

HOMO TROPICUS: A YEARNING

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Abstract

Variations on the theme of the tropical diptych suggest a temporality whose percussion presents a counterpoint to the habit of symphonic time, that is, temperate time, one premised on a quadruple measure of exuberance (summer), descent (autumn), cessation (winter), and nascence (spring). What I am trying to introduce here is a sense of a choreography that may be akin to a primal *fort-da*—a kinesis that elicits at the same time that it donates an attunement to the earth that is more displaced than located. Hence I begin the utterance, even an ululation, of a desire to seek out what remains from this movement—what could be that creature of stasis that may as well be a worldling, an indigene, a subject whose promise is a species whom we name *homo tropicus*.

Keywords

anachronistic space, autochthone, homotropy, Manila, time of the Other, tropology

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As long as the waiting can only be directed toward some other and toward some *arrivant*; one can and must wait for something else, hence expect some other—as when one is said to expect *that* something will happen or that some other will arrive.¹

- Jacques Derrida

I

In my tropics, I had been taught to yearn for *tagsaldang*, the “time of the sun.” One could not help desiring this time, especially if the “time of the rains,” *tag-uran*, had seemed to extend its welcome.

Tagsaldang, tag-uran:

Luminance, and of things lutescent in their exposure: a *langka* halved at the ripest spot, the now-swarthy hand that picks up the sappy flesh, and the afternoon that allows the delectated to look out and catch the gleam of another fruit—perhaps the mango drooping from a branch, perhaps the banana already fallen from its stalk, perhaps the passion fruit demure among the scorched fronds.

Precipitation, and those worn and carried to be safe from the torrents. Straw hats and rubber boots, plastic raincoats and silk umbrellas. And thoughts spun with hope (“He shall be home tonight, the carabao is sturdy enough for him to ride against the flood”) and unraveled in defiance (“I don’t care if the crops drown, my wife will labor for our firstborn until midnight”).

The tropical year, as far as the Philippine rendition is concerned, is one that is measured in *double* time. The matheme can only be 2. The tempo of the folk rests on this rhythm. In the enactment of this premise, when double time is rehearsed and repeated in daily life, that is where the desire is syncopated.

Yearning for another time can happen in *tagsaldang*, especially when one, scantily clad and yet still perspiring, awakes at high noon and remembers that it is also *tag-init*, “hot time.” If the plantation is found dire because of the drought, the morning can’t get any worse. While one may yearn for rain, and even perform a rite to summon the waters above to descend and salve the parched earth, another simply skips the idea of the wet months to dream of *taglipot*, that “cool time” from December onwards. Until the body can no longer take the breeze, and it starts to yearn for the respite of March to come, in order to have a reprieve from those diseases brought by the cooling. *Tagsaldang, tag-uran. Tag-init, taglipot.* Between the sun and the rain, the hot and the cold. Such is the way we kept track of the passing of “time,” or, *panahon*. Or, such is my remembrance of those times.

II

Variations on the theme of the tropical diptych suggest a temporality whose percussion presents a counterpoint to the habit of symphonic time, that is, temperate time, one premised on a quadruple measure of exuberance (summer), descent (autumn), cessation (winter), and nascence (spring). What I am trying to introduce here is a sense of a choreography that may be akin to a primal *fort-da*²—a kinesis that elicits at the same time that it donates an attunement to the earth that is more displaced than located. Hence I begin the utterance, even an ululation, of a desire to seek out what remains from this movement—what could be that creature of stasis that may as well be a worldling, an indigene, a subject whose promise is a species whom we name *homo tropicus*:

III

To comprehend *homo tropicus* as an epiphany in time, one needs to keep in mind that her figuration has been fraught with ethical contention. Taking to task anthropological discourse, Johannes Fabian has argued that while ethnography writes the autochthone as if she had revealed herself in the present of the interlocutor's document, that writing depends on a ruse of temporal co-presence. The reportorial verb may act as if the anthropologist is keeping up with the native, but the tense does not conceal

the all-pervading denial of coevalness which ultimately is expressive of a cosmological myth of frightening magnitude and persistency. It takes imagination and courage to picture what would happen to the West (and to anthropology) if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by the Time of the Other. (35)

The ethnographer's retrogressive maneuver is more a privilege of his modernity than a respect to the purported nobility of his object, the savage. Whatever prose may have been produced to describe the exception of the Other, the turn of phrase can only emphasize the difference—*the time difference*—between the ethnographer and she who signifies the ethnic essence.

Anne McClintock takes the critique of this "denial of coevalness" to the literary, where the discovery of the difference may subtly execute the fictions of exoticism while insisting on its axiomatically factitious coordinates:

The colonial journey into the virgin interior reveals a contradiction, for the journey is figured as proceeding forward in geographical space but backward in historical time, to what is figured as a prehistoric zone of racial and sexual difference ... Since indigenous peoples are supposed to be spatially there—for the lands are "empty"—they are symbolically displaced onto what I call *anachronistic space*. (30)

Like the anthropologist, the narrator enters the realm of the autochthone only to describe an awakening to his departure from modernity, which is nevertheless preserved in the inhabitation of anachrony: the world seems uncanny because the figures do not cohere temporally. The space is anachronistic insofar as it does not suit the habiliments of the one arriving. This makes him resort to witness the unknown with temporal omnipotence. Again, McClintock: "By *panoptical time*, I mean the image of global history consumed—at a glance—in a single spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility" (37).

The character may express discomfort with the transport to a prehistory, but that time-lag enables him to realize that his modern placement severs him from the habits of the prehistoric. It is the Other who does not cohere with his time.

I am a literary critic. In imagining *homo tropicus* as a trope for the time that has been taken away and could be regained from these denials of coevalness, I hope, like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that literary reading may “come close to the irreducible work of translation, not from language to language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is ‘life’” (13). In a series of comparative readings, I would like to open up the interval between texts to delay, if not deter, the chances of the exotic to thrive as natural if not commonplace when the accomplice is tropology. This comparative literary gesture is one that takes into account time as, to borrow from Achille Mbembe, “precisely that moment when different forms of absence become mixed together: absence of those presences that are no longer so and that one remembers (the past), and absence of those others that are yet to come and are anticipated (the future)” (16). This time of “entanglement” could be the cusp where the future perfect present of *homo tropicus* emerges.

IV

How does *homo tropicus* come into being? How does her living struggle from the earth to a world? How does she account for the turn from *terra* to *mundi*? What happens when she is transformed from being the earthling into a worldling? Where can the question of the origin, represented by the indigene, be posited in this scheme? And what about a sense of the *final* figure in the name of a subject? Does she arrive after all the living, or before the dying?

I derive the distinction between *terra* and *mundi* from Martin Heidegger’s differentiation between *Erde* and *Welt*. For him, the earth is a matter of descent, it is where “everything that arises is brought back ... and sheltered” (21). This downward motion suggests not only the gravitational force that holds the earthling to be a creature of the ground but also that understanding that she is to be found there—as a *home/body*. That is where she is kept and protected. On the other hand, the world is that which is opened up by the creation of a release from the said concealment. This emergence, this “‘setting up’ no longer means merely putting in place” (22). It is in this sense that Heidegger’s example of the temple is not just an erection but an ascent as it aspires to “consecrate” (22) presence.

The figure that makes possible this raising is raised as well in the ritual as she passes from being a riddle of creation into a name that answers for creation itself. This shift is indeed paradigmatic, not merely a semantic change from the earthling into a worldling. Nonetheless, I will not leap, like Heidegger, in saying that this “self-opening openness” of the world refers to the

“broad paths of simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people” (26). The path towards that destiny is painful. It necessitates a turning away from the point of origination and an acceptance of originality itself. Heidegger names this encounter *strife* (Riss). Conflict arises between the earth and the world, and neither sphere wins the contest. A wound insists on being marked out after the deference, before the defiance. An indigenal moment may be collective in the process of national nomination, but at the moment of birth, the native is alone. To be *born and raised* from the womb of the earth is also to be taught one’s difference from it: as life, as indignation, as insistence. Nativity is the wounding.

V

On a promontory, a figure looks over:

Delhi
 dos torres
plantadas en el llano
 dos sílabas altas
Yo las digo en voz baja
acodado al balcón
 clavado
no en el suelo
 en su vertigo
en el centro de la incandescencia
Estuve allá
 no sé adonde
Estoy aquí
 no sé es donde (Paz, “El Balcón” 170)

Delhi
 two towers
planted on the plains
 two tall syllables
I say them in a low voice
leaning over the balcony

nailed
not to the ground
to its vertigo
to the center of incandescence
I was there
I don't know where
I am here
I don't know is where (Paz, "The Balcony" 26-27)

In this poem, emplacement in a locale is declared by the persona, or at least it is remembered to have occurred, the being-located and the located-being. The locus is made uncertain however. Delhi, and yet not Delhi. The simplicity of the past tense points to this (*Estuve allá*). When the time shifts to the present (*Estoy aquí*), the hope of the location, its naming, is brought back, however simply so, again. And then the ignorance of Delhi (displacement) is affirmed to be one's knowledge in it (emplacement).

This being-lost/lost-being is made clearer if we examine the lines which precede those which we have just read above. The said lines speak of the city as architecture (*dos torres/plantada en el llano*), but its structures are made up of language that is elevated (*sílabas altas*): sounds making sense with an tense tone, phonemes vibrated by a voice in bass (*voz baja*); because of this shuttling, between height and depth, between cord and chord, such a metropolis is lost and unlocated. And yet the topos appears, because of a locus, an illumination (*incandescencia*) that points to a certainty of place. This light is immanent in language. Could this luminance be the ornamental reverie that dislodges the commonplace of the architectural logic? Perhaps, if we augur that the sounds indeed shine tropical, if the syllable can be a photon that summons no less than a second of sun, that touches that surface which can either be skin or ground?

While the reader may be sure that it is *tropicus mundi* that is the referent here, one is not certain that it is *homo tropicus* summoning that world into verballity. One can speculate that it may be one indeed, if one foregrounds the implied author, the subject intimated by Octavio Paz speaking of the tropics from his own experiences of it. Hence, the tropics, as configured by the chronotope² of the garden in Paz's comparative imaginary, is repeated from India to and through Mexico (however merely implied this garden in the collection may appear to be) and vice versa:

No la tierra
el tiempo
en sus manos vacías me sostiene ("El Balcón" 170)

Not the earth
time
holds me in its empty hands ("The Balcony" 27)

With the tropics as time (*el tiempo*) and not as space (*no la tierra*), the two gardens are now finally almost sequential (read: non-adjacent) in a moment that is indeed *empty*, because it provides for the occupancy, and *homogeneous*, because of the enabling moment of resemblance.⁴ This imitative chance provides for a simultaneity *now* being fulfilled in a single scenography. The mimetic empowerment happens because of homotropy, a human talent to figure the world out in turns of phrase which propel the desiring for a species that ever dreams to be closer to its object of reference—*itself*:

Más allá de mí mismo
en algún lado mi llegada ("El Balcón" 170)

Beyond myself
somewhere
I wait for my arrival ("The Balcony" 27)

Who is to come? Or, what is to arrive? If this subject is indeed a homotrope, and she imagines her futurity through a *métissage* between the world on the wane and the world unfolding, the wish that Paz intones rests on a certain anterior moment that is neither antiquated nor prescient. While *homo tropicus* may be a declension of the posture (*erectus*), mobility (*habilis*), and cognition (*sapiens*) of a certain humanity, what Paz announces is a subject of both promise and predicament, if this figure is dreamed in time and not in space. It is this cusp that we aspire to anticipate if not apprehend.

Elsewhere, another arrival:

El jardín botánico ahuyentó sus risueños recuerdos: *el demonio de las comparaciones* le puso delante los jardines botánicos de Europa, en los países donde se necesita mucha voluntad y mucho oro para que brote una hoja y abra su cáliz una flor, aun más, hasta las colonias, ricas y bien cuidados y abiertos todos al público. (Rizal 43, my emphasis)

The sight of the Botanical garden drove away his gay reminiscences: *the devil of comparisons*⁵ placed him before the botanical gardens of Europe, in the countries where much effort are needed to make a leaf bloom of a bud open; and even more, to those

of the colonies, rich and well-tended, and all open to the public. (Rizal trans. Lacson Locsin 67, my emphasis)

Here is the picture of the returnee struggling with the time of his homecoming, since the point of arrival is interrupted by the place of departure. Again the garden as a chronotope asserts itself as commonplace in the instigation of a differential moment (comparaciones/comparisons). And yet, whereas in the poem above the analogy rests on an angelic epiphany that *the* time will be coming, that there shall be a coincidence between prophecy and presence, this comparison unfolds in a temptation scene (demonio/devil). The garden at hand reminds the native of another one that he has visited elsewhere; instead of recognizing similarity however, the subject sees difference. The immediate space presents a disjuncture to the returnee not so much because the garden fails to summon the memory of a previous promenade but because the latter invokes the phantasm of that passage. This reminiscence castigates the return; one awakes to the insight that one has indeed missed the other site by an already distant time, in spite of a certain degree of recency. The comparison is diabolical because of this taunt to succumb to a vision that is really at best a disappearance, deny the substance that is there (da), and declare its urgency as already gone (fort). The temptee's impending offense is the repetition of nostalgia, but a reprise done perversely, since the yearning is now for an alien shore within the vicinity of one's indigenal zone. If this is the case, then this scene of arrival is an erasure of its own performance. Its fulfillment can only be another departure.

In the example above, the comparison rests on a binary opposition, and not a dyadic partnership. One image is deemed major and the other picture minor. Manila is antithetical to Madrid, Asia to Europe. Can this preference be attributed to climatic differences, between horticultural spaces tropical and temperate? In the latter, the returnee muses that the garden is a delicate niche, that there is a specific economy that dictates the care of foliage. Or can the choice stem from the affective labor that is behind all manner of beauty and arrangement regardless of the elements? When the comparison proceeds to describing the colonial garden,⁶ it is delineated to flourish better not only because of imperial funding nor the exuberance that nature grants to the horticultural space but the industry that this context embraces (ricos y bien cuidados). And yet the question is whether Manilan space is considered to be part of this zone of imperial exception. José Rizal's claim is clear—that within the Spanish empire, Manila does not possess the inflorescence of garden cities like Lima or Havana. It is for this reason that he averts the glance that could have been inspired, adulatory, and loving:

Ibarra aparto la vista, miro a su derecha y alli vio a la Antigua Manila, rodeada aun de

sus murallas y fosos, como una joven anemica envuelta en un vestido de los buenos tiempos de su abuela. (Rizal 43)

Ibarra removed his gaze, looked right, and there saw old Manila, still surrounded by its walls and moats, like an anemic young woman in a dress from her grandmother's best times. (Rizal trans. Lacson Locsin 67)

Manila is a city that has not matured. It is perennially adolescent. What's more, its civility has not yet been performed, *sartorially*, unlike the other key cities of the empire, from Mexico City to Buenos Aires. It has not yet *worn* the proper comportments of a colonial city, like Santiago or San Juan. This occurs, in spite of the homotropy in the narrative, because a promise of nature cannot be fulfilled. Or, not yet. The wish to return to *temperatus mundi* thus finds its rationale here. Perhaps, only when this is achieved can the anticipation for *tropicus mundi* resume. Or even for the world, just the world, before any form of subjectivity?

VI

This theme of the tropics in an anachronistic relation with the world temperate and tempered is at the heart of Claude Levi-Strauss's work on the area. In the particular passage below, the tropics seems not to have arrived, because it has not attained modernity:

Les tropiques sont moins exotiques que démodés. Ce n'est pas la végétation qui les atteste, mais de menus détails d'architecture et la suggestion d'un genre de vie qui, plutôt que d'avoir franchi d'immenses espaces, persuade qu'on s'est imperceptiblement reculé dans le temps. (Levi-Strauss 70)

The tropics are less exotic than out of date. It is not so much their vegetation which testifies to their identity as minor architectural details, and the suggestion of a way of life which gives one the impression that, instead of covering vast distances, one has moved back imperceptibly in time. (Levi-Strauss trans. Weightman and Weightman 87).

Because of this premodernity of the tropics, whatever attempt to transport it to progressive time is somewhat defeated at the outset, for the zone will always remain a version of some *prior* temperate success. Even within its terms, the tropics—as time—will always be anachronistic. While we are

looking towards the anterior, Levi-Strauss gazes at the archaic. But isn't this sentiment the stuff that sustains the exotic?

Le hazard de voyages offer souvent de telles ambiguïtés. D'avoir passé à Porto-Rico mes premières semaines sur le sol de États-Unis me fera, dorénavant, retrouver l'Amérique en Espagne. Comme aussi, pas mal d'années plus tard, d'avoir visité ma première université anglaise sur le campus aux édifices néo-gothiques de Dacca, dans le Bengal oriental, m'incite maintenant à considérer Oxford comme une Inde qui aurait réussi à contrôler la boue, la moisissure et les débordements de la végétation. (Levi-Strauss 24)

The accidents of travel often produce ambiguities such as these. Because I spent my first weeks on United States soil in Puerto Rico, I was in future to find America in Spain. Just as, several years later, through visiting my first English university with a campus surrounded by Neo-Gothic buildings at Dacca in Western Bengal, I now look upon Oxford as a kind of India that has succeeded in controlling the mud, the mildew and the ever-encroaching vegetation. (Levi-Strauss trans. Weightman and Weightman 35)

To reiterate, "el demonio del comparaciones" is that which forces one, while caught in a dissimulating trance, to recognize an ominous difference, struggle with its refusal to cohere with familiarity and homeliness, and surrender to its power to possess the subject of comparison with a gaze that doubts the veracity of one's immediate worlding. On the one hand, Puerto Rico, an *American* locus that looks Spanish. On the other, Dacca, an *Indian* topos that might as well be English. Spaces which invoke the *unlikely* and the *unbecoming*, that is, to the Parisian sojourner who cannot perform flânerie on a promenade that is not French. Because the uncanny occurrence of what is otherwise considered as a particularly European template is parodied in a mere aspiration of it, in a province, the reiteration of Europe in its Other puts into question the very logic of the repeatability of a worlding as an epistemological possibility that rationalizes the proliferation of a prior civilized space in another that *seamlessly* allows for the completion of the historical sequence. This seamlessness, we have been told elsewhere, is the ethos of colonial temporality; as flux, this time inserts itself into colonial space as the instantaneous fulfillment of what had been prefigured as the advent of the modern to the anticipations of the archaic.

While the time of the colonial mimesis is allowed some temporal adjustment (Dacca before London, Latin America before Spain), this neo-similitude must nonetheless encounter a limit. The

reordering in time, however allowed in a turn of phrase, is a phantasmatic token. England cannot be India; its modernity has tended its gardens, and carefully so (a controller la boue, la moisissure et les débordements de la végétation).

This temporal solitude causes the tropics to internalize, as the totality of Levi-Strauss's treatise claims, a certain sadness:

Le ciel fuligineux du Pot-au-Noir, son atmosphère pesante, ne sont pas seulement le signe manifeste de la ligne équatoriale. Ils resument le climat sous lequel deux mondes se sont affrontés. *Ce morne élément qui le sépare, cette bonace où les forces malfaisantes semblent seulement se réparer*, sont la dernière barrière mystique entre ce qui constituait, hier encore, deux planètes opposées par des conditions si différentes que les premiers témoins ne purent croire qu'elles fussent également humaines. (56, my emphasis)

The inky sky over the Doldrums and the oppressive atmosphere are more than just an obvious sign of the nearness of the equator. They epitomize the moral climate in which two worlds have come face to face. *This cheerless sea between them, and the calmness of the weather whose only purpose seems to be to allow evil forces to gather fresh strength*, are the last mystical barrier between two regions so diametrically opposite to each other through their different conditions that the first people to become aware of the fact could not believe that they were both equally human. (Levi-Strauss trans. Weightman and Weightman 74, my emphasis)

In this context, the equator presents itself as a paradoxical imaginary: it reconciles as much as it demarcates. It was at this point of encounter that the comparative devil remained to terrify the monovision of the *altitudinal* northerner as he met his *abysmal* counterpart from the south, with the former realizing that the latter could be as homotropic as he is, and perhaps more so because this other is also *homo tropicus*, with whom the turn of the sun can cohere, with whom the turn of a phrase may finally cease, as the cadency might meet its reference—the other's time wholly for itself. The tropics remain melancholic, for the ones crossing it could not really get over this sense of *global* justice.

As a tropical genre, bossa nova affirms this forlorn “music of the spheres,” however via a pathos that gestures beyond the discourse of civility detected by Levi-Strauss. For it is *homo tropicus* himself singing both his promise and his predicament. Antonio Carlos Jobim, Luis Bonfá, and Vinícius de Moraes would launch this new syncopation of jazz, along with the ethos of *tropicalismo*, through the soundtrack of the film *Orfeu Negro* (1959).

The film's thesis rests on a radical pigmentation of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. This is signaled by the opening image of the star-crossed pair carved in a bas-relief of white stone but abruptly broken by the screen filled by Afro-Brazilian bodies very much invested in the daily life of Rio de Janeiro but also gyrating themselves out of these rites as they usher in the coming of the Carnaval.

That Orpheus is reincarnated as Orfeu tells us that it was the homotropy that created *homo tropicus*, a crucial diversion from our examples earlier. It is the text that engenders the species.

On the day that Orfeu applies for a marriage license with his girlfriend Mira, Eurydice appears in the neighborhood in search of her cousin Serafina, to escape a man whom she says is bent on murdering her. Later on we shall recognize this figure as Death himself.

As soon as Orfeu and Eurydice remember the ill fate that they have suffered in a Past, the mythic time of the Underworld is raised and levels up with the folk rhythm of the Brazilian tropics, promising that in the present, what had been discontinued could be ultimately relived. The morning after they make love, Orfeu serenades Eurydice with "A Felicidade" (Happiness):

Tristeza ñao tem fim,
felicidade, sim.

A felicidade é como a gota
de orvalho numa pétala de flor.
Brilha tranqüila depois de leve oscila
e cai como uma lágrima de amor.

Sadness has no end,
Happiness does.

Happiness is like a drop
of dew on a flower's petal.
Brilliant and tranquil, then quivering,
then falling like a tear of love.⁷

The predicament here is articulated as an *intimation of an immortality* whose long *durée* has arrested its subjects as indeed only temporal beings: subjects-*in*-time as well as subjects-*of*-time—as selves deathly and deadly, with lives *merely* defined by their evasion of the time of death. It is thus that

they are rendered life-less. While Orfeu awakes into the eternal promise that he has made to his beloved, he also realizes that such an encounter, along with the joys of chance, can only be transient, now that their human hands hold the redemption of myth. Orfeu trembles before this fragility. Once the beatific moment is not seized by the visionary subject, so will the bliss vanish as quickly as it has made itself apparent to the witness.

The image of happiness as a dewdrop (a gota de orvalho) suspended on a bloom (pétala do flor) intensifies the impermanence of this mortal sentiment. Dew can be beautiful indeed, emanating light and calmness (brilha tranquila), but soon it shakes (oscila) and gravitates (cai) toward the ground, threatening to disintegrate. The tremor is both tension and intensity. And yet the metamorphosis of this fluid as a loving tear (lágrima de amor) also transforms the doleful reflection into hope, as the downward movement is really not a loss but an arrival, to the earth, that is. It is a tear, but one shed out of passion, thus nourishing the ground of the flower that we thought had been abandoned because of the drop's breakage. What is promised from this irrigation? The sensorium between pollinating caress and nectarine succulence. Yes, another blooming. And perhaps even more: fruition.

The song acts as a refrain for the whole film. A most significant repetition is found at the narrative closure, as Orfeu, carrying the dead Eurydice, walks home in the dawn. Eurydice dies at the tram station. She is electrocuted by the wires of the tram she was holding on to elude Death. It is Orfeu who turns on the switch but he does not realize what the act does to his love. After waking up from a swoon that Death cast on him, Orfeu searches Rio for Eurydice. After running through a hospital and a building where files of missing persons are kept, Orfeu finds Eurydice speaking in a *macumba* ritual, but loses her after looking at the medium. Through the help of his friend Hermes, Orfeu finally finds Eurydice's body in the morgue. Hence, the song again, to mark out the darkening rite of the matrimony:

Tristeza não tem fim,
felicidade, sim.

A felicidade do pobre parece
a grande ilusão do carnaval.
A gente trabalha o ano inteiro

Sadness has no end,
happiness does.

The happiness of the poor man
is like the great illusion of carnival.
We work all year long

Sadness has become eternal anew for Orfeu with the knowledge that his beloved has gone back to the Underworld. The brevity of this bliss is made more poignant by the amorous encounter coinciding with the Carnival, when the infinity of Dionysiac revelry is allowed for the night then taken away by daybreak, when another god's suffering as a human body is made historic. And yet the Christian mythos can only enter with the proper leave-taking of the residual narrative: the Orphic death. When he is hit on the head by a stone hurled at him by Mira (who has just burned her former lover's cot on the hill), Orfeu falls off the cliff, and perishes.

With the corpses of Orfeu and Eurydice pictured in a mortal embrace, their reinsertion into the anterior time of myth redeems their tragedy. The sadness ends, but only with their return to the earth now contemporizing itself with another passional narrative. The figure of Orfeu recedes, but only as *pharmakos*, the prime victim of carnival profanity that prefigures the ultimate sacrifice of Lenten sanctimony—Cristo, who is *pharmakos* as well after the justification of a redemptive victimage.⁸ The radical pigment then is not only black, not just the chromatic marker that alters the mythic into cinematic but also red, the color of the blood that turns the whiteness of stone into the earthiest hue of skin. Blood, whose shedding is both indicative of the time that is life and the time that is death.⁹

The coincidence of these times in the sonority of the Orphic image and the reconstitution of the latter as an apparition that is ultimately tragic and yet humbly surrendering to the Christological scene are all intimations of the occurrence of millennial time. What I am trying to suggest here is that the carnival death that marks the closure of the film points to the final moments of a *saeculum*, a long time whose duration can only manifest in the recurrence of myth, its eventual telling and its necessary culmination, in order for another long *durée* to take place.

The millenniality of the Orphic departure, that receding unto death, makes the question of arrival resurface however. Homotropy enables *homo tropicus* to be born, raised, but also vanquished in *tropicus mundi*. With the facticity of death now made certain to us by this phantasm of the image, our yearning for the articulation of that other possibility called life, becomes all the more pressing. For it is that which is threatened.

VII

In an ellipse, I encounter once more our provisional possibility where I began as an insister,

or better yet, as an insistent of the tropics:

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (Eliot 20)

The said lines from T. S. Eliot operate on the quadruple measure of temperate time. And yet while the part of that tempo that is being inscribed above is that of the nascence of spring, a wintry wrath is portrayed to be contaminating the scene. While life is announcing its return with nature convalescing from the postponements of the previous season, there is a certain travesty of time in the appearance of blooms and in the falling of rain. A travesty since the flowers are conjured from a site of death and because the rains interrupt that zone of dying. April's cruelty stems then from nature operating out of time, that is, out of its own ending. This movement reaches its full destructive arc because the life that it proposes to rise is an imposition. Or a life that comes too close, and too soon. The cycle arrives again, but it comes when the waiting has not rendered itself complete—when the anticipation does not yet attain the level of hope because despair has not been fully respected. Because of this, the welcoming is again an adieu. *The arrivant is a departee*. And where else can these two visitations coincide but at that cusp between the earth and the world:

The more intransigently the strife outdoes itself on its own part, the more uncompromisingly do the opponents admit themselves into the intimacy of their own belonging to another. (Heidegger 27)

It is with this familiarity with the April of the temperate earth that I find myself again comparing. Now, in my vision, the April of the tropical world renders itself uncanny:

Ang abril ay marikit na kalupitan
ng kalikasan ...
ngunit ako'y mamamasyal na walang balanggot
at hubad ang mga paa;
ako'y hindi nangangamba sa kagandahan. (Mangahas 1)

April is a loving wrath
of nature ...

but I shall walk around with my head uncovered
and with my feet bare;
I do not fear beauty.

Here catastrophe is taken for what it is. It is April and while it is not spring—while it is *tag-araw*, the time of the sun—the Eliotic line is reverberated most potently. But instead of the persona prolonging the agony of one's witnessing of *time working against its own timing*, what we read is intention, the willingness of a body to treat the sublime *as* beautiful and transform terror *into* tenderness. This is a body that recognizes the aesthetic because there is no longer a supersensible desire to contest what looms larger than humanity. Even the disaster of the summering no longer becomes an ordeal. Since it is a matter of the earth, it is a matter of the earthling that one attempts to be part of it—to be sheltered, kept, protected. The persona, embracing the calamity of the tropics, sees the threat as part of existence. Hence, a resilience, a move to elevate. By this gesture, the persona *worlds* oneself. One arrives, for one welcomes, accepts, yields.

VIII

This prose has been an attempt to evoke the temporal premise of the *homo tropicus* as an imaginal possibility to vivify the tropological procedure but this time by way of the tropics. In a series of comparative readings on the colonial cosmopolite (Octavio Paz and José Rizal), the melancholy incarnate (*Tristes Tropiques* and *Orfeu Negro*), and the vernal/estival existent (T.S. Eliot and Rogelio Mangahas), I have tried to theorize on the arrivance, pace Derrida, of a figure that could perhaps reconcile the strife, pace Heidegger, between the resisting earth and the oracular world.

I punctuate this essay where I had began, not so much to gesture into a sense of an ending but to open up the oneiric textile further:

Sarung banggi
sa higdaan,
nakadangog ako
nin huni nin sarong gamgam.

Sa loba ko, katorogan.
Iyo kundi simong boses iyo palan.

Dagos ako bangon,
si sakuyang mata iminuklat.
Sa diklom nin banggi
ako nangalag-kalag.

Si sakong paghiling
pasiring sa itaas,
simong lawog
nahiling ko maliwanag.

One evening,
while in bed,
I heard
the song of a bird.

I thought it was a dream,
but it was you singing.

I rose
and opened my eyes.
In the dark of night,
I unraveled my gaze.

When I looked up
into the sky,
I saw your radiant countenance.

How hapless, these misprisions of the voice and the face as birdsong and moonlight! And yet precious is the daze between dream and waking life that a nocturne composes itself to diligently cope with abandonment in metonyms of trace and apparence.

In anticipating, one becomes the arrivant oneself. Now that there is nothing to fear, one ends in yearning, where and when no finale insists. *One becomes Them*: homotrope and homo tropicus. Such beauty shall have been desired. *And They become One*. Such beatitude will have been awaited.

NOTES

- ¹ In invoking homo tropicus, I align myself with Jacques Derrida the way the arrivant haunts his work *Aporias: Dying—Awaiting (One Another at) the “Limits of Truth”* (65).
- ² Although I am articulating this term in a different context, I am still most indebted to Sigmund Freud for illustrating the discursive possibilities which surround the *fort-da* game invented by Freud’s grandson to cope with his mother’s absence. See *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, Volume 18 of the Standard Edition of *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*.
- ³ Mikhail Bakhtin’s term for the event in the text where “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole.” For the full discussion of how the chronotope works, especially in narrative, see Bakhtin’s “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics” in *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays* (84-258).
- ⁴ Here, of course, I am alluding to Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations* (264).
- ⁵ Benedict Anderson translates “el demonio del comparaciones” as “the spectre of comparisons” to describe the inability of Ibarra to “matter-of-factly experience” the gardens and see them “simultaneously close up and from afar.” See *The Spectre of Comparison: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (2).
- ⁶ It is here that the presumed dichotomy in the comparison reaches an aporia, since the climate of the Spanish colonies spans from high temperativity to deep tropicity.
- ⁷ The words of the song and its translation are Antonio Carlos Jobim, Luis Bonfá, and Vinícius de Moraes’s, as they are performed and subtitled in *Orfeu Negro*.
- ⁸ For a discussion of the pharmakos as the scapegoat, see Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (41).
- ⁹ But I also believe that Orfeu Negro’s death cannot allow an aberrant birth. The radical pigment of black cannot be effaced in a whitewash. The pathos of the latter’s narrative can only pave the way for the passional of Cristo Negro. Although I must still provide for this linkage, I am guided by the figure of the Black Nazarene of the Philippines which finds a most productive genealogy alongside the Black Christs of Latin America. I thank my colleague Patrick D. Flores for this valuable instruction. See his “Moving Image, Touching Moment” (unpublished manuscript).

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