BEYOND JOURNALISM AND even beyond history, nothing quite captures the spirit of an era better than its creative literature. Filtered through the writerly imagination, facts acquire a transcendent luminescence, meanings contextualized in universal human experience that we come to recognize as the glimmer of truth.

When the University of the Philippines Creative Writing Center was set up in December 1978, the country was firmly in the grip of martial law, which had been declared in 1972 and six years later had settled into a certain stability, or at least the appearance thereof, buttressed by new governmental institutions such as the Batasang Pambansa, the Ministry of Human Settlements, the Ministry of Public Information, and the National Media Production Center.

Many writers like Eman Lacaba joined the resistance and went underground; others like Eman's brother Pete remained aboveground, working as journalists or academics, delivering by sly metaphor what only surreptitious manifestoes and flyers could convey outright.

Martial law—particularly martial law of "the smiling kind" that the Palace liked to tout—had to create its own fictions, chiefly that Filipinos were free to express themselves and that Philippine culture and literature could find no better sponsor than the present regime, which had after all established the Cultural Center of the Philippines in 1969. The participation of intellectuals such as Blas Ople, Adrian Cristobal, Onofre D. Corpuz, and Francisco Tatad in the Marcos administration no doubt helped this agenda along, and while much of the State's information apparatus was devoted to propaganda and to promoting tourism, some appendages of this machine opened and operated such literary journals as the *Manila Review* and *Sagisag* magazine, and held literary summits such as the Afro-Asian Writers Festival. Behind the headlines, of course, scores of dissident writers were being arrested and thrown into prison; Eman Lacaba was killed by paramilitary forces in 1976; and even Gregorio Brillantes, who had taken on the editorship of the *Manila Review*, found himself unceremoniously fired one morning, with his desk dragged out to the hallway.

The establishment of the UP CWC—which became the UP Institute of Creative Writing (UP ICW) in 2002—may have been part of that liberal façade, the notion that all was well in the New Society. It began as a small office where university-based writers and their friends converged for spirited chats over smuggled beer and gin (itself an act of subversion, as the university banned such libations), with no defined function graver than running the annual Writers Workshop and the occasional lecture or forum.

But over the years, and especially over the decades after the overthrow of the dictatorship at EDSA, the UP ICW has grown into a truly writer- and university-driven institution, overseeing mid-career and novice writers workshops as well as seminars for teachers and translators, running an online portal to Philippine literature at Panitikan.com, conducting outreach programs, representing Philippine writing overseas, and encouraging writing in other Philippine languages beyond Filipino and English.

The launching of *Likhaan: The Journal of Philippine Contemporary Literature* in 2007 was one of the UP ICW's signal contributions to its field of endeavor. At that time, we announced that the new journal was created "to invite and to showcase the best of new and unpublished Philippine writing in English and Filipino. It is a journal of Philippine—and not just university—writing; by this we mean creative writing of any kind that has some vital connection to Filipino life and Filipino concerns, no matter who writes the piece or where it is written."

Since then, over ten annual issues, the *Likhaan Journal* has become the standard of excellence in new Philippine writing, its year-end appearance and its list of contributors eagerly anticipated.

This special *40@40* issue was conceived to gather and present the products of many of our finest writers over the past four decades, in celebration of the UP ICW's 40th anniversary. Filipino writers were invited to submit their best unpublished work for consideration by a board of editors that included Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo and Pedro "Jun" Cruz Reyes for entries in English and Filipino, respectively, with Jose Y. Dalisay Jr. acting as Issue Editor, a role he performed for the very first *Likhaan Journal* in 2007. Aside from the work's merits, the only requirement we imposed was for the contributor to have had some seminal connection to the UP ICW, whether as a fellow or associate of the Institute, a workshop fellow, or a workshop panelist. No preferences were given to one criterion or another, but the final selections—20 for English and 20 for Filipino—display a broad and fair representation of generations, temperaments, proclivities, and styles.

It has to be noted, of course, that Philippine politics seems to have come full circle from 1978 to 2018, with many of our concerns under martial law reappearing with frightening familiarity. That, too, should be evident in the works of this present volume—the pervasive anxiety that naturally drives all literature.

The poets lead off in the English section, with a battle cry—furious, mocking, scornful. Alfred Yuson's "I Will Slap Her" moves to the beat of Beat Poetry, jazzy, syncopated, surreal … only we all know it's real. And then "Quasi-Rap," using rap. And then "Swag," with spunk … and funk … and shag. What is this country in

shambles? What is this strange hypnosis imposed by "a great president, / a tough and brave president," with his "dungface decrees …" Why does no one cringe? Why do we cheer him on?

Marne Kilates chimes in with poems from *The Tokhang Rhapsodies*, which rip apart the government's brutal *tokhang* campaign and its absurd subterfuges: "Surrender and sign … you fought back and you fell … Show no mercy. Go spread disaster …" The predator is seen as savior; his obscenities, adored; his "demented fervor" admired. "Reason and righteous anger all go under." Until, finally, "devoid at last of fear or urge of flight … each of us alone in this last hour." All this, in metered verse, in musical octaves, in terza rima.

Joel Vega's poems offers a stark reflection of current headlines: masked assassins, metal hitting flesh, "no knocks, because no doors,/ no please, because no words …" someone counting pills by a kitchen counter, footsteps retreating back to the front … The tone throughout the poetry suite is both angry and mournful. "was I there?" … "we can do nothing else and we will leave nothing/behind …"

The first line of Joel Toledo's "Taking Apart the Dark" is haunted by the dark side of science and technology; the second, by the trivialized, commercialized culture spawned by modern and postmodern media. And, in the third, "Everything Quivers," even literature offers no solace. The persona must "go beyond the tricks of language/ because corridors upon corridors/ are upon us and things are real …" So, "each time we stumble, the body/ breaks a little, scampers to right itself."

There is a helplessness, a haplessness, a deep loneliness about the persona in Arvin Mangohig's poems. The persona describes his bruises: "… as if you had written/ all the wrong answers and your life/ was being corrected in red ink." Has some failure in human relationships made the persona shun human companionship, and seek the affection of cats? But then cats, too, leave, are lost, even if other strays show up, tail upright, demanding: "Ready to love? Again?" And even when Death seems to have come to claim him, Death fails.

Lawrence Lacambra Ypil's theme is nostalgia. The city's architects "didn't anticipate glass …" The rain signifies "an elsewhere / here / where a woman slowly rises to become the shadow of the shadow of me … The nature of the city is that it is built for someone else … The history of towns is always / The history of looking back." And the cadences that capture this quiet sadness are musical, the images are lyrical, the tone is gentle … But the vision is bleak.

There is a disjunct between first of Rodrigo de la Peña's poems, and the two other poems in the suite. "Amorsolo's Light" is suffused with the radiance promised by its title: "sun-stained rice fields, iridescent flight of birds, star radiance, luminous

bodies. But "Escher's Dream" is actually a nightmare—movement circling and looping, doors on ceilings which might be portals into more sinister worlds; the persona himself transformed into an other; memory repeating itself … And "Triptych" is a set of self-portraits composed of "splintered bones, shards, meaningless questions, somersaulting words," life trapped in "the world virtual and viral."

Danger and violence lurks in the carefully designed and elegant language of Isabela Banzon's poems, whether it be exploding firecrackers viewed from a distance, the eruption of volcanos (both literal and figurative), or the "shrieking horror" of the stricken heart. The persona's warning strikes terror in the heart: "Remember black and be/ undone, the world twisted inside our skull …"

Finally, in hir precise, powerful "Rituals and Other Poems," Shane Carreon addresses a distinct "you." In the title poem, the "you" might be a friend or a lover. "We do not talk about your father. We do not talk about mine. They are the / garden of cacti, silent by our windows." In "Body, 2," the "you" is a lover: "Your body lithe and called black, though much fairer / than my own brown one, your long free-spirit hair." And in "In the well-lighted places, you dark gods are kept," the "you" is plural, deities worshipped by the persona's people before they were replaced by "the ivory-white god," and ze curses them for having abandoned their worshippers, and allowed it all to happen.

The fiction reflects the same range and depth.

In Charlson Ong's "Mystic Marriage," one sees the master at work, perfectly at home in his world. Readers of his novels and his numerous short stories will recognize the Yubiancos: the father who has abandoned business for art, a man "who shrugged and walked away;" the mother who holds the purse strings and runs the household, and nags and nags and nags some more; the absent-minded, withdrawn son who simply follows his own drummer. What they will be unprepared for is the dramatic one-line denouement.

Angelo R. Lacuesta threatened to produce a "horror-melodrama" in "Triple Phantasy." And the story does, indeed, qualify as "horror," but it would be a stretch to call it "melodrama," because its subtlety is the very opposite of melodramatic. It will be of particular interest to readers, who have followed the author through his four short fiction collections. Here's the writer trying his hand at something entirely different, and acing it.

"Daredevil," a new story by one of our few writers of real crime fiction, Dada Fres-Felix, still has a crime at its core. But it is not quite what one thinks of when one thinks of the genre. It is a modern parable, and its subject is something that looms larger in our own time than it ever did since the end of the Marcos dictatorship: the corruption of the soul.

Dean Francis Alfar, best known for spearheading the local speculative fiction movement, now arguably the genre of choice among young fictionists, has continued to experiment with form in his own work. In the very original "The Lorenzo Project Questionnaire," the plot unfolds subtly, cunningly, through a series of questions which participants in the fictional project have to answer. And its ending, though totally unpredictable, is somehow inevitable.

VJ Campilan's first novel, *All My Lonely Islands,* won three of the country's major literary awards last year and this year, the latest being the Gintong Aklat given by the Book Development Association of the Philippines (BDAP). Her "Crisscross" is an excerpt from her new novel, *One Week,* which, judging from this chapter, is set in the dark apocalyptic future favored by many of our contemporary fictionists. It is a powerful tale, and the more painful for its being so understated.

Mookie Katigbak-Lacuesta's name is practically a synonym for poetry. But for this special issue of *Likhaan,* she has submitted fiction. And it's a surprise in other ways, too, for she has thrown into the mix a bit of comedy, a bit of romance, and a bit of crime. But at its heart, this is really a story of friendship, about two women caring for each other, in both meanings of the word: "to look after" and "to cherish."

Another poet-turned-fictionist for this issue of our journal is Merlie M. Alunan. "Women Without Sleep," is composed of a series of sketches by a narrator named Luzvi, who is personally acquainted with the women whose troubling stories of pain and courage she recounts. The project actually reads like creative nonfiction, until the very end, when a male voice suddenly pipes up—that of a five-year-old boy—and then the piece becomes fiction. Or does it?

The creative nonfiction pieces deal with both literature and life.

Gémino H. Abad's "A Poetics of the Literary Work" is an elucidation of the author's personal poetics, a profoundly philosophical work, but "wrought" in a language both lucid and lyrical, a style which everyone familiar with the poet's body of work will recognize. It is undoubtedly an important contribution to Philippine literary scholarship by one of the country's major literary figures.

J. Neil C. Garcia's "The Creative Writing Workshop: Some (Provisional) Aphorisms" is a rumination on writing and its connections to memory, to childhood, to happiness, to life. At the same time, it is a description of his own poetic practice. And his use of the aphorism as his essay's structure is a delight.

It is a big leap from these two literary meditations to Jaime An Lim's "Confessions of a Battered Parent." The epigraph from Robert Hayden says it all:

What did I know, what did I know
Of love's austere and lonely offices?"

An agonized baring of the soul, almost as painful in the reading as it must have been in the writing.

In Anna Sanchez's "An Animal Book for Yuuki," we have the voice of another parent. We are offered a story of her daughter's life—as well as the narrator's, of course—all the time staying within the structure of the alphabet. The nonfiction is addressed to the narrator's daughter, who is a special child. So it is full of images, clear, precise, fresh, startling, fanciful. And the tone is light, cheerful, loving, always loving. But this narrative, too, is shadowed by sadness and pain, even if it ends on a note of brave hope.

The Filipino section is firmly grounded on our social realities, with the writers often looking back to the past to be able to come to grips with the present.

Allan Derain's "Kung Bakit Lumayo ang Ulap sa Lupa" (Why the Clouds Moved Away from the Earth) retells the ancient myth of how the sky rose to such a height because of the rice-pounding task of a couple from long ago when the formless sky was young. Derain's version of the folktale is witty and insistent, akin to a children's story, yet the length and details of the other kind of pounding actions of husband and wife are for adult readers, too. Children's erotica? Possibly, and extraordinarily so.

T. S. Sungkit Jr.'s "Ang Panginoon ng mga Alon" (The God of the Waves) is an ancient tale that unravels in contemporary time. This excerpt from his Cebuano novel translated into Filipino for the present anthology is about leaving and coming back, about stock-taking and vindication, and about liberation from the clutches of foreign landgrabbers. The native people are led by "Vincent" Makaindan Saluyong, the contemporary *bagani* (warrior), heir to the special powers of his ancestors. Though just a chapter from a novel, this work shows the wealth of myths that can enrich the creation of national literature. Vim Nadera's "Hudhud" also has a local hero as subject, turning the epic's lines into lyrical verse.

Like Sungkit's work, Lilia Quindoza Santiago, Buboy Aguay, and Niles Jordan Breis take the war in the countryside as their subject. Lilia Quindoza Santiago's "Mag-ambahan Tayo" (Let's Do the Ambahan) takes on the narrative of the underground movement. It dwells on the Ahos campaign of internal purges that brought confusion and terror into the underground movement in the 1980s, breaking it into two factions. Which one is more correct, the work asks, and poses a challenge: Why not change the narrative instead?

The real form and condition of the countryside is the subject in Buboy Aguay's "Napakatataas ng Talahib sa Daan" (Talahib Grass Is So Tall Along the Way). In the countryside, life and danger walk hand in hand. Autobiographical in form, the piece relates how the NPAs once took a child under their care. The child idolizes one of the leaders who teaches the latter many lessons, including the proper way of using guns and ammunition. When the moment that the character has been preparing for finally comes, it leads to a lifelong trauma.

We meet another complex activist-persona in Niles Jordan Breis's creative nonfiction piece "Go-See, Kraw-Gen, Intro: Sa Daigdig ng Promo" (Go-See, Kraw-Gen, Intro: In the Promo World). Indeed he is an active progressive, but a capitalist as well. How should he treat his workers? He listens to his heart, but taps his pocket as well. Which one is more important?

This theme also finds its way into Carlos Piocos III's "Kung ang Siyudad ay Pag-ibig" (If the City Is Love), a poem about dislocation, such as happened in Marawi. One is able to escape the chaos only to be adopted by the enemy. In another poem, he employs a child's act of flying a kite as an exercise in preparing the self for the endless going and return. In Mark Angeles's elegy "Lipakin Din ang Aking mga Palad" (My Hands Are Dirt-Cracked, Too), the persona is a woman in the countryside whose worth lies in the skills of her hands.

If we look at writers as society's antennae, what other things would they intercept aside from the preceding concerns? Genevieve L. Asenjo's story "Ingat, May Buwaya" (Look Out, a Crocodile) is about the return of the female protagonist to her father's hometown island of crocodiles, not as local child but as a tourist seeking the mythical mountain orchid. As she becomes attracted to the tattoo of a tourist guide, the flower becomes real, morphing into a cat. Dislocation and disorientation attend her point of view.

Mayette Bayuga's story "Nanlaban" (Fought the Police) involves extrajudicial killings and wasted lives. Bullets exterminate lives and hopes. The victim is victimized twice over. One corpse means many more orphaned souls and dreams.

Corruption in an artistic community is the subject in "Petri Dish," the first chapter from Luna Sicat Cleto's novel. Even in honing the talents of the young, monsters abound. On the lookout for the extraordinary? Then choose the staging of Vladimeir B. Gonzales's play, "Arkangel sa Maccrotel," which asks which is more vulgar—sex or politics?

And what's new in old subjects like love, loneliness, and boredom? Rolando Tolentino's "Yeh (Pag-ibig)" (Yeh [Love]) is a new version of the *dagli* in the Philippines. What is already short is further shortened into short short fiction, where

only the essential remains. But it is still full and evocative, full of *hugot* lines, so the pain of love also brings laughter in an intelligent take on what otherwise would stay clichés. Among the bright young lights of 1970s theater, Nonilon Queaño stages a comeback as a globalized Filipino whose sensibility remains rooted in the Philippines in his dramatic piece titled the "Migrante" (The Migrant).

Kristian Sendon Cordero's "Kapungawan sa Mata ng Daga" (Sadness in the Eye of the Rat) concerns itself with the poet's pursuit of deep melancholy, from the point of view of the rat, the bird, and even the cave. In the hands of one with perceptive eyes, even the vulgar is humanized. Meanwhile, Vijae Orquia Alquisola's "padampi-damping pagdaan" (The Softly Intermittent Passage) sculpts the ennui of a predetermined and ritualized life into an exciting read.

There are still numerous worlds beyond the writer's window, and one of them could be Jose Dennis Teodosio's "Ang Daigdig sa Ilalim ng Papag ni Lola Mude" (The World Under Lola Mude's Makeshift Bed), a cramped space that becomes a sanctuary for wisdom and experience. If Teodosio has growing up as his theme, it is leave-taking for John Iremil Teodoro. His piece "Sikat ng Araw sa Luntiang Tanawin" (The Rising Sun in the Green Landscape) is a remembrance, an expression of gratitude and tribute to his literary father Cirilo F. Bautista. Eugene Y. Evasco's contribution in "Ang Mumunting Lungting Talinghaga" ("Little Green Metaphors) opens children's eyes to the beauty of nature, bringing an increasingly important subject to an increasingly important audience.

Eli Rueda Guieb III's "Ang Etnograpiya ng mga Pagtatagpo sa Isang Agosto ng Paglaot Habang Hinahanap Kung Saan Ipinanganak ang Kidlat: Taytay Bay, Hilagang Palawan, Agosto 1997" (The Ethnography of Encounters in an August of Going Out to Sea While in Search of the Birthplace of Lightning : Taytay Bay, North Palawan, August 1997) reminds us that writers will often see what others ignore or accord little importance to. That eye for detail, that sense of the moment, are what render the world comprehensible and memorable.

And ultimately, to comprehend and to remember may be the best mission our writers can fulfill for their time, particularly for these times adrift in confusion and forgetfulness.

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