

GAWAD PLARIDEL LECTURE 2013

Jose F. Lacaba

On 24 July 2013, the Gawad Plaridel, the highest award given by the University of the Philippines (U.P.) to outstanding media practitioners, was conferred by U.P. President Alfredo E. Pascual in the presence of U.P. Diliman Chancellor Caesar A. Saloma, Professor Emeritus Dr. Nicanor G. Tiongson, and U.P. College of Mass Communication (CMC) Dean Rolando B. Tolentino, on poet, screenplaywright, teacher activist, writer, and journalist Jose F. “Pete” Lacaba for his moving and enlightening use of the pen for public service.

This issue of *Plaridel* publishes three documents relevant to the proclamation of Pete Lacaba as 2013 Gawad Plaridel awardee: first, the official citation which enumerates and describes the achievements for which Mr. Lacaba is being recognized; second, an essay on the life and works of the awardee by CMC Journalism Department faculty member Evelyn O. Katigbak; and third, the Gawad Plaridel speech of the awardee.

The Gawad Plaridel 2013 Citation for Jose F. Lacaba

For chronicling and interpreting for succeeding generations the third stage of the Filipino struggle for social transformation, independence, and progress during the 1960s and 1970s through the now classic *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage* collection and dozens of other articles in newspapers and magazines;

For a lifetime of dedication to the profession of writing through a variety of forms in which he excelled, among them poetry, fiction, the essay, feature articles, translations, and adaptations, in both English and Filipino, resulting in works such as *Sa Daigdig ng Kontradiksiyon* and *Mga Kagila-gilalas na Pakikipagsapalaran*, that, already unequalled for their distinction, relevance, and variety, also raised the bar of excellence for literature and literary journalism;

For crafting moving and enlightening screenplays based on actual events and timely social issues, such as the involvement of nuns and priests in the workers' movement (*Sister Stella L.*), the oppression of workers during the martial law period (*Kapit sa Patalim: Bayan Ko*), and the provenance and persistence of human rights violations (*Orapronobis*)—all of which demonstrate that he did not hesitate to venture into a popular art form once disdained by ivory tower artists, and that he believed that artists should reach out to the majority of Filipinos through the popular medium of film;

For editing across four decades publications such as *Asia-Philippines Leader* and *Midweek Magazine*, which were distinguished for publishing some of the best writing that has ever been done in Philippine journalism, and pioneering in the attention to detail and their significance that have since become the standard in the practice of investigative journalism in the Philippines;

For raising the standards of entertainment reporting and writing through his engagement as consultant and writer in popular show business publications, and contributing to the growth and modernization of the national language through his articles and columns on language such as *Showbiz Lengua*;

For teaching in the College of Mass Communication and the College of Arts and Letters of the University of the Philippines subjects like screenwriting, poetry, literary journalism, interpretative reporting, feature writing, introduction to journalism, and Rizal's life and works; as well as supervising the internship program of the Department of Journalism of the College of Mass Communication as part of his allegiance to the education of future communication and media professionals; and

For bravely leading, despite the perils to life and liberty, the Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP) and Panulat para sa Kaunlaran ng Sambayanan (PAKSA), in the process demonstrating that the writer/artist must commit himself or herself to the human imperative to understand the world in order to change it through collective action;

The 2013 U.P. Gawad Plaridel is hereby presented to Jose F. Lacaba—journalist, poet, screenplaywright, teacher, activist, and former political prisoner. (Citation, 2013, p. 7)

**Pete Lacaba:
A Writer for All Generations**

Evelyn O. Katigbak

Ginoong Lacaba, saang planeta ka nanggaling? (Mr. Lacaba, from what planet are you?)

How often has this question been asked of this journalist/editor, poet, screenplaywright, and “*lenguador?*” Jose F. Lacaba’s genius as a writer is so extraordinary some might wonder if he’s from this planet. Jose F. “Pete” Lacaba is this year’s U.P. Gawad Plaridel recipient for print, but he might as well be Plaridel’s awardee for film and television, and for poetry, adaptation and translation as well, if the award had those categories.

To many of his friends, colleagues, and readers, he is Pete (Lacaba, 2008), which nickname, as he explains in his blog, *kapetesapatalim.blogspot.com*, he came to by a roundabout route:

“Usual byline: Jose F. Lacaba. Full name: Jose Maria Flores Lacaba Jr. The late Jose Sr. was nicknamed Pepe, so Jr. was nicknamed Pepito, the little Pepe. In college, Pepito’s nickname got shortened to Pito, then Pit, but the last gave rise to jokes about armpits, so Pit was respelled Pete.” (para. 1)

Spanning almost five decades, his works in print are replete with the kind of humor that makes readers think seriously about the truth behind the joke.

Fate played a joke on him in 1964, when he dropped out of college in his third year in a school other than U.P. Some may find that regrettable, but that school’s loss was journalism’s gain. Lacaba began his career in journalism in 1965. He was first a copyeditor and proofreader, and later a staff writer at the *Philippines Free Press*, where, despite his youth, he found himself in the company of, among others, Nick Joaquin and Gregorio Brillantes.

Lacaba’s years at the *Free Press* were difficult years for the Philippine media. Not only was repression evident in the enforced disappearances and the suppression of dissent during the Marcos administration, there was also more than enough stupidity in the politics of the period to make satire easy for the young Lacaba.

In article after article, Lacaba perfected that mix of humor and seriousness that has made his brand the envy of other writers. His *Free Press* articles in

Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage, which was first published in 1982, reprinted in 1986, and then revised for printing again in 2003, have evolved into models of both good reads as well as insight. Lacaba was writing lengthy magazine articles about demonstrations and political issues that actually held the reader's interest, and that were, as a result, actually read.

While writing for the *Free Press*, Lacaba busied himself with union concerns, and by 1970, was vice-president of the Free Press Labor Union. This involvement with the union led to his departure from the company, together with Nick Joaquin and Gregorio Brillantes. With Joaquin and Brillantes, Lacaba founded in the same year the weekly magazine *Asia-Philippines Leader*, with Joaquin as editor and Lacaba as executive editor.

Asia-Philippines Leader was shut down by the government when Marcos declared martial law in 1972. Lacaba joined the underground resistance, but was captured and detained from 1974 until 1976 with other progressive journalists and writers.

He was newly married when martial law was declared and his firstborn had not even turned a year old. Later, recalling those times, he would write to his son, Kris (Lacaba, 2011):

But before your first birthday, a giant asshole declared Martial Law, forcing me to abandon both my marital and paternal duties. When we next saw each other, I was in the underground resistance and it wasn't an easy thing to take you out to play in the yard or the community playground. And then after that I was just someone behind bars that you visited once a week for nearly two years, and who brainwashed you into replying, when anyone asked where your father was: 'Ikinulong ni Marcos.' (para. 5)

The journalist who was imprisoned by Marcos continued to “brainwash” many others when he was released in 1976, when, looking at the desert martial law had made of journalism, he ventured into writing for television. Together with his wife, Marra PL. Lanot, Lacaba wrote the teleplays for *Antigo* in 1976 (aired over Channel 4) and *Sunod sa Agos* in 1978 (aired over Channel 9).

He continued with his journalism work, becoming editor of the monthly magazine *The Review* and later, columnist for what were arguably the most daring aboveground publications of the period, the weekly magazine *Mr. & Ms.* and newspaper of the period and the daily newspaper *We Forum*.

It was in the early years of martial law, before his arrest, that Lacaba's poem “Prometheus Unbound” was published in *Focus Magazine*. Unbeknownst to the editors of the magazine—editors close to Ferdinand Marcos—the first

letters of each line of the poem spelled out the street cry, MARCOS HITLER DIKTADOR TUTA.

Lacaba also wrote and co-wrote the screenplays of what would later become classic films that exposed the realities that the Marcos regime tried to conceal. These films include *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim (My Country: On a Knife's Edge)* and *Sister Stella L.* (co-written with Jose Almojuela and Mike de Leon).

Both films were completed in 1984. *Sister Stella L.* was shown commercially that year and bagged the Best Screenplay awards from both Urian and the Film Academy of the Philippines (FAP). *Bayan Ko*, on the other hand, was banned from exhibition that year, while reaping recognition in international competitions. A year later, a Supreme Court decision allowed the film's commercial screening in the Philippines. *Bayan Ko* also won for Lacaba the Best Screenplay award from both Urian and FAP in 1985.

Apart from *Sister Stella L.* and *Bayan Ko*, he also wrote the screenplays for classic Lino Brocka films *Orapronobis* (a film banned from commercial screening until today), *Experience* (co-written with Roy Iglesias), *Angela Markado*, and *Jaguar* (co-written with Ricardo Lee); Cinemanila founder Tikoy Aguiluz' *Tatsulok*, *Rizal sa Dapitan*, *Segurista* (co-written with Amado Lacuesta), *Bagong Bayani* and *Boatman* (credited with additional scenes and dialogue); and six other films by other directors. He also wrote the scripts for seven short films and documentaries.

Many of these films were exhibited in international competitions. Lacaba himself wrote the English subtitles for a number of these films. A poet as well as a journalist, essayist, and screenplay wright, he also wrote the lyrics of some of his scripted movies' theme songs.

Lacaba did not leave journalism despite his success in the film industry. From 1985 to 1990, he was editor-in-chief of another alternative publication, *National Midweek*.

From *Midweek* magazine Lacaba went on to become executive editor and later editor of the *Philippine Graphic* from 1990 to 1993; editorial consultant at the alternative news agency Philippine News and Features in 1994; columnist and editorial consultant of the *Manila Times* from 1996-1997; columnist of *Diario Uno*, *Pinoy Times*, and *Maximo* from 1998 to 2003, when he joined *Yes! Magazine* as Executive Editor and columnist—posts he has held to the present, and where he has contributed immensely to the development of entertainment writing, a journalistic genre that has for too long been regarded as a kind of poor cousin of such supposedly more serious genres as investigative, explanatory and interpretive writing as well as news reporting.

From 1991 to 2010 Lacaba authored nine books, among them three selections of his poems in Filipino, poetry translations from English to Filipino, a biography, and a book on the language of show business, *Showbiz Lengua: Chika & Chismax About Chuvachuchu*, which continues to be a blockbuster at the bookstores. He has edited six other books, among them his brother Emmanuel's books of poems and prose; adapted popular foreign songs into Tagalog; provided the Tagalog dialogue for dubbed foreign films and Nick Joaquin's *Fathers and Sons*, among others.

In the course of almost five decades of distinguished work in print, television, and film, Lacaba has amassed numerous awards and honors, among them the Gawad Francisco Balagtas for contributions to the advancement of the Filipino language; three Lifetime Achievement Awards for film, including the Aruna Vasudev Award for cinema writing at the 10th Osian's-Cinefan Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema in New Delhi, India; the Cultural Center Centennial Honor for the Arts honoring 100 artists of the last 100 years in celebration of the centennial of Philippine independence; the National Press Club award for best editorial writing; the National Book Award for poetry; the Carlos Palanca Memorial Award for poetry; the Urian and Manila Film Festival Awards for best screenplay; the Star, Famas, and FAP Awards also for screenplay; and the Catholic Mass Media Award for best song.

In between all this, in addition to his works' being anthologized, Lacaba also taught screenwriting, poetry, literary journalism, interpretive reporting, feature writing, and Rizal's life and works at the College of Mass Communication and the College of Arts and Letters of the University of the Philippines; and screenwriting and creative writing at the Ateneo de Manila University.

Lacaba's extraordinary creative and multimedia talents make him truly unique. Never having been an ivory tower writer, he has also endeared himself to many ordinary mortals. An exemplary writer in both English and Filipino, he has a following that crosses generations, from his contemporaries during the martial law years to his students during the post-EDSA years, among whom he is widely admired both for his commitment to writing and communication as fundamental to the human imperative to understand the world, and also for his rare ability to meld the craft of writing with the necessity to communicate.

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Mr. Jose F. Lacaba accepts the UP Gawad Plaridel (2013) Award. From left: Former UP College of Mass Communication (CMC) and Professor Emeritus Dr. Nicanor G. Tiongson, UP President Alfredo E. Pascual, Mr. Jose F. Lacaba, UP Diliman Chancellor Caesar A. Saloma, and College of Mass Communication Dean Rolando B. Tolentino.

HARNESSING JOURNALISM FOR NATION-BUILDING

Ni Jose F. Lacaba

Bago ang lahat ay gusto kong magpasalamat sa University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication sa pagkakaloob sa akin ng Gawad Plaridel para sa peryodismo.

Dagdag na pasasalamat din para sa tropeo na likha ng National Artist Napoleon “Billy” Abueva, usa ka Bol-anon, isang Boholano, kaprobinsiya ng yumao kong amang si Jose Monreal Lacaba Sr.

Nagkataon naman na ang gawad na ito ay kapangalan ng Plaridel Papers, ang yahogroup o egroup o online forum na itinatag ko noong 1999, maglalabing-apat na taon na ngayon ang nakararaan. Ang paggamit ko ng pangalang iyan para sa aking egroup ay ihiningi ko ng permiso sa Free Legal Assistance Group, o FLAG, na dati ay may newsletter na *Plaridel Papers* din ang pangalan. Sa totoo lang, iniisip ko na sanang sarhan na ang aking egroup, dahil naging bulletin board na lang siya sa kalakhan, at hindi na tulad ng dati na discussion group ng mga mahilig sa umaatikabong balitaktakan. Ngayon, nagdadalawang-

isip na ako kung sarasahan ko nga ang Plaridel Papers egroup, dahil eto nga't nabiyayaan ako ng Gawad Plaridel.

Malaking karangalan itong ipinagkakaloob ninyo sa akin ngayong araw na ito. Kaya lang, aaminin ko na medyo nalula ako sa papuri na lumabas sa press release tungkol sa aking Gawad Plaridel. Ito ang lumabas sa mga diyaryo: "He also raised the bar of excellence for literary journalism to a level unprecedented in the history of Philippine contemporary journalism."

Wow! Super! Sabi nga sa kanto, nag-level-up!

Ayoko namang masabing sobra akong nagpapa-humble. Pero kung ako ang tatanungin, hindi ko rin naman sasabihing "unprecedented" ang level na inabot ng aking pagsusulat bilang peryodista, bilang reporter at feature writer at kolumnista.

Nang mapasok ako sa peryodismo noong ikalawang hati ng Dekada Sisenta, kabilang sa mga nadatnan ko sa editorial staff ng lingguhang magasing *Philippines Free Press* ay sina Nick Joaquin, Kerima Polotan, Wilfrido D. Nolleto, at Gregorio C. Brillantes, pati na rin ang editor-in-chief na si Teodoro M. Locsin, mga beterano at premyadong kuwentista, nobelista, at makata na sumabak sa peryodismo. Sila ang mga naging mentor ko noon, ang nagpapakita ng magagandang ehemplo sa kanilang panulat, ang nagbibigay ng mga tips at payo kung kinakailangan. Kung tutuusin, sila ang aking mga "precedents," wika nga.

Sa madaling salita, hindi unprecedented ang antas na inabot ng literary journalism sa panulat ng inyong abang lingkod. May mga nauna na sa akin. Sila ang masasabi nating nauna na sa pagpapataas ng bar of excellence sa larangan ng literary journalism, na kung tawagin noong panahong iyon ay reportage o new journalism, at kilala rin ngayon sa tawag na creative nonfiction. Saludo ako sa kanila. Salamat sa kanila, naging journalist ang isang makatang sampay-bakod at English major na hindi naman nakapag-aral ng journalism sa kolehiyo. Salamat sa kanila ay tinatanggap ko ngayon ang Gawad Plaridel para sa peryodismo.

Sapagkat pinahahalagahan sa peryodismo ang transparency, babanggitin ko na rin dito ang hindi naman lingid sa marami sa inyo: na ang UP College of Mass Communication, o Masscom, itong institusyon na nagbibigay sa akin ngayon ng Gawad Plaridel, ay matagal-tagal ko ring pinagtrabahuhan bilang lecturer.

Naging lecturer din naman ako sa iba't ibang institusyon dito sa UP, kabilang ang Departamento ng Filipino at ang Creative Writing Center (na balita ko'y Institute of Creative Writing na ngayon), at nagturo din ako sa aking alma mater na Ateneo de Manila. Pero sa UP Masscom talaga ako nagtagal sa pagtuturo. Doon ako nagturo ng iba't ibang subjects—scriptwriting, introduction to journalism, feature writing, interpretative reporting, literary journalism—at doon, mula sa pagiging simpleng lecturer ay umabante ako sa pagiging senior lecturer at professorial lecturer.

Hebigat din iyang professorial lecturer. Ibig sabihin, medyo kahanay ko na ang mga propesor na may M.A. o Ph.D. Ibig sabihin, mula sa pagiging Sir Pete, knight of the editorial desk, ako’y naging Professor Lacaba.

Kung sa bagay, sideline ko lang naman ang pagtuturo—isang araw sa loob ng isang linggo, tatlong oras sa loob ng isang araw. Sa mas maraming araw at oras, patuloy akong nagtrabaho bilang peryodista at, paminsan-minsan, bilang mandudulang pampelikula. Pero nakawilihan ko rin ang pagtuturo. Masarap isipin na may naibabahagi akong kahit kaunting karunungan sa mga kabataan, at ako naman ay may napupulot ding ilang bagong kaalaman mula sa kanila.

Maaari din namang nakawilihan ko ang pagtuturo dahil galing ako sa pamilya ng mga guro. Nasa genes, kumbaga. Ang aking ina, si Fe Flores Lacaba, ay matagal na naging guro ng subject na sa simula’y tinawag na National Language at sa kalaunan ay tinawag na Pilipino. Ang dalawa sa nakababata niyang kapatid ay naging guro dito sa UP: si Paulina Flores Bautista ay nagturo sa mismong Masscom, at si Virginia Flores Abaya ay nagturo ng chemistry.

Guro din ang kanilang inang si Sergia at ang kanilang stepmother na si Maria. Ang Lola Maria, na siyang inabutan ko, ay may sarili niyang pribadong kindergarten school sa ground floor ng bahay namin sa Pateros. Ang tawag sa kindergarten na iyon, puwera biro, ay Eskuwelahang Diyes. Kasi ang tuition fee ay diyes sentimos sa isang araw. Sa mga araw na absent ka, hindi mo na kailangang bayaran ang diyes sentimos. Puwera biro.

Tulad ng nasabi ko na, nakawilihan ko nga ang pagtuturo. Pero wala naman akong college degree, hanggang third year college lang ang inabot ko, at nag-dropout na ako pagkaraan ng unang semester ng fourth year, kaya okey na sa akin na lecturer lang ako. Hindi ko hinangad na maging miyembro ng regular faculty.

Suwerte na rin. Kasi, kung naging miyembro ako ng regular faculty, hindi ako maaaring ma-nominate man lang para sa Gawad Plaridel, alinsunod sa mga alituntunin ng parangal na ito.

Napahaba itong aking panimulang kakuwanan. Ang talagang dapat kong gawin ngayon ay magbigay ng lecture.

Sa totoo lang, takot akong mag-lecture. Hirap na hirap akong mag-lecture. Baka kinokonsensiya ako ng isang satirikal na pangungusap na attributed kay Mark Twain (pero hindi pala siya ang talagang maysabi o maysulat): “College is a place where a professor’s lecture notes go straight to the students’ lecture notes, without passing through the brains of either.”

Oo, lecturer ang tawag sa UP sa katulad kong part-time teacher, pero kadalasan ay iniwasan kong mag-lecture. Workshop style ang ginagawa ko sa pagtuturo. Binibigyan ko ang mga estudyante ko ng writing assignment—halimbawa, “O, sumama kayo sa rali sa darating na SONA, at pagkatapos, sulatin ninyo ang inyong nakita at narinig at nasagap at nalanghap, pero hindi bilang straight news report”—at pagkatapos ay kini-critique at tinatalakay ko at ng buong klase ang isinumite nilang assignment.

Dahil hindi ko nga nakasanayang mag-lecture sa klase, hindi ko naiwasang kabahan nang kaunti nang ipagbigay-alam sa akin na kaakibat nitong parangal ay ang pagbibigay ng isang lecture.

Ang paksang iminungkahi para sa aking lecture ay “Harnessing Journalism for Nation-Building.”

Seryosong usapin ito, saloob-loob ko. Medyo academic lecture ito, hindi basta-basta reportage o bara-barang kolum. Nagagawa ko namang tumalakay sa mga seryosong usapin noong nagsusulat pa ako ng editoryal para sa mga magasing *Free Press sa Wikang Pilipino*, *Asia-Philippines Leader*, *National Midweek*, at *Philippine Graphic*. Pero maikli lang ang mga editoryal, samantalang ang lecture para sa Gawad Plaridel ay dapat daw na humigit-kumulang sa bente-singko minutos.

Nang umupo na ako sa harap ng aking laptop para sulatin ang lecture, muli akong nabahala noong pinag-iisipan ko na ang iminungkahing paksa. “Harnessing Journalism for Nation-Building” ang sabi. Teka muna. Harnessing?

Totoo, ang “harness” bilang pandiwa, o verb, ay may kahulugang “utilize, make use of.” Puwede mong i-harness o gamitin, halimbawa, ang liwanag at init ng araw para magkaroon ng ilaw sa mga bahay na walang elektrisidad. Malinaw na ang pakahulugan sa “harnessing” sa iminungkahing paksa ay ang paggamit ng peryodismo para sa marangal na layunin na pagtatatag, o pagpapatatag, ng ating lupang hinirang at bayang magiliw.

Sa kabilang dako, ang “harness” bilang pangngalan, o noun, ay may kahulugan ding “a piece of equipment, with straps and fastenings, used to control or hold in place a person, animal or object.” Iyan ay ayon sa *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*¹.

Sa pakahulugang iyan, ang literal na larawang pumasok sa suspetsosong utak ko ay ang harness, o singkaw, na ginagamit sa kabayo o kalabaw. Ang nasabing singkaw ay may kung ano-anong strap na nakakabit o nakakapit sa bibig, leeg, at dibdib ng mga hayop na ito, at ginagamit para kontrolin sila o panatilihin sila sa isang lugar: “used to control or hold in place a person, animal or object.”

Ganyan ba ang gusto nating mangyari sa ating peryodismo? Gusto ba natin itong may singkaw at renda, may harness, sa halip na malayang gumagala sa lunsod at nayon, sa lipunan at sa bansa? Paano na ang freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of expression?

Bumalik sa alaala ang panahon ng batas militar. Noon, ang peryodismo ay may piring sa mata, may busal sa bibig, may tanikala sa buong katawan. Ang mga peryodistang tumututol o kumakalaban sa naghaharing rehimen ay ipinasok sa kulungan o nawalan ng trabaho dahil sinarhan ang pinapasukan nilang diyaryo o magasin. Kasunod nito’y pinalaganap ang konsepto o teorya ng development journalism, o developmental journalism. Binigyan ito ng pakahulugan na ang peryodismo ay may responsibilidad na paunlarin o isulong ang Bagong Lipunan, kuno, na itinatangyud ng rehimeng militar.

Sa kalaunan ay nanganak ng tiyanak ang konseptong ito. Isinilang, o baka nabigyan lang ng bagong pangalan, ang konsepto naman ng envelopmental journalism. Dito, nalipat ang sisi sa mga peryodista mismo—ang mga peryodistang tumatanggap ng envelope na puno ng pera; ang mga hao shiao na nalulong sa korupsiyon at lantarang nanghihingi ng anda, o “ang datung”; ang mga doble-karang AC/DC, o mga tagamidyang ang gawain ay “attack and collect, defend and collect.”

Medyo nadiskaril ang andar ng utak ko dahil nga sa isang literal na kahulugan ng “harness.” Pero pagkatapos ay napag-isip-isip ko na hindi naman iisa lang ang klase ng harness. May harness din naman na isinusuot sa mga asong gumagabay sa mga bulag na tao. May harness na nagbibigay-proteksiyon sa mga manggagawang nagtatrabaho sa matataas na gusali. Mismong ang harness ng kabayo at kalabaw ay may silbi sa tao—para dalhin ang biyahero sa ibang lugar, para bungkalin ang lupang pagtatamnan ng pagkaing bubuhay sa tao.

Malinaw naman sa ating lahat na ibang klase ang “harnessing” na iminungkahing paksain ng lecture na ito. Malinaw na ang gusto nating malaman ay kung paano iha-harness o magagamit ang peryodismo para mapaunlad at mapatatag ang ating bansa.

Paano nga ba?

Kung ako ang tatanungin, simple lang ang isasagot ko: Patuloy na igiit at ipaglaban, at lalong patatagin, ang kalayaan sa pamamahayag, o freedom of the press.

Kung gusto mong pumasok sa pulitika o sa serbisyo publiko, o kung gusto mong ipaglaban ang karapatan ng sambayanan sa parlamento ng kalsada o sa iba pang larangan ng pakikibaka, o kung gusto mo lang pasayahin ang madlang pipol sa pamamagitan ng mga palabas na kahit paano’y nagpapagaan sa hirap at dusa ng buhay, karapatan mo iyan.

Pero kung peryodismo o journalism ang linya mo, print journalism man o broadcast journalism, hindi mo maaaring talikdan ang tungkuling magsapraktika ng kalayaan sa pamamahayag.

Noong panahon ng batas militar, ilang taon bago pumutok ang EDSA 1, nagtipon-tipon ang ilang alagad ng sining at miyembro ng midya at nagbuo ng Free the Artist, Free the Media movement. Sa kalaunan ay nagsupling ang kilusang ito ng Concerned Artists of the Philippines. Dito sa huli, kasama ako sa bumalangkang ng credo o declaration of principles. Angkop din sa mga peryodista ang mga prinsipyong iyon.

Ayon sa deklarasyon ng Concerned Artists of the Philippines:

We hold that artists are citizens and must concern themselves not only with their art but also with the issues and problems confronting the country today.

We stand for freedom of expression and oppose all acts tending

to abridge or suppress that freedom.

We affirm that Filipino artists, in the exercise of freedom of expression, have the responsibility to do so without prejudice to truth, justice, and the interests of the Filipino people.²

Palitan lang natin ang salitang “artists” ng “journalists” at makikita natin, palagay ko, kung ano dapat gawin kaugnay ng layuning “Harnessing Journalism for Nation-Building.”

Dagdag pa rito, kailangang bigyang-diin na sa peryodismo, tulad din naman sa sining, napakahalaga ang pagsasabi ng totoo tungkol sa mga nangyayari sa bayan nating “pugad ng luha at dalita,” sabi nga sa kanta.³ Ang pagsasabi ng totoo, masakit man sa tenga ng ilan, ay magbibigay ng matibay na pundasyon sa malaya at maunlad na bansang gusto nating itatag o patatagin.

Noong panahon ng Free the Artist, Free the Media movement ay may sinulat akong lyrics para sa isang mahabang kantang gagamitin sana sa isang binabalak na Brechtian zarzuela. Ang kantang iyon ay sagot sa panawagan ng mga naghahari na ang dapat paksain ng mga alagad ng sining at miyembro ng midya ay “the good, the true, and the beautiful.”

Sa ganito nagtatapos ang kanta:

Awitin mo ang totoo,
sagad-buto, tagos-apdo.
Ang totoo ay mabuti
kahit mapanganib sa iyo.
Ang totoo ay maganda
kahit pangit sa reyna.⁴

Ganyan din ang tungkulin natin sa peryodismo: Sabihin ang totoo, sagad-buto, tagos-apdo.

Ewan ko kung natugunan ko nang maayos ang kahilingang mag-lecture tungkol sa “Harnessing Journalism for Nation-Building,” pero palagay ko’y lumampas na ako sa deadline at kailangan ko nang mag-sign-off, kailangan ko nang bigyang-wakas ang chika at chismax tungkol sa chuvachuchu.

Seriously, inuulit ko: Sabihin ang totoo, sagad-buto, tagos-apdo.
Maraming salamat po.

Notes

¹ Definition of “harness” taken from Cambridge International Dictionary of English (Cambridge University Press, 1995)

² The declaration of the Concerned Artists of the Philippines can be read in full at their website: <http://caphil.blogspot.com>. (Concerned Artists of the Philippines, 2007)

³ The phrase was taken from the song *Bayan Ko* written by Jose Corazon de Jesus and set to music by Constandio de Guzman.

⁴ These were taken from the last stanza of the song “Diyalogo ng Diwa at Damdamin” (Lacaba, 1991).

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