

Nation-formation and Historical Continuity in Ricky Lee's *Si Amapola sa 65 na Kabanata*

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ABSTRACT

The question of identity and subject formation is one of the more pronounced preoccupations of psychoanalysis, but much of our understanding of it is stripped of materialist and historical references. Our common idea of how psychoanalysis deals with the matter of identity is through clinical practice, with the clinic posited as a self-enclosed space. But psychoanalytic concepts can be combined with Marxist historical materialism in order to demonstrate their applicability in the critique of society. This analysis of Ricky Lee's *Si Amapola sa 65 na Kabanata* aims to demonstrate how a blending of these two approaches can be applied in the critical reading of texts. The identity formation of the novel's protagonist, Amapola, who assumes multiple personalities, is interpreted by situating it in the social and historical frames which the novel provides. Through an analysis of Amapola's interactions with various characters, particularly those who typify ideas of historical continuity and collectivism, this paper attempts to show that subject formation is not just something negotiated within the confines of the clinic but a process that takes place in the larger societal setting.

Keywords: historical materialism, psychoanalytic literary criticism, nation-formation, national literature

In reading Ricky Lee's *Si Amapola sa 65 na Kabanata* (2011),¹ one can sense Philippine society and history taking shape little by little, but never completely, in the pages of the novel. There are ample references to real personalities and events, and the reader can easily discern a significant link that the novel is establishing in relation to real Filipino people and the circumstances and incidents that mark their daily lives. In an interview, Lee himself has explicitly pointed out the novel's social and historical connections: "*Tungkol sa kalagayan ng bansa at ng mga Pilipino noong 2010 sa punto de bista ng baklang manananggal na may attitude. Si Amapola ay isang impersonator na naging manananggal. Realistic na fantastic*" (de Guzman 2011).

The connections articulated in this statement account for the palpable realism that can be attributed to the novel: a work of fiction that relates to our actual, material realities. It is peopled by personalities readers can identify in real life. The general locale where most of the events in the novel take place—Quezon City's Morato District—exists in reality as well. The inside back cover of the book even provides a map showing the location of key spots in the novel. Only, there is a catch: places like "High Notes" "Trono's Campaign Headquarters," and "Amapola's House," all of them fictive, coexist with actual landmarks like "Timog Avenue," "Kamuning Road," and "E. Rodriguez Avenue," among others, places which should be familiar to the people living in the metropolitan capital. With the cartographic representation included in the book, a literal commingling of 'fiction' and 'reality' is achieved. In the process, the readers' interpretations and understanding of the two—the events in the novel they are reading and actual events in their society which the novel seems to point to—can be seen as mutually enriching. World and word, reality and fiction are seen in their proper right: not as separate entities but as phenomena that inform, clash with, and develop each other.

What is the world fashioned through the words of the novel and to what extent can we say that it overlaps with the world of the readers? The novel's protagonist, Amapola, is divided in many ways, even literally. She² is a gay impersonator working in a bar called High Notes, and she has two alter egos, Zaldy and Isaac. She is also a *manananggal*. Being a *manananggal* itself speaks of dividedness, since these creatures manifest themselves as divided body parts, with the torso separating from the lower body. As *manananggal*, Amapola also has an alter, Montero, her evil counterpart. This split character one day receives a prophecy from Emil, a Noranian,³ and the prophecy is all about Amapola being tasked to save the country. Emil was sent by Sepa, Amapola's great grandmother, who returned to life from a historic moment in the past, the time of the Revolution against Spain, after that revolution and her love for the patriot Andres Bonifacio both ended in failure.

Amapola also has a love interest in the novel, Homer, who himself had an experience, a harrowing one, with '*manananggals*.' This romantic angle between Amapola and Homer can very well show how her internal contradictions are tied to her conflicted relationship to the people around her and her social environment at large. Homer's unpleasant encounter with *manananggals* has kept Amapola from revealing that part of her identity to Homer.

The constitution and enactment of the Self is always affected by one's environment. Similarly and this we shall see below, Amapola's resolutions of her internal conflicts—her being a *manananggal*, her having an evil *manananggal* counterpart, her hesitation to accept

the task of Savior and so on—overlap with the development and understanding of her relationship with her social surroundings. For instance, in coming to terms with being the designated Savior of the country, he has to deal with characters like Sir Gervacio, a teacher who organizes the *manananggals*, and Trono, the typical politician who in the course of the novel rose from being a Congressman to being the country's President, to negotiate more firmly with the huge task assigned to him.

Lee's second novel⁴ seems to participate in the discourses that look into the idea of the (Philippine) nation and its historical construction, and the contradictions that define not only this nation but also its people. Taking off from Benedict Anderson's well-known postulation that the nation is an "imagined community" because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991, 49), we can assert that Lee's novel contributes to this continuing imaging of the nation. It would be useful to relate this to Anderson's statement that "nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (1991, 48). Cultural artefacts like novels play an immense role in shaping how we imagine the nation and the unending production of these artefacts only guarantee that the way we imagine the nation also continually changes; that is, there is no singular or fixed "image of communion" that binds members of a nation together.

What I am reading as the novel's goal to link its world to the nation/community we actually inhabit is aided by the inclusion of characters and places which actually exist or have existed in real life, particularly in Philippine history and society. In this work, historical personages like Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo, and contemporary political figures like former presidents Corazon Aquino and Joseph Estrada, come to life. The appearance of these characters helps in widening the temporal expanse of the novel, from the last years of the Spanish occupation of the Philippines to the national election year of 2010. This time frame is noteworthy for it can be used to support the claim that the novel prizes a historical approach in order to shed light not just on the contemporary situations that it brings to the fore but also on all the past events to which it relates. Connections are thus pursued not just between the fictional work and our realities but also between past and present. As we go along this pursuit in the novel, there is Amapola, experiencing and witnessing all sorts of splits and divides but paradoxically helping us see the significant relations and connections established in the novel.

The split(ing) Amapola and the splits in her social setting

Amapola represents split-ness (being *split*), and fittingly enough the novel opens with Amapola performing in High Notes, splitting and impersonating the American singer Beyonce. As impersonator, she imitates other personalities, making herself other than her “self.” Amapola’s split-ness though goes beyond the act of impersonation and takes quite a number of forms. First of all, she suffers from a psychological condition called dissociative identity disorder (DID)⁵ which causes her to assume two alternating identities, Zaldy and Isaac.⁶ When she becomes a *manananggal*, she again embodies this split-ness, as this mythological creature literally splits its body. The split-ness in her *manananggal* form becomes even more striking when later she becomes capable of making her *Talukbang*, her lower body, move on its own. Lastly, after her alters, Zaldy and Isaac were killed, she discovers that Montero, the ‘bad’ *manananggal*, has replaced them as her alter.

It is evident that this split character of Amapola which is manifested in various ways is a key detail in the novel. For some, Amapola’s condition can be a constant reminder of Jacques Lacan’s remarks about the mirror-stage in the development of the child—the moment when a child sees her ‘self’⁷ in the mirror is the same moment when her sense of wholeness crumbles, as her image in the mirror becomes the originary figure of the ‘Other’ to her. As Lacan wrote in “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”: “The function of the mirror stage thus turns out... to be a particular case of the function of the imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality” (2006, 78). Paradoxically, the mirror-stage which includes the moment when the child looks at (a representation of) herself paves the way for her recognition of the Other: the image in the mirror is like me but is not really me.

But the Other belies not just our sense of self-unity; it does not just speak of an internal divide. Lacan further articulated that the moment the individual child’s sense of wholeness is devastated is the same moment that she enters the Symbolic Order, the social totality which includes language, ideology, and social relations. This marks the commencement of the Self’s relationship if not “discordance with his own reality” (2006, 76). Once the child enters the Symbolic Order, the notion of having a fixed Identity is replaced by the unending process of identification, or “the subject’s becoming” (2006, 46). The child becomes a “subject rather than a self or ego, merely the occupant of an always moving position in the network of signification” (Habib 2005, 590). This network of signification occurs at the Symbolic level, making attributions to the child—in the form of names, roles, among

others—to which she can attach, unconsciously searching for her lost Identity, an Identity expressed in what Lacan tags the Imaginary.

Does this suffice in illuminating Amapola's split character? If we say yes, it would be as if Amapola's split-ness was brought about by her entrapment in the Symbolic Order, in the endless chain of signification where the system of language is the most dominant player, where nothing else is acknowledged. It becomes dangerous if one proceeds with the poststructuralist maneuver with regard to the 'endless chain of signification' that marks the Symbolic Order. A common poststructuralist assertion, albeit in varying permutations, is that we are now suffused with and enclosed in the 'prison house of language' or in the multiplicity of signs.⁸ This insistence which continues to prevail in the present has a great tendency to pull us out of the concrete setting where all the chains of signification and modes of identity formation take place, the concrete setting where we reside and negotiate with ourselves and others. Therefore, in order not to render psychoanalytic articulations about subject formation worthless, one should proceed from there with the guidance not of poststructuralist everything-is-language postulations but of more materialist readings of psychoanalysis.

For instance, Ian Parker can be a reliable Marxist reader of Lacan. In *Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (2011, 29-30), he points to "alienation" as "a malaise of modern life" in showing how the Imaginary-Symbolic-Real triad gains currency. Here, we can see how factors such as social totalities and specific historical phenomena can be mobilized in order to reveal the wider site where subject formation transpires. If this is applied then to Amapola's split-ness, the focus can be directed not just to Amapola and the ascriptions thrown her way but also to the larger social setup and historical juncture where she is situated. This social setup and historical juncture amount to Amapola's Pilipinas. This is the Pilipinas that is rife with competing class interests, the Pilipinas of 2010 when a forthcoming election enlivens a subtle hype for salvation to a people who may have singing talent and prepaid load cards, but not the means to ensure proper shelter or sustenance for themselves.

The events told in *Amapola*, particularly the ones that impinge on and are negotiated by the protagonist, can be interpreted through the materialist framework of Marxist dialectics. This is not the same as Hegelian dialectics which, with the notion of the *Geist*, posits a kind of telos: an end of history—if not of social history, then of individual history. Marxist dialectics does not posit a similar telos.⁹ Whereas Hegelian dialectics suggests that the cessation of contradictions will occur as time progresses, Marxist dialectics points to a continuing, progressive process. As elaborated by Habib:

The dialectic is often characterized as a triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. ... a way of thinking about any object or circumstance in a series of increasingly complex and comprehensive stages. Each stage supersedes the previous stage **but retains what was essential in the previous stage**. In the first stage an object was apprehended as a simple datum, as simply a given fact about the world; the second stage... object as “externalized,” as having no independent identity but constituted by its relations with other objects. The third stage... viewed the object as a “mediated unity,” its true identity perceived as a principle of unity between universal and particular, between essence and appearance. (Habib 2005, 528, emphasis mine).

Let me call attention to that part of the quotation from Habib which I have stressed: the dialectical process occurs in stages, and moving from one stage to another involves a retention of “what was essential in the previous stage.” Hence, in the dialectic, it is not as if the previous stage is abandoned altogether. What spur the movements in this dialectical process are not just the negations (or series of negations) that eventually lead to a singular and ultimate affirmation, the synthesis, but also what are kept or retained. As Elden clarifies, there is a threefold sense to the notion of *Aufhebung* by Hegel: “negated, retained and lifted up” (2004, 16). Mentioning this tripartite process is vital since what is often overlooked—the “lifting up” aspect of the dialectic—is recalled. Following this, the process of identity or subject formation will be salvaged from the lure of the repetitious and cyclical “chain of significations” and will be seen as developing side by side the progress of society. This shall guide us as we analyze the development of Amapola’s character.

Finally, Habib adds that the “third stage of the dialectic is practical” (2005, 529). Hence, the achievement of (provisional) resolutions through the synthesis is primarily done through practice in the material world where people dwell. This qualification in the dialectical process is special because it explicitly mentions the material setting and the particular actions individuals and other social agents do here—again, something that is bypassed by poststructuralist tinkering with ‘endless chains of signification’.

In clarifying aspects of the framework that will be put to work in this paper, Amapola’s split character and her likewise split social environment have been touched on as well. We can now look at the progress of Amapola’s character in the way she acts within and responds to her social situation. More specifically, we can establish more firmly how Amapola has come to resolve her internal contradictions and the external contradictions in her environment and her country in general whose effects greatly impinge on her own motivations and actions. Making sense of their relationship in a dialectical manner, we can see

more fully how Amapola bears traces of her social conditions even as she also tries to make use of them, how these social conditions serve as both limiting and enabling platform for her actions and then how these actions work within the larger setting where they are launched.

The 'many' Amapolas and the Pilipinas she was prophesied to save

At the end of Chapter 2 ("*Ilan na Ako Ngayon?*"), after she saw herself becoming a *manananggal*, Amapola has this somewhat embittered series of questions about herself, foretelling one of the novel's major problems: the problem of identity formation in relation to one's decisions, actions and positions in her specific material setting:

Pero ako, nag-iba na ako. Hayop na ba ako o tao pa rin? Pilipino pa rin ba ako o hati na ang citizenship ko? Ako na ba si Ama-Pola? Paano pa ako ngayon sisikat? Paano pag sinagot na ni Homer ang pag-ibig ko, kalahati ko lang ba ang sinagot niya? Pero meron din akong Zaldy at Isaac, kaya ilan na ako ngayon? (17)

Just as she was trying to process her suddenly being a *manananggal* (her alters even researched if her condition could be 'cured'), the prophecy from Emil came. Thus begins the process of Amapola's coming to terms with her so-called fate as Savior, in the process learning a great deal not only about herself and her past but also about her country and its history. It is through Amapola's journey as she deals with the prophecy brought by Emil and her great-grandmother Sepa, that we can see how internal and external contradictions arise and attempts are made to resolve them.¹⁰

It is through the process by which she sorts out the prophecy and acts upon it that we are able to relive the history of the Pilipinas she is supposed to save. This reinterpretation of Philippine history also gives us the chance to understand better the problems presently hounding the country, precisely the reason why it needs a savior. For how else can we make sense of this relationship between the past, the present and the future but through a dialectical perspective that maintains that these temporal planes are all interconnected: by cause and effect and then effect-as-cause, by problem and solution and then solution-as-problem and so on. Similarly, another one of Parker's remarks about the links between the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real can be cited in order to exhibit the intimacy of Lacanian psychoanalysis with Marxist dialectics: he uses "the curious figure of the Borromean knot through which each ring intersects with the others and hold them in place" (Parker 2011, 191). This is vital for it goes against the

connotation of waywardness and anarchic slipperiness conveyed in the poststructuralist slanting of the phrase “chain of significations.”

A good illustration of the temporal interconnections in *Amapola* is Lola Sepa’s recounting of her experiences during the waning years of the Spanish occupation as experiences brought about mainly by the Katipunan revolution. Having developed affection towards Bonifacio, Lola Sepa morosely retells how Bonifacio was cheated by Aguinaldo in the elections for the leadership of the Katipunan. Do we not find similar instances of cheating and electoral gimmicks of discrediting political enemies in *Amapola*’s own time? Doesn’t the Bonifacio-Aguinaldo rift point to the degradation of the plebeian and the uneducated, and the glorification of the elite which is still evident in the present? Other contemporary conditions can be mentioned as suitably connected or parallel to the past. Lola Sepa’s stories do not only show how events in the past continue in the present. By showing the persistence of the past, Lola Sepa’s stories can be read as a commentary on the way historical events seem to have been immured in a vicious cycle, a forbidding kind of recurrence, an unproductive chain of signification and actualization.

Also, by suggesting that not much has changed, the recounting of this historical episode also vivifies the connections between the past and the present. I would even argue that the Katipunan episode that is recounted operates on more than one plane: first, there is that episode within the world of the novel which involves Lola Sepa’s actual experiences with Bonifacio, but also there is that cunningly similar episode which occurred in real life: the betrayal and presumed murder of Bonifacio by Aguinaldo’s camp. I posit that this is part of the novel’s tactical strike which aims to shatter the fact-fiction divide and render it useless, turn it into an occasion for rumination.

In a way, Lola Sepa’s recounting of this crucial juncture in Philippine history also serves to offer an alternative view regarding these events. Hence, as we ‘look back’ at the past from the standpoint of the present, we are given the chance to be more aware not just of ‘what happened’ in the past but the relationship of this past to our present, everything that happened in between and their relevance to our present situation.

Lola Sepa’s recounting of her Spanish era days is significant for another reason. Through her perspective, the reader can derive a special insight about the onset of the formation of the Philippine nation, a process that continues up to *Amapola*’s time. Again, we can recognize the vitality of history, or concretized time, time-in-action and how we, as proactive elements within this history, are main participants in making (and making sense of) this history:

Kapag tinatanong ang mga ito kung ano ang katayuan ng bayan noong bago dumating ang mga dayuhan, pabulong na sasagot din siya sa sarili. Nabubuhay sa lubos na kasaganahan at kaginhawaan. Handa ka na bang pumatay upang mabalik muli ang bayan sa ganitong kalagayan? Opo, sagot uli niya, at pumatay.

Ipinanganganak noon ang kanyang Bayan, ang Sangkapuluang Katagalugan na kabahagi ang lahat, maging Bisaya, Iloko, Kapampangan o, sa isip niya, manananggal. (62)

This tells us a great deal about the country/nation Amapola is tasked to save. This Bayan used to experience a prosperous and comfortable life, but this changed with the coming of the colonizers. The shift from 'bayan' to 'Bayan' in Lee's novel can be read as due to the gradual crystallization of the idea of 'Bayan.' Thanks to the material conditions pervasive in almost all parts of the country during that time, all the members of this Bayan, from the Bisaya to the Kapampangan, came to realize that the cause of all their sufferings was the same—the encompassing reality of colonial oppression in all parts of the archipelago and the people's recognition of their common plight that enabled the formation of the idea of a "Nation." This point about the Nation is important to make not just because this is the Nation that Amapola is supposed to save in a heroic act. This Nation, with its own crisis and contradictions, is where Amapola, also with her own doubts and will, resides, and it is largely through her that the reader is able to peek at the novel's world, the Nation that it depicts.

At one point, during Amapola's coming out as a *manananggal*, she runs across a political rally in Quezon City. The behavior of the people at the rally only makes her more apprehensive about the idea of 'saving' them and their nation:

Kaloka! Ito ba ang Pilipinas na gustong iligtas nina Lola Sepa at Emil! Iligtas mula saan? Kung sarili nga ayaw nitong iligtas! Ang gusto lang ng mga ito'y kumain, tumae, mag-Glutathione... Kapag may bagyo o lindol o anumang problema'y lalaban pero susuko din agad at makakalimot, o kaya ay magma-migrate! Ilang taon na ba ang bansang ito pero bakit hanggang ngayo'y wala pa ring pinagkatandaan? (98-99)

In Chapter 26 ("*Ako ang Tagapagligtas!*"), despite these early and reasonable doubts about accepting her role as Savior, Amapola inevitably comes to terms with her new designation (like a conferral of the Symbolic Order, an order that has material manifestations). Previous instances of recognition that might have helped her resolve the contradictions within her have perhaps prepared her for this acceptance of her new role. First, in Chapter 13 ("*Pagtanggap*"), her foster mother Nanay Angie finally learns about her being

a *manananggal* but does not push her away. Then in Chapter 19 (“*Aswang si Sir*”), Amapola finally musters enough courage to reveal her *manananggal* self to her beloved Homer. Even though Homer does not immediately accept this, Amapola’s subsequent moves speak of her greater resolve regarding her *manananggal* identity. She reveals this to those who are very dear to her, and longs for acceptance. It is as if she can finally avow that she **is** a *manananggal*. What is said at the beginning of this paragraph can thus be recast. Amapola does not just passively accept the (Symbolic Order’s) conferral of a particular identity for her. As evinced by the steps she has taken after learning that she is both *manananggal* and designated Savior, Amapola actively wrestles with these conferrals before ultimately embracing them, and this represents an advance. She is now more actively owning her identity, and taking charge of her identity formation as this takes place in a larger social frame. Can we not recall here the third stage of dialectical development—the practical stage of “lifting up”? Amapola did not exactly negate her identity as either *manananggal* or Savior; she retained them and “lifted” them up by seeing them in a new light, altering the way she relates to them.

Little by little, Amapola takes major strides in confronting her internal contradictions—first, concerning her being the Savior of her country, and second, her being a *manananggal*. As Amapola becomes more internally willful and strong-minded, she appears more set to confront the world she is called upon to save; she is now about to meet in the eye more seriously this nation called Pilipinas, with all its contradictions and nerve-wracking physicality.

“Ang dapat tanggalin ay ang dahilan kung bakit dapat may inililigtas”

Once Amapola starts to go about ‘saving’ Pilipinas and after her two alters Zaldy and Isaac are killed, a new apparent threat surfaces: Montero. Later, it is revealed that Montero is just another alter of Amapola, another manifestation of her split-ness. One of Nanay Angie’s sentiments indicates the riddle that is (within) Amapola: “*Kapag umuuzwi ito, ‘di niya alam kung galing ito sa paggawa ng kasamaan o kabutihan*” (259). Four chapters later, Amapola finally conquers Montero and, having rid herself of this alter, she is able to say, “*Si Amapola na lang uli siya*” (282).

Though Sir Gervacio has earlier proclaimed that the enemy is not Montero but Trono (Chapter 37, “*Totoo ang Tsismis*”), it is important to note that Montero’s character functions to exhibit the kind of conflict that is significant to the development of Amapola’s

character. While Gervacio's claim about Trono being the 'true' enemy is tenable, one can argue that Trono is not the only enemy Amapola has to overcome. Her evil counterpart, Montero, serves to point to the internal contradictions that also plague Amapola, which she has to resolve in order for her decisions and actions to have a firmer grounding. In one meeting with Montero (Chapter 41, "*Sa Lungga ng mga Tungkab*"), Montero tells her, "*Bakit ka magliligtas ng mga tao. Kaaway natin sila!*" (255). To see the pairing of Amapola and Montero in a Manichean sense would be erroneous. What I read here is a confusion when it comes to which side Amapola should take; where she should stand; who are the enemies she should fight and who should she be saving? Let us reconsider what Montero says to Amapola. Questioning Amapola's efforts in saving human beings, Montero clearly sees an antagonistic relationship between humans and *manananggals*. The divide is a matter of species, not of political stance, gender, nationality or economic status. But Lola Sepa's words regarding the formation of the Bayan mentioned above already hints contrariwise to any presumable inter-species divide: "*ang kanyang Bayan, ang Sangkapuluang Katagalugan na kabahagi ang lahat, maging Bisaya, Iloko, Kapampangan, o sa isip niya, manananggal*" (Lee 2011, 62). Even as the novel nears its end, both *manananggals* and humans become part of a concerted mobilization for the defense of human rights. Amapola's killing of Montero (Chapter 47, "*Dito sa Tullahan River*") can be read as Amapola's rejection of the idea, peddled to him by Montero, that humans and *manananggals* are enemies and cannot work together. The act may be seen as signifying an impending resolution of her own contradictions.

Another key character in the novel is Sir Gervacio. He led the formation of the Katipunan, a stronghold of mostly *manananggal* members who would eventually join forces with humans in defending a common enemy trampling on the rights of humans and *manananggals* alike. The Katipunan reference easily recalls Bonifacio and the movement he led and this does not seem accidental. In Chapter 37, Sir Gervacio appears to have immensely dented Amapola's conviction about her being the savior of Pilipinas. Sir Gervacio did this by undermining the very basis of Amapola's convictions: that there was a prophecy and that she was the one chosen, or fated to save Pilipinas. He says, "*Hindi totoo ang mga propesiya. Pasintabi pero walang Itinakda. You can only go so far sa pagliligtas*" (237-38). What Sir Gervacio is disputing here is an idea that sounds like Fate, or Destiny, something that has been preordained, or has been preset (*itinakda*). It is also during this meeting with Amapola that Sir Gervacio posits that what should be acted upon, more than saving people one-by-one, is the root of this situation where people need to be saved. Sir Gervacio's final words on Amapola can only buttress the indirect

reference to Bonifacio and what the hero had done before: "*Sumali ka sa Katipunan, marami tayong magagawa kung magtutulungan tayo*" (238). Does this not resound with the idea of collective unity and action which the Katipunan behind the 1896 Revolution proved to be more potent than the previous regionally scattered revolts against the colonizers? Notably, Amapola herself would later concur: "...*si Sir Gervacio ang mas kagaya ni Bonifacio, hindi ako*" (338).

Here, after Amapola was able to resolve her stance as the Tagapagligtas (from the moment she accepted this role until she got rid of Montero to clarify her own stance amidst the warring forces around her), she gradually arrives at more and greater insights on the Pilipinas she is expected to save and the steps that must be taken to bring about this national salvation.

The march as the ultimate confrontation and the return of Nora Aunor (among other returns)

In the 65th and last chapter ("*Katawang Nadagdagan, Nahati at Nabuo*"), the novel gives the closest resolution it can provide. During the march of the combined forces of humans and *manananggals* fighting for their rights, we see the ultimate confrontation. We see the return of Nora Aunor and Bonifacio, in one way or another: the former, through Amapola's speech as read by Nanay Angie at the march:

Pero hindi po ako Itinakda. Kapareho n'yo din lang akong ordinaryong tao, nakakalipad nga lang! ... Tayo po ang tagapagligtas ng bansa!... Tayo po ang tagapagligtas ng bawat isa! Inililigtas natin ang bawat isa nang sa gayon ay mailigtas din natin ang ating mga sarili!

Isn't this reminiscent of Elsa's "*Tayo ang gumagawa ng mga santo at birhen. Walang himala!*" at the end of Ishmael Bernal's film, *Himala*, which Ricky Lee also wrote? One important difference though is that while Elsa's speech was cut short before she could come to any call to action, Amapola's speech, as read by Nanay Angie, is able to reach its conclusion, one that involves a tacit recommendation: "*Alam nating lahat, mahirap ang laban. Pero kung magsasama-sama tayo, aswang man o tao, lahat ay makakaya natin*" (350). After this, a volley of gunfire, just like in the movie *Himala*.

It is on this note of palpable brutality that the novel draws to an end, as the armed forces of the State confront the united forces of the marchers and *manananggals*. It is again the clash of the interests of the privileged few and the exploited majority. This is why Lola Sepa's final thoughts after being shot gain some resonance: "*Parang noong*

panahon ng Kastila, ng US. At kagaya noon, Pilipino pa rin laban sa kapwa Pilipino, nagbubuhos ng dugo sa sariling lupa" (354). As someone who had gone through the turmoil at the end of the Spanish colonial era, she is able to point out the similarity between the situation during her 'first' life and the 'future' situation of her great-granddaughter whom she believes to be the Savior of Pilipinas.

The Nora Aunor element in the novel functions in quite the same manner. Nora Aunor is most famous for her role as Elsa in *Himala* and Neferti Tadiar (2001) has already made a case about the resemblance of Elsa in the film with Nora in real life: both have gained an iconic, if not godlike status, becoming figures the downtrodden and the poor can identify with and pin their hopes on. In Elsa's miracles, the poor have found something to anchor their faith on. In Nora, an underdog (she is small and dark, physical traits disparaged in the mainstream) who became The Superstar, the poor could see the possibility of a similar redemption. Just like in 1982 when *Himala* was released and poverty was so persistent the poor would buy anything—whether a wager in sweepstakes or a miracle-performer—that could get them out of their adversities, Amapola's compatriots were also somehow in need of a savior, though they might have been less conscious of that need.

Establishing the sense of historical continuity primarily through Lola Sepa's character and the Nora Aunor element is very significant because it gives a wider-ranging view of the Pilipinas where Amapola lives and executes her mission. This illumination of Amapola's material setting is important especially following the Marxist proposition that there is a dialectical relationship among individuals and between individuals and their social settings; that is to say, in the same way that individuals can affect the arrangements within their society, the society can affect the decisions and actions of the individuals. More specifically regarding the novel, the complex interplay between the characters and the general condition of Pilipinas and their different motivations and behaviors within this Pilipinas can be seen. Also, solidifying this sense of historical continuity would surely please Jameson whose reaction against the loss of 'historicity' in today's era is coupled with an attack of the same loss. Briefly, Jameson laments this loss because it tends to immobilize us, hinders us from gaining a deeper understanding of our circumstances and the social conditions egging these circumstances and finally preventing any potential for action. Hence, a strong case can be made that if not for Lola Sepa and the Nora Aunor element, Amapola would not have been more deeply aware of the past of the nation she was expected to save and how this past is related to her own time. Consequently, Amapola's decision to accept being the Tagapagligtas might not have happened without this historical awareness.

The book ends by pointing beyond itself

In the protest march in the last chapter, the strength of the Marxist statement on the necessity of violence for the propulsion of history is reaffirmed, like Lola Sepa's point on revolutionary imperatives during the Spanish occupation. Violence, literal or symbolic, is shown as unavoidable if contradictions, whether internal or external, are to be resolved.

Unfortunately, it is this same violence that kills Amapola, perhaps proving once and for all the falsity of the prophecy and hence implicitly calling on the need to work for a new synthesis. Even Lola Sepa comes to realize this:

At ngayon, sa wakas ay alam na niya. Ito ang tunay na propesiya. Tungkol sa isang kinabukasan, isang kinabukasan kung saan isa sa tatlong batang ito (Truman, Baby Mira and Giselle and Isaac's child) ang tunay na Itinakda, tutupad sa lahat. Kung sino ay hindi niya na alam. At mabuti na rin sigurong hindi niya alam. Dahil laging bahagi pala ng buhay niya ang pagkakamali. Nagkamali pala siya ng pinuntahang panahon. Sa hinaharap pa pala siya dapat pumunta. (354-355)

Instead of finality, falsity—the prophecy is belied. And hence, looking forward (to the “*kinabukasan*”) and working for this advance must be sustained. But this time, Lola Sepa is more cautious, issuing her new “prophecy” not with finality but with a welcome tinge of caution and doubt, even professing incomplete knowledge of this new prophecy, which is even better because if we can know everything that is to happen for certain, then what would give us motivation to live and forge ahead in the present, to live and bring about the future? This is perhaps the point of the novel's closure: its lack of closure is its closure. But this is not the same as the fatalist and defeatist version of the poststructuralists, i.e., lack of meaning as meaning, or lack of purpose as purpose. Instead of resolving everything that it opens up, the novel's closure leaves us with even more openings, new ideas to ponder, new possibilities to entertain. This is akin to Parker's elaboration on the ethical way of relating with uncertainty and indeterminacy: “this conception of what we might aim for and how we need to keep open possibilities precisely because arrival at a finished end point would itself close down those possibilities” (2011, 191). The point is not to aim at uttering the Final Word, or committing the Ultimate Act. For when the Word has been said or the Act has been done, how can history proceed? What will be the semblance of progression and motion?

Slavoj Žižek's crucial distinction between the two French words for "future"—"futur" and "avenir"—is pertinent here as well. "Futur" refers to the "continuation of present, full actualization of tendencies which are already here" while "avenir" points to "what is to come, not just 'what will be'". In Žižek's words, we need to adopt a "tragic vision of the social process where there is no hidden teleology guiding us, where every intervention is a jump into the unknown, where the result always thwarts our expectations. All we can be certain of is that the existing system cannot reproduce itself indefinitely..." (2012, 134)

We should all work for the resolutions of the conflicts and contradictions that beset us and our society both internally and externally. But in doing this work, there should be openness to all possibilities of dead-ends, returning and rerouting and constantly moving and not a telic self-righteousness, or dogmatism. Recalling Žižek, the future should be approached not as the "futur" but as the "avenir." This second sense of the word speaks of a future that is not fully knowable but a future that will be created from the present. With Amapola's death and Lola Sepa's tentative view of the future, the novel appears to avoid offering the comfort, even if a lifeless one, of a neat resolution, a happy ending. Amapola and the rest of the *manananggal* cabal along with the human protesters do not appear to have won against the powers-that-be and their armies. Pilipinas remains unsaved. Perhaps Ricky Lee is tacitly exhorting all of us: let go of this book and continue engaging with our personal and social contradictions—it is in the struggles taking place in our immediate environment and in the larger society where genuine deliverance could come about.

NOTES

1. All quotations from the novel in this paper are from this first edition.
2. The feminine pronoun will be used to refer to Amapola in this novel where gender is persistently destabilized.
3. Term used to refer to the loyal and avid fans of legendary Filipino actress Nora Aunor.
4. His first novel, *Para kay B (O Kung Paano Dinevastate ng Pag-ibig ang 4 out of 5 sa Atin)*, was published in 2008. A famous scriptwriter, Lee was already well-known as a multi-awarded short story writer before his entry into Philippine cinema.
5. There are anomalies in this phrasing, let alone in its very concept. First, tagging this condition as "disorder" is causing quite an uproar within the field of psychology, pointing to the effects of this 'mere' linguistic label on the way we understand and relate to the people who have

this condition. Posing more difficulty is making sense of the condition itself for it prompts us to look at the complex and interrelated issue of identity-formation, having a sense of the Self, how it is constituted, and so on. But to satisfy our need for a working definition of dissociative identity, the following might be acceptable: "the presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states... that recurrently take control of behaviour" (Hardcastle and Flanagan 1999, 646).

6. Looking at these two alters of Amapola can help us not just in complicating our view of Amapola but also our notion of the Self or Identity as suggested in the preceding note. The novel states, "*Mahiyain si Zaldy. Closet queen kasi*" while Isaac is "*pag sa ibang tao hindi talaga masalita.... Machong barumbado. And needless to say, guwapo*" (9). 'Inside' Amapola are two personalities that are radically different from and often literally quarrelling with each other or Amapola himself (we can also speak of two personalities constituting Amapola's "identity"). Even further, inside Amapola is a "closet queen," a personality who in itself is not self-evident, who might also be hiding something 'within.'
7. Perhaps the more appropriate term would be, the 'representation' of herself.
8. Paul De Man for instance sought to complicate the difference between "grammar" and "rhetoric" in order to go against the logocentric idea of a "consistent link between sign and meaning" (1979, 8). In stating however that "rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration" (1979, 10), De Man seems to remain confined in the realm of language in explaining meaning-making. Meanwhile, Mark Poster, in his introduction to Baudrillard's *Selected Writings* speaks of language "los[ing] its reciprocity" at the time of Renaissance, ushering the "era of the sign." Poster adds, "In the late twentieth century, signs become completely separated from their referents" (1988, 4) and then become "floating signifiers," as if their meaning is derived solely from their relationship with fellow groundless signifiers.
9. This even though many detractors try to argue that "Communism" corresponds to the Hegelian "Geist."
10. As a short side note, I think that *Amapola* can be read as performing in order to give the impression of following the trajectory of classical or traditional plotting, with the conflict building up to a climax and finding a neat resolution as the narrative ends. The novel, however, digresses from this pattern in the end. Instead of something that amounts to closure, the novel ends with hints that pave the way for musing beyond the text. I see this as Lee's way of implying something about the relationship between his "fictional" Pilipinas and the country where we live and fart and breathe. One can even surmise that Lee is also working from a dialectical framework which admits it that cannot pronounce the end-all and be-all of everything. By neither providing all the answers in the end or neatly resolving all the problems raised in the novel, Lee is also impugning established traits of fiction. Without this digression, the novel will be hermetically and all too joyfully sealed, will be kept as an independent narrative with

no relationship whatsoever to our own actual lives and narratives. The 'resolution' that the novel carries is instead one that points beyond it, and hence something that it can no longer encapsulate, can no longer utter.

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