Gémino H. Abad Literary Awards for Poetry and for Literary Criticism Awardees

What is an Editor?: Ricardo de Ungria as Producer of Knowledge

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At the 35th National Book Awards, the poet Ricardo M. de Ungria received Best Anthology in English for *Habagatanon: Conversations with Six Davao Writers* (2015), a work that consists of transcripts of de Ungria's interviews with writers whose identities are proffered to its readers as Davaoeños; a sampling of the writers' poems or short stories; and an introduction that traces the literary history of the said city and provides an overview of the conversations. Taking inspiration from *The Writer and His Milieu: An Oral History of First Generation Writers in English* (1984) and *Writers and Their Milieu: An Oral History of Second Generation Writers in English* (1993), which are both edited by Edilberto N. Alegre and Doreen G. Fernandez, de Ungria's book is credited to him, the editor, for the research, interviews, and selection of works that best represent the featured writers. The judges at the National Book Awards recognize the effort and describe the book as:

> [A] lively set of dialogues with local writers and its meticulous work of documentation are such an impressive and laudable effort to recover the writers' memories of their craft, fashion a knot of lesser-known but nonetheless significant local histories, and weave them into the larger frame of our national imagining.[1]

By initiating the project, as the citation suggests, de Ungria acts as a producer of knowledge, recording an oral history of craftsmanship that could have otherwise been forgotten, if not completely left unknown.

[1] The information is retrieved through Deborah Nieto, Gmail to author, 20 October 2017. She is Project Development Officer III at the National Book Development Board.

Furthermore, he splices "local histories" to the bigger national picture, constructing a narrative tied to a national identity as the name of the award represents. Yet one wonders how de Ungria chooses the objects of his study, especially when he undertakes the task of speaking, on behalf of the region, to the national audience. Writing about a place whose identity remains a site of contestation is a dangerous endeavor for its risk of misrepresentation and unintended exclusions. Where certain peoples remain marginalized and fight for their right to self-determination—a struggle to which Davao is no stranger—knowing one's subject-position becomes crucial to avoid perpetuating an erasure of minoritized identities. De Ungria, as a celebrated, Manila-based poet who moved to Davao at the age of forty-eight, bravely explores the precarious forest of identity politics in search of the proverbial southern sensibility. Primarily known as a poet, he occasionally shifts from being creative to academic and adapts the stance of an editor of books that introduce the south to the Philippines at large. How far, however, can editorial interventions go in knowledge-production? Does de Ungria, as an editor, offer a merely objective construction of a literary identity and southern sensibility that has organically developed over time? In the election of the writers that best represent local writings, how does the inevitable exclusion that the act of choosing entails explain the silences in the editor's work?

Ricardo Monreal de Ungria's literary life can be split into his Manila (before 1999) and Davao years (1999 and onwards). Born in Manila, in 1951, de Ungria studied literature at the De La Salle University, receiving his bachelor's degree in 1971. He studied for his master's degree in the University of the Philippines, Manila, and, in 1990, under a Fulbright Scholarship, received his master in fine arts degree in creative writing from the University of Washington, Missouri. At that time, his path seemed set out for a life in poetry. As an undergraduate, he already started publishing in national magazines and winning prizes for his poems, including the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards in Literature, which was considered by certain literary groups and academic circles to be most prestigious. Recognizing the importance of literary communi-

ties, de Ungria did not limit himself to writing poems alone. On 8 September 1981, he founded the Philippine Literary Arts Council (PLAC), with Gémino H. Abad, Cirilo F. Bautista, Alfrredo Navarro Salanga, and Alfred Yuson, who were all established writers at that time.[2] PLAC promoted Philippine poetry by organizing literary readings throughout the country and publishing poems, and its members, formally called fellows in the organization, included Francisco Arcellana and Edith L. Tiempo, both of whom would be named National Artist in Literature in 1990 and 1999, respectively. In 1982, the group released the maiden issue of *Caracoa*, a quarterly journal "devoted entirely to poetry," as the small print in the flyleaf of its issues says. Opening its call for contributions to anyone who was interested, PLAC published either poems or essays on poetry written in English. One can surmise that the exclusivity to anglophone writing, despite the burgeoning appreciation for the so-called vernacular writing in academe,[3] stemmed from the fact that all five of the founding members of PLAC wrote exclusively in the language. Given his publication record and the prizes he had won, de Ungria's first collection of poetry, *R+A+D+I+O*, was long overdue, coming out only when he was thirty-five, in 1986. Several collections followed soon after that, including *Decimal Places* (1991), *Body English* (1997), *Waking Ice* (2000), *Pidgin Levitations* (2004), and *m'mry wire* (2013), all of which have won for him a National Book Award. One can surmise that PLAC, with its formidable name, leads in the championing of anglophone poetry, as the specific category, Best Book of Poetry in English, at the nationally sanctioned award is called the Philippine Literary Arts Council Prize.

[2] All four, like de Ungria, continued to lead in their creative and academic pursuits. Gemino H. Abad would map out the development of Philippine poetry in English starting with *Man of Earth: An Anthology of Filipino Poetry and Verse from English, 1905 to the Mid-50s* (1989), which he co-edited with Edna Zapanta Manlapaz; Alfrredo Navarro Salanga would publish collections of his poems and edit anthologies such as *Versus: Philippine Protest Poetry, 1983–1986* (1986), with Esther Pacheco; Cirilo F. Bautista would be named National Artist for Literature in 2014; and Alfred Yuson would win a Centennial Literary Prize in 1998 for his novel *Voyeurs and Savages* (1998). These are, of course, small examples compared to the breadth of their production in Philippine literature in English.

[3] Revaluations of vernacular literature started in the late 1960s, launched by the landmark collection *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Tradition and Literature* (1967) and led by figures such as Bienvenido Lumbera, Resil Mojares, and Virgilio Almario (see Rafael 2013 and Mojares 2017).

His years in Manila provided for him easier access to art institutions and these include academe. Teaching at the University of the Philippines, Manila, since 1971, he became Chair of its Department of Arts and Communication in 1991 and started editing literary anthologies in 1992, with *Luna Caledonia: Five Filipino Writers in Hawthornden Castle.* Unlike Gémino Abad, who traced the genealogy of Philippine poetry in English in anthologies, de Ungria stayed away from the archive and documented contemporary literature instead. It is interesting to note that he did not focus on poetry. In *Luna Caledonia: Five Filipino Writers in Hawthornden Castle* (1992), he gathered the poems and short stories written by writers, himself included, who received fellowships at the Hawthornden Castle International Retreat for Writers in Scotland. In a prototype of the interview series he would conduct twenty years later, de Ungria solicited essays for the anthology *A Passionate Patience: Ten Filipino Poets on the Writing of Their Poems* (1995), which won for him a National Book Award in 1995 and consisted of what he called "genetic criticism," identifying the uneven production of critiques, which were mostly of theoretical in nature as compared to that of a creative process and the "making of a poem." The criteria he set in the selection of the poets included "their having published at least one book of poetry and their national prominence" (de Ungria 1995, xxvvi–xxvii). Suggesting the range of the community he imagined while working on the project, the list had names of writers living in Luzon or the Visayas. The writers, one time or another, had formal education on American and European literature and had attended a creative writing workshop.[4] As he admitted having given the poets free rein to write their poetics, the essays turned out to be harking back to the Anglo-American tradition, to his dismay, employing techniques prescribed under New Criticism. He had hoped to read an articulation of mutual influence among the writers, who should be "establishing some kind of a tradition, if not a literary community, sustained more by disavowals of its existence and by friendships than by a vision or a programme of action" (xxix).

[4] The poets are Gemino H. Abad, Carlos A. Angeles, Cirilo F. Bautista, Ricardo D. Demetillo, Ophelia A. Dimalanta, Marjorie M. Evasco, Alejandrino G. Hufana, Edith L. Tiempo, Trinidad Tarrosa-Subido, and Alfred A. Yuson.

His years in Manila saw de Ungria already constructing a national poetics from a group of writers taught in or exposed to Anglo-American literature. The endeavor should be worthwhile, something that would benefit Philippine culture, for de Ungria had already proved himself a talented poet writing in English, claiming for himself "a native clearing" in the colonial language.[5] By the mid-nineties, four years before de Ungria left Manila for good, one could already glean literary authority from him because of the other anthologies somewhat graced by his byline. The first and only production from the Anvil New Writers series, *Catfish Arriving in Little Schools* (1995), was credited to de Ungria for being its editor, although the book consisted of short stories, a genre he did not write in. His introduction to the anthology gave no explanation on the relationship of his presence as a renowned poet with fiction, hinting instead at the possibility of publishing an anthology of poems in the series. Writing from Davao in 2000, he still held this authority as he lambasted in *The Likhaan Book of Poetry and Fiction 1999*, which he co-edited with Jose Y. Dalisay Jr., the writers for producing poems that were "insufferably mediocre and lazy" and blamed their reverence to Western models such as Rainer Maria Rilke and Seamus Heaney instead of responding to the poems by Ricardo Demetillo and Marjorie Evasco to fortify and expand our own literary tradition. His critique, however, dwelled on the formal handle of the language:

> They [the poets] do not know how to use words commonly but precisely. They do not know how to sound at all, much less to sound well. They are deaf to tones and are kitschy in terms of aural insights and playfulness. . . . They all look and sound alike, aspiring for a generic so-so poem that anyway gets published just the same. (de Ungria 2001, 4)

He blamed the institutions of creative writing, like the workshops and writing programs, for the "vapidity" Philippine poetry had degenerated into, because they inculcated certain formulas and conventions that made for good but uninteresting poetry. He charged that the predicta-

[5] The term was first used by Abad, who posits that Filipino poets eventually appropriated the colonial language and made it their own haven of articulation (see Abad and Zapanta Manlapaz 1989).

bility of the "'correct,' please-all poems" (5) also stemmed from an excess of reading other poetry books and theories. His frustration with the institutionalized writers would later echo in his interviews with Mindanawon poets, whose work he described as reflexive of their milieu, unlike the cerebral poems of those in Manila.

That de Ungria could easily dispense such an indictment ascertained the position of authority he held as arbiter of aesthetics. By then he had firmly entrenched himself in the region outside Manila, particularly in the southern cluster of islands where armed Moro separatist movements and the people's war were ongoing. In a national culture whose artistic production and critique predominantly came from the center, giving such a sweeping, unfavorable judgment from the peripheries must have geographically shifted, at least for the moment, attention from the small community fostered by Manila-based poets to a nation that lay beyond the city, something that personages like Edith Tiempo, who was living and holding the Silliman University National Workshop in Dumaguete City, did not fully achieve, as these fellowships were nothing but brief sojourn to hone their craft before returning to nation's capital.

With his critique of writing institutions that bred "'correct,' please-all poems," de Ungria was decentering the discourse on Philippine poetry.

A writer's life does not begin and end on the page. At the theoretical level, a text is shaped by and shapes the context of its production and reception, a phenomenon that recalls the pronouncement of the self's inescapable enclosure within certain texts. Practically, however, the writer exists and gets interpellated into a dominant system under which he makes a living. Like most writers, de Ungria worked in academe and was actively involved in the very institutions he eventually criticized. In 1999, he moved to Davao City to teach the creative writing course of the University of the Philippines, Mindanao, and be Dean of its College of Humanities and Social Sciences. He had already decided to settle in the city for good, establishing anew a network of writers and building another literary community.[6] As far as his colleagues at PLAC are concerned, he was not the first to migrate to Davao. Alfrredo Navarro

Salanga, active in the protest movements against Ferdinand Marcos's martial law, moved to the city in 1973, worked in social development foundations, and opened the communication arts program of the Ateneo de Davao. He also edited the literary section of the local newspaper *San Pedro Express* and, with Tita Lacambra-Ayala, the anthology *Davao Harvest* (1979). Salanga, however, returned to Manila in 1979 and remained there until his death, at aged forty, in 1989. As if to continue where his friend had left off, de Ungria helped found the Davao Writers Guild and, through its nucleus of writers, collected for the second volume of the anthology, also edited with Lacambra-Ayala, observing that since the first book, the city "had gone through a slow process of literary efflorescence" (de Ungria and Lacambra-Ayala 2008, x). Organized two months after he resettled in Davao, the guild aimed "to arouse public interest in literature and writing" and invited local writers such as Don Pagusara, Margarita Marfori, Aida RiveraFord, Tita Lacambra-Ayala, Josefina Tejada, and Macario Tiu, all of whom would figure in *Habagatanon*, de Ungria's first in his interview series, in which he seeks a distinct, "southern sensibility." Yet a writer whose making emerged from a postcolonial center would have to construct a regional literature that is haunted by the specter of the national, because the two geographical and political spaces are bounded by history and are "interacting, mutually constitutive realities. They conjure each other and are caught up in a process in which their values are not fixed" (Mojares 1990, 2). A writer shaped by cosmopolitan ideas about literature that slants toward Western models would have to contend with the notion of the region as something "outlying, peripheral, folkloric, parochial, [and] subordinate" (ibid.).[7] With a dominant paradigm trudging through the wilderness of its Other, the method is akin to that of an adventurer clearing the fields of a frontier.

[6] In a meeting to form a literary organization in the city, he tells his colleague Tita Lacambra-Ayala that he planned to die in Davao, expressing a long-term intent of retirement and turning his back on Manila as his hometown (see de Ungria 2011).

[7] The introduction from which the quote is extracted provides an anecdote of Mojares being chided that he had resituated himself from national to regional, as though the trajectory were a devaluation of his writing. His decision to decenter parallels that of de Ungria. One must note, however, that while de Ungria did relinquish an identity when he left Manila, Mojares, who was born and educated in Cebu, merely returned to his roots.

De Ungria did not fully leave the institutions that formed literary canons. Instead, his authority in the Davao years was further reinforced when he became chancellor of UP Mindanao and head of the National Committee on Literary Arts (NCLA) under the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, roles in which he imagined the regions and their literature. At the third Annual National Conference in Literature, held in Vigan and organized by the NCLA, young writers were given the platform to articulate their various preoccupations and critiques of the state of Philippine literature. Giving his welcome address, de Ungria admonished the Manila-based anglophone writers for hopelessly speaking to an international audience, particularly their supposed American influences:

> North American and Continental literatures are what the writer in English writes for and against, knocking forever on those heavens' doors. . . , and globalization is his new catchword and line of defense. (de Ungria 2005, xii)

He then entreated the new generation of writers "to contribute to a sense of tradition and history to national literature" (xiii). As a cultural worker, he espoused writings that were rooted in the community and spoke to a local audience, cognizant of local writings as constitutive of the national literature.

As for his conception of this regional community, he hinted at some mystification. In his investiture address as chancellor in 2001, he described Mindanao as a "farflung, wounded island where it [UP Mindanao] finds itself willing to serve out its mission to the Filipino people anew" (quoted in Yuson 2001). Formidable and romantic, the Mindanao of his imagination is an island "that has remained dangerous for the simple reason that it has continued to be beautiful." Nonetheless, he recognized the political nature of the region, invoking, however vaguely, its history of migration, usurpation, and its peoples' struggle for self-determination:

> Against the foreground of a grim future, the fresh nakedness of hope in the mind and heart of the Mindanaoan stirs a magical and bone-deep emotion one or two rallies short of becoming political will. Peace-finally on this island now. Mutual respect finally among peoples of this island now. Governance finally in the hands of the Mindanaoan now. There is just so much to unearth and unlearn here now, so many stories to recover and remember, so much to build without fear of discrimination, retaliation, or bloodshed. (ibid.)

That he expressed sharing in the burden of resolving conflicts in the Mindanao suggests a sense of kinship in his newfound community.

The facts about de Ungria's life and glimpses into his political views should inform the reception of the works he edited. Anthologies are curious bibliographic objects, especially in a society where copyright protects the author and, at the same time, emphasizes ownership and originality. They are constituted by multiple authors, assembled by a third consciousness —between the writer and the reader, the editor mediates to cast new light on the text. They are never produced with-out agenda, which are articulated even in the title alone. *Davao Harvest*, for example, aims to gather works of writers who profess a Davaoeño identity. Because literature primarily is caused by consciousness, its author, the third consciousness that reconstructs texts by multiple authors thus creating a new text is, by its very act of creation, also an author.[8] Yet literary anthologies rely heavily on the name of this third consciousness, for the purported authority it bears over the objects of inquiry. An "author's name is not simply an element in a discourse . . .; it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function" (Foucault 1984, 107). That the author, represented by his name, serves in the discursive formation of the object and "seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being" (ibid.). Beyond the legal implications of the copyright, the author's name situates the text in discourse. Similarly, a presumption of authority is accorded to the editor, who puts forward an

[8] The word editor, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means "a person who is in charge of and determines the final content of a newspaper, magazine, or multi-author book" and comes from the Latin verb edere, meaning, "producer" or "put out."

agenda and serves an "author-function" in the anthology. The framework with which the editor constructs or authors the book develops from a "discursive formation" that purports an epistemic object (such as that of the anthology) to be inherently true and an *a priori* knowledge. Mindanao literature, for example, is regarded as an inevitable body of literatures that represent the historically charged identity of the island. More than a geographic definition, Mindanao in the national discourse is constituted by an "act of formulation," the Foucaultian *statement*, that functions at the level of the sign and operates, among other things, by "a principle of differentiation" (Foucault 1972, 115), one that conjures the political and sociocultural entity that is Mindanao in relation to the equally political and sociocultural entity that is Manila.

Writing on the introduction to *Habagatanon*, de Ungria harps on a so-called southern sensibility that is pitted against that of writings from Manila, concluding that "There are planets of literatures out here [in Davao] untapped and in the offing" (de Ungria 2015, lv). He underscores the dearth of documents and studies on the literary history of the city and, by way of addressing that, traces the beginnings of its creative writing, which, he asserts, started in Ateneo de Davao, quoting lengthily from Nestor Horfilla on the city's long tradition of theater. He mentions playwrights such as Herculano Borneo and Guillermo Dagohoy, who both wrote in Binisaya and came from Southern Leyte, and employs the term *natural-born* when referring to writers such as Jose Angliongto, Leoncio Deriada, and Karl M. Gaspar who who did not have formal instruction in the craft. All three had published a book and wrote in what would come to be as a natural form of literature: codified text meant to be distributed for a wide readership. Recovering the past that concerns "the odyssey of the written word here in Davao," de Ungria names the teachers, "unsung figures . . . who were not creative writers themselves but taught writing out of probably pure love and passion for literature and somehow planted the seeds of creative writing in the city" (de Ungria 2015, xxiv). The "southern sensibility" de Ungria pulls out from the signs that constitute Davao literature remains indistinguishable if not for its essentialist features, haunted by the specter of Manila lite-

rature. By way of embarrassed disillusionment, he confesses having dismissed regional writing as "simple and naïve, and as painless and breezy as the kind of life I thought their authors to have," yet does not offer a counter-description. Invoking the notion of a simple and docile regional life, de Ungria categorically places humility and receptiveness under the rubric of "southern values," emphasizing that the local writers listened more than their Manila counterparts. Because of their receptiveness, they highlighted factuality—"the hard fact of the real"—of their stories. "I had initially thought of such hard-core realism as a charming part of good old southern values," de Ungria writes, partly condescending and bashful and wholly ambiguous in his conclusion, "but I checked myself from further elaborating on the thought because it would be unjust to many other writers for whom the real—rather than mere language alone —remains a valuable and steady source and guide of their works" (xlv–xlvi). From the aesthetic pattern he formed after reading Davao literature—considered as representative of regional writings, de Ungria exhorts for a reconsideration of standards in gauging the canons, rebuking the roster of National Artists for being peopled by those from the National Capital Region. Against New Criticism, "southern literature," with the exception of Aida Rivera Ford's stories, does not hold up as it is "impressionistic [and] slice-of-life," therefore needing a framework that teases out "the poetics of Cebuano, Hiligaynon, or Iluko fiction and poetry." Operating in the dualism of nation (as represented by Manila) and region (everything outside the capital), the discourse redraws and expands the borders of national literature, calling for a more inclusive canon-formation, rendered more organically, because the standards stem from writings with a strong sense of the "real" of community. It is a curious exhortation, however, for such a reconsideration has already been attempted several times—and successfully too—since the sixties. Furthermore, de Ungria's advocacy rings false in the exclusion it unknowingly makes. The writers de Ungria has interviewed for *Habagatanon* are all considered, in contemporary Mindanao society, as "settlers," and nary is there a mention of an indigenous form in his history of Davao literature. Imagining the southern sensibility, he nonetheless invokes

the West in his definition of *literature*: work that is written and ascribed to an author. His enunciation privileges his idea of form and creativity over the indigenous, community-based orality of an epic or a song. His genealogy of Davao literature begins with the settlers who brought and practiced the same academic idea that de Ungria had. Perhaps this glossing-over is enacted by *Habagatanon* itself, the codified perpetuation of ideas culled from a highly oral nature of the personal interview, the intimate engagement with the interlocutor where temporal distance between speaker and listener is eradicated, akin to the communal chanting of an indigenous literature.

The same exclusion is repeated in his follow-up to *Habagatanon*. A book published three years later, *Voices on the Waters: Conversations with Five Mindanao Writers* (2018) widens the scope of his discourse and interviews an initial of five writers whom he considers to have significant contribution to "Mindanao literature." The primary criterion is that they have published a book, regardless of the publishing outfit or the range of distribution, underscoring the literary form de Ungria considers in his scholarship. The introduction, "Notes toward a Concept of Mindanao Writing and Literature," whose format recognizes the nascent stages and porousness of a statement called "Mindanao literature," revisits the various anthologies published related to or in direct declaration of that statement, tracing its emergence and contours to "open up strategies used and possible issues that should be addressed in the representation of Mindanao literature, given that they were products of different historical realities" (de Ungria 2018, xiv). Citing Edward Said's *Orientalism*, he rails at the previous editors such as those in the special Mindanao issue of *Ani*, a literary journal published by the Cultural Center of the Philippines, for framing the island as a "difficult place" as shown in its "violent and bloody-literature" and for their use of folk epics and myths in their self-exoticizing He argues against the generalization, having grown up himself with the notion of Mindanao as a very far place, "the same undifferentiated blur . . . associated with violent deaths—a place to avoid" (xx). Against exoticization, de Ungria reproaches the previous editors for "playing on the difference of the

local, othering it and reifying a living culture into its artifacts" (xxi) and at the same time for prioritizing writers schooled or who have formal knowledge of creative writing. Moreover, he cautions future anthologists on representation, "to show the distinctive marks—thematically or stylistically or whatever—of literary works produced in particular places in Mindanao" (xxviii). He also laments the lack of a "comprehensive collection of traditional lumad literatures" (xxxii), revealing his dichotomy between the traditional and the modern without even considering spaces for assimilation and his conception of literature as one that is fixed in print and not amorphous as in the case of orality.[9]

The imaginary of Mindanao in the national narrative is one with pervasive problems of various warring ideologies. On the one hand, the island sustains the mystification of the archipelago's rich precolonial heritage, and, on the other hand, it has gained notoriety for posing problems in assimilating into the nation-state, persistently resisting the dominant governance of a highly Catholic, purportedly modern center, although the received idea of a monolithic rejection of the nation-state is moot, for there have been accommodations and adaptations from the indigenous peoples.[10] Retrospective of the turn in the late 1960s to a popular-based scholarship marked by the militant peasant-based nationalism and the indigenous movement, Resil Mojares (2017) observes the tendency of scholars "to take the nation as a given and thus address oneself to simply inscribing into the received narrative the marginalized and the excluded without critically interrogating or revising the form and logic of this narrative."

[9] Codified texts of verbal expressions, usually undertaken by anthropologists, are contextualized by the circumstances of their documentation and the background of the chanter. Other iterations of the texts may be found in other ethnolinguistic groups or, like in the case of the Talaandig people, in other pockets of settlements. The daunting task of preparing for a "comprehensive collection of lumad literatures," by their nature of orality, will be like the infinitely paginated book in Jorge Luis Borges's "Book of Sands."

[10] See, for example, Abinales 2000, for the case of Cotabato's representative to the Philippine Assembly, Abdullah Piang, who championed for the integration of Midnanao into the nation-state. As for the case of the lumad's resistance to American colonial system of cash economy and the subsequent migration of settlement in Davao, see Tiu 2003 and Tiu 2005.

Mindanao largely remained beyond the scope of the Spanish colonial government until the nineteenth century. Davao, for example, was merely a trading hub between the indigenous peoples under the Maguindanao Sultanate until the *San Rufo* incident that gave the Spaniards enough pretext to conquer the region (Tiu 2005). It was when the United States bought the entire archipelago, including Mindanao, from Spain under the Treaty of Paris, in December 1898, that it became assimilated into a modern colonial rule. Dubbed as the "Land of Promise" by the colonial government, the island soon drew migrants from Luzon and the Visayas who, despite the pockets of uprisings from the lumad and the Moros, eventually outnumbered the indigenous peoples. The historian Shinzo Hayase notes that *minority* was an alien term at the start of the assimilation until the United States categorized the population into three: Christian Filipinos (mostly referring to the Luzonian and Visayan migrants), Moros, and non-Christian tribes. The settlers' population grew rapidly, responding to the need for more laborers in the abaca plantations where the Moros and lumad refused to work for the oppressive environment (Hayase 2007, 150). Having access and relative mobility in the cash economy, the settlers, who are used to the processes of the modern colonial state, applied for land titles, "legalizing" their property. Operating in the system of private ownership, a concept foreign to the IPs' communal way of living at the time, the settlers earned the nation-state's sanction to build further the community in the newly acquired island. The tide of colonial and postcolonial history was that of the modern system encroaching into Mindanao. Perhaps it is oversimplification to speak of the peoples acting singularly and helplessly in the arrival of the nation-state, but one must note the general dialectical social conditions negotiating one another at the dawn of Philippine national formation. De Ungria's scholarship as editor of the anthologies comes in the aftermath of these negotiations, in light of postcolonialism and the indigenous peoples' movements. With the statement that is Mindanao signifying an identity, a seemingly *a priori* thing that is paradoxically inchoate in its signs that

refuse easy unification, de Ungria enters to fill in gaps and tosses his hat into the discursive ring that is nationalism. His curious subject-positioning, however, is that of a Manila-born, Western-educated migrant who pits the more rooted regional writing against the highly conceptual but groundless preoccupations of his once peers. In his interview with Joloborn Anthony L. Tan in *Voices on the Waters*, de Ungria insists on the Mindanawon aspect of Tan's poetry and that mastery of the craft simply groundless preoccupations of his once peers. In his interview with Joloborn Anthony L. Tan in *Voices on the Waters*, de Ungria insists on the Mindanawon aspect of Tan's poetry and that mastery of the craft simply meant the specificity of the writings transcending into the universal. Observing a particular feature in "southern writing," he explains to Tan that

> the southern sensibility is attracted more by the landscapes and the details of things around them, which are of nature in its element. Landscapes of seas, you know. . . . Waterfalls, rivers, mountains. It's very oriental, like the Chinese and Japanese in that sense. And the loving attentive gaze at small things, like insects. . . . Which I didn't see at all in the poetry in the north, which is very cerebral. 'Yong Manila poets are mostly very cerebral. In the Visayas, think of Merlie Alunan and Vic Subo. It's the same concern for what is around me, the landscape, the people. Very simple, without any cognitive gymnastics and manipulations. (de Ungria 2018, 45–46)

The inward gaze follows Bienvenido Lumbera's dialectics of the national and regional literature. While national literature opens itself up to various traditions, whether indigenous or foreign, and expands the writer's creative horizon, regional literature draws strength and develops depth from the indigenous tradition and culture. The axis allows the writer to process other cultures without losing his strong sense of identity (Lumbera 2005, 13). The trajectory of de Ungria's editorship shows a quest for an identity. From the formal analysis heavy with references to Western canons such as the ancient Greeks and Goethe in *A Passionate*

Patience, his emphasis in the interview series (both in *Habagatanon* and *Voices on the Waters*) changes into a historicized survey of regional writings, to draw from that well a unification that is altogether unique to locale.

As a historical consciousness, identity springs from the spatial and temporal axis in which individuality and homogeneity are constantly negotiated. The person identifies with the social group to which he is born, thrown into a purported *a priori* belonging that shapes his consciousness. This identity leans toward the geographical formation. For they are social constructs and permeable to extraneous influences, the cultural aspects change over time, shaped across history and emplotted for or by the social group in its self-determination. This identity emerges from the narrative formation. Contemporary Mindanao is regarded as a tri-peopled geography where social groups not only negotiate with various extraneous influences immediately around them but also with a larger, more injunctive force that dictates how these social groups generally live: the modern nation-state. But what is *modern* in this sense? Certainly, the term invokes contemporaneity set against historicity, the dialectical relationship between the present and the past. Yet a suspicion of foreignness persists, something that sets modern Philippine society —Mindanao, in particular—against the world at large.

One of the three logics of modernity enumerated by the philosopher Agnes Heller[11] is the logic of technology, or the view of "science as the dominating world," which does not necessarily mean the use of machinery. Instead, the logic is the attitude toward the world, treating it as object. The very utility of the world, how the world, and even other men, can be teleologically harnessed for one's own benefit, and inversely, how the utter uselessness of things such as beauty can refer back to life, are views that predominate modernity. The paradoxical pursuit of seeking specificity of place—the locale—in Mindanao fiction or poetry in order to elevate it to a universal experience instrumentalizes literary content to establish an identity. The conversation between de Ungria and Tan depicts the process, at least for the former, in teasing out a

[11] Asserting that modernity is never a general state of consciousness, Heller posits the three logics to circumvent such a generalization and explain the views that characterize the modern. These are (1) the logic of technology; (2) the logic of the division of social positions, functions, and wealth; and (3) the logic of political power and domination.

homogenizing pattern that will become a feature of "Mindanao literature."[12] That these projects get institutional approval such as the National Book Awards indelibly mark their place in the dominant discourse. Government-sanctioned, the award constructs canons that merit national attention for their identity-forming tendency and is one of the many discursive enunciations of the statement that is the nation, which embodies the "will to self-determination and the self-determining project," responding to "a *theoretical and practical problem* of 'culture'" (Hau 2000, 24). The conflation of a national consciousness with its literature achieves exemplary role in the Philippines with works such as Francsico Baltazar's *Florante at Laura* and Jose Rizal's novels that started a nationalist literary tradition characterized by an anti-colonial tendency, ricocheting between reform and revolution (Lumbera 2006). Established in 1982 by the Manila Critics Circle, which then partnered with the National Book Development Board in 2008, the award aimed, quite open-endedly, to name the country's "outstanding writers and publishers" (Barrios et al. 1994). But nationalism has always been vulnerable to appropriation, exposed to contending forces that seek to redefine it. It can simultaneously breed a totalitarian state and spark a peasant-based revolt. It can also be loosely used to control literary taste. Nationalism remains to be a site of contestation and does not deter one, even the well-informed, from the "mystification and perversion committed in its name" (Mojares 2002, 310). As books are, in the words of Neni Sta. Romana Cruz (2018) at the 37th National Book Awards, "arbiters of culture that nourish the mind and spirit of the Filipino," those recognized by the nation-state, however, wield the hegemonic discursive force that imposes on one's sense of cultural identity. The award accords the author an extension of its authority in forming unities out of the discursive fields, in vividly depicting the national condition, in providing valuable insight into the nature of the Filipino being.

[12] One book that assertively and self-reflexively takes a Philippinist position from the vantage point of Mindanao is Philippine Literature: A Mindanao Reader. Edited by Pamela de Rosario, Don Pagusara, and Macario D. Tiu (2007), the textbook presents the nation as a cornucopia of texts both traditional and modern, an amalgamation of form and interventions that embody heterogenous postcoloniality. Alongside the poems of Western-trained Jose Garcia Villa and Edith Tiempo are excerpts from the T'boli epic that follows the adventure of the folk hero Tudbulul. Exemplifying the communal effort behind literature, as opposed to the premium of the creative genius ascribed to individual authorship, "The Splendor of Tudbulul" is credited to Ye Akub Budea as the epic chanter; Helen Alegado as the researcher; and Peter S. Carado as the translator. The same goes for an ambahan credited to not one person but to the Hanunoo Mangyan of Mindoro.

Editors play a crucial role in expanding literary horizons. Acting as critics, they retrieve works that could have been forgotten in history and revaluates works that might have been purposely relegated to obscurity, reframing them with a clear insight that rethinks art. One can surmise that they thrive on the archive, and their capacity for research accords omniscience. Their discovery and recovery are creative acts, and, through other writers, they introduce (or perhaps reintroduce) new ideas and methods of thinking about ourselves. It would be difficult to imagine historiography now, for example, if Hannah Arendt did not preserve, edit, and strive to publish Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*, which contains his famous thesis about the discipline. Filipino-American literature would have belatedly started if Epifanio San Juan did not dig into the archive of University of Washington to republish posthumously Carlos Bulosan's oeuvre. Editing the work in the author's behalf, however, usually means the author is unable to do it himself. If not, it is presumed that the presence of the editor, who may be asked to write an introduction, is meant to legitimize the author.

At the 31st National Book Awards, the winner for Best Poetry in English is one that has ambiguous authorship. The citation (quoted in Estremera 2012) for *Tala Mundi: The Collected Poems of Tita Agcaoili Lacambra Ayala* is thus:

> This is a distinguished collection that demonstrates the range of thought, breath, music, and emotions from a life of poetry and art that spans more than fifty years. Tita Lacambra Ayala has grown by leaps and bounds since her canonical poem "Cactus." That is saying a lot, since "Cactus" was one of the poems greatly admired by Jose Garcia Villa as well as by past generations that were thrilled by her distinct, original poetic voice. Through Ricardo de Ungria's editorial supervision, Tita Ayala is reintroduced to a new generation of readers and literary scholars—her voice and substance revalued and regained. Transcending the time of the last century, the space of Davao, and a family already distinguished by achievers in literature, painting, and music, the poetry of Tita Ayala provides pure pleasure.

Apart from the slanted insistence of her measure as a poet on the terms of male writers such as Villa, the citation merits her poetry through the mediation of de Ungria, thereby affirming editorial interventions as crucial to the award. Perhaps the confusion on authorship stems from the structure of the collection, which de Ungria arranges according to particular styles and content—sections he calls "suites" based on their mutual love of jazz and classical music—instead of the usual arrangement according to the poems' chronology. In 2011, the publication year, Tita Lacambra-Ayala was eighty years old and an active member of the Davao Writers Guild. It was the year before de Ungria interviewed her for *Habagatanon*, thus, she was not unable to gather her poems herself for the collection. His introduction tacitly conveys that he took upon himself the task of arranging the poems without the usual anecdotal explanation to justify his presence in the book. The introduction, in fact, is refracted through the implacable "I" that conjured the book into being. "It wasn't until I proposed some years back," he writes, "that she come out with a book of her collected poems that I would put together, to which she agreed, that I eventually—finally—came around to reading her poems" (de Ungria 2011, xx).

The so-called suites into which he arranged the collection are "the short poems, the experimental, the shorter lyrics, the long poems, and the love poems," meant to guide the reader "in this venture into her poetic terrain" (xxxix). Knowing the risk, he takes accountability for the decision ("You [the reader] may have some (signs of) discomfort or unhappiness with the way some poems are fitted into the suites, but that is the risk I take in this book") and declares that he is indeed owning the object that is the book by owning the object that is the author ("Each of us will have his own way of owning TALA—the way one chooses one laptop or cellphone brand over others, and the skin or trinket to go with it to make it one's own. This one is mine").[13] Yet such ownership interferes with the "pure pleasure" one might derive from reading Lacambra-Ayala because the third consciousness hovers over the poems with rubrics such as "Suite Gift of Silent Waters" and

[13] The title alone hints at a distancing between the primary author and the book, and the acknowledgments, written by de Ungria, mention merely those that helped him in research and publication, Lacambra-Ayala ironically kept mum in her own omnibus collection.

"Suite Saxophone Windows," words that are not hers. Instead of affirming her art, the editorial interventions highlight the contradictory claims that distort its reader's reception. An example is de Ungria's quest for the southern sensibility divorced from the standards set by creative writing institutions. His emphasis on Lacambra-Ayala's lack of formal training explains her "unschooled, unpolished and rough" poetry, which works to her advantage, as they are "a strong source of her power as a writer," and he conjectures that such an attitude of improvisation and freestyled appropriation may be linked to the Cebuano's idea of *inato*, meaning "just for ours," an aesthetic principle that might be applied to regional literature. With the specter of his authority as a poet and a scholar, he finds patterns in the supposed chaos of Lacambra-Ayala's archive and establishes an order to them, framing her artistic life as simply a reckoning of her domesticity, especially of her relationship with her husband, the painter and writer Jose V. Ayala. Her colleague at the writers organization and long-time acquaintance, de Ungria writes, "I felt I saw on her face and disposition the effects of his [Jose's]—for lack of a better term—creative *being* on her" (xviii), and insists, despite Lacambra-Ayala's prescription to read her without biographical context, that her troubled marriage informs her poetry, because as far as her relationship with her husband is concerned, "writing poems was the most intimate and life-affirming thing she could do to survive the deleterious effects on her emotions of a stronger creative force not hers and not hers to control nor outwit nor submit to nor compel to yield to her" (xxxiv). One can glean from this assertion his disavowal of New Criticism, which prescribes appreciation of the text in and of itself and was, at least during his pre-Davao years, the dominant method in Philippine anglophone writing, and was championed by his peers at the Silliman National Writers Workshop,[14] and his continuation of the dialectical discursive formulation of a southern sensibility as opposed to that in Manila. In place of New Criticism, the editor insists on a context.

A great deal of Philippine literature is reproduced through anthologies. Nick Joaquin (2004) had observed, in a rather controversial claim, that ours is a "heritage of smallness," thus our abundance of short stories and poems and the scarcity of longer projects such as novels. First published in magazines or literary journals, the short works later find print in single-authored collections or in multi-authored anthologies. In the case of the latter, the editor is usually one of the writers in the book or is friends with the writers, as the peculiar case of our literary scene is one that is confined to the narrow spaces of academe and the workshop circuit. In fact, the critic-editor and the writer are mere hats put on by the same person, therefore the difficulty of criticism in the Philippines is one that produces the same significations that circle around themselves, for the author (whether as editor or writer) "is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction" (Foucault 1984, 119), bringing to mind a curatorial act that informs a way of seeing. While the writer curates language, the editor curates bodies of work, which are nonetheless constituted by language.

It is in curatorial decisions that their ideologies are exposed.

[14] Orthodox with the use of the English language and prescriptive with form, New Criticism, which de Ungria frequently invokes in his introductions in both his pre- and Davao years, limits context within the boundaries of the page and therefore espouses a dehistoricized reading of literature. For a more thorough critique of the wave of New Criticism and the institutionalization of creative writing in the Philippines, see Cruz 2017.

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