

**Stefani J Alvarez
& Alton Melvar M
Dapanas (translator)**



Link to Smoke & Mold

Translator's Note

Whilst it is commonplace to profess that Stefani J Alvarez echoes certain formalist elements of transgender poetry such as the averting from direct self-presentation as trans, the destabilisation of an idealised version and articulation of the self, and the disobedience against generic boundaries (see poet-theorists Trish Salah, Joy Ladin, Rebekah Edwards, and Trace Peterson), this conclusion deludes that Global Majority trans writers instinctively subscribe to Anglo-American trans-poetics. Alvarez, a Filipino migrant woman-worker in the diaspora, writes in Tagalog-based Filipino and within a language-specific tradition, the *dagli*—a genre that propagated via vernacular periodicals in early 20th-century Philippines, as the postcolony transitioned from Spanish colonisation to American occupation (see Meg Wesling, *Empire's Proxy: American Literature and US Imperialism in the Philippines*, New York University Press, 2011). The *dagli*, with its nationalist, pastoral, didactic, or romanticist thematic (see Ang *Dagling Tagalog: 1903-1936*, Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2007), is a short piece which withstands Anglo-American categorisations—as it could be flash nonfiction, prose-poem, micro fiction, or all of the mentioned, or none of them—as in a love letter, an anecdote, a political treatise, a rant.

The *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (Cultural Centre of the Philippines, 1994) defines the *dagli* loosely as “vignettes or sketches” which could be traced back to the Tagalog *pasingaw*, the Binisaya *pinadalagan* or *binirisbiris* (alternatively, *dinalídalí* and *pinadagan*), and the Spanish *instantanea* or *rafaga*: “short account[s] of] ... spontaneous and hurried quality ... [either as] an explicit expression of a man's love for a particular woman, but at other times ... highly polemical, expressing anti-American, anti-clerical themes.” Such are poles apart from the dominant Euro-American short story form advocated by Iowa Workshop-schooled (see Conchitina Cruz) and Rockefeller Foundation-funded (see Paul Nadal) Filipino writers who brought American New Criticism in our native shores in the 1960s.

Resonant to Miriam Díaz-Diocaretz, Alvaro Járrin, Mirko

Casagrande, Suneela Mubayi, and Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba, Alvarez's creative praxis offers a framework towards the oceanic intersectional possibilities crossing translation praxis and transgender studies. Herself identifying as a *báyot*—a gendered identity from a lineage of indigene shaman-sovereigns in precolonial southern Philippines—over the Westernised transgender umbrella terminology, her *œuvre* calls to question the malignant tensions of foreignisation-localisation on genres and genders as social constructs restricted by what the North Atlantic readership recognises, a bone of contention I continually revisit as a Filipino queer translator treading in Western literary spaces.

—Alton Melvar M Dapanas

Damay

Pumila ako sa ATM para mag-withdraw. Nakasunod sa akin ang isang Arabo. Tahimik lang ako habang hinihimas-himas niya ang aking likod. Hindi na ako nag react. Naisip ko, ayaw ko ng gulo. Nasa bansa nila ako. Naiirita man sa pangungulit ng Arabo habang nagtatanong ng aking numero. Binigay ko ngunit sinadya kong mali ang last digit.

“Cannot be reach,” sabi nito nang sinubukan niyang tawagan ang aking telepono.

“My phone no battery. Call me later.”

Pagkatapos ng aking transaction ay umalis na ako. Nakabuntot pa rin siya. “Come with me?” yaya niya.

“I am so sorry. I am busy. See you next time.”

Hindi pa rin tumigil sa pangungulit. Pumasok ako sa isang Filipino restaurant. Hindi na siya nakasunod sa akin ngunit nanatiling nakatayo sa labas ng eskinita. Alam kong hinihintay niya ang paglabas ko uli.

Naupo ako sa pinakadulong mesa.

“Noon, nabastos na rin ako. Akala kasi ng mga Arabo na yan, lahat ng mga Pilipino na nandito sa Saudi, bading,” kuwento ng isang lalaki sa kasama niya sa kabilang mesa.

“Nalalahat nga, e. Nadadamay tayo,” sagot ng kanyang kasama.

Hindi na ako umorder. Wala akong ganang kumain. Lumabas ako ng restawran. Alam kong sinundan nila ako ng tingin.

Nakasunod pa rin ang Arabo sa akin.

Implicated

I lined up at the ATM to withdraw. An Arab man trailed after me. I remained silent as he caressed my back. I ignored him. I don't want trouble, I thought. I am here in his country. Irritated at the Arab man's insistence, I decided to give him my number with a wrong last digit.

"Cannot be reach," he said when he tried to dial the number.

"My phone has no battery. Call me later."

After my transaction, I left. He followed me.

"Come with me?" he invited.

"I am so sorry. I am busy. See you next time."

He kept on harassing me. I went inside a Filipino restaurant. He no longer dogged after me but remained standing outside by the alley. I knew he was waiting for me to come out.

I sat down at the farthest table.

"Back then, I got harassed. Because the Arabs thought that all Filipino men here in Saudi are gays," said a Filipino man to his companion from the other table.

"We get generalized. We're implicated," was his companion's reply.

I no longer ordered food. I lost my appetite. I left the restaurant. I could feel their eyes on me.

Outside, the Arab man stalked behind me.