



## Archipelgiality as a Southeast Asian Poetic in Cirilo F. Bautista's *Sunlight on Broken Stones*



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### [ *Abstract* ]

Archipelgiality, a concept continuously being developed by the scholar, is one that attempts to articulate the Filipino sense of place as discoursed in/through its literatures. As a country composed of 7,107 islands, the very fragmentation and division of the country, as well as its multiculturalism and multilinguality, have become the very means by which Filipino writers have "imagined" so to speak—that is, also, constructed, into a singular, united frame—the "nation." This, the author supposes, is an important aspect to explore when it comes to discoursing the larger Southeast Asian imagination, or poetic, as similar situations (i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore), may soon compel for a comparative critico-literary perspective. This paper continues this exploratory "geoliterary" discourse by looking at a Filipino canonical work in English by Cirilo F. Bautista, the epic *The Trilogy of Saint Lazarus*, the title of which already signals a geographic allusion to the first map-name granted by the Spanish colonizer to the Philippines in the region, and consequently the first signification

of the country's subjected existence in the colonial imagination. The work, published between 1970 and 1998, is composed of three parts: *The Archipelago*, *Telex Moon*, and *Sunlight on Broken Stones*, which won the 1998 Philippine Independence Centennial Literary Prize. In these epics, notions of Philippine history and situation were discoursed, and Filipino historical figures were engaged in dialogue by the poet/the poet's voice, with the end of *locating* the *place* [where history and time had brought it; or its direction or trajectory as a nation, being true to the Filipino maxim of *ang di lumingon sa pinanggalingan, di makararating sa paroroonan* (the one who does not look back to his origins would not reach his destination)]. of the Philippines not only in the national imagination, but in this paper, in the wider regional consciousness. The paper proposes that the archipelagic concept is an important and unique characteristic of the Southeast Asian situation, and thus, may be a means to explicate the clearly connected landscapes of the region's imagination through literature. This paper focuses on *Sunlight on Broken Stones*.

**Keywords:** Cirilo F. Bautista, epics, Sunlight on Broken Stones, Southeast Asia

## I. Understanding Archipelicality

The notion of archipelicality in the Philippine literary tradition stems from this scholar's position that a more comprehensive account of literary histories—as well as individual texts—must be used to fully foreground the locality of the tradition—or traditions, if we may so. To begin with, the Filipino nation exists in an archipelagic condition that compels for a more critical and encompassing revaluation, particularly in the practice of Philippine literary history and evaluation. In this project, the scholar attempts to propose a perspective grounded on the idea of geography as metaphorically "writing about the earth," about the land, and consequently, the nation. The word's Greek

etymology, *geographia* is seen in this context as being more than just a "description", that is, a topography of the terrain; geography here is to be seen as the very practice of writing itself, located and locating its utterance in the conditions of place. This framework directs the scholar in the pursuit of further providing a reconstructive method of Philippine literary history and assessment that responds to the vicissitudes of earlier efforts, particularly at assessing marginality and including the "marginalized" literatures of the Philippine regions. In this paper, archipeligiality will be used to chart a poetics that may be comparatively expanded to the rest of Southeast Asia. As a region of various island and landmass formations, Southeast Asia—its countries—embodies similar historical experiences and even creative world views and expressions. In the subject of this study, *The Trilogy of Saint Lazarus* by the Filipino epic poet Cirilo F. Bautista—composed of *Sunlight on Broken Stones* (1998), *Telex Moon* (1981), and *The Archipelago* (1970)—the literary work is being read as depicting a peculiarly Southeast Asian experience, while illustrating a *poiesis* of the Philippines using the material of its geographical fragmentariness and the continuing problematization of the "necessary fiction" of the nation, to borrow from Caroline Hau (2001). Archipeligiality here is to be used to analyze not only how the epic "makes", or in the Heideggerian sense, "brings forth" the country by way of singularizing, harmonizing, the plurality of voices, singing a psychologically sequenced Philippine history; it would also be used to interpret how the work asserts its being *located* in the experience and realities of the larger world of Southeast Asia by being a geographic part of it.

The word archipelago has a very compelling past to trace. Its two Greek roots combined, *arkhi* and *pelagos*, connote rule or dominion over the seas. Its Aegean roots relate it with the chains of islands in the Greek peninsula and evoke the epical and legendary adventures that once traversed its seas. The archipelago's meaning of being "studded by islands" elucidates the geographical configuration of the term, which also in itself embodies the histories of violent conquests and imperial pasts. What could basically be *formed* from this preliminary critical

etymology is the geohistoric form of the concept, which particularly characterizes various archipelagic cultures around the globe, and consequently molds located consciousness and worldviews. Southeast Asia, as one archipelagic area, interestingly epitomizes the same geohistoric conditions. This region, historically, has been conquered by the powers that be from the Western World. The geographic dividedness has been utilized by colonialism not only to divide the imperial loot and create boundaries of domination, but also to situate in the consciousness of the subjected peoples an internalized marginality. This is precisely the case with the Philippines, which boasts of more than 7000 islands (though just half of Indonesia's more than 13,000), and which has manifested through history, various crises in keeping its nationhood intact, amidst challenges of often opposing cultural idiosyncrasies, linguistic diversity, and political heterogeneity. The tumultuous history of the Philippines is in here being related to the geographic make up of the country, where divide and conquer was challengingly carried out, from the era of the Spanish *reduccion*, and the epoch of American "benevolent assimilation", to the Second World War and the short-lived institution of the Japanese "Asia for Asians" ideology, and the eventual emergence of national "freedom". For Philippine literature, this geohistoric diegesis had become the trope since the early days of colonialism, and the problematique of constantly locating the self in dividedness and fragmentation had become from then on the primal creative project, as seen in various Philippine literary works and movements. This postulation builds on the nesological perspectives introduced by Antonis Balasopoulos (2008), particularly on his notions of "apartness" (2008: 12) and "seismic discontinuities that emerge in the interplay between the historical destruction of spatial contiguity and the spatial dispersion of the concept of historicity", (21-22) which may be usefully applied in the context of Philippine and Southeast Asian archipelagialities.

*To ground* the discourse is the singular response of the archipelagic framework, and we exercise this "grounded" discourse in interpreting not only the work but also its geographical

position. Aware of the long isolation of individual Southeast Asian literatures from the rest of region (as in the countries themselves), the scholar proposes the concept of archipelicality, or archipelagic discourse in literature, as a way of re-placing the literatures in its rightful ground as a discursive location of respective and larger imagined communities. The scholar uses the rather poststructuralist tick of the dash (-) between the words not only to emphasize a revision on how we read and value, for instance, Philippine Literature in the context of Southeast Asia. The emphasis now is also *on the place*, and the re-placement of this body of literature is but a reconfiguring of its discourses in the archipelago of national and even regional imaginings. There is really a need to re-place and not merely open the imaginative discourse in the larger geographics and geo-poetics of the Philippine and Southeast Asian context, by way of tracing the history of beginnings, studying high points, problematizing traditions, and explaining the revisions of the contemporary, and even the new. The framework introduces the historical contexts of the "development" of the literary body, and accounts for occasional utterances, its located imaginings, which also condition its perspectives, consciousness, and thought process. Our archipelagic discourse is governed not only by time, but also by space. Our framework sees the "development" (ideally, a movement *in time*, in history) both horizontally and vertically, which means that while the body of works themselves compose the definition of a movement compelled by historical factors, the works themselves constitute a grounded perspective from which they stand, from where they are rooted, or are still rooting.

The archipelicality of the Philippines could never be completely severed from its Southeast Asian context. It is an erroneous gesture to rend it, to begin with. The Philippines, as part of what Barbara Watson Andaya (2014) described as "maritime Southeast Asia", is connected to the whole region by way of "connected coasts and neighboring islands", that basically opened "smaller zones where people shared similar languages and were exposed to the same religious and cultural influences." For instance, the Southeast Asian seas, to Andaya "a second

feature" to the maritime group and the rest of the region, is an important facet of life and history in the Philippines. It is a space by which borders and networks were forged, and where despite the colonial experience of "insularized" Philippines, a certain Asian-ness flowed back and forth in all its territories. It is also a space that in the beginning, was "a world forged by the natural landscapes of sea and sky (and the islands) not regarded as isolated or obscure places," quoting Heidi Gloria (2014), who continued her characterization of the region as composed of lands and islands similar to "stepping stones in a pond, as familiar as the four points of the compass and made to invite rather than impede man's discovery of other worlds" (Gloria 2014: 3). Meanwhile, the early hero-intellectuals of the Philippines involved themselves in this claim of Asian-ness, or at least in the words of Resil B. Mojares (2013), "Malayness". It had been part of "Filipino self-representation," Mojares noted, particularly in the "late nineteenth century", when the need for an "identity claim" was historically in vogue, as was politically deployed (Mojares 2013: 126) for the causes of the Propaganda Movement. Jose Rizal participated in it, *locating* himself and his confreres in a particular imagined community, when all of them "began to write themselves and their "nation." In their discovery of Malayness—the primary strain of Southeast Asian discourse which the Filipino intellectuals practically trail-blazed—the likes of Rizal developed "local awareness", in light of an apparent "loss of memory". The Filipino intellectuals who all went to Spain—and some of them creatively "utilized" by Bautista as personae in his epic—immersed themselves in "European" material and discourses about the region to help them situate themselves as they "struggled with the contradictions of being both object and subject of a scholarship heavily compromised by Europe's dominating position in the world" (128). "While Filipino intellectuals claimed that they were Malay," Mojares wrote, "they also asserted they were a separate and distinct kind of Malay" (130). The way to nationhood for Filipino intellectuals—of *illustrados* or the enlightened—was indeed, the region, however unstable it is "as a category." As "(n)ationalism required a shared identity and name" during the era, the intellectuals perceived that

any labeling of sorts was to inevitably claim "a "unity" denied by Spanish and European authors who characterized the inhabitants of the Philippines as an "anarchy" of tribes and races" (132-133). Such is the meaningfulness of calling themselves, not only Filipino, but also Malay—and by extension, Southeast Asian. Both moves assert national heritage and a significant "Malay core" which cumulatively built the initial ideas of a Southeast Asian region.

While the framework may comparatively be applied, at once, to other archipelagic situations—this we never doubt—this discussion only seeks to pursue the Philippine case as *synecdochic* of the Southeast Asian condition. Wide waters may divide the nations of the region, but it is assumed that there persists an "inter-national" connection, as illustrated previously. The Southeast Asian map, as an observed phenomenon, shows intimacies amidst divisive seas, brought about by theorized landmass connections, cultural closeness, and linguistic equivalence, among others. Geography, the discipline, is being fully tapped in order to culturally cartograph this region, always on the cusp of change. The Philippines, long considered by some quarters as more Western than Oriental, would stand as an ideal case to illustrate the effect and affect of an archipelagic state in the isolated and insular consciousness of a people—a people *separated* from each other by waters, which also consequently separated them, geographically speaking, from other peoples of the region, with whom they have been closely trading in more ways than one. In this connection, the paper also critically recovers the meanings of the Greek word *poiesis*, which etymologically pertains to making, to crafting, or to expand the meaning further, to imagining. A poetics—the explication of ways of imagining—is entirely being made possible in this geoliterary reading process, where the terrain and the territorial in bodies of writing are manifested. In Filipino, the closest word to characterize poetics is *paglikha*, the root of which is *likha*, to create. The word however is potent to also cast out the colonial spectre in the power of objectification of maps—since to be "mapped out" so to speak in the time of conquest is to be

imagined, to be relocated *as subject* in the colonial mind. In the Noceda and Sanlucar *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* (1860), the entry for the word primarily pertains to religious idols, the very vessels of domination and the displacement of the once widespread animist and paganist beliefs of the locals. The additional entry however makes for an interesting turn as it points to a constitution of presencing, of existence or being. With a pre-fix "nag+", it becomes *tenerla* in Spanish, "magkaroon nito" in Tagalog. *Paglikha* as ethos of the *poesis* proves to be a re-presencing, re-locating (as in, finding what had been lost) perspective, in an environment afflicted by what the scholar will illustrate as archipelagic fragmentality, the sense of being dispersed by way of the geographic state. Filipino philosopher and map enthusiast Leovino Ma. Garcia (2013) consummately articulates this reconfigured world view—which may also be applied to various archipelagic conditions. "Maps," he wrote, "help us find our place in the world. They do not only point out where we are and where we want to go but they also tell us who we are. Maps instruct us about our history and identity. They provide us with a memory and a destiny. Maps give us a sense of self-esteem."

The map as a wellspring of self-esteem brings us essential ideas about the Southeast Asian map—the region as global entity—being a source of shared histories, meanings, and connections. Nowadays, at the heart of the region's concerns are the parallel claims to several island groups in the West Philippine Sea or the more popularly called South China Sea. In contemporary times, Southeast Asia as a big archipelago found itself in a volatile situation, as the bigger, more powerful Chinese mainland joined into the fray to assert its historical possession of some disputed islands in the said waters. The linguistic turn that is from "South China Sea" to "West Philippine Sea" reiterates not only a renewed geographic awareness in Philippine diplomacy but also a metaphorical "remapping" of ideas, especially in the face of threats and coercion. Also compelling to be examined is the coming integration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community in 2015, which must be seen as not merely



strategically economic and political, but more so, ideational. The threats from China is but merely one that pushes for a "remapping" of sorts, which to say the least contemplates on the kind of solidarity this region can create if the nations only banded together. "Remapping" in the end is but one strategy of recovering self-esteem, faith in the self, that is, since it provides both geographic, and in effect, cognitive form to what we are. "Remapping" is a peculiarly archipelagic gesture, especially in moments when one is confronted with the impossibility, the paradox of gathering together what is difficultly *situated* as geographically disintegrated from the start. The need for a remapping is nothing but a participation in the "composition of location", in the sense articulated by Homi K. Baba (1990). Remapping is also one that takes part in the important but "ambivalent" tactic of "narrating" the nation by way of "textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, subtexts, and figurative stratagems," still quoting Bhaba. To remap, that is, to relocate one's position and *positionality* may help re-order the marginality, minoritization of the disintegrated, and brings it to the fore by tapping it as another powerful site of meaning. In a similar way, remapping recalls what Heidegger once described as a *presencing* in the midst of boundary making. The act of remapping, in different levels, reiterates the "building, dwelling, thinking" of groups or societies. As text, to remap as recovering the self-esteem of a nation—or a group of nations—not only reinstates the form by which an individual or groups of nations may understand and internalize what it means to value selfhood. It also provides the necessary re-narration of identity, which usually takes the form of artifacts or texts of culture.

## II. Bautista's Oeuvre in the Philippine Literary Tradition

And this is not lost on Bautista, born in 1941, a major Filipino poet writing in English who hails from the Sampaloc district of the Philippine capital of Manila. He is the author of several books of poems—*Tinik sa Dila* (Tongue's Torment 2003), *Kirot ng Kataga* (Pain in Phrase 1995), *Sugat ng Salita* (Wound in Words

1985), *Summer Suns* (1963); criticism—*The House of True Desire* (2011), *Words and Battlefields: A Theoria on the Poem* (1998), *Breaking Signs: Lectures on Literature and Semiotics* (1990); as well as a tome of fiction, *Stories* (1990); and a novel, *Galaw ng Aso* (The Movement of Mercury 2004). Bautista himself embodies an archipelagic character of Philippine writing—he is bilingual, while in better times, dabbling into various genres of literary writing. Bilinguality—and even multilinguality—best characterize the condition of the Filipino writer as one who contends with imaginatively addressing the archipelagic and diverse nation and nationhood. As wordsmith, Bautista best exemplifies what Gemino Abad (1994) constitutes as the "native clearing" of sorts in Philippine writing in English, as he had made his poetic crusade the reinstatement of "words to their position in the social imagination." He carried this out by employing his two languages—English and Filipino—in the public sphere to "make sure that the language of our soul is never going to be corrupted by the ignorant and the malicious," quoting the critical assessment of Marjorie M. Evasco (Bautista 2006: xliii). For a good number of years, he kept a popular literary column for the *Panorama Magazine* of the *Manila Bulletin*, dispensing of critical commentaries on books, writing issues, and creative musings for an "imagined" general readership, and recently collected in the book *The House of True Desire*. This gesture popularized his efforts, and in the same breadth conjured a more useful national address while putting poetry and literature at the forefront of discussions. He also spent most of his time teaching at the De La Salle University, Manila, where he retired as a University Fellow, mentoring young writers and literary scholars in the Literature Program. His most important work is, of course, *The Trilogy*, which was aptly considered by the critic Isagani R. Cruz (2003) as an "obra maestra", a masterpiece that best illustrates a "national imagination" uniquely interpreting "the past, the present, and the future of our nation." Cruz, in Filipino, elaborates his reading of the epic as one that employs the trope of the Biblical Lazarean "resurrection", where myriad deaths actually transform into infinite resurrections, and the Rizalian *morir es descansar* is also,

at once remembered: "Ayon kay Bautista, ang nakaraan ay isang serye ng kamatayan at muling pagkabuhay, kung kaya't ang kasalukuyan na panandaliang pagkahimlay ay tiyak na susundan ng muling pagkabuhay. Sa kabuuan ng kasaysayan, paulit-ulit tayong namamatay, at paulit-ulit tayong nabubuhay" (Cruz 2003: 193)<sup>1</sup>). This "particular sense of history", as described by Evasco, sweepingly amends, "in the process, the concept of the epical structure," and also delineates a poetic worldview that tends to "sight" and "site" (that is, to locate) the sense of the archipelagic. When Bautista wrote that his ultimate predilection was to "shape the past", it may be read that he was not only referring to the historicity of the past, as it were, in his own writings. The spatiality, the location of the event or events of Philippine history also comes into being, and *The Trilogy* at large self-reflexively locates itself in the realm of the Philippine archipelagic universe, proposing "re-views" of individuals and voices which crafted the archipelagic world. In this sense, we may understand Bautista's significant oeuvre as one that maps by way of poetry, the significant Philippine national form and formations.

As a matter of discussion, it must be reiterated that literature is perceived in this paper as one that participates, not only in mapping, but in a "remapping" of nations, in the same way that the Rizalian novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* attempted to *point where we are and where we want to go* during its time. It is important to note that geography, as a discipline of mapping, provides vantage points from which we could view the earth, and sense its wholeness. However, to merely see the idea of the map, or geography at large, in this manner is rather myopic. *A failure to see* seems to be present if a map, or mapping, is not to be discerned as a site of inculcation and contestation—inculcations of location and located-ness, for instance, or the critical interrogations of the perspective *doing* the location or positioning. As both acts of

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1) This scholar's English translation: "According to Bautista, our past is a series of deaths and resurrections, thus our present which is a momentary respite is definitely to be followed by a rising again. In the course of our history, we die again and again, and we resurrect, again and again."

inscription, writing and mapping provide spaces for fictionalizing and the imagination. Both disciplines employ positions—for the depicted and seer, for the one that which is committed on paper and the one who undertakes the interpretive task of viewing. In the archipelagic, postcolonial state of the Philippines, literature may be seen as a "remapping" of sorts, since its traditions are particularly rich in anti-colonial (and even anti-neocolonial) sentiments, *repositioning* the country from subjugation to liberation—a response, clearly, to colonial positionings. In the same vein, the geographic field of cartography may provide stimulating insights into the affinities being illustrated here. To cartograph is to master the representation of the world and to evoke by way of cognition, an understanding of the world by way of the visual representation. Thus, it is not far-fetched to juxtapose geography with literature, since both operate with the same functions. The meaning only expands when the circumstances of these "cartographies" or "writings" are to be considered. Interestingly, Bautista practices this move of "remapping" the Philippines by way of his epic *The Trilogy*, which encompasses more than 50 years of an illustrious career as a poet and major voice in Philippine literature. The epic, which is written in various modern poetic forms and manners, spans the beginnings of Philippine history up to the contemporaneous People Power Revolution that toppled the 20-year Marcos dictatorship in 1986. Bautista's *poeisis* is historical to say the least, but the gesture of recalling the colonial name of the country already signals the geographic turn. In *relocating* the utterance to the memory of the Islas de San Lazaro, the name first given by explorers to this archipelagic discovery of the Philippines, the poet attempted to capture the geographic moment as a juncture of reconfiguring, probing the past.

In his own words, Bautista relates the geographic turn of his project as one that tackles "the development of the Filipino soul from the very start of Philippine history to the twentieth century." He recalls the importance of the allusion to the aforementioned historical circumstance: the "sighting" of the Philippine archipelago on the feast of Saint Lazarus, "known for

his concern for the plight of the lepers, and (who) founded a hospital for their care" (Bautista, 2001: ix). Thus, the name, which today also summons notions of otherness evoked by the *othered* Lazarus, the figure who was re-called from the dead, and one traditionally and hagiographically associated with a centuries-long most dreaded disease. The word used by the poet, "sighted", proclaims a geographic moment in colonial history, one that signals subjugated presencing in the vision of the colonial mind. The first registration of the presence of the islands—though the chroniclers admit to their sense of loss and disorientation while on the conquest—happened during this dramatic moment of recognition. That indeed they have seen land beyond the boundaries they know positions them as "discoverers" of this new territory, as meriting the dominion that comes with the act of naming. With this assumption, the epic begins recollecting the past by making "a poem out of history." The epic poet reiterates one important craft concept that may readily be associated with that of a project, that of "remapping". In his foreword to the collected epics, he quipped quite pronouncedly that his project was meant "to reconfigure (history through) artistic and aesthetic means so that the product emerges as a pleasurable interpretation of history (without) contradicting history or distorting it". His method is "fictionalizing", that is bringing the story "to a level of reality beyond itself, to stretch, harmonize, and forge its elements to a believable discourse". Such is also a powerful method that counters the initial geographic and colonial sighting or marginal presencing of history, where the voice of the *indio*, the subject under conquest, is primarily suppressed. The poet uses voices—legions of them—to haunt the beholder of the sight and of the institutor of the site of colonialism. In a heteroglossic way, Bautista turned away from the Bakhtinian assignment of the epic as monolithic and reconstitutes it in the Philippine and in the Southeast Asian context as one that harmonizes the "narrative out of many voices." The voices, as metonymic of the island experience, come together in "their cogitations, explications, justifications, and interpretations of the significant realities that affected their time and milieu in connection with the nation's struggle for selfhood and freedom."

In his epical remapping, Bautista "re-sights" (and *re-cites*, re-chants an essence into being) the nation by allowing these voices to relate "story or several stories... (that) merge and submerge with each other in interrogative and confirmative moods" (x). In an astute way, the poet synaesthetically combines the sense of sight and hearing to critically re-cartograph, relocate the nation.

There are interesting finds in this project of relocation and re-cartography. A geopoetic close reading of Bautista's ending "literary cartography", *Sunlight on Broken Stones*, the subject of our paper—which also begins the comprehensive estimation of the *Trilogy*—shows the very complexity of the archipelagic condition. The trope of broken stones here, and these broken stones as often smeared with blood all throughout the book, signals the consequences of geographic fragmentedness and disunity, of fragmentality that seems to compel for the laying of heroic lives through and through, and symbolic of the Filipino offering in the name of the nation. The recurring image of the broken stones besmeared by blood relocates the utterance in an archipelagic condition that is typified by constant bloody national struggle, and itself represents not only the aforementioned discord but also the brokenness the nation-in-progress had to undergo all throughout its history. The narrative framework of the epic covered Philippine history "from the 1800s to the present," capturing the "complexity and profundity of the Philippine experience, especially that part concerned with the Revolution" (Bautista, 2000: xi). The narrative voices however blur into the time frame and ambiguously speak of their respective dilemmas signaling the same state of fragmentedness and archipelagic rupture. However, the voices, *as one*, are far from breaking up, as they are all "harmonized into one" by the poetic moment of the epic. Interestingly, the Aegean archipelagic root of the epic here is being recalled, only that there is no singular seer "who has seen it all." The canonical, and colonial Homeric voice is dismantled in the epic—its Western idea and aesthetic—to tap into the possibilities of a Filipino—and by extension, a Southeast Asian—method of epical worlding. Homeric time, first

and foremost, is gloriously dismantled, as the epic only aspires to begin and close the narrations within the idea of cycles, without the aid of a prefigured muse. "(L)ove/ contemplates the world by/ constructing pedals/ for nationhood," invokes the persona in the beginning of the epic, and this same voice ends the body of narratives with "love/ contemplates the world/ by nurturing the engine/ of nationhood," signaling meaningful conveyance. While there is clearly the presence of the fragmented state of the archipelago, the poet conditioned the reading for a possibility of movement, of a sweeping regard for each piece of the islands, for each location. Inconceivable unity is rendered here as a metaphor for vastness, a vastness that deserves to be voyaged by the controlling pilgrim epic voice. The voice unilaterally called on the memory of heroes, the ordinary Filipino, as well as other figures and villains, in its attempt to metaphorize the image of the wheel, a symbol of transport and mobility, as one that makes the movement, the revolution, for independence.

### III. A closer reading of the epic

The 32 cantos embody voices that argue about their participation in the relocation, remapping of the Philippines. The epic's description succinctly characterizes these voices that include "the poet, the nation, its heroes—political rulers, churchmen, everyday people—and even some objects in human embodiment." In most cases, the cantos of the epic are quite challenging to penetrate, as they tend to be hermetic and in an archipelagic sense *insulated* from the rest of the body epic. This form undertaken by the epic dramatizes insularity—that is, detachment from the entire corpus—though the individual discourses bleed into one another, in more ways than one. For one, the epic poem—written in cinquains (five verses in a stanza)—uses connecting words in last canto and first canto lines, successively. This aspect shades into the geographic discourse as reflecting the very solitary experience of island and archipelagic living, while at the same time embodying connexion. This observation may make us read each voice as islands separated from each other, attempting

to hear out each other in a way that would join and gather each of them together. This gesture is one cartographic attempt at piecing together presences and drawing up located utterances that could otherwise only yield mere cacophony. "We would not turn then/ to the essences, or juggle chimeras/ and chimpanzees for jubilees or parades," the collective persona utters in the Canto 2," in California, where desires burn, or in/ Cavite weeping for one's moonglow or dead/ in the other's false catacomb." As the persona in the second canto problematizes the role of art in the epic's project of national recovery, the word is re-positioned as a talisman of sorts in charting, collecting the tenors of voices crafted by the gesture of writing. As a cartographer of the nation, the task of the writer is once recalled: that is to remember, and *re-member* the bits and pieces of the national fragment, despite the deplorable presences of colonizer and the fellow citizen, both inflicting torment on the poetic voice all throughout history:

...Between the white masters  
who broke his soul and his brown brothers who break  
his heart, his biography crawls painfully,  
a cut worm. And yet, as he crawls, he carries  
on his back his people's dream of nationhood,  
their sins and desperations, as if flogging  
him were not enough, as if he could not die. (lines 120-125)

Admittedly, there is difficulty in ascertaining the identity of the speakers of the cantos—one significant marker of reading—and what we proposed, by way of readerly speculation, is but an explication of the artifice of the poem, in the light of our geographic perspective. Within the cantos themselves, one could observe that the speakers, as re-presentation of the archipelago and island insulation, are embodiments themselves of what we initially called as fragmentality. We have explained the term earlier on as *the sense of being dispersed by way of the geographic state*, but clearly, it is more than what it seems. Dispersal is the basic drama of each speaker—from the



persona-"epic chanter" himself, down to the historic figures he recalls. Each of them experiences various forms of dispersal that afflict the connected selves in a way that particularizes their experiences in an archipelagic environment in a particular regional-geographic context. In Canto 3, for instance, we hear of an assassin-persona, attentive to his work, but at the same time attending to a fragmented self as he blurts out: "To cross the thin line between Self and Selfless/ requires no great deed." In Canto 4, a persona-witness makes his case by saying that "his bones sing like a book" and that he walks "on a strand of cobwebbed memory," writing with blood throbbing "with the wounds of ages". "(T)ouch/ my words and my biography falls apart:/ dig into my breast and I have no heart," the persona continues, as his song combines with Canto 5, where he treads a landscape of death, painted by a metaphorical "painter" who "draws what we refuse to see." It goes on and on, the voice, becoming one and another, one and the *other*, but the method in the archipelagic madness is spelled out to clarify a critique, an archipelagic poetics: "Along this shore, down/ the sand where the seagulls move like humans, I/ mark it (the country), I dissect it like so much meat on/ the slab, I stab the ether of its soul, I/ brand it, I criticize its blood." The country, as national body, one that is afflicted, is recalled from the very words of Rizal, who in the *Noli*, offered that same body at the steps of the temple of the gods for healing. "The thousand ills that isolate these Islands," continues the persona in the same canto, "from decent humanity can thus be probed,/ and if fortune be kind, healed to perfection." From the legions, the identity-less speaker resolves to recover "my name", wishing not "to feel again the terror of waking up/ in heavy despair," because of *misplacing* it ("I have misplaced/ my name"). An archipelagic poetics, once described by Oscar V. Campomanes (1995) as a "repossession of a "poetically projected base" in his work on Philippine National Artist for Literature NVM Gonzales and Filipino-American writing, is also a resituation in "current critiques of nationalism," one that is also undertaken by the epic in its myriad, *misplaced* selves. What Campomanes interpreted as Gonzales' imagining of "a nation of fluid, shifting communities whose tendencies toward

decentering and pluralism provide the kernels for powerful autocritiques of grand narratives—narratives whose nationalist ambitions we now see in border-skirmishes, ethnic cleansing, white-supremacist movements, and corrupt bureaucratic state structures" (in Gonzales, 1995: xvi) is also applicable to the appreciation of Bautista's voices in fragmentality, where consciousness may be dispersed and yet resists the impossibility of recovery and integration.

There is also in archipelagic fragmentality, not a negation, but a confirmation of the present, of a *presence*. The form of Bautista's epic, as artifice, is one that provides symphony to the cacophonous speaking out of the fragmented, archipelagic voices. This is what lends it a certain solidity or composition in its writing—the epic in itself as the map to the wholeness of the speech acts. The formal strain however is but merely *the tip of the island*, so to speak, since the *presence* being pointed at here is the *re-presencing*, representation of the islands themselves, as crafted and imagined by the personae. In each voice, a consciousness exists, worlding the islands where time past and time present move in and out of the landscape quite fluidly, like the epic voices that change masks at every movement and turn of the cantos. The paradox of the fragmentality of the voices—their island consciousness deemed dispersed—is that they still have the capacity to execute the project of remapping by courageously and candidly evoking, not the picture of perfection of archipelagic living (its paradisaical tropicity often seen in the institution of tourism), but its blood-soiled brokenness. The primary image of the bloodied broken stones, set to sparkle as sunlight hits them, towards the end of the epic, is but a device that relocates the vision to the state of fragmentation that anticipates resurrection, by way of national wholeness. This is a response to what seems like an awareness of what could possibly happen if the country—as represented by the consciousness-in-legion—would not be shaken by this defamiliarizing, demystifying method of worlding this sense of the tropics: "A sleeping country learns nothing from nightmares,/ but builds whimsical roads to the fabulous—/ it would like to say, in critical moments, "When I

talked to Peshawar," or, "in Persia,/ metal birds sing" (Canto 6) It does not know other things." The epic creates a landscape of death and decay, where imperiousness rule, and mass ignorance abounds. The hegemonic center, the one that must hold everything together, is in a sorry state of confusion, a reflection of the innermost turmoils of the speakers who attempt a cohesive address that could possibly bring forth some sense of order: "What is there to say, even now? Manila/ slumbers in the bedrock of its ruins, dreams/ in the night politic/ ...This living city// of the dead dares the living to die, to hold/ what cannot be owned and, renouncing all, cling/ only to the beauty before the fall, sounds/ of navies clattering the waves, spices, slaves,/ dancing women who would wreck the court,/ letters// for gods and devils, cannon balls" (Canto 12). This portion explains the epic's veering away from chronology, itself, the very means by which national history has been *lined*, that is bordered, and colonially lineated. The epic may as well be read in the manner executed by the poet, but an apt and closer way of reading it is by piecing together the cantos' variously located utterance—typically modernist, and postmodernist to a certain extent, but definitely nonlinear. As the islands, are juggled, "all seven// thousand of them, with the peasants, laborers,/ and clerks clinging to their edges like frightened/ fleas," the crafted archipelagic space admits the past to comingle with the present to tell the tale, as it "must be told," as "it keeps us on our feet, it is our common// heritage" (Canto 13). In time, a world of vegetation, or a possibility of flourishing again, is sought and returned to in the epic, "a last grope for greenery" (Canto 17), despite the destructive occurrence of the pyroclastic mud that alludes to the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippine island of Luzon in 1991. A nameless persona speaks of this memory which reminded him of a wretchedness that "shames" him: "The volcano said/ what we feared to hear, that lahar eats out heart's// verges and erases love from the map" (Canto 16). Natural destruction finds itself again sweeping the archipelago as memories of tempests speak out a powerful history: "Water deprives but does not/ succor, it girds the earth with gore that weakens/ the will of magistrates and regents. It slaps/ with

sudden terror even seagulls sitting/ on riggings, waiting for briny scraps to eat" (Canto 28). In these lines, among others, the Philippines as a country and as one located in the Southeast Asian region, is recreated to take its place as a kind of volatile landscape, conditioned by history and the changing times. It is also re-placed in the center of a seascape's squall, where it recovers in geographic detail, how it is formed rather tangentially, by its own location—the Pacific "ring of fire"—which paradoxically fragmentalizes the earth, though relating the nations along its path by way of often collectively experienced destructive tectonic and volcanic activity.

However, also present in this fragmented environment is a constant spectre of the tyrant figure being exorcised by the collective speech acts of the personae. The tyrant figure is the main torment that practically makes for the continued disintegration of the nation, an archipelagic trope that may well speak for the authoritarian experiences of other Southeast Asian nations. This tyrant figure is allowed to speak, to voice out, his own way of making sense of history, a strategy of discoursing the spectral consciousness and laying it bare. Contextually, it speaks of Ferdinand Marcos, the strongman who in the epic boasts of being "fated to rule/ forever" (Canto 8), as he narcissistically internalizes his heroic myth of being bemedalled and honored for his nobility and valor. "(A)re they not/ the categorical imprimatur on/ my legitimacy?" he asks, in Canto 8, as he laments on his being deposed after bearing "on my shoulders", "the land (which) became my own," as "the lone true keeper/ of its truth, though my shoulders have kept bleeding/ these past twenty one years." He voices out the pain of his exile, mocking the "woman/ who cannot wield a speech (but yet) wields a promise of/ paradise." It is quite interesting to note that the tyrant figure in exile speaks here, "talking to the waves," in archipelagic Hawai'i, his soil of dispersal, intoning the voice of duplicitous compassion in a time of national "disenchantment." In a latter canto, he speaks again, perhaps addressing the nation, as he finds in himself all rights to righteousness, waxing ironic as he makes claims of comparison: "The illness of government/ I have known pale in

comparison to this,/ even in my darkest violence, even/ in my fictive benevolence, requiring/ extreme measures for concomitance" (Canto 19). He again pokes fun at this successor, that "four-eyed woman/ who thought she was democracy's gift to all,/ (and) who stuttered through speechcraft and stumbled against/ her own legitimacy". "(She) would not consent to have my corpse carried to my rightful earth," he cries, while confessing in the long run, that "(a)ll over my land, bloodstains on broken stones/ portray an apology for a fractured/ destiny." The fracture, as resonant to the archipelagic image, seems to depict the historic ruptures that the tyrant's regime, as highpoint of Philippine oppression, had inflicted on the national body. Tyranny as an archipelagic moment in Philippine history attempts to consolidate powers, which in the long run were reclaimed by the people through the 1986 Revolution at the Epifanio delos Santos Avenue, the main thoroughfare of the capital, the city littered by "paper torn from telephone books" (Canto 11). The spectral presence of the tyrant figure made him an embodiment of previous fracturing episodes in the life of the Filipino people. In re-narrating a "history of feeling", the voices in the epic cast out the demon of oppression by "striking back", by responding to the dark voice who is definitely "much at fault," and who has muddled the lives of people by instilling disciplining paranoia: "But you assign your police/ to disturb even our dreams, we have nowhere/ to hide" (Canto 11). In a collective tenor, the persona irreverently shows the tyrant a bright image of street dissent to fully shroud his power with confetti-as-word, properly exorcising this Philippine historical phantasm then and now, aside from the use of the popular "finger politics" (the popular "L" hand sign which means "laban" or "fight", adopted by oppositionists in 1986):

...Because we are blind, we convey  
 our protest through paper—cut paper yellow  
 and white—swirling and twirling mutely in air,  
 words ripped apart, thrown out, bumping and jostling  
 each other in the breeze, looking sadly at  
 each other, as they fall to the ground. (lines 981-986)

The epic at its core is comic, and as the explication of the ending suggests, the brightness of a future is to be anticipated despite the fact that the "the words in my (persona's) pen swim/ in blood, clamber over the pool and fly to all corners" (Canto 9). The sun here, and morning, tropes of the hope and resurrection of which Philippine culture is immersed upon by way of the *Pasyon* as articulated by Reynaldo Ileto (1979), return as positive primal images of the archipelagic tropics of the Philippines, while the instances of voicing muse on identity and a motherland, in their many forms and names. "They will not see me shake my head as I pace," a ruminative persona utters, as he continues walking along "the seashore in meaningless meditation." The rumination, it seems, bears this utterance, the epic, which retells the biography of a nation, "in newer words." "I will/ compel the sirens to give me back my Name," the persona ends, recalling not only the memory of Aegean sea nymphs who sang of forgetfulness but also of the junctures of collective historical forgetting, long lamented in Philippine cultural discourse. Part of the response of this epic's fragmentality—that is, the critical exposition of the discontinuities of consciousness—is the calling out of the voices of main heroes who had played important roles in the most important epochs of revolutions. The leader of the *Katipunan* (the Collective) Andres Bonifacio in Canto 14 makes himself heard, "ready for war,/ having sworn on the skull of Rizal to say/ what must be said". As if recounting his last moments after being summarily executed in a mountain in the Southern Luzon Island, he recalls how the very fragmentary state of the country became the very reason for his demise. He sings of regionalism, the country's gravest affliction, and *re-members*, in a way, the presence of his life and wholeness, his "flesh", which is "prologue to pain that he," Emilio Aguinaldo, his executioner and first president of the republic, "will not write about in his journal." Bonifacio speaks in synecdoches here, referring to himself with seeming corroboration on his being figuratively and literally mangled in death. Historically, his bones were never found, and he puts on his words the very paradox of his own heroic absent-presencing, of his own tragic fragmentation: "I am so full/ of death I cannot die, so full of sorrow. I cannot grieve

over all bastards who/ were rolled into unnamed graves,/ their legacy/ the silence of hardened earth, food for maggots,/ and colonial history." Rizal, for his part, sings oracular and geographic in Canto 30, while performing what was perceived in history as Bonifacio's task in the associated "revolutionary" efforts of both heroes: "Wake up!" I whispered to them as I walked past/ trees and flowers and fresh mounds of earth..." He speaks on the eve of his execution in the said Canto, and in the succeeding Canto 31, the penultimate part of the epic, where his voice blurs once again with that of other hero voices, revealing that the "(t)ime has come." "They (the people) will see/ calamity's corpses redrawing the map/ of servitude with no kindness to spare, each/ line and convulsion livid with passion,/ with pulsating liveliness, with gunpowder." Recalling the mythic tearing of the residence certificates led by Bonifacio, he again mentions the important act of *renaming* the country as a form of renewal and archipelagic collectivity: "We must name/ our world anew, throw its tinsels and tassels/ away, burn the rubbish that clogs our reason,/ and begin all over again." Renaming was one important gesture Bonifacio undertook as a revolutionary leader when he introduced a name that collectively possessed the national idea—"Katagalugan", a name after the language and ethnicity of the dominant Tagalog region, but that which was conceptually a comprehensive reference to all nationals of Filipinas, despite regional origin or linguistic background. Rizal in the epic seems to agree with this grand design and narrative, and even admonishes everyone, particularly the ones who participated in the Propaganda Movement to "act like heroes."

Rizal, "the mapmaker," as instituted in the beginning and ending cantos of the epic poem, is emblematically canonized as the paragon of Filipino heroism in the epic. While the voices were legion, they all fused into one, that of Rizal's, whose shoes—a surprising metonymic turn towards the end of the epic—were described as showing "the way with facts and maps" (Canto 31). His blood smears the broken stones of the country, and he rises Christ-like, redeeming his fellowmen and finally awaiting how history is about to turn "brown under the white sun," the primary

archipelagic image which the *Noli* foretold to be one that must be welcomed in the name of the ones who had fallen in darkness. The collective persona praises the work of Rizal and that of others, announcing how everyone "cleared a space// for new banners and icons," and "rearranged/ the landscapes for our sunrise." The "wretched of the earth" (this was Bonifacio doing a Frantz Fanon in Canto 30) in one voice emphasized their oneness with the heroic voices in the penultimate canto, after a century of being "disenfranchised, disentitled," declaring "our ageless claim to selfhood though we were still/ that time selfless." The last two cantos illustrate once more the blurring qualities of this archipelagic fragmentality, where difference and otherness are boldly dismantled to fully accommodate the "many selves /seeking each other's arms for/ that one National Embrace!" Having clearly followed Rizal's footsteps, the "text of nationhood" was accomplished through the epic, and the body poetic that is the poem became a map telling them "where to go and how to be wise," filling their days with "sunrise, sunrise, sunrise." This "text of nationhood" however was not accomplished without struggle, as seen in metapoetic moments where the epic refers to itself as almost useless, shocking the nation "page by page/ with images of hunger and carnage, though// you portray them in colors" (Canto 13). In ascribing potency to the spirit of Rizal as one that binds the archipelagic pieces together, the epic also remembers the task of the poem and the office of the poet as one that similarly aspires for the restoration of national dignity and integration. The epic empowers itself by looking at the national condition in history with discerning estrangement, a perspective that shows "fragments of my lost loves, so that if/ I sang about its fruits and pendants, the men/ who nourished its pillars, it was because it/ gave me poems and maps to sweeten my tongue// and points directions." In critically and sweepingly accounting for the ills of the nation—from the time of the *conquista* to the era of the diasporic Overseas Filipino worker—the epic as witness provides an unflinching look at the *locations* of a country coming to terms with its nationhood and its place in the global sphere—something that is particularly celebrated when this epic won first prize in the Philippine Centennial



Literary Awards in 1998.

### III. Conclusion

Finishing the epical arch, this scholar elects one important *fragment* of the epic—and we use it here to illustrate the very archipelagiality of the body poetic of the works of Cirilo F. Bautista, recently proclaimed by the Philippine government as National Artist for Literature—as the core of the archipelagic fragmentality that best characterizes *Sunlight on Broken Stones* as the closing book of the trilogy, and as one that finally *locates* the Philippines as a fragmented nation that wills its own salvation. The poem, "Third World Geography", published as a stand-alone lyric in Bautista's book *Believe and Betray: New and Collected Poems*, can originally be found in Canto 22 of the *Sunlight* where a persona ruminates on a steady national decay and pain, while listening to "music in the wind's absence, pondering victory's lexicon/ in the boneyard of remembrance." The canto utters the fragment of the epic and the manner of parables draws up a Philippine map that is almost revolting to see:

...A country  
without miracles sits heavy on the map,  
counting banana trees rotting in the sun.  
The man watching over it has commandeered  
all hopes, crammed them in a sack, tied it loose end.  
He goes around carrying it on *his* back.

When asked what is inside, he whispers, "Nothing.  
Just a handful of feathers, just a handful  
of feathers." That is how light the burden of  
governance is, any tyrant can turn it  
into a figure of speech. Inspired, you kneel

on parched ground and pray for rice. But only  
the burning wind catches your word and eats it. (lines 2105-2117)

Quite interestingly, the poet in his new version revises the fragment, making it more succinct and powerful. As a poet who considers only writing "one poem" in his lifetime, Bautista has always been bent on intertextualizing himself in several occasions, as if calling the attention of his readers to the amalgamation of his otherwise separate texts. When he revises the fragment in the newer version, by changing some words here and there, he dramatizes the connexion and resituates the reading experience in a perspective that clearly witnesses the unfolding of a larger poetic terrain, one that has been critically examined and re-cartographed by way of a faithful reorientation to history. When he adds a commentary towards the end of the stand-alone lyric, he repossesses the sharpness of an archipelagic consciousness to carry out a remapping of sorts, unfolding his map where "new worlds assemble before/ his very eyes, faster than he could untie// the banana-wrapped rice, worlds whose pedigree must be superior to common learning,/ which are not burdened by taxes, wars, rising/ prices, old age, volcanic eruptions, whose/ rulers hold their tongue and tend the greenery" (Canto 23):

The country without miracles  
tries to get up from the page,  
but the bold ink and sharp colors  
hold it down.

"Third World Geography" as one fragment embedded in *Sunlight's* Canto 22 is but a critical resituation of the country—in an allegorical fashion—in the place we call today as the "Global South", which is in a more ways than one, a First World *positioning* and assignment of many Southeast Asian countries—a perceived "politically correct" manner of marginalization in the era of globalization and the upcoming ASEAN integration. The

country already waxes tragic, being one that is not scant of "miracles", and admits to its difficulty of getting "up from the page." The use of the implied metaphor of the map here makes reverberating statements about national ills from within, and without. It also speaks about institutions and structures that "hold it down" by way of geopolitical or geoeconomic subjections. The "bold ink and sharp colors" in the lyric amends Bautista's earlier position regarding the archipelagic condition. It may as well be the situation of other Southeast Asian nations which archipelagically dream that everyone finally "get(s) up from the page", that a new and liberating geography is written soon.

By way of recapitulation, this paper attempted to launch a geoliterary appraisal of the epic trilogy of Cirilo F. Bautista, beginning with end of this major Filipino work, *Sunlight in Broken Stones*. The method is meant to retrace the archipelagic consciousness of the poet as he embarked on this monumental undertaking of giving poetic form to the nation in fragmentality. Regionally, this fragmentality may be related to what the historian Anthony Reid (2010) described as state-aversion, where societies have "a low sense of ethnical nationalism," and where they perceive "themselves as extremely various, with different dialects and customs in each river valley, and a common sense of themselves only in relation to extremes of outside pressure" (46). The "ethnie" here, "a group which imagines itself kin," is an operative term that is at the core of Bautista's project of recovering and *re-covering* (that is of geographically synthesizing) the country in its variousness, even in the imaginative realm. When Reid described Southeast Asia as "state-averse", he seems to resound what may be considered as the complex quality of Bautista's archipelagic utterance and collection, by way of the epics, written in contemporaneous times when the nation was undergoing several forms of redefinitions. The reading of the Bautista epics is in many ways too, an exploration of a Southeast Asian poetics, especially if we consider the shared resistance of Southeast Asian peoples towards imperial machinations and encroachments that led to each of their relegation into subjection. The implied "ethnie-zation", then, may be regarded as

the response to colonialism, and must be valued as an important term in understanding the entity of the larger Southeast Asian region as a newly developed substance "of new communities of belonging," (44) where "felt" or emotional histories are of primal importance, and where "the base metal of empire would have (been) transmuted into the gold of nationhood." Writing is in itself alchemical, and Reid's formulation embodies Bautista's epical gesture as distinctly Southeast Asian, articulating sites of separateness, struggles, and solidity.

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