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Jesse Hernandez Liwag



Throughout the entire decade before the outbreak of the second World War, the country struggled to make independence a cultural and economic reality. Tagalog fiction in general, however, had refused to reflect the inner tremors of doubt and defiance until it became a futile wish-fulfillment (San Juan 1966, 426)

The Father of the Tagalog Short Story is Deogracias A. Rosario (DAR). "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" [I have a bird] (1932) represents both a maturity in DAR's art and a turning point for the Tagalog short story. In the view of contemporary literary theory, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" now reveals itself initially as a story of two conflicting narratives, divulged by the text's resistance to its own progressive trajectory, that points to a larger cultural narrative of a changing society.

In one narrative, the text is a confession of a tradition-bound emotional relationship that did away with conventional plot and characterization. It reworks the form of the Tagalog short story and thus redefines it. The text's subversive literary tendencies were hailed by critics and scholars as the signal of the maturity of DAR's art and the modern turning point of the Tagalog short story.

In the alternative narrative, while the text appeals to literary progression, it has difficulty in resolving the regressive elements of its form, for instance when the text recalls an earlier literary form, the *dagli*, and a non-literary form, the *kundiman*. It also makes overt references to European Romanticism, to specific European models of art and romance, which overwhelm the text's modernity and aligns itself with a reactionary cultural mode in a changing and Americanized colonial society.

Since DAR is generally taken for granted and only typically remembered by literature students for his "Greta Garbo" (1930) and "Aloha" (1931), this article aims to present new perspectives in the

debate surrounding the significance of the short story, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon"—is it a modernist prose-poem or spurious sentimentalism?—and relate it to larger literary and cultural developments, which will cover the privileged critical history of the short story and will touch the debates surrounding its canonical position.

An important limitation is the lack of specific information regarding the original publication of the short story before its subsequent inclusion in anthologies. Even Maria Eloisa N. Francisco's (1977) thorough investigation of old periodicals failed to turn up anything but anthologies. Furthermore, only two scholars have made any significant analysis of DAR's works, Francisco and Genoveva Edroza Matute (1971, 341–72). San Juan cites the short story briefly, and the anthologists Alejandro G. Abadilla, Clodualdo del Mundo, and Teodoro Agoncillo make simple introductions.

This study is a formal textual analysis, informed by specific relations with larger literary and cultural histories. In Richard Johnson's (1983, 46–48) circuit model of culture, a text is defined as a salient moment of a cultural commodity; it is a separated existence suspended between its original conditions of production and its moment of reception. As texts, such cultural commodities, particularly the short story "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon," can be analyzed for their formal properties, in order to understand the larger processes of Philippine culture and society.

Privileged Narratives

In context, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" was said to be a short story established in the literary canon, and there were reasons for this institutionalization: the dominant ideas and standards for the Tagalog short story in the 1920s and 1930s, its accepted history, literary beginnings and growth, its social construction and transformation from a fad-dish magazine story to a timeless literary phenomenon.

The indigenous origins of the Tagalog short story were traced to the 'maikling kasaysayan' but more often to the *dagli*, a short personal or familiar essay resembling the English character sketch or the vignette (San Juan 1966, 424). The *dagli* was a short prose work that was popularized during the early American occupation and served mainly as a filler in the numerous vernacular periodicals at the time (Francisco 1977, 129). Given the popularity and function of these short pieces, they changed both in form and technique until 1914, when

the first short story was published, penned by DAR: "Kung Magmahal ang Makata" was hailed by Nicanor Tiongson (1974, 33, cited by Francisco, 132) as the first work to display all the necessary elements to qualify as a twentieth century short story.

After "Kung Magmahal ang Makata," DAR churned out in subsequent issues of *Buntot Pague* two more works in a similar form, "Nangasilaw sa Dilim" and "Sa Harap ng Panganib." DAR, Tiongson argues, defined the short story in formal terms with its plot, characters, setting, and unity. Francisco looks back and reflects on the significance of DAR's early works:

With these early attempts at a new genre, Rosario seems to have sounded all the notes which were destined to characterize the Tagalog short story through sheer overuse. Above all, the departure from the 'munting kasaysayan' of the first decade [of the twentieth century] is manifested by a preoccupation, obvious in all three stories, with the topic of love, and a lack of involvement with society at large. (133-34)

With DAR's lead, the short story form grew in the popular market in magazines like *Buntot Pague* and, later in the 1920s, in *Hiwaga Extra*, *Mabuhay Extra*, *Taliba*, *Mabuhay*, *Sampaguita*, and more particularly *Liwayway*.

Liwayway at the time was home to a man of letters, its editor, Jose Esperanza Cruz, who had specific literary interests and goals that followed those of Ilaw at Panitik which Cruz headed for a long time. The situation was such that the magazine published short stories that they themselves validated, creating a situation of self-affirming authority. As *Liwayway* increased its weekly circulation, Ilaw at Panitik grew to become the biggest and most popular of the literary societies, with illustrious members like DAR, Jose Corazon de Jesus, Amado V. Hernandez, Cirio H. Panganiban, Fausto Galauran, and Teodoro Gener. It published books and sponsored balls, *balagtasan*, and plays. The group became the vanguard of Tagalog Romanticism, aligning themselves to larger issues of nationalism and cultural progress.

Tagalog Romanticism drew attention and popularity to themes of love and life through the widespread publication of works that explored the truth of imagination, the freedom of emotions, and the value of nature. It was a romanticism undeniably deriving from an Anglo-European tradition (Lacsamana 1983, 29-30). In short, Tagalog Romanticism grew with Ilaw at Panitik and with *Liwayway*. And it was in this literary-commercial situation that "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" was published and awarded a prize as best short story of the year.

The late 1920s saw a publishing industry bursting with short stories that led to a general concern about quality and discernment. By the end of the second decade, it was no surprise that del Mundo started his monthly column "Parolang Ginto" and, later, so did Abadilla with his "Talaang Bughaw." These two columns awoke Tagalog literary criticism and largely concentrated on the short story form, further scrutinizing it, pushing it, forcing it to progress. They began a system of hierarchy and of awards for the best short story of the year. In 1933, Abadilla proclaimed "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" as the "Pinakamahusay na Maikling Katha" [Best Short Story]. It was around this time that del Mundo proclaimed DAR "Ama ng Maikling Kathang Tagalog" [Father of the Tagalog Short Story] (Francisco 1977, 143).

Through these literary critics, their columns and awards, and during a vigorous literary growth led by Ilaw at Panitik, DAR's position in literary history was carved in stone, and led to the subsequent and delicate literary-cultural process of a writer's rise in craft and fame being explicitly and purposely associated with the rise of the Tagalog short story.

Deogracias A. Rosario

DAR started out quietly in 1912, at the age of eighteen, when he joined the vernacular newspaper *Ang Democracia* and at the same time wrote for *Taliba* and *Pagkakaisa ng Bayan*. Two years later he joined the team of *Buntot Pague* where he published his, and Philippine literature's, first Tagalog short story. Florentino Collantes, the poet, introduced him to the literary world as the soldier of Balagtas and, as a young member of the newly-formed Ilaw at Panitik, of the Romantic movement (Santelco 1914, 25 cited by Francisco, 14). In 1922, DAR started writing for *Photonews* which, a few months later, changed its format and its name into *Liwayway*. It was in *Liwayway* that he published the bulk of his works amounting to over eighty short stories, two novelettes, two serialized novels, and countless essays, poems, and feature articles (Francisco 1977, 15).

At the very beginning of his career, DAR confessed that "ang wikang Tagalog ay lalago at magiging wikang panglahat sa buong Kapuluan" [the Tagalog language will grow and become the common language in the entire Islands] (Santelco 1914). The American occupation secularized Philippine culture and society, and permitted

the rise of vernacular literatures through the publishing industry. Because of the newly-felt freedom of the times, Tagalog, as a language, and, indeed, Philippine literature became optimistic:

The American occupation accelerated the movement towards a more open, secular society, one that coincided with America's ethos as a nation. ... A relaxation of censorship, popular education, free enterprise, increased public services and participation in government, together with the challenging activities of the times, contributed to a burst of creativity. (Mojares 1983, 162)

Because of the pervading attitude of the times, Philippine literature and its writers entered into a new phase which del Mundo (1969, 135-37) named the "Muling Pagsilang" era, free from direct suppression and full of eager experimentation:

After centuries of suppression, literature found itself free from unjust censorship. There was a general air of experimentation that prompted the writers to explore other passions and sentiments, to articulate certain ideas and philosophies culled from European writers, to incorporate what they had read and observed into their novel, drama, or poetry. (Reyes 1980, 263)

On DAR's part, he incorporated what he read and observed into his short stories—he used the *travnia*, vaudeville at the Zorilla Theater, the Santa Ana Cabaret, the Manila Carnival, Hollywood films, and the hundreds of newly arrived European literary works. Thus, in the same sentiment of the times, DAR launched a new phase in the development of the Tagalog short story when he began his own literary career. In 1916, he acknowledged his role in this development when he came up with the name for his short fictional works—hitherto called *kakana* by Lope K. Santos, *bahagi ng isang buhay* by Francisco Lacsamana, *munting kasaysayan* by Patricio Mariano, and *maikling kathang-buhay* by Gregorio Conching and Teodoro Virrey. He christened it *maikling kuento* (Galauran 1938, 7-8).

Undeniably, the development of the Tagalog short story and of DAR are one and the same, because "within the span of Rosario's career, the Tagalog short story evolved from an uncertain mixture of native and foreign elements to a literary form of definite characteristics" (Francisco 1977, 129). The Tagalog short story developed from a magazine filler to a work of art of the local Romantic movement, and, much later in the 1930s, to a tool of the modernist leanings of the Panitikan group. Del Mundo, Panitikan member and

Parolang Ginto critic, explained that, after the critical publication of "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" a few years before the 1935 arrival of Panitikan, he bestowed upon DAR the title, "Ama ng Maikling Kathang Tagalog," because of DAR's "use of fiction-writing techniques which lifted him up above his contemporaries and blazed the trail for those who were to write the modern Tagalog short story" (127).

Within his central role in Philippine literature, DAR's 'fatherhood' attributes to him both the birthing and the maturity of the Tagalog short story. In this sense, DAR and the Tagalog short story were one and the same. Like father, like son. And in the midst of all these developments, and through various cultural and social practices, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" came to stand as a milestone of the Tagalog short story, fixing the past and preparing for the future, validating a specific and privileged narrative of Philippine literary history.

Several critics have outlined the hegemonic meaning and value of "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon," particularly Abadilla, del Mundo, Agoncillo, San Juan, Matute, and Francisco.

Abadilla and del Mundo, in their 1936 anthology, defined "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" as a "tulang-tuluyan" or prose-poem and emphasized its poetic rather than its formal qualities—"ipinamamalas ang matulaing buhay sa gawing ito ng daigdig, na sagana din naman sa talalilungan ng buhay at hindi lamang batbat sa salamisim" [revealed the poetic life on this side of the globe, which is also rich in verities of life and not only full of illusions]. They added that "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" displays the Tagalog storyteller's poetic ability that is beyond any comparison with that of foreign writers of fiction (Abadilla and del Mundo 1936, xii) Later, in his own 1949 anthology, Agoncillo (1972, 314) hailed "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" as DAR's best work not only because of its beautiful and easy use of language but particularly for its craft; further, he said that it pioneered the technique of the plotless short story in Philippine literature, besting even the fledgling works of writers in English:

Sa dinami-dami ng kanyang [DAR] mga akda ay nangingibabaw sa lahat ang "Akoy' Mayroong Isang Ibon" hindi lamang dahil sa kagandahan at kaluwagan ng pananagalog kundi sa pamamaraan. Sa mga Tagalog, siya marahil ang kauna-unahang sumulat ng kuwentong walang banghay. Ang kasalukuyang kuwento ay nalathala noong 1932, nang panahong maging ang mga manunulat sa Ingles ay wala pang nalalamang paraan ng pagsasalaysay kundi ang karaniwan, alalao'y ang pagtalakay sa kuwentong makabanghay.

[Despite the number of DAR's works, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" rises above them all not only because of the beauty and ease of its use of Tagalog but also because of its style. Among the Tagalogs, he is perhaps the first to write a story without any plot. The aforementioned story was published in 1932, during a time when even the writers in English did not know of any way of narrating except in the ordinary manner, that is, dealing with a story that is plot-centered.]

Still much later, in 1973, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" was included in another anthology yet by that time, though the text's position in the literary canon was already a given fact, the prose-poem/plotless short story split among critics was given a makeover by yet other critics and scholars (Florentino 1973). San Juan, for example, in 1966, criticized the canonical status of the short story, dismissing both its value as either a prose-poem or a plotless short story, and called it a "straight confession":

Likewise, Deogracias A. Rosario's *Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon*, considered a model of maturity and a point of departure for the modern short story, suffers from a too willing surrender to the emotional charge of language. What comes out is not fiction but straight confession. Lacking any detachment, adopting an introspective tone, it fails to project a plausible analysis of character by directly describing, in essayistic fashion, the attitudes and thoughts of the narrator (425).

Such a strong statement did not go unnoticed, threatening as it was, so that five years later Matute reacted to this "batang kritiko" [young critic] San Juan.

Matute first affirmed the status of "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" as a "tuluyang-tula" but attributed to it a poetic function of allowing the reader to grasp, in a familiar form, an unconventional narrative. And DAR, having done so with his poetry in prose writing, transformed the traditional into something new. Matute (1971, 350) acknowledged the popularity, despite its failings, of "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" and attempted to make sense of the dual status of the text as both a prose-poem and a plotless short story:

Sa kabuuan, ang "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon," bagaman nagtataglay pa rin ng ilang kahinaan ng mga akdang kapanahon, ay tiyak namang nangingibabaw sa mga yaon, sapagka't kinapalooban ng mga katangian ng pagkapihikan, pagkamaunawain at pagkamasining. Ito rin ang nagsimulang umiba ng landas sa kinamihansang maikling kathang may-banghay (at masalimuot na banghay), humawan ng landas sa tuluyang-tula, at nagpatunay na sa kamay ng bihasang manunulat, ang

tinatawag na di-kumbensional, kahit na sinasabing 'malansa' ay napagiging sining.

[All in all, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon," despite the fact that it still bears some faults of works during its time, is definitely above them all, because it possesses the qualities of tastefulness, understanding, and artfulness. It is also the work that started to change the path of the common plotted short story (and complexly plotted), opened the path of the prose-poem, and proved that in the hands of a skilled writer, what is called unconventional, even if seen as indecent, can be transformed into art.]

Matute concluded that "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" was a pioneering work, changing the face and form of the Tagalog short story.

But it was Francisco, the latest of scholars and critics studying DAR within the privileged narratives of literary discourse, who synthesized and articulated the canonical position and value of DAR and his "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon":

At any rate, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" was certainly *avante garde* for its time. It was criticized by the traditionalists for its lack of plot, and hailed by modernists for the same reason. . . . It remains a milestone in the development of the Tagalog short story, illuminating how a progressive artist sought to breakout [sic] of conventional forms in search of new ways of expression. More than any of [Deogracias A.] Rosario's short stories, it reveals him as an innovator and indicates how far ahead of his contemporaries he was in aspect of technique (154-55).

Thus, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon," because of all these scholars and critics working within the confines of dominant literary discourse, using the scholarly currency of institutions, of publishing markets, literary societies, and universities, was circulated as the seminal product and critical point of the Tagalog short story, validating its own and DAR's literary status and meaning, while smoothening out the conflicting points of the criticisms. These privileged narratives simply ignored the historicity and situation of "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" in favor of affirming the homogenous and unproblematic status of literary history and canon.

Alternative Narratives

What has hitherto been ignored or missed in the study of DAR's "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" were the contradictory elements of the text, all those points that oppose the accepted readings and privi-

leged narratives of literary discourse. Cultural studies offers the concept of the textual moment, a text in the circuit of culture and capital: simply, the short story can be explained as a text at the moment between the conditions of its production and its reception, at its moment as text with definite and explainable formal elements within larger cultural and historical developments.

The period of the American occupation, up to the Commonwealth era, was a period of intellectual and cultural ferment. The liberal policies of the American authorities allowed the rise of politico-social organizations and the easy access to the publication of periodicals and books. The same liberalism, however, diluted the conflicts and the protests sounded by the angry sectors of Philippine society, especially with the institutionalization of an ethic of accommodation by the American colonial government. In a sense, Philippine culture was allowed to bloom while being injected with large doses of American culture and commercialism. The era, especially the 1930's, was marked by an increased Westernization, with a movement towards the dominance of foreign valuations of culture and literature. In vernacular literature, as a result, "a basically conservative style and outlook coexisted with 'modern' ideas" (Mojares 1983, 192). This includes new themes about modern life and an emphasis on artistry and form, which were clearly inspired by Joyce, Anderson, Saroyan, and Hemingway—"the young writers experimented with new techniques such as stream-of-consciousness and complex point-of-view ... [they] wrote stories in which the action was mainly psychological... in the mind of the character" (Francisco 1977, 142). Many writers wrote stories that emphasized the requirements of Guy de Maupassant ('the plot is the thing') and O. Henry ('twist at the end').¹ Later, DAR followed and tried his hand in all the modern styles of story writing, experimenting with modernist techniques, and was in fact known to encourage younger writers to do so (del Mundo 1967, 375).

The standards of the conventional short story prevalent in the 1920s and 30s were heavily infused with descriptions of foreign avant garde and modernist literary conventions. In between the rise of the Tagalog short story and the establishment of the Panitikan group, DAR's "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" fell in the middle of these changing times and closely intimated modernist preoccupations with new forms.

As a modernist experiment, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" disregarded the conventional elements of the short story form like plot, setting, and characterization. Instead, it focused on a more psychologi-

cal narration by the persona about Neng, with all its repetitions and obsessions—a technique typical of modernist fiction. It followed the unique logic of a lovelorn mind that wanders, digresses, and circles back.

The text centered on the realms of memory, imagination, the mind, hopes, recollections, and dreams, which explored in a way the inner workings of human emotions, the psychology and the unconscious. And in this realm, the mind moved around recurrent images of a bird and a bird cage, of trees and blue skies, of living and dying.

But the very same 'modernist' text betrays elements suitable to the strict standards of Romanticism, particularly the Tagalog Romanticism propagated by the Ilaw at Panitik literary society. Indeed, even before the overwhelming entry of Western attitudes and standards in literature that accompanied the spread of English as the language of universities, schools, government, and other institutions, the first couple of decades of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of vernacular and especially Tagalog literature. With the momentum of the Propaganda Movement and the Revolution, with the awakening of a racial and national consciousness, the turn-of-the-century changes in culture and society were exciting, and created an atmosphere of intellectual freedom and literary vigor. The collapse of Spanish rule and the entry of American influence hastened the spread of secular values. There was comparative freedom in publishing, in the circulation of books and knowledge, and in education; consequently, a large reading public emerged with a taste for the widespread reading material, especially for vernacular prose fiction. The Spanish language was declining and English was just about to emerge and be established. "In this interim period, native languages flourished as medium for literary expression" (Mojares 1983, 256). In this period, Tagalog literature gave birth to the short story form under the guidance of the Romantic movement.

So, unlike the literature of the preceding era with its themes of religion and medieval romances, a large part of Tagalog literature focused on secular topics, like love and courtship, themes that derived from the tendencies of Rizal and Baltazar. There was a strong movement towards Romanticism:

Romanticism may be defined briefly as that tradition which showed an inordinate preoccupation with love and all its attendant passions and complications: reality in its exquisite chaos. Life is seen either through rose-colored glasses, or as simply not worth living, in the tradition of European Romanticism. Consequently, the view of reality is

quite simplistic, even as the writers created stereotyped characters, predictably dealt with unrequited love, used artificial diction and in general assumed a noncritical stance. (Reyes 1980, 266)

In a sense, Romanticism stuck to traditional forms of literature and concerned itself with its ideals and its expression, talking about imagination and emotion, about the greatness of the human soul and the purity of nature. Later, in the decades before the war, the romantic movement reached its peak with Ilaw at Panitik and with DAR. Under the auspices of Ilaw at Panitik, romantic ideals and standards spread with their publication of books and with *Liwayway*, consequently catalyzing the commercialization of Tagalog fiction.

DAR's "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" was circulated in these commercial and romantic-literary conditions, and was a part of Tagalog Romanticism, of the Ilaw at Panitik Movement, adhering to the conventions of the Romantic movement. To the characters of the narrator and of Neng, the text attributed a moral goodness with their verbal effusions of sentiment and sensibility, every emotion general and superficial to simulate a sympathetic situation. And consequently, the ultimate expression of this sensibility was romantic love, where emotions are thrust into the realms of morality. It also involved "the stress on the virtues of patience and suffering, the conception of love as mysterious, spontaneous and voluntaristic" (Mojares 1983, 196).

Colonial Culture

The text was a product of a colonial culture, largely depending and deriving from European-American literary models, manifesting as the specific references in the text that hints of a decisive influence of Manila culture and its attendant popular forms. References to foreign cultural figures and literary models all found in the text "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon"—particularly Marguerite Gautier and Armando Duval in Alexandre (film) Dumas's *Camille* (*La Dame aux camelias*, 1848 novel, 1852 play), and their affair's parallels with Sarah Bernhardt and Victor Hugo, with Eleanore Duse and Gabrielle D'Annunzio. Then there were references to Greta Garbo's *Romance* (1930) and *As You Desire Me* (1932), to Chopin's *Marche Funebre* (Sonata Op. 35) and to Wagner's "Wedding March" in his 1850 opera, *Lohengrin*. Every reference made obvious the fact that "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" was informed by the popular forms of cul-

ture and art of the time like novels, theater, and music, like opera and Chopin.

A further scrutiny of the text within the historical and cultural milieu of the era, reveals that the 'modernist' techniques, romantic confessions and poetic effusions, intimate an earlier form of the prose *dagli*, the ancestor of the Tagalog short story; and, that the bird and the cage metaphors, the repetition of lines like refrains, the emotional exchange between the narrator and Neng make the text sound somewhat like a song, a *kundiman*—a form with which Rosario was not unfamiliar. The text fits well both ways, as a musical lyric exercise and as a literary poetic confession, with its expression of love in an extemporized manner along with repeating phrases.

There is the possibility of a revival of form, because the text's techniques are comparable with those of an old and popular form. In this sense, the text harks back to an earlier form of short prose writing, the *dagli*, which was suitable to effusions about love and idealized objects of that love:

The *dagli*, literally 'immediacy,'... was a personal or familiar essay, with mood and atmosphere of setting predominant over observed situation and dramatized events. The *dagli* resembled the English character sketch, the *vignette*, or the isolated episodes of the *Pickwick Papers*. (San Juan 1966, 424)

Other literary scholars have described the *dagli* as a confession, often in the form of a letter to a muse, or an invitation to a place or occasion for a loved one (Galauran 1938, 13). Also, it narrated incidents to explain something to the lady addressed. In this way, "*Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon*" may well fit the description, with its first person point-of-view that explains the narrator's emotions and angst born of his love for this girl named Neng. He explains his relations with her, his heartaches and wishes, his dreams and sadness. He recalls their encounters, what she said, how she talks and feels, how she is, as well as her history of love.

"*Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon*" fits the *dagli* form and even the descriptions of earlier forms of DAR's prosework. For instance:

This is the story of two lovers who are separated, then reunited... Unlike the typical short prose works of the time, it contains no pointed message or moral lesson and seems to have been written for the sole purpose of entertaining the reader by arousing in him a sense of won-

der at the mysterious workings of fate in a poet's life. To be sure the characters lack individuation, the plot contains several incidents, and chance rather than logical causation dominates the action. (Francisco 1977, 132-33)

The above passage is a description of DAR's first short story, "Kung Magmahal ang Makata," but it might have well fitted "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" with its two lovers separated by fate and circumstance, each suffering in love, with no overt moral lesson or a proper plot, with characters also lacking any individuation.

The text also refers to Chopin's Sonata Op. 35, which is composed of four movements and has two important movements, the *marche funebre* and the *finale*, containing anguish, demonism, sarcasm, and even a touch of the baroque, in a romantic dedication to death. It is through this poem of death that the narrator of Rosario's text describes the emotions he sees in Neng's eyes. This reference to a non-literary narrative recalls DAR's involvement with lyric-writing for Francisco Santiago's "Anak Dalita" (1917) and Nicanor Abelardo's "Mutya ng Pasig" (1926), both in the form of kundiman, which focuses on the expression of love through extemporized text with the insertion of phrase formulae.

The era saw the rise of formal music academies and conservatories, unavailable in the previous era, which brought about the popularity of the romantic composers Liszt and Chopin, whose works became ingredients for the kundiman of Francisco Santiago (1936, 34)—"No song can excel the kundiman in popularity. It is today the love song par excellence of the Filipinos, the plaintive song which goes deepest into their heart, the song which brings them untold emotions."

Indeed, a kundiman generally portrayed the faithful and true, often forlorn, pleading of a lover who knows nothing but sacrifice in behalf of his beloved. In its elevation to a literary-verse format, the kundiman shrugged off its use of stock phrases but retained the principal thematic element of an expression of unrequited and undying love, together with a resignation to one's fate. "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" was a kundiman, with its own yearning for a distant loved one named Neng, a yearning that verges on desperation and obsession as the narrator sinks into dreams, imagining, and hopes.

"Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" was a product not only of DAR's craft, but of a whole era marked by an abundance of cultural forms, foreign and native mixing into a colonial mixture. It derived influ-

ences for its narrative techniques and artistic tendencies from many cultural movements and traditions, ranging from Western modernism and the European-inspired Tagalog Romanticism; it intimated and recalled forms like the *dagli* and the *kundiman*. Indeed, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" is not merely a prose-poem or a plotless short story. Rather, it is a literary and cultural product, a textual moment, informed by the cultural ferment of the 1920's and 1930's. "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" is many things, and deserves in this day and age a new reading and analysis as a miniature narrative representing an entire age marked by the dialogue of artistic and literary forms, and by the transition of attitudes and ideals from romanticism to the more experimental modes of modernism, a change witnessed by the struggles of Ilaw at Panitik and Panitikan, and by DAR himself.

Narrative of Love and Loss

Given all the details and explorations of the previous sections, we may make the opportunity to make coherent what the resulting contradictions mean, how the specific textual elements—the story, the repetition of lines, the references, and others—actually simulate and represent the contradictions and meanings of a larger cultural narrative, all falling into historical and metaphorical narratives of love, and the loss of that love and more.

"Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" has the basic narrative of loss: the narrator loves Neng, who loves someone else who, in turn, also loves someone else. This narrative explains the idea of displacement, the continuous displacement of meaning and closure, how the object of love is always lost. It is not a simple loss of love and meaning but rather a continual loss of love and meaning—an insecurity with the stability of meaning.

The story of "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" is simple—The narrator is quietly in love with Neng, while Neng is in love with another. Neng's loved one is in love with still another. Simply—A loves B, B loves C, C loves D. It is a classic tale of courtly love:

Ang katamisan ng pag-ibig na naging gantimpala sa matagal at nakababagot na pagtitiyaga ng isang bintang sumusuyo; ang kabanalan ng isang 'oo' na naggagaling sa labi ng isang sumusumpang salaga na halos katumbas ng kaniyang sariling puri at buhay. (Galauran 1938, 13)

[The sweetness of love that became a reward for a long and tiring diligence of a young suitor; the sanctity of a 'yes' that comes from the lips a maiden that vows her love, which is equal to her dignity and life.]

Indeed it is romantic love, impossible love—even "Neng" is the classic name of maidens in Tagalog love stories—where the pleasure and happiness is in the desire rather than in the consummation (Reyes 1980, 263).² But the simplicity betrays some contradictions, tensions of narrative.

The initial tension of the narrative lies in the narrator's wordy expressions of passion and anguish of his love:

Matagal ... Matagal na panahon ko siyang nakikita. Sukat sa isang ngiti niya upang maging matamis para sa akin ang lahat ng pait sa aking buhay. Sukat sa isang sulyap niya, upang kahi't hatinggabi ay sumikat sa akin ang isang araw na ginto ng katanghalian.³

[So long ... so long is the season that I see her. One smile of hers is enough to turn sweet all the bitterness in my life. One glimpse of hers is enough even at midnight to make the sun shine as the gold of an afternoon.]

The narrator's professions and dedications, his promises and desperations, all display the story of a simultaneous existence of the willful desire for a consummated love and the natural resistance of love to that consummation. Love exists and is expended, and is forever displaced. Loving goes on, does not end. To have no ending is the ending.

The text attempts the containment of its contradictory elements with the repetition of lines, loss of plot, loss of characterization, loss of conventions. Superficially, the obsession of the text with the loss of love and its repetitions appear as symptoms of a literary instability.

The unconsummated love is the surface metaphor for another and deeper structural tension. There exists a willful readerly need to consummate meaning, to find meaning, in the text. We call it a short story and expect to find a conventional plot and some recognizable characters. But we find no typical introduction of plot or character, no build-up of story or its resolution, no explicit characterization or even description of time and place. Rather we have alternative narrative strategies—an initial confession, then disclosures, recollections, wishes, simply a surrender to a different, more rambling, even repetitive, narration.

The text returns to the line of how Neng is undeniably no different from a bird ("Si Neng, hindi ninyo naitatanong, ay walang iniwan sa isang ibon" [Neng, you cannot deny, is no different from a bird]), and how this bird is always flying and perching on the highest tree-tops, away from him. The text repeats the fact of Neng's absence from the narrator's heart, how she is always free of her cage in his chest. The narrator wishes and wishes, asking God and Fate that Neng accept his love. But, no, Neng is a bird, and as a bird, it is in her nature to fly away from the view of earthbound mortals:

Kung buhat sa malayo ay pinagmamasdan ko si Neng, ibig kong maluha sa lugod. Paano ay ibon si Neng. Nahirati sa paglipad ng malapit sa alapaap at ituktok ng matataas na punong kahoy.

Kung lalo na naman siyang gumanda, sumigla, at lumakas—sino ang makahuhula? Si Neng marahil, ay lilipad na naman. Oo, lilipad sa maliayo, [sic] sa bagong daigdig, sa bagong kabuhayan ...at sa bagong pag-ibig.

Sa gayon ay makikita ninyo ang isang krus na pitak niya sa aking dibdib at mababasa ninyo ang ganitong nakasulat: "Dito Nakalibing ang Bangkay ng Isang Dalisay na Pag-ibig."⁴

[If I observe Neng from afar, I desire to cry for joy. Because Neng remains a bird. Accustomed to flying near the clouds and above the tops of the highest trees.

If she does become more beautiful, frolicsome, and strong—who can tell? Neng may as well fly again. Yes, fly far away, to a new world, to a new life ... and to a new love.

And then you will find a single cross in her compartment in my chest and you will read these words: "Here lies the Remains of one True Love."]

The text ends with the narrator surrendering to fate, to the inevitable loss of his love, Neng. He surrenders to the death of his supposedly undying love, in a grave marked by one cross in his throbbing chest. There is a loss, and that is the ending.

The containment of such tensions results in the denial of a conventional plot and of conventional characterization, the repetition of lines and lines of thought, the preoccupation with the bird image and the image of a bird cage within the narrator's chest, the general sense of helplessness and inevitability of loss.

The text attempts further containment through the search for a history with its textual references. It attempts to find for itself a larger

and fixed history to make its meaning, value, and literary status also fixed, to avoid loss of meaning and death. And this story is repeated; likewise the elements of plot and ideas of the loss of love are repeated. The text seems to shout—as the text's narrator does—that it is not alone, that it is not dying, that it is part of a larger, more stable history of European Romanticism and of a Garbo pop culture. It shouts and screams and clamors: such are the tensions of the narrative.

The references to specific cultural texts involve a larger narrative of representation and literature-making. Simply, the text attempts to align itself with specific literary and artistic histories. The references to European cultural texts are significant. They display knowledge the author has that should be apprehended by the reader. The tension of this relation focuses on the necessity to have or even expectation of an awareness and working knowledge of who Dumas (fils) was, with his Marguerite and Armand, who Duse and D'Annunzio were, Bernhardt and Hugo, Chopin and Wagner. Who are these names?

Wagner had an opera, *Lohengrin*, first produced in 1950. The story is a love story, of a nameless knight asking for a princess's trust and love in marriage in exchange for his protection. But because of the princess's doubtful and hesitant heart, the knight, brave and all, is forced to leave. The princess, in the end, with the loss of a husband, falls lifeless. At about the same time, Alexandre Dumas, fils, adapted his 1848 novel, *Les Dames aux camelias*, into a play. The play's 1852 release in legitimate theater was met with so much enthusiasm that its success grew unabated until the turn of the century (Shipley 1984, 186). The story of *Camille* is the love story of Armand and Camille, how Armand has nothing to offer the sickly Camille but his love. At first Camille scorns this love because she could not imagine living in poverty. But later she finally realizes how much she loved Armand.

Les Dames aux camelias parallels closely the story of "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" with the nameless narrator as Armand and Neng as Camille, equally sickly and torn in love, needing to take a vacation out of the city. Thus it could be held as the model and predecessor of DAR's text, sharing some similar preoccupations and problems.

The novel went through many translations including a Tagalog adaptation by Gerardo Chanco in 1915 called *Sa Gitna ng Lusak*. The Tagalog translation may be how DAR managed to acquire intimate knowledge of the story of *Camille*, along with the large Tagalog readership. In fact, it was a changing cultural scene with an abundance

of hitherto proscribed books, due to the absence of direct censorship and the increased availability of secular reading matter (Mojares 1983, 162). Camille then was a shared story, a common foreknowledge that made the story of Neng readily acceptable and digestible.

"Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" further refers to Eleanora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt, two actresses, Italian and French respectively, who toured Europe and were known for their memorable portrayals of Camille in *Les Dames aux camelias*, but even more for their famous love affairs—Bernhardt with Hugo, and Duse with D'Annunzio—their steamy passion and turbulent endings.

The series of references reveals a similar theme or preoccupation with romantic love, love seen and written about in the late nineteenth century Europe when romanticism was in transition, dying away, giving way to a new literary and artistic, albeit general social, attitude—the self-same preoccupations of DAR's "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon."

The loss is inevitable, as the text exhausts the forms available to it only to find that its intense love, its desire for consummation, for meaning, will find no rest or response, that its forms, models, and histories are used up and over, that Tagalog Romanticism is ending, that modernism is taking over with the changing times, along with the dominant literary societies:

Sa panahon ng romantismo nabibilang si DAR ...; samakatuwid, siya ay napagitan or [sic] transisyon sa panahon ng mga manunulat na hayagang nagpalitaw ng kani-kanilang moraleha sa kanilang mg akda at sa panahon ng 'sakdalista't aristokratang samahan ng Panitikan' na lantarang naghihimagsik sa mga paksa at pamamaraan ng matatanda. (Matute 1971, 342)

[DAR belongs to the era of romanticism...; therefore, he is the in-between or the transition of the era of writers who explicitly expounded their individual moralizings in their works, and the era of the extremist and aristocratic group of Panitikan who is blatantly rebelling against the themes and methods of the elders.]

Conclusions

DAR's "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" is an elegy to a dying age, to changing times, where passion and spirituality are struggling against industrialization and new historical forces bannered under

modernism and funded by the American colonizers, against a larger change in civilization.

It is an elegy to a phase of Tagalog literature and the Tagalog short story which had exhausted itself on conventional themes, predictable plots, and explicit moralizing. Philippine writing in English was threatening to displace Tagalog writings. Thus, Tagalog literature and its writers in the 1930's were struggling, along with the times, to redefine themselves as manifested in the bitter struggles of the major literary groups then:

There was among writers a heightened self-consciousness and a growing concern for defining their role and function. . . . In Tagalog literature, the scene was dominated by the group of writers called *Panitikan*. (The Commonwealth era is also called 'the period of *Panitikan*' in Tagalog letters). Led by Alejandro G. Abadilla, Clodualdo del Mundo, and others the group was organized in 1935 in protest against the rigidly conservative policies of Tagalog weeklies (specifically, the *Liwayway* under the editorship of Jose Esperanza Cruz) and what it saw to be the 'sins' of Tagalog writing, as practiced by old writers identified with *Aklatang Bayan* and *Ilaw at Panitik*, such as the use of hackneyed themes and plots, diffuse rhetoric, cloying sentimentalism, and hostility against experiment and modernism. (Mojares 1983, 301-2)

With such cultural and literary resistances, the text, "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon," equally resists the contemporary need to follow changing models of literature, modernism in particular, as it recalls older and more traditional forms and techniques. The text thus brings full force into literary form the contradictions and tensions resulting from the inevitability of change in Philippine literature and society. In consequence, the text defies its contemporary standards, becomes unclassifiable—prose-poem or plotless short story? romantic or modernist? *dagli* or *kundiman*?

The text "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" is both a prose-poem and a plotless short story, it is romantic and modernist, it uses techniques of the *dagli* and the *kundiman*, and more. It is the site of the contradictions of a changing society, of a changing literature, with Philippine society and culture providing the larger historical context that informs DAR's text which in turn manifests such contradictions in literary and textual ways.

Notes

1. For example, Buenaventura Medina Sr., Francisco M. Vasquez, Mateo Cruz Cornelio, Rosalia C. Aguinaldo, Jovita N. Martinez, and Carmen S. Herrera.
2. "Neng" derives from the typical "Nena" and "Neneng."
3. All the three anthologies (listed in the bibliography) that include "Ako'y Mayroong Isang Ibon" offer the same version of the text with no major structural differences. But, the Abadilla-del Mundo version has some few and slight syntactical differences with the two other versions in the latter anthologies.
4. This is taken from the Abadilla-del Mundo anthology. The other two anthologies have this line—"Kung pinagmamasdan ko si Neng buhat sa malayo, ibig kong maluha sa lugod."

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