

from guilt to prose: a preface

editorial

Prefacing is a tedious, often reluctant, summary building; something one does to establish the shortest route to the main hub of discourse or a marketplace of ideas. As such, prefaces can be expendable distribution circuits. Once they finished concocting feedback chains, the links they created dissolved into plastic constituents of a major body of tissues, overlaid by synthetic skin toners and astringents that make wonders. Granting, that is, they were too obedient to a fault to be taken as extending the assumed values of a trove of providence of which to hold the audience in awe. Other prefaces, meanwhile, are code-repellent horses.

I am writing the preface for the 2016 issue covering a major theme "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Towards a More Responsive Philosophy for the 21st Century Crises of the Time," that is, a year backward, here and now, in the year 2017. A two-year gap can be a standard 'cheat the sheet.' But supplies are scarce, as it were. In the meantime, one passed the time until it was time to cram, when supplies from somewhere came in hordes. In brief, some were the right kinds we were waiting for to commence the editorial process. But everyone also took notice of the brief time within which everything had to be sorted out before day one of the annual conference (this year held in Baguio) where the journals were scheduled to be announced (and not just this volume and its two issues).

The 'everyone', however, happened to be just about a 'bound' coterie of five (Jeremiah Joven Joaquin, whose election to PAP Presidency I am sure many would agree is a result of more than a 'charm offensive'; Michael Hernandez,, the Editor-in-Chief, the 'brain and muscle of PAP'; Paolo Bolanos, our editorial consultant; Jayson Jimenez, a Borgesian knot I haven't quite fully discerned, and yours truly), sharing a collective syndrome of putting things together whose mechanism, if I were to describe with the usual conceit our editorial labor, ran like a horse with 'legs and hooves' toiling 'upon a



timeless sand'. That is how, in one of his most popular poems, Robert Creeley puts something in the 'The Rescue', portraying a man reckoning with time.¹

What is now crucial is to concoct that time in the form of a preface. I take it that my role as issue editor is to *defang* a noumenon of its irremissible character, a time frozen in the memories of those who had leisure to recall, assuming that by their being unheeded in the shadows of time their scholarly worth in publishable format must have already wielded today a priceless treasure.

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As a formality, I would like to begin the preface with one of J.G. Ballard's early short stories 'Chronopolis'.²

The story offers a dilettante approach to time – how to negotiate with time in an age when even time is increasingly becoming less an object of poetic contemplation, unfortunately and despite our fondness of poetry, no more 'movement of legs and hooves upon a timeless sand' as in Creeley's 'The Rescue' we just mentioned which talks of time like 'a house burning in the sand' and 'a man and horse burning' in the same way the wind burns, all 'running to arrive.' In Creeley, time arrives to punish leisure and curiosity, birthrights of what we have come to regard as philosophy. Let us first listen to Creeley:

The man sits in a timelessness
with the horse under him in time
to a movement of legs and hooves
upon a timeless sand.
Distance comes in from the foreground
present in the picture as time
he reads outward from
and comes from that beginning.
A wind blows in
and out and all about the man
as the horse ran
and runs to come in time.
A house is burning in the sand.
A man and horse are burning.

¹ See Robert Creeley, "The Rescue," *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1945-1975*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 231.

² J.G. Ballard, "Chronopolis," in *The Complete Stories of J.G. Ballard* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009), 150-168.

The wind is burning.
They are running to arrive.³

Time arrives to punish the philosopher (he burns) whose responsibility rests solely in extending time a mortal invitation. Even more so, it comes to punish what the philosopher has enabled the rest of humankind to manufacture: technology (symbolized by the 'horse'), and the settlements and structures, built environments, one can suppose (represented by the 'house'). In Ballard, however, the main character 'Newman' decides to put up a challenge to 'The Rescue' by defying the illusion of timelessness embodied by the post-apocalypse city (Creeley's vision of everything that burns when time arrives) that has outlawed the practice of mindfulness of time. It was time that had earlier ruined the idea of human progress in the city; rather than brought forth the comfort that mindfulness of time promised, it dignified the poetic vision of Creeley. Mindfulness enabled *concentration*, *concentration reflection*, *reflection judgment*, *judgment segregation*, *segregation containment*. Mindfulness, in a word, repressed leisure or comfort, and finally curiosity as everything followed the axiomatic of time-rationing in the city.

Newman sought to rediscover, in the Kantian fashion, the conditions of possibility of apocalypse before the city was ruined by time. He was the quintessential philosopher, the inquiring type. Later he found an ally (someone who was in the quest before him; no philosopher had ever arrived with novelty) in the deserted city littered by huge clocks on every single high rise where time-telling no longer availed. The time police shut them all down when, due to overpopulation, authorities were forced to ration time. The clocks were getting bigger and bigger in order to contain every minute detail of time distribution, corresponding to social classes represented by different colors on the plate. A timepiece, an individual wristwatch, could only show the time rations of a class he or she belongs. The huge clocks, however, showed not only the distribution in others, likely providing the feeling of being-with-others, but also the impersonal machine of time that owns everything. By time-rationing everyone was forced to look at time, regard time the foremost concern of existence. On the part of the authorities the awareness that they were fighting a losing battle was a game changer. Humans were insatiable companion-seekers; soon time rationing would implode. Time to arrest time, literally, throw it into prison.

Curiously, the authorities did not resort to bioengineering in the hope of reversing the propensity of the species to heed the Biblical exhortation to swell. At least the story was silent on this aspect. The crux of the matter is time in all its infinity cannot be realistically rationed; what can be were humans. When time was finally arrested, prison terms became the sole official tellers of tables. Time was allowed to exist in Plato's cave

³ Ibid.

and only in caves. Jail wardens permit the use of timepieces. Newman, eventually caught by the time police heroically resetting the clocks under the false hope of reviving the city, became its prisoner. The last time we heard of him he was having a nervous collapse with the irritating sounds of ticktocs inside his cell. Unlike being outside of time, prison term gave him freedom to accomplish two things at once, experience and speculate time as a unity of his being, a being he knew by heart is a being in time, and also of time, beyond the artificiality of their separability in pre-apocalypse days – the days of time-reckoning, of wonder, of the godding of the gods. But the new man of the post-apocalypse city (Newman) is now serving time in prison.

In the following remarks from 'Reading of Emmanuel Levinas', Creeley seemed well prepared to answer Newman's challenge to make time the fundamental issue of being when the former dedicated a poem to Levinas famous for questioning its centrality, exposing the illusion of a being inquisitive of time:

'dreams dream of dreaming
inside seeming outside
since left then gone
comes home alone.'⁴

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It makes us wonder now how to do philosophy in the age of the Creeleys. In his plenary lecture (which appears here as the carrier issue) during the 2015 PAP annual conference held in Laguna, Professor Abulad, a known pioneer of Filipino philosophy, showed us the way to challenge a Creeleyesque affront to prison time, in a manner of speaking, as it would amount to the highest unpardonable insult to the queen of all sciences, the only science perhaps that thinks, as, one should also know, Heidegger thinks.⁵

But how does philosophy think within certain confinements? Despite their emotional aversion towards an insulting Creeleyesque challenge to philosophers, especially of self-conscious types, to precipitate from their self-imposed mission of releasing fellow prisoners in their common caves, as the venture would give them no assurance of recovering from nervous collapse, much less comfort and redemption to those who would receive such a grace, philosophers, doers in their own right, are forced

⁴ See Robert Creeley, "Reading of Emmanuel Levinas," *Just in Time: Poems, 1984-1994* (New York: New Directions, 2001), 162.

⁵ See Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 6.

to reckon with their own prison terms, but only to affirm every single mad Creeley protesting against seeking time in a timelessness, but also timelessness in time. The right way to challenge the poets, the arch-nemesis of philosophy ever since Plato, is to get ahead of the times, "not behind the times."⁶ Relieved by a promise perhaps of pardon or accidental providence, one can get out of prison by running ahead of time, creatively, diligently. But time is a masterpiece only in a closed space.

Abulad offers a way with time in our troublesome age, the age bedevilled by the Creeleys, but also by a larger reality, much larger than the Creeleys. Particularly, his offer is for Filipino philosophy to thrive, caught in global hyperspace, at present threatening the relevance of the discipline by forcing it to carve up its own space through the time-bending medium of fiber optics and cable wires installed by surveillance societies that depend on satellites, a far cry from philosophy's usual approach to time – to get ahead of it. But philosophy is no match to the speed of light. Its traditional approach to this threat since Plato is to withdraw into the relieving spaces of rigor and diligence in its search for words to describe its own impotence. This impotence would spread through the time-honored apprenticeship of multiplying diligence, from one mind to the next; an innocuous serialization of monadic strivings to catch a glimpse of the outside world, for the outside remains the sole object of wonder, outside the prison where light shines in its true undiluted beauty. From time to time, there would be internal conflicts among monads as to which of them have actually seen the light, no one has, whence the origin of naming who's who, not without nurturing enmities tamed only by the elegance of style in speech and writing, which no sooner would split the blind population into devotees of competing master narratives.

Fabulation made up for lost time the entire time, glorified or accused in books, journal articles, essays, plenary speeches, etc.. Now the Newmans are busy trying to accredit fabulation to global offices of metrical tellers of tables who decide which fables are true, which are fake, whose platforms have mushroomed like unabated neural growths out of a huge synthetic brain called 'technology' manifesting a threshold proximity to the singularity phenomenon vouched by the anti-Creeleys.

If one were to ask now where in this hyperspace is the Filipino philosopher, one can cite an exhortation that Pinoy Creeleys in their post-damaged⁷ life would extremely delight at in filling in the blanks, not to mention that any kind of 'world' that philosophy can appeal to has already burned, burned by the 'times' towards which philosophy still

⁶ See Romualdo Abulad, "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Towards a More Responsive Filipino Philosophy for the 21st Century," *Suri* Vol. 5, no. 1 (2016): 3.

⁷ I am taking a liberal approach here. Post-damaged life is post-nihilism, amounting to a consciousness that any alternative to nihilism stands the risk of repeating it.

unbendingly insists on us to be sensitive (Newman's jail time hype) under the new slogan of receptiveness to damaged life:

The world in which we, Filipinos, live, cannot be divorced from our people's sufferings as defined by our own experience of oppression and deprivation, poverty and injustice, concerns which we have daily to contend with. How to live amidst our damaged character and culture, how to liberate from a past remote from the peace and equipoise of Adamic paradise, how to reckon with the rapid and radical changes of this technologically conditioned era – these realities the Filipino philosopher has not only to live with but also draw insights from. This is not merely a matter of psychology, as Husserl and the others earlier told us; to face these challenges we need, yes, an ontologically transformed self.⁸

This could well be a no-nonsense challenge to philosophy to defeat capitalism, for such transformation to take place, or hope that one day it performs an auto-critique, before the next cycle of species extinction takes its toll on the most vulnerable. The worst one can fear is the sixth cycle doom may come quicker than anticipated, ahead of what is possible for something like capitalist conscience to pull or draw, if at all, in behalf of humanity, including the poor inhabitants of this Pearl of the Orient. What has become instead an ironic truism tells of a much dimmer prospect: it is easy to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. As the issue stands, I leave its irresolute resolution to the reader.

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Nietzsche once said that what is important is not the news that God is dead but the time it takes to bear fruit.⁹ The death of God is the death of time as sitting timelessness which refuses to concede. Here, Mr. Palomar's words (let us leave Newman for a brief while) expand Nietzsche's vision into a wonderful prose, a cut stone of wisdom for its piercing irony, a work of cunning dialectics:

'If time has to end, it can be described, instant by instant,' Palomar thinks, 'and each instant, when described, expands so that its end can no longer be seen.' He

⁸ Abulad, "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines," 19.

⁹ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 106.

decides that he will set himself to describing every instant of his life, and until he has described them all he will no longer think of being dead.¹⁰

This episode in Italo Calvino's best-selling philosophical novel shows how nihilism occurs when philosophy refuses to concede to conscious fiction; to a post-damaged life consciousness that the very nihilism it opposes is the same nihilism it is guilty of making. The magic circle of immanence is unstoppable unless philosophy recognizes it is dead. Until it buries itself it cannot teach; it remains cyclical in its consciousness of time, thus also its idea of being, incapable of imparting something to generations.

It is in this context that the reader may find Marella Ada Mancenida-Bolanos's essay transcending philosophy's negativity by asking the question, "How Do We Teach Values to Children?" I am tempted to say that, at last, philosophy has learned its lesson by infracting its cyclical time. When philosophy is ready to teach that is the time it fully accepts the futility of extending every instant of time in the hope of prolonging its relevance by refusing internment – its corpse, probably overlaid in wax, an assurance of a long line of funeral goers and a relieved throng of pallbearers dressed to occasion. Neither motivated by time-honored apprenticeship (children are instead playful co-conspirators in the weaving of imaginative life and who unfortunately may not choose philosophy as a profession when they come of ripe age), nor urged by the 'prison time of being' to expand every instant of time so that it can no longer see its end (children are far more creative than a professional lunatic), the essay reaches out to the future and end of philosophy – the child, the Levinasian third to whom responsibility is extended, and not knowledge that has been thoroughly inventoried by reason.¹¹ In Mancenida-Bolanos's essay, however, whatever insinuation we can make regarding its Levinasian subtext, for all its worth, is gracefully subdued by the major voices of the text, Max Scheler and Matthew Lipman, which I now leave the reader to break down according to his or her preferred framing approaches, or allow its poise and substance to freely engage.

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In the meantime, I would like to give the reader names to consider – Amartya, Niccolo, Immanuel, Hannah.

One should not ask on impulse who they are, inasmuch as the question presupposes of a doer who, as my mentor Luis S. David, S.J., would elegantly put it, in his

¹⁰ Italo Calvino, *Mr. Palomar* (London: Vintage, 1999), 112-13.

¹¹ See Immanuel Kant, "Preface to the Second Edition," *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Markus Weigelt (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 18-19; B xvi-xvii.

many lectures on Nietzsche, might be wielding dangerous supernatural jujus that you would wish you had not summoned, even by accident. Some of you know these names. But that is not the point of not asking 'who'.

As it is always the case that the subject behind the action or deed is a presumptuous shadow of an even more spectral entity, who knows what it is like, any such attribution of identity can end up in a disastrous collaboration of Lovecraftian monsters. It took odd distances of time to unravel the monsters behind the facade of reason. As creatures of nature they too love to hide. When Hegel in his *Phenomenology* forced existence into the Spirit, H.P. Lovecraft responded in his published tales by revealing what this cunning of reason could yield – **Cthulhu**, mother of all horrors, taking the world hostage to unspeakable evil.¹²

Cthulhu is the symbol of everything devastated by the hubris of reason, taking a toll on human lives and natural habitats, mostly in the trail of periodic wars and the banality of human corruptibility that reason, enslaved to *chronos* and money, administers to cunning perfection.

The "Call of Cthulhu," Lovecraft's carrier story of nearly all his tales, is a post-metaphysical response to nihilism that reason refuses to admit it alone had summoned from the depths, now terrorizing the planet. All philosophies after Lovecraft are thus responses to this call be they anthropological or descriptive. Not to overpower **Cthulhu** – as recent history has shown, it is unbeatable – but to give this monster the opportunity to unmask its maker, reason, spellbound to time and capital. That means welcoming mother **Cthulhu** as the inevitability of disaster,¹³ if only by preparing a welcome party to it humankind may cushion the shock to prevent further damage like mangroves can do in the face of a raging tsunami.

So, when four Filipino authors appeal to the names of Amartya Sen, Kant, Arendt, and many others, I would like to believe that they are responding to the call. Also, each of them tells us to hesitate. There are renegade **Cthulhus**, party poopers, waiting in ambush. And by Lovecraft's lights alone, Rizalino Malabed's "Is Philippine Politics Machiavellian? The fox, redeemer, citizen in doubled Philippine Politics," to begin with, is a hesitant Machiavellian. Every imaginable **Cthulhu** likes Machiavelli as the party host; he had to conceal his true political agenda as demanded by the anomic timelessness of his time. It is what makes Machiavelli a free zone, which makes his prose all the more potentially

¹² See H.P. Lovecraft, *The Call of Cthulhu and other Weird Stories*, trans. S.T. Joshi (New York: Penguin, 2016).

¹³ See Paul Virilio, *The Original Accident*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2005).

disastrous. As Paul Virilio argued in one interview, all historical time is local time.¹⁴ When thus applied as if Machiavelli's ideas were astronomical, a unified time that is universally relevant, they become recipes for totalitarian control.

A curious accommodating gesture toward **Cthulucene**,¹⁵ one of the fashionable names of post-development capitalism today, argues for a similar caution when putting up with a monster that has outlived its days hiding from history. It may be incorrect to call it a monster. In fact, in Kevin Ross Nera's "Democratic Reasoning and Epistemic Violence: Insights from Amartya Sen," **Cthulhu** evolves into a democracy that works, though much still need improvement, hence, the cautionary tale of "government by discussion,"¹⁶ allowing different sections of society to narrate the concrete impacts of the ravages of **Cthulhu** with the purpose of drawing negotiable terms on how to mitigate them in the foreseeable future. By this measure, the reader can agree with Rex-Belli Alejandro, in his essay "Genuine Antagonisms and the Right Use of Reason: Conditions of Genuine Democracy in Kant," that knowing the world (now that it has changed drastically) will not be sufficient to mitigate the impacts, but one has to 'have the world' by participating in it, in effect, an attempt to humanize **Cthulhu**. In standard Filipino participatory politics, this means electoral democracy. **Cthulhu** is aware of your ballot; thus Joel Granada, SDB, seems to say in his Arendtian disambiguation of non-participation in "Filipino Democracy Through Arendt's Looking Glass." No. Not Alice's and the proverbial glass.

This is non-fiction.

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Meanwhile, for a descriptively minded consciousness, the use of the anthropological, historical-time, method does not make a thesis in the right or correct sense, but one makes of its fizzing contingency and finitude, vis-à-vis its rival's universalist and transcendent clichés, to become a dabbler, a dilettante, a flaneur, a poet, refractory to titles of expert, professor, competent book writer, thinker.

Now, I can imagine here Rochie Matienzo, tight roping on a dangerous path to a Lovecraftian encounter, dangerous in the eyes of hardcore anti-anthropological Newmans of our new age. The Newmans are those Virilio would speak of harboring an

¹⁴ See Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst: Interview with Philippe Petit*, trans. Michael Cavaliere, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1999), 13.

¹⁵ See Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

¹⁶ Kevin Ross Nera, "Democratic Reasoning and Epistemic Violence: Insights from Amartya Sen," *Suri* 5, no. 1 (2016): 63.

astronomical conception of time.¹⁷ Matienzo's time in "The Religious Experience of Hermano Puli's Cofradia and the Seeding of 1896 Philippine Revolution" is historical time.

But then again, Virilio also speaks of returning to the city as Newman did in 'Chronopolis', arguing that the turn to universal time, to real time, live time, is an irreversible planetary event – time ahead, not past. Except in Virilio, not in Newman, real time is a result of mindfulness that Creeley lamented, perhaps best nurtured in descriptive analogies, exploratory surveys and inventories of landscapes, that need be imagined here, in order to produce the desirable effects in the faculties, as uncharted, chaste, exotic. In other words, Newman's return to the city is driven by lust for virginal landscapes overlaid by desolation, those that by resetting the clocks in the city could be hopefully restored. It seems past mindfulnesses of time had been wrongly minded and timed.

Sure, Matienzo's historical time has no pretention; its very lack of pretension is its own Lovecraftian epiphany, gazing at the workings of the apocalypse of reason, a trail of afflicted metaphysical *a priori*s whose powers during Lent soared at their peak when supernatural spirits descended from the mountains, at most to commiserate with the plight of the living. In fact, it is descriptive of a time not lost but rather repressed – that is, by the astronomical time of the present. Its being repressed does not guarantee it the Freudian axe to grind, the 'return of the repressed' churning out the likes of Frankenstein. **Cthulhu** is not this repressed time yielding vengeful tales; rather, it is reason nostalgic of the landscape familiar to philosophers. For one, modern instrumental reason has turned philosophers' caves into high rise condominiums to keep the passion alive (Jose Saramago's novel *The Cave* quickly comes to mind),¹⁸ but not lacking in tales of ghosts, horrors and mysteries, haunting nighttime sleep, granting, everyone ever sleeps.

By this light, if Bernado Caslib's entry, "Aquinas: On Ethics and Moral Education in Contemporary Times," is not a reconstructive tale of philosophy that is haunted by its onto-theological roots (if one suspects Heidegger was bluffing), it might be read instead as a serious attempt at art. Lovecraft would love the mysterious tiara worn by an alien-looking priest who presides over a **Cthulhu** clan in a remote country village to match any such kind of reconstructive aestheticism of grief-stricken mind, in the hope of finding 'something' to restore, and thereof extend philosophy's dystopian midnight. In our local literary scene, Allan Derain's *Ang Banal na Aklat ng mga Kumag* is an exceptional

¹⁷ Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst*, 13.

¹⁸ See Jose Saramago, *The Cave*, trans. Margaret Costa (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2002).

speculative tale with a remarkably folk intellectual taste, brilliantly effortless.¹⁹ But seriously, there is a streak of tragic vision in all this, a theme that harks back to Nietzsche. Jeff Bartilet's "Nietzsche's Tragic Vision" is therefore a welcome refresher, offering an equanimity of thought, distressed by the cyberpunk age that has also fast becoming a spent shadow of what is cooking up in a post-control society, past the time of the flight of the idols that the case of Newman had unraveled. Therefore, a must read.

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Lastly, and needless to say, the Newmans are *trapped* in the identities they fetishize, hence, the extreme significance of Michael Roland F. Hernandez's "Trapped Identities: Filipinization and the Problem of a Nationalist Historiography" that caps this volume of *Suri*. The Newmans' lust for 'description' and 'exploration' is exposed. Hernandez describes these academic notions as indicative of the virulence of translation: "Within the historical and social text, this becomes an attempt to substitute one set of signifiers in place of another – a manifest translation of the violence necessarily connected with the possession of knowledge-identity from one text/context to another."²⁰ The Newmans of the archipelago like the big ones they emulate in the West are trapped in a time, otherwise given leave by *chronos* and money, to measure and experience timelessness in time and its obnoxious double, all in the dungeons of **Cthulhu**. As several speeches we have heard in the past discombobulate these terms, 'description' and 'exploration' have also "become obsessive-compulsive [conditions] for all emancipatory agenda."²¹ Once again, the philosophers come into the picture, liberators of fellow-prisoners.

But I can only leave the reader to connect this dystopian narrative of *Chronocapitalism*, as it began with Ballard's tale in the opening sections of the preface, to Hernandez's masterful handling of how **Cthulhu** is fetishized in Filipino thinking since this monster set afoot in the archipelago. Hyperbolic as it may sound, however, I wish the reader can learn in Hernandez's well-researched essay, for instance, the defining social and historical context of the making of the **First Filipino**, the most highly fetishized concept

¹⁹ Allan N. Derain, *Ang Banal na Aklat ng mga Kumag* (Mandaluyong, Philippines: Cacho Publishing House, 2014).

²⁰ Michael Roland F. Hernandez, "Trapped Identities: Filipinization and the Problems of a Nationalist Historiography," *Suri* 5, no. 2 (2016): 156.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

in the nomenclature of Philippine studies, as no less the handiwork of a secret society of **Cthulhu** in the twilight of the 19th century over this side of the Pacific.

Now, as to why this preamble, by any other name a preface (in case you're lost), is titled the way it did, as far as I could recall, one dystopian midnight, a whim passed over me and thought how words can burrow in sandstones.

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