

# DEATH, EVENT, AND A DECONSTRUCTION OF *GIHAPON* IN *FLORES NI MARIA SANTISIMA*

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## Abstract

This paper proposes a deconstructive reading of *Flores ni Maria Santisima*, a Hiligaynon novena written by Padre Raymundo Lozano and printed in 1867. Set against the economic bustle of nineteenth-century Iloilo after it opened port to foreign trade, the novena demonstrates a homological relationship between capitalism and the practice of spiritual accumulation in the Flores. Nevertheless, teasing out the liminality of this text undermines its self-assurance as a monologic triumph of signification. A recurrent word in the novena, *gihapon* (always) plays an important transactional role in the promise of a happy death. As an incalculable event which subverts anticipation, death is a call towards faith without the consolation of certainty. The alterity of death beckons us to respond with Derrida's perhaps, a trace of *gihapon* revealed in the three stories from *pananglit* (hagiographical narrative): the deathbed experience of St John of God, the Emmaus-like encounter of two priests, and the acquittal of a convicted robber.

## Keywords

Novena, event, trace, deconstruction

## About the Author

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The effect of deconstruction to the humanities and social sciences has also been felt in theology. Scholastic theology, which developed in the Middle Ages significantly through Thomas Aquinas, has been the official form of theologizing in the Christendom. Such theologizing was characterized by rigor through intricate categorizations. Philosophy being utilized for apologetic purpose, scholastic theology has maintained an explanatory aim. The emergence of deconstruction as a leading philosophical attitude questions the very basis of scholastic theology. The logocentrism of metaphysics is held suspect as a historically privileged signification. The presence of a transcendental signifier whereby rests the signification process is, argued by deconstruction, based on unstable ground, a “groundless ground” (to borrow John Caputo’s expression). If the very root of Christian theology is God, then this anthropomorphic signification could be a bankrupt attempt towards certainty—despite the serious effort of theologians to put the mystery of God to rest or at least to a rational grounding. Granted he is a mystery, the presence of mystery does not preclude the presence of rationality proving the metaphysics of his presence. After deconstruction has left us questioning the transcendence of the *logos*, after we are left in ruins, how do we make sense of the broken paradigm and its cultural accoutrement?

The death of metanarratives spells out the death of God, the loss of innocence after our banishment from the Platonic world of ideas (Vattimo, “Trace of the Trace” 81). Surprisingly, the extreme turn of secularism has not totally “killed” God. Like a haunting spectre, God has visited us postmoderns and leads us towards the “theological turn” of postmodernism (Raschke<sup>2</sup>). Remaining as an affirmation of God, this theological interest is bereft of system-building characteristic of logocentric theologies. According to Charles Winquist, theology has become less stabilizing but more interruptive and critical (Robbins 2). Like Freud’s the uncanny, the experience of the religious is the return of alterity, that which is radically Other:

In religion, something we had thought irrevocably forgotten is made present again, a dormant trace is reawakened, a wound re-opened, the repressed returns and what we took to be an *Überwindung* (overcoming, realization, and thus a setting aside) is no more than a *Verwindung*, a long convalescence that has once again to come to terms with the indelible trace of its sickness. (Vattimo, “Trace of the Trace” 79)

Christian postmoderns must come to terms with late capitalism and Christian heritage. This implies the failure of total nihilism which extinguishes any trace of Christianity as originary standpoint to dialogue with. In its protean form, the Other returns as an “irruption,” a rhizomatic “discontinuity in the horizontal course of history” (Vattimo, “Trace of the Trace” 86). If religion does not set itself out as antithesis to scientific epistemology, the return of religion takes the shape of a deterritorialized body which does not admit any binarism between itself and science, or reason, or modernity (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge” 28).

Christianity possesses historically determined traditions from which communities draw out their faith and identity. Sacred texts that explicitly espouse gender bias—to name one—could not just be easily dismissed as though we can do away with the past through wilful forgetting. If we bravely stare back at the text's gaze, we must continue (t)reading mindful of its texture shaped by history's writing and erasure. Therefore, a deconstructive theology is an affirmative option, not a negation, because it acknowledges the existence (presence) of a text (palimpsest) in its polysemic form. As believers of a religion of the book, our justification rests on the texture of the text—both having the same etymology (Latin, *texere*: to weave). An element of art, texture refers to the tactile quality of a sculpture or how an artwork feels to our touch. The texture of a lisible text imposes a definite interpretation and positions the reader as a passive consumer, while a scriptible text is characterized by its openness to the slippage of signification. Aware of the trace of history in the text, a deconstructive reading of sacred texts admits the possibilities of intertexts to weave boundless significations like yet-to-explore labyrinthine passages (corridors/verses/journeys). Instead of plugging textual leaks, deconstruction exalts in them and rejoices at the advent of deferment.

This paper proposes a deconstructive reading of *Flores ni Maria Santisima*, a nineteenth-century Hiligaynon novena. Although my reading acknowledges the lisible dimension of the text as evinced by the commanding presence of religious and colonial discourses in the pages of the text, I am also attentive to its scriptible character by teasing out the liminal which undermines the self-assurance of the text as a monologic triumph of signification. I shall proceed by situating the novena against the economic bustle of nineteenth-century Iloilo after it opened its port to foreign trade, and argue that capitalism demonstrates a homological (parallel) relationship with the practice of spiritual accumulation in the Flores. A recurrent word in the novena, *gihapon* (always) plays an important transactional role in the certainty of the promise of a happy death. As an incalculable event which subverts preparation, death is a call towards faith without the consolation of certainty. It is the alterity of death which beckons us to respond with Derrida's perhaps. I shall read *perhaps* as a trace of *gihapon* in the three stories from *pananglit* (hagiographical narrative): the deathbed experience of St John of God, the Emmaus-like experience of two priests, and the acquittal of a convicted robber.

## The Logic of Capitalism and the Practice of Spiritual Accumulation

Prior to Nicholas Loney's arrival, Iloilo thrived on weaving industry. Studying the soil in Negros and Iloilo, he saw the potential for sugar as crop money. Remarking on the lack of business adventurism among the inhabitants of the colony, he referred to the Philippines as "unenterprising" (Loney 72). Both the opening of Iloilo port to foreign trade in 1855—a year before his visit to Iloilo—and the escalating price

of sugar in the world market were favourable conditions for Loney to import sugar cane cuttings from Sumatra: “The sugar crop is increasing very much. I gave high prices for the “Pet” cargo, and this has led planters and others to see how much they benefit by the direct trade, and coupled with the general high prices of sugars, it has induced a great extension of planting” (Loney 97). Modernizing the equipment for sugar production, he sold iron plows and milling machineries on credit without imposing interest, and offered first crop loans to planters like Jose Ruiz de Luzuriaga, his first customer who subsequently set up a sugar mill in Lupit, Bacolod (*Development History* 108-109). Russell and Sturgis, the firm where he worked, expressed support for his venture: “they are prepared to advance funds to the extent of \$12-15,000 to build a camarin [warehouse] of stone, and go into produce operations” (Loney 66). Aside from constructing a road from the town of Iloilo to the river, he also reclaimed the swamp and enjoined others to build warehouses on the site, later named Muelle Loney.

Foreign trade and sugar planting transformed the social environment of Iloilo. The presence of foreigners in Iloilo increased. In 1863 twenty-six foreign ships docked in Iloilo port to buy sugar. By 1877 foreign firms set up offices in Iloilo. Five dealt with maritime and fire insurance. The city had direct commercial connections with Australia, China, Singapore, Europe, and the US. In 1870 the total export of Iloilo (US\$ 868,861) exceeded import (US\$ 5,602). The destination and trade value of sugar distribution in 1873 explains this propensity for export—Britain: US\$ 188,351; Australia: US\$ 86,896; Europe: US\$ 32,773; and US: US\$ 23,631 (*Development History* 129). From 1854-1890s, trading partners of the Philippines—some of which had consular offices in Iloilo—included the UK, British India, China, Spain, the US, Germany, Netherlands East Indies, and French Indo-China. Next, the standard of living in Iloilo was way ahead than the rest of the provinces because labourers received higher wages in Iloilo than in other parts of the colony. In 1861, Iloilo labourers were paid 12 ½ -18 ¾ cents a day. Carpenters, experienced field workers, and those working in boiling houses received 18 ¾-25 cents a day with one meal per day for the latter two. Caulkers also received 25 cents a day. In other parts of the country, labourers got 25 cents per week with one meal a day (*Development History* 140). Third, the stevedore appeared as a new form of individual whose behaviour was shaped by capitalism. The stevedores would transfer sugar from the lorchas to the bodegas and carry them to foreign cargo ships. Although employed prior to the sugar boom, the Ilonggo stevedore was an emergent economic species due to larger discretionary income from steady employment. With cash to spend, he helped sustain retail businesses which needed a continuous cash flow for their operations. While sharecroppers and labourers received compensation in kind—a common form of remuneration in an agricultural pueblo sector—a stevedore’s job closely linked labor with monetary value. In Negros the *sacada* exemplified the diasporic existence of labourers and the colonial vestige of the passport system, which inventoried the space and time an *indio* occupied. Expiring after three

months, a passport must be secured before he could transfer to another province. To keep up with sugar production in Negros, planters moved around the villages of Iloilo in search of labourers. The planters paid the prospective labourer's tribute and gave him advance payment for his wage. The labourer would secure a receipt from the *cabeza de barangay*, and proceed to the municipal hall to get cleared by the *gobernadorcillo*. Next, he would secure a clearance from the parish priest. It was usually difficult to secure consent from the *cura*. A decrease of the population in the parish would spell out decrease in church revenue. However, he had to secure the clearance with the parish before getting cleared by the governor of the province. In the account of Loney, the labourer

very often unites with a number of companions, hires a canoe, and sails across to Negros, disembarking on an unfrequented part of the coast and, with the connivance of the planter who engages them, enters with his companions on the estate without any passport at all. Here, however, the planter is exposed to the chance of the Governor having his estate searched, and all the men returned to their province, he losing the amount advanced them for their services. Others however are deterred by the risk and will not leave their villages. (quoted in *Development History* 158)

As of 1867, nine thousand sugar workers in Negros did not have passports (Aguilar 129).

Although the weaving industry waned, the world market speedily altered the province into a metropolitan hub. The number of social clubs and schools increased, and Iloilo could boast of its own printing press in 1877. Venturing to sugar industry allured planters because of the common practice of advance sale of harvest to foreign firms (Corpuz 175). This led to mass migration to Negros among both labourers, who sought employment, and planters, who came to buy cheaper land. Prominent families who came from Iloilo included: Simeon Ledesma (Silay), Lucio Lacson (Talisay), Coscolluela, Perez, and Alvarez (Hinigaran and Himamaylan) (*Development History* 146-147). Jaro's population declined from 32,413 during the 1850s to 10,681 by 1903 (*Development History* 150). Iloilo experienced scarce supply of human labor and a rise in the value of land and animals.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, a study on the overlap between the capitalist mode of production and Calvinist theology, Max Weber observed that capitalism became more organized and profit-oriented through maximization and conversion of labor into commodity, which he termed as "rational capitalism." The Calvinist doctrine of predestination declares that each person has already been destined to either suffer the fires of hell or enjoy the bliss of heaven. Instead of the expected fatalistic attitude conducive to predestination, anxiety motivated the early modern man to seek reassurance that one indeed deserved the beatific vision God has predestined for him (Morris 63-64). Ironically, eschatological preoccupation also affirmed the here-ness of life by exhorting believers to perform their godly

duty in everyday life. Hence, predestination compels the believer to accumulate good deeds in this life as a corroboration of his predestined place. Weber has noticed how this ethos coincided with the “correct” attitude in rational capitalism: “the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life” (quoted in Morris 62).

Printed in 1867—twelve years after Iloilo portopened to foreign trade—*Flores ni Maria Santisima* was written by the Augustinian Raymundo Megia Lozano, a parish priest in Iloilo. Born in 1826 in Toledo, Spain, he entered the order at the College of Valladolid. He arrived in Panay Island in 1854 to learn Hiligaynon. The following year, he served the parish of San Joaquin, Patnogon (Antique) from 1855-1868, and San Miguel, Iloilo (1861-1877). After his assignment in Iloilo he was sent to China to study the possibilities of establishing a mission. In 1884, he became the chaplain-director of Asilo de Huerfanos de Mandaluyong. Lozano produced around thirty devotionals printed at the Colegio de Sto. Tomas by D. Babil Salo until 1868; in 1868 by D. Simeon Zapata; and in 1869 by E. Plana-Jorba (Hernandez 72-74).

For this paper, I used the 1964 reprint of the *Flores* published by La Panayana, a printing press established in 1877 in Iloilo. With 107 pages, the edition is thicker than the original because of the appended *despedida* hymns composed by Jeronimo del Fregenal, OMC; P Pedro Ma. Tiangson; P Amado Panes; P Felipe Torres; and P Tomas Navarrete (whose 195-page *Bulan sang Mga Flores ni Maria* was printed in 1909 by La Panayana). For a pamphlet, the *Flores* is voluminous because it covers 31 days, with each day having a separate reading—comparable to the monastic *lectio*—and *pananglit* (example through a story). Aside from the Latin *oremus* (let us pray) recited daily after the *despedida* hymn, an orasyon for a specific day is prayed just before the *despedida*. While an ordinary novena should be prayed for nine days, the *Flores* is distinctive because it must be prayed the whole month of May. In other aspects, it shares similar structure with other novenas like usual preparatory prayers, hymns, and sequences which may moderately vary in content from one devotional to another.

A homological relationship between capitalism and religious practice avoids the reductionism of Marxist reflection theory. *Without* attributing any causative link between Flores and the nineteenth-century economic transformation of Iloilo, we can nevertheless perceive how some aspects of the novena parallel the logic of capitalism. First, the text is based on asymmetry between the Virgin and the reader: *O Iloy sang Dios! Iloy sang madaligngapaghigugma! O Iloy sang santosngapagtu! O Iloy sang santosngapaglaum! Bisanmakasasala kami ngadakuumatubang kami sa Imo sadakungapagpaubos* (Lozano 8).<sup>1</sup> In the hierarchy of the text, the reader assumes the role of the supplicant and the Blessed Virgin as the powerful mediatrix between humanity and God. Mary’s role did not run counter to the dynamics of

<sup>1</sup>“Oh Mother of God! Oh Mother of sweet love! Oh Mother of holy faith! O Mother of divine hope! Bearing our tremendous sinfulness, we face you with all humility.” (Note: Since *Flores* has no English edition, I have attempted to translate the quotes from Hiligaynon and Spanish myself.)

commerce in Iloilo. In the spiritual realm she functions like the middlemen, who proliferated during the sugar heyday. Dia 8, *Maria esnuestramadre protectora* (Mary is our mother and protector), describes the role of the Blessed Mother: *Angatonlloy Santa Maria, amoy sia ang kumalagon kagumalamponatonsaatubangan sang Dios siling sang pag-abi-abi ta saiya sang Maghimayaka Hari* (Lozano 29).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the rhetorical style foregrounding the difference between the writer (Lozano) and the addressee (reader) implies an asymmetry in the power to articulate. By speaking for the reader, the author constructs a subject who must speak the words written for her in advance. In the first day, *Buenaventuras los que aman y sirven a Maria* (Blessed are those who serve and love Mary), the relationship is already staged as an act of pleading by a debtor (Lozano 11). Central to the asymmetrical relationship, spiritual debt becomes the rationale of praying the novena.

Second, the message of remuneration has an accumulative undertone because it demands upright living in preparation for afterlife. In *Tiliman-anan* Lozano encourages the reader to perform the Flores annually because of its benefits: *Kabay nga untangainyo tumanonsakatuiga nang mga FLORES NI MARIA SANTISIMA agud mapuslanninyo sing dakukayagud baslankamoni Maria Santisima* (Lozano 4).<sup>3</sup> The pananglit also emphasizes a spirituality based on heavenly reward, as revealed in two stories. The first comes from Dia 20, which tells the story of P Martin Gutierrez, a martyred priest: *[K]ag sang pagkamatay sang amonga Parisamga Hugonotes ngadili Kristianos, umatubangang Dios nonngalloykaupodniyaang mga Santa ngaulayngan angaputsila sang bangkayni Padre Gutierrez, kagdinalanilasalangit nga amo ang balusni Maria Santisima* (Lozano 63).<sup>4</sup> The binaries (Catholic/Protestant, afterlife/present life, reward/punishment, gain/loss) construct a “self” linked smoothly with capitalist ideology through the activation of exclusionary terms. Another story narrates about a datubrought back to life through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. The commercial undertone of the text could be encapsulated through faith in the merit of holy practices: *Kay sawa ay duhaduhamapusan ta ang pag sirbek ag pag dang upsaiya* (Lozano 30).<sup>5</sup>

Lastly, the devotional circulates spiritual currency of indulgence merited through diligent recitation of the prayers for the whole month (Lozano 6-7). The devotion to the Blessed Virgin, patroness of the colony, was a highly commendable practice to such an extent that the bishops of Manila and Cebu granted eighty and forty-day indulgences respectively:

<sup>2</sup>“For according to the prayer ‘Hail holy Queen,’ the holy mother is indeed our spiritual intercessor in the presence of God.”

<sup>3</sup>“May you employ Flores ni Maria Santisima every year because you will gather benefit from it and She will reward your devotion.”

<sup>4</sup>“And when Fr Gutierrez died in the hands of the infidel Huguenots, the holy Mother rewarded him by appearing in the company of holy virgins who brought his body to heaven.”

<sup>5</sup>“Without doubt we will profit from serving and invoking Her.”

*El Excmo e Ilmo. Sr. D. Gregorio Meliton Martinez ArzobispoMetropolitano de esta Islas concede ochentadias de Indulgenciasporcadaparafo[sic] o oracion de los contenidos en estalibro a los queleyeren con intencion de aprovecharse.*

*El Excmo. E Ilmo. Sr. Obispo De EstaDiocesis De Cebu D. Fr. HomualdoJimeao concede quarentadias de indulgencias porcadaparrafooracion[sic] de los contanidos [sic] en estalibro, leyendolos con intencion de aprovecharse. (Lozano 7)<sup>6</sup>*

With prayer understood as currency for grace, Lozano ends Tiliman-ananby asking for the reader's prayers: *Kagkabayngaig-ampoakoninyosaiya*. (4).<sup>7</sup> The introductory song—to be chanted daily—fondly declares: *Gugmaonta angaton Iloy,/Halaran ta ang Flores Niya/Agudhatagankaluoy* (Lozano 8).<sup>8</sup> Feelings and good intentions alone would be insufficient; it must be demonstrated by the action of the body: *Pagpenitensyaagudbaslankani Maria Santisimasubongnabinaslanniyaangtaosasingpananglit* (Lozano86).<sup>9</sup>

## Gihapon and Its Trace

The practice of spiritual accumulation appends with the persistence of *gihapon*<sup>10</sup> within the text. Modifying the action of the supplicant and the intercession of Mary, the term appears at least ten times in the novena. Four of the 31 ejaculations in the section MgaBulak include *gihapon* which connects itself to the supplicant's concern with the practice of holy death: *O Iloyngalabingmaluluy-on, magadebotosakosaimogihapon!* (Lozano 5)<sup>11</sup> Most of the stories in *pananglit* recount near-death experiences or salvation of the soul amidst the presence of devils upon Mary's intercession. The story in Dia 3, *Maria Es Nuestra Madre del Amor Hermoso* (Mary, Our Mother Most Sweet), tells about a heathen desiring holy orders before his imminent death. His wish is granted because: *Kagsubong sang batangadiutaynanawagsiagihapon sang Iloy sang madaligngapaghigugma*" (Lozano 17)<sup>12</sup>. The relationship between the sinner and Mary alludes to Rafael's

<sup>6</sup> "His Excellency, the most Illustrious D. Gregorio Meliton Martinez, Metropolitan Archbishop of these Islands, has granted eighty days of indulgence for each prayer contained in this book to those who read these pages with the proper intentions.

"His Excellency, the most Illustrious Bishop HomualdoJimeao of the Diocese of Cebu has granted forty days of indulgence for each prayer contained in this book to those who read these pages with the proper intentions."

<sup>7</sup> "Pray for me."

<sup>8</sup> "Let us show our love to our Mother/offer flowers in Her month/that She may shower us mercy."

<sup>9</sup> "Repent so that the Blessed Virgin would reward you as She rewarded the man in the following story."

<sup>10</sup> Kaufmann's 1934 *KapulunganBinisaya-Ininglis* has the following entries for *gihapon*: ever, constantly, always, evermore, continually, perpetually, at all times and hours. *Gihapon* is synonymous with *dayon* (continuous, permanent, lasting, perpetual, eternal, at all times, evermore, constantly, always, everlastingly; to continue, go on with, last, stay for some time, lodge, sojourn, visit or call upon for an extended time, spend some time); *dalayon* (plural form of *dayon*; also adjective: continuous, constant, persevering, always); and *pirme* (from Spanish *firme*: constant, consistent, incessant, uninterrupted, persevering, perpetual, continual, ceaseless, unceasing, persistent, continuous, pertinacious, steady, invariable, regular; firm; strong, lasting; constantly, always, ever, for ever, every moment, all the time, aye, for aye, consistently, etc).

<sup>11</sup> "Oh Mother, most merciful, I will pray to you always!"

<sup>12</sup> "And like a child he constantly implored the most loving Mother"



reading of preparation for death as the “reinvention of death” in the colonial Philippines. Death, as an event that actualizes the dreaded possibility, is rendered familiar by understanding it within the colonial practice of patronage. In his footnote he claims, “Notions of paradise and hell, contrary to received assumptions, are Spanish innovations with no Tagalog precedents. Indeed, the absence of a Tagalog mythology of rewards and punishments after death underlines the novelty of heaven and hell introduced by the Spaniards” (Rafael 170). This relationship is established through God’s ownership of the soul through the intercession of the Virgin: *O IloynamonngaEspirituhanon, bawionmogihaponangkalagko!* (Lozano 5)<sup>13</sup> This tie between the Divine and the supplicant entails a responsibility imposed on the latter through the declaration of submission to the regime of truth, expressing constant awareness of one’s place in the hierarchy, a “mediating chain of representations” (Rafael 167). This mediation comes about through the imagining of paradise, *kahimayaansalangit* (Lozano 68)<sup>14</sup> which makes possible the surrender to “an outside power located in the future which would make past and present fears eminently reasonable” (Rafael 179). Despite the higher esteem rendered to Mary in Flores, the text acquiesces that other protectors, specifically the saints, have roles in the salvation of the soul. For instance, the pananglit bases stories from the lives of saints or accounts of conversion due to the zealous efforts of these servants of God. Dia 12, *Devocion al Ave Maria* (Reciting the Hail Mary), expresses this mediated power over death: *Igintakgani Maria Santisimakay Santa Gertrudespagtugot sing subongngamgagrasyasaoras sang ikamatay* (Lozano 41).<sup>15</sup> The submission to the spiritual authority constructs “a new constellation of social relations, which is manifested and articulated in prayer” (Rafael 202). The images of heaven and hell demand a good preparation for death attainable only by Divine grace and good deeds which stall the possibility of eternal condemnation: *O Iloysang Diosnonngagrasyasirbihanikawgihapon!* (Lozano 5)<sup>16</sup> For this reason, Nietzsche remarks that the preachers of morality are the preachers of death because they are preoccupied with the afterlife (Kotsko 57).

Admittedly, the *Flores* succeeds in building a formidable system over the uncertainty of death through a constant reassurance of a governing Sign who promises salvation from Kierkegaardian “fear and trembling” if the supplicant accepts the terms of patronage and incessant deployment of temporality in *gihapon*. Its aggressive cooptation of the uncertain seemingly erases the trace of the “undecided” in language. Although the *Flores* establishes itself as a religious text, I hazard to say that it is “irreligious” because it effaces the paradox of God who is both the cornerstone of language (being the Transcendental Signifier) and also its *differance*. The tower of Babel reminds us of how ancient people built a

<sup>13</sup> “Mother most holy, deliver my soul from evil!”

<sup>14</sup> “heavenly glory”

<sup>15</sup> “The Blessed Virgin Mary promised through St Gertrude the grace of holy death”

<sup>16</sup> “Oh Mother of spiritual grace, I will serve you always!”

structure which attempted to reach the heavens. When God saw it, he brought confusion among the people by causing them to speak in different tongues:

The “tower of Babel” does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics. (Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel” 104)

Hinging itself into the discourse of colonial patronage, the text rebuilds the tower of Babel to regain the monolithic signification God denied in language. God self-effaces by blurring the divide between his central presence in the system and the subaltern excluded from it. It means that the very foundation of language is found(ed) at the periphery of language itself. I employ “found” in two ways. The term suggests the construction, the origin, the cornerstone. But it also suggests the discovery, the encounter, a “stumbling upon.” Nietzsche’s “death of God” often means the age of moral decadence and the replacement of God by science. Vattimo reinterprets Nietzsche by arguing for the hermeneutic dimension of this “death.” He reads it as the start of hermeneutic freedom, an opportunity to go beyond the restrictions of textual economy towards teasing the untapped possibilities in theological interpretation. The death of God is not a death of a substance; it is the end of the Transcendental Signifier that regulates which interpretation to allow (Vattimo, *The Meaning of Hermeneutics* 6-7). The destruction of the tower suggests God’s creative self-deconstruction by interrupting the violence of *logos*:

In seeking to “make a name for themselves,” to found at the same time a universal tongue and a unique genealogy, the Semites want to bring the world to reason, and this reason can signify simultaneously a colonial violence (since they would thus universalize their idiom) and a peaceful transparency of human community. Inversely, when God imposes and opposes his name, he ruptures the rational transparency but interrupts also the colonial violence or the linguistic imperialism. (Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel” 111)

Death as deconstruction is an event (*evenement*) because we stumble upon the undecidability of presence/existence—that the spectre of non-being is at the heart of being. Event possesses the dimension of surprise, the epiphany of the “possibility of the impossible.” Despite the aporetic possibilities of language, Flores attempts to curb semantic excess by pushing for a certainty expressed in teleological/theological discourse. *Gihapon* is employed to express a faith bereft of its own spectre—the doubt that persists in the articulation of the promise—even though St. Augustine distinguishes between faith and understanding (the soul’s capacity to believe because it comprehends the Divine Plan). If we have understood, faith is no longer a virtue. The faith we profess transforms into an axiom that compels our intellect to assent. Being a virtue, it inevitably inflicts violence to the intellect—not

by taking away our freedom to assent, but by leaving us free not to believe. A mathematical statement (for example, “Two points create a line.”) forces us to accept it (for there is no other way it contradicts our paradigm). But a statement on the afterlife—complicated by its non-empirical nature—gives our intellect a leeway to dismiss it. In a sense, the possibility of faith is rooted on the impossibility of belief. Yet the novena combats the centrality of doubt through the repetition of *gihapon*, *aguddilimagduhaduhatubtubsaikamatay* (Lozano 77).<sup>17</sup>

A deconstructive reading of *gihapon* suggests the presence of doubt in the practice of faith. My preference for the expression “presence of doubt” teases out this contradiction which sustains faith. Instead of confirming an ontological truth, faith seeks to defer, “to resort consciously or unconsciously, to the temporal and temporalizing mediation of a detour that suspends the accomplishment or fulfilment of a ‘desire’ or ‘will,’ or carries desire or will out in a way that annuls or tempers their effect” (Derrida quoted in Baugh 75). Death invites us to faith which opens the future of the *perhaps*. While institutionalized religion and Marxism are seemingly opposite, both actually share a grand narrative that espouses a clear destiny (*telos*). On the other hand, deconstruction suspects this promise of return to innocence or a finality of destination. As *de*-construction (not a destruction, but a construction *from* the sign and its trace), *gihapon* suggests a reading with a hospitable attitude towards the trace—by interrogating the metaphysical unassailability of being. While a teleological reading of *gihapon* declares and punctuates with a period (a closure), a deconstructive reading leaves a question mark—a *perhaps*. Derrida teases out the semantic openness of the French *peut-etre* (*perhaps*) when he points out that *etre* means “to be” (Shakespeare 134).

## The Incalculability of Event in Pananglit

In the closely knitted system where *gihapon* predicates an assurance—an end foreshadowed—Dia 25, *Fe de Maria* (The Faith of Mary), exemplifies an opening to the spiritual ordeal of the *perhaps* in doubt and surprise (the incalculable moment Derrida associates with *evenement*). While Eve closed heaven because of sin, the Virgin re-opened it through her faith expressed at the Annunciation. The *Flores* continues with examples from the Bible demonstrating the faith of Mary amidst the contradiction—the surprise—in the unfolding of events: the Creator of the universe born in the stable, and the flight of the King of kings, *Hari sang mga Hari* (Lozano 74), from the evil intent of Herod. She kept her faith during the Passion when Christ, *angmaalamnga way katubtuban* (Lozano 74)<sup>18</sup>, kept silence. She continually meditated on the paradox of the Divine when—remaining at the Calvary—she gazed at him nailed on the cross, the ultimate stumbling block towards comprehension of divinity. The last paragraph reminds the supplicant to imitate her faith: *Di*

<sup>17</sup> “and not to lose faith until the day of death”

<sup>18</sup> “Eternal Wisdom”

*mopagsundunangmgadesperatesngabatuksapagtuokonditumuokalamangsa Dios* (Lozano 75).<sup>19</sup> The pananglit for that day tells about the story—narrated by St Alphonsus de Liguori— of St John of God’s longing to see the Virgin before he dies. Even though he has strong faith in the promise, her unexpected delay saddens him: *apangkagnadugaynasi Maria Santisimasapagbisitasaiyanagsubosi San Juan* (Lozano 75).<sup>20</sup> Derrida’s reinterpretation of Christianity proposes a “messianism without messianism,” an attitude of waiting without waiting for what we expect. The theological notion of death as the arrival of salvation with the face of the Self suppresses the element of alterity in redemption: “God is the best name we might say for the combination of infinite alterity and irreducible singularity. But his is a name that may mean at the same time death” (Hanson 14). We do not experience the magnanimity of the event because we have transformed it into a familiar face which is our Self. If God is the alterity that exceeds our understanding, the hope for a future anticipated within the ambit of our finite representation constitutes an idolatry against God—an act of appropriating that which should remain as alterity. We act inhospitably to the excess of God. This idolatry reminds us of Lacan’s remark that “only theologians can be truly atheistic, namely those who speak of God” (quoted in Crockett and Malabou 32).

I associate magnanimity not just with nobility and generosity (excess), but also with forgiveness (a crucial dimension in Christian theology). What should be forgiven? Traditional theology replies: “forgiveness of sins.” I focus instead on forgiveness as a gift, a divine invitation to dialogue without us deserving it or asking for it. It does not imply a state of innocence or exculpation without our acknowledgment. On the contrary, for the gift to become an initial step towards a relationship, it must be “countersigned” by the recipient. The onus of the giver lies in his openness to vulnerability. Because he does not take away the free will of the receiver to respond in any way, he could suffer rejection (which supremely tests his magnanimity). What then is forgiveness outside the context of moralism? On the part of the giver, it is the openness to be scar(r)ed by the refusal yet leaving the recipient unscathed because of the balm of forgiveness. Without forgiveness, the gift changes into a condemnation and develops into a battleground of opposing wills. Forgiveness—appropriately understood within the context of event, of *peut-etre*—is the receiver’s openness to be surprised by the arrival of the event or the willingness to be disturbed from one’s torpor and to be troubled by the presence of the excess. Hence, forgiveness summons us to *jouissance* found in the illogic of logocentrism. I wish to point this out because “messianism without messianism” might be misconstrued as a theology of despair when the contrary holds true. It is a freedom from the worldliness of calculation—the accumulation of certainty. A messianism (the attitude of waiting) without messianism (the prefabricated messiah) maintains the genuineness of faith and hope as theological virtues because

<sup>19</sup> “Do not imitate those who lost their faith, but only in God you should put your trust.”

<sup>20</sup> “but St John was saddened by the prolonged absence of the Blessed Virgin Mary”

“A hope that was guaranteed, that knew what to expect, would not be hope at all. It would be prudence” (Shakespeare 137).

Although the spiritual practice of accumulation prevails in Flores, the text also challenges *gihapon*. In the story, St. John is saddened by the extended absence of the Virgin. The occasion brings about the crisis in the “at all times and hours” of *gihapon*; instead of the presence, the saint’s faith must thrive on the trace of that presence. Desire for the presence expects its actualization in the manner of temporality and representation that the saint imagines (the time the Virgin would visit). But faith is a decision without an ontological guarantee: it is an act of waiting for the event to unfold beyond the limits of our paradigm. From a Derridean perspective, the pain experienced in faith ensues more from *not* knowing what to wait (rather than from waiting itself): “A decision that didn’t go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process” (quoted in Shakespeare 132). If we don’t know what to wait or when it will arrive, then there is no point of waiting at all. In fact, the nobility of Derridean faith is found here: to wait without waiting, to wait for the *perhaps*, to risk waiting for nothing (the spectre of presence).

Rebuking him, the Virgin said: Juan, *naghunahunakangabayaan ta ikawsaoras sang ikamatay? Dilikamakhibalongadilikopagpabayaanangmgadebotokosaikamataynila? Diliakoumabotkaydilitigayonpa, apang tan-awaniyanngaigonaangoras; tan-awakayumabutnaakosapagbisita* (Lozano 75-76).<sup>21</sup> Emphasizing the centrality of *gihapon* in the preparation for good death, her rhetorical question flaunts the “always” implied in *gihapon*. One does not waver in faith, but should trust the verity of the promise. Yet what brings about the reiteration of *gihapon*? To speak repeatedly is to attempt to construct the presence. The illocutionary power of repetition solidifies the simulacrum of a presence by deploying words to stand for the thing itself. Reiteration concretizes that which is absent by draping it with signifiers charged with their own specificities. Writing about the Tagalog society during the early Spanish rule, Rafael’s idea of translation elucidates on the role of language in lending presence to the absence:

The Spanish notion of translation as the reduction of native signs into a structure comprehensible in Spanish terms was very much at the root of the attempts to codify native culture. Translation was a process of making known the unknown, of distinguishing between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” native practices, and finally of harnessing native signs to further the spread of God’s Word and consolidate its gains. (Rafael 106)

<sup>21</sup> “John, did you think I shall leave you at the hour of death? Do you know that when death arrives I shall not abandon those who devote to me? I did not appear yet because the time has not come. But, look, I arrive at the right time.”

The narrative privileges the position of the Virgin when it allows her to speak in direct speech—the simulation of presence—while the omniscient narrator reports St. John as *nagsubo* (“saddened”) (Lozano 75). Supposedly a dialogue, the absence of direct speech on his part means that his spiritual ordeal functions as backdrop for the monologue of the Virgin. There is no dialogue at all. Focusing on understanding—*naghunahuna* (“did think”) and *makahibalo* (“do know”)—her questions cannot be answered: they are unanswerable because of their inappropriateness. They presuppose that faith lies in understanding when faith is found elsewhere—in the margins of logic, in the illogic of logocentrism. *Perhaps* lingers in the semantic dispersal of *gihapon* despite the marked excess of assurance (as exemplified by the rhetoric of the monologue). Yet because faith is born out of experience *with* the *perhaps*, communication fails because the assurance is apparently draped in the language that perhaps does not speak. Whereas *perhaps* can only happen with faith in the event (in the surprise surpassing our mental construct), *gihapon* as certainty happens only through prudence. Hence, deconstructing *gihapon* teases out its incalculable signification beyond its herme(neu)tic interpretation as certainty.

Derrida claims that to speak makes up for the absence of presence (Dastur 58). Our words cannot speak the thing itself; we speak *for* the thing itself when we marshal the mediating forces of language. In our imaginings, we evoke the presence that is barely there while the iterative power of language enchants us to believe that language and things are interchangeable. As the speaking subject, the Virgin puts closure to *gihapon* as she reiterates and fulfils her promise at the end of the narrative. As the axis of the promise, it validates holy practices, the accumulation of indulgences, and the preparation for happy death. Despite the insistence of presence—through aural/oral performatives—“speech requires the death of the speaking subject” (Dastur 57). The decentralization of the subject in structuralism asserts the primacy of language over the subject who speaks as fiction—for the language speaks us, not the other way around. Instead of the Virgin speaking, the discourse of *gihapon* (fleshed out in her utterance) speaks the system of *logos* to avow its presence. As a speaking subject, she is transformed into a tropological constituent, a synecdoche for the promise she utters. Furthermore, the speaking subject ceases as her words generate significations beyond her intentions and context. Writing is the death of the writer but it does not prevent the generation of excess meaning (Dastur 56). We can extend this observation if we recall the collapse of binary opposition between writing and speaking (which Derrida has already attempted). In writing, the author’s presence is substituted by words; in speaking, the presence is subverted by the tropes of language and the context of the utterance. The rigid structure of prayers for holy death guards against the excess of meaning: “The highly formulaic petitioning for their [saints’] aid fills the listeners’ minds with a catalogue of names that block other chains of associations that death’s approach otherwise might trigger” (Rafael 205-206).

*Gihapon* as certainty persists as the presence of the promise which cannot be violated by the Virgin. It assures the monolithic meaning of the promise to the extent that it preempts the future. Rehashing the future, *gihapon* actualizes the potentiality of the promise as a present (meaning: gift, time) into a specific imagining of what will come. An illocutionary gift, a promise binds the speaker to the addressee and mobilizes the fulfilment of the future. Present is also the temporality tempered by the future; insofar as the promise is spoken in the present time, it also orientates how life should be lived now. For example, Dia 19, *Devocion de Visitar a Maria* (Devotional Visit to Mary), urges the supplicant to pay homage to the images of the Virgin and to visit churches dedicated in her honor. The promise of heavenly graces always already signals the manner of life to lead in the present. The promise being a transaction, both the present and the future cohere in order to fulfill the gift in the form predicated on calculability: *kaghiagaumannamonangpulos sang amonpagduaw* (Lozano 61).<sup>22</sup> In the process of promising, *gihapon* restrains the trace that threatens the prudence of the promise. Entering into a transaction, both the supplicant and the Divine utter the yes which seals both the present and the future into an assurance that excludes incalculability. In fact, the prudence of the promise—the reason for the utterance of the yes—is founded on the threat of incalculability:

In order for the yes of affirmation, assent, consent, alliance, or engagement, or gift to have the value it has, it must carry the repetition within itself. It must a priori and immediately confirm its promise and promise its confirmation. This essential repetition lets itself be haunted by an intrinsic threat... which acts like a parasite, like its mimetic, mechanical double, its incessant parody. (Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone" 326)

The repetition of the promise lends presence to *gihapon* through the formulaic repetition of Hail Mary, Hail Holy Queen, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and the prayers included in *Flores* (Lozano 60).

Nevertheless, Dia 19 also subverts the persistence of *gihapon* as a dominant presence in the text. The *pananglit* for that day encourages a reading that recuperates the trace of incalculability, uncertainty, and openness to the event. Culled from the "*Kronikani San Francisco*," it tells the story of two priests who frequently (*nagsali*) visit the shrines of the Virgin. One night, they lose their way in the forest. Trying to find their way, they see a structure which looks like a house (*ang daw isakabalay*). They decide to inquire the servants of the house about its owner. The servants say the house belongs to the most beautiful and kind lady. Allowed to stay for the night, the priests request the servants if they could have an audience with the lady to express their gratitude. She favors them with her presence and asks them about their journey. They tell her how they have lost their way to visit a shrine of the Virgin. The lady promises to hand them a letter which may help them during

<sup>22</sup> "to reap the reward of our devotion"

their journey. The following morning, while almost far from the house, they realize the letter is not enclosed in an envelope (*way sobre*). They decide to return to the house, but they cannot find it anymore. They retrace their path, yet the house has vanished. Finally, they decide to open the letter and discover it signed by the lady who turns out to be the Virgin herself.

The story foregrounds the image of travelling as an event that opens the characters to the possibility of chance encounter. Although they have a definite purpose for the journey (to visit the shrine), the duration of the narrative concentrates on how they lose their way. The narrative paradoxically reflects on the interruption of the journey, but this interruption—the *perhaps*—is the heart of the journey, its “completion.” Derrida remarks that *perhaps* does not entail the rejection of truth. Instead, perhaps invites us to open ourselves to it unexpected unfolding—its being “unbelievable”—and to be hospitable to its alterity:

Our unbelievable *perhaps* does not signify haziness and mobility, the confusion preceding knowledge or renouncing all truth. If it is undecidable and without truth in its own moment (but it is, as a matter of fact, difficult to assign a proper moment to it), this is in order that it might be a condition of decision, interruption, revolution, responsibility and truth. The friends of the *perhaps* are the friends of truth. But the friends of truth are not, by definition, in the truth; they are not installed there as in the padlocked security of a dogma, and the stable reliability of an opinion. (quoted in Shakespeare 139)

The priests have not reneged on the promise to visit the shrine, but at the same time they give in to the sweetness of delay—the hospitality of the house. In losing their way, they respond to the event in its uncertainty. As the night approaches, they experience the possibility of the impossibilities—the incident that inaugurates the happening of the yes, “a scene of call and request: it confirms and countersigns” (Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone” 332).

Aside from its relational characteristic, *gihapon*—as a promise—is also a yes that accepts the trace hidden by the signification of *gihapon*. Yes is not a certainty, but an affirmation of uncertainty. The instability of the *yes* pulls us into a moment of decision when we face options without guidelines (the immutable law) and we are responsible for our own choice. A promise is an exchange of *yeses* which, by the moment of utterance, join other free-floating signifiers: “The relationship of one yes to the Other, of one *yes* to the other, and of one *yes* to the other *yes*, must be such that the contamination of the two *yeses* remains inevitable. And not only as a threat: but also as a chance” (Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone” 337). It seems that both threat and chance are inseparable consequences: *yes* threatens by undermining the certainty of monolithic signification, but it also brings opportunity to respond to the call of the Other. At the end of the story, the priests only have the trace, a reminder of the absence of the lady and the house. In their memory both characters rekindle their moment of *yes* to the event. By remembering, they affirm what is left



to them—the signature, the trace, and not the presence. In its attempt to re-live the vanished presence, remembrance falls into multiplication of signifiers that buries the very presence it tries to recoup: “This memory of a promise begins the circle of appropriation, bringing with it all the risks of technical repetition, of automatized archives, of gramophony, of simulacrum, of wandering deprived of address and destination. A yes must entrust itself to memory” (Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone” 338).

*Gihapon*, as the advent of the incalculable, transgresses the law by insisting on the outside as the site for the fulfilment of justice. Although both ethics and religion deal with the incalculable, both tend towards a mechanical mode of understanding the law rooted on the unproblematized capacity to return to the pristine, originary, revealed law. Illegality turns out to be the “forgotten moment” in the institution of the law because “The law is made possible by illegality. And this is no accident; there is no other way for law to come into being, for the line between the ideal and the real to be crossed” (Shakespeare 13). Dia 28, *Pobreza de Maria* (The Holy Poverty of Mary) exhorts the supplicant to renounce worldly goods in favor of the spiritual wealth promised to the elect. In the same manner that the Virgin distributed her inheritance to the poor, her faithful follower must also find joy (*lipayonmoangbuotmogihapon*) in the life of poverty. Although Dia 28 directs its attention to renunciation of material wealth, the *pananglit* for the day reflects on poverty of spirit—supposedly the end goal of material poverty. It tells the story of a boy taught by his mother to pray the Hail Mary every day and invoke the Virgin: *O Birhennadalayawontabanganmoakosaoras sang ikamatayko* (Lozano 83).<sup>23</sup> When he grows into a young man, he leads a life of robbery. Sentenced to the gallows, the man pities his mother who has not yet heard of his plight. One day the devil appears in human form and promises to help him escape if he despises God and the sacraments. The man ponders on the condition. When the devil also asks him to despise the Virgin, the young man vehemently opposes and prays: *O Birhennadalayawontabanganmoakosaoras sang ikamatayko*. The devil flees and leaves the prisoner sorry for his sins. On his way to the gallows, he passes by an image of the Virgin and asks the executioner permission to kiss the feet of the image. He repeats the prayer taught him as he kisses it. Suddenly, the Virgin touches his arms that he can hardly move. The crowd sees the miracle and demands his release. The man dies of old age and stays a fervent devotee of the Virgin. The poverty of spirit shown by the man subverts the very law that condemns him. For Derrida, law cannot be equated with justice; as the “experience of the impossible,” justice is the trace of the law:

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<sup>23</sup> “Oh Virgin most venerable, help me at the hour of death!”

Law (*droit*) is not justice. Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice, that is to say of moments in which the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule. (quoted in Shakespeare 131-32)

When he remarks that “Deconstruction is justice,” Derrida points at the irreducibility of justice to a set of prohibitions, and the fulfilment of the law outside itself. Justice can only become an event outside the calculability of law, and this event is predicated on hospitality to the Other which circumvents the prudence of legalism. Justice, then is a “pure gift” which “always escapes the economy of reward, recompense, punishment and revenge” (Shakespeare 133). The fulfilment of *gihapon* comes from the exercise of justice. Deconstruction recognizes the role of law in the pursuit for justice, but also reminds us that the law is founded on the illegality it seeks to curb. Insofar as the law is promulgated to punish what is prohibited, it also resurrects the spectre of the illegal either by codification or the inventory of actions categorized (from then on) as prohibitions. The law can still be a *yes*, an affirmation to justice and an elocution of commitment. It is not a silent yes, but a yes that gesticulates through a proclamation by a voice that renders the presence of the law aural/oral. In the process of reproduction, the law also deconstructs its duress: “Such gramophony responds, of course, to the dream of a reproduction which preserves as its truth the living yes, archived in the form of the most living voice. But by the very same token, it gives way to the possibility of parody, of a yes technique that persecutes the most spontaneous, the most giving desire of the *yes*” (Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone” 326). The continual existence of the law comes precisely from its perpetual interpretation, “the endlessness of scripture and commentary upon scripture” (Shakespeare 98). As a site of interpretive contestation, the law becomes an event that ushers the arrival of justice. If we wait for the coming of justice, it is because justice lies outside of the law, because it is the law in its incalculability. In the case of the young man, the fulfilment of justice is the deconstruction of the law. Poverty of spirit allows him to experience redemption from the letter of the law which can sometimes hinder justice because of its insistence on finality. Understood as deconstruction, justice can be considered as an “event of revelation that escapes such constriction, opening it to other interpretation and voices” (Shakespeare 118).

## Conclusion

As a metanarrative, God has spawned a hierarchy of texts; from his word flow dogmas, ethics, interpretations, and understanding. Institutions wield power through his name by appropriating themselves as his rightful representatives. The Catholic Church has maintained that revelation and tradition are the sources

of faith. The Bible is the repository of God's word which cannot be changed or added on. Time-locked, the scriptures remain true for perpetuity. Composed of the teachings and scriptural interpretations of the Church Fathers, tradition is also a time-locked interpretation of the scriptures which privileges the metaphysics of presence. The interpreter cannot leap out of the decidability of the text and the ontological assumptions of interpretation.

Devotionals, like the novena, remain on the margins of religious literature because they have been produced after the revelation through the scriptures. After the books comprising the Bible have been codified, texts written after the canon are considered as spiritually salubrious yet do not bear the signature of the Word. Therefore, they should carry with them the *imprimatur* (could be printed) and the *nihilobstat* (nothing contradictory to the Faith) of the local bishop. The Flores indicates on its title page the Church approval (*con licenciaseclesiasticas*) that its content and intentionality align with the Church mission to propagate the Faith, prevent heresies, and enkindle the love of truth among the faithful. By branding texts with its *imprimatur*, the institution imagines a language cleansed from the danger of misprision. The texts could be strapped to the intention of the writer. The production of marginal meanings is arrested by the presence of the *Logos*, the witness and judge of interpretation.

The deconstructive reading of *gihapon* illustrates the possibility for re-reading colonial religious literature without setting aside our historicity. If we cannot escape the effects of postmodernity in our effort to understand, it is because the text repeatedly calls us to affirm our prejudice as the starting point of understanding. Secularization, far from excusing us from religion, is "our way of living the return of religion" (Robbins 3). Deconstruction, a secular attitude, invites us to read the novena as a way of de-naming God. After deconstruction, God becomes a *nomen in nominabile* (Caputo 8), a name that deconstructs itself. Pinning him down to an attribute or one just leads to a deconstructive process whereby what is left of God is a space, a *differance*. God is a force overflowing beyond the restrictions of binarism. When we talk of Him, we are aware of the provisional naming we supplement to the supreme Becoming (instead of Being). God is always already a slippage...

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