

Waking the dead by yvette tan essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Since the dawn of time, horror has already been thriving on the Philippine mainstream (A. Paman, 2010). Men and women, old and young, alike, have been fond of being scared by the characters of the child-imitating tiyanak, the tree demon kapre, the vampire-like aswang, the horse-headed-human-bodied tikbalang, and the violent spirits, among others.

When a typical Filipino is asked about what horror is for him, what instantly comes into his mind are those supernatural creatures or paranormal experiences which he could have either heard from others' recount or from his own personal encounter. Horror has always been associated with the eerie creatures of the night. This has been the common perception, so that, when one has able to read horror stories written by fictionists like that of by Yvette Tan, he would really be surprised and doubtful if it really belongs to horror.

As the book “ Waking the Dead and Other Horror Stories” by Tan implies, horror can offer a lot more possibilities-greater and wider than that we had expected it to be. While most Filipino horror stories are based on the Philippine mythology, Tan's stories are different as they are based on the current times, weaved by the author's creative mind, and added with a number of twists and dramas, making a great move from the conventional horror we Filipinos are accustomed to.

Tan's horror stories are different because first, it is founded on our present-day situation. If you are to observe, books like the True Philippine Ghost stories and Afraid: The Best Philippine Ghost Stories among others are commonly based on real accounts of people- in their encounter with those

horrible creatures, or on recounts passed from generation to generation by our folks. In other words, the supernatural horrors from these stories are rooted down from the folklore and religious traditions (“ Horror Fiction”, 2012).

On the contrary, Tan’s stories are generated based on her limitless imagination, a characteristic that can be identified as under the genre of speculative fiction. The stories came up from her personal observations and experiences—in her everyday encounter with different persons and situations. She then “...laced her 10 precision-machined stories with elements of horror which are neither contrived nor telegraph. She takes the mundane and turns it into something menacing.... (As cited in “ Dead” and loving it, 2009) Aided by her creative and imaginative mind, Tan was able to use characters and settings which are definitely found and prevalent in our present times.

D. J Delgado affirmed this in her book review when she said : “ What makes Tan’s stories compelling is that the fantasy takes place ... in worlds founded on reality as we know it, or reality as it is usually rendered in what’s largely considered as conventional.... ” She added, the “ stories are set in recognizable cultural and physical environments, and they carry familiar and pronounceable names” (Delgado, n. .). The first story, “ The Child Abandoned” is set in the Quiapo where the main character’s life, the unusual child named Teresa revolves. The story mentions about the strange fascination of the child for the filthy Ilog Pasig and about a Feast of the Black Nazarene—the very night of it when The Change happened. The Change has been referred to as the night when the child died after drinking all the river’s

impurities- resulting to a cleaner Ilog Pasig. To recognize this miracle, the child was canonized Sta. Teresa of the Child Abandoned.

In “ The Bridge”, the descriptions of the Madame are by no doubt referring to the glamorous former First Lady Imelda Marcos, who accordingly visited the town again, after a very long time, to be in charge of the building of the bridge, which would connect the provinces of Leyte and Samar-the San Juanico Bridge. The third story did not really mentioned about famous and pronounceable names. However, what makes it involve is the fact that the story is set in “ recognizable current physical environment”. “ Delivering the Goods” is set in a familiar environment where the people would trade even their souls to Satan in the name of money.

This story happens among persons belonging to that certain sectors of our society whose only priorities apart from survival, is money. These are people who no longer believe in conscience and karma. Harming and killing others becomes as easy for them due to their in-dire need of money. This story also presents the widespread illegal trade of human organs in the Philippines and its neighboring countries. “ Boss, Ex? ” like the first and third story, is also set on the decadent city. This time, it mentions of a mall named Virra Mall- the back room of it is the den of many vendors of mostly banned objects.

It features people in the industry of piracy-the selling of X-rated and illegal films. The title is a modification of the “ Boss, X? ” summons of the vendors trying to persuade you in buying their illegal products. Again, this story happens in the realms of reality-the fact that many people in this society will resort to illegal things just to sustain their living. The story “ Stella for Star”,

although not exactly revealed, happened in Malate, which is somewhere in Manila. In here, a tiyanak named Stella was adopted by a gay couple, Dorian and his partner, Paco. Two important points are presented here.

First, the tiyanak character, which is commonly found only in remote barrios, is now preying in the city. Also, the baby monster is adopted by a same-sex couple who are living under one roof as a family. This presents another contemporary situation—the homosexuals and their relationship with the same sex, by which, these days, are slowly accepted by our former conservative society. The kapre story in “Kulog”, this time, happens in a province. However, the characters are very similar of what we often see nowadays on Filipino TV programs and films, and even in reality.

Therein, the father is a strict and is always drunk; the mother is a martyr and a battered wife; and their daughter, Angela is a victim of the father’s maltreatment (Delgado, n. d.). “Fade to Nothing” is also set in the city. The story presents a variety of human personalities and strange human practices (Delgado, n. d.). It highlights different persons from different fields: muralists, fashion models, celebrated artists, and businessmen whose fate came across together through Felicia. Felicia, a celebrity, “...in trying to please others...,” was flirting almost every night with every man she met. I wanted to ask what happened to Robert, but that was like asking what happened to Grant, to Felipe, to Marco, to me. A list of names as long as my arm, all of them gone, as if they had never existed.

To Felicia, you existed only because she believed that you were there. We were all imaginary friends to her, dolls that dissolved as soon as she was

done playing”(Tan, 2009, p. 108) . And witnessing all of these idiosyncrasies of her is David, a muralist, whose relationship with Felicia becomes the source of his inspiration in his well-acclaimed artistic works. ...I’ve always wondered the pain behind that one”, a fan once asked David (Tan, 2009, p. 106). This story presents the night life which is very prevalent nowadays and pictures out persons, like Felicia, who considers love and sex as a mere game. It represents today’s very liberated society-the society who no longer considers sex as consecrated as it should be. It also presents a different kind of relationship-one that is not really founded by love but by mere dependence with each other.

Both of them were tied not really because they are in love but because they have needs that only their partner can met-Felicia for an aide during her weakness and David for a source of “ gross fantasies and artistic inspiration” (Delgado, n. d.). Again this presents the reality-the reality in which many people nowadays, out of practicality, would choose to live with persons whom they do not truly love. In the next story, “ Daddy”, the main character is Yvette Tan, herself. The story is about this writer, who had, one day, received a call from her deceased father in the midst of her demanding work.

It is to the readers’ surprise that the visit was not through an apparition but instead, through a phone call. One must really be filled with wonder to note that the other world has gone high-tech like ours that the dead can now connect with us using the modern devices. Also, based on the naming of the character and the intensity of emotions Tan embodied in this story, one could bet that this is indeed, partly fiction and partly a reality. This is testified by an interview with Tan whereby she said, “ I never put anything of

myself in my stories, and this is the only exception. All of the elements there are real, just jumbled up.

The only thing that's fiction is the phone call itself" (Chikiamco, 2009).

Lastly, the " Sidhi" story, which won a Palanca award, is also set in Quiapo and in a highly speculative future. This is a continuation of " The Child Abandoned" and happens years after The Change begun. By this time however, a more ample description of Quiapo was told, especially how it became a melting pot for different species. The story combines fiesta, drugs, alcohol and the supernaturals-all present in that night when different folks from all over the world, accordingly, were there to celebrate the saint's drowning.

What used to be a religious celebration has become a night of partying, with drugs and booze flowing as freely as the saint's blessings.... " (Tan, 2009, p. 132) This is about a woman, who had partake in the sacred water and was truly cleansed, and their so-called The Dreamer named Noah, who claimed himself to be someone who could give temporary salvation but did not actually receive salvation, himself. Although this story was imagined to be happening in the future, the physical environment in it still depicts the present-day Quiapo-a melting pot of different people.

The " presence of these supernatural creatures into our world" might represent the increasing number of different folks migrating and coming to Quiapo. Hence, being a melting pot, horrific though not paranormal creatures like the holdapers, pickpockets, drug-pushers and many other different characters of bad intentions came to settle there. Also, the great aspiration

of people to be cleansed as evidenced by their coming to Quiapo for the feast is a representation of the great devotion of the Filipinos to the Black Nazarene in Quiapo especially during its feast day in the first week of January.

The great packing of people, in their desire to get hold of the ‘miraculous’ rope is suggesting their great desire of being saved-whatever it takes for them to do it. As presented, Tan’s stories involve recognizable and famous persons, places or things in history or in actuality. This technique is referred to as allusion (“Allusion”, 2012). Furthermore, as can be observed, Tan uses the city as her setting in almost all of her stories. Delgado related: “...familiar places in the city...are rendered as strange, unwieldy, unpredictable, disorderly, dark, dangerous, and therefore ideal venues for horror” (Delgado, n. d.).

On the other hand, our traditional horror did not necessarily use famous elements or actuality in the story. Most of the stories, basically, involve same sets of elements. The horrific creatures are usually: a ghost of a dead person disturbing the living ones; or monsters like the tiyanak and aswang haunting for its prey; or significant things which turn out to have the spirits of its owners. Meanwhile, the usual settings are those insignificant places-a deserted house; or a century-old tree or anything; or a place where crimes or accidents happened; or cemetery; or a barrio where the clan of horrific creatures live and the like.

Most stories do not involve actuality since over and over again the formula used is almost the same. (A. Paman, 2010) This does not mean, however,

that the horror of Tan is solely based from her imagination. In some of her stories, she borrowed characters and other elements from our mythology. However, her kind of horror is still different in a way that she made some twists and changes from the usual. As what D. J Delgado attested: “ In these three stories [“ The Bridge”, “ Kulog,”, and “ Stella for Star”], Tan successfully breathes new life to the myths, legends, and outrageous gossip.... ” (n. d.)