The Exiles: A Reading of Gregorio Brillantes’
The Distance to Andromeda

Maria Cecilia V. Locsin

Philippine Studies vol. 15, no. 3 (1967): 407–424

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder’s written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.
The Exiles: a Reading of Gregorio Brillantes' The Distance to Andromeda

MARIA CECILIA V. LOC SIN

Two years ago when the future of the Filipino novel was the subject of much “sound and fury” in several conferences held on the Ateneo campus, one critic came up with the observation that local Catholic prestige schools produce a very negligible number of literary figures in the field of Filipino literature. Among those cited were Gilda Cordero Fernando and Gregorio Brillantes. Though considered promising, the position of these two young writers is relatively minor when compared to writers of non-religious orientation. Several decades from now, when what passes for contemporary literature will no longer be considered contemporary, critics will have assigned definite places for N.V.M. Gonzalez and Nick Joaquin but not perhaps for Gregorio Brillantes. There would certainly be no place for Brillantes if one were to base an estimation of the writer solely on his collection of short stories entitled The Distance to Andromeda and Other Stories.

The crux of the matter does not lie in the fact that his subject matter is so limited. Brillantes’ talent is especially suited to the delineation of Filipino middle class life and its attendant problems. With rare exceptions, his characters in-

---

variably belong to the more or less well-to-do class. The father is always either a doctor or a lawyer involved in politics, the mother a local society figure; the boys go to Ateneo, the girls to St. Theresa's or Holy Ghost. Even the problems that assail them form a pattern: mother often neglects the children because of too many mahjong sessions; father gets into trouble by dipping too deeply into the nation's treasury, and Junior commits indiscretions while playing the local Lothario. Surprisingly enough, Brillantes is at his best when he confines himself to this narrow circle. It is when he deviates from this pattern that he lapses into whimsicality, as in the stories "Sunday" and "The Ricefields."

Rather the defect lies in his thematic preoccupation which leads him to sacrifice characterization to such an extent that his characters fail to attain dimension, in the sense that they are not well-rounded. Hence even in his more successful stories like "The Living and the Dead," his characters emerge as stereotypes: Jose Romano could be pinned down with one label, the corrupt public official; Chito Romano could be tagged as the poor little mixed up rich boy; Mrs. Romano as the empty-headed society matron and Sylvia as a junior version of Mrs. Romano.

Yet, for all Brillantes' stylistic defects The Distance to Andromeda and Other Stories remains a landmark in the field of contemporary Filipino literature even if only as the chronicle of the growth of a young artist's mind. Certain Brillantes stories are sure to endure. Among them would be "Faith, Love, Time and Dr. Lazaro," "The Light and Shadow of Leaves," "The Exiles," "The Beautiful Girls," "The Distance to Andromeda," "A Wind Over the Earth," "The Young Man," "The Years," "The Last December," and "The Living and the Dead."

In his introduction to Gregorio Brillantes' The Distance to Andromeda and Other Stories, N.V.M. Gonzalez says that the book contains "principally the material any college graduate might want to know from Dubliners to the Roman Catholic Missal."² Coming from such a discerning critic as N.V.M.

²N.V.M. Gonzalez, in his introduction to The Distance to Andromeda and Other Stories (Manila: Benipayo Press, 1960), p. vii.
Gonzalez, the reference to James Joyce's collection of short stories can hardly be dismissed as an offhand assertion. Reading through Brillantes' anthology, one realizes why Gonzalez makes the comment. A close scrutiny reveals a pattern that recurs time and again in most of Brillantes' stories, the frequency of the failure of the characters to understand one another's motives and actions, and their constant inability to communicate their thoughts. Immediately the allusion to *Dubliners* becomes apparent, especially when one recalls that Joyce himself said that his book was meant to be a study of paralysis in Dublin. To a lesser degree Brillantes treats the idea of paralysis which takes the form in *The Distance to Andromeda and Other Stories* of an inability to communicate. Lack of communication, as Brillantes sees it, inevitably results in isolation. Significantly, even when taken out of context, the selections within the collection hint at the nature of the theme. We have "The Exiles," "The Strangers," "A Wilderness," "Lost."

In 265 pages Gregorio Brillantes explores the many and varied forms of isolation ranging from a boy's feeling of plain homesickness in "The Light and Shadow of Leaves," to a man's state of lovelessness in "The Young Man." But unlike *Dubliners*, Brillantes' stories are not arranged according to the degree of the protagonist's state of isolation.

Brillantes writes of barriers, both natural and unnatural, separating individuals. In "Sunday," this natural barrier comes in the form of a language problem. Juan, a simple farmer, experiences a feeling of helplessness and inadequacy because of his inability to comprehend the governor's speech in English, a situation which he does not encounter when he communes with God in church. Almost always, however, Brillantes treats of unnatural barriers, for example, in "The Years" and "The Living and the Dead," where members of the same family are so alienated from each other that when an urgent need to communicate arises, they no longer know how to express them-

---

5 "Paralysis" as James Joyce understood it came in the forms of impotence, frustration and death; see *Dubliners* (New York: Random House, 1954), pp. 46-47.
selves. Hence, when Carlos de Leon finally seeks in "The Years" to communicate with his wife, the most that he can manage is a "dumb, strained gasp." The sense of separation among these individuals is so acute that each member of the family seems to exist in a world of his own. In "The Years" this impression is achieved through the use of the rotating point of view by which the thoughts of each member of the de Leon family are spotlighted. We find Chabeng de Leon wrapped up in thoughts of her birthday party, Alice lost in her indecision over a vocation, Manoling brooding over the pains of growing up, and Carlos de Leon confronted with ghosts from the past after years of lovelessness.

The same motif is repeated in "The Living and the Dead." As a matter of fact, "The Years" and "The Living and the Dead" form a double pattern in the sense that the inspection tour of the Romano household reveals another birthday party. The occasion is Sylvia Romano's debut. Unlike the de Leon faction both mother and daughter are equally empty-headed, their main concern being the success of the party. However, the focus of interest is on the male members of the family. A juxtaposition of scenes devoted first to the father, and then to the son, discloses the estrangement between Chito and his father. Both are in trouble. The father has not always been a faithful husband nor has he been scrupulously honest, while the son has gotten a girl with child. Both are at a loss as to whom they should confide in. Faced with the danger of exposure, Jose Romano ("ex-judge, ex-governor, ex-representative" and would be ex-director) realizes the loneliness of his predicament, but pride prevents him from admitting the need to confide in anyone. In the face of crisis he evades the sense of impending doom by losing himself in lustful thoughts of his mistress Carmen. On the other hand, despair paralyzes Chito from taking any overt action when confronted with the news of Helen's pregnancy. Like his father he toys briefly with the idea of suicide as a means of escape but shudders at the thought of physical pain. In the end we leave him with thoughts turned to the innocence of childhood and its freedom from care.

The effect of this repetition of pattern is an intensification of the theme that even in a closely knit family isolation is not
uncommon. The only difference in the isolation of the two families is one of degree. Whatever the de Leons have done, the Romanos have made worse. Hence though Carlos de Leon and Jose Romano are not in communication with their wives, the former makes a breakthrough while the latter does not. This repetition through variation creates the impression of the author’s looking at the same question from different angles of vision.

Alienation exists not only among individuals belonging to different generations but also among those belonging to the same age level. The gap between generations intensifies as it mirrors the gap between individuals. Separation between father and son, and mother and daughter is duplicated by the estrangement between husband and wife and among the children themselves. Chabeng de Leon has lost contact with her busy husband through the years; Manoling is a “stranger” to his father; Alice has lost rapport with her mother:

If only she could tell mama—but they could no longer talk the way they used to, when she was in high school and she could simply tell her just anything. If only—but a suspicion came between them, a holding back—of course she was to blame, not mama, Alice admitted to herself. It was being away too long, the series of loves she had managed to keep secret from her mother, the other places, the years.4

And her relationship with her cousin Marilu is no better:

“Don’t you ever listen?” Marilu said.

Alice turned to her cousin, seated before the dresser correcting her lipstick; and she wished she were like her, tomboyish and casual, untouched so far by the anguish of any passion.5

Even newlyweds are not exempted from this state of isolation. In “Lost,” Fred and Laura experience a sense of separation alien to honeymooners. In the course of sharing confidences, Fred realizes that however much Laura and he might love each other, there are certain things which he cannot reveal to her:

“There is—music in the rain,’ she said. ‘A singing... tell me, what things does it make you remember?’

5 Ibid.
'There were the afternoons I came to see you,' he said. 'At the college, and later on at Tia Deling's place. The sala, the portraits on the wall... You coming down the stairs in an evening gown. And the time I told you I loved you and you would not look at me and when you did you looked at me straight and long...' 

Even now in the room with her, he could not recall the moment without a silent start of guilt: before he felt the deepest tenderness he had imagined he could defile her as he had the others. Did she know that then? Now? The knowledge of his deceit cast a shadow across his mind; so long as he was aware of it, it marred the spell of rain and the memory in the room.6

Brillantes could be said to speak for the "lost and lonely generation" in the sense that his characters are all haunted by some unnameable grief which infects both young and old and sets them apart from other people. His characters are initiated early into a state of loneliness brought about by isolation, a situation most effectively brought to the fore by the fumbling attempts of young boys to communicate what they themselves cannot fully understand, "the innate listlessness stamped on mortality." The frequency with which Brillantes makes use of the adolescent's point of view is also significant, because next to children, they best dramatize the loneliness of the human condition. In their search for identity (many of them are not properly identified, a flaw which acquires a symbolic significance) they alienate themselves from other individuals. Though most of these adolescent characters are properly inarticulate, like their adult counterparts, they are specialized people endowed with a certain amount of sensitivity and self-awareness which enables them to give an account of their struggle. In nine out of ten cases however, when these individuals attempt to reach out to other people, their efforts to communicate are frustrated. The unidentified narrator of "The Beautiful Girls" is a case in point. Haunted by a nagging dream of a "lost and ancient city," he finally decides to share this with the girl Remedios, only to realize that he has already lost her to someone else:

You and Chito shook her hand, soft and right; her eyes were almost on a level with yours (how tall and lovely she was), the shy, proud, happy eyes, that you knew were fated to love someone else. Raul lin-

---

6 Ibid., p. 81.
gered on at the gate with her; you watched them from the jeep; he seemed to be telling her something urgent and final. He held her hand; they stood there together in the dusky light beneath the acacia trees. You thought of your dream: the fountain, the ancient town. She must know of it; you must speak to her of it; and your need of her deep, quiet listening rose within you, strained, receded; too late; you would never find her again.7

A quixotic notion of friendship prevents him from disclosing his real feelings for Remedios. Though all may be fair in love and in war in cliché, delicadeza dictates that it is bad form to court the girl of one’s best friend.

The people in Brillantes’ world are separated from each other by pride, indifference, inhibition and a natural inarticulateness. In “Blue Piano,” because of pride Linda, a small town belle seduced into a life of sin, rejects Joe’s attempts to reach her. In “What Do We Do When We All Go Out?” a school bully’s threat of physical violence hinders the little boy from telling his father of his initiation into evil. In “Faith, Love, Time and Dr. Lazaro,” habitual indifference isolates Dr. Lazaro from his fellow human beings, to such an extent that it renders him incapable of sympathizing with those who suffer, as Pedro Esteban and his family do. In “The Rain,” Flora is alienated from Eddie in spite of the fact that she feels a bond existing between them because she is held back by her inhibitions. Finally, in “A Wind Over the Earth,” Don Ricardo wishes to say something to his son Tony, but because of a stroke he dies without uttering all the things he has left unsaid through the years.

Most of the characters of Brillantes are isolated because they have allowed themselves to remain out of touch through the years. Time plays an important role in the isolation of these people. Habitual procrastinators like Dr. Lazaro and Don Ricardo find out that the years, instead of bridging the gap between them and the persons they care for, only serve to set them adrift farther and farther away from their loved ones. Others even add to their isolation by their refusal to admit that they are estranged from other people. Nevertheless the lack of contact which results from isolation takes its toll, and

7 Ibid., p. 139.
we find his characters continually misunderstanding and misinterpreting one another's motives and actions. Hence, in "The Light and Shadow of Leaves," Pepe's mother interprets his coming to the province as a visit of love, when actually he and his brother Luis are hatching up a plan to sell a piece of land that has belonged to the family for generations. In "A Wind Over the Earth" Teresa misunderstands Tony's sorrow and lonely despair for plain lust, and rejects his advances. In "The Exiles" Amanda takes her father's smile of tenderness for a sign of idiocy:

Something glinted in his eyes, he smiled to himself. For a while he did not speak. She regarded her father's wrinkled, amused expression; another symptom of his prolonged illness; a childishness, an idiocy that will soon understand nothing...

It is interesting to note that the only people who do not feel lost among Brillantes' characters are those who have maintained their faith in God, among them Manuel in "The Exiles" who "converses with saints"; Mrs. Lazaro and her son Ben who are imbued with a lively faith in God; the sisters in "The Conquerors" "who can dream of children singing Christmas carols in another country" in the midst of the din of mortar shells; the closely knit families in "The Last December" and "The Distance to Andromeda"; Pedro Esteban and his humble family in "Faith, Love, Time and Dr. Lazaro" who can accept God's will stoically in the face of death; and the simple folk in "Sunday" who do not forget to visit the church and commune with God on their rare visits to town.

In his analysis of the title story, "The Distance to Andromeda," Gregorio Brillantes obligingly points out to Fr. Bernad that the story is about "distances, destinations, homecomings; several touches point to this central idea of journey and arrival, the boy's sense of distances, nearnesses so to speak, physical, emotional and spiritual." Earlier in his analysis he comments that what matters in the story "is not the distance to Andromeda but the distance between human beings and bet-

---

8 Ibid., p. 64.
ween them and God, their ultimate destiny." These two statements could be said to sum up the idea behind all the other stories as well. Brillantes conceives of man as a pilgrim. Significantly, either his characters are geographically dislocated, as the fathers of Amanda in "The Exiles" and of Remedios in "The Beautiful Girls," or they feel a strong sense of destination as Ben and Dr. Lazaro do in "Faith, Love, Time and Dr. Lazaro," Tony in "A Wind Over the Earth", Ben in "The Distance to Andromeda", and the "I" in "The Beautiful Girls", Juan in "Sunday", the wounded soldier in "The Ricefields" and Manoling and Carlos de Leon in "The Years.” Life in this world is a journey or pilgrimage. Hence the abundance of journey symbols in his stories where actual and non-tangible space is traversed.

Actual distance is traversed in "The Distance to Andromeda" where the engineer father comes home to the love and security of a happy home life after an out-of-town construction job. The same case is noted in "The Light and Shadow of Leaves" where Pepe’s father ends a pilgrim’s long search for love and serenity when he meets Emong’s cousin. Non-tangible distance is overcome in "The Strangers" where Linda, a lonely young sophisticate, breaks through the wall of indifference that has hitherto separated her from the religion of her childhood, when a milling crowd in Quiapo forces her into the church where she eventually rediscovers God. Emerging from the church, she experiences a feeling of closeness for her fellow passengers in the bus and she is able to observe them with a degree of compassion and understanding that she has never before been capable of.

Man’s destination is heaven, his real home. He is therefore only a stranger in this world. Because of the fall of Adam, man begins life in this world as an exile marked by what Brillantes calls “an innate listlessness stamped on mortality.” His characters sense this inherent alienation. This is what causes the boy Pepe in "The Light and Shadow of Leaves" to wake up late in the night feeling lost. This is what brings pangs of loneliness to another boy, Ben in "The Distance to Andromeda-
Since man is an exile from heaven he naturally longs for the haven of his real home. Thus Brillantes' characters continually dream of a "lost country," a place where they feel much more at home. Amanda's father dreams of this in "The Exiles." So do Flora in "The Rain," and the unidentified "I" of "The Beautiful Girls." Some, however, lost in the hurly-burly of fast living, become too engrossed in meeting the demands of a material existence and forget altogether that they are not meant for this world. They become isolated physically and symbolically from other people, an isolation that is only a sign of a greater separation from God. When God deems it proper to intervene, He sends a reminder. Consequently, each of Brillantes' characters comes close to some kind of death, literal or psychological, as experienced by Jose Romano and Carlos de Leon in "The Living and the Dead" and "The Years" respectively. In a sense, the barriers that Brillantes writes about are not permanent, because, although his initial situation always starts with isolation, the structure of his stories is linear. First comes the beginning, the illuminating point, then the resolution, so that in the end, the principal character either makes a breakthrough or a deus ex machina is introduced. Thus, within the context of the stories like "The Living and the Dead," "The Years," "A Wind Over the Earth," "The Strangers," God intervenes and saves all, whether man merits the salvation or not. The use of this pattern has created consternation in certain quarters. Fr. Bernad objects to the breaking through the barriers beyond the expectation of the structure in "The Living and the Dead" and "The Years," on the grounds that the author does not sufficiently prepare the reader for the climax. Dr. Leonard Casper said something to the effect that if a charge could be made against Brillantes, it is that his stories have a deus ex machina, whose presence involves the reader in a theological view of man. Inevitably the question

arises—Does God intervene too often? Do we have an artist in Brillantes or a moral propagandist?

And yet in one particular instance Brillantes could be said to have departed from his standard pattern. In “Faith, Love, Time and Dr. Lazaro” no God comes down from the altar to save Dr. Lazaro from the sea of indifference he is wallowing in, and perhaps because of this, “Faith, Love, Time and Dr. Lazaro” may be said to dramatize most completely the theme of isolation. Lazaro is out of contact with his fellow mortals. This situation arises from a combination of indifference and absence of Faith. Indifference clings to him like a disease. “It was as though indifference were an infection that had entered his blood; it was everywhere in his body.” Lazaro exudes an aura of lifelessness, the “tomb-image” is applied to him throughout the story; his face has a “dusty, wasted quality,” only his eyes contain life; his body usually takes on a stance of “habitual slack repose,” he is often “buried in a strange half-sleep”. While listening to a Chopin sonata, he is “curiously reminded of ancient monuments, faded stone walls, a greyness.” His name is ironic and symbolic, because in contrast to his biblical namesake, Lazarus the brother of Martha and Mary, he negates rather than affirms life. Like the other Lazarus he does not rise from the dead, but he is a living dead. Physically he seems sapped of vitality, emotionally he is barren. Display of emotion fills him with unease:

‘I cannot thank you enough, doctor,’ Esteban said. ‘You have been very kind to come this far, and at this hour.’

They stood on the clay bank, in the moon-shadows beside the gleaming water. Dr. Lazaro said: ‘You had better go back, Esteban. We can find the way to the road. The trail is over there, isn’t it?’ He wanted to be rid of the man, to be away from the shy, humble voice, the prolonged wretchedness.

‘Let’s go Ben,’ Dr. Lazaro said.13

But worst of all, he has lost the capacity to feel sympathy for the misery of others. The pathetic sight of Esteban’s dying

child which greets him in the farmer’s hovel elicits nothing but an “impersonal disgust” on his part.

True to the pattern created by Brillantes, Dr. Lazaro, like Carlos de Leon and Jose Romano, is alienated from his immediate family. He is a stranger to his wife but he does nothing to alter the situation existing between them:

Her silence had ceased to disturb him, like the plastic saints in her room, in their cases of glass or the air of conspiracy she wore when she left with Ben for mass in the morning. Dr. Lazaro would rumble about miracle drugs, politics, music in monologue; he posed questions, supplied his own answers and she would merely nod, with an occasional “yes” and “is that so” and something like the shadow of anxiety in her gaze.14

He is alienated from his son Ben whose vocation he chooses to ignore in spite of the broad hints thrown his way. He patronizes his wife and his son, and views their piety with at best amused tolerance. This attitude of his can be traced to his own loss of faith which creates an irreparable rift between him and his family because religion no longer holds any meaning for him.

Dr. Lazaro found himself wondering again at the world of novenas and candles, where bread and wine became the flesh and blood of the Lord and a woman bathed in light appeared before children and mortal men spoke of eternal life, the vision of God, the body’s resurrection at the end of time. It was like a century from which he was barred; no matter—the customs, the geography didn’t appeal to him.15

This absence of a common bond between husband and wife and between father and son, coupled with an indifference which has built up walls around him, makes Lazaro’s attempts to communicate with those closest to him difficult. Consider the following:

He felt a need to define unspoken things, to come closer to the last of his sons; one of these days before the boy’s vacation was over, they might go on a picnic together, a trip to the farm; a special day for the two of them, father and son as well as friends. In the two years Ben had been away in college, they had written a few brief, almost formal letters to each other; your money is on the way, study hard, these are the best years...16

14 Ibid., p. 47.
15 Ibid., p. 57.
16 Ibid., p. 49.
Dr. Lazaro's attempts to communicate are highly unsuccessful. So are the other characters' efforts to reach him. When Esteban tries to talk to him over the phone, "a humming in the wire" occurs, making perfect communication impossible. As he enters the farmer's hut, "an old man greeted him lisping incoherently. Finally, he finds out that his patient suffers from a case of lockjaw although he notices that the "infant seemed to be straining to express some terrible, ancient wisdom." Ultimately he never breaks through the wall of isolation separating him from the rest of the characters in the story. His isolation is complete.

The ending of "Faith, Love, Time and Dr. Lazaro" is ironic because, contrary to his illusion, Dr. Lazaro fails to bridge the gap separating him from his son. As a matter of fact, he only succeeds in widening the gulf separating him from Ben, because by the time he decides to communicate with his son, time has wrought so many changes in their relationship that, like Jose Romano and Carlos de Leon, he no longer knows how to express his thoughts. Consider the very awkward episode in the car when he tries to dole out paternal advice regarding the boy's choice of profession. The pregnant silences, the awkward pauses, as well as the series of evasive answers which greet his suggestions, go to prove an absence of a meeting of minds. Dr. Lazaro adds to his isolation by deluding himself that in spite of the fact that he has allowed the years to create distances between him and Ben, a few fumbling words can dispel the barriers separating them. He does not realize this delusion because the years of lovelessness, indifference and "the common sense of his unbelief" have jaded his finer sensibilities. He fails to comprehend that for him and Ben there can be no common bond, not only because he is an unbeliever and Ben is a faithful believer but also because, through a defect in love, he has lost the capacity to sympathize. Hence Brillantes' comment apropos Dr. Lazaro's dilemma: "He makes light of the boy's piety — and what is love but compassion, a true sharing?" His lack of compassion is brought to the fore by an allusion to the gospel of St. Luke (Chapter 10, verses 23-37) sparked by his mocking query to Ben: "Father Lazaro, what must I do to gain eternal life?" an echo of a tempter's question to
Christ: "Master, what must I do to possess eternal life?" Jesus answers the question: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." On these two considerations Lazaro fails. An extension of the gospel finds Christ answering the tempter's query: "And who is my neighbor?" with the parable of the Good Samaritan, the story of a man whose compassion moves him to help an unfortunate Jew who was robbed and wounded by robbers and left naked on the road. The Samaritan's deep sympathy for a total stranger contrasts with Lazaro's refusal to get emotionally involved in the plight of Esteban's child. He is really quite devoid of any strong emotion, since one can hardly call his attachment for Ben deep. In this respect he is more akin to the dead than to the living. Understandably, though a doctor, his touch brings death, not life. Esteban's child does not respond to his ministrations and he fails to heal her. He cannot give life because he himself is without life. It is Ben who saves the child by his timely administration of lay baptism, the sacrament that "raises the soul to life of grace."

"Faith, Love, Time and Dr. Lazaro" may have the distinction of best dramatizing the theme of isolation which is hinted at on the first page and displayed in the last story in the collection, but "The Light and Shadow of Leaves" epitomizes the central idea. The selection has the distinction of being the only one among all the Brillantes stories that deals with all three phases of life which he takes into consideration in his study of isolation: boyhood, adolescence and manhood. It also has the distinction of treating all three forms of isolation at once: isolation from God, from other men and from culture and tradition. Consequently, one is inclined to believe that it is no accident of style that "The Light and Shadow of Leaves" is placed at the very end of the collection.

"The Light and Shadow of Leaves" is divided into three interrelated sections. The first one comes in the form of a recollection. It is an account of Pepe's father of his search and eventual discovery of a place to belong and a loved one to come home to. Gray rain and mist accompanied his trip to Emong's
home town in 1923, but his first vision of "the town" was through a haze of golden glow:

Somewhere a band was playing La Paloma, the dying sun was in my eyes and my first view of the town was a golden blur of trees and houses on the opposite bank.\textsuperscript{17}

Bracing himself for disappointment, he is pleasantly surprised to feel a sudden close kinship for the place, a sense of "happy recognition" which creates in him an impression of pre-experience:

I had prepared myself to be disillusioned; the reality was at once a happy surprise and somehow, a sort of memory; I felt as though I had lived here before, loved here my deepest love, and I knew the names of the streets, the history of each house, the blend of light and shadow under the trees.\textsuperscript{18}

He meets Lourdes, Emong's cousin and instantly he feels committed to her:

I had met other women; I had known the joy and sadness of their love; but never had they inspired that irrevocable commitment of one’s being. To be happy with her, that was not enough, it seemed with a little effort, one could be happy anywhere; I would embrace pain for her sake.\textsuperscript{19}

That vision of a "lost country," which haunts Brillantes' characters ultimately becomes a reality for Pepe’s father. The pilgrim heart finally comes home.

Throughout the first section, the acacia tree in the courtyard figures prominently. The narrator realizes how much he loves Lourdes when he sees her face framed in "the light and shadow of leaves". Leaf-shadows move across her face when she reveals that she loves him too.

The middle section deals with Pepe's boyhood and adolescence. He grows up in the safe and protective shadows of the same living acacia tree. Yet the child, like so many characters of Brillantes, begins to sense the mark of exile stamped on him. He wakes up one night wanting to communicate something he does not exactly know, and finds the house empty.

\textsuperscript{17} Brillantes, "The Light and Shadow of Leaves," \textit{op. cit.}, p. 248.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 249.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 251.
except for his brother Luis. He experiences a very strong impulse to wake his brother and talk things over:

...but his brother Luis would only get angry if he should wake him now; the thought saddened him, made him lonely, then resentful. Where was everyone else? Was there no one to talk to him now that he was awake in the night?\(^\text{20}\)

Several other incidents in his boyhood and adolescence heighten this sense of exile in him. When the family decides to go to a fair he is left behind because of a fever. On a vacation to an uncle's place, he experiences the agony of not belonging, because the other boys refuse to include him in their games. Back home he feels the sweet pain that comes with the first stirrings of love and the insecurity of not knowing whether the loved one cares enough. War, which has been a remote possibility, suddenly becomes a shocking reality for him when it deprives him of a father.

The third section deals with the son Pepe's pilgrimage to the old hometown. Like his father, he comes as a man with a quest. He is not in search of a loved one, however, in contrast to his father, since he has already found one in the city. His mission is less romantic and noble. He has come to negotiate the sale of a piece of ancestral land "that has never failed them even when there wasn't enough rain" to some parvenu from the city who does not know what to do with all the money he has amassed and has taken a sudden fancy for rustic life.

Inclement weather accompanies him on his trip to "the town." Whereas in his father's case, the hostility of the elements is offset by the warmth and friendliness of his co-passengers:

A man who had been dozing in the sunless morning, his face covered by a copy of the *Free Press* jerked awake, lassoed us into a conversation; he was incredibly fat, I remember with a shock of white hair and an enormous laugh; he offered us cigars; the pungent odor made me a trifle dizzy, but we had run out of Piedmont cigarettes.\(^\text{21}\)

In his case, it only serves to intensify his feeling of loneliness.

and his consciousness of the general spirit of apathy around him:

He wished he had someone to talk to, a friend to whom he might say: We'll soon reach the town—I grew up there—it's been years...the man beside him is engrossed in a paperback novel; a stranger with a life of his own, protected by an invincible indifference.22

On his return home, he notices the changes that time has wrought—"the great river has become shallow, the traceless mainstreet is a babel of commerce," the convento has acquired a new coat of paint, the old parish priest has been replaced, the familiar acacia tree has been cut down and "smoke from the smouldering stump insinuates itself into the house." These external changes in the physical make-up of the town fill him with a vague sense of loss. Actually, they reflect the disturbing changes within his own self. He has become citified, but his newly acquired set of values does not sit well on him. His mother thinks he has come purely for a visit of love. In reality he conspires with his brother to sell a piece of land that has belonged to the family for generations. He dislikes the underhandedness of the plot and feels constrained to justify his action by rationalizing that although he is not badly in need of the proceeds from the sale of the land, "money isn't everything but it helps."

In repudiating the world that his father represented, he comes to the realization that he has substituted an ersatz culture for something more valuable. He shrinks inwardly at the remembrance of the eternal rat race he pursues in the city and the "cramped fly infested apartment on a one way street." The genteel world of the past in "The Exiles" and "The World of the Moon" once again gives way to vulgar modernism and upstart values. These upstart values have found their way into the baroque house on del Pilar Street—his brother Luis consorts with Chinese businessmen in shady deals in between games of poker. Pepe feels alienated from both the world of the past and the present. He feels disturbed at the incongruous combination of the new bed in his old room and his "chest of drawers in the very same corner." This troubled feeling per-

22 Ibid., p. 260.
sists even after he has prayed his shortened Act of Contrition, and in his uneasy slumber he is haunted by dim memories of the past which even in his waking hours are accompanied by a kind of unphysical pain. He wakens in a dream of his father, "a cockcrow of denial" shrills in the early morning. The memory of the past is pushed back into the inmost recesses of his mind. Its call gives way to the demands of the present and Pepe

...closes the window against the smoke smell drifting into all the rooms of the house, and returns to the unaccustomed bed: an early train—be back before noon—got to see Martinez about the land; sleepless now and impatient for the morning.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 265.