

21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World

First Quarter - Module 3
Texts and Contexts of 21st
Century Philippine Literature

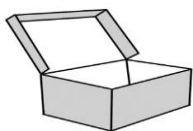


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What I Need to Know

This module offers you the chance to prove that the study of literature is about the quality of the text and has to be perceived as an independent work, freely existing, and making meaning on its own. Each piece of literature has to be considered and interpreted as an object of reading. The experience that you may have while doing the close reading of the text makes it different from other contexts. Every piece of literature must successfully articulate itself without consideration of other author's intention, the work's historical background, or its impact on a particular audience.

At the end of the lesson, the students are expected to discuss how different contexts enhance the text's meaning and enrich the reader's understanding (EN12Lit-Ie-28).

Specific Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will learn to:

1. explain the relationship of context with the text's meaning;
2. practice contextual appreciation by relating the story of the text with details from the author's biography; and
3. respond critically to the short story and consequently articulate this response through a presentation of individual social media photograph posts and impressions about street life and public transport.



What I Know

Choose the letter of the best answer. Write the chosen letter on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What point of view is used when the narrator uses I and is a part of, or recollecting events in the story?
 - a. First person
 - b. Second Person
 - c. Third person
 - d. Either second or third person



2. What is the part of the plot where the action subsides from the climax and issues get disentangled?
 - a. Climax
 - b. Denouement
 - c. Exposition
 - d. Resolution

3. What is it that pertains to the parts of a text preceding and following a passage, giving it fuller meaning than if it were read by itself?
 - a. Context
 - b. Local color
 - c. Point of view
 - d. Text

4. What do you call the qualities of the character that involve physical attributes, get-up, and mannerisms?
 - a. Behavior
 - b. External qualities
 - c. Intelligence
 - d. Internal qualities

5. What is the part of the story where it concludes in view of a transformation or insight from the character, or for the reader?
 - a. Conflict
 - b. Dialogues
 - c. Resolution
 - d. Rising action

Lesson Texts and Contexts of 21st Century

1 Philippine Literature

The mastery of close reading depends on the closeness of the reader's apprehension of the internal elements of the text. A poem requires the examination of the persona, dramatic situation, images and figurative language, and poetic insight. A story, on the other hand, must be read considering its point of view, characterization, plot, conflict, and theme. Other genres like novel, epic, news story, textual, autobiography, etc. also need to be considered in terms of their particular elements. The reading experience transforms when extra textual contexts come into play with the text. The author's biography and influences, for example, may be used as a reference in further understanding a text. An awareness of how a work intersects with history helps properly situate it in a particular society.

The reader has to remember that while the work can be isolated as an independent whole entity; its meanings are also contingent on its contexts.



What's In

Let us go ahead and seek to understand the complexity and richness of a whole piece of literature through a personal and aesthetic appreciation of its text and context. Let us reveal a strong adherence on the idea of contextualized learning. We will use our own objective analysis to understand the whole story. We may want to use our prior knowledge that reflects an in-depth personal understanding of a particular event in the story that occurred at a particular time and place.

What's New

Mobility is a necessity, and we know it. We take rides to reach our destinations, and are sometimes stalled by the very rides we take. In the metropolis, mobility is the key issue because it implies the capacity for movement. Traffic is the word for the flow of people and vehicles in human settings that is also, in the Philippines, the word for the day-to-day ghastly experience for moving about. As city roads get congested easily, people scrambled for rides that could bring them to their destination faster. Though usually unreliable, public transport systems are still popular for the persevering Filipino plying long distances. For shorter distances – as well as in smaller communities like this story's setting – tricycles are kings of the road. Their speed, size and maneuverer ability allow them to bypass traffic easily which of course offend some people on the road. The tricycle is very much part of the landscape of our country's streets – rural or urban – and like the jeepney, it embodies our common aspirations for mobility, traffic congestion, and all.

One Day on The Road

Temistokles M. Adlawan

Cebu

The last passenger has gotten off, an old woman carrying a smelly basket, and now I've a mind to turn back and go the way I came. I take a quick view of the side of the road ahead of me, and another quick look at the road to my back to check for any coming traffic, a truck or any other vehicle heading towards my side of the road.

Through the Ray-Ban which I am using to guard my eyes from the glare and the dust of the road, I'm glad to note that the road is clear on both sides – it would be a cinch to turn back. But an empty tricycle drives up behind me and position to make a u-turn, with the intention, I gather, to go back the same way it came, pick up any passengers on the way back to town to the parking place which the new mayor, the Honorable Ferdinand M. Chiong, is planning to improve according to the best standard.

My elation quickly fades, overruled by another feeling – one of disappointment. If I go on back as I had planned and Inting-Sana's son is going to do the same thing- any driver would, and as I often hear this told among drivers themselves- we would be racing



each other down that road, a race to pick up passengers, and I am not sure there'd be any at this time. Or if there are, how many would there be?

At the same time, it occurs to me on one hand, I could choose not to turn back. Let Inting-Sana's son go ahead- For I certainly won't allow him to get the better of me on the road- I myself will drive farther up this road to Sitio Buwabog, where hopefully a creature with the finest, smoothest skin is, at this moment, hanging out. Relax, take a breather from this tiresome, wearying, dangerous occupation- driving a tricycle, a trade that most people look down, tyrannized at any time by the riding public, and persecuted by bigger vehicles along the road.

Still, on another consideration, it wouldn't be right for me to yield here, for after all, I got to Sitio Inamo-an first, this place which is part of Barangay Lutac, therefore I should be first on the road back to town. This is an unwritten rule among tricycle drivers- to respect the one who arrives first at a place, he must be allowed to be first on the road back, a principle obeyed in practice and recognized by all drivers – the first to arrive must be given the privilege to go first. Without this principle to guide everyone, it would sure be messy.

On this consideration, I decide to turn around. I figure if there are no other tricycles plying the road ahead. I could pick up a few fares at the corner waiting shed of Soton, the first sitio, where once I caught a glimpse of a girl showing off her sexy butt in the skimpiest of outfits, anew one to my eyes, two former barrio captains of Barrio Pangdan, Undo, Ikot, and Bay Kadyo Alinganga, all friends of mine also live here. The next waiting shed is at Sitio Humayan, this is where the fares have become choosy about their rides, starting from the time when some of their relatives began working abroad. And on to the waiting shed of Sitio Grey Rock (where I myself live, in the only house left standing sort of askew on the side of a hill). Last, the waiting shed of Barangay mainit, which any old day is abloom with the presence of many pretty girls, such as Hope Canalita and all her cousins, the sisters Helen and Judith Sayson, the Aliganga sisters and many others, you find them along the side of the road at Alice-Gary's place all the way to Carmen-Sammy and Seria-Willy. I don't even count the waiting shed at Barangay Na-alad, because I'm sure in the places that I've mentioned, if there are any fares at all, and if there are no other tricycles plying that route, or turning back from Sitio Inamo-an, I'd surely be full-house already.



I get the other side of the road, the right side that leads straight to town, ahead of Inting-Sana's son, whose small juvenile face is almost completely masked by his dark cheap sunglasses likely bought from a Muslim hawker, and who, at that moment, is starting to twist his wheel. I have a mind to call out to him, "Do Sherwin, just give me a little lead. 'Do, don't follow so close behind me. "But it also occurs to me that this guy's been to the Don Emelio Canonigo Memorial National Barangay High School in our barrio, surely he has enough common sense to do the proper thing. So I stop myself from giving him my mind and simply go on to drive past him.

I am on fifth gear and cruising at 30 kph on my speedometer, easy as can be, no problems in the world, absolutely relaxed, thinking to myself, this small fellow, he looks like a child (as small as Inting himself who's ever smaller than my own five-foot bare frame, puyra buyag), but even he must know the rules. He should take care to stay behind, he should caution himself, because if he sticks close to me, the two of us following each other so closely on this road, it would not be a good thing for both of use picking up fares.

Driving on low speed, I feel easy, comfortable, enjoying the wind generated by the velocity of the motorcycle, although my skin is still prickling to the bite of the early afternoon heat. I whistle a light air to myself, thinking of the pretty little chicks who might be waiting up ahead to ride with me. All my fares so far, puyra saway- because after all I'm no different from any of them- where old women who went to town to sell their produce, their big baskets smelling of tinabal, salted fish, and slightly putrid fish which they bought for their own food. From whistling, I soon find myself singing la-la-la-la and hu-hum hu-hum hu-hum, an old love song in English, Brenda Lee's "Losing You" a song I love very much, I use to sing it everywhere I went- that was when I dropped out of school and became a ne'er-do-well rambler, moving out of Cebu to Davao, Misamis Occidental, the two Zamboangas, there where I fell in love with a lot of women, wooed them for their love, serenaded them, and all of them rejected me, so that now, all I could do is rue my loss, and express my longing for them with this song that tells about lost love. All this, while I believe myself to be well ahead, I glanced at my left side mirror to check. I cluck my tongue at what I see. "This devil of a kid, he's after me fast." I feel threatened in my hope to pick up fares in the Soton waiting shed.

I grip the clutch to bring it lower, hitting back to fourth gear. The motor gives me a little kick at the speedometer pointer climbs to 35 kph. I watch the point rise higher



as I gear back to fifth, keeping a steady pressure on the gas, glancing back again at the mirror, saying to myself, “Ahmn see if you don’t hang yourself now.”

Not him. Without a second thought, when he notices the smoke belching thicker from the exhaust of my motor (which he must have breathed in, along with the dust on the broken cement surface of the road pavement), and he gets wind of what I am doing, he follows suit, not wanting to be left behind. I tell myself, “This kid’s racing me for fares, as if he has a family to feed and needs a lot of money.”

I keep the pressure up in the gas twisting it more. My speed increases, but the devil takes it, Sherwin is right behind, closing up to my back.

There’s still room on the gas, but I desist from using it, first, because at the rate of 50 kph, it would not be easy to maneuver a vehicle running on three wheels, a little mistake, and it’s the hospital, if not the cemetery, for the unfortunate, second, I feel the stress on the machine, it could overheat, and the piston inside the cylinder will stop working; third, I’m still slightly ahead of Sherwin. I’m close to the Soton waiting shed, and I’m planning to slow down in case there are passengers.

Right enough, there are passengers. I am not sure they’re waiting for a ride for they get out of the waiting shed and signal for me to stop, two boys and a girl in shorts, but I haven’t seen their faces yet. When I am close enough to them, I recognized the girl as the sexy one I glimpsed a few days ago in the part of our barrio, wearing the skimpy outfit and showing off her butt.

Of course, I have not a whit of a right, nor reason to feel angry or jealous- I’ve no relationship of any kind of this girl, and I’m sure she never laid eyes on me until now. I know nothing about where she comes from, her name, nor of the boy who is with her.

I let go of the hand brake lever which I had prepared to turn, at the same time putting my right foot on the brake pedal, using the clutch to change gear quickly back to third. Turning the gas, I tell Sherwin showing down for an overtaking panel truck, while I slow down towards the waiting shed, I throw these words at him.



“Do Sherwin, they’re yours. Animal, the girl looks like she’s already taken!” Sherwin does not answer but I believe he would stop to pick them up. Why would he be racing me? It could only be for fares. Here are two sure ones.

Well, I’m wrong! He tails me, like a shadow refusing to leave my back, he doesn’t stop. Suspicion rises in me- he’s not racing me for passengers after all, he wants a contest, machine against machine to find out which one is stronger, faster. I am suddenly afraid.

We’ve the same kind of machine- two stroke, self- mixing or auto lube, Japan made, but his is a bigger 135 cc, mine only 125 cc. I could go up to fifth gear, however, he can go up only to fourth. I am positive of my motorcycle speed, a brand different from the one I used to have from what Sherwin is now driving. But talk has it that Sherwin’s model is a strong and powerful, as it is also said that Sherwin is a speedster, not only in a tricycle but also on the habal-habal. I myself, who’s been long in this business of running a tricycle, long before I retired from work, my if still alive, my four children still unmarried, I myself am witness to the fact that this kid can really speed his tricycle.

This is not to toot my own horn, but before a sidecar was attached to my motorcycle, it could go up to 120 kph or even more, with a sidecar empty, it could make 60 kph, loaded, it could only do 40 kph if the load’s heavy, it can barely make 40. I have no idea what Sherwin’s motor is capable of. My worry grows like a boil inside me.

Except for one curve not far from the house of Bay Kadyo Aliganga, the waiting shed at Sitio Humayan should be visible now. I see two dump trucks following behind a passenger bus. I know there are craters on the cement roads near the waiting shed and I figure that these large vehicles will be on me on this bad patch of road, so I let off on the gas. From almost 60 kph, I am down now to 45 kph after gearing up from third, but Sherwin, unmindful it seems of the cracks on the paving, unmindful of the approaching trucks, storms past me. Porbidal after that encounter- those trucks bound for the mountain, the two tricycles going to town- I swallow the dryness in my throat, catching a glimpse of three fares, all young women, getting out of the waiting shed and signaling for Sherwin to stop. But Sherwin doesn’t stop for them, and now I am pretty sure of it, he’s out for a race, machine against machine to prove which one is more powerful. He’s not racing me for passengers.



The three made a half-hearted effort to stop me, no urgency in their gesture, in such instances, one may stop or not, it doesn't really matter. I am driving through this area where the passengers are choosy about their rides. The tricycle must look spiffy, and the driver preferably not an old man.

Well, I decide, I won't stop for them, not even if they wave hand at me, I won't stop. Even if my earnings for the day, from morning till noon, is still small. It would have been good to add to it, but at this point, my mind is no longer set on picking up passengers. Away now from the cracks and the crater of the road, I gear up to third, gear up to fourth, and hold it on some more. What I'm afraid of is this, that I would be put to shame when I pass by Grey Rock, the place where I live and I would hear my relatives and neighbors shouting when they see me beaten, hanging back, "Ngeee! Tricycle, 'Noy Miguel, Bay Miguel, Itso Miguel, Miguel, loser, loser, loser!" I clench my jaws, but.....

I am making speed close to 60 kph on the fifth gear, I am moving forward but not fast enough to catch up with Sherwin. However, the difference is no longer too big. This means, we're moving on almost equal power, considering that I still have a few more turns left on my gas. I am wondering what Sherwin is keeping back. I'd really like to overtake him when we get to Grey Rock. But the cracks and craters are on the road again, and there are two curves to navigate before and after the waiting shed. I try to keep our distance down, putting up with the smoke and the dust which he is making me swallow. The fear and the shame pursue me all the way to Barangay Mainit where, I'm sure, Hope, Judith, and Helen will witness the event and will join in the shouting. "Wiiiiiii Loser! Loser!

Had I only more muscles left in my jaw to clench, I would surely clench it now. Loser, Huh! This is Miguel who's lived long enough in this world, a man of experience, a man who knows a lot, all through his own efforts, even if he's a drop out. Will he allow a mere high school kid to beat him? Hmnn let him try. He will see. This thought is going on inside me. Meanwhile, we are now on a straight stretch of road along Barangay Na-alad, after the curve near Sammy-Carmen, along Willy-Seria, past Namatyas Insek, the place of Penteng the healer and Pulirta-Tiago, into and out of Mainit, and at this point I take the last turn of the gas, ran the motor which I've never ever done before, going for broke at last. At this point this is not a fight machine to machine; this is a fight for pride.



Pride! Pride! We flash past vehicles we have overtaken, even more so, the ones we encounter.

Sure enough, I get what I want. At fourth gear, the speedometer begins to move from 60 kph to 70 kph, fifth, which brings me neck to neck with Sherwin, then ahead of him on that straight stretch of road in Na-alad.

They dig me up from plowed land by the side of the road near Sitio Luyo-Menteryo, that's where the people pick me up, including Sherwin, the jeep owner, Mello Yoyot, Bay Jesus Tolentino, Bay Marcos, and Bay Doro, whose tricycles I have overtaken, but cannot now remember where. There was a dump truck that Sherwin and I encountered, and after I had overtaken him, I also tried to overtake an old, slow-moving jeep but I hit it with my sidecar. I lost control of the tricycle which swung and lunched to the side of the road. A good thing the owner of the jeep stopped, and Sherwin himself also slowed down and stepped on the brake, not following what I did. I find this out when already recapping the event.

Those who were there take turns wiping the blood of my scratches and lacerations, rubbing those parts of my body which hurt from the fall, and everyone who's there is saying the same thing, "Pride, pride got the better of you. Lucky thing you were flung from your tricycle to this soft plowed soil."

Looking at the badly damaged tricycle the words would not come out of my mouth. "Never again!"

I do not look at Sherwin when he says, "Let's take Noy Miguel to the hospital." I also lost the Ray-Ban which had barred my eyes from seeing.

Activity: Respond critically to the following questions to process the selection.

1. We know the story through the point of view of Miguel, the elder tricycle driver. What do you think is the significance and effect of telling the story in present tense?



2. What is the consistent tone of the story, and how does it reflect Miguel's attitude towards his experience?
3. What are the basic street life scenes Miguel reveals as he goes about his day?
4. What do these scenes imply about the setting of the story?
5. How well does Miguel know his "vocation of driving a tricycle? Point out three important details from the text showing the depth of his knowledge of this road trade.
6. What does he reveal about himself and Sherwin, the younger driver who he realizes is tailing him? Complete the tables below.

	Manuel	Sherwin
a. Age		
b. Civil Status		
c. Education		
d. Get-up		
e. Tricycle		

7. Though indirectly, Miguel compares himself to Sherwin. How does he feel about and react to their differences? Cite portions of the text that show his attitudes towards Sherwin.
8. We can see that Miguel constantly talks to himself during the encounter about the senselessness of racing against Sherwin. What are the factors that compel Miguel to try to race?
9. The accident that flings Miguel to the soft plowed soil become for him the pivotal point of transformation. What is the importance of Miguel saying "Never again"? How did the near-tragic experience change him?
In the last sentence, Sherwin says that he also "lost the Ray-Ban which had barred my eyes from seeing." How does this reference to seeing change, read alongside the character's transformation?



What is It

The title “One Day on the Road” already signals the direction the story takes- it followed a gradual psychological unfolding, a dramatic present, through the perspective of Miguel, the veteran tricycle driver. Miguel gives his impressions of the place of people around him, of Sherwin, and of their comic race that could have ended tragically. Miguel’s **point of view**, or the perspective from which the story is being told, is what we refer to as **limited**, since it only sees things based on its own perceptions. As a first-person point of view, Miguel limits our sensing of the story to the possibilities of what he can see and narrate.

Points of View and the Extent of their Perspectives

1. **First person**- the “I” narrator necessarily limited and subjective, especially if the speaker is part of or is recollecting the events of the story, unreliable when he/she is clearly only sensing experience through his/her perspective.
2. **Second person**- a perspective not often used, where the view point character (and in effect, the reader) is referred to as “you.”
3. **Third person**- a comparatively objective point of view; if omniscient is all-knowing and able to get into the minds of all the characters.

Other Literary Terms in Contextualization

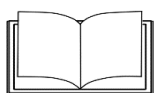
- a. **The external qualities** of character involve the physical attributes, get-up, or mannerisms of character, as described by the narrator.
- b. **The internal qualities** of the character are manifested through dialogue, motivation, and action.
- c. **Local color** means that specific details are placed because they enhance the reality crafted by the story.
- d. **Plot**-is basically the movement of the narrative.
- e. **Contexts** are the parts of a text preceding and following a passage, giving it fuller meaning than if it were read by itself.



Activity: This story follows a conventional **plot** pattern that recalls the classical narrative structure formulated by Aristotle, and consequently Horace. Plot is basically the movement of a narrative, known nowadays as the narrative arc devised by Gustav Freytag. “One Day on the Road” certainly follows this order of narration.

Exposition introduces the characters, the setting, and the circumstances of the story. The **rising action** escalates the circumstances into a conflict or tension. **Climax** is the point where the conflict or tension explodes or heightens. What earlier escalates falls into a **denouement** where action subsides from the climax and issues get disentangled. The **resolution** is where the story concludes in view of transformation or insight from the character, or for the reader.

With these in mind, point out the parts of Temistokles Adlawan’s story that fall under these elements of the plot.



What’s More

Context and the Literary text

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines context as “those parts of text preceding and following any particular passage, giving it meaning fuller or more identifiable than if it were read in isolation.” Part of it pertains to the “biographical, social, cultural, and historical circumstances in which the text is made.” To contextualize an interpretation, the Oxford Dictionary says, is to offer “to explain it (the text) in terms of its context, which for A Dictionary of Modern Critical terms or on the other hand is associated with the “more open-ended part of the criticism.” It always enriches the text when its contexts are explored. An appreciation of a text historical milieu may fill in the gaps encountered in reading and analysis.

In this case, the reading of the story of Temistokles Adlawan is enriched when we encounter the fact that he knows his subject well. His depth of awareness and experience is easily observable in the text- his narrator talks about motors with full knowledge of speed and capacity, about the dynamics of being on the road with fellow

drivers, etc. In this case, context provided dimension to the realism of the story because what seems like lived experience was transformed into text.

However, it is not only Adlawan's so-called "day job" that provides context in this case. His story is set in locality in Cebu, gradually being urbanized and contending with the marginalization of his culture. Adlawan seems to have employed the marginal figure of the tricycle driver here to represent those who are culturally and economically silenced in an era when short story writing is being described as somewhat "middle class enterprise."

Going through this lesson gives us necessary insights into literature's relation with the world. Literature, though it may be considered organically whole, is in continuous dialogue with the universe. When it does so, it usually comments on reality, examines its brokenness or imperfections, and imagines possibilities for resolution. Literature's power lies in its capacity to be in close contact with the world, despite its being perceived as merely a work of artistry, a thing that yields escapist pleasure. Yes, there is dulce, sweetness, and delight (Sanchez 2017) in literature. From the discussion above, we have seen how literature transcends itself by embedding the world in its text. Adlawan, in this case, embeds his street life, his being a driver, and his being a Filipino in his stories, so that experiences of the marginal may also be represented and form part of our contemporary awareness.

Activity: News/Documentary Search!

Search for and view local news videos and documentaries discussing the plight of the transport industry. You may also conduct virtual interview to the tricycle drivers whom you know in your locality. After that, discuss the following questions and make a video report presentation response.

1. What are the usual problems of the transport industry and how does the industry in general address these problems?
2. Considering the story of Miguel and Sherwin, does the industry need further regulation and professionalization?
3. How is the life in the streets of Adlawan's story, the video you watch, and the result of your interview similar?





What I Have Learned

Now that you have finished the lesson, you may have learned that:

- Contextualized learning takes place when we are able to present information or deduce information in a way that we are able to construct meaning based on our experiences or experiences of the people that surround us.
- Reading stories with local color maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning from the experience, which significantly, a story can be tackled as “organically whole” in its own sense.
- Critical reading of texts may be useful for one’s development if it provides learning experiences in a context which readers are interested and motivated.
- Increasing one’s effort in understanding the text in relation to the contexts of the story results in more ability.
- Readers learn the standards, values, knowledge of the society by analyzing the plot of the story, raising questions, and accepting challenges to find solutions that are not immediately apparent.



What I Can Do

The story you are about to read is by turns, horrific, and fantastical. It can also be interpreted as a cautionary tale. This also has social commentary, and tells us what people think, and how this could be pushed into a logical, and horrifying conclusion. Though it has horror effect, it does not only hope to shock and awe but makes you think about whether the horrific elements that were present in the story can be found in today’s society. It possesses hints at certain core values that are still believed in the provinces, or the old country, today. When the protagonist goes against these values, he meets a rather frightening end.

Martinés
by Anna Felicia C. Sanchez

IT WAS said that the oldest among them held the secret to immortality, and that it was this secret that kept the land from drying, from crumbling under the weather of a world that had lost its way along its own axis. With this knowledge, the rest of the land could be saved from drowning in the color of blood, and there would be no need for the shadows of things long gone.

There would be life, Richard's father had told him. As the story went: there would be life.

And now, as his cousin drove the grimy owner-type jeep into the dying jungles of Batangas heartland, Richard Servacio cussed eloquently under his breath.

He had come here looking for a bucolic view of the countryside and warm afternoons on the beach—notions of paradise, after two weeks of getting wasted on various alcoholic drinks in his apartment. Totoy's text message came out of the blue, but by then Richard had already realized how screwed up he was so he'd thought, What the hell, things can only get better here on.

And here he was. He would've tried to shape words to describe what he was feeling, for he was supposed to be a trained speaker perfectly at home with vowels and bilabials, but at the moment, only expletives pronounced themselves in his mouth.

The sun's messing with my eyes, he swore, kneading his face, And, there isn't anything in the trees at all—

“Ano ga, 'Insan,” Totoy said, “are you okay, all right?”

There was nothing like Totoy's English to push anyone over the edge. Richard knew that his own Tagalog wasn't to die for, but Totoy's speaking like this was no way to treat a cousin from Manila.

He could not quite tell Totoy that, no, he was not all right, which was why he was here in the first place. Richard should've been facilitating corporate seminars in Makati, but two weeks ago his boss had showed him a pile of evaluation sheets that revealed, in no uncertain terms, that Richard was a lousy motivational speaker. He wouldn't have minded so much if it had been the first time, he'd been told that, but it had been the fifth time, and the fifth company, and Richard was only twenty-five. So much for a career.

He had believed he was on the road to success, and now he was literally in the middle of nowhere. Richard ran his hands through his hair, feeling for lumps, evidence



of the seven million times he'd banged his skull against the jeep's steel frame. He wondered if a concussion was making him see those black things flitting in the trees.

They were little more than shadows, but every time he tried to focus on them, they disappeared.

Optical fatigue, he told himself, and that isn't the fluttering of—

He felt another blow on his head as the jeep crashed into the brush. "Oh, for Christ sakes," he said.

Thorns made little screeching sounds against the jeep's fender. Unfazed, Totoy jerked the jeep back on track, his hair flapping, his lips curled in a grin that showed off his crooked teeth. Richard tried to recall just how depressed he'd been right before Totoy texted to ask if he might like a vacation. Now Richard was wondering if maybe suicide in his apartment had been the better option.

"Where are we going again?"

"Sa Martinés, didn't I say," replied Totoy. Richard stared at his cousin for a minute, waiting, and when Totoy began to whistle a ditty that sounded like some terminally ill animal, Richard stifled a sigh and looked out at the road instead.

At lunch, Totoy had asked him to come not on a trip to the beach or to the fields, but on an errand. To deliver a gift, Totoy had added. Richard had been about to refuse when his aunt and uncle left the table, and Richard made out the name despite their lowered voices. Martinés.

He'd asked Totoy who Martinés was, and all Totoy would say was that Martinés would change Richard's life forever.

It sounded like a good thing a couple of hours ago. Now, as the sun glowered through the trees and burned his skin, Richard brooded over what Totoy had actually said:

"That's your—what you call it—destiny."

"Destiny?"

"You know, 'Insan, as in, it was destiny's ga-a-a-a-mme, when you finally c-a-a-a-a-ammme...a-lllonngg...only to find—"

To think that Totoy had just passed the board exams to become an engineer. It bewildered Richard that his cousin had been going around smiling stupidly at him, bright eyes winking from under that shaggy hair. And that whistling.

They were just the same age, with Richard only a few months older. But that was the one thing they had in common. Richard had not visited the province in years, not since high school, when his father died of a stroke and his mother went off to earn liras in Italy.



He had loved his dad, as any son would, and yet he had not been very affected by his death. What shocked Richard about the whole thing was not the stroke itself, but the fact that something unexpected had happened to his father at all. The man had probably never felt anything so exciting.

Richard had never understood his father's placid disposition, his contentment with the barest of lifestyles, his devotion to the office he'd worked in for an eternity—duty, his dad had said, there were things that needed to be done—or how anybody could stay rooted to the same place they had lived in all their lives, like the Servacio clan. They were the oldest family in the village, and Richard had heard tell that the rice fields would perish without them, and yet it was not as if they were earning more than the other farmers. All their neighbors had houses five times larger than Totoy's, for example.

Richard had aimed to reach for the top all his life, and he could not understand these people whose only ambition, it seemed to him, was to reach a hundred years old and die on the same land where their child had formed his first crooked tooth. At least the neighbors had sense enough to send someone from their households abroad, to greener pastures that delivered prosperity.

The jeep stuttered on, past tall nameless trees, a few wooden huts, patches of dried grass and thorny brush. Where was this Martinés, Richard wondered.

He squinted into the woods. Those shadows again. He had always hated the country—the humidity, the gigantic flies, the stench of animal dung that never seemed to go away—but that story about a stranger, and the stones as red as blood—

There were no flocks of birds in the sky, and no red rocks among the shrubs. Richard shook off the feeling. He was lost, after all, in his father's old town, and there was nothing else to do but endure his cousin's tuneless whistling, and the shrieks of plants that clawed at him from the sides of the jeep.

IN RICHARD'S head, while the ride in the jeep fell into a rhythm, and the sunlight engulfed his face in a dizzying warmth, a story from long ago began to play out as a dream.

Once there was, said Richard's father, A stranger who walked through a village. These days nobody knows how this stranger looked like—not the height, the build, not even the gender. Only the voice lingers in the memory—a voice that whispered like bamboo leaves, sweet as a woman's. It is said that she came from the mountains, and with her coming, the earth began to unfurl with her every step.

The land on which the village lay sprawled was mainly rock and sand, and the only trees that would survive were coconut. But when the stranger came, she churned the earth till it was loam, so that vegetables and flowers could blossom. She caused



crops to grow, trees to yield fruit, fish and livestock to be bountiful. She dug out the sweetest of waters and conjured mild seasons, filling the hearts of the villagers with the quiet desire to work and dream.

It is said that seedlings bloomed like miracles on the places where she walked.

And so they asked the stranger to stay. She could not, of course, for she had other villages to visit, but still they pleaded.

Then, and only then, did she suggest the contract.

It is wise to suspect a contract, but it may be wiser to suspect one's ability to keep one's part of the terms. The head of the village, thus confident, asked for the nature of the agreement.

And here was the stranger's condition:

Remember.

Remember? echoed the village head.

Remember, and your village shall continue to flourish.

And the village head asked: But what if we forget? For our memories die sooner than our bodies.

Then tell your offspring, said the stranger, And, in this way nothing can die.

But what if they forget? For our offspring inherit all our frailties.

And here was the stranger's reply:

Then they shall be reminded.

And lo, a cloud overhead stretched across the village, and the people looked up to see the shape shatter into a thousand birds, small and black like the shadows of memories, and they flew down to the edge of the village where grew a young acacia tree. The villagers exclaimed at the miracle, but when they turned back to the stranger, praises on their mouths, they saw only dents in the earth where she had stood.

RICHARD JOLTED awake. Totoy had just parked the jeep. He pulled out a length of steel bar, an empty jute sack and a coil of rope from under his seat, then hopped out towards the undergrowth. "No, 'Insan, you stay there," he said as Richard moved to follow him. "You don't have to come."

"The hell I don't," Richard grumbled, listening to his joints crack as he clambered out the jeep. "What are you gonna do with all that?"

Totoy handed him the steel bar. It looked like it had been an old part of the jeep, and the weight surprised him. His cousin shoved the sack into his own back pocket and deftly tied a few intricate knots as they walked into the thicket. "It's for, kwan, pangbitag," he said.

"What in the world are you gonna set up a trap for?"



“For offering,” said his cousin, leading him down a slope and into a clearing, where the sound of rushing water seemed to wash out Totoy’s faulty enunciation. “For Martinés.”

A shallow brook bubbled over the stones in the clearing. From above, the leaves shimmered in the sun and cast mottled shadows on the water. On the ground blossomed dozens of patches of tiny flowers. Richard leaned on the steel bar and pronounced, “Picturesque,” while Totoy strolled along the brook towards a small grotto, whistling as he strung his rope.

The grotto slanted into the ground through a small entrance, but Totoy easily slipped in a few knots of the rope and then hid the rest under the bushes, where he set up a few more knots involving the stems of young trees and pieces of rock.

“Is this what they teach engineers now?” Richard said, peering over his cousin’s shoulder. Totoy had that sun-browned smell of peasant folk that Richard associated with unsanitary circumstances, and he backed off.

“Are you joking, 'Insan?’” said Totoy. “I have been catching animals since I learned how to walk.”

“You must’ve had a boring childhood.”

They settled down to wait among the bushes a few meters away. Totoy gave him his silly grin. “No, 'Insan, it’s you who missed out on many things. You will learn from Martinés.”

Martinés, Martinés, Richard muttered in his head. I won’t even ask this time. So instead he asked, “What are we trying to catch there?”

Totoy began munching one end of a twig, like he would a toothpick. “Martinés likes lizards. You want like this?” He pulled the twig from his teeth and held it near Richard’s face.

Richard flashed his cousin a tortured smile. “I’m fine, thank you.”

“Inang and Itang told me before, that long ago Martinés also liked musang.”

“All right.”

A minute later, when Richard could no longer stand not talking, he said, “What’s a musang?”

“Plenty of things you don’t know.” Totoy shook his shaggy head. “Small wild cats with dogfaces. Long ago our grandfathers would catch musang and offer carcass to Martinés, but now no more, no more musang in these forests. Only lizard.”

I’m in a zoo, he thought, gazing down at the steel bar in his hand. I’ve worked as language coach for two call centers and speech trainer for three corporations. What in God’s name am I doing out here?



“I really don't know”, his boss had said. A nice enough executive, but Richard's records and the hundreds of evaluation sheets about him gave the old man no choice. Judged and found wanting.

Richard looked to the heavens. The sunlight blinded him, but not before he saw—or thought he saw—a small black bird, its streaked wings flapping a short distance above his head.

“Did you see that?” he gasped.

His cousin's eyes seemed lidless underneath his hair. “What, 'Insan?”

“A bird—a crest on its head like a crown—I swear it was going to swoop—”

“You know, 'Insan,” Totoy spoke as if he had not heard Richard, “you returned just in time.”

Richard shivered. That hadn't been a bird, he thought, Just the sun in my eye.

His cousin smiled kindly at him. “Insan, did you know that you're the oldest of our generation? Tata Onsing is dying, and now you're here.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Tata Onsing is the oldest brother of Tata Domeng.”

“Who the hell is Tata Domeng?”

“Insan, Tata Domeng is our—what you call it—great grampa. Lolo sa tuhod.”

Richard rubbed his eyes in frustration. “Sure, I remember now,” he said, just to end the matter. “Are you telling me you didn't see that black b—”

Totoy snatched the twig from his mouth and waved it at him for silence. Richard grimaced at the stray drops of spittle, and then he heard bushes shaking, and the sound of something thrashing in the dampness of the grotto.

Totoy bit on the twig and crept through the thicket, running his fingers along the rope that he had knotted around shrubs, to the opening of the grotto. The man might've been a reptile himself, Richard thought, the way he slithered over the ground. Richard followed cautiously.

In one swift movement, Totoy clenched his fists around the rope, swung his arms, bolted down and then straightened up, jerking the rope with his full strength. Richard heard the thwapping of the knots closing in on the catch, and suddenly he was staring at the lizard dangling in front of his face.

Richard tightened his grip on the steel bar.

He had seen pictures of monitor lizards in encyclopedias before, and twice or thrice of the real thing in zoos, but they had all seemed to Richard still as stone. But this lizard, despite having been bound at the jaws, limbs and tail by Totoy's system of



knots, was as civilized as only a rabid wildcat could get. It could've been a meter long from snout to tail, a lean, mean, writhing reptile.

"Huli," Totoy smiled in delight, turning to Richard. He pulled the sack from his back pocket and instructed Richard to hold it open for the lizard.

Richard did as he was told. He poised with the steel bar as Totoy pulled the thrashing lizard up towards him. "Shouldn't we kill it now? It's putting up a fight."

"Martínés will do it." Totoy spat out the twig and drove it into the ground with his heel. "Don't worry, enough time and it will know it is caught."

The lizard held Richard's gaze with its own yellow eyes as it fell.

"I almost forgot," said Totoy as he fought to close the sack. "Please, 'Insan, pick some flowers from the water, for on the way to Martínés."

Turning me into a pansy, muttered Richard as he gathered a bunch of the white and yellow flowers from the side of the brook. Totoy then hoisted the sack over his shoulder, and the thing did not stop bouncing and thrashing about, even as it was tossed onto the floor of the jeep, and Richard kicked the steel bar against it, and Totoy revved up the engine, and the jeep started to dodder up the dirt road again.

Only when the jeep had gone past the tangles of shrubbery into the coconut jungles did Richard notice that the sack had finally stopped moving.

He should've just stayed home with the alcohol, he thought. He held on to the flowers the rest of the way, even as the movement of the jeep rocked him back to sleep, and to the story in his dream.

AND SO, the sun and the storms took turns in their assault, but the waters remained sweet and the land was always green and golden in the seasons of ripeness. And whenever the little birds rose like flowers from the acacia, the villagers knew in their hearts what they had been given.

The leader of the village kept all these things until his death. When he died, the villagers turned to the youngest members of his family.

The villagers said: You are young, and can remember well. Which of you will remember in your ancestor 's place?

And the oldest of these children said: I will, for I know more about the world than anyone else.

This is how things have been since then.

Many other strangers came as generations passed, visitors who wielded gold and fire and books, pale men in odd clothing who tried to change the village with their own gifts. And the land thrived despite the false gifts, and the people lived in much



abundance, until the day came when the last villager who remembered was lain down in the earth from whence he came.

The village found none to replace him, for the youngest of the clan were mere babes, and there was no one else who would take up the burden. The little black birds shrouded the sky, but still the villagers began to forget.

And then the disaster fell upon them—and for many nights the sounds of grief were so deep that the soil's heart broke in a flood of despair, grief so strong that the waters colored the rocks with blood, grief so sharp that it shook the mountains and ripped apart the heavens.

And this was when the stranger returned, and where she walked, the seeds of the earth broke and blossomed. She called to one of the birds that nested in the acacia. A final gift, then, she said. One hand held the bird's crested head so that it opened its beak—the other glimmered with the silver of a knife. With fingers so delicate that the very air around them seemed to dance, the stranger pulled out the bird's tongue.

This is how you will be reminded, she said.

“YOU KNOW, 'Insan, there is no such thing as miracles,” Totoy was saying as the jeep crawled along the road, the tires rolling over the fallen coconuts, which made popping noises as they were sundered. “No coincidences either. Reap what you sow, as they say.”

Richard rubbed his eyes, cursing under his breath. Couldn't Totoy see that he'd fallen asleep? There'd been something hovering in his dream, the air of a nightmare—

“Why did you agree to come home, 'Insan?” said his cousin.

He wanted to say, I'm not home, you moron, I'm only visiting. But the unsettling feeling had welled up in his throat. He glanced around. In these parts there were no more huts and shrubs, just palm trees that towered above them like gods, and in the west, the dark foliage of faraway woods. He had a vision again, of crested birds with white streaks on their wings, of red, red rocks strewn across the land, but he pushed it all away. By now the sun hovered above the woods, the deep glow of its light breaking into solid shafts.

“Insan?”

“Quarter-life crisis,” said Richard irritably.

“What that, 'Insan?”

“It means I'm doubting my profession.” Totoy's head bobbed.

“Then you are lost.”

“Something like that,” Richard conceded at last. He chuckled. “But I guess hotshot engineers wouldn't know anything about getting lost.”



His cousin grinned with all his crooked teeth. "I'm engineer only so I can take care of Inang and Itang."

"My mother can't come home yet. She's earning so much there." She wants to, he didn't add, But I told her, she's earning so much.

"Tiyo Rudy loved his home." Richard glanced up at the mention of his father. "I know," he said. "Doesn't mean I have to, though."

There flitted across his cousin's face a little smile that Richard would remember in the years to come. The jeep wove on under the palm trees. A peculiar coconut tree rose into view, all trunk and withered leaves as brown as the earth.

The jeep slowed down to a stop beside the dead tree. Totoy turned to Richard. "Insan," he said, pronouncing his words well, "you don't know anything." Richard sat there blinking as Totoy took the flowers from him. With his free hand, Totoy dragged the jute sack and the steel bar out of the jeep. He walked around to Richard's side, the sack slung motionless over one shoulder, and waited.

"That way to Martinés' hut," he said, tilting his head towards the glowering sun.

"Past this red rock into the coconuts. Let's go."

He turned, and then looked back at him. "Unless you want to go home by yourself." Richard couldn't get over it. Had his cousin just patronized him, daring him to find his way back to the village proper? Totoy walked ahead in the direction of the reddening sun. Richard climbed out of the jeep, but as he was about to sprint after his cousin, a chill imploded down his spine and he froze in his tracks.

Past this red rock?

There it was at the roots of the dried tree, solid rock, misshapen, misplaced, and where the sunlight struck, the red grain sparkled eerily. Richard placed one hand on the rock and felt heat in its coarseness. He glanced up at the dead palm tree and thought he saw the light of the sun set the wilted fronds aflame.

If he could only remember where they had driven from, he would jump back into the jeep—

He shook himself and hurried after his cousin.

IT IS said that the stranger left the black bird to the care of the villagers. These days, however, nobody will say where the creature was kept, or what became of it as the seasons came and went. What may be said is that the stranger wept as she departed, and while her tears washed away some of the sorrows of the land, her very words unfurled the earth.

If the contract is broken once again, she whispered, her voice the rustle of leaves in the trees, I will visit a third time, to drain the land after your demise.



Trees took root where she walked, and they are all that remains of her voice.

And so, the pain is borne, because it is a language unto itself.

Thus, the bird learned, and grew, and spoke.

THE COCONUT trees seemed to gaze down at the two men, looming over them from the height of the sky. He and Totoy walked in silence until Richard could no longer see where they had parked the jeep.

“Shouldn’t we have brought a flashlight or something?” said Richard. “The sun’s about to set, and it’ll be completely dark when we get back.”

Totoy grinned at him. “You see that tall acacia? That’s the hut of Martinés beside it.”

Richard looked straight ahead, and sure enough, there stood the one tree for miles around that wasn’t coconut. Dwarfed by its slender neighbors, the acacia seemed to make up for its lack of height with thick branches, reaching out with dark, impenetrable leaves. And right in the tree’s shadow was the nipa shack.

“Near enough,” Richard shrugged, trying to contain his relief. They would drop off Totoy’s gift and get the hell out of there. There would be no need to talk about destinies, he would say—he would deal with his problems alone, because it was his life and no one else’s. Rhum and other such spirits waited for him back home.

He thought of the days in Makati, of the buildings that sparkled with offers and rejections. He thought of his mother’s letters, the echo of loneliness from beneath her words. But then Richard glanced at Totoy whistling that unearthly tune, flowers in his hand and a monster lizard in the sack slung over his shoulder, and he vowed he would never return to this country again.

As they walked on, Richard saw that there was a clearing in front of the hut. Despite the twilight’s hue, he saw the rust-red rocks—similar to the one that had marked the side of the road—littered across the ground. But as the cousins approached the clearing, Richard realized that the rocks weren’t randomly strewn from some long-forgotten landslide. There were dozens of the small boulders, arranged across the clearing in clean, spacious rows.

Totoy caught him gasping, and asked him if he was superstitious.

“Me, superstitious?” said Richard. He could not tear his eyes away from the rocks.

“Sometimes, the coconut farmers say—” Richard heard the little smile in Totoy’s voice, “—at night, they hear the crying of infants and children from the rocks.”

The cousins were walking across the clearing now, past row upon row of the rust-red markers. “That’s fucked up, man.”

“You don’t know about them?” Totoy prodded. “Tiyo Rudy told you nothing?”



And that was when Richard could not pretend about the memory anymore: a family history, a tale of black birds and red rocks, a sacrifice that granted speech—

His gaze swung back to the acacia, and he saw hundreds of the birds perched among the branches, nesting in holes they had carved in the tree trunk. They held Richard's gaze with their bright yellow eyes.

Totoy glanced up. "The martinés," he said cheerfully. "Like the musang, they are now rarely seen here. Related to myna birds, only the martinés have crests on their head and white streaks on their wings."

When Richard said nothing, Totoy added, "When martinés are young, people can teach them to speak by snipping their tongues bit by bit."

Hundreds of black birds in the tree, thought Richard. Yellow eyes. A gust of wind from their wings.

"You were saying, 'Insan,'" Totoy went on, as if oblivious to how Richard had stopped in his tracks, "that you were lost. Not anymore."

He paused, and turned around to look at Richard. The sack on his shoulder trembled. Something else glinted from under his arm. "The oldest of the youngest must take up the burden. Memory is a fragile thing."

Richard stood still, breathless, not believing, gazing around him at the rows of red stone markers. "Coincidence," he said. He was confused now, with so many details and images digging their way up his brain from old stories he had long ago rejected.

Totoy said nothing. He stepped forward.

"There was probably a war, or an epidemic—lots of people used to die in wars and epidemics," stuttered Richard. "Coincidence."

His cousin took another step. "Destiny," he said. Gently, he lowered the sack to the ground. "We come to Martinés."

Richard whirled around to run, but there was a flash as steel hit him hard on the back of his head. The last thing that he saw before he blacked out were the flowers, the flowers that Totoy was laying among the rows of rust-red stones.

IN THE DARKNESS, Richard smelled the acrid odor of decaying wood. Of bird droppings. Of a dying reptile. He heard the sound of tearing flesh.

He clenched his fists in alarm, but his hands were tied behind his back, and his feet, too, were bound with rope. He was sprawled on the floor, and as he struggled to sit up, the sound took on another form: a chewing, a gobbling, a flapping of wings. Richard cried out.

"Insan," came Totoy's voice in a whisper, "Martinés is feeding."



“Get me out of here!” Richard screamed. His voice sounded hollow in the dark. The beating of wings stopped.

“Insan,” still in a whisper.

“Light,” Richard muttered. His legs were bound tight but they quivered and shook like they used to, when he was a kid waking up from nightmares of black wings and yellow eyes. “Turn on the fucking light.”

“Are you sure, 'Insan?”

“A light, please...”

Richard heard a match strike, and a faint light crawled into his vision. He saw Totoy standing by a door, a candle in his hand. Its flame enshrouded the tiny shack with a single, writhing shadow. Near the door was an ancient table cluttered with books and sheaves of paper.

“Insan, Tata Onsing.” His cousin held the candle towards the figure huddled at the table. The light flickered across the old man’s eyes, and they were eyes that would welcome death. Tata Onsing gazed vacantly at Richard, and his ashen beard shuddered as he opened his mouth. Only a piteous moan rose from his throat.

Weakly, Tata Onsing lifted one gnarled hand, and with another whimper, the old man let his hand drop on a sheet of paper. A pen scratched with difficulty.

“Told to him, and to him only,” Totoy murmured. His crooked teeth gleamed in the candlelight. “After him, you. If I had been born before you, 'Insan, I would have gladly accepted this burden.”

Something in the shadows of the room beat its wings again. Totoy bowed, and added apologetically, “But I am only a builder of things.”

Richard shifted his gaze to the shadows, and the first thing he saw were the mangled remains of a lizard strewn on the dirt floor. Bayawak, he remembered irrelevantly, that’s what it’s called.

Then he saw bright yellow eyes the size of bottlecaps—a slimy beak—midnight wings streaked with white—

The great bird hopped over the reptile’s corpse. It hopped close to Richard’s feet, cocking its crested head. When it hopped onto his knees, digging its claws into the tender muscles of his flesh, Richard tried his best not to cry out.

He failed, and when his mouth opened, the great bird struck.

In the haze that took over his mind, Richard watched his cousin leave the candle on the table, seek Tata Onsing’s feeble hand for a blessing, and creep out back to his owner-type jeep, past the rust red rocks and the coconut jungle. Richard wondered



about Totoy, and Tata Onsing, and his mother in Italy, and his father long gone, and the bayawak and musang, and the martinés perched in the acacia.

The Martinés bent its crested head to his ear and started to speak.

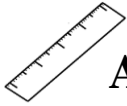
Task A: Read and answer critically the following questions.

1. What is the point of view used in the story? Lift some lines to prove your point.
2. What scenes in the story show something about local color? Cite at least 5.
3. Discuss the plot of the story. Identify exposition, rising action, climax, denouement, and resolution.
4. Do you think, Richard, as a character, no longer values his hometown and its values? Is that why he had to remember?
5. Why is it significant that Richard as a motivational speaker fluent in English? Why is it significant that Richard is irritated with Totoy's English?
6. What do you think are the insights of the story about the old country, or the province? What are its insights about modern Filipinos? Do you agree or disagree?

Task B: Alternative Ending

Write an alternative ending to the story. In your short story, would Richard be able to save himself? If so, why or why not? Will he try to escape, but find himself in worse trouble than he already is?





Assessment

Write TRUE if the statement is correct; otherwise, write FALSE on the blank provided.

- _____ 1. Dialogue, motivation, and action are considered in determining the external aspect of a character.
- _____ 2. How a character dresses forms part of that character, among other things.
- _____ 3. Local color makes the story more believable, especially if it provides particular details true for specific locality.
- _____ 4. Biography is also considered in the contextualization of a literary text.
- _____ 5. Critical reading of texts is needed for one's development especially if it provides learning experiences in a context which readers are interested and motivated.



Additional Activities

Imagine that you are a barangay official in the locality of Miguel in the story entitled "One Day on The Road" and you have heard of the accident involving the two tricycle drivers. Write a copy of a poster campaign for discipline driving.





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