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RESEARCH ARTICLE

“nararampang nga mga takna... nangangaliding nga mga higayon”: Memory, Nostalgia, Love, and Loss in Victor Sugbo’s *Taburos Han Dagat*

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Abstract

This paper explores how the concepts of memory, nostalgia, love, and loss are depicted in the poems 1) “Ha Akon Paglinakaton” (In My Travels¹), 2) “May Ada Panahon” (There Comes a Time), 3) “Parada Han mga Sinya” (The Parade of Zinnias), 4) “An Pagdumdum” (On Recalling), 5) “Kawarayan” (Emptiness), 6) “Agurang Mundo” (Old Mundo), 7) “Taburos Han Dagat” (Sea Spray), 8) “La Madonna Alegro,” and 9) “Cadena de Amor” from Victor N. Sugbo’s *Taburos Han Dagat* (2014) using an ecocritical lens. Published in a post-Haiyan context, the poems may be classified as belonging to the ecopoetry genre with their use of nonhuman natural elements in portraying nostalgia or the longing for home, inevitable loss and eventual acceptance of it, and the resilience of love. While the poems do not directly champion environmental awareness and conservation, they prove how humans—our memory, consciousness, and fate—are intertwined with nature and dependent on its elements. The paper presents a perspective on reading Waray poetry that reveals the Waray people’s affinity with the Eastern Visayas flora and fauna and sea- and landscapes as evidenced by the selected poems in Sugbo’s *Taburos*. It contends that perhaps, through the reading of poems like the ones found in *Taburos*, which greatly rely on sentiment and thus exhibit a certain kind of romanticism, a renewed consciousness of and high regard for the environment may be instilled in readers. The paper thus opens the discourse on how the people of Eastern Visayas relate to their ecology, and how this relationship may be revisited and renewed through Waray poetry.

Keywords: ecocriticism, ecological nostalgia, Waray ecopoetry, Waray literature, post-Haiyan literature, Eastern Visayas ecology, memory, nostalgia, love, loss, hope

In their introduction to the book *The Shoulders We Stand on: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism*, Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic write:

...multi-ethnic groups from around the world are increasingly entering the conversation about ecocriticism on their own terms by producing artistic expressions of their responses to the natural world. Such responses are intrinsic to human life, regardless of culture—and such responses contribute in profound ways to our identities as individuals and communities, independent from the advantages or disadvantages we or our ancestors have faced. (10)

Writing about nature has long been done by writers from all around the world. Romantics idealized nature by making it the subject or object they associate with human feelings and emotions. They “tried to engage directly with natural detail and related landscape to the inward motions of the observing consciousness...” (Constantini 489). “Topographical (or locodescriptive) poetry,” which, according to Mariaconcetta Constantini, is a “poetic tradition [that] conceived the life of nature as a source of health and integrity, in utter contrast with the corruption wrought by human beings,” was prominent in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (489). Constantini adds that “[l]ocal topography inspired the poet-observer, who captured natural details to create appealing landscape pictures” (489).

Since the rise of romanticism, writing about nature has evolved. One may claim that it has adapted to exigencies that required it to champion environmental justice given the global problems of environmental degradation that has immensely affected the quality of life across the world. Environmental criticism or ecocriticism thus emerged. Like other revolutions, it came in different waves. Adamson and Slovic characterize these different waves:

“First wave” environmental criticism concerns itself with conventional nature writing and conservation-oriented environmentalism, which traces its origins to the work of Emerson, Muir, and Thoreau. “Second wave” environmental criticism redefines the environment in terms of the seventeen Principles of Environmental Justice and increasingly concerns itself with

“issues of environmental welfare and equity” and “critique of the demographic homogeneity of traditional environmental movements and academic environmental studies” (Buell 112, 115)...*third* wave of ecocriticism, which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries...explores all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint. (6–7)

The recent years saw a rise in the number of literary texts foregrounding the environment and emphasizing our relationship with it. Ecopoetry, a kind of poetry that tackles the environment and advocates its conservation, is one of the genres that have recently gained traction. John Shoptaw, in his article “Why Ecopoetry,” explains when a poem is considered an “ecopoem”:

... What is ecopoetry? What must an ecopoem be to do justice to its name? My answer is twofold: an ecopoem needs to be environmental and it needs to be environmentalist. By environmental, I mean first that an ecopoem needs to be about the nonhuman natural world—wholly or partly, in some way or other, but really and not just figuratively. (395)

But more than depicting nature, an ecopoem should present how different aspects of human life—memory, history, and consciousness—are interrelated with the environmental elements around (Shoptaw 395).

In Philippine literature, there exist texts depicting the relationship of humans with nature and the physical environment, and the most recently produced ones come from Eastern Visayas. After the onslaught of typhoon Haiyan in 2013, works of poetry and fiction recalling and processing the disaster and its aftermath started getting published. In his article “Ugmad: Storm Surges, Super Typhoons, and the Ecopoetry of Post-Haiyan Leyte and Samar, Philippines,” Antonino Salvador de Veyra calls these works “post-Haiyan Samar-Leyte ecopoetry” (79). Poems and short stories trying to make sense of the chaos were written by new and established writers and collated in anthologies. These texts primarily deal with the pain and trauma felt from the loss of lives, property, and the sense of place and belongingness. A number of these texts expound on the grief of losing loved ones, and some on losing the memory of home and childhood—personal histories.

The poetry collection *Taburos Han Dagat* (Sea Spray) by Victor N. Sugbo can be categorized under this genre.

Written in the Waray language, one of the major languages spoken in Eastern Visayas, *Taburos* was published in 2014, a year after the region was struck by typhoon Haiyan. The title of the book may give the impression that the poems inside talk outrightly about the Haiyan experience—the storm surge that took away lives, the strong winds that destroyed houses, and the eeriness that followed and stayed for several months (or years)—but most, if not all, of the poems offer, not a portrayal or recreation of the trauma, but a subdued and nuanced remembering of the past and a delicate yet strong declaration of hope and love. The book, therefore, provides respite.

In the book's preface, Sugbo shares his own take on the poems and the rationale behind the book's title:

The poems here are all about home, my country, and places of memory...It was only when I was outside, in a country not my own, that I began to pull all snatches of remembered moments about Nang Agrifina, Tata Santo, San Barotil, and the corollaries of home...I entitled this collection of poems "Taburos Han Dagat" because every poem here is a flare of memory like a sea spray that comes from the larger sea. The sea has always been a part of me since childhood, having lived in Tacloban whose coastline is bounded by it. I grew up watching its waves, its moods, and fury. I do not really know much about the sea. What I do know is that occasionally it sprays saltwater at us probably because it seeks company and wants us to remember many a moment of certainty, grief, delight, and indecision. Too often one light wave of sea spray or *taburos* is enough to catch us and shake us. (xi–xii)

As explained by Sugbo in his preface, the poems in the collection mainly share fragments yet full memories of people, places, and moments in the persona's life. Interestingly, these memories are placed side by side elements of nature like trees, plants, fruits, and flowers. While the poems certainly do not forthrightly champion environmental awareness and conservation like the ecopoems under the first and second waves of ecocriticism, they underscore the environment's role in retrieving memory, accepting loss, and cultivating love despite loss. The meaning of the poems greatly relies on

the visual and olfactory imagery that the local flora—the *dama de noche*, *zinnias*, and *cadena de amor*, for example—and the background of fruit-bearing trees—*malimbin*, *mangga*—provide. One may claim that the poems present "facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint" (Adamson and Slovic 6–7).

Through examining how the elements of nature are used as the main metaphors or lyric backdrops in the poems 1) "Ha Akon Paglinakaton" (In My Travels²), 2) "May Ada Panahon" (There Comes a Time), 3) "Parada Han mga Sinya" (The Parade of Zinnias), 4) "An Pagdumdum" (On Recalling), 5) "Kawarayan" (Emptiness), 6) "Agurang Mundo" (Old Mundo), 7) "Taburos Han Dagat" (Sea Spray), 8) "La Madonna Alegro," and 9) "Cadena de Amor," the paper will be able to contend that ecopoetry and environmental literature do not necessarily have to be so blatant in its attempt to encourage in its readers a renewed consciousness towards and high regard for the environment. A certain kind and level of romanticism, which *Taburos* strongly relies on, may still work in reminding the readers, perhaps particularly the people of Eastern Visayas, of their connection to the local ecology and vice versa, and subsequently, if not incidentally, develop and maintain the drive to conserve their natural surroundings where personal and collective memories are lodged, nurtured, and even preserved.

Slovic asserts that "a more comparative, transcultural approach to ecocritical studies" that "[explores] the ethnicity through the study of environment literature" is what the third wave of ecocriticism tries to achieve, and that it differs from the first two waves because it has "the tendency to study human experience 'in relation to the more-than-human world and to compare human experience across cultures'" (qtd. in Nuri 11). The paper will also attempt to reveal how the Waray community, as portrayed by the poetry of Sugbo, position themselves in relation to the environment, and how the Eastern Visayas ecology assumes an inherent cultural significance by serving not merely as the backdrop but the carrier of meanings and realities, the symbol itself.

Memory and Nostalgia

The poems in *Taburos* collectively speak of nostalgia, a bittersweet reminiscence of home and love from the past that eventually ends in a poignant

acceptance of the present that no longer has place for what has been. In “Ha Akon Paglinakaton” (In My Travels), the persona narrates how he/she has been to many places:

*Ha akon paglinakaton
Damo nga mga bungto in akon nakit-an:
Zamboanga, Iloilo, Cagayan de Oro,
Iligan, Carcar, Bacolod, Calbayog,
General Santos, Laoag.*

Since I travel much
I have been to many cities:
Zamboanga, Iloilo, Cagayan de Oro,
Iligan, Carcar, Bacolod, Calbayog,
General Santos, Laoag.

In these different cities, he/she finds the old face of his/her hometown Tacloban:

*Han pagsinubaysubay ko han ira mga dalan
Say ko natad-an mga dalan han hadto nga
Tacloban,
Daan nga balay, mga bintana nga capis,
Higluag ngan banwaon nga mga laguerta,
Mabukad nga mga beranda.*

Ambling around their streets,
I would find the paseos of old Tacloban,
Ancient houses, capiz windows,
Wide grassy orchards,
Flowering verandas.

Then the persona ends the recollection with an expression of grief for only in these different cities will he/she be able to get a glimpse of the city he/she grew up in. His/her childhood city—the memory of it—is what he/she can only keep:

*Dagos liwat nabug-on an akon dughan
Kay didto ha amon di ko na kilala
An bungto ko nga nahiraan.
Ginhahandom ko nala
An ginmat-an ko nga Tacloban.*

Quickly my chest would tighten
For at home I no longer see
The town I used to live.
Now all I can keep is
The old Tacloban. (80–81)

This certain sentiment for the past and longing for home are present in many other poems in the collection. In “Ha Akon Paglinakaton,” the persona navigates the physical world and provides a layout of memory markers, a landscape of “*Daan nga balay, mga bintana nga capis*, (Ancient houses, capiz windows) / *Higluag ngan banwaon nga mga laguerta* (Wide grassy orchards), / *Mabukad nga mga beranda* (Flowering verandas).” This poem, which illustrates how the physical world can be a living fossil—a reminder of past lives, reinforces the book and the author’s claimed intent. Same as the persona, the reader is also drawn to the elements of the physical world, particularly the natural ones, used as the literary devices, the metaphors, and the conduits of the personal and metaphysical human vulnerabilities.

Bouts of nostalgia come in moments when you are alone: “*May ada panahon nga pagaabotan ka nira / ha imo pag-inusara* (There comes a time when they’ll catch you / alone),” says the persona in “May Ada Panahon” (There Comes a Time). Then the persona goes on to creating a montage of memories, a random yet curated enumeration of vignettes of moments from an earlier time in his/her life:

*lumatod, ubanon, kauropdan
tigda la in pagrampag
sugad han nagpupungpong nga bukad han
malimbin*

Ug manlulutaw ha imo linantawan

*adton iyo panaklang han tiyotes
an uruyas ha bakilid
adton pagbantay niyo han kababalayan
an pagsikmit han kamot han kasayaw ha
plasa...*

children, white hair, cousins
they spring thick
like little clusters of purple flowers of the
malimbin tree.

And they’ll float in your eyes

that time you climbed the tiyotes tree
the games by the hillside
the day you looked after the houses
the way you clasped her hand at the dance ...

The rush of these memories will overwhelm you: "Makarimadima an ira pagdangat (How they lure you) / kay huhugayon ka hin narampang nga mga takna (with the lushness of those hours), / nangangaliding nga mga higayon (the wheels rolling and gleaming), // Ngan manmamarahayaw ka... (And you'll feel your hair bristle)," but although it overwhelms, it is going to unburden you: "...magtitin-aw / an bug-at han im pinapas-an (...the load / you carry lighten)" (6-7). In this poem, the *malimbin* and *tiyotes* trees do not only depict an image of the countryside a young child visits during summer vacation, where he/she spends time with grandparents and cousins, but their lushness (*kamarampag*) is also used in the poem to describe that childhood memory. There is also an abundance of memories (*narampang nga mga takna*) that visits the persona, and these memories give relief.

Zinnias seem to be the subject in "Parada Han mga Sinya" (The Parade of Zinnias), but the mood shifts towards the middle of the poem when the persona recounts memories with Inse Agripina, a mother/caretaker figure from the persona's childhood:

...Maiha na kami ni Inse waray pagkita,
Tagbantay hadton akon kalumatod.
Diri na ha amon hiya nabisita
Amo nga nailiw na hi Nanay han binungkos
Ni Inse nga mga sinya dara kabilin nga hamot
Han hagkot, kikidlat, adlaw ngan uran.

For a long time I have not seen Inse,
After she took care of me as a child.
She has not visited us since.
This is why Mother misses her harvest
Of zinnias, heavy with
The scent of lush cool nights, lightning, sun,
and rain.

The poem, in its last stanza, takes a more somber tone that renders it a character like that of a eulogy's, as the persona, in a hinting tone, reveals how Inse Agripina left: "Nabaroan ko nga binmaya hiya han Cantandug (I learned she left Cantandug) / Napulo na ka tuig ngan upat ka dulom na an umagi (Ten years and four quarter moons ago). / May nagsiring nga di na daw mabalik (They say she would not come back)." Yet the persona claims that Inse must still be around because the zinnias have bloomed in the yards of Bitanhuan: "...Aanhi la tingale nagtitinago hi Inse (...Inse could just be hiding here). / Kay inin mga

sinya (As these zinnias keep) / *Duro man pamarada* (Parading) / *Ha mga bungsaran hinin Bitanhuan* (In the yards of Bitanhuan)" (10-11). In this poem, the zinnias may be considered as the objective correlative, the symbol for Inse Agripina's energy or presence. Like the zinnias, Inse, who is the persona's caregiver, also gives comfort and coziness that a childhood home scented by zinnias "...heavy with / The scent of lush cool nights, lightning, sun, and rain" provides.

Nostalgia seems to yield no real pleasure, because it is a longing for a place, person, or an experience, that though can be remembered and retrieved (but only to a certain extent), cannot be relived. While the moment can be recreated, the new reality is only a replica of what once has been. But perhaps it is not pleasure that one seeks when one recalls the past, but a respite in a personal utopia. "An Pagdumdum" (On Recalling) presents a two-pronged take on "recalling." It starts with the persona illustrating how bidding goodbye happens: "*An pag-ilinakatan* (Leave-taking) / *Diri ada ha una nga pagbiksal* (Does not happen in a step); / *Ada ini kun may naruruyagan* (It begins when one selects) / *Nga agi-anan* (The path one wants) / *Sugad hinin yana nga akon* (Like me here) / *Ginpipinamiling* (Tracing the footpath)..."

But it seems that the persona is leaving to go back to a place that he/she once stayed in, or a moment once experienced, or a life once lived. However, the footpath that should lead the persona to this place has disappeared, covered by grass that has overgrown: "...*Kay ginkanapan inin dalan mga banwa nga lakatan* (The grass has overgrown) / *Napara an akon tigaman* (And hidden)." To retrieve the path, the persona decides to rest under the lomboy trees and wait for a bird, an insect, or a flower's scent that will guide him to this hidden path: "*Ta adi la ako anay ha may kalomboyan* (Under the lomboy trees) / *Mag-iininaw* (I wait, observing) / *Kay bangin la may* (Just in case suddenly) / *Bumungkaras nga iling* (The iling bird appears) / *Umalimwag nga manzanilla ha hangin* (Or the manzanilla's scent tinctures the air) / *O sumalimparay nga tambuburay* (Or a dragonfly comes flirting) / *Magpapahinumdom han para nga dalan* (To bring me to the path)" (34-35). Here, the persona clearly expresses his/her reliance on the natural elements—the iling, manzanilla, and the tambuburay—for recollection. Their appearance or presence that can be perceived by several senses may bring clarity and remembrance. It is easy to take

for granted the physical world, its natural and man-made elements; but in moments requiring the moral and spiritual uplift that only the past can offer, it is only the physical world—oftentimes its small and seemingly insignificant components—that can reveal “The footpath... The grass has overgrown.”

Love and Loss

Accompanying the themes of memory and nostalgia are the themes of love and loss. In the poem “Kawarayan” [Emptiness], emptiness unravels against a background where kalatsutsi flowers continue to fall and smell of seasonal fruits pervade the persona’s surroundings:

*Yana nga kulopay
Bukad han kalatsutsi
Damo na in nagtataktak;
Ha may amon bunggaran,
Panahon man han panmunga
Mangga ngan makopa
Nabakdaw an gutom*

*Hamot han luy-a nabilin han paksiw ha
daba
Usa ka pudyot nga hipon in aada ha plato.*

*Damo na an mga taktak
Bukad hinin kalatsutsi;
Nagkakahihinog nga prutas
An hangin say nagsasabrag;
Yana nga tikasirom inin langit
Ha amon bunggaran,
Mahapdus inin hangin.*

This early afternoon,
Of the white frangipani
So much has fallen;
In our yard
Even at this time when
The mangoes and macopa are fruiting
Hunger stalks.

Only the smell of ginger is left in the fish pot.
One morsel of shrimp paste on the plate.

So much has fallen
Of the white frangipani;
The smell of ripening fruit,

The wind spills.
As the sky starts to darken
In our yard
The wind is sore. (42–43)

This poem depicts contradicting images and emotions: while it displays images of abundance during the time of harvest—“*[p]anahon han panmunga*”—a glaring portrayal of scarcity (almost absence really) of resources needed for daily sustenance is found in between the images of abounding fruits and flowers: “*Hamot han luy-a nabilin han paksiw ha daba* (Only the smell of ginger is left in the fish pot) / *Usa ka pudyot nga hipon in aada ha plato* (One morsel of shrimp paste on the plate).” The lines “...*Yana nga tikasirom inin langit* (As the sky starts to darken) / *Ha amon bunggaran* (In our yard), / *Mahapdus inin hangin* (The wind is sore)” add another layer to the idea of decrease, decline, and eventually end of abundance. The *hapdos*, or ache that accompanies the loss, is depicted in these lines.

Related to the falling *kalatsutsi* is the *dama de noche* whose “perfume [...] never lasts” according to the poem “Dama de Noche”:

*Pagginhawa han mga Dama de Noche ka gab-i
An dalan nanngalimyon hin nakakalinop.*

*Asya nga nagkarayhak hira Sabet,
Tonton, ngan Otoy. Nagmaratinbatin
nagpalanat.*

*Mga bintana nag-abri para sumulod huyob nga
mataghom
May silindron nga nagtutunog hin usa nga
ugay.*

*Hira Charing ngan Saling nanmasyada
Nagpapanlingi-lingi nagpupurupaypay.*

*Nagharampang hira Sukoy, Andot, ngan Olan.
Hin usa ka galon nga tuba ug nanaringsing in
damo nga kanta.*

*Tanan nanhingalimot nga an pangalimwag
Han mga Dama may oras la.*

When the Dama de Noche breathed one evening
The street smelled of a dizzying perfume.

Sabet, Tonton, and Otoy burst into laughter
While playing the catch-and-run game.

The windows opened to let in the cool air;
A harmonica was intoning a chant.

Charing and Saling went for a walk
Looking sideways, fanning themselves.

Sukoy, Andot, and Olan sat around
A gallon of tuba, warbling songs,

All had forgotten that the perfume
Of the Dama never lasts. (36–37)

The poem ends in an anticlimactic mood with its clincher last stanza, relaying, in a foreboding tone, a fact that the playing children Sabet, Tonton, and Otoy, the strolling women Charing and Saling, and the drinking buddies Sukoy, Andot, and Otoy seem to have forgotten: the *dama de noche*'s perfume only lasts for a season and will eventually fade. This reality is juxtaposed to images of laughter and leisure.

The gloom and melancholia of the past and present losses are the more evident themes of the poetry book, but poems like "Agurang Mundo" [Old Mundo] offer alternative and redeeming themes including beginnings and hope. "Agurang Mundo" relies greatly in the power of irony, presenting an image of an old man tending a garden that continues to grow and give:

*Lagas,
Sakang nga nalakat,
Maingat an ulo,
Matawatawa mauran man
O masirak ug nagutak an tuna.
An aslum, kayumito ngan hantak
Nga iya inaataman,
Dayon namumukad;
Binubuklad niya iya mga tudlo
Kun nagbubukad han tuna
Ngan iya ini binibiliburan han mga liso
Upod an iya mga linalauman
Ngan mahidangat ha ginhawa
Han espiritu han tuna.*

Old man,
Bow-legged,
A shiny bald head,
Always smiling even when the heavens pour
dourly

Or when the sun bakes the earth;
The pomelo and star apple trees and the string
beans
He looks after,
They bloom and fruit on time:
He uses his hands
To hollow the earth
And he sprinkles the seeds
And sows his hopes
Then waits for the spirit
Of the land to breathe into them. (46–47)

The last three lines of the poem tell about the magic behind the old man's green thumb: a quiet prayer whispered to the spirit of the land to nurture the "seeds of hope" he sows. The ending of the poem perfectly punctuates the different ironies presented by the poem—old age and youth, hope and adversity, death and growth.

Related to "Agurang Mundo" is the poem "Taburos Han Dagat" that speaks of longing, decay, death, perishing, surrender, and helplessness.

*Dara han duro nga taburos han dagat,
An lidong nga dahon ha akon palad iginlupad;
Nagkakalilisang an mga kabakhawan ha may
baybayon;
Naningog hin tigda an nananago nga
tikbubulan.
Usa ka palki han akon mata
Usa nga baroto diin
Nakalingkod hi Apoy Simo butnga hiton
kahaluagan nga asul;
Guba na an mga pilapil ni Apoy ha Hindang;
An asugi han salaming ha may iya katurogan
maiha na nga napanas.
Dapit ha tampi may usa ka Inse nga
naghihinuring ha katubigan
Nga unta kada paghangkop han balud
Magbabata an iya kalawasan, an mga uban
magkakawara:
Usa pa kapakli han akon mata
Mga balinsasayaw sigi an pagsinurop
Hinini mabaturon nga hangin, nagsisinibotsibot
Han kaladnganan han dagat.*

Along with the strong gust of sea spray,
The round leaf from my palm takes flight;
The bakhaw trees rustle wildly;
The tikbubulan birds suddenly make sounds.
In a wink of the eye

A lone boat
 With Apoy Simo sitting in the midst of the
 widening blue:
 The dikes of his paddy in Hindang have long
 crumbled;
 The mirror in the room where he sleeps has
 faded.
 At a nearby shoal an old woman whispers to
 the waters;
 With every sweep of the sea, she would wish
 Her body would turn younger, her gray hair
 black.
 In one more wink of the eye
 The balinsasayaw birds keep diving into
 The wind and sea spray, taking in
 The mood of the sea. (88–89)

While one may feel a level of calm from the poem's images, a closer look at the elements present yields a sacred eventuality of life on this earth, that though we can pray and hope like Agurang Mundo, we are more like "Apoy Simo sitting in the midst of the widening blue" or the "old woman whisper[ing] to the waters... wish[ing] [h]er body would turn younger, her gray hair black." Just like them, our fates are at the mercy of the sea. We are no better than the *kabakhawan*, *tikbubulan*, or *balinsasayaw* who also are dependent on the sea, who rely on it for life and sustenance. The sea, while it sustains life, may also take it away. The image of Apoy Simo in the middle of the sea depicts humanity's vulnerability against the sea, and at the same time the consoling thought that we have this affinity with other creatures we co-exist and share the same fate with.

The poems above may bear small hints of fatalism, but they are offset by several poems that capture love—how it is sown or just naturally grows and blooms. A kind of love that persists through imprinting is the theme in "La Madonna Alegro":

*Kada aga, kinukogos ko ha ak butkon
 inin babayehay nga bata
 agud niya ako masimhot
 ngan sugad han tiyo
 madumdoman niya inin akon hamot.
 Maaram hiya nga di ko hiya iginburod,
 asya nga permi ko ipinatatalamhot inin akon
 alimyon
 basi umalop han iya hinumdumdoman
 ngan di ako niya hikalimtan
 bisan pa hiya nalabay*

*ha mga nanrarampag nga mga hardin han
 gardenia ngan hasmin
 ha mga dalan diin nangangalimwag an mga
 karan-an
 o naglilinakat ha mga parke han siyudad
 ug mga lagwerta han mga nagdadagko nga
 simbahan.*

Every morning, I lift up in my arms
 this little girl
 so she can smell me,
 and like a whelp,
 remember my scent.
 She knows I never bore her;
 but I shall keep her smelling me,
 stain her memory with my fragrance
 so she will never forget me
 even when she walks down the gardens among
 gardenia and jasmine,
 and along food alleys
 or passes by city parks
 and lawns of huge cathedrals. (54–55)

In this poem, the persona, who one may assume is a mother figure, makes sure that a daughter that she did not bear and birth remembers how she smells. It is through the olfactory sense that she manages to etch herself in the daughter's memory, so that the latter will remember her "even when she walks down the gardens among gardenia and jasmine."

Perhaps the poem in the collection that illustrates love's persistence and resilience is "Cadena de Amor":

*Hadton bata pa ako
 Kinakatkat han kadena de amor
 An mga alad nga alambre
 Mga sangburan ha mga hardin.*

*Tika-iha namalit an mga apoy
 Hin dalya, rosas, ngan vanda;
 Pinapanrabnot nira an mga kadena
 Ha mga alad ngan sangburan,
 Pinansunog ini
 Hasta nga nawara an amor.*

*Yana nga adto hin mga piliw
 An mga kadena de amor
 Nanunurok;
 Ha mga tay-aw nga lugar
 Nanbubuskad
 An ira amor.*

The cadena de amor would clamber
Wire fences
Trellises of gardens.

Years flew, and the old ladies bought
Dahlia, roses, and vandas;
They tore the vines from
The wire fences and trellises,
Burned them
Until love drew away.

Now in the fringy spaces
The cadena de amor
Grows;
Far-off
They bloom
And love. (68–69)

The persona shares a childhood memory, perhaps an old neighborhood where *cadena de amor* used to be grown and how through time it was replaced by new flower-bearing plants. One may construe the poem as a mere recalling of an old visual landscape, but towards the end of the poem, where the persona points out the *cadena de amor* growing in some corner, one cannot help but suspect that the poem is maybe hinting at something else, and that its elements, particularly the *cadena de amor* and its growth alludes to an abstraction or representation of a reality that is altogether human and natural. The reader may not go further than look up the translation of *cadena de amor*, which translates to “chain of love.” While *amor* can be lost, either through natural or unnatural causes, it will find a way to grow back and once able, will cling to the “fringy spaces” steady and strong. The *dama de noche*’s scent may be fleeting, but the *cadena de amor*’s strength prevails.

Conclusion: Waray ecopoetry and Sugbo’s econostalgia

Aside from *Taburos*, Victor Sugbo has authored three other poetry collections: *Inintokan* (2008), *Poems from Ground Z* (2021), and *Gimata* (2022). In her account of the development of contemporary poetry in Eastern Visayas, particularly Waray poetry, Merlie Alunan narrates how the University of the Philippines Tacloban creative writing workshops, which she organized together with other faculty members of

the college—William Remollo, David Genotiva, and Victor Sugbo, himself—gave birth to Waray writers and a Waray writing style that is heavily influenced by Anglo-American formalism and new criticism. Voltaire Oyzon’s *An Maupay ha mga Waray ngan Iba nga mga Siday* (2008), Victor Sugbo’s *Inintokan* (2008), Phil Harold Mercurio’s *Ayaw Pagpudla an Tuog ug Iba pa nga mga Siday* (2010), Neil Lopido’s *Ha Salog ug Iba nga mga Siday* (2010), and Janis Claire Salvacion’s *Siso Sakradang ug Iba nga mga Siday ha Taguangkan* (2010) are some of the UP Tacloban creative writing workshop’s output. This new breed of poetry, written by young writers who “readily accepted the seemingly freer, looser style of contemporary versification borrowed from Anglo-American models,” Alunan claims, represents the “new poetics” of Waray literature. In this new poetry, “the poet [...] step[s] down from the high perch of the public platform and speak[s] now as one human being to another without the oratory and ‘fireworks display’ of the traditional poet.” She adds—

...The younger writers shift the site for poetry from issues of public concern to the intimate drama of human experience. Freed from the strictures of the meter and rhyme, poetic language may now try to explore the emotive and sensual nuances of experience. The new poetics opens the gateway for metaphoric inventiveness and originality, and allow for richer layering of meanings, heretofore ignored by earlier poets. (222–224)

This “new poetics” in Waray poetry that Alunan speaks of indeed manifests in Sugbo’s poetry. Mostly written in free verse, Sugbo’s poetry offers insight into the “intimate drama of human experience.”

In *Taburos*, the poems 1) “Ha Akon Paglinakaton” (In My Travels), 2) “May Ada Panahon” (There Comes a Time), 3) “Parada Han mga Sinya” (The Parade of Zinnias), 4) “An Pagdumdum” (On Recalling), 5) “Kawarayan” (Emptiness), 6) “Agurang Mundo” (Old Mundo), 7) “Taburos Han Dagat” (Sea Spray), 8) “La Madonna Alegro,” and 9) “Cadena de Amor,” read using an ecocritical lens, reveal how the environment serves not only as the backdrop but the carrier of meaning and memory. In “Ha Akon Paglinakaton,” the reader finds a persona seeing traces of old Tacloban in other cities and places he/she visits, suggesting that certain aspects of our concept of home may be

shared, communal, and even universal. Memories of childhood, particularly of playtime at the countryside where *malimbin* and *tiyotes* trees grow, are evoked in “May Ada Panahon.” The longing for a mother figure from childhood, the presence of whom attributed to the blooming zinnias, is the subject in “Parada Han mga Sinya.”

While the first set of poems, fleshing out nostalgia and memory, can be characterized along the lines of sentimentalism, the second set, exploring the ideas of love, life, loss, and death, are more confrontational, even philosophical. “Kawarayan,” “Agurang Mundo,” and “Taburos han Dagat,” using elements of the natural environment, offer musings on the frailty and momentariness of pleasure, and humanity’s absolute dependence on nature, and its vulnerability and insignificance against the latter. Familiar yet now elusive images of nature and intimate interactions with it act as the metaphors and conduits of age-old notions and long-established realities about life. However, a renewed and revitalized awareness about them is instilled in the reader. The poems, one may claim, give a new meaning to the phrase “communing with nature.”

The use of nature and its elements is not, however, a new characteristic of Waray poetry. If one reads and examines Waray’s folk poetry, particularly its folk songs, a rich repertoire of verses heavily reliant on nature—the flora and fauna, the land- and seascapes, can be formed. Waray folk poetry, which, according to David Genotiva, is an “[attempt] by sensitive beings to render human experiences which yield interesting insights into the natives’ inclinations, impulses, and intelligence...” and “...reflect a true, probably a truer and more authentic image of the Warays of Leyte and Samar” (qtd. in Alunan 473), offers its readers and listeners an orchestrated presentation of social issues and realities using natural elements like flowers, animals, and so much more as the subjects, symbols, and metaphors. The folk songs “Lawiswis kawayan” (Tall bamboo)³, “An lubi,” (The coconut tree)⁴, and “Tikbubulan” (The tikbubulan bird)⁵ are few examples.

The stark difference in the way the elements of nature are employed as literary devices in the folk songs and in Sugbo’s poetry should be noted, however. One may argue that the presence of elements of nature in Waray folk poetry is inevitable—alluding to them in everyday language or in literature is expected if they are found in the person’s immediate surroundings. Hence the dominant presence of elements like *lubi*

(coconut) and *kawayan* (bamboo) in folk songs and poems, either as the subjects, symbols, or mere objects in the background. So strong their presence is that these objects, along with others, can rightfully represent what Genotiva is referring to as the “truer and more authentic image of the Warays of Samar and Leyte.” As far as physical environment is concerned, the images do reflect what can be seen literally. But more than merely showcasing the flora and fauna of the region, the poems reveal how the Warays relate to their environment by ascribing shared or communal symbolic and cultural meanings to natural elements. While nature’s role, foremost, is being the source of livelihood and sustenance, the Waray people also rely on it for meaning and memory, thus forming a symbiotic relationship that is metaphysical. Human’s relationship with nature seems first to appear as a kind of commensalism, where the former benefits and the latter does not gain anything in return, or amensalism, where the former benefits and in the process hurts the latter, or simply predation. But being present in a people’s folk poetry delegates a special role to nature and establishes a kind of relationship where it can also “benefit.”

Merlie Alunan, in her introduction to the book *Our Memory of Water*, claims that the book, which aims to “[memorialize...] Leyte-Samar writers’ [Haiyan] experiences,” “lacks an ecocentric consciousness,” and that “in the traditions of poetry in [the] native [Leyte–Samar] language, nonhuman nature is ignored, or if not, is made to carry the common burdens of humanity through imaginative projections” (qtd. in De Veyra 76). But perhaps a certain kind of “ecocentric consciousness” is present in Sugbo’s *Taburos*, or in Waray folk poetry, where “nonhuman nature” is linked to the human experience, where the flora and fauna and the land- and seascapes become the reminders of being and nonbeing, the metaphors of life and death, and that without them, memories may not be retrieved, and meanings may not be created.

In “*Ugmad*,” Veyra enumerates the following as “characteristics, not necessarily present in all types, that may be found in an ecopoem”:

- ...(a) nature is not just a frame “made to carry the common burdens of humanity through imaginative projections,” as Alunan points out; (b) nature is depicted through a keen understanding of its dynamic processes; (c)

the human figure is shown in a self-effacing relationship with the natural world, and is not located in a central position but just one among many entities in the natural environment; (d) the human figure (or the poem itself) takes cognizance of his/her responsibility towards the natural environment of which he/she is interconnected, and where the poem displays the ethical relationships between humans and nonhumans in an interdependent ecosystem; and (e) the poem itself exhibits an awareness of how the language and thinking can represent the natural world, especially in relation to the looming threat of ecological catastrophes. (77)

This is the list he comes up with after examining different takes on ecocriticism. The list is informed by both Anglo-American and local theories. It weaves commonalities and intersections among them.

Sugbo's poetry, as Jose Duke Bagulaya puts it, "has a conscious and privatized sense of aesthetics [that] forms his poetic praxis" (108). This can be traced back to Sugbo's training in the UP Tacloban creative writing workshops. He writes, indeed, and as he claims in his introduction to his poetry collections, from a personal vantage point. But how do we now locate Sugbo's sentimentalism, his "privatized sense of aesthetics" in the context of climate crisis? How do we make sense of his poetry's themes of memory, nostalgia, love, and loss in the discourse on disaster, resilience, and human and nonhuman relations? Perhaps his post-Haiyan poetry is not just expressions of grief over loss and destruction and declarations of hope and resilience, but also is a writer's fulfillment of what Alunan terms "the obligation to remember" (qtd. in de Veyra 76). What Alunan actually refers to is the urgent, almost reflexive, impetus to write about the Haiyan experience—particularly the life-changing destruction during the typhoon and the trauma that followed. But in the case of Sugbo's poetry, it is not only the catastrophe and its aftermath that is memorialized, but also what once has been, including the past physical environment with its natural nonhuman elements—plants and animals that the persona does not see anymore in the present city of Tacloban. Through the persona's recollection of earlier times with allusions to these natural elements, at least their names—most are not used anymore or forgotten—are incidentally (or perhaps not) retrieved and documented. His poetry is characterized by a kind of ecological nostalgia from which a kind of

literary taxonomical material that records names of different species of plants and animals of the locality and a sort of cartographical rendering of the region's geography emerge. His poetry and poetics thus become instruments of remembering and memorializing in a world that continues to be subjected to disaster and loss.

Endnotes

¹ The translations are provided in *Taburos*.

² The translations are provided in the book.

³ *Ako magtatanom lawiswis kawayan, / Akon la kan Pikoy palatay-latayan. / Salbahis nga Pikoy ka waray Batasan / Sinnulod ha kwarto, kan Inday higdaan. // An Panyo nga may sigarilyo, / Ginpiksi ni Inday kay may sentimyento. / An nasisinahan, an nabibidoan, / Tungod la han gugma nga waray katuman.*

I will plant a tall bamboo / For Pikoy to roost on / But Pikoy is a rude fellow / Entering the room where Inday sleeps. // The hanky, the hanky with the cigarette / Inday tore it up, feeling bad. / What made her angry, what made her mad? / It's all because of love unrequited. (Alunan 32–33)

⁴ *An lubi maupay nga tanaman. / An tuba ha daol gigikan. / Nasaklay ha kawit / Ngan matagay, ay ahay! / Tuba gud la an maupay ko nga sangkay.*

The coconut is a wonderful tree. / The tuba comes from its flower. / I carry the kawit / And I pour out the wine, ay ahay! / Tuba is my only friend. (Alunan 36)

⁵ *An tamsi nga tikbubulan / Gutiay ko la hidakpan. / Lugaring, Ningning, kay ginsalipdan / Han lubi nga kalanyogan. // Kun diri de-abaniko / Patay na inin lawas ko / Lugaring, Ningning, nadidismayo / Han balhas nga di masyado.*

The tikbubulan bird / I almost caught. / But Ningning, it hid behind / a very tall coconut tree. // If it were not for this fan, / this body of mine would be dead for sure. / But Ningning, I am almost in a faint / for perspiring so profusely. (Alunan 39)

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