

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Steven Patrick Fernandez's Transcreation of Poetry and the Integrated Performing Arts Guild's SugaTula/Crossing Poetry: An Autotheoretical Analysis

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Abstract

This is an analysis of Steven Patrick Fernandez's transcreation of poetry through the Integrated Performing Arts Guild's SugaTula. I use autotheory as I retell, examine, and reflect on my experiences on SugaTula and on Fernandez's transcreation of poetry. From my autotheoretical analysis, I then situate Fernandez's and IPAG's SugaTula in the field of translation studies. The study reveals that Fernandez's transcreation of poetry through SugaTula is a concept which is not only significant for theater practitioners but also for reading and literature teachers. Transcreation can also be used as a method to explore not only poetry but other various literary pieces. Fernandez's transcreation may overlap with distillation but it is in the overlapping of meanings of these creative processes that research and experiments can be done. Furthermore, SugaTula may involve the process of poetry translation but in its entirety, it is a trans-media performance in which the original poem is used with other mediums such as music and dance; thus, SugaTula is transcreation and not translation..

Keywords: transcreation, distillation, translation, poetry, literature, IPAG, SugaTula

Hubad ako, pagmasdan. Lahat! Ay nasa akin!

The actor stood naked as the last line of German Gervacio's "Kung Paano Maging Makata" was recited in the transcreation of the poem performed by the Integrated Performing Arts Guild of Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (Fernandez 05:11–5:26). The performance made me see the baring

of a poet's body and soul in the creation of one's poetry. Charles Simic said:

I'm one of those who believe that there is something that precedes language...I've always felt that there is a *state* that precedes verbalization, a complexity of *experience* that consists of things not yet brought to

consciousness, not yet existing as language, but as some sort of inner pressure. Any verbal act includes a selection, a conceptualization, a narrowing down. (Simic 1985:61 qtd. in Lysaker 548–549)

It is this *state* and *experience* that the poem, “Kung Paano Maging Makata,” shows. A state in which a writer should experience before poetry is created, an experience that a writer should undergo before one could be considered a poet. However, in contrast to what Simic wrote that this “consists of things not yet brought to consciousness,” in the transcreation of “Makata,” the writer in this *state* and *experience* is conscious of himself and the world.

In relation to IPAG’s transcreation of “Makata,” what is the *state* and the *experience* that Steven Patrick Fernandez, the director of SugaTula, and the IPAG artists undergo before creating Gervacio’s “Makata” on stage? If for Charles Simic, “there is something that precedes language” before poetry is written, what is it that precedes the IPAG’s transcreation of “Makata”? Gervacio chose to end the poem with *Hubad ako, pagmasdan. Lahat! Ay nasa akin!* —the choice of words is deliberate. If for Charles Simic, “Any verbal act includes a selection, a conceptualization, a narrowing down,” what process did the IPAG artists undertake to create a seamless thread of music, images, and words that captured the “soul” of Gervacio’s “Makata”?

Hence, this paper speculates on the possibilities of the *state* and *experience* that IPAG artists undertake before the production of the transcreated poem on stage. I also aim to explore Steven Patrick Fernandez’s transcreation of poetry and situate Fernandez’s and IPAG’s SugaTula in the field of translation studies through autotheory.

Autotheory

Autotheory, according to Lauren Fournier in *Autotheory as a Feminist Practice in Art, Writing and Criticism* (2021) is the “integration of the auto or “self” with philosophy or theory, often in ways that are direct, performative, or self-aware”(6). It is also “theory and performance, autobiography and philosophy, research and creation, knowledge that emerges from lived experience and material-conceptual experiments in

the studio and the classroom” (Fournier 29). This is echoed by Ralph Clare who said that it is a manner of writing that “meld personal experience with reflections upon philosophy and theory” (86) and it insists on “the “reality” and value of lived experienced” (86). For Rae McNamara, it is an “...interdisciplinary approach to history, weighing in on the politics of access surrounding knowledge production and what it means...to bring everyday life to theory.” This concept is reflected in Arianne Zwartjes definition of autotheory in “Under the Skin: An Exploration of Autotheory.” Zwartjes writes that this “engages in thinking about self, the body, and the particularities and peculiarities of one’s lived experiences, as processed through or juxtaposed against theory—or as the basis for theoretical thinking.” Through these, we see that the *auto* or the self and the self’s experiences are salient components of autotheory. However, autotheory is not so much as a theory about the self but it is a theory that develops from the self and from one’s experiences (Vigneault).

One’s experience may be individual, but this experience is always a response from the spaces where one is. Max Cavitch wrote that “[w]hile *autotheory* may sound solipsistic, autotheory addresses the need for relational, rather than merely reflexive self-narration—including the need to attend to the intersubjectivity of writing and reading” (84). Autotheory’s need for relational is also expressed by Nicole Trigg. She writes that autotheory is a hybrid and creative-critical genre, it is “writing and thinking the self in relation to the world by way of close encounters with others—people and things” (532). This is then echoed by Fournier who writes that “autotheoretical works most often exist somewhere in the place where the “self” comes into relation with others—be it other people, through physical and citational communities and kinship networks, or objects of study, such as works of contemporary art and literature (272). Thus, autotheory “engenders collectivist, rather than individualist worldviews; it uses theory to recognize the power of shared connection, shared experience in a fragmented and isolated time”; hence, it recognizes “multiplicity of experience, of perspective, and embodied subjectivity” (Zwartjes). These explain that autotheory not only allows the writer to write about his/her experiences with theory but also tries to connect from other people’s experiences as well. Also, since “[e]xperience occupies the contested territory between

ways of being and ways of knowing” (Pickering 27), then autotheory can be used to conceptualize or explore a theory through our experiences. It can be used to interrogate and understand the various concepts that we encounter in the spaces we are in. Also, how experience is “articulated, understood, drawn and shared with others” is also as important as what is experienced (Srinawati 127).

My experience with IPAG's SugaTula was an encounter. It was an experience that moved me. It made me feel, think, and respond. At that time, I was already experimenting with collaborative activities for my students to appreciate literature, specifically poetry. IPAG's SugaTula resonated with my desire to make my students respond to literature through a creative work—a poetry performance. For me, the process of creation was as significant as the performance itself. It was because a poem is not only meant to be read but to be lived, and it is through the creative process—the pre-articulation of my students' creative work that the poem is lived. Thus, my encounter with SugaTula gave me a “thinking feeling”—a feeling that “creates an appetite for experimentation” (Manning 222).

In *Relationscapes*, Erin Manning writes that “[f]eeling is a pulsion to think, a sensitivity that situates thought in the world...Feeling is affect bleeding into thought, activating complexities on the verge of expression...” (222). Fernandez's and IPAG's transcreation of poetry on stage was not only a poetry performance to be appreciated, but it was a force that allowed me to respond and to participate. Hence, I use autotheory as I weave my experiences—my feelings, my thoughts, my pedagogical experiments, and my reflections on my experiences with theories of translation and transcreation to illustrate my understanding, interpretation, and application of Fernandez's poetry transcreation; and to compare and contrast Fernandez's and IPAG's SugaTula with the concept of translation of various scholars to explore its position in the field of translation studies.

Translation and Transcreation

Translation is expressing the exact equivalent meaning of a text (the way the author intended) in another language (Newmark 5, Pagliawan 19). This definition of translation seems simple, however, according to Newmark, “there are many tensions in

translations. This can be illustrated between sound and sense, emphasis (word order) and naturalness (grammar), the figurative and the literal, neatness and comprehensiveness, concision and accuracy” (5). These tensions in translations can be more problematic especially in translating literary pieces, especially poetry. Luciana Ruas wrote:

The translation of poetry is a controversial subject in translation studies, due to the many different linguistic and cultural features that make up a poem. The combination of these features leads, in many cases to choices having to be made by the translator in order to determine which aspects to maintain, as not all of the features can be rendered successfully into the target language. (1)

This is echoed by Vermeer who writes that “although translation in its ordinary sense is generally thought of as a (primarily) linguistic transfer process it is, as such, at the same time a cultural process, because language is part of culture” (38). Eliot Weinberger explains this further in his work on translating Chinese poetry stating that “[t]he point of translation is more than a leap from dictionary to dictionary; it is reimagining” (34). Reimagining entails close reading of the text which will then enable the translator “to capture one's perception of the text and to develop new modes of perceiving it” (Scott ix). Thus, “[t]ranslating is a creative effort that requires interpretation and re-creation of the source text through the filters of target language, culture and customs. In a way, the process of translation is as creative as creative writing” (Gaballo 101). Hence, translation, especially in translation of poetry, is a process that requires interpretation of the meaning of the text and reimagining how the meaning can be rendered in another language, taking into consideration the culture of the people who use the language.

This meaning of translation closely relates to the meaning of transcreation. Due to this relationship, “professional translators were rather cool, if not suspicious, as they were feeling that a useless new category had been assigned to the activity that they had been doing for years, i.e., translating” (Gaballo 95). This is reiterated by Joanna Dybiec-Gajer and Ritta Oittinen in *Negotiating Translation and Transcreation of Children's Literature* who wrote that:

The concept of transcreation has been discussed in the literature of translation studies, leading to a variety of responses. On one hand, transcreation has met some skepticism from more traditionally oriented standpoints perceiving it as an invention of a superfluous label already covered by the broad notion of translation and pointing to competing terms such as internationalization, localization, cultural adaptation, transediting, or marketing translation and copywriting. On the other hand, it has been embraced as offering new perspectives on translation in a changing, globalised world. (4)

The reception of transcreation varies in the main stakeholders' communities.

The term *transcreation* was coined and introduced by P. Lal, an Indian Sanskrit Scholar. He used the term to refer to his techniques of creative translation (in English) of Indian texts from Sanskrit (Di Giovanni 33 qtd. in Malenova 529; Gopinathan 2; Fernandez, *Making Theater* 167; Gaballo 97). According to Gopinathan, "his technique is applicable for the whole tradition of creative translation of great classics of *Ramayana*, *Bhagarata* and *Mahabharata* in the regional languages from Sanskrit" (2). The aim of the translators using Lal's transcreation is of "spiritually educating the people of their time who were separated from the ancient age by the time factor and also by language factor since they are ignorant of the target language" (Gopinathan 2). This can be seen as "rebirth or incarnation (Avatar) of the original work" (Gopinathan 2). Hence, Lal's transcreation can be defined as "aesthetic re-interpretation of the original work suited to the readers/audience of the target language in particular time and space" (2).

In 1969, Brazilian poet H. de Campos used the term to describe the new approach to creative literary translation that aimed at "phonetic, syntactical, and morphological equivalence achieved by appropriating the best contemporary poetry and the existing local tradition" (Milton and Bandia 2009 qtd. in Gaballo). Bollettieri Bosinelli also used the Indian literary notion of transcreation and used the term to refer to Joyce's writing strategy of "transforming a commonplace meaning into something new and unexpected" (190, qtd. in Gaballo 97). Currently, transcreation has been used in advertising and media in which a "considerable amount of creativity" is used in the process (Gaballo

95). Since creativity is given much emphasis in transcreation—"creative approach dominates over fidelity to the source text" (Malenova 530), then it is a strategy that "demytheicizes the ideology of fidelity" (Vierra, qtd. in Malenova 529). This creative approach that characterizes transcreation is reiterated by Dybiec-Gajer who wrote that "transcreation is a creative rewriting loosely based on the provided texts, not so much concerned with faithfully rendering the source but with communicating the message and evoking a desired emotional response in the target audience" (49).

From these definitions, it is clear that creativity is a factor that should be considered in transcreation and in translation, especially in the translation of poetry. However, Gaballo, in "Exploring the Boundaries of Transcreation in Specialized Translation" concluded that it is not only creativity that should be considered in transcreation. She wrote that "[b]y reverting to the etymological meaning of the two components of transcreation, i.e., translation and creation... I have been able to identify the peculiar feature that distinguishes the term from other terms: its productivity, i.e., the capacity of generating new, unheard-of solutions" (111). From this distinguishable feature of transcreation, Gaballo then defines transcreation, she wrote:

Transcreation is an intra-/interlingual re-interpretation of the original work suited to the readers/audience of the target language which requires the translator to come up with new conceptual, linguistic and cultural constructs to make up for the lack (or inadequacy) of existing ones. It can be looked at as a strategy to overcome the limits of 'untranslatability', but in fact it is a holistic approach in which all possible strategies, methods and techniques can be used. It requires fluency (the ability to generate ideas and meaningful responses), flexibility (the ability to repurpose ideas), originality (the capacity to produce rare and novel ideas). It requires the translator not only to conceive new words, but also to imagine new worlds. (111)

Thus, I would like to reiterate that transcreation similar to translation entails imagination and creativity, however, transcreation is distinguishable from translation because of its "productivity" which can develop unique and original results (Gaballo 111).

My Experiments on Fernandez's and IPAG's Transcreation

During my first years of teaching at a University in Bukidnon, I taught Humanities and Literature. In my classes, asking my students to perform poetry—to interpret poetry through a performance was imperative. My fascination with performing poetry was from my experience with *The Legend of Maria Cristina Falls*, a vignette of *Tales from Mindanao*, a production of the Integrated Performing Arts Guild, the resident theatre company of Mindanao State University–Iligan Institute of Technology.

The Legend of Maria Cristina Falls is a dance-drama based on the poem written by Christine Godinez-Ortega. This poem is inspired by one of the legends of Iligan City's Maria Cristina Falls. I was in elementary when I first experienced IPAG's *Tales* at MSU–IIT. In college, I applied as an apprentice in IPAG. When asked why I wanted to join the group, I replied that it was because of *Maria Cristina*. As IPAG's apprentice, I experienced *Maria Cristina* again, as a performer. When I became a teacher, I integrated this task of performing poetry in my classes.

I remember explaining the activity in relation to *Maria Cristina*. I would start with Godinez-Ortega's interpretation of one of the legends of Maria Cristina falls in her poem, then IPAG's interpretation of the poem. My students' activity entailed four steps: (1) close reading of the poem, (2) analyzing the poem using prepared questions (based on the elements of poetry), (3) writing the production script (the plan on how to interpret the poem which includes the music, the costume, the props, the script aside from dominant image(s) in the performance), and (4) performing the poem. I gave my students the freedom to decide on how to weave the poem in their performance—they may recite the entire poem, recite a part of the poem, include lines of the poem in their narrative/story or in the lyrics of their song.

From Interpretation to Transcreation

In 2010, I saw IPAG's SugaTula. Steven Patrick Fernandez, "Sir Tibo," the director and founder of IPAG called this poetry performance as *transcreation*. SugaTula was an encounter. I was moved by the beauty of the words, music, and movement. I felt that the experience was personal as I connect with the poems.

At the same time, the experience was also communal as I became part of the rhythm of the audience's reactions. My SugaTula encounter made me feel how it is to live at a moment with poetry; also, it made me think about my pedagogical experiments with the poetry performance of my students. In retrospect, I reflect on Gilles Deleuze who writes that "[s]omething in the world forces us to think. That something is not an object of recognition, but a fundamental *encounter*" (Manning 1). Indeed, my SugaTula experience was a "fundamental *encounter*" because at that moment, I was able to have a name of my poetry performance activity in class, and at the same time, the concept of transcreation became "a thought in motion" (Manning 5).

In transcreation, Fernandez said, the "essence is retained" (SugaTula playbill and performance). In relation to my students' poetry performances, I call this "essence," "the soul" of the poem. In Fernandez's transcreation, retaining "the essence" of the poem is a conscious and deliberate act. This I have applied in my classes where the 4-step Interpretation Process should be seriously considered to reveal the "soul" of the poem. From then on, I used the term *transcreation* for my students' poetry performance in my classes. At that time, after my SugaTula encounter, my students still used the 4-step Interpretation Process. However, because of SugaTula, wherein the entire text of the poem is recited and projected on stage, I then asked them to create performances in which the entire poem is recited whether at the beginning, middle, or end of the performance.

When I moved back to Iligan City to teach at MSU–IIT, my students explored transcreation of poetry and created poetry films. The same 4-step Interpretation Process is followed for planning and creation. However, this time, the fourth step is the production of poetry film in which they included the entire poem in their poetry films. In 2016, my students transcreated the poems of Anthony Tan from one of his poetry books, *Poems for Muddas*. He was already retired from the University, but he came to my class to give a lecture on literature and to watch the best poetry films that my students transcreated. Transcreation of poetry then, in my students' poetry performances and poetry film projects, combines words, images, and music on stage (our classroom's performance space) or in film.

Anthony Tan was one of my college professors and his words in our Fiction class, "there is no accident

in fiction,” has been imprinted on me. This I believe is also true in poetry. Even the sound in poetry is a deliberate choice. Mary Oliver wrote that “[t]o make a poem, we must make sounds. Not random sounds but chosen sounds” (19). Thus, when poetry is transcreated, the process in transcreating should also be deliberate where it is necessary that “the essence is retained,” and that the “soul” of the poem should be captured through words, images, and music. This makes the first three steps in the 4-Step Interpretation Process a necessary experience for my students to allow them to be in a creative state of consciousness as they transcreate a poem. I imagine this creative state of consciousness as a state wherein the poem was not only read but lived.

SugaTula

“SugaTula crosses the roads between poetry and performance thus the term ‘sugat’” in SugaTula—Crossing Poetry (“IPAG in National Theater Festival”). SugaTula (Original title: *Tula Tugma sa Dula*) is a “performance in dance, music, chants, and images” of eight poems by prominent Philippine writers from the South. It features the transcreation of poems by Marjorie Evasco, Ralph Semino Galan, German V. Gervacio, Christine Godinez-Ortega, and Anthony Tan. The script, direction, and music is by Fernandez. The choreography is by Leilani Monterola-Fernandez and Melvin Pascubillo (Fernandez, *Directing* 191).

The performance began with actors entering the stage and reciting quotes on poetry:

“*Ang wika ng mga diyos.*”

“*Salamin ng buhay.*”

“*Poetry is an echo, asking a shadow to dance.*”

“*Poetry is life distilled.*”

It is then followed by Christine Godinez-Ortega’s “Pamahra” (an invocation to the gods), “Camp Bushra’s Mosque on Inquirer Page One,” and “The Legend of Maria Cristina Falls,” followed by Ralph Semino Galan’s “Southern Cross,” German Gervacio’s “Kung Paano Maging Makata” and “Bamboo Tusok-tusok,” and Anthony Tan’s “Crossing the River.” Then, an actor enters and recites/explains what poetry is and what IPAG did in creating SugaTula:

...But as we go beyond words and translate meanings and mood, to movement, music and

action. We attempt to re-form poetry, perform poetry, and interpret, cross poetry. But we make sure to keep the original essence.

Then Marjorie Evasco’s “Origami” follows.

The Beginnings of Fernandez’s Transcreation

In the SugaTula playbill, Fernandez wrote, “poetry re-formed, poetry performed,” and this was indeed what was shown in the play. The performances combined music, movement, images, and poetry—the poems were projected on screens (in this case two scrims, lightweight white fabrics which were hung on stage) and actors recited the poems. It was indeed “crossing poetry” for IPAG created a space wherein poetry and theatre meet, and in which poetry from a page was brought on stage.

Two of the poems in SugaTula were already performed in IPAG’s previous productions: Christine Godinez-Ortega’s “Maria Cristina” was part of *Tales from Mindanao* (1991) and German Gervacio’s “Bamboo Tusok-tusok” was part of *How the Women of Joaquin Met Lawanen* (2000). However, in SugaTula, my experience with these two poems was different—I did not only hear the lines of poetry spoken (as they were performed in *Tales* and *Lawanen*), but I also saw the lines of the poems on-stage. It is important to note that these two poems were performed before SugaTula was produced, thus these performances were not labeled as transcreation when these were created. However, Fernandez already used the concept of transcreation before labeling them as such. In his essay “Transcreating Poetry Not Translation or Adaptation” specifically in the Chapter 14 of his book, *Performance Level* he wrote:

My work in transcreation began with theater experiments I labeled *distillation*. Working with the “transformation” of theater material from original texts into barer interpretations, I recalled the works of European dramatists who were models of my stage explorations, Jerzy Grotowski (*Towards a Poor Theater*, 1968) and the “Theater Anthropology” of Eugenio Barba. Exercises in my drama classes produced distillations of *Medea*, including the full-length transmedia production of *Tula Tugma sa Sayaw at Dula* (Poetry, In Tune with Dance and Play,

2009) which transcreated nine poems of six of our more eminent poets... Even before learning of the term "transcreation," I was already involved in creative "translations" and permutations... (119)

Thus, Fernandez's transcreation began with the concept he labeled as distillation. Fernandez then explains that the term distillation does not fit a creative work. He wrote:

Exploring through the process, I realized that *distillation* which denotes exactness and measurability was a concept too scientific for comfort. The term seemed inappropriate to describe a creative act that depended on intuition, inspiration, and other inner emotive logic. *Distillation* denoted a process fixed to exact points and precise outcomes, a process that was unlike that of creative transformation. (Fernandez, *Performance Level* 119)

Fernandez used the term *transcreation* after Marjorie Evasco, his colleague and friend introduced him to the term. This concept, "about how original Cebuano poems are translated into English then re-translated back to Cebuano" was discussed in Evasco's doctoral dissertation (1997) at De La Salle University in Manila (Fernandez, *Performance Level* 119). From this concept, Fernandez began to use the term *transcreation*.

Fernandez wrote in the playbill:

The production highlights the *transcreation* of poetry—the creative process whereby a subject expressed in one media is re-shaped in another... *Transcreation* is, in this case, poetry that is transformed into performance. The process dissects the poem beginning with the medium and the structure that evokes meanings and feelings. In dissecting the poem, transcreation seeks to capture both the discursive constructs of the poem in its original language and the meanings these constructs have shaped into the multi-media platform of performance.

The transcreation of poetry is not *translation* nor is it *adaptation*. It is not about transforming meaning from one medium to another as transcreation keeps the poet's intention. Insight, meaning, and feel in the poem, despite

the transposition, remain in the second form. Transcreation, too, differs from *transformation* because transformation reshapes and redefines meaning different from the original.

The performances, besides capturing the intangible inner logic of the poem, also reclaim the poetic experience the poem evokes.

For Fernandez, the attempt to "re-form poetry and perform poetry" as in SugaTula is transcreation and not translation, adaptation, or transformation because it "keeps the poet's intention." Since "[p]oets compose with intents (they want to achieve something)" then "transcreation should keep the poet's intention" (Fernandez, *Performance Level* 118). To retain the intention of the poet, the process entails dissecting the poem, capturing the poem's discursive constructs and the meanings of these constructs, and then bringing this on stage which is the multi-media platform of performance (*Performance Level* 118). This process is similar with the distillation process which he had experimented. In his book *Making Theatre*, he wrote:

...*Distillation* was the process of 'transforming' theatre material from original texts into barer interpretations recalling the work of European dramatists like Jerzy Grotowski and Antonin Artaud...distillation related to transcreation in this manner: with heat, liquid that vaporizes from fruits is condensed and cooled to produce the pulp, the essence, of the fruit. The juice squeezed out of an orange contains the pulp of the fruit, its essence. As in creative transcreation, the essence of one form is distilled into another. One medium transfigures into another. Poems for instance, are transcreated to the multi-media expressions of performance. Poetry re-forms into performance, words into the multi-media system of the stage that includes design, movements, sounds and music, and the overall visual-aural composition. (167)

These ideas on distillation were also expressed in Chapter 14 of *Performance Level* (121).

For Fernandez (2005, qtd. in Guinto 2013), distillation is the "extraction of symbols, metaphors, meanings, from a given literature to have the tangible and intangible elements transcreated to performance." Thus, in creating movement, music, and images for

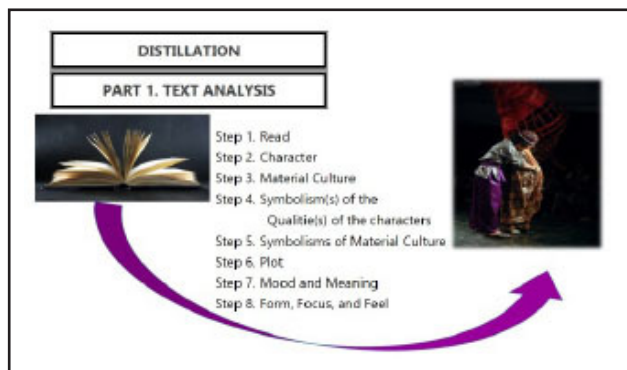


Fig. 1. An image from the AVL of *Distillation Part 1: Text Analysis*

performance, the poem is carefully read to enable the director and theatre artists to “extract symbols, metaphors, and meaning” from the poem. Hence, to “keep the poet’s intention,” the “essence” of the poem is then distilled into another form—the “multi-media expressions of performance.” This poem’s “essence” is drawn from the process of extraction which is called *distillation*. Thus, what the poet wants to say in his poetry is also said in the *transcreated* performance.

Exploring Distillation and Transcreation

Fernandez’s experimentation of distillation was then used by Amado Guinto Jr. (one of the performers of SugaTula) in his M.A. thesis entitled: *Using Distillation as an Alternative Method for Imagery Based Instruction: Towards Improving Comprehension in Literature Classrooms* (2013) in which he (Guinto) concluded that this is a viable alternative to imagery-based instruction as participants are given more intimate interaction with the text. From his study, we then used distillation as a reading strategy in our extension activity (community work) in the English Department of MSU-IIT to the students at Iligan City East National High School in Santa Filomena, Iligan City. The activity entitled “Reading Towards the Creation of Theater: Enhanced Scaffolding Techniques in Increasing Reading Comprehension Level” was designed to improve students’ reading skills through distillation. From the activity, an undergraduate research entitled *Distillation as a Reading Comprehension Strategy: An Experimental Study* by Jefferson A. Dela Cruz and April Al Ian T. Jacob was done to evaluate the program. The study revealed that distillation (the

method used in the extension activity) as an alternative teaching method had increased the overall reading comprehension of the students than the traditional method of teaching. Also, the students enjoyed the new method more than the traditional method of learning. In 2017, another extension project was done by the department for DepEd teachers, “The Training on Teaching Reading and Literature” in which one of the speakers of the training was Guinto who taught the teachers to teach reading through distillation. Although researches done on distillation were used to evaluate the effectiveness of distillation in relation to the improvement of the reading skills of the students, it is important to note that the studies also reveal the significant connection between reading the source text and producing theatrical expressions. Also, through the studies, the concept of distillation by Fernandez was explored and used.

From the extension activities that we had and from the lecture and study of Guinto (2013), I created an audio-visual learning material (AVLM) for distillation and transcreation. This was the project that I created for the Training Program on Audiovisual Learning Materials—Management, Production and Activities (AVLM) at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven) in 2018. In that material I divided distillation into two main parts, Part 1—Text Analysis and Part 2—Production. In our extension activities and in Guinto’s lecture, the literary material used is not poetry but short story. In the AVLM which I made, I used the story “The Gravediggers” by Edilberto K. Tiempo which Guinto used in his study and which we used in our extension activity with the high school students.

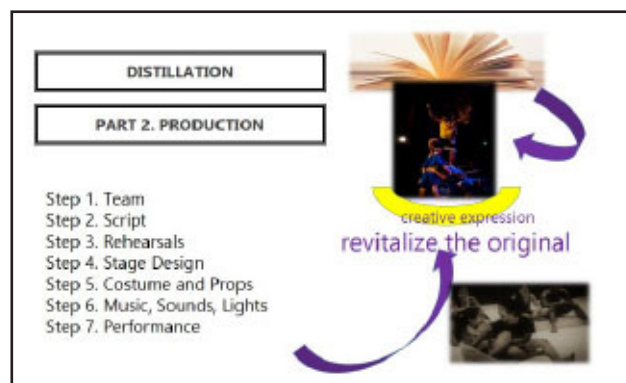


Fig. 2. An image from the AVL of *Distillation Part 2: Production*

In the Text Analysis, the first part of distillation has eight steps: (1) read, (2) analyze the character, (3) analyze the material culture (the objects and places in the story), (4) analyze the symbolism(s) of the quality/qualities of the characters, (5) analyze the symbolism(s) of material culture (objects or materials mentioned in the story), (6) analyze the plot (with the use of Freytag Pyramid), (7) determine the mood and meaning, (8) determine form, focus and feel.

The second part of distillation is production which considers seven important aspects in writing a production script and/or planning the production. This includes (1) the team, (2) the script, (3) rehearsals, (4) stage design, (5) costume and props, (6) music, sounds, lights, and (7) performance. Through distillation, the original is "revitalized" using creative expression (Guinto).

It is important to note that Guinto wrote that through distillation the students will have "a blueprint for staging a text..." However, in the AVLM, I refer to the blueprint, only at the first part of distillation which is the text analysis. Thus, the "blueprint for staging a text" is the text analysis that the students used as guide in *transcreating* the literary piece that they have read—whether this is fiction, poetry, or drama. The second part of distillation which is production uses the "blueprint" in planning and producing the performance—the distilled piece, which is the transcreated piece. Hence, the product of distillation in my AVLM is transcreation.

The distillation process that Guinto used and which we used in our extension projects are based on the process that Fernandez also refers to as transcreation—"the process dissects the original poetic structures that bear the meaning this structure relay" (Fernandez, *Making Theater* 168). I interpret "dissecting" as analyzing the text which I used as the first part of distillation in my AVLM. Part 1 of the AVLM is Text Analysis which entails close reading. This is significant since no one can "transform" a literary piece or an artwork unless one understands the piece (a literary piece or any artistic piece) that one intends to use.

Fernandez does not consider his *transcreation* as translation, but he sees that in the process of "transcreating one medium to another, one moves through varying degrees of translations" (*Performance Level* 119). Thus, translation is involved in transcreation. Translation has shown the importance of close reading for a translator. This is one aspect

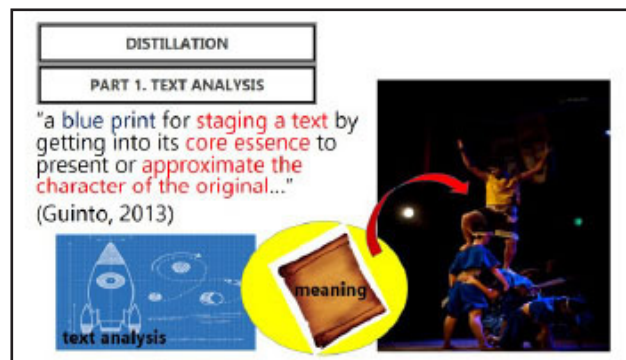


Fig. 3. An image from the AVLM of *Distillation Part 1: Text Analysis*

in translation that I believe is true for Fernandez's transcreation. Daniel Hahn, a literary translator reminds us that "translation is two things: it's very close and careful and thoughtful reading. Then, it's precise and careful and thoughtful writing." He explains that it is imperative to identify these two stages in the translation process because "creativity plays an important role in both: the literary translator both reads and writes creatively" (qtd. in Rossi, *Literary Translation*). Hence, in both stages in the AVLM of distillation—text analysis and production, creativity is very important. This importance is heightened in production since the result of the text analysis is read and analyzed for the performance. These include writing the script, designing the stage, designing costume and props, and producing music and sound, and designing lights.

Guinto's study, our extension project on reading, and the AVLM on distillation resonate with the 4-step Interpretation Process that I asked my students to do in my classes. This is because the 4-step Interpretation Process which I then call "transcreation" (from Fernandez's SugaTula) uses distillation.

Fernandez's distillation and transcreation are both labeled as "process" and it seems that there is no clear delineation between the two. Although, Fernandez wrote that "[t]ranscreation complements distillation" (*Performance Level* 121), I still would like to see how these two concepts complement each other and in what way they differ. Thus, I used term distillation in the AVLM, for the two-part process—Part 1 Text Analysis and Part 2 Production—and I use the term transcreation as the performance that uses the distilled piece to distinguish the two ideas.

The Transcreation Process in SugaTula

For Fernandez, in the process of transcreation, two contexts are at play: “the source material and the transformed expressions” (Fernandez, *Making Theater* 164). He showed these two contexts as he explained IPAG’s transcreation of Evasco’s “Origami” in *Performance Level* (121). In the explanation, he examined the “source material”—the poem “Origami” to create “transformed expressions”—the transcreation of “Origami” on stage. He began with the subject of the poem. He wrote, “[i]ts subject too figuratively illustrated a metamorphosis where one art is the others’ art: poetry is origami, origami is poetry” (*Performance Level* 121). The persona is then analyzed and what the persona is going through is also explored. The cadence of words is also studied. From the reading of the poem, they (the transcreators) then:

appropriate elements to suggest polish, continuity, impermanence, and the plodding cadence. Magic and ephemerality are organic to the piece. The motif white shapes magically and transforms into ideas that move from art to feeling. (*Performance Level* 122)

It should be noted that Fernandez’s explanation of Evasco’s “Origami” is an illustration of the transcreation process, a process that deals with “the source material and the transformed expressions” (Fernandez, *Making Theater* 164). The transformed expression is the poem which has been “re-formed”/ “re-shaped” into a performance.

IPAG’s Transcreation of Gervacio’s “Kung Paano Maging Makata”

I imagine that the IPAG artists’ experience after reading “Kung Paano Maging Makata” by Gervacio is the same with my experience after watching SugaTula. I believe that they must have had an encounter with the poem. This encounter must have been profound because of their intention to draw the meaning of the poem, to capture the soul of the poem, to distill the “original essence” of the poem and use this to create music, movement, and images for the transcreation of “Makata.” The artists must have begun with the experience of the poem’s substance which contains tangible signs like words, images, and structure, etc.

and the intangible elements, like visions, attitude, and mood, etc. (Fernandez, *Performance* 121). The lines of the poem, like *Ang ikasiyam na pusang magdaraan / Tadyakan sa tagiliran o kaya’y sa balakang* (Fernandez 0:27–0:30) must have evoked a sense of wonder and mystery, and feelings of anxiety, confusion, and tension. These feelings created in the encounter must have inspired thoughts of creation. Manning wrote that “[...]at the threshold of thought as creation, feeling provokes an aperture for that which has not yet been thought. Thought is a lure for feeling that prearticulates the inflections of its incipient expression” (220). Through this I imagine continuous movements of feeling-thought-creation as the artists were in a creative state of consciousness. What made this state more exciting is that the transcreation of the poem to theater is a collaborative work and one’s idea or response must have created more feelings and thoughts to other artists in the team. In this creative state, the artists must have decided on which tangible and intangible components of the poem they can transform into comparable elements for performance on “space (action, movements, shape, etc.) and time (sound, music, spoken language, etc.)” (*Performance* 121).

The artists then created music, dance, images, etc. Each medium of creative expression has the essence of Gervacio’s “Makata.” They are independent and recognizable from each other (Fernandez, *Performance Level* 221). The artists then combine all these creative expressions with the original poem and created a poetry performance—the transcreated “Makata” of Gervacio.

I likened “Kung Paano Maging Makata” to Charles Simic’s “White,” a poem of poetry. In Simic’s poem, White struggles “to find itself at its origin” (Simic 1985:110 qtd. in Lysaker 537) and in Gervacio’s poem, the speaker reveals the struggles of a writer—his struggles before his poem was written and his struggles in becoming a poet. The speaker in the poem is a renowned poet (*napabantog na sa panulaan*). He reveals to the addressee (a writer) the process of the ritual for a writer to become a poet. This poetic ritual involves violence and sacrifice, purification, and transformation. The poet loses himself in a painful and conscious process and he takes form in his poetry. The poem reminds me of Heidegger in the “The Origin of the Work of Art” in which he wrote that “[t]he artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other” (17). Thus,

poetry begins with the poet, and the poet is a poet because of his poetry.

My interpretation of the poem may be different from that of the IPAG artists' interpretation; however, I would like to emphasize, that I read the poem after my SugaTula encounter, thus my interpretation is based also on how I felt and what I thought of the poem in relation to IPAG's "Makata." I would like to emphasize that although the essence of the poem is retained in the performance because the original poem is part of the performance, but the IPAG artists' interpretation as revealed in the transcreated poem greatly influence my understanding of Gervacio's "Makata."

IPAG's transcreation revealed the inner and physical tension of the poet which for me was the dominant feeling of the poem. On stage, I saw two actors. I assume that the actor in white, who recited the poem, took the role of the poet who was the speaker in the poem. The other actor who was dressed casually was the writer—the writer who became a poet as he underwent the poetic ritual that the poet/speaker shared with him. The transcreated poem revealed a sense of mystery as the actor/dancer moved in rigid, stiff, angular movements, punctuated with jumps and flips (Fernandez 1:26–3:59). The silence evokes awareness—the writer's awareness of himself and of his world (Fernandez 0:10–1:26). As the actor bares himself onstage, the speaker/poet tells the addressee/writer that he has now become a poet for he has written poetry based on what has been revealed to him—*Ngayo'y isa ka nang mahusay na makata / Tanto mo na ang lihim na aming inaligata*. The speaker then tells the poet, *Bumalik ka sa salamin at ulit-ulitin: / Hubad ako, pagmasdan! Lahat ay nasa akin* (Fernandez 4:44–5:29). The poet has given everything to his creation, his poetry and despite giving his soul to his poetry, he still lives and is complete. His poetry that is born from him is not just a mirror of himself, but it is himself. He is complete because he is his poetry—none has been taken from him, not his soul since he shares the same soul with his poetry. As the last line of the poem echoed, I imagine the poem speaking back to the poet, *Hubad ako, pagmasdan! Lahat ay nasa akin* (Fernandez, 5:11–5:29). The poem similar to the poet is bare, but complete in itself. It uses language but does not explain itself; in its gaps, silences, and imagery, it speaks and expresses itself.

I remember asking my students about IPAG's "Kung Paano Maging Makata." For them, it was a

poem that revealed the difficulty of writing a poem. Another student said that the poem revealed the fears of the poet—the poet fears to share his poetry, for he has given his soul to it. If this was Gervacio's and IPAG's intention, then IPAG's transcreation was able to retain the essence of the poem.

SugaTula as Transcreation

Fernandez, in his talk with the audience after SugaTula performances always emphasized that transcreation is not translation; this is also clearly stated in the SugaTula playbill and also reiterated in *Making Theatre*—"transcreating poetry is not translation..." (168) and in *Performance Level* (118). However, he wrote that "transcreation also involves the translation of literary works (poetry, in particular) where the translations keep the cultural context of the original piece" (*Making Theater* 167). Although Fernandez considers translation as a process since he said that transcreation "involves translation" (*Making Theater* 167), he does not consider its entirety as a process for his transcreation. And even though translation, similar to interpretation also creates an image of "carrying across" (Reynolds, *The Scope of Translation*), it does not "carry across" what Fernandez considers as "original essence." If in distillation, the ideas/meanings "extracted" from text analysis is then "carried across" to produce transcreation, this does not happen in translation. He wrote that transcreation is not translation because "it is not transforming meaning from one medium to the next" (Fernandez, *Making Theater* 168). For Fernandez, he uses the term *transcreation* because transcreation "keeps the poet's intention" and keeps the same "insight, meaning, and feel" of the original poem to the performance, which translation does not. For him, a translated piece does not reflect the original "poet's intention" but it is transcreation that intentionally does that.

To illustrate that SugaTula is not translation, let us examine Roman Jakobson's three kinds of translations. These are: (1) intralingual translation which he also calls as *rewording*; this is an interpretation of verbal signs using other signs of the same language. For instance, a Sebuano poem is translated to Sebuano through the use of synonyms; (2) interlingual translation which he calls *translation* proper; this is an interpretation using verbal signs of other language



Fig. 4. An image of “Kung Paano Maging Makata” by German Gervacio from SugaTula. The poem was recited and projected on stage.

such as when a Sebuano poem is translated to English; and (3) intersemiotic translation which he calls as *transmutation*; this is an interpretation of verbal signs to signs of nonverbal sign systems; similar to literature to dance (Jakobson, 114).

The closest kind of translation for SugaTula is the intersemiotic translation because SugaTula entails an interpretation of poetry to theater. However, if we examine closely, SugaTula cannot be considered as an intersemiotic translation because theatre is considered as a combined art or an “integrated art” (Fernandez, *Making Theater* 7). Theater integrates verbal signs (words and language) with nonverbal signs (music, movement, visual arts). Furthermore, in SugaTula, the artists extract the “original essence” of a poem, then distills the “original essence” in the creation of music, movements, and images, and weaves the original poem with the distilled expressions. Thus, SugaTula as a transcreation deviates from Jakobson’s “intersemiotic translation” since in weaving the original poem with the distilled expressions, the verbal sign is retained.

Moreover, in relation to literary translation, specifically in poetry translation, I believe that IPAG in transcreating poetry has also grappled with the same concerns that translators are confronted with in translating poetry. Jackson Mathews, referring to translation as an art of approximation, observed that “to translate a poem whole is to compose another poem. A whole translation will be faithful to the matter, and it will ‘approximate the form’ of the original; and it will have a life of its own, which is the voice of the translator” (qtd. in Leighton 447). Thus, if poetry is translated, it is just an approximation of the original poem, the translated poem will be a different poem

because it will have the “voice of the translator.” This observation is echoed by Szirtes who showed how a poem is written by the poet and how the translated poem is re-imagined and re-shaped by the author. He wrote that translation is an “act which is itself a form of composing that is not a forgery” (Szirtes 62). Hence, the translated poem is not a mere copy of the original, “it has a life of its own” (Mathews qtd. in Leighton 447).

IPAG’s SugaTula as transcreation, uses poetry as its source, but it does not claim that it “has a life of its own” rather it claims that it has kept the “original essence” of the poem. This means that the poem and the transcreated performance are one. They are similar since they share the same essence, the same identity. This then makes Fernandez’s SugaTula as transcreation and not translation because it not only aims to be faithful to the original poem, but as a trans-media, the original poem is combined with other mediums in the performance.

However, if we examine the process of the transcreation of poetry, it cannot be refuted that it goes through a process of translation because IPAG artists begin with close reading of the poem and extracting the “original essence” in creating music, images, etc. Thus, these mediums which are created—music, image, movements have lives of their own for they are separate mediums. Hence, each of them are translations of poetry which can even be considered as Roman Jakobson’s intersemiotic translations. However, in its entirety, SugaTula is a trans-media, and thus use all the distilled mediums in the performance, including the original poem. These tell us then that it is transcreation and not translation.

Moreover, based on the definition of transcreation by Gaballo, Fernandez's SugaTula does not only have the feature of creativity (a feature to be considered in both translation and transcreation) but it also has the feature of productivity (a feature to be considered only in transcreation) (110). As I reflect on the feature of productivity, transcreation has the "capacity of generating new, unheard-of solutions" (Gaballo 111). For IPAG and Fernandez, this refers to how SugaTula was used to popularize poetry by bringing poetry to the stage. Through SugaTula, "students enjoy poetry without losing poetry's original essence through its transformation in other mediums"—the theater (*Performance Level* 117). Moreover, Gaballo wrote that transcreation requires fluency, flexibility, and originality (111). All these are also required in IPAG's transcreation of poetry. Furthermore, in SugaTula, the original essence of a poem is retained because the poem was transcreated into a trans-media performance. Fernandez describes this as "[p]oetry re-forms into performance, words into the multi-medium systems of the stage condensed as a unified trans-medium of performance" (121). SugaTula, the transcreation of poetry to theater, is indeed an "imagined new world" by Fernandez and the IPAG artists (Gaballo 111).

SugaTula as Trans-media Performance

IPAG's SugaTula, a transcreation is oneness of beings. Creative expressions of the poet, the director, and the theater artists are beings by themselves and transcreation creates this oneness. The "original essence" is not "kept or retained" because the "original essence" is already there, it is there because the original poem is part of the performance. Music, movement, and images which try to keep the poem's "original essence" (through distillation) now live with the poem itself, thus taking in the poem's "essence" in the entirety of the performance. This is the beauty of Fernandez's SugaTula as transcreation, it allows the distilled piece(s) to live with the original piece, and it creates oneness of beings. Gervacio's "Kung Paano Maging Makata" lives with IPAG's music, movement, and images. Thus, on stage, they are one. *Hubad ako, pagmasdan! Lahat ay nasa akin* does not just belong on a page but seen, heard, felt, experienced, and encountered from the stage.

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