



## TURNING THE TIDE: PROTEST POEMS ON MARTIAL LAW AS COUNTER-MEMORY

Ms. Mary Ann M. Majul

Senior High School, University of Santo Tomas, Philipines  
Corresponding author: meannmajul@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*Memories of Martial Law and the burial of strongman Ferdinand Marcos at the Libingan ng mga Bayani on November 2016 prompted artists and writers to converge at a common platform—that of safeguarding national consciousness from the impending rewriting of history. Using Foucault's concept of counter-memory, this paper aims to illustrate how literature, specifically protest poetry, can be used to interrogate perceptions and knowledge of events and personalities on Martial Law. Six poems: i) Open Letters to Filipino Artists; ii) A Furnace; iii) Still Life for Mendiola; iv) A Metaphysical Dialogue Between the Bronze Man and the Great Stone Face; v) Third World Opera; and vi) Dead Man's Tale were used to challenge the existing texts written on Martial Law. The findings show that the texts allow readers and viewers to identify themselves with the realities and truths shown in the texts, expand their knowledge and associations of the meanings of events, and provide alternative interpretations of historical events and personalities. This paper concludes that literature can either deceive or enlighten readers. It also remains an important site where ideology is articulated and truth is interrogated.*

**Keywords:** Martial Law, counter-memory, protest poems, alternative history, subjugated knowledge

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Threats of a communist takeover and mounting civil unrest prompted President Ferdinand Edralin Marcos to sign Proclamation 1081, putting the Philippines in a state of emergency or Martial Law on September 21, 1972. Less than a year later, Defence Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile ordered the military to arrest those who threaten the stability of the government's New Society. Undercover agents were deployed in colleges and universities to prevent the selling of illegal drugs like opium and marijuana, and more importantly recruitment of the young to the Communist movement.

The intensified crackdown on communists forced many to go underground and flee to the mountains. To raise people's awareness and popularize the revolutionary cause, cultural workers including some low and high ranking officials of the New People's Army and the Communist Party of the Philippines used literature as propaganda material. Using the stance of literature for the masses, revolutionary writers emphasized the cause over aesthetics.

For a time, literary works deemed revolutionary were confiscated and published secretly. They finally saw light after the strongman was toppled and a new government was put in place. More than forty years later, memories of the atrocities of Marcos fueled public outrage after the Supreme Court decision allowed the burial of the former strongman at the Libingan ng mga Bayani on November 18, 2016.

According to Ted Te, spokesperson of the Supreme Court, the High Tribunal dismissed the petitions challenging Marcos' burial on the following grounds: no abuse of discretion on the part of the president existed; the regulations of the AFP allow Marcos internment for serving as president, commander-in-chief, soldier, medal of valor awardee, and legislator; and Marcos was not convicted of crimes involving moral turpitude.

The Libingan ng mga Bayani is the resting place of former presidents, national artists and heroes of war and forms an integral part of public memory and history. For critics, some civil society groups and Martial Law victims, Marcos does not deserve to be honored because of corruption and strings of human rights abuses that occurred under his watch.

Several artists and writers likewise called for unity within their ranks to protest the burial. Among the measures undertaken were the continuous creation, reproduction and dissemination of old and new works critical of the Marcos administration. Many believe these will help the public remember the atrocities of Marcos and educate the younger generation who will be adversely affected by the impending "rewriting" of history—that of the State's acknowledgment of the heroism of Marcos.

In this paper, I used Foucault's concept of counter-memory to illustrate how literature, specifically protest poetry, can be used to interrogate perceptions and knowledge of events and personalities related to Martial Law. Counter-memory as used in this paper meant the process of interrogating, reading and examining events against hegemonic histories.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Jose Medina, "In order to understand the diversity and heterogeneity of forms of resistance, we need to understand the positionality and relationality of social agents in networks of power relations" (Pison, 2005, p. 10). Power, for Foucault (1982), may come from multiple or heterogenous forms. Medina adds, "Struggles of resistance should be studied in their specificity, without renouncing investigation of their connections, intersections, and points of convergence and divergence" (Pison, 2005, p.10).

Foucault coined the term subjugated knowledges for forms of experiencing and remembering that are unacknowledged by prevailing hegemonic discourses. They remain invisible to people from the mainstream who may have been "contaminated" or have already internalized certain epistemic exclusions; thus, some forms of resistance and subversion go unnoticed. The challenge is for readers and critics to exhume or make known, interpret and analyze these silenced or ignored subjugated knowledges. There are two types of subjugated knowledges: the first are historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations, and the second consists of knowledges from below.

Contrasting the genealogy of knowledges with linear intellectual history is one of the best ways to understand subjugated knowledges. The latter is located in the cognition truth axis, while the former is situated in the discourse-power axis. Usually, the dominant ideologies obstruct or suppress the knowledge of oppressed groups. A way of confronting this is by turning knowledge against itself and resisting omissions and “distortions” of official histories. This entails turning to lost voices and forgotten memories and looking at the past from the perspective of the present which are core to counter-memory.

Official histories are the results of monopolizing knowledge-producing practices in relation to a shared past in order to maintain the unity and continuity of a political body such as the State. Moreover, it is a means to silence alternative histories or interpretation of existing ones. This is evident in Marcos’s endeavor to produce the “Tadhana” series, a set of books written under his regime’s ideology.

In contrast, counter-histories try to undo and challenge official histories. As histories kept in the shadows, these are voices of the silenced and present not victories, but histories of defeats (Medina cited in Pison, 2005 p. 15). In order to transform discursive practice from the inside, there must be a “return to the original,” “the primary points of reference,” meaning foundational texts must be revisited and reinterpreted. This exercise would also train the reader or critic “to listen” to the gaps and silences of the texts, identify omissions and enhance the understanding of history and its relation to the present.

Foucault’s counter-memory suits the purpose and nature of protest literature, a body of literary works that occupies a significant place in Philippine culture. Filipinos have endured long struggles which have challenged existing social, economic, political and cultural systems and ideologies. Most writers come from the middle class, but there are still works that can be culled from peasants and workers. In addition, protest literature seeks to help create a “counter-hegemony” directed at the false consciousness nurtured by the dominant ideology and culture of the ruling class (Ordenez, 2001, p. 86).

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

In this paper, I examined six protest poems namely “Open Letters to Filipino Artists,” “A Furnace,” “Still Life for Mendiola,” “A Metaphysical Dialogue Between the Bronze Man and the Great Stone Face,” “Third World Opera,” and “Dead Man’s Tale” using content analysis and Foucault’s lenses on counter-memory. The poems were selected based on the hegemonic histories challenged, aesthetic quality, and depiction, interpretation and positionality on Martial Law.

### **4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 The State, Art and Literature in “Third World Opera”**

Simeon Dumdum Jr.’s use of Carnavalesque (2016) to illustrate the relationship between the government (represented by the governor) and literature or art (represented by the artist) in the theatrical performance revealed two things: the illiteracy of the governor on the elements and nature of theatrical performances and art as a whole (“That he loved Vivaldi/ Whom he thought painted The Last Supper”) and the actor’s mockery of the governor and his master, the dictator.

By using Carnavalesque (2016), the boundary between the audience and the performers is torn down allowing genuine expression. Characters are stripped of their rank and influence and made to appear as equals. For the governor, the kick in the groin from the actor was part of the performance, and the applause of the crowd, an acknowledgment of his presence and effective participation in the act. It is also an affirmation that he has communed with the people; however, this is not the intention of the actor. As a show of disgust for the dictator, the actor kicked the groin of the governor. The latter, not recognizing the mockery, praised the performance by joining the crowd in the applause.

In the Philippines, literature and drama were utilized to express people's disgust and condemnation of social, political and economic concerns. During the American occupation, the Supreme Court banned nationalist dramas claiming they "tended to incite people of the Philippine Islands to open and armed resistance to the constituted authorities" and "inculcate a spirit of hatred and enmity against the American people and the Government of the United States in the Philippines" (Riggs cited by Rafael, 2000, p. 40). As a result, playwrights and casts went underground. Those caught were fined and imprisoned. After 1905, the Americans succeeded in curtailing the production of nationalist plays.

Dramas, however, remained popular in outlying barrios. One U.S. observer wrote, "When seditious plays appeared, the people rose to it as one man, recognized that it told their story and patronized them liberally" (Riggs cited by Rafael, 2000, p. 41). Theatrical groups used various methods to escape colonial surveillance such as publishing plays under different titles, staging impromptu songs and speeches on Philippine sovereignty, dressing the cast in costumes that momentarily create an image of the outlawed Philippine flag, use of visual props like the rising red sun for the Katipunan, allegories of romance and kinship to invoke sympathy (damay) and lengthy soliloquies and debates that questioned benevolent assimilation and Filipino collaboration (Rafael, 2000).

On the other hand, nationalist plays drew on the *komedya* and other 19<sup>th</sup> century vernacular genres. These were usually performed at market places. When the revolution set in, many theatrical forms became politicized. The plots dealt with shared social experiences of the revolution, colonial occupation, war, and freedom. Some used the relationship between a female beloved and her lover-protector, mother and children, and personifications of freedom, patriots and the people. Language was politicized and playwrights used common nouns and adjectives to "denote character and signify a social concept or entity" (Rafael, 2000, p. 44).

"Dekada '70," a film about a family caught in the web of Martial Law, for example, showed how the State's rules and regulations can destroy peace and relationship among family members. The eldest son joins the activist group, goes underground, raises a family, gets caught and tortured. Another son, however, was not so fortunate. Both parents raise their shortcomings and doubt their capability, faith and ideology.

Such events in the film validate literature's influence in that readers and viewers are enticed to identify themselves with the realities and truths shown in the text, expand their knowledge and associations of the meanings of events, and provide alternative interpretations of historical events and personalities.

#### 4.2 The Revolutionary Call in “Open Letters to Filipino Artists”

Unlike the traditional epistolary format, Emmanuel Lacaba divided the poem into three distinct parts appearing as different letters which tackle the challenges besetting the artist as part of the revolutionary force. The countryside with its mountains, waters and people serve as the artists’ home and school. The context of the struggle and the people helped transform the artists’ subject, theme and aesthetics into a body of work that mirrored the struggle and experiences of the masses.

Experiential learning from living with the masses taught the poet what to write; however, there was still a need to “transcend the bourgeois origin” and write in the language the masses can understand. The line, “His ballpen blown up to a long-barreled gun,” affirms that the pen (writing) is as powerful as a gun in that it has the ability “to slay” the enemy.

In the second stanza, the persona explained the difficulty or internal struggle the poet faced as he embraced revolutionary life and “tears away/ The billion layers of his selfishness”. As a revolutionary writer, to write solely for self-expression and aggrandizement were considered acts of selfishness; thus, he must cease writing for and about the “lumpen culturati,” the elite and so-called patronizers of “high art”. Instead, the poet was expected to share the aspirations of the masses who live in the mountains or rural areas, link them together like pieces of the jigsaw puzzle and fight for their emancipation.

The persona also raised the allegations and perceptions of the artist as surreal and a bandit. He said these are false because the artist is the people’s advocate. When disorder in a community especially in rural areas becomes prevalent, bandits or *tulisans* are immediately blamed. According to Iletto (1985), the latter did exist during the Spanish period and increased in numbers “due to the opening of some provinces to capitalism and the new system’s adverse effects on the population” (p. 10). While the owners prospered, some members of the community were deprived of resources and were unemployed. To sustain their needs, they resorted to pillage, prompting the Spanish government to reorganize their police network, “systematize the process of keeping dossiers and conduct warrantless arrests” (Iletto, 1985, p. 10).

Bandits were most likely to strike in areas like Manila, the sugar districts of Negros, abaca plantations of Bicol, districts of Cagayan planted with tobacco and other regions were “economic development is implemented” (Rafael, 2000, p. 12). Moreover, classifying revolutionaries as bandits makes it easier for the government to arrest, imprison and execute suspects. Pillage, after all, is a crime punishable by law.

The last two stanzas contained a powerful statement: Filipinos own the resources and the power to name, yet they are deprived from enjoying such. To the fascists, the revolutionaries are “faceless enemies” who are brigands, killers, and “moving, shining, secret eye of the storm.” In contrast, the last stanza acknowledged the enlightened masses as the Messiah and borrowed lines from Robert Frost’s “The Road not Taken” to justify that serving the masses is the best decision an artist could make:

The road less traveled by we’ve taken---  
And that has made all the difference:

The task of the artist then is not to stay cooped in the Bohemian world, but to rouse from his sit and actively contribute his talents, skills and life to a greater cause which is to serve the people.

#### **4.3 Prison Life in “A Furnace”**

One way of breaking the spirit of the opposition is to capture and detain its leader. In the poem, the persona took comfort in the metaphor of the cell. He claimed that while it was a freezer in December, an oven in midday, and hell in summer, it retained its “cuteness” as a furnace for it served as a site where the spirit and mind were made stronger and purified.

The poem also suggested that a person can endure the physical extremities of imprisonment as long as the mind is properly conditioned to the context of the struggle and its ideology. The word “cuteness” sarcastically described the setting and its accompanying comparison, the furnace. Apparently, the persona mocked the state’s prison house by subtly stating that imprisonment of the body is not sufficient to break his will. By transcending the difficulties imposed by the physical, the persona subverted his situation.

Unlike Hernandez’s “Isang Dipang Langit” prison poem, Jose Ma. Sison’s “A Furnace” was not apocalyptic. The former is anchored on the collective notion that as long as the Bastille, people and Bathala remain, the fascist government will not endure and freedom will be achieved. In contrast, the latter is nearer the challenge posed by Amador Daguio in the last two lines of the poem, “Man of Earth:” “Bend me then, O Lord/ Bend me, if you can” which challenges either the Divine or a powerful entity to make him submit to the latter’s will.

#### **4.4 Fossilized Time in “Still Life for Mendiola”**

In art, still life is a representation of inanimate objects on canvass which appear eternally frozen in time. A similar concept is used in Juaniyo Arcellana’s “Still Life for Mendiola” in which the persona compares the protesters to statues on the pavement of Mendiola. Such scene is not new for Mendiola has been the site of rallies due to its proximity to Malacañang Palace.

Reclaiming space and inching forward meant getting closer to the dictator; however, the persona laments: “They would not even/ give us half a bridge” and the presence of a riot policeman with an overused truncheon indicates violence is probable should the tyrant behind the barbed wire commands it. The barbed wire is a symbol for salvation for Christians in that it serves as a reminder of the crown of thorns on Christ’s head. In contrast, its political connotation is oppression. In dreams, a barbed wire symbolizes difficulty in conveying ones thoughts to another or the idea of breaking free. The presence of the barbed wire and police with truncheon affirms the state’s readiness to suppress the protesters if need be. The reduction of the struggle to a still life painting is a statement of uncertainty on the situation of the protesters who gathered at Mendiola.

#### **4.5 Questions of Morality and Leadership in “A Metaphysical Dialogue between the Bronze Man and the Great Stone Face”**

Ninoy’s death at the airport implicated Marcos as mastermind of the assassination. Stone Face, representing Marcos, claims that he has atoned for his crimes and calls Bronze Man (Ninoy) “Shining One.” He states that he has confessed his sins to God and admits that the commission he put up, the Agrava Commission, was indeed meant “to whitewash/ all traces of his murder—

hide a blue/ conspiracy—a game of ruthless generals.” It appears that it was not Marcos, but some generals were involved in Ninoy’s assassination. Moreover, Ninoy’s death was likened to an oracle which foretold the downfall of Marcos.

While Benigno Aquino Jr.’s death fanned the flames of nationalism, it was the snap elections, which sealed Marcos’ political fate. In “The Fall of the Regime,” Almendral (1988) explains that Marcos, wanting to please the US government and prove that he is still the people’s choice, challenged the latter to send people to observe the elections and promised under the COMELEC January 1985 resolution to grant them privileges. History records later showed that this move was “the costliest mistake he ever made in his life” (p. 181).

Why would Marcos want to appease the Americans? America remains an important ally of the Philippines and a provider of military and financial aid. America is concerned about Marcos’ performance and the security of its interests in the Philippines. Although Marcos made public his support for the continuous presence of American military bases in the Philippines, the American government is not convinced.

In October 1985, America sent Sen. Paul Laxalt of Nevada to speak with Marcos. As an intimate friend of President Reagan, Laxalt carried a personal message from the latter. American intelligence disclosed that there is a deteriorating situation in the Philippines anti-insurgency campaign, growing anti-Marcos sentiment and calls for economic, military and political reforms. Sen. Bill Bradley of Nevada said “we may have to establish a timetable for the elections and reforms if Mr. Marcos lacks the will or capacity to ease his resignation. We should offer him and his family safe passage and sanctuary for his retirement. We must also be prepared to provide a worthy successor to Mr. Marcos and the additional security, assistance needed to restore democracy...” (de Dios, 1988, p. 179). Clearly, America could not turn a blind eye to the dictator’s waning popularity. At the same time, the pronouncement proves that the US is actively involved in the political and economic affairs of the Philippines to the point of concerning itself on which leader to throw its support. While Marcos never admitted his crimes in his lifetime, readers see an alternative version of history thru the poet’s interpretation of Marcos’ actions. What kind of history does Bronze Man speak of? Iletto (1985) explains that “the passion to teach history with precision and order stems from the bourgeois mentality’s fear of anarchy and social order” (p. 6). He goes further by illustrating the content of all Philippine modern history textbooks:

- 1) Golden Age (Pre-Hispanic society)
- 2) The Fall (Conquest by Spain in the 16<sup>th</sup> c.)
- 3) The Dark Age (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century)
- 4) Economic and Social Development (19<sup>th</sup> c.)
- 5) Rise of Nationalist Consciousness (post 1872)
- 6) Birth of the Nation (1898)
- 7) Suppressed Nationalism or Democratic Tutelege (post 1901, the American regime)

The preoccupation for linearity puts the educated Filipinos at the forefront of economic progress. Iletto’s evaluation of Renato Constantino’s “The Philippines: A Past Revisited” and Amado Guerrero’s “Philippine Society and Revolution”, for example, reveals that both works follow the Fall-Darkness-Recovery (Triumph) pattern (Iletto, 1985, p. 6). In addition, while both look upon the masses as “the real makers of history”, the masses are not allowed to speak. Instead, they are represented “by articulate leaders who are said to have a deeper understanding

than ordinary people of the causes of oppression” (Ileto, 1985, pp. 6-7). Likewise, the multivolume series “Tadhana: The History of the Filipino People” commissioned by Marcos devoted a quarter of the volume to the “roots of the Filipino heritage” (Ileto, 1985, p. 5). What is the intention for doing such?

Marcos needed to justify his platform of a New Society and maintain a culture of patronage and subjectivity. To stay in power, he needed to project himself as father of the nation, while his wife served as its mother. A painting which validates this mythologized parenthood of the nation is the “Malakas at Maganda” displayed at Malacañang. Marcos was drawn as the legendary Malakas, while Imelda was Maganda. Furthermore, while Marcos steered the economic and political ship, Imelda carried the image of the couple as benevolent patrons of the arts and people by promoting her notion of the “true, the good and the beautiful.” Monuments, edifices and other infrastructures along with art and literary performances proliferated. The objective was to market the Philippines as a progressive, strong and prosperous nation.

According to Rafael (2000), “Imelda’s cultural projects were logical extensions of Ferdinand’s attempts to leave traces of his power everywhere” (p. 137). The Marcoses embarked on patronage which is not only concerned with the “possession of resources, but the means with which to stimulate the desire for and circulation of such resources” (Rafael, 2000, p.138).

The Stone Face of Marcos in Ilocos is a cultural reification which preserves and displaces public memory. It has a preserving influence in that it reminds people of Marcos as president of the country; however, it also displaces because it elevates the strong man to a god-like status and benefactor of the people. These views affect the positionality of the person looking at the history of Martial Law and Marcos. Since monuments in the Philippines are erected to commemorate the greatness of a person, Ilocanos and the rest of the Filipinos from the Martial Law generation to the new generation may view Marcos as hero. This is why advocates oppose the burial of the former president at the Libingan ng mga Bayani.

The conversation between Bronze Man and Stone Face ends with Bronze Man wishing for the redemption of Stone Face so that “...[he] shall reclaim/ his birthright: a rainbow-colored robe,” a biblical allusion to the garment bestowed by Jacob to his son Joseph. This implies that the right to rule is a birth right—a destiny bestowed on Marcos which he lost because he abused it. It is through the forgiveness of the Lord that he can regain his status.

By making Marcos sober and Ninoy benevolent, the persona appears to raise Ninoy as the epitome of a Christian leader, but the words of the Bronze Man “Once you’ve purged your soul of dross/ and settled your accounts with the dispensers/ of karma, then you shall reclaim/ your birthright: a rainbow-colored robe” indicate an acknowledgment of Marcos greatness—that he fell or lost his birthright because of his pride and corrupt practices and that he can still regain it if he mends his ways. After the moral dialogue between the two key Martial Law personalities, the question remains: What alternative history is the poem presenting? While there is an admission of guilt and repentance on the part of Stone Face or Marcos, the persona does not completely implicate him. Instead, Marcos psychologically and morally suffers more than Ninoy.

Littered with conceits and Christian dogma, the poem reminds readers of the extent of religious influence in the shaping of the spiritual and psychological dimensions of the Filipino meaning, it is natural for a Filipino to seek forgiveness once an admission of a sin is made. There is also explicit acknowledgment of the existence of a greater power stemming from the Divine, not the temporal as evident in “May the Lord of Light liberate you”. More importantly, by representing Ninoy as one cast in bronze and using the Stone Face of Marcos in Ilocos as the latter’s representation, a strong statement is subtly made: Bronze will outlast stone; therefore, Ninoy, not Marcos shall leave a stronger impression on history.

#### **4.6 Death and Violence in “Dead Man’s Tale”**

During the American Occupation, Americans took pictures of dead natives standing in stark contrast “to those of living U.S. soldiers united in a common cause” (Rafael, 2000, p. 90). Rafael (2000) explains that photographing corpses meant “keeping them alive, after a fashion” (p. 90). It entailed preserving their death as a living legacy, beyond even one’s own death. Similarly, pictures of Ninoy’s corpse hit the front page of newspapers and covers of magazines. The Aquino family kept the corpse in its original state during its wake to show the brutality of the Marcos regime and illicit the sympathy of the public.

Gemino Abad, in “Dead Man’s Tale” explains that violence since the beginning of history has been “our text”. Andres Bonifacio and Antonio Luna, for example, were killed upon orders of Aguinaldo. Some members of the principalia collaborated with foreign aggressors, held positions of power, abused their authority, and slaughtered their kin and countrymen. Such is the grim part of history which led to the moral turpitude of some Filipino intelligentsia and the wealthy.

The Mendiola Massacre, deaths of farmers at Hacienda Luisita and extrajudicial killings all show how the State use the military against its people and justifies Abad’s claim that indeed, violence has been our text. Violence uses force and power and has almost become a necessity to achieve or effect radical changes. The Revolution of 1896 and World War II are classic examples.

The plot of Ninoy’s death is no different from Rizal, except that it was the Spaniards who killed Rizal, while Ninoy was shot by an assassin allegedly hired by the regime. Ninoy comes home from exile knowing the dangers posed by his decision to his security. His death made him more popular as stated in “but once he was dead/ we began to read his tale,/ and no less curious/ than a herd disturbed by carcass”.

Aquino’s death became the well of inspiration for the people, a stimulant to an uprising. “His death had become/ our sole image--” and “he would be a book to read/ without too much pain”. The persona, however, casts some doubt about the assassination and suggests that perhaps there is another version to the assassination story. It may be possible that Ninoy knew he was going to die or be killed when he comes home. The persona does not further elaborate on this and leaves the readers to contemplate: Who really killed Ninoy? The “official records” penned during Marcos time absolves the dictator from the crime. Other books and articles have their version as well, meaning, there is not one true authority, but multiple interpretations depending on the ideology and positionality the writer of history takes.

Corazon Aquino, Ninoy's widow, became president, while the Marcoses went on exile in Hawaii. Upon the return of the dictator's family and Ferdinand's corpse, the State refused funeral rights for the late dictator at the Libingan ng mga Bayani. Years after Cory's death and the end of her son Noynoy's term, the dictator was finally buried at the Libingan ng mga Bayani.

The poem also makes an allusion to the birth and death of Christ. Although considered the Son of God, he too must die in order to redeem mankind and validate his "power over men". Likewise, someone must die to rouse a nation from its slumber, end an oppressive regime or catapult another to power.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

According to Iletto (1985), "in an alternative history, we should find a whole range of phenomena which have been discredited or denied as history" and adds that "we would be better nationalists...with a national history that welcomes difference, disorder, and uncertainty [if we do not accept historical events at face value]" (p. 16). Foucault's notions of counter-memory and subjugated knowledges which served as the lenses from which the protest poems were analyzed echo the same sentiments as Iletto's pronouncements in his professorial chair lecture.

"Third World Opera" used Carnavalesque (2016) to show how literature can be used "to deceive" the State and enlighten the people, the audience, to the truth. The audience can identify with the presentation, but the governor cannot. In addition, it reminds the readers of the kind of society they live in. Lacaba's "Open Letters to Filipino Artists," illustrates the role of the artist in the revolutionary cause including the misconceptions imposed on the latter as surreal and bandits. It also questions ownership of land and resources and the power of naming. Moreover, it validates that serving the people, not the elite or Bohemians is the best option. Meanwhile, Jose Ma Sison describes the prison cell as a furnace for tempering the spirit and will. Unlike the usual physical torture explicated in prison cell stories and poems, Sison contends that what is really tested is the strength of ideology and political will. His is an open invitation to transcend the physical and strengthen the mental, spiritual and ideological faculties.

Drawing similarities between a painting and poetry in "Still Life for Mendiola," Arcellana explains that the protesters came not just to voice out their sentiments, but to own or occupy a space in an attempt to inch closer to the seat of power and topple a tyrant; however, they are frozen still like still paintings as the future of their cause is left uncertain. Neither party is moving, but it is apparent that the State as represented by the policeman with the truncheon is prepared to use violence should the tyrant order so. This is a part of history that is often relegated to the margins for most are more interested in "live action" rather than the silent tension brewing between the protesters and the government.

Rich in conceits and presented in the form of a moral dialogue, Ninoy in "A Metaphysical Dialogue Between the Bronze Man and the Great Stone Face" seems to enjoy better privilege or status over Marcos. By making Marcos admit his crimes and express penance, the persona is able to expose the issues surrounding the death of Ninoy and the cause of Marcos' downfall. The moral conversation is comparable to a confession, a disclosure of the sins committed and

an attempt to reconcile with God to redeem a former glory. Lastly, Abad's "Dead Man's Tale" speaks of violence and death as a means of gaining power. The poet also invites the audience to look at the death of Ninoy from a different perspective. Was the assassination planned? Was he not really aware that he will be shot?

The poems as counter-memories are indeed interrogations of events and personalities during Martial Law until the assassination of Ninoy. As counter-memories, they exhume the voices that were suppressed and snippets of events hidden by "official histories" by inviting readers to re-evaluate their notions of power, the writing of history and critical understanding of Martial Law.

## REFERENCES

- Almendral, G.N. (1988). *"The fall of the regime," in dictatorship and revolution: Roots of people's power*. Metro Manila: Conspectus Foundation.
- Carnivalesque. (2016). Retrieved from [www.public.asu.edu/~cajsa/eurodrama/Carnivalesque\\_summary.pdf](http://www.public.asu.edu/~cajsa/eurodrama/Carnivalesque_summary.pdf)
- de Dios, A.J., Daroy, P.B., & Kalaw-Tirol, L. (1988). *Dictatorship and revolution roots of people's power*. Manila: Conspectus Foundation Incorporated.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777-795.
- Ileto, R.C. (1985). *Critical questions on nationalism: A historian's view*. Philippines: De La Salle University.
- Medina, J. (2011). Toward a Foucaultian epistemology of resistance: Counter-memory, epistemic friction, and guerrilla pluralism. *Foucault Studies*, 12, 9-35.
- Ordonez, E.A. (2001). *Emergent literature essays on Philippine writing*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines.
- Pison, R.J.L. (2005). *Alternative histories: Martial Law novels as counter-memory*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.
- Rafael, V.L. (2000). *White love and other events in Filipino history*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.