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# QUEER ASWANG TRANSMEDIA: FOLKLORE AS CAMP

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## Abstract

In recent years, the aswang—a supernatural creature of Philippine folklore that is often associated with female monstrosity and patriarchal misogyny—is being flamboyantly queered across a range of media. The aswang is a centuries-old transmedial, transgeneric figure whose monstrosity has been interpellated by gender-essentialist agendas while nonetheless epitomizing disruptive gender instabilities. In the handful of texts that comprise queer aswang transmedia—a 2011 Filipino novel (Ricky Lee’s *Si Amapola sa 65 na Kabanata* [Amapola in 65 Chapters]), mainstream film (*Mga Bata ng Lagim* [Children of Terror], dir. Mar S. Torres, 1964), and amateur digital video (*Amabilis 2*, Napoleon Lustre, 2011)—the aswang, an iconic female monster, is being destabilized and reimagined. Gay men (or more accurately, *bakla* subjects) are occupying the place formerly reserved for monstrous women. This queering of aswang transmedia is a forceful, funny, yet undeniably risky reappropriation lodged in language (*swardspeak*) and a kind of *pinoy* [Filipino] camp style. This essay attempts to theorize a distinctly Filipino camp sensibility in relation to queer time. It wrestles with queer aswang transmedia’s implications for both temporality (since anachronism underpins the cultural figures of both *bakla* and aswang) and visibility (queer scholars argue that the *bakla*, stigmatized as effeminate and lower class, is increasingly the object of forcible bourgeois erasure in the face of the urban gay scene’s aspirations toward an imagined gay globality.)

## Keywords

*bakla manananggal* (gay viscera sucker); *pinoy* camp temporality; anachronism and co-evalness; queering Philippine folklore; *baylan* and *asog* (indigeneous Animist shamans)

## About the Author

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**QUEER ASWANG TRANSMEDIA: FOLKLORE AS CAMP<sup>1</sup>**

Something new is happening in the Philippines' vibrant transmediascape. In at least two genres that command both popular and indie appeal—the Tagalog novel in print and independent digital cinema—the *aswang*, a supernatural creature of Philippine folklore, is being flamboyantly queered. At the moment, only a handful of print and screen texts feature queer aswang, though more conventional depictions of aswang in Philippine popular culture have enjoyed a thriving resurgence since at least 2008.<sup>2</sup>

That depictions of aswang emerge across media should come as no surprise: newer media are linked to older media that they remediate and transform in what Marie-Laure Ryan describes as a “chain” of interpretive “substitutions.” Every medium not only contains but also interprets another: as McLuhan argues, the telegraph interprets print, print the written word, the written word speech, and speech, thought (qtd. in Ryan 28). Oral narratives recorded in print, then named “folklore,” recirculate in altered form in celluloid cinema, digital video, graphic novels, and on mobile phones. In this study I am not using “transmedia” to refer primarily to corporate media franchises developed around movies like *The Matrix* (1999) and its sequels, whose overarching story “unfolds across multiple media platforms” in order to “motivate more consumption” (Jenkins 622). Instead, I employ a transmedial approach along the lines conceptualized by Ryan, as a mode of comparative media analysis that looks at a range of genres and media without losing sight of medium specificity. For Ryan, the cross-media relationships by which one medium interprets and contains another are always partial, so that the chain of interpretive substitutions that links one medium to another emphasizes what is specific to each medium rather than flattening out differences between media (Ryan 1-2, 28). In their recent anthology, Marsha Kinder and Tara McPherson underscore the centrality of medium specificity to an era of ever more rapid media innovation and convergence, as well as the “generative” potential of registering the “transmedia frictions”—the differences, conflicts or resistances—that emerge from “productive juxtapositions between past and future, history and fiction, theory and practice, change and continuity, text and image, visuals and sounds, narrative and database.” (xiii-xiv). A transmedial approach to aswang explores further frictions usually occluded by the conventional understanding of “folklore” as timeless, traditional, and anti-technological. A remediative chain—one that involves orality, print, celluloid cinema and digital video—demonstrates that what is collected and constituted as “lore” is crucially dependent on technological media (Abrahams 380-381, 389). Folklore does more than merely supply “traditional” content remediated by film and new media; folklore indexes the lived relationship between people and technological media.

The small but significant corpus of queer aswang transmedia includes Ricky Lee's riveting 2011 novel, *Si Amapola sa 65 na Kabanata* [Amapola in 65 Chapters], whose *bakla* [provisionally: gay male] protagonist's transformation into a winged nocturnal monster or *manananggal* recalls a similar metamorphosis undergone by two teenage boys in Mar S. Torres' campy 1964 horror-comedy film, *Mga Bata ng Lagim* [Children of Terror]. Such texts point to an emergent structure of feeling that posits felt solidarities between the social expulsion levied against aswang and experiences of marginalization endured by queer subjects. To my mind, these two examples of the fledgling subgenre of queer aswang transmedia open up to broader considerations of other popular texts that do not feature aswang but nonetheless participate in a loosely shared project of "camping" Filipino folklore.<sup>3</sup>

This nascent horizon of sentiment is not confined to fictional genres; it has been succinctly expressed, for example, in a nonfiction amateur video posted on YouTube, *Amabilis2* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgZcp4NH4rg>>. In the germinal stages of this paper, I talked about my research to a friend and former student, Napoleon Lustre, who shared this brief video shot on his mobile phone in March 2011. *Amabilis2* is a conversation with his late mother, Amabilis Altarejos Almodal Lustre, while she was a patient at the Good Samaritan Hospital in San Jose, California. Onscreen, we see Amabilis, an eighty-six year old woman framed in long shot, wrapped in a light blanket, alert and relaxed in a wheelchair by her hospital bed. She's chatting with her son, Napoleon, and the short video portrait is clearly one he captured on his phone during a hospital visit. The context and mise-en-scène immediately evoke the poignancy of an aging, ailing parent's storytelling. The medium specificity of the mobile phone's "portable and intimate screen" and its characteristically "good enough" aesthetic—privileging "real-time connection... over visual quality"—are evident (Bassett 147, 153). In Tagalog with snatches of English, Napoleon's offscreen voice asks her to talk about a relative of theirs who stayed with them briefly during his childhood in Marikina, though nothing remarkable happened during her stay. Amabilis recalls, "people believed she was an aswang." [*Ang paniwala ng mga tao, aswang 'yun.*] In response, Napoleon wonders, "How do you get accused? Maybe she just had enemies." [*Baka may kaaway lang.*] By way of explanation, Amabilis remarks enigmatically: "Oh, those aswang are a queer people too." [*Ay, yung mga aswang, they are a queer people too.*]

Is it possible to know what Amabilis Lustre meant by "queer"? Did her enigmatic pronouncement deploy the term to mean strange, eccentric, or unconventional? Or was she drawing on more contemporary LGBTQ usage, in which the older, usually disparaging use of the word "queer" to mean "homosexual" gives way to either more neutral or more affirmative usage?<sup>4</sup> I posed these questions to Napoleon, who remains uncertain as to what his mother could have meant. In two emails sent some years later, he observes:

As far as how my mother used the word “queer,” I always thought she used it in the classic sense of strange, deviant or eccentric. I don’t think my mom was all that aware of the LGBT appropriation of that word. I’m also thinking that she wasn’t aware that queer is American slang for homosexual. But I did note the ambiguous meaning of her statement, if only to myself. (Lustre 2014a)

In a second email sent minutes after the one quoted above, Napoleon further resists foreclosing the possible meanings of his mother’s remarks:

I am becoming more and more unsure of my assumptions that Mama did not know the other connotations of queer. It’s just that I never heard her use it in the derogatory way to mean homosexual. Also, I often assumed I had to translate slang words for her, but I was sometimes surprised that she already knew them. So really, these are just from my own familiarity with the way my mom spoke, and her particular command of the language. I could just as easily be mistaken. (Lustre 2014b)

A *Los Angeles Times* obituary notes that Amabilis Almodal Lustre “died peacefully in her sleep” in May 2011, about two months after the video was taken. In the wake of her loss, we, like her son, are left with the temporalized, generational inflections and the wry humor of her richly ambiguous remark. We cannot know for certain whether she meant older notions of queer as “eccentric” or “unconventional”; whether she was alluding to earlier decades’ pejorative usage of “queer” to mean “homosexual”; or whether she was referring to more contemporary understandings of the term, particularly in LGBTQ and academic communities that have reappropriated “queer” as a neutral, affirming, or radical term.

I asked Napoleon why he had inquired about aswang in this short video and he explained: “I’ve asked about the aswang over the years because the aswang fascinated me as a child.” As a nine-year-old vacationing in Masbate City in the mid-seventies, Napoleon remembers that “aswang was common conversation,” especially between children. In an email, he recalls, “The aswang were made to be so other, yet they must have been related to people. So the idea of aswang in my family titillated me” (Lustre 2011). Napoleon’s fondness for this short video, a brief snippet of a conversation with his mother before she passed away, is rooted both in his valuing of his mother’s storytelling, especially as she got older, and the resonance of her last comment on the queerness of aswang. Napoleon writes: “I imagined the people rumored to be aswang must have been a marginalized people, for whatever reason, so when my mom called them ‘queer’ it struck a chord” (Lustre 2011).

It’s important to note that, as an example of queer aswang transmedia, *Amabilis2* is a nonfictional video document, an inter-generational exchange of stories and memories that attests to the continued relevance of this figure in the everyday life of Filipinos in the Philippines and overseas.<sup>5</sup> In *Amabilis2*, the lived, constantly

evolving dimension of aswang lore confirms that what Isabelo de los Reyes called “*el folklore Filipino*” is not a nostalgic cataloguing of customs and beliefs from a dead past. De los Reyes regarded folklore as not “lore” in an “antiquated” or obsolete sense, but as “*el saber popular*,” a living reservoir of local and popular knowledge (Anderson 12-15).

Aswang are at once transmedial and transgeneric, defying rigid demarcations between fictional and nonfictional genres. A durative yet mutable fixture of Philippine culture across five centuries, aswang eschew the notion of folklore as antiquated tradition. As I have argued elsewhere, aswang accounts ranging from the sixteenth century to the present straddle and frustrate generic borders and emphatically demonstrate the porosity of genre definitions. Sources for what are now called aswang “lore” include the chronicles of Spanish colonial missionaries and administrators, oral storytelling, published folklore collections, newspaper reports, literature, radio and television programming, cartoons, celluloid film, and digital video (Lim 114, 127). The transmedial, transgeneric quality of aswang—a figure whose monstrosity has been interpellated by gender-essentialist agendas while nonetheless epitomizing disruptive gender instabilities—reminds us that gender and embodiment (even as these shatter) are always implicated in the aswang’s traversals of genre.<sup>6</sup>

The definition of “legend,” under which pioneering folklorist Damiana Eugenio classifies aswang narratives, also does not designate it as fiction (2002: xxvi-xxviii); it is rather a story that is believed to be true, or a story in which attitude towards belief is at issue. The anthropologist Frank Lynch, whose research on aswang stems from fieldwork in Bicol in the late 1940s, notes that the aswang is, for many Filipinos, a “living...belief or near-belief” (198-199). As Linda Degh underscores, belief in the supernatural as articulated in legendry is never straightforward. Rather, complex and fluctuating attitudes toward belief lie at the heart of legends, which participate in much broader debates about believability within communities.<sup>7</sup> Napoleon Lustre’s 2011 conversation with his mother, recorded on digital video, confirms that the durative figure of the aswang as a protean near-belief continues to circulate locally and diasporically in popular knowledge.

In wrestling with what it means to allege that, in Amabilis Lustre’s words, aswang are “a queer people, too,” I want to acknowledge at the outset that my comments here are necessarily preliminary and provisional. This paper is a thought-experiment about what exactly is new about queer aswang transmedia and the campy approach to folklore exemplified by the film *Mga Bata ng Lagim* and the novel *Si Amapola sa 65 na Kabanata*. The new, as Hans Robert Jauss once remarked, requires a “detour of understanding” that is sometimes only possible much later than the initial moment of emergence, so that the new is inevitably shadowed by a certain latency of understanding (35). As a diasporic Filipina familiar with aswang but far from fluent in *swardspeak*, the gay vernacular central to the radical humor and irony of *Amapola*, I cannot presume to have the last word on these queer doings. I proceed



in a spirit of fascinated critical exploration, convinced that something vital—risky, perhaps, but vital nonetheless—is afoot in queer aswang transmedia.

In the handful of texts that comprise queer aswang transmedia, an iconic monster of Philippine folklore—the conventionally female viscera-sucker or manananggal—is being subverted and reinvented. In *Amapola* and *Mga Bata ng Lagim*, bakla subjects are campily occupying the cultural place formerly reserved for monstrous women. The queering of aswang transmedia through the figure of the bakla manananggal is forceful, funny, and even joyous; it is also, without a doubt, a kind of risk-taking. Its reappropriations are lodged in image-sound relationships, language (*swardspeak*, an umbrella term for subcultural languages spoken primarily by Filipino gay men) and a *pinoy* [Filipino] camp deployment of anachronism explored at the end of this paper.

*Bakla* is no mere Filipino synonym for the English word *gay*. Instead, as Martin Manalansan and Bobby Benedicto, among others, have pointed out, bakla messily conflates concepts that are usually kept distinct in transnational LGBTQ (lesbian/ gay/ bisexual/ transgender/ queer) vocabularies, collapsing same-sex desire (homosexuality), gender expression (male femininity) and gender nonconformity with assigned sex (trans identifications). J. Neil Garcia notes, “While the terms *bakla* and homosexual are far from congruent, many Filipinos use them interchangeably because they entail the same social effect: stigmatization” (“Male Homosexuality” 13). Whereas same sex-desire is the denotative content of the term *homosexual*, markers of gender form the “conceptual core” of bakla as a social category, which involves “cross-dressing,” “effeminacy,” and connotations of lower class status. However, as Manalansan notes, the primacy of class connotations in the term bakla did not always hold for Filipino American gay men in New York City in the 1990s, for whom bakla was centrally a racial-cultural category, often signifying pinoy queerness in opposition to the white-identified word *gay* (*Global Divas* 24).

Replacing the female manananggal with a bakla is a move rife with political and temporal risks. Broadly, this essay pursues two lines of questioning: first, visibility. In terms of visibility politics, contesting the contemporary erasure of bakla subjects by reappropriating a formerly misogynist figure from folklore is a tactic that could well backfire, turning an older figure of horrific misogyny into a newer figure of comic homophobia or transphobia. In a context in which manananggal—a winged, particularly vicious type of aswang—are usually expected to be women, what does the conspicuous emergence of bakla manananggal signify? As Benedicto demonstrates, since at least the 2000s, the bakla, reified as a stereotypically poor, effeminate man, has become the object of exclusionary erasure by a neoliberal urban gay scene in Manila whose middle-and upper-class men aspire to the hegemonic imaginary of “gay globality,” adopting hypermasculine norms represented by gay urban capitals in the US (*Under Bright Lights* 75-85). Crucially, Benedicto clarifies that bakla communities are not actually declining; rather, *kabaklaan* (bakla-ness) “is ‘being dis-appeared’ through strategies of invisibilization and discipline authorized



by the local market, which participates in setting the contours of gay identity and its cultural visibility” (75). Such tactics of discursive erasure proceed even as, in everyday life on the ground, low-income bakla and tomboys are prominent in the thriving constituency of vernacularized forms of LGBTQ advocacy in the Philippines (Thoreson 539-540). In this context, I read the recent conspicuous emergence of bakla manananggal as a bold reimagining of queer aswang in a camp folkloric register that emphatically resists what Benedicto calls “the dream of burying kabaklaan” (*Under Bright Lights* 75). If, since at least the late nineteenth century, manananggal have been predominantly feminized in the Filipino popular imagination, then arguably queer aswang transmedia works are putting gender-transgressive bakla where a monstrous, abject woman used to be. As a new form of queer visibility in popular media then, the figure of the bakla manananggal or queer viscera sucker inherits, unsettles and resignifies misogynist histories, on the one hand, while contending with the forcible bourgeois erasure of the bakla on the other.

My second line of questioning involves temporality. A perhaps unexpected link between aswang and queer subjectivities emerges in the figure of the indigenous Animist shaman. In Spanish colonial sources, native female priests were called *baylan* (in Visayan) or *catalonan* (in Tagalog), while male priests dressed as women were known as *asog* in the Visayas and *bayog* in the Luzon area. Both *baylan/catalonan* and *asog/bayog* were indigenous Animist shamans in the pre-colonial era who went on to oppose the Spanish colonizers.<sup>8</sup> Baylan were subsequently demonized by the Spanish, first as witches (*hechiceras* and *brujas*) in the 1600s, then as aswang in the late nineteenth century. Described by historical sources as a class of native priests consisting of male transvestites and women, baylan and asog are the object of present-day redemptive reappropriation as proto-feminist and/or queer-positive figures (Brewer 84-86).<sup>9</sup> In terms of temporality, drawing an equivalence between precolonial shamans and contemporary queer formations also runs temporal risks, since bakla are today dismissed as embodying anachronistic, pre-modern forms of sexual subjectivity eclipsed by overtly masculine styles of present-day gay globality. Anachronizing discourses, then, have long underpinned both the cultural figuration of the aswang and the bakla. As a new modality of queer cultural visibility, the bakla manananggal’s campy, fierce, and joyous recuperative potential is not without political and temporal risks.

If such risky undertakings succeed, then camp temporality suggests that an extraordinarily durative figure of monstrosity can embody the continuing challenges of queer survival. To be sure, queer survival encompasses an array of ongoing challenges that take many forms in the lives of people multiply marginalized along intersecting axes of sex, gender, embodiment, race, ethnicity, class, and generation. In this essay, I use “queer survival” in two senses. First, the term refers to stratagems of surviving and resisting the attempted erasure and/or devaluation of bakla subjectivities by upwardly mobile, “global gay” subjectivities; and second, it evokes

the effort to survive and contest the naturalized erasure of queer subjectivities in received notions of folklore, given that the ideological project of constituting a “folk” or “people” has been profoundly heteronormative where aswang are concerned (it is through a presumptively heterosexual lens, for example, that aswang appear as anomalous, monstrous “gender inverts,” as I discuss below). In queer aswang transmedia, a campy sense of time—a chronologically inappropriate, obstinately willful, and highly pleasurable wielding of anachronism—holds out the possibility of breaking open the “straight,” nationalist project of Philippine folklore to forge counter-heteronormative affinities between past and present experiences of social and sexual marginalization. In *Amapola*, for example, a bravura camping of Philippine folklore rewrites national origin myths to suggest that gender essentialism (and by extension, the misogyny that underwrote aswang narratives) is always already obsolescent. The queerly revisionist creation myth proffered by *Amapola*, “The Legend of the Bakla,” is a willfully anachronistic assertion that the *bakla* has always been coeval with the creation of the world.

#### ASWANG: TRANSMEDIAL TRANSLATIONS

Aswang predate the colonization of the archipelago and are chronicled in the earliest Spanish missionary accounts of the Visayas and Central Luzon, appearing in a 1582 description of Visayan funerary practices by Miguel de Loarca, who was among the earliest Spanish settlers in Panay (Loarca 135; Cullamar 17). “Aswang” does not name a singular folkloric monster but is instead a broad term encompassing an assemblage of supernatural creatures with many names and guises in a variety of Philippine languages.<sup>10</sup> Aswang is a word used by the Visayans of Panay and Negros Oriental, the Waray of Samar and Eastern Leyte, and the Tagalogs of Luzon,<sup>11</sup> but other variants are used in other Philippine vernaculars.<sup>12</sup>

In 1731 Tomas Ortiz, a Spanish Augustinian priest who exhorted fellow missionaries to stamp out native superstitions in the Philippines, described “the witch called asuang, which, flying, passes by the houses of those who are in childbirth... It places itself on the roof of a neighboring house, and from thence extends its tongue in the form of a thread that passes into the body of the child... With it he draws out the bowels of the child and kills it.”<sup>13</sup> Ortiz’s characterization of the aswang—as a winged monster whose long threadlike tongue enters the body of a pregnant woman to suck out the unborn child in her womb—is the aswang’s most durable and immediately recognizable guise. Perched on the thatch roofs of houses or concealed under bamboo floorboards, aswang eat human liver, fresh corpses, and the phlegm of the ill; in particular, they have a taste for infants and young children (Lynch 185).

Though other types of aswang may be both male and female, the viscera sucking manananggal—the central figure in queer aswang transmedia—is almost always a woman. Folklorist Maximo Ramos writes that she is “reported to look like an attractive woman by day, buxom, long-haired, and light complexioned”; come nightfall, however, she “discards [her] lower body from the waist down and flies” in search of human prey (xviii-xix). The Tagalog term manananggal is usually translated as a “self-segmenting viscera-sucker” in English, and its many names in Filipino vernaculars include *wuwug* in Boholano, *magcucutud* in Pampangeno, and *anananggal* in Bicol. Accounts in Aklan, Siquijor, Cebu, Bicol, and Bohol describe a lesser-known variety of the flying viscera sucker, one that segments at the neck rather than at the waist, entrails dangling from her severed head.<sup>14</sup>

Ramos’ 1969 study of aswang was sparked by the curiosity of his mentor at UCLA, the American folklorist Wayland D. Hand.<sup>15</sup> Ramos’ definition of the aswang complex as a “congeries of beliefs” cast various types of aswang as Philippine versions of European counterparts: vampires, witches, ghouls, and werewolves. It is crucial to remember, though, that such neat definitions are really “congeries of translation” routed through the more familiar monsters of European folklore, even though, as Ramos admits, aswang “do not fit exactly into the traditional European categories.” He further cautions the reader that once oral storytelling is frozen in print form, such versions suggest an imaginary coherence that living legendry does not possess (xv-xvii).

I emphasize the ethnolinguistic diversity that undergirds aswang in order to highlight the submerged question of translation in English-language scholarship on this figure. As Carolyn Brewer and Greg Bankoff point out, the Spanish colonization of the Philippines took place in an era when witchcraft trials and persecutions swept Europe, a theological climate that shaped the perspective of early Spanish missionaries in the Philippines. Believing in the existence of witches and servants of the devil, the Spanish translated the Animist beliefs they encountered in the archipelago within the framework of demonic practices familiar to Europeans (Bankoff 39; Brewer 84-90). Spanish Catholicism construed shamans to be in league with the devil, even though the Christian binary God/Satan had no counterpart in the archipelago’s Animist tradition (Brewer 102). Our encounters with aswang—and “Philippine folklore” more generally—are thus mediated by colonial and postcolonial forms of knowledge-production that make it impossible to sustain the fantasy of an authentic pre-colonial indigenous past (Narayan 177-199; Eugenio 2002: xxii-xxiii).

Institutionalized folklore scholarship in the Philippines itself began as a colonial enterprise, carried out by American teachers stationed in the Philippines in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, aswang are shot through with translation and transculturation, reaching us via the ethnologies of early Spanish missionaries, the folklore studies of American observers in the early decades of the twentieth century, and the scholarship of the first wave of

Filipino anthropologists trained by American mentors. First articulated by Spanish evangelist-imperialists and later “decrypted” by the functionalist paradigms of postwar American anthropology, the aswang was linked to anti-colonial peasant histories in nineteenth-century Spanish Philippines. In the 1950s, its political valence shifted again: an American CIA operative’s “psy-war” campaign demonized Filipino Communist guerillas as aswang. The aswang, then, is a durable stockpile of colonial and postcolonial translations in which imperialist stratagems collide with peasant idioms of protest (Lim 96-148).

Aswang beliefs have been used to argue for the “homogeneity of the Philippines as a culture area” that delimits Filipino national culture as “a proper field of ethnological study” (Pertierra 319, 334-335). Yet the aswang contravenes the fantasy of a homogeneous national culture in several ways. Aswang predate the Philippine nation and the regional prevalence of aswang belief is not co-terminous with the country’s present geographical compass: aswang beliefs are primarily concentrated in the Christianized areas of the archipelago, and are markedly absent in communities that Spanish colonizers failed to “missionize”: the highlands of northern Luzon and the Islamic regions of Mindanao in the South.

Given that not all Filipinos tell stories about aswang, it may be more generative to approach the aswang through a regional Southeast Asian framework. The *penanggalan* of the Malay peninsula and the *balan-balan* of Sabah resemble the type of manananggal that sever at the neck. Penanggalan and manananggal share the same regionally Malay (rather than narrowly Philippine) etymology: the terms share the Malay cognate, *tanggal*, “to detach.”<sup>17</sup> Other analogues to various types of aswang occur elsewhere in Southeast Asia: the *suanggi* of eastern Indonesia is a beautiful young woman who is a blood-sucker by night; in North Maluku, the *suanggi* is a cannibal witch who consumes its victim’s liver. Living victims possessed by the witch’s spirit become self-segmenting viscera suckers: “they live a normal existence during the day, but at night their heads pull free (*cabut*) from their sleeping bodies and the disembodied heads, with their entrails dangling from their necks, fly through the night... in search of victims.” Types of Philippine aswang that pose a danger to unborn infants also recall the Malay and Indonesian *pontianak* or *kuntilanak*, the “spirit of a woman who died during child birth and who represents a danger to pregnant women in particular” (Bubandt 9-10).

To the already considerable vernacular and regional heterogeneity of aswang texts are added the altered modes of circulation and continual remediation characteristic of accelerating media convergence in our own era. Aswang made their first cinematic appearance in a 1932 silent film of the same title. From the mid-1980s onward, they became the mainstay of a decades-old horror film cycle initiated by the horror-comedy franchise, *Shake, Rattle, and Roll*. Critics of mass media adaptations of folk narratives worry that transmedial uptake will inevitably homogenize the diversity of folk variants into uniform, hegemonic consumer forms. Apart from the decline of lived oral performance styles, dominant versions

of folklore produced by corporate media structures (e.g., Disney in the US, or Regal Films or ABS-CBN's Star Cinema in the Philippines), might wipe out the multiple "oral variants previously in circulation" (Koven 177-178). Such fears are understandable; yet it would be a critical misstep to assume that media-convergent modes of transmission inevitably homogenize public discourse. Popular mainstream films are themselves not "fixed texts"; in an era when media proliferate in both analog and digital forms, mainstream popular films themselves tend to fracture into multiple versions and variants, from director's cuts, bonus tracks, and restored versions on DVD and Blu-ray, to peer-to-peer file sharing, excerpted quotations on YouTube, and welcome and unwelcome forms of creative sampling, fan appropriation, and queering (Koven 185).

The nascent groundswell of queer appropriations and resignifications of aswang, in this light, might turn out to be a new and significant instance of transmedial translation: first, of Philippine legend to swardspeak; and second, of misogynist discourses around female monstrosity to redemptive critiques that reclaim the manananggal as a queer form of self-ascription. Such shiftings, veerings, and unmoorings open up to a new queer variant of Philippine folklore, transmedially staged.

#### **QUEER DOINGS: BAKLA MANANANGGAL**

In this study, I approach aswang transmedia from a queer perspective, where queer is understood not in substantive but in anti-identitarian, anti-normalizing terms.<sup>18</sup> As Sally O'Driscoll has noted, the many meanings of "queer" are not always compatible with each other. She sees a tension between two distinct meanings: first, a collapsing of sexual practice and sexual identity; and second, a conflation between the term's street origins as an identitarian label (queer names a person who is engaging in non-heterosexual practices) and the term's academic usage in the late 1990s (queer as a counter-normative cultural and political position not determined by sexual practices but by "a general concept of sexual transgression" (30-35). Queer is itself a lexically shifting word; without "static grammatical functioning," it circulates promiscuously as adjective, noun, and verb. Grammatically mutable, queer is also significantly coreless, that is, intractable to definitions that essentialize embodied gender performance or sexual-subjective experience (Cleto 3). In saying that queer is not just a noun, I mean that it is not a fixed name that presumes a stable sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The transnational LGBTQ lexicon has informed, but has not monolithically dominated, queer advocacies in the Philippines. Here I'm strongly indebted to anthropologist Ryan Richard Thoreson's eye-opening work on the "vernacularization" or "translation" of transnational LGBTQ "agendas into a form of politics that is locally intelligible." In the Philippine context, on the grassroots level, there is never a straightforward



reproduction of Western paradigms. Instead, the heterogeneous queer movements that represent the interests of “*bakla, bayot, bantut, tomboy, silahis, transpinoy, and transpinay* subjectivities” draw on transnational LGBTQ categories in ways that are broadly legible but signify very differently in the praxis of transnational advocacies, middle-class organizers, and lower-income Filipino queers (531-549).

Rather than being primarily a noun or a name, queer is also something one can do or become, a verb that can sometimes name a process of critique, as in the queering of folklore through the sensibilities of pinoy camp. The notion of queer doing which I elaborate here is indebted to Manalansan, who remarks in a recent interview that “the vital dimension of queer is not ‘what queer is’ but rather ‘what queer does.’” The “dynamic aspect of queer,” notes Manalansan, “refuses homogenizing tendencies” and asks: “what is being normalized?” and “what...would profit from a queering or queer analysis?” (Manalansan 2012: 106, 110) What, then, is queer doing to aswang, and what about the aswang would be productive to queer? In the simplest terms, queer aswang transmedia focalized around gay male manananggal put a bakla in the cultural place of monstrosity usually reserved for deviant women. However, the valences of that queering in terms of both representational politics and temporality are a more complicated matter to adjudicate.

The canonical anthropological view is that the viscera-sucking manananggal—a beautiful woman who turns into a nocturnal monster that preys on pregnant women, infants, and young children—evinces a normalizing, disciplinary relationship to gender power. Raul Pertierra’s functionalist analysis of the manananggal argues that a patriarchal suspicion of women lies at the heart of the aswang complex. As a form of superstitious accusation that blames women for death in childbirth, the manananggal indexes the patriarchal ordering of public social life as the domain of men versus the domestic sphere as the realm of women. Within this gendering of public and private domains, aswang articulate fears regarding covert forms of violence women might accomplish in the home (330-335).

The policing of female deviance figures strongly in stories of male lovers or husbands who “cure” their aswang wives. In a 1922 Tagalog folktale, a husband ties up his aswang wife then suspends her head down in a well until she asks for his forgiveness and finally vomits up the animal familiars that are the source of her power (Fansler Tale 31). The cure is a disciplinary form of violence: the aswang is hung upside down and swung, beaten, or smoked until the magical bird inside her body is forcibly expelled,<sup>19</sup> as evocatively visualized in Gilda Cordero-Fernando’s paintings for her 1998 book *The Aswang Inquiry* (see fig. 1). The female aswang suspended upside down in the foreground appears beautiful but vanquished, her eyes shut as she relinquishes her power in the form of an enchanted bird. Hair trailing on the ground, her melancholy and wraithlike figure is surrounded by red tongues of flame.





FIG. 1. Gilda Cordero-Fernando illustrates violent cures for aswang wives in her 1998 book, *The Aswang Inquiry*. Courtesy of Gilda Cordero-Fernando.

Folklorists classify such tales under motif number “G299.5 Cure for witches (so she will cease to be a witch)” (Eugenio, *Philippine Folk Literature* 145-147). However, these tale types make no mention of the violence against women inscribed in these stories, which, from a queer/feminist perspective sympathetic to aswang, read like stories of spousal abuse in the name of reforming deviant lovers and effecting their return to heteronormativity. In what I read as an ironizing move, Cordero-Fernando replaces the figure of the aswang wife with that of a tortured husband, seated and struggling with his head thrown back in pain, when she illustrates such tales (see fig. 2).



FIG. 2. Although folkloric and anthropological accounts mention aswang women as the object of these violent cures, Gilda Cordero-Fernando includes an ironic illustration of a tortured husband subjected to this remedy in *The Aswang Inquiry*. Courtesy of Gilda Cordero-Fernando.

Brewer argues that gender and sexuality were central to the project of Spanish colonial religious conversion in the Philippines. A “Hispano-Catholic process of sexual transformation” established Catholic sexual morality, abolished native erotic practices and sexual mores, and introduced gender inequalities based on an ideology of essential biological difference. As historians have demonstrated, Animist shamans—women *baylan* chief among them—mounted the fiercest opposition to Catholic conversion and were subsequently demonized as witches and aswang (Brewer xviii-xix, 18-21, 63-64, 109). Against this historical backdrop, I read the violence against female aswang inscribed in aswang lore to be a memory-trace of this Spanish Catholic disciplinary apparatus in the colonial period, which included confession, self-flagellation, and corporal punishment for powerful native women who refused to obey the church.

The few films that feature a romantic plot between human men and manananggal women make no mention of this violent therapy (a 2009 example is *Ang Darling Kong Aswang* [My Darling Aswang]). In contrast, brutal cures for aswang are explicitly criticized in Ricky Lee’s 2011 novel, *Amapola*. In two vignettes given by different characters in the novel, two aswang—one, a grandmother; another, Homer’s wife—end up killed by this so-called cure. The novel’s appraisal of the aswang cure as a false remedy premised on destruction is articulated by one character, who wryly exclaims, “*Hindi na nga aswang ang lola nila pero namatay naman sa bugbog!*” [“Sure, their grandmother was cured of being an aswang. But she died from the beating!”] (Lee, *Si Amapola* 21). Explicitly rejecting a purported remedy that succeeds only by killing aswang, the novel instead advocates forms of community building and collective politics premised on an acceptance of the aswang’s radically different forms of being.

### **MGA BATA NG LAGIM [CHILDREN OF TERROR]**

Do queer aswang have the potential to destabilize the conventional misogynist link between aswang and femininity, or do they merely reinscribe this link in scenes of transformation reminiscent of drag performance? The 1964 film *Mga Bata ng Lagim* [Children of Terror] depicted, with relish, the spectacle of flamboyant young men who turn into manananggal after unwittingly eating what turn out to be human remains in an aswang’s kitchen. Starring six teenage romantic couples supported by older comic actors, this film was a bid by a former major studio, Sampaguita, to captivate youth audiences with a film that combined multiple genres: comedy, horror, romance, and musical. Set immediately after the end of World War 2, five families set off in search of the famous Yamashita treasure left behind by Japanese forces, braving haunted woods and scary mansions in the process. In a film full of visual jokes and campy gags, what stood out to me as a child watching the movie on TV reruns were the characters’ unbidden metamorphoses into aswang.

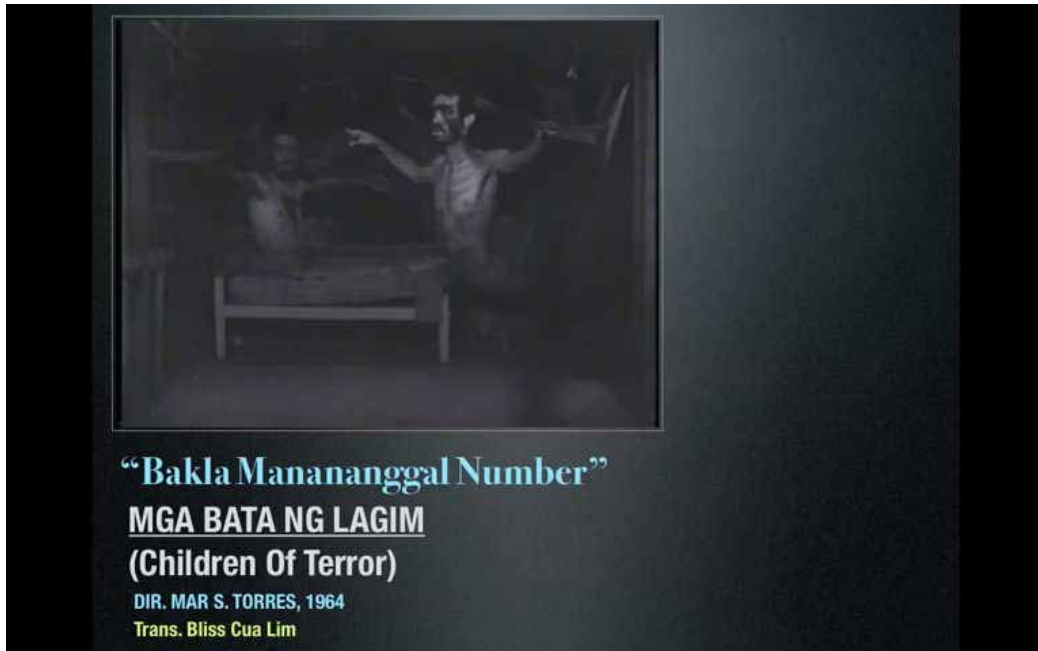
The conventional association between manananggal and women is parodied in *Mga Bata ng Lagim* (see video clip 1, <http://journals.ateneo.edu/ojs/kk/article/view/2053/2055>). Two unnamed boys, played by comedians German Moreno and Boy Alano, are marked queer from the beginning. The girls they are courting consider these boys a joke, not only because of their feminine speech and movement, but also because of their pretentious attempts to appear cosmopolitan by peppering their speech with English and Spanish words, resulting in comic malapropisms. Moreno and Alano's camp antics reach their height in a musical number bewailing their transmutation into aswang, which I'll refer to as the "bakla manananggal" number in *Mga Bata Ng Lagim* (see fig. 3).



FIG. 3. Boy Alano (on left) and German Moreno (on right) in the "bakla manananggal" musical number in *Mga Bata Ng Lagim* [Children of Terror], dir. Mar. S. Torres, 1964.

The musical number features the melody of a familiar Tagalog folk song, "Paru-parong Bukid" (Farm Butterfly), but Hermie Ilagan's tongue-in-cheek lyrics and the scene's incongruous mise-en-scène generate parodic effects. Popularized as a film soundtrack in 1938 by Sampaguita Studios, which also produced *Mga Bata ng Lagim* three decades later, "Paru-Parong Bukid" compares a flirtatious farm lass making a spectacle of herself to a butterfly conspicuously fluttering its wings.<sup>20</sup> Anchored in the perspective of a scopophilic male gaze (Mulvey 19), the folksong's traditional lyrics relish the woman's exhibitionist display of sexualized feminine beauty: the way she sways her hips (*lalakad ng pakendeng-kendeng*), the petticoat peeking out from under her long skirt (*nagwas de ohetes ang palalabasin*), and the ornamental comb (*payneta*) that she wears in her hair.<sup>21</sup> *Mga Bata Ng Lagim* queers this folk tribute to female spectacle through its use of sound. The familiar melody connotes, to Filipino audiences, a celebration of rural Filipina beauty and femininity, but the humor of the scene in part rests on unexpected aural and visual

incongruities. Rather than evoking woman as image, the lyrics and staging instead emphasize monstrous male physiognomy as two teenage boys—winged torsos segmented at the waist—bewail their unbidden transformation into aswang. And in place of the sweet warbling style in which the familiar melody is usually sung, the young men’s jarring vocal delivery is closer to a harangue.



**VIDEO CLIP 1.** The “bakla manananggal number” in *Mga Bata Ng Lagim*.

Whereas “Paru-Parong Bukid” opens with the image of a butterfly’s delicately fluttering wings, the rudimentary choreography of the “bakla manananggal” number emphasizes the ungainly flapping of the viscera-sucking aswang’s large, bat-like appendages. Shots of the segmented torsos of the manananggal are accomplished cheaply by superimposing footage of the actors’ upper bodies onto footage of the background, making them appear to float in the air. The Tagalog lyrics to the “Gay Manananggal” number and my English translation follow below:

*Kay laking milagro ang nangyaring  
ito!  
Tao siya kanina, ngayon ay aswang  
na  
Talaga kang boba, di mo  
napapansin  
Ang iyong sarili ay aswang na rin?  
Pangil nami'y tabak, tunay rin ang  
pakpak.*

*Sino kayang tao ang aking  
mapapapak?  
Sa tuwing hatinggabi ay gagala  
kami.  
Guwapo sanang tao ang siyang  
ma-jackpot ko!  
Malas nga talaga! Tayo ay aswang  
na,  
pati ating asal, tipong  
manananggal.  
Yamang tayo'y wala na ring  
magagawa,  
ating pagbutihin ang pagkaaswang  
natin!*

What miracle is this?  
He was human but is now an  
aswang!  
You stupid girl, don't you realize  
you're an aswang now too?  
Our fangs are like cutlasses, our  
wings are real.

Who will I be snacking on?  
Every midnight we will wander.  
I hope I hit the jackpot with a  
handsome human!  
What bad luck! We are now  
aswang,  
we behave like manananggal.  
Since there's nothing we can do  
about it,  
let's make the most of our being  
aswang!

The song opens with Moreno and Alano exchanging barbed insults, calling each other “stupid girls” (*boba*). The long shot of their airborne antics are intercut with a medium close up of another roommate’s stunned reaction—though it’s unclear whether this straight-acting boy is more shocked by their transformation into aswang or their vocal expressions of same-sex yearnings. (see fig. 4) Moreno and Alano chorus, “Every midnight, we will wander,” making literal reference to the aswang’s nocturnal hunts as well as alluding to the practice of gay cruising at night.



FIG. 4. A stunned roommate witnesses his friends' transformation into aswang in *Mga Bata ng Lagim*.

When Moreno sings, “I hope I hit the jackpot with a handsome human,”<sup>22</sup> the lyrics make explicit the conflation of accidental manananggal transformation and the voluntary avowal of gay male desire. In the song’s last line, their initial complaint (“even our manner has become manananggal-like”) turns into celebratory queer resolve, (“Let’s make the most of our being aswang!”), suggesting that becoming aswang has helped these boys own their same-sex desire. The scene closes with a long shot, sans superimposition, in which the boys’ winged torsos have supposedly rejoined the lower halves of their bodies. The absence of superimposition means that the boys no longer look like aswang but instead look like cross-dressing men who playfully wrestle each other onto a bed.

The bakla manananggal number displays several hallmarks of parody as “imitation characterized by ironic inversion” (Hutcheon 6). The desirable femininity evoked in the traditional folksong (the farm maiden as butterfly) is replaced with monstrous femininity as depicted in folklore (the bat-like aswang). On both visual and audial tracks, numerous overlaid inversions—of maiden into monster, butterfly into bat, female into male, and pastoral into comic-horrific style—result in a suffusive irony that at least partly reconfigures the meanings of aswang for Filipino cultural insiders able to “get the joke.” The parodic aspects of the scene dovetail with camp humor, which typically converts something serious into something frivolous through extravagant theatricality, stylistic excess, and cross-gender impersonation (Sontag 288).<sup>23</sup> In this case, the campy bakla manananggal number ironically and parodically unseats both the earnest admiration for feminine beauty articulated in the folksong “Paru-parong bukid,” as well as the serious terror elicited by belief in the existence of female aswang.

To the degree that the two young men transformed into aswang look like bakla impersonators of female manananggal, the musical number recalls Judith Butler’s resonant question vis-à-vis drag: “Does the denaturalization of the norm succeed in subverting the norm?” (“Gender is Burning” 387) Put another way, is parodying the heteropatriarchal inscription of the aswang as a monstrous woman



enough to displace it? The answer to that question is, of course, complicated. First, there is the problem of ridicule. In inviting us to laugh at the predicament of transmogrified queer men, the bakla manananggal number may replicate phobic media representations of “LGBT people...in Filipino comedy,” in which, as Libay Cantor puts it, “viewers are encouraged to “laugh at the gay guy, or the ugly gay guy” on the movie screen (qtd. in Thoreson 535).

Second, there is the thorny issue of drag and the historical shifts in North American queer theory’s approach to this issue.<sup>24</sup> Butler’s influential early theorization of drag emphasized its potential destabilization of gender essentialisms. In Butler’s well-known formulation, drag exposes the “imitative structure” of idealizations of gender (*Gender Trouble* 31), though her own subsequent work has complicated this in response to the “new gender politics” posed by “a combination of movements concerned with transgender, transsexuality, intersex, and their complex relations to feminist and queer theory” (*Undoing Gender* 4). Viviane Namaste’s trenchant critique exposes the ways in which early queer theory’s celebratory focus on drag unwittingly confined the consideration of gender nonconformity to onstage spectacle, thus erasing the realities of transgendered subjectivity in everyday life:

That gay men can accommodate the presence of drag queens on stage does not mean that gender liberation has arrived... this containment of gender transgression [as drag] can in turn, work against transgendered people in a variety of ways. Drag queens are reduced to entertainment, coifed personalities whose only purpose is to titillate the gay male viewer. Framed as pure spectacle, this negates a variety of reasons why people might choose to cross-dress in a club: an exploration of one’s gender identity, a gesture of political intervention, a creative solution to boredom, and/or a way to pay the rent.

A restriction of drag queens to the stage also suggests that drag is something you do: it is not someone you are . . . The relegation of drag queens to the stage is a supplementary move that excludes transgendered people even as it includes us. Appropriate objects to look at, we are not subjects alongside whom one marches. (11)

Namaste’s reading of onstage drag as a containment of gender transgression aptly describes how *Mga Bata Ng Lagim* contains male femininity by allowing its temporary eruption in a single drag performance, after which the narrative reinstates a heteronormative closure. The film centers heterosexual romances in its multiple plotlines of teenage boys and girls whose terrifying journey to haunted places only cements their love with a sweetheart of the opposite sex. Within the gendered and generic conventions of this comedy-horror-musical narrative film, homosexual desire can only come out of the closet—idiomatically, “*magladlad ng kapa*” [“unfurl the cape”] (Manalansan, *Global Divas* 27-28)—in one brief musical number staged in the register of camp supernaturalism, only to be re-contained by straight romantic closure at the end of the film.<sup>25</sup>

What is most fascinating about the bakla manananggal number, then, is not that it lays bare Butler's imitative structure of gender idealizations. Rather, the bakla manananggal number exposes the iterative structure of longstanding *monstrifications* of gender inversion. Over the centuries, the repeated feminization of the monstrous viscera sucker as an anomalous gender invert had congealed into a predictable cultural figure. Richard Leiban, whose influential "inversion" thesis about the aswang would be repeated by subsequent anthropologists, writes: "The aswang resembles some witches elsewhere whose behavior in certain respects antithesizes or inverts normal behavior in the societies where they are found." Leiban offers the following examples: "the female aswang who exposed her genitals in a society which emphasizes female modesty; the girl who was perceived by her brother to be upside-down, and thereupon was thought to be a witch. This principle of inverted behavior is exemplified in a range of aswang characteristics" (78). Aswang are thought to "constitute the very essence of anomaly," and this comes through most strikingly in the female manananggal's desire to eat pregnant women, infants, and fetuses, an emphatic reversal of a supposedly normal woman's presumptive maternal inclinations (Pertierra 329-330). Gender inversion has also been attributed to aswang men. Lynch recounts that in Bicol, a male aswang who has just fed looks like a pregnant woman and will often "nurse his children at the breast" (187). Aswang of both genders, then, fail to embody "proper" femininity and masculinity.

The bakla manananggal number in *Mga Bata ng Lagim* displays both the homophobic humor and the camp tactics of a more overtly closeted age. Nonetheless, it does manage to introduce a new, unexpected twist to discourses of inversion and gender incoherence in which aswang have historically been steeped. Here, the gender reversal is a consequence of intentional male to female impersonation, not "reversals of moral behavior" that spring from innate aberrance (Lieban 78-79). By the end of the number, the bakla manananggal's decision to "make the most of being aswang" by trying to "hit the jackpot with a handsome human" partially denaturalizes the link between aswang and female deviance by lightheartedly foregrounding male same-sex desire. It also foreshadows the emergence, over three decades later, of a literary character who would bridge bakla and manananggal not only via onstage drag performance but also through everyday transgendered experiences: Amapola, the eponymous protagonist of Lee's novel, considered later in this essay.

The bakla manananggal sequence ambivalently straddles the distinction Manalansan draws between two terms of queer process. According to Manalansan:

*Nababakla* can be loosely translated as "baklaness" happening or descending on somebody as opposed to *nagiging bakla*, that is, "becoming bakla." The first verb actually suggests that bakla can also be an essence that can be transferred to or can descend upon a person like a trance or a fever. Thus, in some aspects, bakla behavior is seen to be not

a product of something inside a person, but rather as a product of an outside force or forces. (*Global Divas* 43)

The two similar but distinct verbs contrast exteriority with interiority: the idiomatic phrase *nababakla* (to be temporarily possessed by *bakla-ness* as an exterior force that “happens” or “descends” on someone) is different from *nagiging bakla* (“becoming bakla” as the “product of something inside a person”). I suggest that the bakla manananggal number stages both. In diegetic terms, the two boys are *nabakla*: the femininity associated with manananggal take possession of the young men after they mistakenly eat aswang food; this is *kabaklaan* (bakla-ness) taking hold of them from the outside, resulting in a temporary foray of two otherwise straight characters into queer monstrosity. In narrative terms, becoming a manananggal is explicitly depicted as *nabakla*, queerness as an unbidden and uninvited force that takes hold of the straight subject from the outside. As the film progresses, *nabakla* and *na-aswang* turn out to be a passing phase, a temporary accident. This very temporariness of accidentally turning into bakla manananggal is a mode of containment that betrays the film’s fundamental sexual conservatism and the form that historical homophobia takes in a 1960s Filipino musical. By the end of the film, the two boys are reunited with their girlfriends in the film’s hetero happy ending.

At the same time, in both diegetic and extradiegetic terms, another reading of the scene is possible. The bakla manananggal number could be interpreted as staging a more organic notion of bakla-becoming or *nagiging bakla* in which supernatural transformation serves as a catalyst, a moment of crisis that pushes the characters to acknowledge and actualize the same-sex desires and pleasurable gender performances they were implicitly suppressing all along.<sup>26</sup> Such a reading would depend in part on the audience’s familiarity with the offscreen star persona of one of the actors in the bakla manananggal number, German Moreno, a well-known gay celebrity who enjoyed a decades-long entertainment career.

### **ASOG/BABAYLAN/ASWANG: ETYMOLOGIES AND TEMPORALITIES**

The scene’s retrospective appropriation of aswang as bakla finds its footing in the etymological reconstruction of the word’s origins in two Philippine languages, Bikolano and Aklanon, and in the historical association, and later, conflation, of aswang with precolonial shamans. As I noted earlier, female shamans were called *babaylanes* by the Visayans and *catalonan* by the Tagalogs; male shamans, referred

to as effeminate or transvestite men in historical sources, were named *asog* in the Visayas and *bayog* in Luzon (Brewer 128). Baylan, catalonan, asog and bayog were indigenous priests or shamans who were paid to “act as intermediaries and mediators between the gods and the people,” (Cullamar 17-18) heal the sick, and preside over rituals, which made their work both highly esteemed and profitable (Bankoff 39, 52). Native words for Animist shamans have fallen into such disuse that they scarcely appear in contemporary Philippine dictionaries (Brewer 85). Robert Blust reconstructs the etymological relationships between the words *asog* (male shaman), *babaylan* (female shaman), and *aswang* in the Austronesian language family. His entry reads as follows:

\*asug ‘shaman in ritual transvestite attire’  
 BKL *asóg* ‘an effeminate priest who speaks and attires himself like a woman, wears trinkets, and executes funny movements and provocative contortions during rituals offered to Aswang (witches)—Bikol mythology’, AKL *ásog* ‘lesbian; any woman who acts outside of the female role; tomboy’, TM *in-asug* ‘ritual name for the babalian (shaman)’. (17)

Blust’s reconstruction makes apparent the etymological conflation between the perceived gender incoherence of cross-dressing male *asóg* in Bikolano (and *in-asug* in the Malaysian language Timugon Murut) and a larger notion of gender transgression that appears in the Aklanon denotation of the same word, *ásog* as lesbian or tomboy. The Bikolano term *asóg* refers to an “effeminate priest” presiding over rituals involving aswang. Lynch had previously speculated on the uncertain etymology of the Bikolano term *asuwang*. Initially hypothesizing that its etymological roots may lead back to *aso* (the Tagalog word for “dog”), Lynch ended by dismissing that possibility, noting that “the Bicol word for dog is not *aso* but *ayam*” (Lynch 185). Blust’s ethnolinguistic research suggests that Lynch may have been just short of the mark: the etymological root of *asuwang* is quite possibly not the Tagalog word *aso* but the Bikolano and Aklanon terms *asóg* or *ásog*, shamans associated with gender transgression.

Historical sources clarify, however, that babaylanes were not aswang. Father Jose Castano’s 1895 *Noticia del Bicol* recounts that babaylanes in sixteenth century Bicol often presided over a healing ritual, called a *hidhid*, that exorcised aswang from an afflicted person or locale (qtd. in Lynch 203-206). Though early Spanish chroniclers understood babaylanes to be indigenous priests, by the late nineteenth century, babaylanism had taken on an overtly political and anti-colonial cast. In the volatile transition between the 1896 Philippine Revolution against Spain and the beginning of American rule in the aughts, babaylanism became a religio-political peasant protest movement against Spanish and American colonizers

and the local *hacendero* elites who colluded with them (Cullamar 71). Herminia Meñez compellingly argues that Spanish colonizers responded by demonizing these shamans as aswang, which explains why the manananggal is stereotypically feminized (Meñez 87, 90-94). While Meñez demonstrates the success of the Spanish attempt to demonize babaylanes by calling them witches, there is also evidence that in at least one case—a twenty-two year old native woman accused of witchcraft in 1808—a babaylan successfully reappropriated Catholic iconography for her own ends (Bankoff 49-50, 55). This fraught history of ideological contestation is distilled in the brief etymological entry quoted above, in which collocations between aswang, babaylanes, and queer transgressions of gender normative performance (transvestism, male femininity, female masculinity, and lesbianism) are flattened and preserved in linguistic usage.

In contrast to Catholicism's male priesthood, the Animist religious traditions of the pre-colonial Philippine archipelago were matrifocal; however, the culture's bilateral gender symmetry allowed men to participate in a predominantly female shamanism. Brewer speculates that in precolonial and early colonial Philippines, male shamans took on women's vestments because spiritual potency was seen to inhere to femininity (135-136). If Brewer is correct, then the cultural valuation of feminine spiritual potency in the archipelago would have fueled the answering misogyny of the Spanish Catholic colonialism that strove to stamp out Animist shamans. Since shamanism was allied with femininity, its denigration also took the form of a profound misogyny, as evident in the anti-female cast of the aswang complex. If the aswang complex is, among other things, a memory-trace of the denigration of precolonial Animism and its spiritual leaders, then the pervasive misogyny of aswang lore could be rooted, not only in the patriarchal ideology of Spanish Catholic colonialism, but in the protracted campaign to eradicate Animist shamanism and its corresponding investment in female spiritual potency.

Though these etymological conflations between aswang and asog doubtless have a homophobic cast, the association between gender transgression and the anti-hegemonic political charge of babaylanism has allowed asog and babaylan to be resignified as queer-feminist symbols. One scholar, for example, posits a genealogical continuity between ancient asog and present-day bakla as evidence of suppressed pre-colonial forms of homosexuality (Quintos 156, 160). Such recuperative projects are at once promising and risky, since claims to a noble pre-modern Filipino queer tradition may unwittingly reproduce the temporal elitisms that structure the dichotomy between *bakla* as a "vestigial," "anachronistic" throwback versus a contemporary cosmopolitan gay subjectivity (Manalansan 2006, 6, 37; Benedicto 2014, 82-83). The rhetoric of temporal disparagements of bakla anachronism vis-à-vis a global gay "now" is one of surmounted abjection: homosexual Filipinos "were once" bakla, but queer pinoy today are bakla "no longer" (Benedicto 2014, 81). I have learned a great deal from Manalansan and Benedicto's incisive critique of anachronizing pinoy gay bourgeois rhetoric that

fails to recognize the existence of multiple queer modernities, in which the bakla is both coeval with and nonequivalent to dominant transnational forms.

Do queer aswang have the potential to unsettle a homogeneous understanding of gay globality? Against the broader context of a forcible elite erasure and disparagement of bakla, what should we make of the recent, flamboyant visibility of bakla in aswang transmedia? My hunch is that where once aswang (with its historical connotations with shamans of either sex, baylan or *asog*) figured resistance to Spanish colonialism, albeit in demonized terms, today bakla manananggal may signal a nascent recalcitrance to the norms of a homogenizing gay globality.

### AMAPOLA IN 65 CHAPTERS

I'd like to turn now to another bakla manananggal, the titular character of Ricky Lee's 2011 novel, *Amapola in 65 Chapters*. In the novel, written for the most part in Tagalog—a language in which pronouns are non-gendered—Amapola's assigned sex at birth is male. I have elected to use "she" to refer to Amapola, who identifies as a feminine bakla and inhabits feminized subject positions in relation to other characters, for example as a daughter or an aunt. Using a Western LGBTQ vocabulary, one could say that Amapola straddles the subjectivity of a professional drag queen and everyday forms of trans subjectivity. Amapola is regarded as a daughter by her adoptive mother, Nanay Angie, while her masculine personalities, Zaldy, Isaac, and Montero (Amapola has multiple personality disorder) are regarded by Nanay Angie as sons. Although translations between Philippine and English terms and sex/gender cultures are at work both in Lee's novel and this essay, I want to emphasize that part of the shared project of Lee's novel and my study is the eschewal of normalizing labels and the emphasis on the messiness of Filipino/a subjectivities in relation to global/Western queer nomenclatures.

Some 45 years after the filmic appearance of bakla manananggal in *Mga Bata ng Lagim*, Lee's novel explicitly draws a parallel between the social discrimination aimed at aswang and bakla alike. It narrates the unexpected emergence in Manila's Morato district of a civil rights movement for aswang whose most conspicuous embodiment is Amapola, a 26-year-old professional drag queen who turns into a heroic manananggal. The novel opens on an evening in February 2010. The nation is gearing up for the presidential elections in early May but is still reeling from the aftermath of the floods brought on by typhoon Ondoy some months before. When we first meet her, Amapola is performing as Beyoncé singing "If I Were a Boy," resplendent in a huge wig, hoop earrings, false eyelashes, a push up bra, ultra-short shorts, and tall boots. In the middle of her number, she feels a strange, unbidden transformation coming over her. Hurrying out of the bar, Amapola undergoes a profound metamorphosis: her vision fractures, her eyes redden, her hair hardens; wings sprout, and her body splits at the waist as she takes flight. We thus meet



our queer protagonist, Amapola, at the moment when her life changes completely: without warning, she becomes an aswang.

Amapola, we quickly learn, suffers from multiple personality disorder: her two other alternate personalities are Zaldy, a shy “closet queen who likes to speak in English,” and Isaac, a handsome but homophobic straight man, described as “*machong barumbado*” [a rude macho man] (Lee, *Si Amapola* 9-10). Both masculine personalities contrast strongly with the flamboyantly feminine Amapola. As the story unfolds, Amapola’s already plural subjectivity will fragment further: she will develop a superhero persona named Grandiosa, whose evil nemesis is Montero, revealed to be another of her multiple selves. What’s more, in her *manananggal* guise, the lower half of her body (called a *Talukbang* in the novel), turns out to have a mind of its own.

Amapola’s profoundly divided nature is mirrored by the novel’s fragmented form. Chapters alternate between Amapola’s first person perspective and subjective narration focalized through the point of view of other characters. The effect is conspicuously cinematic: the same story event is often described through the overlapping narration of multiple character perspectives, recalling the multiple character format that distinguished Philippine New Cinema masterpieces like *Manila by Night* (David 14-25). This is not entirely unexpected, given that Lee is one of the foremost screenwriters of the New Cinema. Lee’s novel suggests that a divided, multiple self inheres not only to aswang or to those diagnosed with multiple personality disorder; rather, as the tag-line on the novel’s cover suggests, “*Lahat tayo hati, di nga lang nakakalipad ang iba.*” [“We are all split in half, only some of us can’t fly.”] Complex, inherently self-contradictory, and divided by conflicting desires and attributes, human subjectivity, the novel suggests, is not so different from the divided nature of aswang.

Lee’s novel and the other queer transmedia works I consider here collectively pose the question: why queer aswang? Is there something about the aswang that lends itself to queer appropriation? In an interview, the novelist offers one possible answer to this question by linking *bakla* to aswang through the notion of marginality:

I think that’s why my characters are... marginalized, and they don’t experience barriers between time and space. No space or time, 1998 or 1896 or the present, or the world of the dead, the world of the *manananggal*, or the world of the *bakla*. I myself have been marginalized, and, like my beloved characters, I want to erase barriers and walls. Inevitably of course, *manananggal* and *bakla*— two of the most precious [figures] to me—I decided to combine them. (Lee 2012)

Dovetailing with the novel’s thematic of division and fragmentation is its insistence on the acceptance of marginality and difference. The aswang’s split subjectivity—embodied by the self-segmenting *manananggal*—poses a challenge

to the fantasy of an internally consistent self. Crucially, Lee envisions bakla and manananggal as able to move between discrete times and spaces. Indeed, we learn that Amapola is descended from a female manananggal, her great grandmother Lola Sepa, who aided Filipino revolutionary leader Andres Bonifacio and the Katipuneros in their struggle to overthrow Spanish rule in the late 1890s.<sup>27</sup> Lola Sepa travels forward in time to 2010 in the belief that Amapola is the Chosen One who will fulfill a prophesied future in which both acceptance for manananggal and true freedom for the Philippines will finally be gained. The Lola Sepa-Amapola plotline not only alludes intertextually to historical research speculating that babaylanes who resisted the Spanish were accused of being aswang; as fictional revisionist historiography, it also explicitly writes aswang into central events in the annals of Philippine anti-colonial revolution. Under the mentorship of Lola Sepa, Amapola embarks on a crash course in Philippine history. Noting that historians never acknowledge the agency of aswang, Amapola reflects, “*hanggang sa kasalukuyan, walang binabanggit na participasyon ng mga aswaang. Binura ba sila?*” [“Even today, aswang participation is never mentioned. Have they been erased?”] (Lee, *Si Amapola* 153) The erasure of aswang, perpetually passed over in silence and relegated to the margins of the narrative, can be read as an allegory for the elision of queer subjectivities in canonical Filipino historiography.

According to Manalansan, the etymology of the Tagalog term *bakla* is a combination of the first syllables (“ba” and “la”) from the words *babae* (woman) and *lalaki* (man), thus condensing the popular conception of bakla as an interstitial, indeterminate (*alanganin*), hermaphroditic sex/gender category (Manalansan, *Global Divas* 25).<sup>28</sup> If that is the case, then *Amapola* transgressively rewrites the etymology of bakla in a story told by the central character, “*Alamat ng Bakla*” (Legend of the Bakla).

In response to an inquisitive young boy’s question, “*ba’t me bakla? Saan sila nanggaling?*” [“why are there bakla and where do they come from?”], Amapola tells a brilliant revisionist creation legend that rewrites the indigenous origin myth of creation in which the first man and woman, named *Malakas* (Strong) and *Maganda* (Beautiful), respectively, emerge out of a split bamboo. Amapola’s retelling centers instead the creation of the first queer subject, who emerges from the bamboo clad in a pink floor-length gown. *Bathala* the Creator was at a loss to name this fabulous creature, who neither had a stable appearance nor a consistent sexual orientation:

*Kasi nahirapan si Bathala na bigyan siya ng pangalan, kasi araw-araw ay nagpapalit siya ng anyo. Minsan ay may soot na bonggaderang headdress, na type niyang ipahiram kay Bathala, at minsan naman ay nakasombrero. Minsan ay pa-mhin, minsan ay mahinhin, minsan ay malandi, minsan ang gusto ay lalaki at minsan naman ay type niya pareho lalaki man o babae. Tinanong tuloy siya ni Bathala. Gusto mo bang lituhin ang mga tao?*

*Hindi po, sagot ng bakla. Gusto ko lang pong ipakita na nang likhain n'yo ako, ang nalikha n'yo ay hindi iisa kundi marami. Na hindi kayo lugi.*

*Impressed si Bathala sa sagot kaya sinabi niya: Sa paglipas ng panahon ay marami ang di makakaintindi sa 'yo. Lalaitin ka at aalipustahin at ida-down, at madalas pa nga ay itatago kang parang isang kasalanang nakakahiya. Pero may ibibigay ako sa 'yong isang regalo—ang karapatan mo na mamili kung ano ang gusto mong maging sino...*

*At hindi ka nila puwedeng i-etsa-puwera, patuloy ni Bathala, dahil mula ngayon ay tatawagin kang Bakla, na ang ibig sabihin ay—ba, ka, at la. Bahagi ka ng lahat. (Lee, *Si Amapola* 90-91; translated in note)<sup>29</sup>*

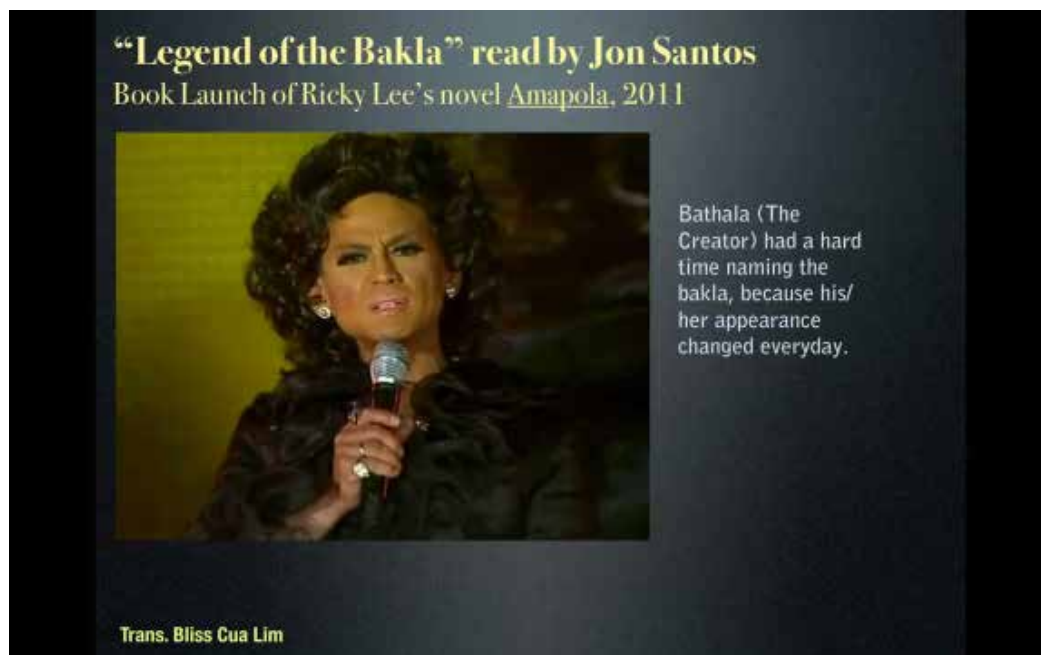
Asked by Bathala whether it was trying to confuse everyone, the newly-made creature replies that it merely wants to demonstrate that its being was not one but many. Bathala then bestows upon this new creation—destined to be derided and misunderstood—a unique gift, that of agentive choice, the right to choose what or who to become. And finally, Bathala names this creature: *bahagi ka ng lahat* [you are a part of everything]. Condensing that phrase into the first syllables of each word yields “*bakla*,” a kind of acronym for queer affirmation at the origins of the world. Conceptualizing both bakla and aswang as marginal and yet constitutive of the social fabric themselves, the novel suggests that profoundly unsettling difference, though often presented as peripheral to social life, is actually at the weave and weft of everything.

The legend is an allegory for queers as socially excluded yet part of the multiplicity and diversity of the social, embodying not stasis but becoming. Set in a time before the minting of a world locked in gender, this story of the bakla’s naming ends by asserting that names and labels are not important. The young boy listening to the story asks, “And you, Amy, what should you be called?” Amapola replies: “*Labels lang ‘yan, Truman. Maski anong itawag mo sa akin—bakla, transvestite, transgender, bisexual at kung ano-ano pa—di pa rin magbabago kung ano ako*” [“Those are just labels, Truman. No matter what you call me—bakla, transvestite, transgender, bisexual, etc. —it will not change what I am”] (Lee, *Si Amapola* 92). The same point is made by another sympathetic character in the novel, Amapola’s therapist, Doc Locsin, who eschews labels for gender, sexuality, or subjectivity: “homo, bakla, trans, you are not just one label. You can be all of them. *Kumplikado ang tao, lalo na ang bakla. Hindi siya dapat ikahon ng labels*” [People are complicated, especially the bakla, who should not be boxed in by labels] (31-32).

Here the novel pushes towards an anti-substantive, anti-identitarian, non-normalizing notion of queerness that would refuse the confining fixity of labels. What captivates me about Amapola’s irreverent retelling of the Filipino origin legend of the first man and first woman is not only that it retrospectively reframes the established legend as a heterosexist narrative by rescripting it as the origin story

of the first bakla. It is that “Legend of the Bakla” queers the very desire for origins through its casually flamboyant insistence on multitemporality. When Amapola describes Bathala, the Divine Creator as wearing a fabulous “*bonggaderang* headdress,” or characterizes the first unnamed queer creature as alternately *mahinhin* (feminine/ femme) or *pa-mhin* (masculine/ butch), the peppering of gay slang accomplishes a queer speaking of Bathala that reimagines swardsppeak to be coeval with the origins of the world, anachronistically contemporaneous with the moment of Creation itself. The incongruously funny juxtaposition of the conventions of origin legends alongside swardsppeak comes through with particular clarity in a spoken word performance of this very scene, recorded on digital video, at the novel’s book launch in November 2011.

At that star-studded, high profile book launch—a testament to Lee’s standing in the Filipino film industry as one of its most respected and prolific screenwriters—Jon Santos, a celebrity impersonator who came out publicly as married gay man in 2008, read an excerpt from the novel, “Legend of the Bakla” to a large and very receptive audience (see video clip 2, <http://journals.ateneo.edu/ojs/kk/article/view/2053/2055>).



**VIDEO CLIP 2.** Celebrity impersonator Jon Santos’ spoken word performance of “Legend of the Bakla” from the 2011 book launch of Ricky Lee’s novel, *Amapola sa 65 na Kabanata*. Courtesy of Ricky Lee.

If one of the things a transmedial analysis pays attention to is the question of what “medium  $x$  [can] do that medium  $y$  cannot” (Ryan 35) and the ways in which remediation profoundly transforms precursor texts, then certainly the online video

of Santos' live spoken word performance vivifies, in ways the novel cannot, those queer codes of style, vocal delivery and bodily performance that are characteristic of swardspeak. Lee's novel is written primarily in Filipino (the national language based largely on Tagalog in addition to other linguistic borrowings) and Taglish (a mixture of Tagalog and English), with swardspeak words and phrases sprinkled liberally throughout the text.

In *Global Divas*, Manalansan defines swardspeak as “the vernacular language or code used by Filipino gay men in the Philippines and in the diaspora” whose etymological origins derive from “*sward*, a Cebuano word for homosexual and/or sissy.” Swardspeak liberally borrows from and resignifies words and phrases drawn from the translocal languages of Filipino, English, and Spanish to express gay men's experiences of marginalization as well as assertions of resistance (46). As is well known, queers can sometimes frustrate visual economy in which everyone is presumptively heterosexual until marked otherwise. Manalansan explains: “swardspeak immediately marks the speaker as queer. Informants have told me about situations in which men whom they initially thought to be heterosexual slipped in a term or two, which caused these informants to suspect that the speakers were not exactly straight after all” (47-48). Crucially, swardspeak “involves performance and bodily movement,” not mere lexical expertise. In practice, swardspeak is a swiftly changing code whose constantly innovated terms pass rapidly out of fashion, even as mainstream Philippine slang borrows, at a temporal lag, from its subcultural queer lexicon (50-51). In this light, quite apart from the narrative or thematic content of the novel, the code-shifting between Filipino, Taglish, and swardspeak constitutes an unmistakable linguistic cue that signifies that the work is discursively, aesthetically and politically “not-straight.” As captured and recirculated by digital media coverage of Lee's book launch, Santos' live reading of “Legend of the Bakla” from the novel vivifies the characteristic gestural flourishes, vocal inflections, and bodily dispositions of bakla men speaking swardspeak.

The insistence that swardspeak is contemporaneous and coeval with the origins of the world is more than chronologically inappropriate: it is an immiscible, heterogeneous mixture of two different orders of time: the sacred, archaic time of myth and our own historical time (Sandor 347), that time in which swardspeak arises as a historical, political, and cultural expression of queer struggle and self-fashioning. These two temporalities, sacred archaic time and historical time, are campily and lightheartedly mingled in Lee's legend within the novel.

### **CAMP TEMPORALITY: A QUEER TASTE FOR ANACHRONISM**

This willfully anachronistic—in the sense of chronologically improper—appropriation of origin legendry in *Amapola* is, to my mind, akin to the likewise anachronistic appropriation of baylan and *asog* (premodern shamans) or aswang (a



durative figure originating prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century) as homosexual, bakla, trans, or queer (all contemporary nominations). From a strictly historiographic perspective, baylan and *asog* could not accurately be considered feminist, bakla, trans, or queer.<sup>30</sup> In chronological terms, they are antecedents (prior in historical time) but not necessarily precursors (ancestors in a teleological sense) to these modern sex/gender categories and subjectivities. To collocate or invoke babaylanes/*asog*, aswang, and bakla in the same cultural-political-sexual continuum, then, is to run the risk of being called “ahistorical.”

In North American queer studies, the injunction against ahistorical claims has sparked generative debates on queer relationships to time. David Halperin, for example, warns against regarding modern sexual rubrics as universal or transhistorical and cogently articulates what has been called the “alteritist” position in queer historiography (Dinshaw et al, “Theorizing Queer Temporalities” 178). In this view, the first ethical principle of a history of sexuality is to “understand our own inability to understand” the “erotic particularities” of the past, resisting the tendency to tell stories about past others that cast our profoundly different predecessors as versions of our present selves (Halperin 2-3). A variant of the alteritist position has been voiced by Peter Jackson, who exhorts scholars of queer Asian studies to “abandon the mistaken association of transgenderism with precapitalist residues of tradition and instead trace how the market has provided a space for the modern Filipino *bakla*, Thai *kathoey*, Indonesian *waria*, and other transgender identities beyond the West to form around the commodification of modern norms of feminine beauty” (359-360). Such cautionary injunctions issued from the alteritist perspective—both Halperin’s warning against ahistorical claims and Jackson’s specific call to investigate the ways in which market capitalism, rather than precolonial indigeneous traditions, create the conditions for the emergence of local queer subjectivities—are crucial interventions.

On the other hand, spirited challenges to the alteritist position have been articulated by thinkers who champion the queer desire to ford the chasm of time. Carolyn Dinshaw argues that the sexual past is indeterminate yet still usable for queer community formation in the present; community is built through “partial connections...across time” (“Got Medieval?” 212). Queer historiography is a relationship with indeterminacy; that our knowledge of the past is necessarily unsettled and imprecise is “the condition, not the failure, of historical analyses.” Rather than presuming identical correspondences across the centuries, queer historiography is a temporal mode that constitutes community out of an indeterminate but still usable past, “making affective connections...across time” between what has been “left out of sexual categories back then” and analogous relations of exclusion, elision, or minoritization in our own day (*Getting Medieval* 1, 11-12, 22). Similarly, for Valerie Rohy, Edgar Allan Poe’s 1838 short story “Ligeia” precedes the minting of lesbian as a modern category yet still gives off an unmistakable queer glint. The lesbian effect in Poe’s writing is historically



implausible, Rohy grants, “but just the same,” she writes, “it hangs before our eyes” (123). Such felt correspondences with intractably different pasts pose hard questions about historical anachronisms and the legitimacy of cross-temporal interpretations. Despite its apparently ahistorical cast, the queer optical illusion in older works is the equivalent of an anamorphic historical mirror: the glint of lesbianism in a text that predates such a modern nomination is an anamorphic image, visible only when seen at an angle, considered from the perspective of “the wrong time” (125). Queer analysis thus forges temporal links between different, incommensurable forms of relation (Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval* 205). Such analyses are affective and importantly, improper: in *Queer/Early/Modern*, Carla Freccero willfully embraces temporal impropriety as the defining gesture of queer theory (2).<sup>31</sup>

What can we learn from such creative refusals of the injunction not to read modern queerness into the past? Strategic espousals of queer anachronisms—espousals that are emphatically not in the service of stable, universal homosexual identities across time—point to a reluctance to renounce the co-presence of the past or to concede the closure of other times to pure alterity, and to a refusal to be disciplined into “correct” uses of history and time. What Dinshaw calls the “queer desire for history” is very palpably the desire for a willful, if not faithful, relationship with the past (“Got Medieval?” 202-203). That very desire is conspicuous in the fictionalized historiography of *Amapola*, which overlays modern bakla subjectivities with archaic legends and turn-of-the-century revolutionary history; it is similarly striking in the yearning to see in precolonial baylan and *asog* an analogue for present-day feminist and queer subjectivities.

What is generative about imagined cross-temporal bonds with a past that resonates with present-day concerns is neither the fiction that same-sex liaisons are identical throughout time, nor that an essential homosexuality or queer subjectivity can be traced throughout history. Rather, willful, strategic espousals of anachronism articulate feminist and queer yearnings to feel the touch of the past due to shared abjections, political positions, or minoritarian pleasures. A profound, constitutive, and transformative connection to the past, and even a perverse embrace of what is disparaged as anachronistic, is vital to the project of queer survival, not least because the past is a reservoir of virtuality (Grosz 94) through which we can begin to think of a future that is emphatically unlike the straight, heteronormative temporality of our present (Muñoz 83, 91).

In this last section, I want to bring together two lines of queer thinking on time: first, work that champions affective, nonchronological queer historiography, discussed above; and second, scholarship on the temporal aspects of a queer comic sensibility, camp.

Camp humor is strongly drawn to the anachronistic as a source of enjoyment. Camp’s taste for the eclipsed, for things that have declined or been surmounted was first described by Susan Sontag as follows:

. . . So many of the objects prized by Camp taste are old-fashioned, out-of-date, *démodé*. It's not a love of the old as such. It's simply that the process of aging or deterioration provides the necessary detachment—or arouses a necessary sympathy . . . Time liberates the work of art from moral relevance, delivering it over to the Camp sensibility . . . Thus, things are campy, not when they become old—but when we become less involved in them, and can enjoy, instead of be frustrated by, the failure of the attempt. (285)

While queer scholarship has rightfully criticized the shortcomings of Sontag's controversial 1964 essay on camp,<sup>32</sup> I find her remarks on camp temporality in particular to be a generative starting point. For Sontag, the camp sensibility operates through a temporal distance, a detachment from the outmoded. I suggest that camp operates as a form of temporal conversion, folding the old into the new and enacting the survival and longevity of nearly-forgotten works. Rather than always or only excluding an outmoded temporal other, camp temporality might be seen differently, as being founded on gestures of affective inclusion. It is important to remember that, in Sontag's formulation, "detachment" is counterbalanced by "a necessary sympathy," and that camp's interest in the outmoded doesn't just make fun of, but also has fun with, the touch of the past. I am suggesting, therefore, that camp temporality be considered along the lines of Dinshaw's ideas of queer affective history: its "touch across time" intentionally collapses historical distinctions and queers history by centralizing affect or sensibility in its "felt experience of asynchrony" ("Theorizing Queer Temporalities" 190). A camp engagement with anachronism brings something that was only apparently surmounted or left behind in the past forcefully back into the present. Camp temporality can demonstrate the co-evalness of an apparently outmoded cultural legacy and insist, not on obsolescence, but on persistent survival.

Emphasizing the need to "distinguish the transgressive reinscriptions of Western postmodern camp" from Third world texts marked by "postcolonial difference," Garcia usefully conceptualizes postcolonial camp in the Philippine context as marked by hybridity: "hybridity may be said to derive from the nonconvergence between neocolonial power's intentions and the affect of those who receive them—which is to say, between the globalized influence of conventions coming from Western Camp and the creative ways that they are fashioned and refashioned by, in, and as Philippine gay culture" (52). Through the notion of hybridity, Garcia incisively highlights the degree to which camp in Filipino culture is marked by strong forms of borrowing and influence from primarily American variants of camp; yet by also underscoring nonconvergence and cultural and historical specificity, Garcia allows us to hone in on vernacularized difference and particularity. For the purposes of my argument below, Garcia's reading of the transmedial texts of *Zsazsa Zaturnnah* (Carlo Vergara's graphic novel and its subsequent theatrical and filmic adaptations) highlights issues of allegory and obsolescence—"the persistence of the 'local' and the 'old,' despite or precisely because of the prevalence of the 'foreign'

and the ‘new’—in postcolonial camp (Garcia 54). Such valences are tremendously significant for my reading of *Amapola*.

### FOLKLORE AS CAMP

I interpret both *Mga Bata ng Lagim* and *Amapola* as transmedial texts that camp aswang legends and origin myths drawn from Philippine folklore, mining these for pleasurable and counter-heteronormative affinities with contemporary queer experiences of social and sexual marginalization. In its “straight” (e.g., non-ironic) forms, the folkloric genre of legend explicitly thematizes a community’s debate over what is believable and what is not in relation to a recounted extraordinary event (Degh 33, 38, 44). In contrast, a campy, irreverent attitude to folklore is not centrally concerned with the enigma of belief. Campy treatments of aswang and manananggal in queer aswang transmedia are uninterested in either affirming or discrediting the existence of supernatural monsters. Instead, these camp appropriations of folklore license visual or audial spectacles of queer hypervisibility and stylization (whether in *Mga Bata ng Lagim*’s sound and image relations, or *Amapola*’s use of performative codes of swardspeak). A pinoy queer camp sensibility in these transmedia texts accomplishes an ironic colonization and a humorous conversion of the deadly serious ideological project of folklore into flamboyant displays of style and queer assertions of desire.

Normally, folklore is a mode of cultural production that ideologically constitutes “the folk” as both a communal audience and a political category (what Stephen Gencarella calls a means of “instituting a people” (174).<sup>33</sup> Queer aswang transmedia’s camping of Philippine folklore (converting it from the serious to the humorous) raises crucial questions: “who counts as folk?” (so rarely, queers); and “what counts as lore?” (so rarely, contemporary popular knowledge, mediatized experience, gendered embodiment, and sexual practice). If particular practices or performances of folklore constitute “the folk” or “the people,” then canonical folklore in which the aswang is an anti-social figure of gender inversion demarcates a highly normative, exclusionary notion of “folk” in comparison to the more inclusive tendencies of queer aswang transmedia, in which the bakla manananggal appears as a lover, a family member, or a fellow activist within the social fabric itself.

A campy sense of time espouses a strategic use of anachronism that signals a counter-straight positioning and forges temporal affinities between past and present. Camp time disrupts the presumed timelessness of folklore as a repository for traditional authenticity. Camp temporality is a different way of approaching the question of anachronism, a vigorous espousal of retrospective approaches to history that obstinately resists notions of chronological propriety. In this context, pinoy camp temporality’s espousal of strategic anachronism in queer aswang

transmedia is not without risks, since camping folklore via the figure of the bakla brings together two already anachronizing discourses.

On the one hand, postcolonial folklore scholars caution that the “folk” is never a neutral category but is rather one that inscribes temporal fantasies of timeless rural tradition (Narayan 177-179). Folklore is caught in a persistent problem of frozen time, conventionally construed as a pre-technological cultural relic of anachronistic survival that can either be nostalgically revalued as heritage or repudiated as atavism (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 283, 296-299).

On the other hand, overlaid upon the already archaic connotations of folklore is an urban temporal elitism that stigmatizes the bakla as vestigial, feminine and lower class. As Benedicto’s trenchant critique points out, the global gay contemporaneity that gay nightlife and consumer culture in Manila aspire to deploys a temporal rhetoric of obsolescence: while urban Filipino gay men “*were once*” bakla, they “*no longer*” are (Benedicto, 2014, 81). (This attempted erasure is by no means absolute, as recent scholarship recuperating both *asog* and *bakla* attest).<sup>34</sup> Manalansan’s influential 2003 book *Global Divas* recounted how diasporic gay Filipino men in New York City in the 1990s recuperated the signatures of kabaklaan—swardspeak and cross-dressing—to resistively negotiate vexed issues of assimilation, resistance, and belonging on their own terms. In contrast, Benedicto recounts that by the late 2000s, young bourgeois gay men prominent in Manila’s middle-class gay nightlife had largely abandoned cross-dressing and swardspeak as “a dying language in Manila’s gay scene,” due to their association with bakla as a reified category onto which anxieties over class and gender markers had been projected and expelled (“The Haunting of Gay Manila” 321).

Abjected by anxious attempts to reconfigure Manila’s middle and upper class gay scene according to a US-identified global gay imaginary, bakla and swardspeak are devalued as outdated and excluded from gay contemporaneity. As I have suggested elsewhere, the rhetoric of anachronism often arises whenever stubborn temporal heterogeneities or a multiplicity of conflicting but coextant times are being disavowed (Lim 79-87).

In the context of these “competing temporal imaginations” (Benedicto, “The Haunting of Gay Manila” 326), the question becomes: What kinds of temporal performance can destabilize the neoliberal devaluation of kabaklaan as well as the naturalized misogyny of the female manananggal in Philippine folklore? I have suggested that camp’s strategic—rather than temporally elitist—use of anachronism, a crafting of queer temporal relations that refuse or exceed chronological time, opens a promising though risky path here. In queer aswang transmedia, pinoy camp is a contestatory comic sensibility that pokes fun at straightness in many forms: not just straight heterosexuality but also the straight-laced seriousness of a failed norm sent up by swardspeak, which functions here as a zany insider code.<sup>35</sup>

In the case of *Amapola*, the grim misogyny inscribed onto the female manananggal or the unsmiling disparagement of the bakla as obsolete is irreverently

undone by an outlandish narrative about a bakla impersonator-turned-aswang who becomes the nation's Redeemer. Amapola leads a broad-based civil rights movement against the machinations of corrupt state officials, uncovers the elisions of sexual minorities from national history, and fights all manner of villains while also learning to coif her stiff aswang hair into more stylish forms.

Obstinately, oppositionally, yet playfully, queer aswang transmedia's bakla manananggal winkingly suggest that the essentialist female figuration of aswang is itself outdated. In both *Mga Bata ng Lagim* and *Amapola*, bakla aswang dethrone the traditionally misogynist figure of the female manananggal and suggest that it *should be made obsolescent*. In *Amapola*, swardspeak is joyfully wielded in order to anachronistically assert, contrary to the bourgeois dismissal of swardspeak as a throwback to a surmounted form of homosexuality, that such modes of queer speaking are fantastically, impossibly coeval with the dawn of time itself. Pinoy camp temporality here is chronologically inappropriate and willfully anachronistic, recalcitrantly collapsing distinctions between disparate eras. The temporal condensation of the archaic time of myth into the historical time of swardspeak is done knowingly; it is not symptomatic of historical amnesia but aspires to a queer folkloric past and future that would be emphatically unlike our own dissatisfying present.

## Notes

1. This paper slowly took shape over many years in which I had the privilege of presenting these ideas on queer aswang and camp temporality to several different audiences: at the University of California (UC), Los Angeles and UC Riverside in 2010; at UC Berkeley and the University of Zurich, in 2011; at the Los Baños and Diliman campuses of the University of the Philippines, in 2012; at the Society of Cinema and Media Studies Conference in Chicago and at Josai University in 2013; and at Cornell University in 2014. I am enormously grateful to the organizers of those talks and conferences as well as the various students, colleagues and friends whose valuable feedback urged me to clarify my focus and pursue new sources and lines of exploration. My profound thanks to Napoleon Lustre, Gilda Cordero-Fernando, and Ricky Lee for fruitful conversations and for generously allowing me to discuss their work. And, as always, I am grateful to Joya Escobar for encouraging and supporting all my conceptual tinkering.
2. A few examples of the broad resurgence of aswang across media platforms and genres over the last decade follows. **Short independent digital cinema:** *Bakasyon* [The Visit], 2004; *Lola* [Grandmother], 2010. **Feature films:** *Yanggaw* [Affliction], 2008; *Ang Darling Kong Aswang* [My Aswang Darling], 2009; “Punerarya” [Funeral Parlor] segment, *Shake, Rattle and Roll 12*, 2010; *Aswang*, 2011; “Emergency” segment, *Shake, Rattle and Roll X*, 2008; *Corazon: Ang Unang Aswang* [Corazon: The First Aswang], 2012; *Tiktik: the Aswang Chronicles*, 2012. **Documentary Films:** *The Aswang Phenomenon*, 2011. **Graphic Novels:** *The Mythology Class* (1999/2005); the *Trese* series (2008-2012); *Skyworld*, 2012; **Novel:** *Rosallea: sa Daigdig ng Mga Mangkukulam* [Rosallea in the World of Witches], 2010. **Stage Performance:** *Luna: An Aswang Romance*, first staged in English in 2000.
3. Camp folklore, or folklore as camp, is a zany, irreverent register of queer media expression in which supernatural legendry is ironized, kidded and queered. I am thinking here of transmedial texts such as the film *Zombadings 1*, 2011, and *Ang Kagila-gilalas na Pakikipagsapalaran ni Zsazsa Zaturannah* [The Spectacular



Adventures of Zsazsa Zaturannah], which originated as a 2002 graphic novel that was adapted for both film and stage in 2006.

4. I am thankful to two interlocutors who generously read earlier drafts of this paper and who urged me to address the rich ambiguity of Amabilis' remarks: Caroline Sy Hau and Lucas Hilderbrand. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* notes a historical shift in usage as follows: "Over the past two decades, an important change has occurred in the use of *queer* in sense 2d [often disparaging: homosexual; sometimes offensive: *gay*]. The older, strongly pejorative use has certainly not vanished, but a use by some gay people and some academics as a neutral or even positive term has established itself. This development is most noticeable in the adjective but is reflected in the corresponding noun as well. The newer use is sometimes taken to be offensive, especially by older gay men who fostered the acceptance of *gay* in these uses and still have a strong preference for it."
5. Another example of the aswang as a resonant figure of diasporic intergenerational Filipino/a American storytelling emerges in feminist cartoonist Lynda Barry's comic book, *One Hundred Demons* [2002], where the aswang is a figure for both the bonds of love between grandmothers and granddaughters and a vicious cycle of maternal estrangement and alienation. See de Jesus.
6. While it may be tempting to propose a further extension of the aswang's *transmedial* and *transgeneric* valences here to the term *transgender*, I feel that such a move should only be made carefully and with due attention to historical and cultural specificities. First, *bakla* is equivalent to neither *transgendered* nor *queer*. As Vic Muñoz has noted, "Western concepts of "identity" are untranslatable at best and hegemonic at worst." Second, I am mindful of Ambrose Kirby's crucial insight that *trans*, commonly "used to signify in between, beyond, crossing, or a combination of these," as applied to *transgender* to evoke "the space between, beyond, and on the other side of a male/female binary" might unwittingly reproduce a transphobic discourse: "The idea that transsexual people cross, are in-between, mark the limits of, or transcend a male/female binary, in many cases, is contrary to the assertions and lived reality of transsexual people. Indeed, the assertion that "trans" is always/only between, beyond, or crossing is made possible by denying claims to authentic maleness made by some transsexual men and to authentic femaleness made by many transsexual women" (Muñoz, Garrison, Kirby, 292-293).
7. Linda Degh urges folklore scholars to acknowledge the nuanced complexity of belief. Rarely articulated in a direct, self-consistent way, belief is "invisible" and "inaudible," a matter of "inherited and tacitly shared" understandings between tellers and listeners. Degh asks: "Why do folklore collectors (not mental health carers) insist on asking, 'Do you believe it? Is it true?' The question itself provokes distortion. In the first place, belief is fluctuating, hesitant and selective, not consistent or absolute. In the second place, the informant has many reasons not to tell what he or she really believes" (See Degh, 33, 36, 38-39).
8. In this essay, I use the terms *baylan* and *babaylan* interchangeably. Brewer notes the "hybridization" of various Philippine words for shamans: "Signifiers

from the Visayan area include variations of the double syllable *bailan*, including *baylana*, *balyán*, *balian*, *baliana*, or *babaylana*. From the Tagalog area and to the north of Manila modifications of *catalonan* or *catalona* occur. A more general terminology that seems to be used throughout the archipelago is based on the signifier for the spirit *anito*. These include *maganito* and *anitera*. The men dressed as women who performed the Animist rituals are recorded as *asog*, *bayog*, or *bayoguin*. For their Spanish readership the missionaries occasionally grouped all the above under the labels ‘priestesses’ or ‘priest’ (Brewer 84). I am most grateful to Stefanie Joy Lira for recommending this source.

9. Of feminist reclamations of *babaylan*, Brewer observes: “Some scholars today, intent on rediscovering and reclaiming the ancient Animist priestess, are using either *babaylan* and/or the Tagalog *catalonan*... An interesting borrowing from the Visayan by Tagalog-speaking women is occurring. These women, unconstrained by the disciplinary boundaries of academia, are invariably choosing to use the Visayan, *babaylan*, rather than *catalonan* from their own language. The reason for this has nothing to do with linguistic semantics, but rests instead with a form of folk etymology. Intent on making apparent a link between woman, *babae*, and the priestly function of the *babaylan*, these women hybridise the two language groups—*babae* from Tagalog and *babaylan* from Visayan. Even though there is no evidence linguistically to link *babae*/woman with *babaylan*,... [this] transgression allows them to conceptualise femaleness with the priestly function” (Brewer, 85-86).
10. One type of aswang, called *mangkukulam* in Tagalog, *maranhig* in Hiligaynon, *manggagamod* in Ilokano, and *barangan* or *ongo* by Visayans, is often translated as *bruja* by Spanish chroniclers and as “witch” by folklore scholars writing in English. Such witches may be male or female, and can take various forms, especially the guise of animals: birds, wild pigs or large dogs (called *sigbin* in Cebuano). The various names for aswang in Philippine languages that I recount here are taken from the following sources: Fansler; Lieban; Ramos; Eugenio, 2002; and Lynch.
11. The orthography of the term aswang varies; *asuwang* and *asuang* are also used by other writers. I am adopting the usage of anthropologists and folklorists F. Landa Jocano, Richard Lieban, and Maximo Ramos.
12. Folklorist Maximo Ramos glosses one type of aswang as a “were-beast” whose most common forms are weredogs and werepigs, as opposed to the werewolves common in European and North American folklore (xxiii). Aswang are often heard before they are seen: their attacks are presaged by bird cries emitted either by aswang themselves or their animal familiars (*tiktik*, *kikik*), or by the sound of flapping wings on the roof (*wakwak* or *kaskas*). Many of the aswang’s names in diverse Philippine ethnolinguistic regions are onomatopoeic words that approximate these noises (*tiktik* in Aklan, *kikik* or *kakak* in Bicol, *wakwak*, *kiki*, or *kaskas* in Negros Oriental and Cebu) [Lieban 68; Lynch 189].
13. Ortiz, Gardner translation 193; compare with Blair and Robinson translation, 103-112.

14. For headless manananggal (also called *anananggal* or *wuwug*), see Lieban, 68; Eugenio, 149-150; Lynch 185-187; Ramos, 61-62; and Pertierra, 329.
15. Ramos credits Wayland Hand's question, "What's an aswang?" with sparking his decades-long research into aswang. Wayland Hand was the former president of the American folklore Society, the former editor of the *Journal of American Folklore* and *Western Folklore*, and Director of the Center for the Study of Comparative Folklore and Mythology at the University of California Los Angeles (Ramos xv).
16. Berton Maxfield and W.H. Millington focused on the Visayas, while Fletcher Gardner and Lucetta Kellanbarger Ratcliff worked in the Tagalog region (Eugenio 2001, xxii-xxiii).
17. I am very grateful to both Jafar Suryomenggolo and Caroline Sy Hau for apprising me of various Southeast Asian analogues to the aswang. For the Malay root of the term "manananggal," see Ramos xviii-xix.
18. Filmmaker and performance artist Wu Tsang cogently articulates the desire to disrupt the normalizing tendencies of the LGBTQ vocabulary as follows: "I think that the word "trans" has the potential to become normalizing in the same way that queer or LGBT can. I use "trans" and "queer" more than most words, but always with this huge caveat. . . What I'm actually talking about is a general non-conforming gender, something non-western, not white American, and not articulated in an LGBT framework. It's not about sexuality even. It's just about being and not having set ideals of masculinity or femininity. It's something that needs to keep shifting, because otherwise you get complacent and think you've won all these gains, but you haven't. It's the porousness of community and representation that threatens people..." (Wu n.pag.)
19. Not all these stories are about husbands striving to cure their wives. In one Tagalog account, a man has his aswang mistresses arrested; in another story from Ilocos Sur, the husband takes matters into his own hands, killing his wife upon learning about her aswang nature. See "Father and His Anananggal Concubine (Tagalog Text)," and "A Viscera Taking Wife (in English from Ilocos Sur)" [Ramos 43-44, 56-57].
20. According to José Mario Alas, "Paru-parong Bukid" is a Tagalog adaptation of "Mariposa Bella," a Spanish-language Filipino song composed during the 1890s, which shares the same melody. As the Spanish language declined in the Philippines during American rule, the song was gradually forgotten and eventually effaced when the Sampaguita film *Paru-parong Bukid* popularized the Tagalog version in 1938. See Alas.
21. The lyrics to "Paru-parong Bukid" are as follows: "*Paruparong bukid na lilipad-lipad/ Sa gitna ng daa'y papagapagaspas/ Isang bara ang tapis/ Isang dangkal ang manggas/ Ang sayang de kola/ Isang piyesa ang sayad/ May payneta pa siya (Uy!)/ May suklay pa man din (Uy!)/ Nagwas de ohetes ang palalabasin/ Haharap sa altar at mananalamin/ At saka lalakad na pakendeng-kendeng.*" [Author's translation: Farm butterfly flitting about/ Wings a-flutter in the middle of the road/ A yard of cloth over her skirt/ Her sleeves the length of a hand/ The train

of her dress/ as long as a bolt of cloth/ Wearing a decorative comb (Ooh!)/ Petticoat of eyelet peeking out/ She checks her mirror while facing the altar/ And walks off, hips swaying.]

22. Though the nouns for male and female, *lalaki* and *babae*, don't appear in the lyrics, the adjective *guwapo* (handsome) is gendered masculine, just as elsewhere in the song, the adjective *boba* (stupid) is gendered feminine.
23. "The whole point of camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious" (Sontag 288). Sontag's influential essay on camp notoriously claimed that camp was depoliticized and irreducible to homosexual taste, sparking a reclamatory project on the part of gay writers attempting to assert ownership over camp.
24. My understanding of this historical shift in North American queer theory—from reading drag performance as a subversive allegory of gender to an increased sensitivity to the everyday lives of transgender subjects and the challenges of queer survival— is strongly indebted to Lucas Hilderbrand, whose feedback on an earlier draft of this essay was invaluable. See Hilderbrand.
25. In the era of the closet, camp was a queer practice that frustrated the ocular and linguistic economy of dominant culture. Hearing and not hearing, seeing and not seeing were the stuff of camp. Steve Cohan has called camp's pre-Stonewall capacity to hide in plain sight as dramatizing a "straight blindness to a queerness standing with hands on hips right before their eyes" (12). In contrast, in the post-Stonewall era, camp has lost its insider status, becoming not only the object of academic study but also an openly recognized horizon of reception and marketing in North America and elsewhere.
26. This would be in keeping with Tzvetan Todorov's view of the fantastic as a "license to transgression," a discourse that licenses the speaking of sexual taboos (157-159). "Desire, as a sensual temptation, finds its incarnation in several of the most common figures of the supernatural world. . ." (127) "Homosexuality is another kind of love which the literature of the fantastic often accommodates" (131).
27. In *Amapola's* fictional revisionist historiography, Andres Bonifacio and the Katipuneros were helped by Sepa, a female manananggal who fell in love with Bonifacio and unsuccessfully tried to save him from assassination in Maragondon, Cavite. Tellingly, when Major Lazaro Makapagal reports the assassination of Bonifacio to his superior, he decides not to mention the manananggal's attempted rescue of Bonifacio (Lee, *Si Amapola* 70-71). Hence Lee's novel both explains and is premised on the elision of aswang in Philippine historiography.
28. Manalansan notes: "*Bakla* is a problematic Tagalog term. Its etymology is popularly seen to be a result of the contraction of the first syllable of the word for woman (*babae*) and the first syllable of the word for man (*lalaki*). Tagalog dictionaries define bakla as a hermaphrodite. In addition, it is also seen in terms of the in-between, or *alanganin* (which was also another term for Filipino male homosexuals in the 1950s and 1960s.) The interstitial and epicene

quality attributed to the bakla illuminates the social script. Indeed, while *bakla* conflates the categories of effeminacy, transvestism, and homosexuality and can mean one or all of these in different contexts, the main focus of the term is that of effeminate mannerism, feminine physical characteristics (i.e., small, frail bodies, delicate facial features, and so on), and cross-dressing” (*Global Divas* 25).

29. Although Bathala is conventionally presumed to be a male divinity, I have translated all pronouns as s/he because Tagalog pronouns are non-gendered: “Bathala (The Creator) had a hard time naming the bakla, because his/her appearance changed everyday. Sometimes s/he wore a fabulous headdress that s/he felt like lending Bathala, and sometimes just a hat. At times s/he was butch, or feminine, or flirtatious, or liked men, or liked both men and women. So Bathala asked:

Are you trying to confuse everyone?

No, said the bakla. I just want to show you that when you created me, you created not one creature, but many. You got your money’s worth.

Bathala was impressed. Over time, S/he said, many will not understand you. You will be ridiculed and treated cruelly and hidden like a shameful sin. But I will give you a gift: the right to choose who and what you want to be.

...

And they can’t throw you aside, Bathala said, because from now on you will be called Bakla, which means, *ba-*, *ka-*, and *la*.

‘Bahagi ka ng lahat.’ You are a part of everything.”

30. In her study of 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century Philippines, Brewer notes, “I deliberately avoid the use of homosexuality since this was a term introduced into the language in the late nineteenth century,” and notes that *asog* would likely be understood by contemporary readers as transgendered (129-130).
31. “Indeed, the reversal signified by the rhetorical term *metalepsis* could be seen to embody the spirit of queer analysis in its willful perversion of notions of temporal propriety and the reproductive order of things. To read metaleptically, then, would be to engage in queer theorizing” (Freccero 2).
32. From about 1860 to 1960, the subcultural street term *camp* (from the French verb for flaunting, exaggerating, or posturing) moved from the late nineteenth-century sphere of what Fabian Cleto calls “post-Wildean queerness” to the early twentieth-century urban world of fashion, theater, and entertainment, appearing in print in Christopher Isherwood’s novel in 1954 and finally entering the mainstream amid the “postwar pop euphoria” of the 1960s. This is the historical moment at and about which Susan Sontag writes her 1964 “Notes on Camp”; in her infamous claims about camp’s apolitical nature one can read, retrospectively, the reflection of a decade in which camp as pop attitude was indeed part of the much-denounced “de-gaying” of camp. In hindsight, Sontag may be read as a critic whose pronouncements decisively hastened the process of camp’s mainstream incorporation. See Cleto 44-48.

33. Stephen Gencarella's "rhetorical theory of folklore" draws attention to the political uses of folklore in constituting the folk in contrast to its enemies: "a people to kill and a people to kill for" (173-174). Since, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes, "we like to think that the 'real' folk never refer to what they do as folklore," this naming of particular communities as "the folk" and what they do as "folk life or folklore," is the defining gesture of folklore as a discipline, a way of carving out which objects, behaviors, or groups come to be identified as belonging to "the folk" (305-306).
34. See Tolentino ed., *Plaridel* special journal issue on "Queer Media and Representations."
35. I am employing "straight" here in several senses. First, in Sally O'Driscoll's sense of how "straight" functions as the multivalent foil to "queer" (30, 34-35). And second, as used by Susan Sontag: "Behind the 'straight' public sense in which something can be taken, one has found a private zany experience of the thing" (281).

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