

# philippine studies

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## **Illusion and The Inner Cell: A Critical Analysis of the Later Stories of Arturo B. Rotor**

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*Philippine Studies* vol. 18, no. 4 (1970): 753–768

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

# Illusion and the Inner Cell: A Critical Analysis of the Later Stories of Arturo B. Rotor

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ISAGANI R. CRUZ

*You know only the song; I know,  
and I'll never forget the silence after  
the song.*

—Rotor in "Because I Did Not Ask."<sup>1</sup>

**T**HERE are always many reasons for a writer's silence. One of the saddest reasons, perhaps, is that of Arturo Belleza Rotor. For Rotor did not stop writing for lack of talent nor for lack of opportunity. He stopped writing because he wanted to, because he could not reconcile in himself the artist and the doctor, the man looking and the man experiencing. "When I entered the practice of medicine," he wrote Alejandro R. Roces in 1957, "I discovered suddenly that I did not possess the vocabulary to record or describe what I saw. I could write vividly enough about characters which existed in my imagination. But when I saw them in my clinic and noted the caught breath or measured the

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<sup>1</sup>"Because I Did Not Ask" is included in Rotor's collection, *The Wound and the Scar* (Manila, 1937), now out of print. It is reprinted in *Philippine Cross-Section: An Anthology of Filipino Short Stories in English*, eds. Maximo Ramos and Florentino Valeros (Quezon City, 1964), pp. 22-43. It was originally published in the *Sunday Tribune Magazine*.

quicken pulse, I found myself inarticulate. I knew then that what I had written before was written neither with understanding nor with compassion."<sup>2</sup> The practice of medicine, which in the Commonwealth period helped Rotor achieve what A. E. Litiatco described as "not only . . . more individuality in technique but more freshness in material,"<sup>3</sup> thus ironically starved the very urge it used to feed.

Fortunately for Philippine literature, however, Rotor's self-evaluation of his stories is, from the point of view of objective critical norms, quite inaccurate. Rotor achieved, in his pre-war stories, something which can be described as good, if not great, literature. And as good literature, Rotor's stories contain valuable insights into humanity, insights which stem from deep understanding and deep compassion. From a critical examination of his later stories, I shall try to show some of the qualities of Rotor that indicate the depth of the wound he inflicted on Philippine literature when he decided to be silent after his songs.

Arturo B. Rotor published his first short story, "The Great Leveller," in 1925. For the next five years, Rotor turned out around half a hundred stories in the tradition of the well-constructed plot and the powerful single effect.<sup>4</sup> These early stories consisted of logically developed incidents, leading to a climax and adding to a single, unified effect. Rotor was then heavily influenced by the "earlier high priests of the short story," as Litiatco called them—Matthews, Canby, Esenwein,

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<sup>2</sup> Letter of Rotor to Alejandro R. Roces, replying to the latter's column in the *Manila Times* of 13 February 1957. Reprinted in Roseburg, Arturo G., ed., *Pathways to Philippine Literature in English: An Anthology with Biographical and Critical Introductions*, 1st ed., rev. (Quezon City, 1966), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Introduction to *The Wound and the Scar*. Reprinted in Arturo B. Rotor, *Selected Stories from The Wound and the Scar* (Manila, 1967), pp. 7-11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7. Arcellana, however, says there were a hundred of these stories. See Francisco Arcellana, "Period of Emergence: The Short Story," *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Tradition and Literature*, ed. Antonio G. Manuud (Quezon City, 1967), p. 612.

Pitkin, and Hamilton.<sup>5</sup> To this list can be added Burt, Davis, and Garstin.<sup>6</sup>

The most important influence on Rotor came at the end of this five-year period. Rotor discovered Wilbur Daniel Steele and the so-called "fifth-act method." This method compares the short story to the fifth act of a play. Instead of starting the narrative at the beginning of the first act, the short story begins with the crucial moments of the last act. The reader is then forced to reconstruct the full story through hints planted by the writer. In the fifth-act method, then, the details in a short story seem random, until the reader discovers for himself the events that preceded these details. "Zita" (1930) is perhaps the most popular example of this type of Rotor story.<sup>7</sup> The story of Mr. Reteche and the woman who wrote on blue paper is told through scattered hints and through the metamorphosis of Zita. In this early story, however, qualities which characterize the later Rotor are already starting to show. The self-awakening of Zita, for example, is a focal point in the story and is not subordinated to the story of Mr. Reteche and the woman. "Flower Shop,"<sup>8</sup> published in 1934 but certainly belonging, by temper, to this earlier period, is, by contrast, more concerned with the fifth act. The growth of Letty and the narrator is not allowed to take the attention of the reader from the main story of Miss Martinez. In "Zita," the two foci of the story are equal.

When Rotor acquired his M. D. degree from the University of the Philippines in 1932, his stories began to become

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<sup>5</sup> Litiatco, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Arcellana, p. 612.

<sup>7</sup> "Zita" was originally published in the *Philippines Herald Magazine* (1930) and later included in *The Wound and the Scar*. It is reprinted in *Selected Stories from The Wound and the Scar*, and has been anthologized frequently. It is in Leonard Casper, *New Writing from the Philippines: A Critique and Anthology* (Syracuse, 1966), pp. 165-177, and in T. D. Agcaoili, ed., *Philippine Writing: An Anthology* (Manila, 1953), pp. 188-197.

<sup>8</sup> "Flower Shop" was originally published in *Graphic* and later included in *The Wound and the Scar*. It is reprinted in *Selected Stories from The Wound and the Scar*.

more personal. Rotor started to write, as Litiatco pointed out, "about the things he knows and loves best."<sup>9</sup> The period from 1932 to 1937, in fact, was Rotor's most creative and most distinguished period. He did not write as many stories in these five years as he did in the twenties, but the few stories he did write were masterpieces. It is with these stories that this article is primarily concerned.

It is difficult to characterize the later stories as a whole. We shall learn more by examining the major stories in detail. At this point, it seems sufficient to say that Rotor's later stories contain a variety of themes.<sup>10</sup> I shall, however, be mainly concerned with the two major themes of illusion and the inner cell. These two major themes form the unifying core of the later stories.

The first major later story, "How They Transferred the Convicts to Davao" or simply "The Convicts" (1932), is the fruit of Rotor's work as a prison doctor.<sup>11</sup> The narrator in the story is a trustee in the penal colony at Iwahig. He has a very close friend named Budlong, also a trustee at the same colony. They entered Bilibid prison in Manila together. Budlong, it seems, believes that his lawyer is about to obtain his release, and lives in constant anticipation of this release. The release does not come, however, and Budlong and the narrator have traveled to different prisons in the meantime—Bilibid, Tagaytay, Camp Murphy, Corregidor, and now Iwahig. The story begins with the premonition and the subsequent official announcement that Budlong and the narrator are going to be transferred to Davao. The trip to Davao is undertaken, reminding the narrator of the first inter-island trip he made from Manila to Iwahig. In Davao the two friends are made to clear a *kaingin*, a work they like to do. One morning, the

<sup>9</sup> Litiatco, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Petronilo Bn. Daroy, "Introduction," *Selected Stories from The Wound and the Scar*, pp. 12-17.

<sup>11</sup> "How They Transferred the Convicts to Davao" was originally published in the *Sunday Tribune Magazine* (1932) and later included in *The Wound and the Scar*. It is reprinted as "The Convicts" in *The Literary Apprentice: Silver Jubilee Edition*, ed. R. Rafael Ingles (Quezon City, 1952), pp. 10-24.

narrator has a premonition that Budlong and he are going to be released. Like most of the narrator's premonitions, this one comes true. It comes true in an unexpected manner, however, for as the papers ordering the release of the two friends arrive, Budlong dies.

The story is simple, but as told by Rotor, it is exquisite. The fifth-act method is used to reconstruct the lives and the personalities of Budlong and the narrator. The crime for which the narrator was imprisoned, for example, is not explicitly mentioned, but the reader is allowed a guess at it with the words: "Do they still see the weapon in our hands, the blood on our clothes?" Budlong's constant anticipation of release is concretized by the flashback to his first day in Bilibid, when "his lawyer had assured him that he would not serve the full term," and by the remark that, in Corregidor, "in the six months we were there he never failed to talk to me about his release." The travel theme, incidentally, is employed with powerful effect. The two friends are constantly moved from prison to prison. The boat trip to Davao is painstakingly described. The last scene is the long funeral march for the dead Budlong. The theme of death is also a central theme in the story. The release that Budlong has been waiting for turns out to be death itself. His death changes the attitude of the narrator from the cynical ("when the hour comes, one goes") to the thoughtful silence of the last scene, when "as night fell, we were left alone, the two of us, Bantay and I."

The major theme that will keep coming up in the other later stories, the theme of illusion and reality, is treated in "The Convicts." The narrator, for instance, tells us of his two premonitions: first, that they are going to be transferred, and second, that they are going to be released. Both premonitions come true. In fact, premonitions usually come true in the prison camp. "Somehow we always knew ahead. We knew who were going to be pardoned or whose parole was coming in the next mail, as we sensed the threat of rain, or the shifting of the wind, or the beginning of a new day before the cock crows." Premonitions, however, by their very nature, are illusory. Although illusory, they seem very real to the pri-

soners, and in fact are taken as accomplished reality. Illusion has thus become reality. The death of Budlong itself, however, is more revealing. Budlong thought he was going to be freed. His concept of freedom, therefore, was essentially an earthly one, a freedom from prison walls and prison life. His death, however, forces the narrator to realize that freedom is not just freedom from prison, but freedom from life. The freedom, then, that Budlong was not able to attain on earth was achieved by him, ironically, through his death.

The theme that I have called the "inner cell" is also treated in "The Convicts." Rotor here draws the portrait of a man struggling to transcend his past, to get out of the inner cell he has built around himself. The narrator is a man with a past, an ugly past. He is trying to forget that past and to live his life without its debilitating presence. The boat trip from Iwahig to Davao, for example, symbolizes the separation that the narrator is trying to achieve between himself and his past. The kaingin is another symbol of the new frontiers that the narrator is eager to open in his life. The incident on the boat, that of the convict and his wife, brings home to the narrator his own loneliness, his own search for someone to share his life with even for a short while. It is in Davao that the narrator articulates the struggle with this past:

The foreman looked at me suspiciously. He thought perhaps I was thinking of escaping. Of course, I was. But how little he knew the escape I was thinking of. I was going to escape from this life to another life. My former life? No, that was dead and irrevocably of the past. I was not going to start where I left off. I was going to start all over again. I was going to leave all this behind me, my uniform, my crime, my punishment. . . . And—if only I could—I would leave my memories too.<sup>12</sup>

The relatively simple themes and techniques of "The Convicts" are developed in the next major story, "At Last This Fragrance" (1935).<sup>13</sup> In this story, as in the rest of Rotor's later stories, the narrator is a doctor. The narrator-doctor is assigned to the female medical ward on Christmas Eve. He

<sup>12</sup> *Literary Apprentice*, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> *Selected Stories*, p. 46.

resents being cooped up in the ward on such a festive day. Eventually, however, he gets involved in the hospital preparations for Christmas. One of his patients, a taxi dancer in Pasay who is suffering from advanced cardiac decompensation, spills perfume on herself and dies, right after the Midnight Mass. Through the tragic death, the narrator realizes his own need for human companionship and love.

With this story, Rotor moves into a more explicitly reflective type of literature. All the events in the story are told, not so much for their own sake, as for the effect they have on the narrator. The narrator is presented in the beginning as a very selfish man. He tries to avoid being on duty on Christmas Eve. When one of his colleagues volunteers to relieve him for an hour of two, he even refuses, on the ground that one generosity has to be repaid by another. He remarks to himself that, if he got sick, he would not want his friends to visit him; they would only make him more miserable. When the time for Christmas decorations comes, he comes late and with hesitation. Finally, he continues his investigation of the pneumonia patient, not because he is concerned for the patient, but because "my record would be incomplete and I'd probably be marked down."

The almost mechanistic attitude of the doctor towards his patients and his colleagues comes from the "inner cell" that he has built in himself. He does not relate to others, because he *will* not relate. We do not know if this present attitude is due to a disappointment in the past; we can only guess that it is. We do know, however, that whatever the cause of the doctor's selfishness, he is aware that he is not involved in other people:

Some of the patients we have are in our hands for one or two months; we talk with them several times a day, ask them questions, take their pulse or blood pressure, note the effect of the medicine and see the changes in their condition or the progress of the illness. So sometimes we become quite familiar and intimate with them. The more congenial of my classmates strike up acquaintances this way that last even after the patients leave the Hospital, but I have not been able to do this. I am too reserved, I suppose. I can't chat away like some of them do to save my life. Even with the nurses I have never been able to become

intimate. I always envy my colleagues when I hear them calling the head nurses by their first names, teasing them, going out with them.<sup>14</sup>

The narrator even has his own explanation for his aloofness: "What I am afraid of is that people will think I am getting too fresh and will snub me."

Salvation from this isolated state comes to the doctor in three steps. First, he becomes friendly with Miss Basa as the two of them work on the Hospital Belen. He fails to really relate, however, since he is still afraid of being snubbed, and since he still does not realize the full extent of his isolation. The second step on the road to involvement is the doctor's solitary walk from the dormitory to the ward. For the first time, he notices the awesomeness of the mango tree along the path. The silence of the night, the faint strains of a Christmas carol, and the grimness of the mango tree bring home to the doctor his own isolation, his own silence. The final break from his inner cell, however, occurs when he sees the decompensation patient dead, with the vial of perfume spilled on her breast. The vial was all the patient brought into the hospital; it was all that reminded her of her past life. As she died, she spilled all the perfume on herself, symbolizing the spilling out of her own life. The significance of the spilled perfume is not lost on the narrator. He becomes intensely aware of his own loneliness, in contrast to the reconciliation that the taxi dancer has achieved between her past and her death. The narrator is goaded into breaking out of himself, and as he waits by the bedside for Miss Basa, we realize that the cell door has been finally opened.

The theme of the inner cell is thus central to "At Last This Fragrance." The other themes of death and of illusion are expertly combined in the death-event of the taxi dancer. There is an echo of the death-as-release idea that we first found in "The Convicts": "Those who have been in bed say two or three months find out one day how wonderful it would be not to get up at all any more, to lie down forever in peace."

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<sup>14</sup> "At Last This Fragrance" was originally published in *Graphic* and later included in *The Wound and the Scar*. It is reprinted in *Selected Stories from The Wound and the Scar*.

But the more significant position that death occupies in the story is similar to the position it holds in "The Convicts." Death is the occasion for a change of attitude in the narrator. The *reality* of death does not strike the narrator until he sees the death of the taxi dancer. Where before he could say: "We have seen so many hearts stop beating and so many breaths end in a last sigh, that it does not affect us any more," now he has to sit by the bedside in quiet anguish. Death, or more precisely the *reality* of this woman's death, has become, for the narrator, a singularly educating experience. What was formerly in the realm of the unreal has suddenly become real.

A similar story is "Deny the Mockery" (1936).<sup>15</sup> The narrator is again a doctor. The narrator tells the story of Luis Javier, a tuberculosis patient in the prison hospital in Manila, who gets well only when he receives letters from his wife. The letters, however, Javier does not know, are forged by Johnny, another inmate. Johnny is the righthand man of the narrator. One day, on Christmas Eve, gifts arrive for everyone in the prison. Javier gets a gift too. But because of the pilfering going on in the prison, his gift is a bum gift. Johnny solves the crisis by forging another letter and sending Javier a gift. Javier silently cries over this particular letter. The narrator, watching him, realizes his own loneliness.

The story of Javier is used by Rotor as a parallel to the narrator's own story. The identification of both stories is made explicitly in the text: "I was too much like Javier, I could be hurt and wounded." The narrator, like the narrator of "At Last This Fragrance," is a hurt and wounded man. We still do not know why he is hurt and wounded, but we do know, at least, that he finds it very hard to get out of himself and involve himself with other men. In the beginning, in fact, he is genuinely surprised that even prisoners celebrate Christmas. His attitude towards the prisoners is condescending and coldly scientific. When he finds out that Javier is being consoled by Johnny, however, his attitude towards others changes. If a

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<sup>15</sup> "Deny the Mockery" was originally published in the *Tribune* and later included in *The Wound and the Scar*. It is reprinted in *Selected Stories from The Wound and the Scar*.

prisoner, "this fellow, a black sinner if there ever was one, who would not hesitate to lie and cheat and rob for the mere fun of it," could have enough compassion to console a fellow prisoner who has not done anything for him, surely a doctor should too. The narrator thus starts revising his own attitude towards other people. He becomes aware of the hidden self-righteousness of the two society matrons distributing the Christmas gifts. He becomes intensely angry at the prison practice that robs Javier of his gift, and indignantly starts a report to the chief on the mockery of prison life. He has opened himself so much that, when everyone else leaves, he is still there, watching Javier from the corner of his eye.

It is in "Deny the Mockery" that the inner cell image is explicitly brought out:

When a man takes on a number instead of his name, wears a prison uniform, and talks and moves as he is told to talk and move, he ceases to be an individual whom you can distinguish from another. He answers when he is called, runs when he is told to run, stops where you tell him to stop, receives a reprimand with a smile or a serious face, depending on what you want. He eats whatever is offered him on a plate; retires to his narrow bed at a signal, falls in step, and marches to your count. You would think that there was nothing you could not know about him, that here, inside these walls, you can study a man inside and out. But that is a mistake. For as soon as you put a man inside a prison cell, he retreats into another where you cannot follow, a dungeon known only to himself and in which he stays for life. Every man who is convicted receives two sentences, one that the judge and the world impose on him, and one that he imposes on himself. That period of one year or two years or ten years which we give him in our effort to make the punishment fit the crime and after serving which we believe he is once more free, never really ends. The convicted never regain their freedom, they never crawl out of the torture chamber which they themselves have built out of their shame and repentance.<sup>16</sup>

Not only prisoners, however, climb into an inner cell. The narrators in Rotor's stories are not always prisoners, but they are always inside some form of inner cell. They may be hurt and wounded, and unwilling to try again to reach some other person. They may be unable to relate, not knowing what to

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<sup>16</sup> *Selected Stories*, p. 23.

do. Often, at the end, however, they see some hole in their own defenses, and their lives are saved from total isolation.

The theme of illusion does not receive major attention in "Deny the Mockery." The only allusions to it are the letters of Johnny, which are, of course, illusory for everyone, but real for Javier, and the interpretative reading by Johnny himself of his forgery, which is in itself real, but which, in comparison to the play in the Christmas program, is much more melodramatic and unreal. "Deny the Mockery," then, is really the story of the inner cell, and of the two men—Javier and the doctor—who are brought out of themselves by the goodness of the man named Johnny.

The most sophisticated of the prison stories is "Convict's Twilight" (1937).<sup>17</sup> The central incident in this story occurs during a routine review of the prisoners in the Bilibid prison in Manila. Cornelio and his wife stare at each other, oblivious of the commotion around them, until it is dark and time to go. The doctor, who tells the story, is caught up in the strange communion of the two.

"Convict's Twilight" has no real plot. Everything is built around the central, climactic incident. The first part of the story is a beautiful description of twilight in the penal colony in Davao, where Cornelio and the narrator once met. Taken in itself, this first part is so un-storylike that it has been reprinted as an essay in a collection by Roseburg.<sup>18</sup> Taken as part of the story, however, the description of twilight in Davao assumes an enormous structural function. The communion of Cornelio and his wife at the end is another twilight, very like the twilight in Davao. This is brought out in various ways.

Twilight in Davao is not merely the physical twilight when day grapples with night. Twilight is also the return of the men

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<sup>17</sup> "Convict's Twilight" was originally published in the *Graphic* and later included in *The Wound and the Scar*. It is reprinted in *Selected Stories from The Wound and the Scar*, and in Roseburg, *Pathways*, pp. 4-14.

<sup>18</sup> Arturo G. Roseburg, ed., *Essays: English, American and Filipino* (Manila, 1950), pp. 242-244.

from the forest. It is the hour of silence, of prayer. "No angelus rings here, for the nearest church is a day's journey away, down the river and along the coast, but one does not need to hear the tolling of distant bells to be reminded of the hour of prayer. One must pray here, if only to relieve the terrifying solitude, to stay the gathering darkness." Similarly, the intense communion of Cornelio and his wife is a twilight: "I seemed to hear the sound of a distant bell tolling, and that and the silhouette of the woman kneeling naturally brought the thought of angelus: the woman was praying, the silence itself was a prayer, the darkening world's daily invocation at twilight." After the prayer, the men in Davao play games or listen to the radio. Twilight is an hour for joy and make-believe; it is "an hour to play at being free." Cornelio, too, plays at being free in Manila. He is so close to his wife, though they are far apart physically, that "in his place the man did not move, not even to shift his weight from leg to leg." At Davao, it is "that calm that is more breathless and awesome than silence" that captures the doctor's heart; in Manila, it is the "consciousness leaving a sick body, restlessness and strife and pain being replaced by a profound peace."

The incident of Cornelio and his wife reminds us at once of the incident of the prisoner and his wife on the boat to Davao in "The Convicts." Here, as there, the attempts of the two lovers to have some semblance of communion and peace occur in an atmosphere hardly conducive to such communion. Cornelio's wife kneels transfixed in the crowd of visitors and tourists. She sees only her husband; she cares for nothing else. In fact, she does not notice the darkness come. She does not even notice that she can no longer *see* her husband. Somehow a deeper sight has prevailed over her physical sight. Love has transcended its surroundings. Love has bridged physical distance.

It is this transcendence of love that the narrator learns to value. Just like the narrators in the other later stories, the prison doctor in "Convict's Twilight" is struggling to get out of himself. As he describes the advantages and disadvantages of living in Bilibid, we cannot help but suspect that he is also

talking of his own inner state. "Would the days of my isolation pass sooner if every hour of the day I was made aware of the sounds that augment the sense of my isolation? Probably not. Probably I would prefer to be in Davao." When the narrator finally finds the situation of true and lasting communion, he immerses himself in it. He becomes one with Cornelio and his wife, and in the end, the guard has to wake him up, too, from the trance. "I saw a guard by my side, and seeing him I also saw that there were no more people here, that the review had ended and the visitors gone home." Thus, by this act of self-forgetfulness, the narrator grows from the adolescence of incomprehension ("Gradually I found myself looking at the two of them, and like them forgetting all the others; first at the man, then at the woman, wondering, if after all they were not really talking audibly to one another in a language not only beyond my sense of hearing, but also utterly beyond my pitiful comprehension.") to the maturity of understanding.

The theme of illusion is central to "Convict's Twilight." Which is real, the parade or the communion of the lovers? For the three principal characters, the parade is unreal, illusory. It does not bother them. For them, what is real is the non-spatial, non-temporal communion of Cornelio and his wife. Prison life in general, moreover, is a life of illusion and reality. "All you have to do to be free, to throw away chains and shackles, to discard a numbered uniform, is to discredit your senses." And so the prisoners play at being free. They listen to the world news, imagining themselves still an active part of the world. They like the forest, for its unbounded magnitude helps them forget that, after all, they cannot live the lives of normal people. They snatch at opportunities of meeting their loved ones, and in the special case of Cornelio and his wife, they play at being one, in spite of the crowd around them and in spite of the falling night.

The themes of illusion and the inner cell are brought together completely in "Because I Did Not Ask" (1937), the logical climax of Rotor's later stories and probably his best short story. The cell becomes a cultivated illusion, a mask for

the narrator's own feelings and thoughts, a false face that the narrator has himself fashioned and developed in order to keep out other people. What is real: what one really is or what one shows to the world? It becomes very difficult to tell in this masterpiece.

The story is simple. Adela, a very close friend of the narrator, has left for a few weeks in the Visayas. The narrator is writing her a letter, explaining to her his action the night before. Apparently, the two had a conversation that did not end satisfactorily. Adela asked the narrator if he was sorry he lost something (his creative power? himself? Adela? we are not sure), but he replied that he never possessed whatever it is that he is supposed to have lost. The narrator's letter tells of an appendectomy he helped perform earlier in the afternoon, but its real purpose is to clarify the misunderstanding with Adela.

From the very beginning of the story, Rotor poses the problem of illusion and make-believe. The narrator comes to the boat to see Adela off and to tell her some important thing. Instead, he is forced to talk about "the summer weather, vacation resorts, people leaving for abroad." Social amenities force him to hide his real intent, his real self. Dr. Hernandez, the chief surgeon, has to do something similar in the operating room. Pretending to others and to himself that he is having no trouble with the patient, Dr. Hernandez whistles nonchalantly in the middle of an operation. "The more difficult the problem he was facing, the more enthusiastically he hummed under his breath." Nobody is fooled, however, not even Dr. Hernandez himself. The difficult appendectomy described in minute detail in the story brings out the hollow pretense underneath the whistling. As the operation progresses, the chief surgeon becomes more serious, less pretentious, even less self-assured. In the end, the chief surgeon recognizes his own inability to find the appendix, and then admits it to the others by stopping the anesthesia. Dr. Hernandez is thus led to face his real self.

The ironic treatment of the operation also brings out the theme of illusion. The narrator reminds himself that real-life

operations are not at all like those in the movies, where melodrama is the rule. He tries to disillusion Adela, by telling her the plain truth about operations. But the operation he describes is almost melodramatic, complete with whistling and hidden appendix and suspense and all. The result, of course, is ironic, but it also contributes to the over-all intertwining of reality and fiction. Another element which helps build the atmosphere of truth and illusion in the story is the incident of the woman with the child. Medical efficiency dictates that the narrator stop thinking of the appendectomy as soon as that operation is finished. He has to attend to his other patients. Thus, the narrator cultivates a facade of medical competence and concern. How much of his real self, however, is really in this particular case at this particular time?

The greatest illusion of all, to which the examples above are only subordinate, is that between Adela and the narrator. Somehow the narrator has not really related to Adela. He is still laboring from some past wound. He is living in an inner cell, inside a wall into which no one can break, not even Adela. "You see the scar; I saw and remember the wound. You know only the song; I know, and I'll never forget the silence after the song." There is a distance between Adela and the narrator, a distance that is symbolized by the physical distance now existing between them. The narrator has not transcended his past, nor has he attained the courage needed to try to reach some other person. Unlike the narrators of the other later stories, the narrator in "Because I Did Not Ask" does not open himself to some sort of love in the end. Rather, he only confirms himself in his isolation. The recognition in this final story is not a recognition of ability to love, but a recognition of defeat and despair. "And always, like a faint perfume, the wonder of your nearness, of how I have but to put only my hand to find yours. But I'll never find out why, because I do not ask to understand." It is a sad ending, but perhaps, the more real one.

The theme of the wound and the scar, what I have called the "inner cell," and the theme of illusion and reality thus weave in and out of the later stories of Arturo B. Rotor.

From these stories, we glimpse the artistic greatness and the human compassion of both the writer and the man. We see the writer's mastery of structure and reflection. We see the man's perceptiveness and sensitivity. We see how real his insights are, how very close these are to the world of real men. Notwithstanding his protestations that these stories were "written neither with understanding nor with compassion," we see that Rotor's stories are filled with humanity, with understanding, and with compassion.