

# Longhand

*Longhand Vol. 21 no. 3*

## Introduction

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This issue is a snapshot of an English department in flux. Like most educators, our faculty are teaching in new circumstances, learning to work online and offline, both inside and beyond our classrooms. We are reimagining our graduate programs, restructuring our committees, and exploring synergies between the curricular areas of Language, Literature, and Creative Writing. As scholars, critics, and practitioners, we are also grappling with our position as Filipinos “doing English;”<sup>1</sup> our debts to the different ways of reading and writing we have inherited; the tendency of our discipline to bleed into others; the demands, gains, and potential compromises of writing and researching within a university intent on professionalization and internationalization; and the gaps that open up between academic and creative practice and what Sara Ahmed calls “the empirical work” that is done in and that affects “the world that exists.”<sup>2</sup> Our footing is not stable, but this is actually a strength. It also brings up exciting questions. What kind of work can take place from this stance of (productive) discomfort? What kind of work are we producing in these conditions, and what methods are we using and developing in order to do this? Where do we go from here?

The entries in this issue may provide some answers.

Our Articles section contains four tenure lectures that have been delivered at the University of the Philippines’ Department of English and Comparative Literature (DECL) in the last few years, and then reworked for publication. Taken on its own, each of these lectures gives us a glimpse at the trajectory of its author’s research and at what they hope to offer or contribute to their field. The tenure lecture thus marks either the beginning or the crystallization of dedicated, potentially lifelong inquiry. Collectively, the lectures help to make a case for the

viability of the new research coming out of a department in transition. They demonstrate that innovative, useful strategies can evolve in response to topics or problems that available forms and methods aren't always built to address, especially when borrowed models or frameworks are brought into contact with Philippine contexts, research, and writing practices. There is a wealth of exciting work being done at these limits, and we are equally excited to feature some of it here.

In her examination of “De Espectáculos,” a film column published in the early twentieth century magazine, *Cultura Social*, Louise Jashil Sonido reframes a practical problem as an “enabling condition.” Absences and gaps in the Philippine film archive do not always limit understanding; rather, they spur critics and historians to reflect on and adjust their practice. In response, Sonido both argues for and models an interdisciplinary approach, balancing realist historiography, historical anthropology, and textual analysis in order to read and contextualize articles from the column. Her argument for interdisciplinarity culminates in broader questions about how this might invigorate Philippine literary criticism. Timothy Ong is similarly concerned with how well existing approaches suit specific texts and how well they work in local research contexts. In his article on the Sugidanon tradition, Ong draws on the work of ecocritics to shed light on the relationships between humans and the natural world in the Panay epics *Tikum Kadlum* and *Amburukay*. At the same time, he argues that folk conceptions of and attitudes to nature and wildness may allow us to venture beyond what he marks as ecocriticism’s “frontiers.” Research on Anglophone literature can also be motivated by the desire to expand the tools and resources of the critic. In her analysis of urban space in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The London Scene* essays, Loren Evangelista Agaloos surveys and questions the usefulness of modernist criticism that centers the male experience of public space or that portrays women as marginal figures in such spaces. She proposes the “apparition” as a figure that is better suited to Woolf’s writing than the more widely discussed “flaneur” and “flaneuse.”

Meanwhile, the complementary processes of composition and exegesis make it possible for Christine Lao to engage with difficult questions about the law as it is used (and abused) in the Philippines. In her article, Lao argues that poetry can help us conceive of the law in more productive ways, pushing back against depictions of the law as a tool for oppression. She presents and analyzes three of her own poems, relying on the conventions of the lyric poem, the sestina, and the mechanical form to make sense of her position and practice as a lawyer in the Philippines and to envision the law more optimistically. In our Creative Work section, Lakan Umali uses poetic forms pointedly as well. Her two contributions are made up of fragments, modules, and chains that invite

the reader to participate in the act of social commentary. Thomas Leonard Shaw rewrites two Philippine myths, examining love, transformation, destruction, and the nature of filial and familial relationships. We are also pleased to round out the issue with Sydney Paige Guerrero's award-winning essay about objects charged by memory and how one's artistic practice can change over time. The piece won third place in the 2019 Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio Awards for Nonfiction.

The contributions to this issue – alternative ways to analyze, critique, and litigate; and arguments for expansion, revision, and reorientation – will hopefully generate more good work. In future issues, we look forward to hearing from writers and practitioners outside the department who share a similar vision: responsive writing that comes out of immersion and enthusiasm and that therefore suits method to matter.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Robert Eaglestone, *Doing English: A Guide for Literature Students*, 4th ed. (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 9.