in the case of the monotonous war between Aliguyon and Pumbakhayon—renders time to be practically non-existent, that is, the same homogenous and empty one.

21. Mariano's translation to Filipino reads as follows: "Lumapit si Magappid sa kanyang anak: 'Daulayan, / Lalong mabuti, mahal kong anak, / Na tayo'y tumahimik, makisama / Sa mga kaibigan mong tulad nati'y mayayaman; / Napag-alaman ko na si Aliguyon, anak ni Amtalao, / Ay bihasang mandirigma. / Mapapantayan mo kaya ang galing niya, Daulayan, mahal kong anak?" (45, lines 599-605)
22. In fact, according to Yapan, because of the complimentary nature of Aliguyon and Pumbakhayon, no one is supposedly able to become greater than the other, and thus, their warfare would ideally continue indefinitely, if not through "an elevation of the war as a tradition between the two lands that were eventually united in marriage" ("pagkakaangat ng digmaan bilang tradisyon sa pagitan ng dalawang bayan na kinalauna'y mapagbubuklod ng pagpapakasal") ("Ang Bisa ng Pag-uulit" 54-55; translation mine).
23. Del Rosario's (2013) remark regarding Daulayan's weakness pertains to his appearance in another version of hudhud, as transcribed and translated by Lambrecht as *The Hudhud of Dinulawan and Bugan at Gonhadan*. In this version of the hudhud, Bugan is the sister of Dinulawan (instead of Pumbakhayon), and married to Daulayan (instead of Aliguyon). Because of Dinulawan's recklessness, a war eventually ensues, in which Bugan was compelled to partake in order to defend her brother. During these turbulent times, however, Daulayan was described by Del Rosario as "a failed character who made no move to help her [Bugan] in battle" (139). From this, one can then deduce that in Lambrecht's version, Daulayan similarly incurs a wound, this time in the form of such weak masculinity that is frowned upon in their society, and yet without which Bugan would not be able to let herself emerge as "exemplary—the real *hero*" in the said hudhud (Del Rosario 140). This way, too, one can draw an analogous appraisal of Daulayan as traumaturge in both versions of the hudhud.
24. Contrary then to Sanchez's reading of the unnamed native's poem as a demonstration of "how we [Filipinos] purely experience the phenomenon of surroundings, no matter how violent" ("kung papaano táyong lantay na dumarama sa danas ng paligid, gaano man ito kalupit") (*Aralin at Siyasat* 220; translation mine) as metonymized in the wound, the body is thus presently asserted to be just as violent, being a wound, too, in itself. For the intuition of the body *as* a wound, particularly during the height of Spanish colonization, see for instance the discussion on Don Juan and Bernardo Carpio, from the metrical romances *Ibong Adarna* and *Bernardo Carpio*, respectively, in Jacobo ("Mood of Metaphor" 101-147). One can also compare with the gestures embodied by popular movements, such as those described by Ileto (*Pasyon and Revolution*).
25. According to Pettazzoni, the "magic of the word... [is] the power... of the *fa-bula*... a secret and potent force, akin, as its etymology shows, to the power of *fatum*" (15), which in turn "comes from the Latin word *for, fari, fatus sum* 'to speak,' it connotes the meaning of 'decisive word' spoken by a deity" (Demetrio 23n12). A demonstration of such power of words, as in tropes, can be found in Jacobo's recalling of tropical seasons, as evoked through an array of metonymies ("Homo Tropicus" 65-66).
26. Nayar particularly articulates such "traumatic materialism" in the context of the South Asian Dalit poetry, which are often "treated merely as social documents that map suffering, victims' lives and pain," but to which he attempts to "locate a specific literariness arising from specific socio-historical conditions in a poetry that defies traditional accounts of

- the ‘poetic’ (2)—indeed, a similar rereading that can also be perceived as tropical in its considerations.
27. Regarding the usualness of these adversities in the tropical world, Aristotle goes as far as saying in his *Meteorologica* that “beyond the tropics no one can live” (37).
 28. In this sense, Sanchez’s warged “dichotomy of nature-human” (“dikotomiya ng kalikasantao”) (*Araling at Siyasat* 220; translation mine) is deconstructed, in the sense that the hastily perceived enmity between the folk persona and their immediate surroundings also tropically turns into an assembly, if not intimacy, as how the staff that would supplement the former’s body is ultimately derived from the latter. One might then dare say that in this particular moment in the poem, an early imagination of a cyborg is articulated: while in Lumbera’s translation, the folk persona is identified as “disabled” (“lumpo”) (42), they can also be envisaged as traumaturgically reconfigured, given this particular wounding encounter with the surroundings.
 29. Eventually, Marcelo H. del Pilar’s poems with similar stanzation and measure, simply called as *dalit* too, helped calcify the technical definition for the said form that is commonly accepted to the present (see Almario, *Kung sino ang kumatha* 37; and *Panitikan ng Rebolusyon* 46-48).
 30. Compare with Potet’s translation: “The canticle is pleasant to hear if it is not disjointed,” that is, “if it is chanted fluently” (255).
 31. It is interesting to note that *dálit*, in contrast to the poem named *dalít*, refers to either the gesture of cutting something into pieces (“cortar en rebanadas”) or an herb whose sap is used as poison for arrowheads (“yerva de que se hace ponzoña”) (Noceda and Sanlucar 166). Although Almario rigidly differentiates the *dálit* as an herb and the *dalít* as a poetic form on the basis of their respective accents, he intersects them through imagining the said poem as perhaps a “poisonous song” (“may kamandag [na] awit”) (*Pag-unawa sa Ating Pagtula* 103; translation mine). However, considering the *dálit*, too, as a lacerating action, one might as well speculate a critical implication in this homography: the *dalít* as that toxic poem, or poetic toxin, that is created from the such gesture.
 32. Similar to how Rafael describes the gesture of *tawad* or bargaining in Catholic confessions as means to put equivalences to the *utang na loob* imposed through the figure of the Catholic divine, as a way to ultimately attempt eliding the incommensurability of such debt (130-135).
 33. Consider, for instance, an obviously and relatively recent myth in Fansler’s collection, narrating “the origin of homosexuality”: one day, St. Peter impulsively beheds people from a noisy neighborhood, and in Christ’s command, eventually restores these heads to their bodies. However, because of his haste, St. Peter ends up “[sticking] some female heads to male bodies and male heads to female bodies,” the exchange of which “explains the existence of homosexuals” (see in Eugenio, *The Myths* 308-309). From this myth, one could then intuit that gender nonconformity and transness, as possible modes of being, are similarly incurred wounds as, say, *cisgenerity*; however, it must also be noted that there is a danger, too, in the figuration in the mentioned myth, in its possible conveying of *noncisgenerity* as a deformation of sorts. Therefore, if such myth is to be somehow instructive, a reading of it must also wound the very ideation of corporeality: that in the myth, the separation of the bodies is construed to be perhaps less testifying to St. Peter’s

powers than pointing to a vernacular conception of the human body as reconfigurable and, ultimately, transformative (see note 28).

34. It is interesting to note here that a 2018 Filipino film features the same line from Shire's poem ("Unless the Water is Safer than the Land") in its opening, and even uses it as the English equivalent of its title: Iar Lionel Arondaing's *Musmos na Sumibol sa Gubat ng Digma*, which literally means "A Child Who Sprung Out of Forest of War."
35. Compare with Lumbera's translation: "My fate has taken a bad turn, / and I would like to know / who is like unto me, / ashore but being tossed by waves" (17).

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