

*Merlinda Bobis's The Solemn Lantern Maker: The Ethics of Traumatic
Cross-Cultural Encounters*

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Abstract: Merlinda Bobis's second novel is an interesting combination of opposites: of the powerless and the powerful, the holy and the profane, the magical and the seedy, Third-World Asian poverty and white Western affluence. *The Solemn Lantern Maker* is a traumatized mute 10-year-old boy who lives with his crippled mother in the slums of Manila. One day, when trying to sell his colourful wares, he becomes involved in the life of a grieved American tourist who is caught up in a murder of a controversial journalist. In this post-9/11 climate, this event will soon be wrongly interpreted as a terrorist conspiracy. My paper will rely on some of the most relevant assumptions put forward by ethical criticism and trauma studies to show that Bobis's novel succeeds in illustrating how the powerful world of international politics can inadvertently impinge on the small world of an insignificant Third-World child, and how the love and care that this child offers to an unknown distressed westerner eventually manages to play the miracle of transforming the latter's life, thus making it clear that Bobis's allegory of traumatic cross-cultural encounters testifies to the power of the (un)common to render the invisible visible, and of the unselfish circulation of affect to effect unexpected changes in an apparently indifferent globalized world.

Keywords: Merlinda Bobis, ethical criticism, trauma studies, post-9/11 novels.

Merlinda Bobis was born in the Philippines but now lives in Australia. She has been carried across different cultures, and is consequently endowed with a multiple and privileged perspective which allows her to bridge the gap, or else bring to the fore, the discontinuities that separate one world from another. Her second novel, *The Solemn Lantern Maker*, is an interesting combination of opposites. It portrays the powerless and the powerful, Third-World poverty and white Western affluence, the holy and the profane. The magical and the seedy come into collision but also become one: twinkling lanterns and poverty, Christmas carols and prostitution, dreams of friendship and the global war on terror, utmost generosity and rampant political corruption.

The title refers to a traumatized mute 10-year-old boy called Noland, who lives with his crippled mother in the slums of Manila. One day, when trying to sell his colourful wares with the help of his older friend Elvis, Noland accidentally becomes involved in the life of Cate Burns, a grieving American tourist caught up in the murder of Germinio de Vera, a controversial Filipino journalist “famous for his daring exposés on corruption and extra-judicial killings” (2008: 32).¹ Cate gets out of her taxi in order to see the boys’ lanterns better, and Noland is fascinated by this American woman, whom he immediately identifies with an angel, similar to the ones he found in the public dump, and with which he has decorated the ceiling and walls of the tiny hut in which he and his mother are now living. Suddenly, a Pizza Hut motorcycle approaches the journalist’s car, shoots him dead and quickly revs past, hitting the woman, who collapses. Noland’s reaction is immediate and unpremeditated. He will do anything to save her. The lack of commas and full stops in the excerpt that tries to reproduce Noland’s thoughts while trying to rescue his blonde angel clearly points to his agitated state of panic and confusion.

She’s shot too she’s shot and Noland is rushing to her rushing with his cart of lanterns picking her up where did he get his strength lifting her into the cart with Elvis pushing her from the screaming the shocked ‘Jingle Bells’ the silenced cars the halted buying and selling and the man bleeding at the wheel wondering why the star is growing smaller dimmer and where does this thought come from? (14)

The TV newsreel *City Flash* takes it for granted that this journalist has been killed for exposing the links and friendship of an influential Senator, Senator GB (“Good Boy” Buracher), with a famous *Jueteng* King, the godfather of illegal gambling. Germinio de Vera was trying to find out whether the Senator’s latest election campaign had been funded by this personage, and had even considered the possibility that the senator might be *Jueteng* King himself. The euphemism used on the media to mean “killed” is “salvaged”. Here lies the terrible paradox: “Salvaged doesn’t mean ‘saved’ in this part of the world, which has turned an English work inside out to reveal the dark interior, the deadly heart” (52), in other words, “the political machinations of a rotten system” (137). However, as soon as the news spread that an American tourist who happened to be on the scene of the crime is missing, the journalist’s murder is all of a sudden sidelined by an obsessive fixation on that American and on the spectre of terrorism against the US.

In a post-9/11 climate, the American woman’s disappearance is soon wrongly interpreted as a terrorist conspiracy. As is stated in the novel, “after 9/11 any American gets hurt or gets sneezed at in a foreign country and ‘terrorism’ rears its ugly head” (76). The previous American hostage crises in Mindanao bring about all kinds of terrorist speculations about the abduction and possible shooting of this American woman by members of the dreaded kidnap-extortionists known as Abu Sayyaf. Abu Sayyaf is regarded as the enemy to fight because they are said to have strong links with several al-Qaeda cells, whose main target is to carve out an Islamic state from the predominantly Catholic Philippines. This would do away with the American supremacy and control in this strategic region. This foreboding, together with the traumatic memories of the 9/11 attacks, have led the American authorities to grow “acutely sensitive to any untoward actions against [their] citizens” (138), and to demand unconditional support on the part of the Philippine government which, in order to ingratiate themselves with the Americans, don’t hesitate to insist on the long history of friendship between the two

governments, their current bilateral relations, and the joint exercises of the Philippine and the United States military in their common fight against terrorism.² To put it differently, the Philippine authorities are most willing to give priority to a lost American, more than its own citizens. That is why they take a combat helicopter on a city tour, and even think of effecting what they euphemistically name as “relocation,” which broadly speaking means getting rid of “the pests who clog traffic and make Manila dirty” for the benefit of “the eyes of city folk and tourists” (39) and, in this particular case, demolishing the poor intersection where, they suspect, the potential kidnappers might be hiding.³

The Solemn Lantern Maker can therefore be seen as a denunciation of the pernicious impact that 11 September 2001 is having on global politics and the world's collective unconscious, which at present seems to revolve around one single but crucial idea: we cannot control our lives, nor the obscure mechanisms that rule the complex world we live in, and there is no escape from the caprice of injustice and death. Whereas many authors have written about the feeling that the big shock given by the events of 11 September 2001 has rendered literary productions futile, others, such as Merlinda Bobis, have felt compelled to respond precisely because of the events' symbolic nature and tragic dimension and consequences, both on a global and on a local scale. Neo-colonial interests, information technology and widespread mechanization have led to a blurring of boundaries between East and West, the private and the public, the physical and the psychological, perception and representation. The result is, according to Mark Seltzer, a traumatic space of socialization, a pathological public sphere, which is “everywhere crossed by the vague and shifting lines between the singularity of the subject, on the one side, and collective forms of representation, exhibition, and witnessing, on the other” (1998: 17-18).

My main contention is that Bobis's novel succeeds in illustrating how, in spite of this dark scenario, the small story of an insignificant Filipino child can impinge on the powerful world of international politics. The love and care that this child, and subsequently also Nena, his mother, offer to an unknown westerner will eventually make the American tourist forget about her own problems for a while so as to worry about the future of the two dispossessed and helpless people who rescued her. Cate Burns's post-traumatic stress disorder is not only due to the shooting that she witnessed, but also to the miscarriage that this assault inevitably brought about and, over and above everything, to her American partner's selfishness and unwillingness to let her have that baby, which led her to fly to the Philippines on her own in a desperate attempt to keep some distance between them. Noland's affection and generosity eventually bring about the miracle of getting together people who, although belonging in different and apparently confronted worlds, can nonetheless transcend all their differences in order to care for one another. Although Nena is at first most reluctant to have Cate with them, (as she rightly sees it, keeping this American woman in their hut will get them into trouble), she eventually feels sorry for her and lovingly tends her wounds. Nena becomes “the tender hand wiping her aching belly, making her less sad about something that she's now forgetting” (18), to the point that they become so close that they cannot help “clinging to each other” (48) and feeling the other woman's suffering as their own: “Nena stares into the blue eyes welling with tears. Her own fill too; the tug of grief runs between them, and much more. Pasts so estranged and futures that will never touch again. But here, they are irrevocably bound” (134). Physical contact allows for mutual understanding, empathy, and affection. It is the sense of touch that ultimately makes this

possible for, as Edith Wyschogrod affirms, “there is a chiasmatic or crossover effect of touching and touched when, for example, one hand touches the other” (1998: 107). This is the soothing effect that can alone help people to better cope with their pain, like when Noland “lays his hand on [Cate’s] brow to check for fever and, in a bold impulse, his head on her chest to check for life”, and she then “dreams of a heaviness. She knows the weight of all the sobs of her life, but *this* is different. She wants it to stay, please stay,” because this is “the one speech that truly gratifies” (65), the one and only way to love what, according to Germinio de Vera, “makes us human” (181), namely, the capacity to open ourselves up to the other and to “fabricate stories” (182) that can help us to face up to the hardships of life and make communication possible. As literary critic and philosopher George Steiner argues:

There is language, there is art, because there is ‘the other.’ [...] The meaning, the existential modes of art, music and literature are functional within the experience of our meeting the other. All aesthetics, all critical and hermeneutic discourse, is an attempt to clarify the paradox and opaqueness of that meeting as well as its felicities. (1991: 137-38)

After all, we are all human. As Filipino journalist Eugene Costa retorts to his American counterpart: “There are good and bad Catholics, or Christians if you will, and there are good and bad Muslims. There’s violence and kindness on both sides, on any side –it’s just people” (168). It is only when we become aware of this fundamental fact that peaceful cooperation and a better world can somehow be possible. On the contrary, widespread refusal to see things with the eyes of the others can only lead to blind confrontation, injustice, and unjustified violence. This negative disposition, Amin Maalouf has argued,

encourages people to adopt an attitude that is partial, sectarian, intolerant, domineering, sometimes suicidal, and frequently even changes them into killers or supporters of killers. Their view of the world is biased and distorted. Those who belong to the same community as we do are ‘ours’ [...]. As for the others, those on the opposite side, we never try to put ourselves in their place, we take good care not to ask ourselves whether on some point or other they might not be entirely in the wrong, and we won’t let our hearts be softened by their complaints, their sufferings or the injustices that have been inflicted on them. The only thing that counts is the point of view of ‘our’ side; a point of view that is often that of the most militant, the most demagogic and the most fanatical members of the community. (2000: 30-31)

This is, no doubt, the attitude shown by the American authorities as represented by the American consul in Manila and, by extension, by the Philippine government, which has chosen to overrule all kinds of local protests in order to uphold at all costs the Philippine-American friendship and the drawdown of ten million US dollars for military assistance. It might therefore be argued that one of the issues that *The Solemn Lantern Maker* puts forward is that no excuse whatsoever can free individuals of their obligation to be *ethical*, that is, to engage in an open-ended dialogue with the world and the others, to open themselves to the experience of *alterity* that will let them cling to love and make the most of the redemptive resilience of their spiritual dimension. By inviting readers to meditate on the experience of otherness and the need to endorse a

dialogical ethical model, the novel subtly echoes some of the most well-known current discourses on narrative ethics. Emmanuel Levinas is, without doubt, one of the main philosophical figures of the turn to ethics that has characterized literary criticism for the last two decades. His theories, mainly as put forward in *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974), have time and again been used by critics concerned with defining and advocating a postmodern post-foundational ethics. This ethics clearly asserts that it is possible to make ethical claims without relying on normative codes, categorical imperatives or universal moral principles because “there are no categories or concepts knowable prior to what becomes the decisive ethical moment in Levinas’ philosophy: the encounter with the singular, irreducible Other” (Kotte 2001: 71). As Levinas argues in his seminal work *Otherwise than Being*, ethical responsibility is prompted by the encounter with the Other, or *the face*, as he also names it, and responsibility “goes beyond being” (2004: 15); it means being open up to vulnerability, not only to the other’s happiness, but also to the other’s pain (49). Moreover, for Levinas, the Other is always radically different and resists being transformed or appropriated. Yet, our encounters with the Other are often ruled by our attempts to assimilate it and transform it in terms of our categories of understanding. To put it differently, we strive to reduce the Other to the Same, which turns this ethical moment par excellence into a rather unethical imposition. This has been, according to Andrew Gibson, the characteristic mode and ultimate sin of Western philosophy and politics, which have systematically tried to “speak of and therefore master the other as whole, to reduce the other to the terms of the same” (1999: 65).

Change and modernity have systematically been associated with the West. This has led most westerners, and Americans in particular, this novel seems to claim, to regard their civilization as ultimately superior, and thus wholly entitled to preserve itself, even at the cost of destroying the others, and to impose its own norms and categories upon all the other cultures, which cannot in turn help experiencing ambivalent feelings towards this imposed and ever-growing westernization/ modernization process. As Amin Maalouf has put it:

For the rest of the world’s inhabitants, all those born in the failed cultures [...]. For the Chinese, Africans, Japanese, Indians and American Indians, as for Greeks, Russians, Iranians, Arabs, Jews and Turks, modernization has constantly meant the abandoning of part of themselves. Even though it has sometimes been embraced with enthusiasm, it has never been adopted without a certain bitterness, without a feeling of humiliation and defection. Without a piercing doubt about the dangers of assimilation. Without a profound identity crisis. (2000: 72)

Maalouf’s words can be said to wonderfully illustrate and testify to the Philippine government’s servile attitude. Just as *TSLM* abounds in characters who refuse to open themselves up to the other (the blind American and Philippine authorities, corrupted Senator GB who only thinks of making money at the expense of the poor and dispossessed), Bobis’s novel is also full of destitute characters who, like Noland, his mother Nena, and his friend Elvis, desperately try to cope with exploitation, sadness, absences, loneliness, bad memories, humiliation, and silences. They all share the same difficulty to remember their traumatic past, cope with their heart-breaking present, and hope for a better future.

Noland has remained mute for six years, and it is only right at the end of the novel that the reason for this is revealed. His muteness is the outcome of the trauma that he suffered when he saw how his parents were brutally subdued by the military. His father had hacked his landlord to death for having mercilessly evicted and erased him and his family from the land that they had been cultivating for generations (the name he chose for his son paradoxically prophesied their dark fate: Noland/ No-land), and was shot dead while escaping.

When the fields turn gold, the boy finds himself crouched in the bushes, shivering. Earlier, he stumbled over a body with red all over it. It looked familiar but not quite. The face was also covered in red and dirt; it felt sticky. The eyes were looking up, trying not to forget the sky. When he comes out of hiding, he's still afraid but he must look again before night falls. He must not let his eyes play tricks on him. So he looks and looks. This is how a neighbour finds him. Squatting in the dark, silent at his father's feet. (203)

This is Noland's trauma: his eyes cannot recognize his father's face because his mind refuses to actually see and acknowledge what has happened. As is well known, trauma has often been described as an impossible gateway between the walls of the past and the present. Cathy Caruth, one of the most outstanding trauma critics, relies on the concepts of "latency" and "belatedness" in her well-known volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* to define trauma as the successive movement from an event to its repression to its return (1995: 6-7). Caruth explains how traumatic experiences produce:

[...] a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (4)

In other words, Caruth makes it clear that the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only later on, in its repeated possession and haunting of the one who experiences it. Noland's incapacity for speaking, together with his obsession with angels, testifies to this trauma. Noland's muteness could also be taken as the symbolic representation of the discourse of silence that the military imposed on the poor and helpless for decades. All of these massacres were seldom denounced by the mass media, which clearly contributed to relegating them to oblivion, or even worse, to turning them into an insignificant event. To rely on the terms put forward by other well-known trauma critics such as Dori Laub and Dominick LaCapra, in Bobis's novel, Noland's speechlessness might account for the turning of an individual loss (Noland could speak before) into a structural absence (nobody talks about these massacres so nothing ever happened). This absence, as Laub (1992: 81) and LaCapra (2001: 45-6) go on to explain, imposes a discourse of melancholia that blocks mourning and working through this individual, but also collective, trauma, problematizes the possibility of finding any outside witness/ listener, and thus frustrates any ethically responsible socio-political response. If nobody talks, nobody will listen and react accordingly.

Nena, Noland's mother, is another trauma victim. The night "the uniforms" came to their home looking for her husband, they brutally hit her in the legs, turning her into a lame and crippled woman for the rest of her life. Noland could only cover his ears, pretending he was not there: "His mother is crying louder, pleading, no, please, no [...] then the crashing and thumping and she's shrieking, 'My legs, my legs,' the pitch so sharp it cuts through his chest. Then silence" (200). And silent she remains, for she will never again utter her husband's name to Noland: "For years, she has told stories about the hill, the stars there, the angels, but never uttering the name that long ago drove the boy whimpering to the wall for days" (191). Nena's silence is Noland's silence, just as their two bodies often look as if they were one single entity, as formless and dishevelled as their own traumatized psyches:

[Nena] is holding her son like a baby. His head is buried on his mother's breast, his body curled. Her head is burrowed between her knees, her legs drawn in to shield him. In the dim light they look like one body, not human, just limbs bound together. (150)

As regards Elvis, he is a street boy condemned to work for Bobby Cool, the pimp who taught him how to prostitute himself in exchange for some money, clothes and food. Elvis treats and protects Noland as if he were his own brother. He cares for him so much that he offers his pimp to do double jobs on the condition that he leaves Noland in peace: "Bobby, I'm game, but not Noland, he's not in this [...], I'll do all jobs [...], I promise, but not Noland" (110). When Bobby 'hires' Noland for a dirty photograph session, Elvis is "all vulnerable rage, his skin burning, his heart cold" (129), and does not hesitate to hit his pimp right on the mouth, notwithstanding the fact that this will condemn him to utter helplessness and destitution on the streets. Elvis's eventual death at the hands of the police, who want to believe that he was the mastermind behind the American woman's abduction and kidnapping, cannot but be taken by most readers, not only as a tragedy, but also as a relief. Death puts an end to the violence and sexual vexations that he would have had to keep on suffering, and also prevents Bobby from abusing Noland in a similar way. Last but not least, it is after Elvis is shot dead that Noland all of a sudden remembers his father's death. Significantly enough, from that moment onwards, Noland will no longer whimper, will no longer weep: "The mother wonders why he's silent, no sound of distress at all. He is silent because he knows. He is sure now. That stick figure, that body on the hill. *His father*" (205). It might be argued that Noland can at last begin to work through his trauma. Paralyzing melancholia has turned into healing mourning. As is often the case, trauma here implies the interplay between two moments, the second of which suddenly brings to mind and retrospectively determines the meaning of the first. It is Elvis's death that makes Noland remember his father's. Furthermore, it might be no exaggeration to affirm that Noland's act of remembrance is his ultimate tribute to Elvis's friendship, his compulsive need to obey Derrida's "law of friendship," that is, "proleptic mourning," according to which, it is grief, and more specifically, the individual's responsibility for "prescient grieving" of his/her friend's loss and death, that lays at the heart of friendships. Friends cannot possibly escape this predated responsibility (in Dalziell 2012: 54). It is this responsibility, and ultimately love, that make Noland's mind connect the losses of two of the people he mostly cared for.

Merlinda Bobis's novel becomes a valid means for bringing to the fore many thorny questions. In a time in which the mass media seem to be omnipresent, it is ironic that a

form as old as the novel is the one medium that can best make us imagine what it might be like to live as another does. Literature, and culture by extension, is a powerful constituent and vehicle at the core of possible transformations, given that it mediates and transfers ideas, values and intellectual refinement between generations and between civilizations. Culture is, therefore, both a preserving and a transforming force. As Ada Aharoni stated:

Culture is a key factor in promoting genuine peace. If a peace culture system instils recognition of the 'other,' respect for its identity and culture, as well as a commitment to solving conflicts and differences by peaceful means, then the chances for peace will be greatly enhanced. By contrast, if the cultural and educational system instils self-centeredness, rejection and hatred of the 'other,' of its identity and of its culture, and calls for and justifies the resort to violence to solve conflict –then sustainability may be endangered. [...] There is therefore a crucial need for reform at an international scale, concerning culture, literature and the arts, that can undermine and replace the culture of violence terror and crime. (2002: unnumbered pages)

Just as Noland's humble artistic production, his first hand-made lantern, made him come alive again after having been whimpering into space and wetting his pants for years, his drawings of angels allow him to tell what he cannot possibly say: "What he can't say, he thinks hard. What he thinks hard, he tells in comic strips: stars and angels framed in hundreds of little story boxes strung together since he found his first angel, four years after he lost his speech" (25). Yet, no matter how many different drawings he may produce, "[i]t's really only *one* story" (25): the silent story of his belated trauma and desperate need to believe in angels, in salvation.

Noland's silence, however, could also be interpreted in a rather more positive way. Silence might also be understood as a sign of respect. However necessary mourning may be, it can also run the risk of illegitimately appropriating the other's voice. To quote Dalziell's words, "it runs the risk of ventriloquizing the other, of speaking on their behalf, of reducing the alterity of the subject to the same, to the self" (2005: 53). *TSLM* seems to be aware of this problem. This may be the reason why successful and conclusive mourning is avoided. The novel's open ending (Will Noland manage to speak again? Will he and his mother be able to return to their motherland some day?) leaves some space for uncertainty, which allows for the other's alterity to be respected.

Bobis's novel can therefore be said to resist foreclosure and testify to the magnitude of traumatic experience through the use of metaphor. In this way, the other's pain is denounced and brought to the fore but without actually appropriating his/her voice. For Noland, a star has, will always have, five lights. That is why his main star has five points. Each of the star's points is encircled, and in each circle is a pasted figure: his mother, his father, Elvis, the American woman, and Noland himself. In other words, the people who make up what he regards as his family, his main source of happiness and affection. The fact that, for Noland, the presence of the dead is just as strongly felt as that of the living, if not more, might be said to corroborate, as Gail Jones argues, Derrida's insistence "on our responsibility to consider those beyond the living in the radical formation of ideas of justice," in such a way that mourning should be reformulated "as a necessary, interminable, and ethically demanding haunting" (Jones

2004: 159). Derrida's idea of haunting, however, should not be confused with LaCapra's use of the term as 'acting-out' or paralyzing melancholia. As Gail Jones goes on to explain (2004: 167-68), the haunted subject should not be mistaken for the melancholic person who cannot work through his/her trauma and consequently remains pathologically obsessed, and possessed, by his/her identification with the lost loved object. On the contrary, Derrida sees the figure of the ghost as the ungraspable figure whose insurrection brings to life and into the present the claims of the repressed and the dead, in their unavoidable demand for justice. As Tanya Dalziel puts it (2005: 55), while successful mourning may stand for premature celebration and offer a hegemonic and partial version of what happened in the past, which inevitably enforces forgetfulness, this type of mourning allows for remembrance and keeps responsibility alive. In Bobis's novel, the mystery and silence that enshroud Noland, together with his constant drawing of angels, not only contribute to maintaining the tension throughout the narrative, but also play a fundamental role in this ethical fight against forgetfulness. Noland may remain a mystery till the very end, but most readers cannot ignore his presence, while also feeling inexorably bound to him. By focusing on the figure of the mute child and his obsession with angels/ghosts, *TSLM* pushes this individual and, by extension, collective trauma to a spectral position, which demands that these unheard voices should be listened to. To quote Gail Jones's words once again, "an aspiration to justice is an aspiration to full responsiveness to those forms of address that remind us that we exist in a 'community of the question'" (2008: 82). Justice can only be achieved through a discourse that "speaks shadows," that is, through "a mouth that will go on shaping meaning in the face of senseless annihilation" (2008: 83). A discourse of uncertainty is good in so far as it allows for the constant questioning of established ideas, which can alone pave the way for "the full responsiveness" to those uncertainties and, ultimately, for the search for, and defence of, justice. The novel under analysis creates a narrative world that resists fixed definitions and foreclosure. It is a narrative that, to use Jones's expression once again, "speaks shadows" or, to put it differently, that encourages remembrance and does away with forgetfulness. The repetitive allusions to symbolic figures such as angels undoubtedly work to this effect. In short, *TSLM* keeps some ethical distance from the victim, while insistently claiming that the victim is there, and must always be borne in mind. The ending of the novel is a desperate call for hope.

How to draw a Christmas fairy tale? It's time to help. We begin right here. We look closely at the boy and the mother. We draw wings on him, on her, we let them fly through the locked window, to the canopy of fairy light, to a woman on a hospital bed. We make sure she too sprouts wings, make sure they fly together, glide over bodies in a morgue to finally find the other boy who needs his own pair. We make him test them, make him join the flight back to that hill where the man with open eyes sees four winged creatures descending –we hesitate, but we take our chance and draw his own pair, flawed but taking off with them back to the sky, all five points of light. (207)

The Solemn Lantern Maker, Merlinda Bobis's allegory of traumatic cross-cultural encounters, testifies to the power of the (un)common to render the invisible visible, the power of the unselfish circulation of affect to effect unexpected changes in an apparently indifferent globalized world and, most important of all, claims for an

ethically demanding mourning that can alone urge limitless recognition and responsibility upon all human beings, without exceptions.

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¹ Further page references from the novel will appear in between brackets and without the date of publication.

² This common fight against terrorism brings to mind the collaboration and military help that the US offered the Philippine government presided by Corazon Aquino in the 1987-1989 total war waged against the communist insurgency, which brought about the militarization and destruction of so many villages in the country.

³ Relocation was a military strategy very similar to the *Lambat Bitag* (Fishnet-Trap) tactics used in the 1987-89 total war, which, as human rights advocate Arnel de Guzman explains, was not at all new: “It was used by the United States in the Philippine-American War, was used to crush the Huk [peasant] rebellion in the 1950s, and was the mainstay of Marcos-directed counter-insurgency warfare in the 1970s and 1980s. The victims of the tightening noose are of course meant to be insurgents, especially the leaders, but since they are so elusive, a broad net with small openings is needed. Casting such a net risks catching innocent fish, but this, reasons the military, would be an acceptable by-product of war. In regions where the net fails, the entire population (the water) may have to be removed in order to starve the fish” (1991: 40).