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Notes and Comments

Self-Annihilation in the Fiction of D. Paulo Dizon

L. M. G R O W

D. Paulo Dizon "never won a literary prize in his life."¹ This is almost certainly because of the widespread assumption that his work is lightweight because of his reputation as a humorist. It also explains Alejandro Roces's peculiar "Introduction" to Dizon's *Twilight of a Poet and Other Stories*.² After noting that Dizon is ranked as 'one of the finest Filipino writers of humorous stories', Roces's "Introduction" wanders off into a series of anecdotes about Dizon's life, illustrating his point that "Dizon was a colorful man" (p. vii). Celso Al Carunungan, also, has produced an elegy, not a preface, with hyperbole such as "Dominador Paulo Dizon, one of the most glittering names in Philippine literature" (p. xiii) and "He has written some of the most compellingly beautiful stories ever written by a Filipino in English" (p. xv). Like Roces, Carunungan's point is basically that "Paul was a humorist" (p. xiii).

Casper, however, has responded more perspicaciously that "there is virtually no comedy in these stories, and what little humor does emerge is wry, bitterly satiric, defensive, Chaplinesque-humor of the Absurd, rather than of the simply incongruous."³ This is it exactly, as we can see almost immediately in the collection's title story, "Twilight of a Poet":

1. Celso Al Carunungan, in the Preface to Paulo Dizon, *Twilight of a Poet and Other Stories* (Manila: Regal, 1962), p. xv. All textual references are to this edition. Although "Wayward Children of the Arts" did win a 'third prize' in the 1960-61 *Philippines Free Press* Short Story Contest. See Lydia R. Castillo, *Foreign Influences on the Filipino Short Story in English, 1948-1968* (Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1976), p. 225.

2. Dizon, *Twilight*.

3. Leonard Casper, *New Writing from the Philippines: A Critique and Anthology* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. 62.

"I may have a few grey hairs, but that is because I think too much and too deeply. Why, I am only 33."

"At your age Christ died on the Cross," she said, perhaps to remind me of my religion and soften my heart. (pp. 2-3)

This is not sunny humor. It is sardonic humor of the 'go play on the freeway' variety, and it is among the lighter moments in *Twilight*.⁴ In fact, after this finely-modulated tonal piece and the following "Not Enough Fuel in the World," the tone darkens considerably, reaching the point of *nada* in "Rain and Wooden Clogs." The tone, however, simply reflects Dizon's premise throughout these stories: that man is self-annihilating, actively bringing on his own destruction for no good reason. In the process man is portrayed as irrational, a creature of basic impulses rather than a ratiocinative being.⁵

TWILIGHT OF A POET

In "Twilight of a Poet" the first-person narrator claims that "I am sick and tired [sic] of being lonely" (p. 11), but he has done everything imaginable to bring this condition on. After shouting "Shut up!" at his lover, he responds to her complaint, "I am bitter, too. And hungry" with "Sleep it off" (p. 5). Evidently she has good reason to be irked with him. She has just finished inventorying their financial problems: "'You may include in your deep contemplation when and how to get money for tomorrow's breakfast,' she said. 'Not to mention the succeeding meals and the rent for the house since two months back. I may as well remind you about Redi Kilowatt's threat to darken your threshold with its absence'" (p. 5). To this he retorts "That's what I like about you, lover,"⁶. . . . You have a flair for poetic sardonicism." But this is simply to pay in the poet's own coin, to hold a mirror up to the sardonic speaker and, at one remove, to the creative artist in general and thus, of course, to D. Paulo Dizon in particular. It is not at all surprising that she does so, since she is also a failed artist. He throws her failures in her face:

4. In citing the "go play on the freeway variety," it is difficult to resist drawing a comparison with Carlos Bulosan, also widely regarded as a humorist, whose bitter, corrosive stories rail against social injustices; their laughter is the reflex outcry of the severely wounded, not the guffaw of the entertained. Cf., *The Laughter of My Father*.

5. It would not be farfetched, in fact, to see Dizon as a late naturalist, the heir of Norris and Dreiser in particular.

6. Not a term of endearment: "That was what we called each other [-] lover [-] when we got sick and tired and were about to jump at each other's throat" (p. 2).

"Or maybe if you did not take singing lessons and spend most of your time at radio stations and back stages rehearsing soap operas. . . ."

.....
 "Or maybe if you stopped performing in those lousy plays for nothing and making personal appearances before prisoners and malingering soldiers and mental patients . . ." (p. 8).

"And maybe if you stopped thinking of yourself as a former movie extra . . ."

"I was not an extra. Oy, I was a starlet . . ."

"Forget it." (p. 9)

The narrator knows that her departure is permanent because she removes her prized possession: "I knew she was never coming back because the phonograph was gone . . ." (p. 10).

Casper has noticed, "... the narrator (in Dizon's stories) customarily is either a featureless artist—violinist, harmonica player, but above all a 'poet'—or an admirer of one. He is long suffering but short on sensitivity of the kind that leads to explanations."⁷ Symbolically, the artist represents the ordering process of the imagination, creativity as a constructive force. It is far from accidental, then, that Dizon's artists are all failures and that not only do they recognize this, often they insist on it. In "The Boarding House" for example, the young boarder answers Mrs. Meliton's question about his vocation with "I am a violinist. A third rate violinist. . . . A third-rate musician," (p. 49). This is to reverse the artist's constructive, ordering function, if the artist persists in plying his trade, which is what the Dizon artist invariably does. In the case of the young man at the boarding house, the reversal of art's goal is doubled since, as he says, "I am a poet" (p. 49) as well.

But why does the girl leave the narrator in "Twilight of A Poet"? He is employed as we know from his complaint that "When a man works eight hours a day and has to put up with the bosses' ill-temper and the inefficiencies of his officemates, as I do, if he has to be pushed around, as I am, and get bawled at for a miserable stipend, at least when he goes home, no matter how humble the home is, he expects, as I do, to be treated with kindness and understanding" (p. 8).

The answer emerges in passing, in the midst of the characters' mutual recriminations: "I would stay at home if I did not have to work, and I do not have to work if you did not spend most of your time and money drinking or loafing or talking in bars or sulking and feeling sorry for yourself" (p. 8). That this is so we can determine from an early self-revelatory comment of the narrator: "The only breaks

I get are the kind that hurts. . . a break on the head I incurred in a brawl with an unpublished poet who also knows how to employ an empty beer bottle in the art of self-defense" (pp. 1-2).

His lover, true to her foil role, has also not tended to duty as scrupulously as she could have:

"Why, you don't bother to find out if there are still buttons on my underwear and my shirts, which there are none. If you miss some of your pins they are holding my pants from falling." (p. 8)

"You can make it clean and livable if you spent what little time you have left from your free shows." (p. 9)

NOT ENOUGH FUEL IN THE WORLD

"Not Enough Fuel in the World" features the Dizon recurrent adolescent narrator Melkor, here ordered to build a cooking fire. Since there is no fuel, he "was trying to peel off a loose board from the wall downstairs" (p. 14), literally a self-destruction of the home. Nor is this a for-the-nonce situation, as the preceding paragraph informs us: "A week before I had already chopped one of the broken windows of the kitchen" (p. 14). How much this predicament is the father's fault is unclear. He is unemployed, but he does claim to be trying to get a job: "Don't start telling me I did not go out the whole morning to look for work," my father said. "I did my best. But there is no work for me" (p. 15). This is defensive in tone, however, and one wonders whether the father could have sought employment in the afternoon as well. Although the seventeen-year-old narrator claims that "My father had been poor all his life, and for him to live was to do something about it, or at least try to do something about it" (p. 17), the father's penchant for recumbent postures does not reinforce this claim:

He was not lying on the floor with his folded arms under his head in place of a pillow, blinking at the ceiling, amusing his taste buds with the candies my sister Victa was able to pilfer from the confectionary. (p. 16)

"I am getting to be too old to work, I am afraid," my father said stretching himself lazily on the floor. He yawned, heaved another sigh, and scratched the side of his head. (p. 17)

Certainly Melkor's mother has her doubts, as her immediate reaction to the preceding sally indicates: "'Don't stretch too hard,' my mother said. 'I can hear the joints of your lazy bones creaking like hinges that need oiling very badly'" (p. 17). And the father is none too concerned about the family's plight:

"I don't know where tonight's meal is coming from," my mother said.
 "And yes, the fuel."

By this time my father was beginning to snore. (p. 19). Similarly, the narrator's position is undecided. His announced goal is "to become something of Guy de Maupassant" (p. 16). But predictably "I was trying to make something of myself. I picked up Guy de Maupassant again, but I could no longer understand what I was reading" (p. 17). This puts him in the "failed artist category. But even were he an artistic success, his reward would be recognition, not remuneration, as his dialogue with his father reveals:

"What will that bring you?" he said.

"What they call in English *fame*," I said.

.....

"What is that?" he said.

"It means," I said, "if I succeed in my endeavors, I will get known." (p. 18)

But the narrator's father points out:

"What does it avail me [the father] if I am known? Will those who greet me in the streets help me earn my living?" (p. 19)

The Socratic twist to this interchange (it is noteworthy that the father's first two questions are followed by "he said" rather than "he asked") clearly is designed to induce the reader, as well as the narrator, to reassess the value to the creative artist of his own art. In this case, there is even some doubt about how seriously the narrator is pursuing artistic achievement. Before he can respond to another of his father's questions, "What do you want to be, Melkor?," Victa cuts in with "Grow pimples on his face and mustache on his upper lip. . . And write love letters, grease his hair, eat and sleep" (p. 17).

THE MAN WITH THE TREMBLING HANDS

Carlos Mercado of "The Man with the Trembling Hands" faces a more extreme situation—penury to the point of desperation:

There were no streets in the community in which Carlos Mercado and his family lived; the makeshift houses, most of which had been built in dire need and in great haste out of scraps, stood huddled together as if in common wretchedness. In lieu of a street or even an alley, one followed a sinuous footpath that was cut in many places by puddles of dirt water from the kitchens of the houses; the footpath passed under the stairs of houses or through a narrow passage between the wall of one house and that of another . . . (p. 26)

But of all jobs to apply for, Carlos selects that of a security guard, a position which is self-destructive. In the first place, his job creates an antagonism between himself and the people he lives among, not a good situation at best, but looming larger, potentially, because "Like its neighbors, Carlos Mercado's house had no door to lock against intruders . . ." (p. 27). Second, his job, "which required him to be unfriendly towards his fellow workers and even suspicious of them" (p. 27) does Carlos' health little good:

"Why are you always angry, Carlos?" Felisa said. "I can feel the trouble in your heart; what is it? You have been this way since you started working in the factory.

.....
"Are you sick?"

"My soul is sick and tired." (p. 27)

Another hazard, which ultimately proves fatal, is that his hands tremble when he feels anxiety. This problem proved lethal during the war, when Carlos's trembling hands accidentally discharged his weapon, thus giving away his patrol's presence to the Japanese, who promptly opened fire, with the result that three or four were killed (pp. 23-24). With this history, why would Carlos even consider a job that involved handling firearms? Ironically, at story's end remembering his war-time experience, he freezes when he needs to pull the trigger of his carbine and as a result is killed by a piece of brick thrown by one of the oncoming strikers.

TO ROME WITH LOVE

In "To Rome with Love," the narrator, a publicity man for a travel agency, reminds himself more than once that "I knew only too well, jobs were rare and the times were hard" (p. 33). (Note the later chiasmatic version "Times were hard and jobs were rare," p. 34). Yet instead of attending to his duties at a board meeting, as he admires the endowments of Mrs. Garrido, seated in front of him, he daydreams about an encounter he had in Rome. This is so obvious that his superior, Captain Esperidion, angrily rebukes him: "'Vy golly,' he said to me, 'har you taking down notes por your fresh releases?' He came from my own province and sounded like it. 'Hall you av been doing hall the time was feep at Mrs. Garrido's legs. Work, man, work'" (p. 34). Rather than doing so, however, he interrupts the board members' discussion with "Let me tell you about Rome" (p. 42). When again taken to task by Captain Esperidion (in fact, Esperidion tells him twice to "shut up"), he mimics his boss' accent: "Hokay . . . I

mean okay" (p. 43). As a culminating act of self-immolation, this fictionist *manquè* neglects his assignment:

I stayed long after the board meeting was over, trying to write a feature article on traveling on credit, but I could not help thinking of Rome and of Sandrina.

I wrote this story instead. (p. 43)

Is it possible that he could have escaped getting sacked?

THE BOARDING HOUSE

"The Boarding House" opens with a rather distasteful scene in which the chauvinistic husband affronts his wife by reminding her that she possesses nothing and won't until he dies:

"You know very well we have money in the bank," he said. "Only it is in my name. But you are entitled to it just the same. And in the event of my death, it's all yours."

"Let's not talk about death", she said.

.....
 "As for anything that may happen", he continued, "you need not worry about that, either. I am insured for fifteen thousand. The money in the bank, which will be in your name in the event of my untimely. . ."

Before he could finish what he was going to say she stood up and walked out on him in a huff, leaving him bewildered, pained. (pp. 46-47)

Knowing that his wife doesn't welcome the subject, he persists with it until she is angered. A similar bit of senseless tension is the result of defaulting on his promise. After work he is always too tired to make good on "his promise in the morning that they were going out that night to the movies or for just a stroll" (p. 48). One morning, after a discussion of what to do about the nocturnal noise which the musician/poet is producing, Mr. and Mrs. Meliton "didn't say anything to each other even when he came up to their room to dress for the office, and he didn't even say goodbye when he left. Instead he banged the door behind him" (p. 56). None of this is necessary; it is gratuitous erosion of what began as a happy marriage. Minor though it seems, it is enough, evidently, to produce sufficient disaffection in Mrs. Meliton that she "put on her satin negligee and before she knew it she was going down the stairs" (p. 56). Although the narrator ingenuously says that "She had forgotten she was in her negligee" (p. 57), her memory is a tap which conveniently shuts on and off: "She might have resisted but afterward she could not remember having done so" (p. 58).

GIRL ON A VOYAGE

"Girl on a Voyage" continues the pattern of disaster self-inflicted. A girl, about seventeen, is put on board a boat by her fiance, an American serviceman, so that she can return to her family home in order to win her parents' permission to marry him. But the story's ending makes it questionable that such permission is strictly necessary: "I am going home to my parents," she said. "I am going to tell them. I will get their permission" (p. 67). But if she is planning to tell them, not ask them, winning their consent is merely a courtesy or a bit of family protocol, which means that her unaccompanied voyage is an unnecessary exposure to harassment.

What increases the likelihood of such an occurrence is that, first, she makes a late appearance: "She was about the last passenger to come aboard. Her coming was rather unwelcomed because, such as it was, she was an addition to the already overwhelming crowd on deck" (p. 60). Second, the American youth is so conspicuous:

She was accompanied to the boat by a hatless young American in an army uniform. He carried for her the heaviest of her personal effects. On his shoulder he bore a big trunk and under the crook of one arm a bundle of bedding under whose weight he was clumsily bent as he walked behind her up the gangplank. (p. 61)

Even after making due allowance for the callowness of youth, it is stretching credibility to think that this couple could be unaware of what other people must think their relationship is. In fact at the end of the story we discover that she, at least, has from the outset been conscious of what other people's attitudes might be:

I don't understand why people do not understand it. I knew all along that they wouldn't understand it. They think cheap of me because of it. At first I did not care, but now. . .

.
He is going to marry me. He is a nice boy. He is not what people think he is, I mean, he is serious. He does not pay me for loving him. (p. 67)

From the outset, too, we know that this is precisely what people are thinking: "Besides that, from the beginning, at their first sight of her, the other passengers already seemed to know what she stood for, although I think this was a matter of offhand sort of prejudice, a rash jumping to conclusions" (pp. 60-61). If this voyage really did need to be undertaken alone, the girl should have certainly been careful about making an earlier arrival, not making it obvious that the American was her lover, etc. Nor would the result have been quite the same.

The "bemustachioed young man" provokes the blow on the head which causes him to fall "over the deck, his head bleeding" (p. 66). First, the man assails her with disrespectful verbal epithets: "Hello, honey," "Where are you bound for, sweetheart?" (p. 64), and "You can't sleep there, baby" (p. 65). Then he pulls a hair from his head and tickles her nose with it, as she pretends to sleep. After three polite requests to leave her in peace, she "slapped the bemustachioed young man" (p. 66). It is only then that she deals him the blow with "something hard and heavy" (p. 66).

ONCE UPON A CHRISTMAS EVE

"Once Upon a Christmas Eve," a melodramatic tale a cut below most of the other *Twilight* stories in quality, nonetheless contributes to the continuity of the self-destruction motif. The male protagonist has quarreled with the female protagonist. She had accused him of lacking "strength of character" and, we gather, of coming home late and drunk. "And then he had recriminated her (sic). In an angry voice he mentioned the lack of womanly touch in their own home, her neglect of his welfare, the missing buttons on his shirts, on his underthings, the undarned holes in his socks" (p. 72). This exchange, which could easily be an interlude from "Twilight of a Poet," so similar is its content, results in the male protagonist's leaving "in a huff, dramatically slamming the door behind him" (p. 72). When he returns, he finds that she has left. Although she returns and they are reconciled, each has pointlessly risked a permanent breakup, to the detriment of happiness.

THE BAMBOO FLUTE

"The Bamboo Flute" only symbolically continues self-destructive behavior, in the form of Victa's threats to commit suicide by ingesting *tintura de yodo* unless her demands are acceded to. Nor is this the first time that she has utilized such tactics:

At another time she had threatened to run away just because my mother had refused to let her go with the other girls on a picnic. She had bundled some of her clothes together and before she could decide whether she should really go or not, she unbundled them again and for three days she did not eat at the table with us. She said she would starve herself to death, but I always caught her eating surreptitiously in the kitchen when the old folks were asleep, or out of the house. (p. 81)

A TALE TOLD FROM A KITCHEN SINK

Although it is likewise a more symbolic than actual predicament, granted that the narrator of "A Tale from a Kitchen Sink" is only a teenager, he does feel himself wasting away, if not actually self-destructing, because of his job:

I am sick and tired of the noise and the crowd and the stink of the kitchen. But what can I do? Someday, perhaps, I will be promoted to what? In this restaurant only females are allowed to wait on the tables, and only they have the opportunity of receiving tips.

I am getting old very fast. I am now seventeen years old. I do not know how long I will be working at Ching Huat Restaurant, and I do not know what I will do if Ching Huat suddenly puts it into his head to kick me out. My aunt will in turn throw me out of her house. It is a time of difficulty. Thousands upon thousands are out of work, or perhaps are just too lazy to work, or perhaps they simply know how to live. I am afraid I am wasting my time, the only time of my life upon the earth, by washing the plates that other people feed from. (p. 92)

The dilemma, obviously, is that staying put is debilitating, but putting his job behind him would worsen, not ameliorate, his situation.

Another character from this story, Marilyn, the restaurant cashier, has, experienced something akin to what occurred in "Twilight of a Poet" or "Once Upon a Christmas Eve." She and her husband have been separated. He begins to patronize the restaurant. Finally, after one such visit by him, she has a cry in the ladies' room and then dispatches Tagi, the narrator, with a message for the husband, who has just exited the premises. The baffled narrator "cannot ask her how come she is married to the lonely man and they do not even talk to each other, and all the time that the lonely man was sitting alone at his table she was joking and laughing with other men, and now she wants to come home with him" (p. 96).

NAPOLEON AND THE MAYOR

The tense Occupation tale "Napoleon and the Mayor" is neither symbolic nor merely debilitating for the narrator, who has, with his wife, come to live in San Roque. Why he has chosen to settle in such a hazardous locality we never find out. Two days after the couple's arrival, he is summoned to the mayor's office, by two bolo-bearing policemen, to answer just this question. The first risk the narrator takes is to be cavalier with the policemen:

"I will go see the mayor later," I told them. "I shall have breakfast first."

"You just come at once," the shorter and more muscular of the two said. I did not like the tone of his voice and from the beginning I had wanted to take a poke at his jaw.

.....
I was about to tell the policeman with the missing teeth to go to hell when my wife came into the room from the kitchen. (p. 98)

He knows that he is playing with fire: "Ever since we arrived in town we had been hearing stories of unwholesome happenings, of men being picked up and detained at the garrison, of men being killed at twilight by the banks of the river; and now, remembering all these, I could not help feeling afraid" (p. 99). Although the narrator "From the beginning . . . had been made to understand that if you valued your life it was necessary to lick the mayor's shoes or something like that. . . . From the way the town was behaving I could tell how dangerous it was to deal with the Mayor" (p. 100). But he persists in being abrasive, first by mildly resisting a search: "He [the police sergeant] immediately searched my person with a meticulous thoroughness, and when I made a move of protest, he jabbed his stubby thumb into my stomach" (p. 100). Next, he is verbally provocative in his answers to the mayor's questions:

"You are a stranger in this town?" he said

"Yes."

"Say 'sir' when addressing the mayor," the policeman with the missing teeth said.

"In this town the people respect their leader, you see," the mayor said with a tone of rebuke.

"I am sorry, mayor," I said, but where I come from people did not have to say 'sir' in order to show respect for each other." (p. 101)

.....
"Now, tell me, did you have any permission, from anybody to enter this town?"

"I did not know it was necessary to have anybody's permission to come to this town or any other town." (p. 102)

Naturally, the mayor is angered by this tone (and perhaps, if he has detected it, the fact that the narrator not once addresses him as 'sir'). The mayor reminds the narrator that "I have you in the palm of my hand. It is within my power, you know, to kill you or let you live. I hate people who do not respect those who lead them." (p. 102). Undaunted, the narrator continues in the same manner:

"Well," I said, "if you don't want me in this town, why, I can always quit—with your kind permission, of course."

"Aha, there you are! But once you are trapped, you are trapped."

"I am afraid you are giving me a bad impression of your town, Mayor," I said, unable to control myself.

"Why you impudent—you!" he said taking several steps toward me, and hit me on the ears with his fists. He was so puny, the blow was nothing. But I did not like the idea of being made a punching bag of, so I tried to stand up, and immediately the two policemen bore down upon me and pressed me back to my seat.

The mayor dismissed the policemen shortly, so that he would have the full and sole benefit of punishing me. He resumed hitting me at random places with his fists, growling like a mad dog as he did so. "And you want to fight back, eh? Well, I'll show you . . . Ugh! Ugh!"

When he got tired pounding on me, he sat in his swivel chair panting and trembling from exertion and from rage.

"I tell you," he said, "it is within my power to kill you. I won't even have to answer for it. And, by God, I'll be glad to do it myself."

"I don't doubt that," I said. "But why be glad to kill me? Or anybody else? What did I do?"

"Shut up!"

"What is it I have done to justify your wanting to punish me so?" I was beginning to see I could break him down.

"Shut up, did you hear me?"

"I can see that you are weak, vain, ambitious, and frustrated, Mayor," said I. I could restrain myself from hitting back, but I couldn't hold my tongue, and I knew he was too tired to hit me further, so I fought back with my tongue, and I wondered why his policemen didn't do anything about it.

"Shut up, you scoundrel!"

"I can see that you have so much lust for power; ah, but your own ambition will overpower you."

"If you won't stop, I'll. . ."

"Have you heard of Napoleon, Mayor? Have you heard of the lives of great men? Have you heard of what too much power. . ."

"Take this fool away!" he ordered. (pp. 102-4)

That the mayor has not been bluffing, the narrator discovers when he is gaoled: "From the building across the road where the garrison runs, you could hear the plaintive groans of men being beaten all day, and at night, like the sad whisper of the wind against the walk outside. You almost could hear the men gasp for breath, and you heard the hobnailed steps of Death itself prowling outside the walls" (p. 104). Although the narrator spends only three days in gaol and must perform a month's "voluntary" labor, he is let off only because the mayor concludes that he is insane.

RAIN AND WOODEN CLOGS

"Rain and Wooden Clogs" is another story sombre in tone and thoroughly serious in content.⁸ Although much of what befalls the narrator is unavoidable, he does engineer his expulsion from school by translating (albeit euphemistically) what his father has said in dialect:

"My father has a very bad impression of the way you run the school, ma'am," I said.⁹

"All right, all right, get out of this place this moment!" Mrs. Smith shouted. "And you are permanently dropped from school." (p. 114)

COURAGE

The second Occupation story of *Twilight* is "Courage." The male protagonist has lost something of himself and, he fears, his wife's esteem by an act of cowardice:

She had seen how his knees trembled in fear. He saw her looking at the trembling of his knees as he stood there near their unfinished shack, almost below the man on the horse, who gazed down upon him with arrogant superiority, with gloating. He could imagine now how like a beggar he must have looked as he stood under the triumphant gaze of the man on the horse, like a beggar begging in silence for his life.

He remembered now the strange look in her eyes when she shifted them from the trembling of his knees to his care-yellowed face; it was not a look of sympathy or understanding or even of hate; it was a look of one who suddenly lost faith in another; it was an unforgiving look.

Even the man on the horse [,] an agent of the enemy, who had turned his back on his own countrymen for the power that he could not have otherwise enjoyed, had spat on the ground in his direction, with an air of disdain. (pp. 119-20).¹⁰

8. To the degree that it is the most strikingly proletarian-like story in the collection. Although as Casper (*New Writing*, p. 63), observes, "None of these stories engage 'social consciousness' in the semi-abstract fashion of the thirties, when Dizon reached manhood. Even his widely-known 'The Man With Trembling Hands' is, essentially, not about class struggle and betrayal, but about the fumbling confusion of an isolated human being in a time of decision."

9. Cf., the similarity to the wording "I am afraid you are giving me a bad impression of your town, Mayor" in "Napoleon and the Mayor."

10. This reaction is the mirror half of the foolishly brash approach of "Napoleon and the Mayor." The point made by these stories combined is the pessimistic conclusion that man can risk destroying himself by erring in either direction: too much courage or too little.

His weakness is accentuated by juxtaposition with his wife's fortitude:

"Let us risk it across the fields," he said. "Can you make it to those hills?"

"It is useless," she said. "The hills look near enough, but they really are too far to reach on foot. And I hate running away. I would much rather face them. Tell them what I think of them. Spit in their faces." (p. 123).

When he self-pityingly laments, as though their fate has irrevocably been determined, her response, qualified with "so far" (suggesting that this is not the end) and containing its reference to "excitement," is a sign of her tensile strength:

"I am sorry," he said, "In our brief and troubled time together we never had the bed of roses. We never even had a home of our own."

"It has been exciting so far, wasn't [sic] it?" (pp. 123-24)

But, after more dialogue, "Her voice sounded to him as if she were saying goodbye" (p. 125).

WAYWARD CHILDREN OF THE ARTS

"Wayward Children of the Arts" opens with Salvador and Bodoy incarcerated because they tried to "break each other's head and broke the glasses (sic) of the store at the corner and exhibited themselves and brandished lead pipes" (p. 137). This pathetic turn of events has stemmed from drunkenness, a self-inflicted malady. Nor is this an isolated incident, apparently: "My friends. . . wrote poems once in a while and lived like their ideas of poets, doing things differently, living dangerously, and were now behind bars" (p. 132). At the end, Marcos is gently asked to leave his place at the Gentleman's Dormitory, since its occupants have expressed concern to Mrs. Meliton, the proprietress, about Marcos' raffish friends visiting him there. Marcos now adopts the role of *picaresque*, as his friends have before him:

"Do you have any place to go?"

"Yes, ma'am. My friends are waiting for me. I will join them tonight." (p. 138)

CONCLUSION

Although the last three stories of *Twilight*, "A Story Told in Anger," "Twilight," and "Joseph's Harmonica," do not treat the theme of

fallible man's self-destructiveness, nonetheless it is the note that D. Paulo Dizon sounds most often. His stories display a comprehensive range of ways and means by which man effects his own downfall. There is therefore disquietingly serious matter in his work, for the reader sees the virtually ubiquitous potential for self-annihilation. We may regret D. Paulo Dizon's passing, not because it stilled Joseph's harmonica or our fathers' laughter, but because it silenced D. Paulo Dizon's bamboo flute.

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