

Ethics, Representation, and a “Filipino Ecocriticism” of Yolanda in Daryll Delgado’s *Remains*

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Abstract

Even over a decade since super typhoon Haiyan (known as Yolanda in the Philippines) struck central Visayan regions of the archipelago, survivors continue recalling their mortifying experiences at the mention of the storm. However, literature continuously flourished to keep the memory not only of the destruction but also of the survival and resilience that surrounded its aftermath. Jeffrey Santa Ana regards this literary intelligence as a “Filipino ecocriticism,” which discloses how historical violence aggravated weather events across the Philippines and the Southeast Asian region. Using this lens in the close reading of Daryll Delgado’s novel *Remains* (2019), this article intersects issues of ethics and fictionality on the representation of real-life experiences in the wake of the most devastating land-falling storm in modern Philippine meteorology. It draws insights on postcolonialism, positionality, and ethical witnessing from the works of Sarita See, Walter Benjamin, Jocelyn S. Martin, and an online interview with the author herself. Towards the end, this article ultimately discloses “literarising truths” as a non-neutral approach on the sociopolitical realities that lies at the core of representing climate disasters.

Keywords

Philippine climate disaster, Typhoon Yolanda, Filipino ecocriticism, Filipino ecological imagination, ethical representation, disaster literature

Introduction

As of writing this article, several provinces in the Philippines are still recuperating from the successive devastation of two typhoons which forced the country to declare a national state of calamity. Typhoon Tino or Kalmaegi (2025) and super

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typhoon Uwan or Fung-Wong (2025) struck in the early weeks of November 2025 while people were yet recovering from a sequence of earthquakes that struck different regions. These disasters eerily reflect the devastation of super typhoon (ST) Yolanda, or Haiyan, in 2013, which was commemorated within the very few days between Tino (2025) and Uwan’s (2025) landfalls.

ST Yolanda remains one of the deadliest storms to have made landfall in modern meteorological history. It is *the* storm that local weather forecasters recall on the topics of atmospheric disturbance, making references to the thousands of deaths, millions of displacements, and billions-worth of damaged properties in cash in its wake (Blanco 743; NDRRMC 2). As such, dwelling in a disaster-prone country lodged in the western North Pacific “typhoon belt” require essential knowledge in surviving natural calamities (McPherson et al. 1; Yamada & Galat 433). Yolanda’s aftermath heightened discourses on social inequalities. The inadequacies of post-disaster response and relief distribution were veiled by the notion of resilience, which was argued by Eadie (100) as a mode of normalising the presence of profit-seeking organisations. Consequently, displaced survivors lost not only properties and livelihood, but were also left vulnerable to unprecedented risks as that of the COVID pandemic (Siguan 457). The harsh realities uncovered by Yolanda refuse to be omitted in climate forums and calls for climate action, which constantly revives narratives of survival, resilience, and hope. Trauma survivors lean onto narrativity as a coping mechanism to make sense of the tragedy and integrate them into their identities, as narrating helps reconstruct a consciousness of time by “establish[ing] a certain chronology to discern past and present,” which is vital in the process of post-traumatic growth (Jirek 20; Martin, *The Wave* 407).

Prose and poetry about Yolanda similarly flourished. For Martin, such literary works serve as written memoirs which “either come to terms with the catastrophe and/or to pay tribute to the ones who passed away” (*The Wave*, 403). With these literatures, the educator and author Jeffrey Santa Ana introduced the Filipino ecological imagination which maintains that Philippine literature incited by typhoon Yolanda are testimonies of altered weather patterns brought about by its history of colonisation (62). Drawing from Sarita See’s interpretation of postcolonial melancholia, Santa Ana argues that Filipino authors express their version of ecocriticism which “appeals to human experience” (61). This discloses the comprehensibility of the environmental justice called for by Filipinos against rich nations’ resource extraction in the Philippines in particular and Southeast Asia in general. One of the characteristics of the Filipino ecological imagination is the “Filipino artistic expression of loss” (76), where authors convey their grief over the overwhelming destruction and displacements resultant to neocolonial

practices. With the Filipino ecological imagination, writers from local and diasporic communities depict the losses and displacements suffered by the victims of Yolanda and characterise them as a long-term consequence of Western imperialism.

Relatively, the idea of narrativising one's own, as well as another's, traumatic experience is tangential to the ethics of representation, which is pivotal in Yolanda-themed texts as they speak *for* real-life experiences subsumed in creative devices. Martin for one warns writers of "mislistening"—the tendency to apply selective listening and identifying oneself with victimhood, that is, "exercising a sort of hegemonic control over the other's narrative" (*The Wound* 406). Ethical considerations, then, make it possible for one to discern art as aesthetically endearing but immoral, and vice versa. This places in the writer a responsibility to balance creative and scholarly license with ethics, polishing freedom of expression with sensitivity in representing delicate matters such as morality and collective trauma.

In this article, I intend to bring together ethics and representation in Daryll Delgado's fictional work *Remains* (2019), with Santa Ana's notion of "Filipino ecocriticism" and the typhoon as an overarching concept. Its trajectory begins with sifting evidences of gradual changes in pastoral tropes and seasonal traditions—how global warming disrupted the once congenial bond between people, weather, and the natural environment. These evidences are then analyzed as "Filipino artistic expression of loss" (76) from the perception that victims have no means of channeling their "rage and grief," and such powerlessness renders them incapacitated to express their plight. Towards the end, I shall attempt to raise and engage issues of ethics and positionality in representing the Yolanda disaster.

***Remains*: Nature, nostalgia, and newness**

Remains is told from the perspective of Anna "Ann" Suarez, a part-time journalist who returns to Tacloban to fulfil an NGO project—documenting "untold stories of resilience" and "trail[ing] after organizations distributing relief goods, recovering bodies, and providing psychosocial intervention to survivors" for a special year-end featuring (57). Although cynical with the task, Ann would remain complacent in order to carry it out with an ulterior motive. She needed to locate Mano Pater, an important family friend, whose mysterious disappearance in the thick of the disaster would soon drive her into dubious conclusions.

At the beginning of the book, Ann is welcomed by the panorama of chaos from afar, and her three-day homecoming would be accompanied by their nostalgic childhood innocence and freedom "before the secrets, before the

storm, before the deaths” (320). Consequential to the political turmoil they were caught in, Ann is triggered by unwanted recollections. She is haunted by an internal bickering with her sister Alice, and would often argue with their childhood friend Dino, a Yolanda survivor, who was made aloof by the gap of their life circumstances. Ann works for the project while gathering answers to her own queries, which Delgado describes as “questions she had no capacity to ask and whose answers no capacity to recognize” (ANWW 1:06:53-1:07:58). Towards an indefinite conclusion to the plot, Ann is yet to discover what to make of the experiences that overwhelmed her, the narratives of misery she would be paid for, and the remains of long-forgotten ordeals exhumed by the storm. Generally, the plot intersects Ann’s childhood to her present life, sending her mind in chronic motion to and from three prevailing conflicts in the past which have eminently shaped her psyche: the *sumsuman*, the dog brought to them by typhoon Undang (1984), and the brutal crime against someone she and her sister loved dearly.

In Delgado’s lecture, “Writing within and as Labor,” *Remains* was expounded from divergent angles—language, imagination, feminism, and socio-political allegories. Here, Delgado described her work as a story at the onset of the aftermath of typhoon Yolanda, narrated by a female character “whose ties to the city are problematic at best and questionable at worst” (ANWW 19 32:05–32:10). It is imbued with the voices of seven other characters cutting through the main narrative. It is either a novel in Waray, the author’s first language and culture, but written in English, or an English novel imagined in Waray. The novel further portrays how women lived in patriarchal families, particularly of two sisters who grew up clinging onto events of the past, and of their mother “who broke free from the strictures of motherhood to forge her own path” (Delgado, Zoom Interview, Jan. 5, 2024; 15:02-11). By setting the story in Tacloban City, the area hardest-hit by Yolanda, Delgado captures a metaphoric reference to the Philippines with its history of unspoken tragedies that continue to transpire.

In the end, Delgado proposes to leave to the reader their own description of her novel, hence is my interpretation of it through the Filipino ecological imagination. I construe that for Ann, nature is always a reminder of their home in Tacloban, which was lost to her through its history of political violence. In it, she bears vestiges of the childhood she loved and despised equally. She associates the sea and the sky to freedom, which foreshadowed their family’s escape from the city and her mother’s eventual liberty from the play pretend of motherhood. Their beautiful Tacloban house had accesses to places where she, Alice, Dino, and his sister Mai-Mai, would often escape when they were children, to “look up to the wide, open sky, making believe [they] were spotting falling stars, while

listening to the waves crashing against the seawall” (Delgado 22-23). Ann states that the sea and sky would often become one in the imagination. The night would yield copious stars and signal the advent of summertime, evoking to them *nagbabaras*, or “sanding” in Waray, so the stars are “truly as numerous as the *baras*, the sand, on the beach” (39). Also, Ann’s keen olfactory sense would allow her to smell an incoming rain from certain emissions by the sea, though it was a potential which remained unexplored due to the skepticism that surrounded her.

They would soon fly between sea and sky to relocate in the aftermath of their beloved Tito Jun’s murder. Ann narrates that while on the plane to Manila, she asked Mano Pater if there would be a garden or gumamela (hibiscus) in the house they were moving to; Mano Pater said he would make sure that there was (77). One can acknowledge in this sentiment that Ann’s childhood in Tacloban was reminiscent with nature. This is signified by her seeking of a garden, which Mano Pat made effort to landscape for her. Although it turned out to be a smaller garden, incomplete with the “overgrown white bougainvillea, and pink and yellow hibiscus ... which [they] used to crush in water and make bubbles with,” (77), Ann and Alice would still find happiness in their new home.

It can be argued that the idea of a garden in the novel is associated with the notions of beginning and end, as when it functioned as an alternative to graveyards. While resting across makeshift burial sites during her fieldwork, some children spoke to Ann about their families being “in *the garden*, too” (138, emphasis in original). This likely references the Memorial Garden attached to names of private cemeteries around Tacloban. Similarly, Delgado deliberately set the ending of her book at the garden of the family’s Manila home. Here, Ann momentarily steps off the confines of her anxiety, which is marked by a newfound silence of her sister’s mental reprimands. One can envision Ann in reconciliation with her past, portrayed in a mundane act of gardening. She clears weeds and cuts overgrown branches, which may be symbolic to making way for the growth of her persona. To further emphasise this, the author chose to set the scene at daybreak, which is a literary convention of newness and reform. Delgado confirms the optimistic mood of this ending, describing it as “a seemingly peaceful environment of the character [Ann] ruminating what’s out there, what’s possible, and being among the living” (ANWW19 1:00:37 – 1:00:54).

A “Filipino Ecocriticism”: History, neo-colonialism, and the fictional journalist

The intersection of culture, literature, and the natural world embodies environmental writing and is contributory to the enhancement of awareness of the ecology and issues of sustainability. As an expanding field of scholarship, it

cultivates ecological values-formation by championing populations that are marginalised by the lingering effects of environmental colonialism (Ryan 9). The pre-eminence of foreign aid in *Remains* is evidential to neo-colonialism. Highlighting the Philippines as a former colony of the US, Santa Ana affirms the continuity of American influence over the country’s politics, culture, and economy. This was based on patterns he traced since the beginnings of American imperialism in the Philippines, particularly in Visayas where significant colonial activity took place. Santa Ana observes that it has been usual for the US to lend money to “formerly colonized poor countries of the global south,” and later force them to “pay back loans at exorbitant interest” (Santa Ana 65). This heightens suspicions that the US took advantage of the Yolanda disaster to further expand military presence in the guise of disaster relief efforts (e.g., Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement). It can be recalled that when globalisation was recognised at the turn of the millennium, citizens raised emergent concerns of greenhouse gases affecting the climate. However, powerful governments led by the US would not listen due to “special interests and war[iness] of political costs” (Chakrabarty 199).

Contextualising the above in a Filipino ecocriticism, postcolonial melancholia materialised around secondary characters of the main storyline and the primary characters of the intervening narratives. Consider Evelina Pulga, the character of the first narrative, whose segment was first published in the *Agam* anthology, titled “*Panawagan*”/ “Plea.” Her account is accompanied by the image of an elderly woman holding the picture of a man around her age. Evelina seeks help from relatives, friends, authorities, and literally *anyone*, to locate her husband, Filemon, who was one among the “men [who] went back to check on the sea, on [their] homes, in Candahug, Palo” (Delgado 83). Filemon has not returned even after seven days. Evelina represents a group of survivors, particularly wives, and is overwhelmed by grief and frustration on the loss of their husbands and the community. She blames the inadequacy of warnings and dissemination:

Our husbands! Our homes! Where are they among these bloated bodies, these decapitated arms, these pair-less slippers, these twisted clothes, these broken posts, these crumpled metal sheets, these rotten lumber, concrete walls that have been pulverized into dust, decapitated coconut trees lying on the ground.

How come we weren’t told? How come no one talked to us? Why didn’t anyone explain how these things come about? Why didn’t anyone tell us what to do when these things take place? That when the sea disappears, that when the silence falls on us like a cloak, what follows will be these monstrous waves—raging, terrible, black as the devil! (84)

For the secondary character Dino, Ann's childhood friend whom she contracted to drive for her in the three-day documentation, postcolonial melancholia set in when the Suarezes relocated to Manila. This had taken away what little comfort they had while living with the family and serving them. Dino, Mai-mai, and their mother, Tita Lina, who was another house help and companion apart from Mano Pat and Tito Jun, lived "in a one-bedroom affair ... nothing but a generous extension of the laundry area and outhouse kitchen" (24). Regardless, the children became close playmates with Ann and Alice. Dino and his family stayed as caretakers of the Tacloban house when the big move to Manila took place, but they also moved out soon for "it was *too big, too quiet, too haunted*" from the "*looting, and vandalism, and breakage* ... since Tito Jun died, in '86" (79, emphasis in original). This is interpreted as them being victims of the chaos and social uprisings that resulted in the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship in February 1986. The economic gap glared between Dino and Ann in the years that followed. For example, in their conversation regarding their employment as job orders, one can easily detect Ann's attempt at modesty by equating their status. This interaction did not end well, however, as both knew their cases were entirely incomparable.

Moreover, unlike Ann, Dino's limited education in the historical violence resulting from the socio-political tension in the disaster amplified his trust in politicians who publicly showcased empathy with the victims. It reached a point where these leaders' administrative faults were deliberately overlooked. Ann defined this confidence as "probably loyal, blindly loyal, ... like the majority of this poor city [Tacloban]" (196). On one occasion, she criticised the town Mayor for not prioritising the evacuation of coastal neighbourhoods. Dino countered by evading the issue and insisting that the said Mayor had "almost lost his family" as well (196). Furthermore, Dino's defence and disregard of the culpabilities of the subtly referenced former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, who was then Mayor of Davao City when the disaster struck, is but an individual example to the collective obliviousness (and often, approval) to the extra-judicial killings that swelled in his bloody war on drugs. This is but another repetition of the historical violence that transpired during the US-sanctioned Martial Law, which had not only enabled decades of notorious dictatorship over a fascist ideology but also warranted Western military bases and capitalism to proliferate. Eventually, a neo-colonial governance was launched, authorising the harnessing of the country's natural resources. Through Dino, Delgado demonstrates how the Yolanda disaster was exploited and "used as a platform to promote political ambitions, to make money, to manipulate people" (ANWW 45:19 – 45:27). It is also worth taking note that the disaster was used by political candidates to vie for the highest national offices, and to date, have succeeded.

Santa Ana concludes that through Yolanda-themed texts, “Filipino writers speak in defence of the Philippines’ natural world” (75). Discussed above are instances when fictional characters were used to recall the more favourable environmental conditions, such as when rainfall harmonises with the annual season and gardens are remembrances of a beautiful home instead of a graveyard. Alternatively, Santa Ana insists on recuperation and preservation done “through memory, native land, life, and heritage” (79). This calls to mind Delgado’s nuance of historical politics through the *Pulaban*, a local anti-colonial movement in the 19th to early 20th-century Visayas. One of the movement’s putative leaders was Santa Benedicta, a subject of controversy and falsehood due to her being a self-proclaimed prophet. Santa Benedicta’s “prophecy” manifested in survivors who claimed to have outlasted the Yolanda disaster by heeding their ancestors’ warnings to take refuge in the mountains. This appears to be in consonance with professor Namita Goswami’s critique of the postcolonial melancholia, which acknowledges the idea that nature “has no need of us and can stand alone” (Goswami 117) regardless of the severity of rage and mourning over our losses. Goswami suggests a shift from postcolonial melancholia, calling it “a living postcoloniality” (117), where our preservation can be determined by “going even further (back) than the history of violence ... [to] where it “all” began, in the beginning” (118).

Towards an ethical representation of climate disasters

If narrativity insists on its being drawn from actual events and actual people, then the ethical considerations undergone in the production of Yolanda-themed literature such as *Remains* must also be given thorough attention. This article informs what ethical considerations mediated Daryll Delgado’s decision-making in the literary form and process of production. It draws from a personal interview with Delgado via Zoom platform, in which she engaged with inquiries of experience, protocol, ethical decisions, and advocacy relevant to the production of her fiction. Insights grasped from the interview were analyzed in Walter Benjamin’s assertions for the intellectual’s (i.e., author’s) engagement with the social and political realities of their time in his compelling essay, “The Author as Producer.”

Written sometime in 1934 when fascist and authoritarian regimes caused widespread turmoil in Europe, Benjamin sought to influence cultural producers to become active contributors of social change by coursing left-wing ideals into the entertainment they cater to the public, whether in the forms of prose, poetry, drama, and music. It is a period marked by a dichotomy of classes, where the bourgeois heavily influences dissemination and cultural production. Benjamin

describes the extent of their influence, being “capable of assimilating, indeed of propagating, an astonishing amount of revolutionary themes without ever seriously putting into question its own continued existence or that of the class which owns it” (Benjamin 94). What Benjamin observed in his time, that which saw the rise of Adolf Hitler’s notoriety, does not stray far from the dynamics of power that surrounded the Yolanda disaster. His is a timeless essay which speaks to writers living in periods beyond theirs, a demand for the intellectual “to *think*, to reflect upon his position on the production process” (101, emphasis original). Its significance is contextualised on “literarizing”—as per Benjamin’s term—one of the strongest storms to make landfall in the modern century. He writes to “[t]he bourgeois author of entertainment literature” born and raised from “a *perfect* community” (85, emphasis in original). As such, I first argue that Delgado belongs to an economic class which mimics the privileges of the bourgeoisie and is similarly caught in a period of social and political tension, compelling her to determine her position in the production of *Remains*.

At the time of Benjamin’s essay, the bourgeoisie was given a more negative connotation. They are often related to worldly excessiveness: “philistinism, materialism, and a striving concern for ‘respectability,’” although such overtones had only become prevalent in the 18th century within the construct of Marxist capitalism (“Bourgeoisie”). However, the medieval origins of the word are outside political context. The bourgeois was categorised as the middle-class of the urban area: “professionals [and] manufacturers” who did no manual labour, having “lived from their invested income of property” (“Bourgeois/Bourgeoisie”). The present middle class is generally composed of a growing sector that enjoy “more stable incomes, better educational opportunities, and access to essential services,” with a diversity of occupations that range from “professionals, entrepreneurs, and skilled workers” (Divina). Similarly, Delgado does not shy away from divulging her family’s affiliation with local political parties. Her father was a mayor of a town in Leyte, whose extended terms were “ow[ed] to the declaration of Martial Law” (ANWW 44:45-45:49). This political protection made Delgado unaware of the horrors that were rampant outside the comforts of their home. Completing her academic training in journalism at the University of the Philippines, Delgado was easily employed by both mainstream and non-mainstream media. She was able to teach in distinguished universities while working on her literary publications. Presently, she manages and writes for the Research and Stakeholder Engagement unit of Dignity in Work for All, formerly known as Verité Southeast Asia, a non-government organisation (NGO) which focuses on labour rights and migration. Her work addresses persistent social and labour issues, which is currently informing a new fiction she

is writing. This novel in progress is in the periphery of “an ordinary family ... in a city like Tacloban in the aftermath of the fall of the dictatorship on 1986” (Delgado, Zoom Interview, Jan. 5, 2024; 35:01-35:20).

Aside from her capacity for self-publication, Delgado’s privileges allowed her to pursue a degree of her choice, to travel, and even manage an NGO, all of which emulate the privileges the bourgeoisie have had in their time. Similarly, the socio-political conditions in Benjamin’s time can parallel with that of the Yolanda disaster, as seen in the conditions of survivors in *Remains*. This speaks for her position in the representation of Yolanda in the novel, beginning with Delgado’s actual volunteering in the aftermath of the storm. By working with NGOs in relief operations, she observed first-hand the precipitation of a “stratified social landscape” which, she reckons, may be closely reflected in future natural calamities. “It affects people differently,” Delgado begins, rejecting the claim that Yolanda had been “an equalizing force,” for

it affects women differently from men ... in very literal ways. It affects rich people differently from poor people. For example, ... in the aftermath of the typhoon [Yolanda], people with resources, people with money, cars, connections, could leave the city right away. So they had that choice, but people who didn’t have those resources had to stay and deal with the aftermath. (Zoom Interview, Jan. 5, 2024; 32:31-33:27)

Strictly speaking, Delgado primarily observed a political plundering of aid, controlling of information, and serving of unequal privileges. These all resound with Chakrabarty’s reference to humans as a major force not only of geological, but also biological, collapse. “There was no point in human history,” Chakrabarty declares, “when humans were not biological agents [of climate change]” (206). Delgado’s revelation of administrative delinquencies and the shortcomings of the national disaster governance embody what Benjamin calls the pursuit of a “tendency, or ‘commitment.’” This occurs when the writer is forced by the present social situation to decide whom to write for. Benjamin argues that privileged creative writers are favored by “autonomy: his freedom to write just what he pleases,” but there is also what he calls the ‘progressive’ artist:

The bourgeois author of entertainment literature does not acknowledge this choice [autonomy]. You prove to him that, without admitting it, he is working in the service of certain class interests. A progressive type of writer does acknowledge this choice. His decision is made upon the basis of the class struggle: he places himself on the side of the proletariat. And that’s the end of his autonomy. He directs his activity towards what will be useful to the proletariat in the class struggle. This is usually called pursuing a tendency, or ‘commitment.’ (85-86)

Given this, the privileged writer sustains their class status and projects neutrality between the authorities and the “proletariat”—the marginalised labour force deprived of property. By using their creative license and the conveniences that come with their social class, they maximise this autonomy to see that their work intervenes with the power struggle of their time. Benjamin inquires in his essay, “what was the position of that work *vis-à-vis* the social production relations of its time?” (89). For Delgado, she relays through *Remains* the power struggles she personally observed while volunteering. Benjamin proposes for the writer to prove a formula before addressing the question, as “the correct political tendency of a work includes its literary quality” (88). In other words, a creative work can only be politically correct when produced with an appropriate literary technique. Benjamin makes an example from Sergey Tretyakov’s production of *Feld-Herren* (‘Field Commanders’) out of an agricultural crisis in 1928 Russia. For him to fully understand their situation, he conducted personal visits to the propagandists’ communal venue, which mirrors Delgado’s personal visit to Tacloban days after the destruction of Yolanda. Hence, I argue that the literary technique of representation accomplished by Delgado in the production of *Remains* helps provide truthful political observations.

For example, Ann and Dino portray certain social margins as nearly estranged childhood friends who witnessed several episodes of horror on equal footing, and yet one had the privilege to travel in and out of the disaster and a house to come home to, away from the calamity. The other is commissioned to drive around the ruins of Tacloban for additional cash and goods to sustain his family who lost their meagre properties in the storm, presently taking refuge at an evacuation site, and unsure of how to rebuild life from the rubble. Let us pose Benjamin’s question, “what is the position of the artists *within* the literary production [i.e., *technique*]?” (87, emphasis original) Answering this inquiry scrutinises the ethical dimension of representing climate disaster in *Remains*, considering that it operates on real-life stories and events. Translating the example of Tetryakov into the article, how Delgado “positioned” herself during the preproduction fieldwork determines whom she sides with in what Benjamin calls “a revolutionary struggle ... fought between capitalism and the proletariat” (103). Benjamin would affirm later in his essay, that “the place of the intellectual (i.e., artists) in the class struggle can only be determined, or better still chosen, on the basis of his position within the production process” (93). To paraphrase, what the writer does with information gained from documentary representation reveals who they stand for in the sociopolitical struggles of their time.

It has been attested that Delgado witnessed corrupt practices relative to relief operations and broadcasting. As a point of comparison, this article advances

that the issues Delgado identified in *Remains* did not stray from actual social and political malversation. At the time, Delgado’s family home opened “as a shelter for volunteers from different parts of the world.” Although it exposed her to the calamity, she claims to not have initially thought of collecting information for a novel because the notion of writing had not crossed her mind in such chaotic circumstances. Rather, she had only thought about “thinking of survival,” “helping people,” and “being of use to the community.” It was six years later that Delgado had thought of writing down in a sequential structure the “images, sounds, pictures, and sensations” that lingered in her memory—“voices [that] sounded very clear in [her] head”—eventually moving her to produce the fiction (Delgado, Zoom Interview, Jan. 5, 2024; 12:09-13:02).

In this regard, ethics became a paramount consideration for Delgado in her selection of observed realities to be represented, challenged by the lack of standard ethical guidelines on this sort of decision-making. Ethics translates to *obligation*, a well-defined, contractual relationship which operates on avoiding “distortion, misrepresentation, or coercion” even if the literary production appears to “serve a higher goal, such as ‘getting the story’ or ‘exposing injustice’” (Nichols 155). With fieldwork demanding personal visits and face-to-face interviews, Delgado was confronted with decisions that would reveal the depth of her ethical awareness in the process of creative production. The choice to narrate in the survivor’s language is an ethical decision when the ultimate aim is representation. Delgado stated being convinced that ethics is innate, and one needs “to be an ethical person anyway, no matter what [one] does” (Delgado, Zoom Interview, Jan. 5, 2024; 24:26-24:35).

Perceiving *Remains* as a realist fiction, Delgado is strictly mindful of the depiction of people as characters in her novel despite their fictionality, considering that these aggregate characters were drawn from real-life stories. “Just because they were victims of a disaster, and they’re poor people to begin with,” she stated in the personal interview, “doesn’t mean that they don’t have agency, that they don’t have integrity, they don’t have dignity, and they have to be portrayed in that way” (Delgado, Zoom Interview, Jan. 5, 2024; 25:01-25:30). Delgado’s assertion closely reflects See’s reading of postcolonial melancholia, which expresses the susceptibility of the poor towards unethical representation. As a fictionist, the best Delgado could offer is “to write well, and to be true.” Hence, in the ambience of a natural calamity where death and devastation sit at the core, writing *true* would include depicting horror as graphic and detailed the way real-life survivors experienced them. In so doing, she could only trust that the reader would expect to come across repulsive, hair-bristling scenes, that they “know what [they’re] getting into ... a deep look into not only what a dead body

looks like but what was the story behind that, and how does that affect people” (Delgado, Zoom Interview, Jan. 5, 2024; 26:33-27:05). Interestingly, Delgado refuses the notion that the intervening narratives in *Remains* should be dismissed as non-existent. “It is not wrong to say that they [characters] are real people,” she insists when commended on how realistic the interview transcripts are, “because all of these characters are based on real people” (Delgado, Zoom Interview, Jan. 5, 2024; 22:07-22:15).

Another feature this article assumes for Delgado would be her pronounced awareness of her own limitations as a writer. She regards *Remains* as a book that touches on collective trauma, but not as an attempt to suggest closure nor solution for the victims. This reminds us of Patrick Campos’ critical proposition to not “demand unquestioning belief” in the process of representation, but rather “offer a space for ethical reflection” (123). Delgado acknowledges that writing has its own limits, and that problems cannot be straightened alone in the act. Hence, one has to be clear on what can and cannot be done as a writer, for it is their job to expose truths and untruths, from which value judgement happens within the readers. Delgado further manifests this acknowledgement of limitation through the protagonist of the novel. For more than once in the story, Ann thought of herself unworthy of witnessing the stories being told firsthand to her after recognising how dire they actually are. The grave condition of the survivors was treated as bait for increased client attention so several private organisations can profit from their stories of misery.

As an example, Delgado presented a scene where Ann was listening to a mother who lost all her three daughters in the deluge. “My stomach churned,” Ann narrated, “I didn’t have the right to be here” (Delgado 186). She admits on a different occasion, “I did not deserve to hear their [children] stories” (140). One may argue that Delgado’s choice to craft a fiction out of the non-fictional narratives may blur the truthfulness in her novel. However, she asserts that fictionality does not equate to falsity, because “there are truths that can only be revealed in fiction.” This acknowledges that truth would remain in a literary work, regardless of genre, as long as it is written with conviction.

Delgado readily disclosed a piece of advice for writers to maintain an ethical work by giving signs when the writing process has become exploitative, that is, when truths are generalised and details are evaded. She distinguishes the research phase (i.e., documenting) as a creative process, and maintains that part of the aesthetic of writing for the masses is being concrete, detailed, and being truthful about their own subject position. In Benjamin’s essay, he quotes an inquiry for creative writers from the Paris periodical *Commune*—“For who do you write?” (101). As if directly answering Benjamin, Delgado suggests for the writer

to not only identify who they’re writing for, but also about who they are writing as. She claims that the writer’s work must not only be guided by facts and verifiable data, “but also a world of structure, deliberateness, actionable truths and queer accountabilities. Often, many other truths get waylaid, many other stories get buried and sacrificed but their existence never goes away” (ANWW 1:06:53 – 1:10:53). Finally, Delgado affirms her position for the survivors of the storm in a final remark that “everything we write should be socially relevant and aesthetically pleasing” (ANWW 1:40:41 – 1:40:51).

Conclusion: Representing the permanence of a storm

This article is centred around the manifestation of Santa Ana’s “Filipino ecocritical imagination” in Delgado’s *Remains*, and how ethical representation can be observed in writing for disaster survivors. It analytically draws from the arguments of Walter Benjamin’s essay, “The Author as Producer,” while imbuing insights from a personal interview with Delgado herself. In *Remains*, memory and survivors’ accounts merge in the perspective of Ann, a part-time journalist who returned to Tacloban City after typhoon Yolanda left it in ruins. She volunteers to cover the aftermath of the storm and uses the opportunity to search for a missing family friend. While the search did not succeed, Ann’s return to the city became the closure she needed to heal from a childhood trauma.

The novel teaches us the permanence of uncertainty. There are questions that would remain as questions, and even the existence of an answer could lead to even more questions until it ultimately becomes content in its own indecipherability. In a way, *Remains* tells us the permanence of the storm and the impossibility of its termination, and we could only—truly—begin healing from its rage when we acknowledge its permanence. People will not fully acknowledge the permanence of the storm when they keep founding recovery plans on profit than sustainability. Robert Bullard concludes that inequities, such as those explored in the novel, will continue to escalate, but citizens “have the right to challenge” them (16). Having authored the environmental justice theory, Bullard shares a framework where the fair treatment of races, economic standing, and culture in relation to the development and implementation of environmental policies, can be drawn. Delgado implicitly communicates this framework through the perspectives of her characters in the novel. For example, when Ann shows her boss the interview guide for the fieldwork, he immediately strikes out her recommendation for their organisation to inquire “*Whether or not criminal elements are taking advantage of the situation and covering up crimes?*” (Delgado 303-304, emphasis original). This disapproval stems from the fear that their funders will withdraw from the project due to such critical topic. Ann was reminded that her task was

mainly to “find potential stories of ‘resilience’” for an infographic that would gain them sponsors and donors, in the guise of “contribut[ing] to what they’re hoping would be long-term post-disaster response” (62).

The novel demonstrates a disrupted congenial relationship between humans and weather, and how postcolonial melancholia allowed for the “Filipino artistic expression of loss” (76). Representation captured postcolonial melancholia in the survivors’ expressions of “rage and grief” over the losses of nature, life, property, as well as their right to such emotions. However, representing requires the ethical obligation of the artists who speak for those who are unable to speak for themselves. Walter Benjamin urges the writer to reflect on their position in the process of “literarizing” truths, which includes maximising their privileges to mediate with the power struggles of their time. Here, he evokes the artist’s “commitment” towards the proletariat (of his time). Having been secondhand witnesses to the disaster, Delgado attested through *Remains* the fraudulence and insufficiency of governmental response to aid survivors, which led to severe cases of looting and mental instability from post-traumatic stress.

The process of literary production reflects the author’s political and ethical orientation, which influences their decision-making in return. A closer look into the literary production of *Remains* reveals that Delgado, through the pre-production phase of fieldwork, witnessed firsthand the environmental disorder and the struggles for survival that followed the destruction. These struggles caused social stratifications, exploitation, and political misgovernance. Her participation on the ground was moved by the intentions of helping provide relief services for the survivors, even opening their family house as headquarters for volunteer groups. The impulse to write a novel based on her encounters with survivors occurred to her only years later. She also recognised her origins by narrating her family’s political connections, and her knowledge on how politics plays in post-disaster efforts was employed in the setting of the plot. This helped unmask several political controversies and how they alter not only family relationships, but also personal and existential growth.

Ultimately, what lies at the core of representing climate disasters is its non-neutral approach on socio-political realities. Delgado opens subtle hints of administrative negligence, whether by personal narration or infused in the conversation of fictional characters. The intersection between Filipino ecocriticism, ethics, and representation reveals the necessity of standing for people who do not have the means to represent themselves. Filipino ecocriticism represents people “at the forefront of climate change”—survivors of natural disasters or rural communities which are losing fishes and farmlands to

developmental projects of massive companies. Fundamental to the ethics of Filipino ecocriticism is the writer’s obligation to practice non-neutrality in the face of social and political struggles and intervene with postcolonial melancholia, primarily driven by their position for the marginalised.

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