EDEL GARCELLANO, THE FILIPINO CRITIC IN A TIME OF WAR

Caroline S. Hau

ABSTRACT

Edel Garcellano's coruscating wit, trenchant analyses, and principled critical stance and interventions on literary, cultural, social, and political issues have made him one of the most influential, though underappreciated, critics of our time. This article combines personal reminiscences with an attempt to provide a preliminary overview of Garcellano's key ideas about the inter-disciplinal task of imagination and criticism, the role of "the Filipino critic in a time of war" (to use Garcellano's term) and the necessity of engaging in "contrapuntal readings" that interrogate the politics of reading, writing and the text, while remaining vigilant about the location and locution of the critic herself/himself.

EDEL GARCELLANO, POET, critic, novelist, teacher, passed away on April 23, 2020, at the age of 73.

I first met Edel in 1990, right after I graduated from the University of the Philippines at Diliman and applied for a job as an Instructor at the Department of English and Comparative Literature.

As an undergraduate, I had many excellent, inspiring teachers—Franz Arcellana, Amelia Bonifacio, NVM Gonzalez, Nieves Epistola, Winifred Evangelista, Wilhelmina Ramos, Pacita Fernandez, Sylvia Ventura, Yolanda Tomeldan, among others—who trained me in the art of reading, writing, and research.

In those days, literary studies was largely New Critical, formalist in spirit, orientation, and method. English majors studied the classics and engaged in "close reading" of literary works. My concentration was "Imaginative Writing," not "Creative Writing" (don't ask me what's the difference). We read novels, plays, and poems, not "texts." We worked on "analyses", not "critiques."

The education was not entirely (neo-)colonial. Our solid grounding in English and American literature (no problem acing the GRE Literature in English test when the time came to apply for graduate school in America) was complemented by language-training in Spanish, French, and Chinese and by coursework in Philippine, European, and Asian literature. Few of the courses at UP were being taught in Filipino, and there were no courses specifically devoted to Southeast Asian, Latin American, and African literature.

Encountering Edel came as a shock, intellectually and otherwise. With his leonine features, polemical style of talking and writing, and unfailing sense of humor, Edel was charismatic, funny, and provocative. Unflinching and unrelenting in his pursuit of a point of fact or argument, he embodied a critical stance that I had only read about in the pages of the *La Solidaridad* and the *Philippine Collegian,* in the loose-leafed Xerox copies of essays, pamphlets, and little red books that our Social Science II instructors surreptitiously circulated among select students, and in the mimeographed manifestos and statements issued at rallies and demonstrations.

Edel helped me make sense of these unfolding social, political, and economic crises wrought by the return of elite democracy; the killing of activists, journalists, and farmers; the coups d'état mounted by the military; the ballooning foreign debt; the failure of agrarian reform; the crippling power shortages; and the succession of natural disasters.

Some of the UP English department's junior faculty began gravitating toward Edel and gathering at his office at the Faculty Center to form a kapatiran of sorts. The office, room 1127, was meant for all of the department lecturers, but for us junior faculty, it was quickly known as "Edel's office" or, simply, "FC1127."

I was part of a group that included people like Felicidad "Bliss" Cua Lim, poet and film critic and scholar now based in the University of California at Irvine; Antonio "Tonchi" Tinio, activist and former national chairperson of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers who has represented the ACT Teachers Partylist at the 15th, 16th, and 17th Kongreso ng Pilipinas; Patricia Arinto, Dean of the Faculty of Education of the UP Open University;

and Maria Theresa "Tess" Dizon (De Vega), a career official at the Department of Foreign Affairs and currently Philippine Ambassador to Germany.

Through Edel, I was introduced to Neferti Tadiar (one of the Philippines' foremost literary critics, now at Barnard College), Luisa Mallari (before she went to the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia to do her now-classic comparative study of Tagalog and Malaysian novels; a plane crash cut short the life of one of our country's pioneering Southeast Asianists), and the inspiring revolutionary and teacher Monico Atienza. We were joined by the Filipino-American scholar John "Jody" Blanco, and would in turn link up with Jaime Biron Polo, who was then with the Department of Anthropology, and Patrick Flores of the Department of Art Studies to form the Critical Forum.

As Jody Blanco has rightly pointed out, Edel "was the real heart and soul" of the Critical Forum's project of bringing together "scholars, artists (in literature, film, and the performing arts), journalists, and cultural workers to engage in dialogues over social and cultural issues" (Blanco in Garcellano 1998, 263). Edel's office, room 1127 on the ground floor of the Faculty Center, which sadly burned down in 2016, became our meeting ground, the place we gravitated toward in order to discuss books and ideas, debate the issues of the day, hang out between and after classes, and dream up ways to criticize, perhaps even disrupt, what we saw as the reactionary complacency of our field and the institutional practices of reading, writing, teaching, and working in academia more generally that underpinned it.

Most of Edel's students remember him for his coruscating wit, his trenchant analyses, and his principled stance

and interventions on issues ranging from the EDSA "Drama" (as Edel calls it) to the Second Great Rectification Movement of 1992 within the Communist Party of the Philippines; from the possibilities and limits of Filipino feminist and progressive writing to the reigning cult of the author, the literary award, and literary barkada; from the nativist and anti- theory turn in Philippine scholarship to the importance, but also pitfalls, of academic konfrontasi between progressive intellectuals, on the one hand, and writers, artists, academics and media practitioners, on the other hand, who, as Edel put it, "have arrogated upon themselves this privileged slot in the so-called 'command post' of civil society" (Garcellano, "The Silence of the Lambs" 1998, 146).

To me, however, Edel was the consummate listener. I have a clear image still of Edel sitting quietly, head slightly bent down and forward, listening intently, intervening very infrequently to ask brief but pointed questions that forced the speaker to be clarify her ill- conceived thoughts, reconsider the ideological position that grounds her thinking and action, and attend to the gaps and silences that riddle her own agenda. Edel defies the basic assumptions that still inform our commonsensical ideas of the critic as teacher, assumptions that purport to deconstruct, yet continue to affirm, the teacher as charismatic intellectual, autonomous subject, fountain of truth and wisdom, and source of one-way learning and transmission of knowledge in which the teacher shapes the student. Edel's statement about his pedagogical practice--or more accurately, his anti-pedagogy--is revealing, not least for its resolute modesty, which those who don't know Edel would find surprising in light of his famously fearsome, provocative public and intellectual persona. In a 1994 interview with the *Philippine Collegian,* he gives us an idea of

this anti-pedagogy: "Hindi naman ako nakikibaka sa classroom. It's just that I say what I want to say, according to the logic of my discourse. Pero yung messianic spirit that I will change the kids, wala. In fact, they're the ones changing me." (Garcellano "Isang Panayam" 1998, 215) He goes on to joke that "Ako nga tamad ngayon, kasi tamad ang mga estudyante ko," but he then goes back to his main point: "So, ang nangyayari I do things on my own. Basa na lang ako nang basa."

Although I had never had the privilege of being Edel's student, the way he talked about what he did in his classes suggests to me that the value of coming into contact with a teacher like Edel, who changes your way of thinking, perhaps even your way of life, has more to do with the critical stance Edel encourages his most gifted students to develop on their own rather than any distinct style or method of teaching, let alone transfer of ideas. The critical stance Edel nurtures is largely free of, indeed inimical to, the kind of consumer-oriented credentialing that now afflicts our institutions of learning.

Edel was of a generation that was radicalized by the political and intellectual ferment of the 1960s and early 1970s, the generation that experienced martial law and was fully aware of the brutality beneath the mask of what Imelda Marcos, shamelessly stealing from the Latin Americans, called the "smiling dictatorship." Edel once told me that getting a failing grade of "singko" in class was a badge of honor in the fight against reactionary teachers, the irrelevance of the subject being taught to students, and the bureaucratism, careerism, and self-promotion of academics and artists (including creative writers) who engage in vicious infighting over the crumbs that the state and the private sector deign to brush off the table. He was also of

that generation of writers, like Nick Joaquin, Gregorio Brillantes, and Kerima Polotan, who, whatever their ideological stripes, honed their skills in journalism and had first-hand experience of the world outside the cloisters of academia. In his time, as he would say in his "Letter to Young Poets" (2016), "The idea of a Ph.D. or master's in whatever was somewhat preposterous."

Edel's partner Rosario "Chats" Garcellano, whom Edel always fondly called the "real writer in the family," and whom I had the pleasure of meeting before I ever met Edel when Nieves Epistola invited her to speak to our undergraduate class about the world of newspaper publishing, embodies the integrity of the prodigiously talented, peerless writer who combines a refreshing professionalism with a prose that is as scintillating as it is incisive, as you can see from the essays collected in her book, the classic *Mean Streets: Essays on the Knife Edge* (1991), and her editorials for the Philippine Daily Inquirer. The kind of professionalism Chats exemplifies is worlds away from the debased way the term "professional" is now used.

The current professionalization of the university, its obsession with counting faculty members with PhDs and the number of students enrolled in a discipline or program, its preoccupation with global rankings based partly on publications in journals that are included in selected, largely USA- and Anglophone-centric citation indices, its consumer-oriented approach to teaching that turns teachers into entrepreneurial whores who need to sell themselves and make their courses attractive to upper-middle-class students who have no use for either Marxism or critical thinking or literature and the arts, unless they can make money off any of them--all these pitfalls

have made it impossible for people like Edel to join the regular university faculty, let alone obtain tenure and job security that free them to pursue their own research interests and writing projects.

Edel's writing often presents itself as a view from the margins because it is writing that is undertaken, against great odds and often at great risk of further marginalization, from a position of precarity that the better-paid, tenured intellectuals based in the Philippines and abroad can never begin to understand. Paid by the hour, subject to negative evaluation by students who are too dumb, too pampered, too ambitious to make it in the status quo, to appreciate the critical stance he is trying to nurture, the intellectual precariat would also be subject to the tyranny of yearly renewals at the discretion of a succession of department chairs who find it easier to play by the bureaucratic rules rather than challenge and change these regulations, and by colleagues who think the university ought either to be some kind of social club where people are buddy-buddy and civil to each other or else a collection of guilds and factions, keen to promote the interests of their members at the expense of members of other factions and outsiders. Meantime, print, airwaves, and the ethernet are polluted by uninformed, under-researched, under-examined, and reactionary opinions.

Furthermore, playing the rankings game has also led to the branding of a few top elite schools, overwhelmingly Anglo-American, and the uncritical valorization of the STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) at the expense of the Humanities, while leading the human sciences--particularly economics and political science--into the trap of

trying to shore up their scientific credentials by disregarding the contribution of the Humanities to their own disciplinal thinking and practices.

Deirdre McCloskey (1994) has argued, for example, that economists routinely fall into the trap of relying too much on mathematical models while ignoring the fact that economists rely on rhetorical and narrative strategies to persuade each other and other people of the validity of their arguments. In turn, Arjun Appadurai (2013) and Jens Beckert (2016) have argued that the dynamics of capitalism are shaped by temporality, specifically by the imagined futures that actors create and try to realize. Capitalists seek to turn the risk and uncertainty that attend the future--the fact that we can never fully anticipate nor control what happens in the future--into opportunities for making profit and hedging their losses. In fact, the profitable enterprise of futures trading--where people enter into contracts to buy and sell at a specified future-- is propelled by narratives that encode fictional expectations of what the future might bring, expectations that in turn help make that future but also are subject to political contestation.

Political scientists, on the other hand, have been busy banishing the question of incalculable uncertainty from their analyses, so obsessed are they with calculating only risks that they can understand and control, the better to come up with their parsimonious, variables-based explanations and their so-called theories. Observing the struggle for hegemony between the United States and China, they pull terms like the Thucydides's trap (Allison 2017) out of their drawers or asses, all the while ignoring the fact that the battlegrounds have multiplied beyond land and sea to encompass air, space, cyberspace, and the

electromagnetic spectrum. They have largely neglected to do basic empirical research, relying on English without bothering to learn the local, regional, and national languages of the countries they study, and, worse, end up talking to each other inside their guilds without attending to the creative, innovative ways in which humans respond to situations of uncertainty. This is why, for example, no one really listens to political scientists when it comes to policy making, and most activists greet with skepticism the political scientists' call for a comparative-historical method of study (Kuhonta 2014), laudable though that call may be, because, as Ramon Guillermo (2018) has said in the case of the Philippines, "the main reason for the relative dearth of comparative studies is the fact that there is (as of yet) no strongly felt need for doing them in the Philippine academic context. In other words, the rationale for undertaking such work is still a puzzle for Philippine academics. It is not yet clear what comparative studies with respect to other Southeast Asian countries can contribute to a better understanding of Philippine issues and realities. All other obstacles (including language study and study grants) could potentially be overcome if these questions are answered in a way that would convince more academics."

The task of imaginative writing and criticism cannot and should not be corralled in the narrow confines of existing fields, institutions, and practices. Edel in fact argues in favor of the inter-disciplinal nature of the study of culture. He says: "Maraming nagtuturo ng literature na limited ang notion, for instance, sa psychology, political economy, etc. Interdisciplinal ang area na ito" (Garcellano "Isang Panayam" 1998, 255). Such interdisciplinary orientation has not only cleared new grounds in the study of Philippine literature, film, and culture. It resonates as well with more recent revaluations and recuperations of Marxism

in the fields of economics, political science, human geography and other branches of social sciences, and in ecology and the natural sciences and the philosophy of science.

In his novel *Ficcion,* Edel has his narrator enjoin the reader to take up the Janus-faced challenge: "Masdan ang kasaysayan. Tumingin ka sa sarili" (Garcellano 1978, 105). The biggest challenge for our young, emerging intellectuals is to grapple not just with the conceptual implications of the split within the Philippine Left, but with the praxiological implications of the various courses of action undertaken by factions of the Left leadership since the Second Rectification, some of which include working within the pores of the state and working with trapos, NGOs, and other forces across multiple scales of the local, regional, national, and global. Edel does not mince words when it comes to assailing the populist ruses of a Manny Villar or what he calls the disastrous "negotiated settlement" circa 2010 of a united front that brings together "the likes of Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the militarist Ariel Querubin, and the party-list radicals Satur Ocampo and Liza Maza " (Garcellano 2010). But he is not one to impose his views on others. Instead, he tells our young intellectuals: "So, ikaw ang magdesisyon. Mag-analyze ka. Ang problema ng mga bata ngayon ay ang mode of analysis na gagamitin nila, the history of revolution. Ang burden ngayon ay nasa inyo, to go beyond your notion of the Left, at the same time you must arm yourself with proper analytical methods that are more sophisticated and informed in terms of interventions. Puedeng magsimula sa recuperation ng mga Maoist at saka global politics of monopoly capitalism...Precisely that everything is not right, you have the possibility of changing it." (256-57)

True to his word, Edel practices what he preaches, offering a way of reading that he has characterized as "contrapuntal reading" (Garcellano "A Young Man's Fiction's Macro/Micro Readings"1998, 78), one that makes, to use another of Edel's terms, a "negative reader" of all of us, "s/he who must posit a reflexive distrust of the thought-system, though trapped within it" (79), who renders "visible the invisible marks of the class struggle" (ibid.). In his poem "Words" (Garcellano 2012, 10), he writes of the double bind and challenge of speaking truth to power: "There is no salvation in the saying of words--/But what weapon do we use/against that which oppresses & chokes?/ Silence overwhelms/but we must keep on inventing the word/ that will smash/the thick glass of air between us./The task is heroic./Poetry is a minor matter."

This critical vigilance is rooted in what Edel calls an "aesthetic of totalization [that] is crisscrossed today by nationalist consolidation, postmodern fragmentation, capitalist globalization and colonial recuperation, socialist emergence and authoritarian option" (Garcellano "Bamboo in the Wind and the Strategy of Containment" 1998, 24). These are words Edel used in the 1990s, and it is a mark of his acuity that they remain relevant and urgent even now, in the age of Duterte and Trump, which marries the populist backlash against the elite-driven and elite-profiting globalization of capital and labor to a virulent identity politics based on racism, sexism, and religious intolerance, a time of ever-penetrating state and capitalist surveillance that allows politicians and governments to track dissidents using GPS and facial recognition software on cameras and through their own mobile devices and manipulate elections in their own and other countries, and allows corporations and other organizations to mine the personal data collected from

people's everyday use of the internet and mobile devices such as watches, phones, game consoles, and computers. Most of Edel's critical writing was focused on the postmodern turn and its problematical engagement with the issue of truth under erasure, which Edel rightly assailed for ignoring the historical, political, and cultural contexts in which truth has been put under erasure. I wonder what Edel would have thought of the world we live in now, where truth is now actively under erasure, truth is under siege by troll armies and purveyors of fake news, a time of tough-talking strongmen and armchair commandos for whom willful ignorance abetted by shameless, outright lying is the new, widespread norm.

Ficcion was completed in 1972 at the height of political and intellectual ferment and activism just before the declaration of Martial Law (and published in 1978). It is a fine novel that to my mind has not received the critical attention it deserves. In it, Edel already makes a case for writing as an ethical practice, a form of responsibility and solidarity that comes out of bearing witness to, as Petronilo Bn. Daroy has pointed out in his Foreword to the novel, the "scenario of events unfold[ing] before your eyes--events in which you have not at all participated, which you cannot change, but which, as they enclose your life, change you and carry you along their ineluctable logic" (Daroy "Foreword" 1978, vi). Listen now to the narrator in Ficcion: "Samakatwid, ang pagsulat ay malaking responsibilidad; ang salita ay di dapat maging sandatang magagamit ng kaaway...Ang blangkong papel ay magkakaroon ng katarungang sosyal at indibidwal, mababuhay sa gunamgunam ng lahat. Ang pagsulat ay ang pagbabalikat, hindi lamang ng sakit ng tao, kundi ang sakit at lunas ng sansinukob...Ngunit bakit ayaw intindihin ito? Bakit

marami pa rin ang nagpipilit maglublob sa lumang kaisipan?" (192-193).

There are echoes of Rizal and Bonifacio and Amado Hernandez here, and also of Sartre and De Beauvoir, whom Edel cites liberally in his tale of the intersecting lives of three male student activists from different class backgrounds, one, the aptly named Simon Extranjero (think Rizal's Simoun), a scion of a powerful hacendero family from the Isla del Fuego, another named Elias Resurrecion (Rizal's Elias resurrected), the son of what we now call the educated urban middle-sector of schoolteachers, and still another, Andres Dimasalang (a latter-day Bonifacio), a descendant of the taong-labas tulisan, now working alongside radicalized peasants and workers to challenge the oligarchy. What is interesting about the novel is not only its exploration of the contradictions and conundrums of the masculine codes of ilustrado activism--the ways in which gender, class, and ideology define the possibilities but also limits of the students and intellectuals' political thought and activism during the First Quarter Storm--but also, and far more important, the way the explosion of parenthetical remarks throughout the text enables a multitude of voices from different walks of life to break through, and break open, the narrator's prose and interrupt his so-called transcription of Simon's storytelling with their own claims.

Here we see already the demotic impulse at work that anticipates the turn in Edel's thinking and writing toward an avowed Marxian-inflected critical discourse alongside a fellow traveler's critical sympathy with the radical movement, even as Edel, like Marx, said that he was not a Marxist (Garcellano

"Isang Panayam" 1998, 256). Edel would put the art of inserting parenthetical remarks to polemical use in his succeeding essays, with their branching flights of inquiry and commentary that require readers to do the difficult work of reading and re-reading toward a genealogy of knowledge (Garcellano "Part One: If Dumbo Could Write, He Would Have Written Thus:" 1998, 123) that "defines its own construction" as a text (Garcellano "Speaking from the Margins of Margins" 1998, 55) while gleaning "the traces that inhere in these polyphonic discourses" (Garcellano "Part One" 1998, 123).

By the time Edel published his essay "The Filipino as Critic in a Time of War" (Garcellano 2001) in 2001, his position on the task of criticism was clear. The Filipino critic, he says, "knows that ours is a society under siege," that the critic "is not innocent and has his/her ideological filiations and modes," "that his/her viewing eye has its own blind spots from which he/she views himself/herself/the world," "that the aperture of his text is the closure of his/her consciousness which does not/cannot transcend history and society" and "that indeed his/her truth as canon is also a possible imprimatur of his/her lies" (246). "[O]ur locution defines/betrays our location" (248). Critics, regardless of their institutional rubric--are "in effect already enlisted as active combatants in a field where forces of resistance and imperialism are locked in a fatal embrace." (249) What they say and do have consequences, not least the inherent danger that their words and actions can be used or twisted by the state, the military, business and media against the progressive movements whose cause they espouse. This is what Edel means when he declares: "ang salita ay di dapat maging sandatang magagamit ng kaaway" (Garcellano 1978, 192).

In this critical spirit, Edel has given us some of the most exemplary Marxian-inspired readings of novels like Azucena Grajo-Uranza's *Bamboo in the Wind* and the strategy of containment it deploys to elide class differences and antagonisms and to valorize ilustrado vanguardism (Garcellano "Bamboo in the Wind" 1998, 23); and Miguel Syjuco's *Ilustrado* for its "projected imagining of an underground novel [that ends up] sublimat[ing] his disavowal of the movement itself" (Garcellano 2010).

Edel's critique, I think, can be fruitfully extended to a number of other recent novels such as Gina Apostol's *Gun Dealers' Daughter* (2010), which deploys irony as an artistic device to load the dice in favor of political defeatism by reducing the fraught issue of ilustrado engagement with, and involvement in, revolution to a simplistic tale of solipsism and adventurism on the part of a couple of well-meaning but misguided rich kids playing at being irresponsible revolutionaries, whose assassination of an etiolated version of Colonel Edward Lansdale-Mister Kurtz/Colonel Walter E. Kurtz results in the death of one of the conspirators' driver, and whose well-connected families then proceed to shield them from the violence of state reprisal.

The novel is indebted to the Rizalian thesis without being able to advance or deepen Rizal's discussion of revolutionary violence. In *Gun Dealers' Daughter,* Simoun's filibusterismo, which had mobilized students, farmers, and taong labas, dwindles to a sparrow unit of two, bereft of either intellectual substance or institutional ties to progressive organizations and movements. Even as the novel trivializes Simoun's flawed revolutionary endeavor (not to mention gives short shrift to real-life people who broke ranks with the privileged classes to

become activists and dealt with the life-changing, even life-threatening, consequences of their decision to do so [see the example provided by Pimentel 2013]), it resolutely avoids the vexing issue of the ethical dilemma with which Rizal's Elias grappled. For Elias, the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" is not, as Walter Benjamin puts it, " a criterion of judgment, but... a guideline for the actions of persons or communities who have to wrestle with it in solitude and, in exceptional cases, to take on themselves the responsibility of ignoring it" (Benjamin 1986, 298).

In real life, the New People's Army Alex Boncayao Brigade has been linked to the assassination of Colonel James Rowe, chief of the ground forces division of the Joint United States Military Assistance Group, on April 21, 1989 (and the serious wounding of Rowe's Filipino driver, Joaquin Vinuya). *Gun Dealers'* literary version of the assassination of an American colonel literally relegates to the margins the radical Left actors and their motivations and responsibility as well as continuing struggle against oppression.

The novel's tokenistic nod at the radical Left is evident in its depiction of the lone true activist, Solidaridad Soledad. Soli sporadically flits in and out of the narrative. Her job in the novel is to serve as a character foil to her tokayo, Sol Soliman. Worse, Soli's attempts to persuade one of the conspirators, Sol Soliman, to join the social movement—a movement that offers the kind of solidarity that is irreducible to the narcissistic pitfalls of thinking and acting in solitude—are perfunctorily depicted and, above all, plotted to fail. Soli Soledad's inevitable scapegoating (along with the accidental death of the Solimans' faithful, long-time family driver) marshals the novel toward its obligatory

climax and resolution: Sol's crisis of conscience and mental-psychic breakdown. Soledad's brutal salvaging by the military simultaneously saves and traumatizes her namesake.

The sacrifice of Soli Soledad is largely overshadowed by the novel's ironic revelation that Sol Soliman's gun-dealer parents not only arranged the scapegoating of the activist, but also knew all along about their daughter and her boyfriend's plan to kill the American colonel and exploited the assassination to promote their business interests. In *Gun Dealers' Daughter,* the state- and capital-instigated violence inflicted upon people who are working to change the system feeds into an overall vision of an omniscient, omnipotent ruling class that brooks no effective resistance. In such an elite-dominated system, resistance is futile; beneficiaries of that system should just (literally) forget about trying to change it.

One comes away from this novel with deep misgivings, fueled by the strong suspicion that its "surprise" revelation functions more as a handy plot-twist device to heighten suspense and offer the obligatory ironic "shock ending" than as a serious artistic meditation on issues of ethical responsibility and political instrumentality that the tragic death of innocents necessarily triggers. Apostol's failure to artistically and intellectually engage with the ethical dilemma of revolutionary violence (an issue with which Filipino activists and rebels have long grappled [see, for example, Weekley 2001, 166-67; Jones 1989, 68-69])—a failure of imagination that puts art in the service of the fashionable ambivalence of political quietism—yields not only a literary iteration of "the false commitment of the inserted political reference" (Williams 1980, 23), but also, and more important,

a political reiteration of the truism that conflates revolutionary violence with the death-of-innocents "excesses" of Jacobin Terror. To borrow Edel's phrase warning of "minor subversions" by "imaginary warriors," such writings "legitimize...non-choice, despair" (Garcellano "A Reductive Letter to Imaginary Warriors: Or Minor Subversions for Our Times" 2001, 8). They invoke revolution, only to de-fang it by exiling it (literally) to the margins and placing it at an intellectual, existential, political, and moral distance from their principal narrators, who are left to wallow in self-pity, angst, and alienation, or, in the case of Gun Dealers', suffer a nervous breakdown and take a permanent vacation from life in expensive medical facilities, paid for their rich and all-powerful parents. Above all, these "minor subversions" retail recipes for non-action, for political passivity amidst inequality, injustice, and political crisis. They bring to mind Fredric Jameson's (1994, 118) timely reminder that reflexivity is not necessarily subversive, and "antipolitical irony" as an aesthetic device often serves to "bracket...any fundamental personal and political commitment, while enabling the contemplative and henceforth purely aesthetic persistence of an oppositional social stance."

Edel's critics complain about the difficulty of his prose. In answer to one of those people who decry the use of theoretical jargon, Edel issues this memorable rejoinder based on an analogy that gestures at Edel's own background as a former Physics major: "[I]f he can't possibly follow the convolutions of the theory of relativity, much less Hawking's theory of an expanding universe, should he burn those scientists at the stake for mystifying him?" (Garcellano "Philippine Hermeneutics and the Kingpins of the Hill 2001, 85).

Indeed, one of the pleasures of reading Edel lies in coming across the bons mots he lobs, usually at critics, many of them self-proclaimed nationalists, who start fights that they have neither the stomachs nor brains to see through to the end, or at the complacent (and complaisant), self-congratulatory shibboleths and truisms peddled by academics and writers, "as if," Edel reminds us, "writing were easy." Edel speaks, for instance, of the culture of self-interest that prevails in academia, noting of the UP English department in his time that "There should be paper reading every week dito pero wala kang maapuhap. Ang paper lang dito yung panglinis ng puwet." (Garcellano "Isang Panayam," 253).

Even among people who think and declare themselves progressive, Edel remains critically vigilant. Listen to Edel chide the middle-class feminists: "You are able to pursue your feminist activities because you have your surrogate slaves [i.e., katulong]" (ibid., 255). To aspiring writers dreaming of Palanca literary awards, he says: "Why write, in the first place, for contests? ...[I] s your ego so puny that you need a pat on the head by three or probably four buffoons who would confer on you some cash from a corporate entity that keeps people intoxicated, and a certificate born of their self-styled assessment of your work?" (Garcellano "Philippine Hermeneutics and the Kingpins of the Hill" 2001, 72). Of one advocate of nativism, Edel writes that he "heard his own voice, like a small-town cacique orating at the town plaza before some dogs and promenadors" (Garcellano "Part One" 1998, 128), saying of the same man that to hear him "regale us with the parochialism [of his nativism]...is to hear a child shout in your ears that he has discovered how the faucet works" and concludes with this sentence, surely one of the most memorable

in the Philippines' long history of giyera patani: "He has not lost mind, really, only--alas--his teeth" (128).

There is one final thing I'd like to say about Edel's work, and this has to do with Edel's keen sense of temporality and the inexorable change that the passage of time brings. In his prose-poem "Unfinished Business" (Garcellano 2012, 212), he writes: "Always, a person is an unfinished business. Somehow, one imagines oneself traveling on the road, meeting people who would go their separate ways. Always, what would be left are bits & pieces of a conversation, a voice, a gesture..." Not for nothing does he entitle one of his collections of poetry *Vanishing History.* A number of his later poems, including those collected in *Sons of Naujan: Poems in the Labyrinth of Time* (2016), can be read as acts of remembering, commemorations not only of family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, of people whom he personally met and admired such as Monico Atienza, Dante Ambrosio, and PUP's own Nemesio Prudente, but also the recording of what Edel calls the "inconsequential history" of the anonymous and ordinary people, the janitor and the vendor, the farmer.

Edel also engages in acts of empathy and critique beyond national borders, bearing witness to lives lived by strangers in far-away lands: the people of Tohoku region in Japan after the earthquake and tsunami of 2011, the people who took part in the Arab spring; George "Dubya" Bush, Musharraf, Ghadafi, and Arroyo and their ilk, but also Hamza Al-Khateeb, aged 13, who died in the hands of the Syrian authorities, and Chen Chou Chang, who badgered the Chinese authorities for the missing corpse of his father, killed by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution; General Ratko Mladic, who oversaw

the massacre of 8,000 Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in 1995, during the Bosnian War, and Comrade Duch, the Khmer Rouge warden responsible for executing the more than 12,000 Cambodians who were incarcerated in Pol Pot's notorious Tuol Sleng prison; the chess genius Bobby Fischer, and also the countless unnamed men, women, and children who came to Edel's attention in person, in print and media, and made a home for themselves in his mind and in his poetry.

When I had a chance to talk to him in person, over a cup of coffee, or increasingly, long- distance over the phone, and asked him how he was doing, he used to say "Oh, the usual. Nothing has changed. I'm still here." This is the Edel I will always remember. The novelist and literary critic Amado Anthony Mendoza III (2018, 90) trenchantly observes that Edel's critical and poetic work, "characterized by a metacritical and confrontational mien," "gestur[es] towards a more political type of literary criticism, or as some critics are wont to say: a demonstrably polyvalent, multivectoral, and self-reflexive Marxist critique of politics and culture" that is all the more exigent because it is so rarely practiced in these troubled times.

I leave you with poem no. 12 from Edel's "Troubadour" (2014), marking the anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law. Here is Edel, speaking to those of us who lived through, or in the shadow of, the EDSA Drama and its ambiguous, ambivalent legacy. Here is Edel exhorting us to commit a different kind of apostasy, the opposite of reactionary apostates who purvey false histories and fake news. Here is Edel exhorting us to exercise critical vigilance and, just as important, take action against the barbarians who are well past our gates, who have always dwelled within our walls.

It's been 42 long years
since the people tried
to reclaim the Palace
& drive the dictator away,
like a dog with its looping tail!
O how this generation
of texts & internet
has erased the memory
of a once-heroic deed?
But the executioner's family
is back in the saddle &
the children are basking
in the glory
of the legislative government!
O America,
who gave shelter
to both warring families,
what crimes have you committed?
To stop the intramural
among the mafia gadflies?
The traitors are back
in church,
given the sacrament
as if they were repentant, innocent.
Do the people deserve their fate?
Amnesia is the scourge
of history?
Guerillas still linger
at the gates,
hunted by dogs of the state:
O the law proclaims

the rule of fair play,
they have rights & privileges!
O shit!
This is the country
that never learns its lessons!
Alas, behind the curtain
peeks
another apostate!

May there be more apostates and apostasy among us.
Mabuhay ka, Edel! Mabuhay ang Pilipinas!

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