

“THERE’S NOT A NAME THAT FITS”: TOWARDS A FILIPINO  
AMERICAN POETICS OF SHAME

by

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We are all Treaty people.

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## Dedication Page

For my family.

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## Abstract

My thesis explores the functions of shame in contemporary Filipino American poetry. I draw on theorists of shame such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Timothy Bewes alongside applications of the indigenous Filipino value of *hiya* to demonstrate how racialized and gendered shame informs the writing and identity formation of Filipino Americans. Through close readings of Patrick Rosal's *Brooklyn Antediluvian* and Barbara Jane Reyes's *Letters to a Young Brown Girl*, my thesis argues that contemporary Filipino American poetry not only contends with the painful restrictions that come with shame, but also reconceives shame as a potentially positive tool capable of fostering ethical engagement and newfound (or restored) forms of relationality.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

When asked about constraints in poetry in an interview about his 2016 collection *Brooklyn Antediluvian*, Filipino American poet Patrick Rosal responded by noting that “[t]here are so many ways that our speech is circumscribed—by taboo, politeness, authority, shame, etc. So sometimes a poem finds its form dialectically—anti- and synthetically—with (and against) these circumscriptions” (Lycurgus). If shame is conceived largely as a painful, unpleasant emotion, Rosal’s discussion of it as a circumscription that affects not only his speech but also his poetry’s form invites one to characterize his work as fitting in a tradition of Filipino American literature that Oscar V. Campomanes has observed to heavily feature recurring “[m]otifs of departure, nostalgia, incompleteness, rootlessness, leave taking and, dispossession” (298). Rosal goes on to list race as yet another one of these circumscriptions: “Culture and racialized rhetoric can restrict how I’m seen—sometimes violently so—or how my nieces and nephews are seen and then the poem is a way to trouble those edges” (Lycurgus). Rosal thereby implicitly links the shame that informs his poetry with that of the shame of one’s race, and racialized rhetoric that determines the perception of Filipinos as a whole. If poetry, for Rosal, is a “way to trouble those edges” of what constitutes Filipino identity, his poetic project might be thought of as an example of what Martin Joseph Ponce refers to as the “self-questioning ... constitutive of Filipino identity” (13), an identity Ponce earlier refers to as an “intensely convoluted project” (6). Filipino writer Nick Joaquin cheekily claimed that the “identity of the Filipino today is of a person asking what is his identity” (Joaquin 397); Rosal’s poetry might be read as continuing in the tradition of Filipino interrogation

of Filipino racial identity, one that examines the ways in which shame is crucial to this “intensely convoluted” identity formation.

However, I argue that Rosal’s invocation of shame, and indeed, that of many Filipino American writers, is far more ambivalent than its expression as a purely negative, unwanted emotion. His poetry is neither constrained by shame nor is it unequivocally working against this shame, and it is far from ignoring it entirely. Instead, Rosal recognizes the way shame functions as a circumscription and his poems find their form “dialectically ... with (and against)” shame. It would also be a disservice to Rosal’s work, and to Filipino American literature at large, to consider it to be largely interested in providing a definition of Filipino American identity; I follow Ponce’s call to reject the “teleological, prescriptive notion that ethnic or postcolonial literature ought to consolidate a ‘positive’ sense of cultural or national identity” (28). I argue that Rosal is one of several contemporary Filipino American poets who productively write with, contest, and redefine the shame that informs the speech, writing, and the identity formation of Filipino Americans. What is more, I suggest they are writing in a way that avoids offering what Filipino American identity *is* for self-consolidation in favor of exploring how shame relates Filipino Americans among themselves and others. Drawing on various theorizations of shame that include that of the similar Filipino cultural value of *hiya*, I will argue that the work of Filipino American poets Patrick Rosal and Barbara Jane Reyes contends not only with the painful restrictions that come with this shame, but also reconceives shame as a potentially positive tool capable of fostering ethical engagement and newfound (or restored) forms of relationality.

To attempt to understand how shame functions in a corpus of contemporary Filipino American poetry, it is necessary to attempt to understand how shame functions more generally. Recent theorizations about shame have emphasized the difficulty of defining shame in the first place; as David Callahan observes, “[s]hame is ... used so different in so many contexts that it serves rather as a conduit to discussion than as a term of resolution” (68–69). Rather than offering a singular definition, I am more interested in discussion of what several different conceptualizations of shame may offer as a way of examining the shame in Rosal’s and Reyes’s work. I am particularly interested in conceptualizations of shame that emphasize the ways in which it connects a “shameful” person to some other, especially emphasized by theorists of affect.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed provides an analysis of emotion that rejects the idea that “feelings ... reside in subjects or objects” but are instead “produced as effects of circulation” (8), and specifically claims that shame is “not a purely negative relation” but is instead “ambivalent” (105). Ahmed originally describes shame as an “intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself” (103) but emphasizes its interrelational quality, suggesting that “shame requires an identification with the other who, as witness, returns the subject to itself” (106). Drawing on the work of psychologist Silvan S. Tomkins, Ahmed emphasizes the relation of shame to love, with the subject of shame requiring a love of some other to feel as though they have failed; shame, for Ahmed, arises out of a failure to “approximate ‘an ideal’ that has been given to us through the practices of love” (106). Ahmed’s discussion of the necessity of a witness is also significant in a thematic discussion of shame in the work of Rosal and Reyes, in which speakers describe particular witnesses, ranging from lovers,

parents, elders, and total strangers that invoke a sense of shame in themselves. Beyond the witnesses described within these poems, the poets analyzed are also highly conscious of their readership as a kind of witness to their shame. Ahmed's elaboration of how shame is experienced as a failure of approximating a loved ideal is also useful to an analysis of shame in contemporary Filipino American poetry, whose speakers frequently describe the pain of failing to live up to various Filipino and Western ideals. Shame informs this body of work not only thematically but formally; the formally varied work of these different Filipino American poets, I will argue, frequently challenges and fails against particular poetic ideals in ways that complement their different examinations of shame. What connects these different poets is their presentation of how shame is always making what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as a "double movement . . . toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality" (37). Far from being plainly seen as a positive or negative emotion essential to one's identity, Sedgwick suggests that shame is "a permanent structuring fact of identity" with "powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities" (64–65); the poets I analyze similarly write productively both with and against an ambivalent characterization of shame.

In *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*, Timothy Bewes also explores how shame affects literary form, but writes of it not as a sensation or affect but as an event that always accompanies the act of writing itself. Bewes reframes shame as the embodiment of the tension "between the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of literature" and "a moment at which the formal possibilities open to the work are incommensurable with, or simply inadequate to, its ethical responsibilities" (1). This incommensurability, for Bewes, can never be resolved. Shame, for Bewes, cannot be resolved by straightforwardly naming its

sources, and this too is shameful. David Callahan writes that Bewes would consider postcolonial literature to be “a good example of writing which cannot write its way past shame because it emerges out of an antagonistic historical inheritance which frames its formal possibilities from the outset” (68); Bewes’s ideas have particular relevance to a study of how shame functions in a body of Filipino American literature that deals with the complex (neo)colonial relation the Philippines has with the United States. The speakers of the poems I analyze are frequently overwhelmed, baffled, or unable to express the weight and complexity of their historical and personal situation. Callahan suggests that Bewes’s conceptualization of shame may be “marshalled as a positive tool ... for the writer’s responses to existence,” and that shame might allow for a kind of writing “which refuses mastery over its material– and which makes this lack of mastery its principal matter” (70). In a study of Asian American feeling, Jeffrey Santa Ana also points out the strictures of affect that accompany a frequent “racialized perception of Asians as economic subjects” (22) and argues that a “re-embracing of shame ... amid the neoliberal politics of color blindness returns Asian Americans not to some essential identity but to a sense of agency grounded in a complex history woven of colonial, gender, and class oppressions” (28). I argue that Rosal and Reyes not only express a Bewesian sense of shame over being unable to write their way past shame, but intentionally refuse a mastery over their historical condition, embracing shame in their writing both thematically and formally as a way of gesturing towards a “sense of agency” despite the negative feeling that shame also brings.

My research will fill a gap in literary studies of shame, however, by also considering the indigenous Filipino cultural value of *hiya*, a word often translated into

English as “shame” and described as both a painful affect and a “virtue of a person that controls individual wants for the welfare of the other person” (Lasquety-Reyes 77). *Hiya* is closely related to the concept of *kapwa*, which roughly translates to “other person” and involves the recognition that “one has a shared inner self with others” (David et al. 48). While Ahmed and Sedgwick emphasize shame’s ambivalence and Bewes emphasizes shame’s irresolvability, conceptualizations of *hiya* frequently characterize it as a positive ethical virtue essential to collectivist Filipino society. Studies of *hiya* and *kapwa* are also frequently put in sharp contrast to Western ideals; Virgilio Enriquez, whose writing on *hiya* and *kapwa* in the 1970s was foundational to the study of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, or “Filipino psychology”, explicitly aimed to “decoloniz[e] Western psychology” by theorizing Filipino behaviour differently from Western interpretations of such behaviour that “are always-already informed by histories of domination” (Remoquillo 9). More recent theorizations of *hiya* by scholars such as Jeremiah Lasquety-Reyes emphasize a “tension between the Western values that promote individual competition and success and a Filipino ethics that advocates a constant concern for the *kapwa* and the group’s success” (76). There are resonances that *hiya* has with Ahmed’s sense that shame is a failure to approximate an “ideal self” as a “self that belongs to a community” (106) but *hiya* is frequently treated as a trait essential to Filipino character in a way that contrasts against Ahmed’s rejection of the idea that “feelings ... reside in subjects or objects” (8). *Hiya* also has resonances with Bewes and Santa Ana’s characterization of shame as a tool that can be used positively, especially for writers of postcolonial and diaspora literature, but considers its expression as something capable of satisfying one’s ethical responsibilities to others (at least within the context of group cohesiveness) in a way that

Bewes would contest. Nonetheless, *hiya* is helpful for reading the embracing of shame within contemporary Filipino American poetry that seeks to promote ethical engagement in line with Filipino values.

However, it is my goal to avoid romanticizing or uncritically engaging with these Filipino values as a direct alternative to Western ideals. One might argue that Enriquez and Lasquety-Reyes's characterizations of *hiya* paradoxically promote a sense of national pride over a feeling of national shame, but other Filipino American scholars such as Martin Manalansan have questioned the framing of *hiya* as a necessarily positive ethical trait or monolithic cultural value and criticized the very idea of a "monolithic notion of Filipino and Filipinx American national character or personality" (366). *Hiya* still involves pain and is crucially felt differently by Filipinos of different genders, sexualities, and class positions; a controlling of "individual wants for the welfare of the other" can very easily manifest as a repressive move in the name of community and tradition. Geographical position is also significant to consider; Andi T. Remoquillo has criticized Enriquez's argument that "the Westernized Filipino (such as the Filipino American) is unable to truly understand or feel *kapwa*" and his conflation of "Filipinx Americans' Westernization with elitism or cultural ignorance", arguing that this apparent cultural ignorance is a "direct [product] of socio-emotional pressures of assimilating to the dominant culture, intergenerational trauma, and internalized perceptions of Filipino inferiority/Western superiority" (11). Such socio-emotional pressures are frequently thematized in Filipino American poetry and are themselves a frequent source of Filipino American shame, one uniquely inflected by both Western ideals and ideas surrounding shame as well as Filipino ideals and ideas around *hiya*.

In reading for such shame, I will explore how Rosal and Reyes write both with and against shame and *hiya* in content, form, and the act of writing itself. In analyzing Patrick Rosal's collection *Brooklyn Antediluvian*, I will demonstrate how Rosal uses invocations of shame to form collectivities that cut through time and space in spite of historical erasure and colonial violence. Rosal's poems exemplify the way shame moves one "toward painful individuation" and "toward uncontrollable relationality" (Sedgwick 37), not only acknowledging the dislocation of having the origins of one's identity complicated by a shameful history but gesturing to the ways in which this very dislocation is emblematic of a trans-national, trans-temporal form of *kapwa*. I will then turn to Barbara Jane Reyes's 2020 collection *Letters to a Young Brown Girl*, whose Filipina American speaker documents the shame of failing through the gaze of both Western ideal others and the gaze of traditional Filipino ideal others. With particular focus on the epistolary mode of the poems in the collection's final section "Dear Brown Girl," I will demonstrate how Reyes invokes a productive shame in brown girl readers that counteracts the shame of these traditional ideals. Despite demonstrating the inability to fully remove the presumed shame of her ideal readers, Reyes paradoxically emphasizes *hiya* as a way of forming an ethical relation between all brown girls against the pains of the intertwining Western and Filipino shame explored throughout the collection.

Following Manalansan, I seek neither to come towards a monolithic definition of what shame and *hiya* are within these texts nor a monolithic definition of what it means to be Filipino or Filipino American, but to instead ask "What does *hiya* do?" within a literary context (368). By examining the highly varied works of these poets, I will argue

that their poetry gestures toward a “more critical, capacious, and judicious understanding, construction, and unmaking of Filipino and Filipinx American predicaments, challenges, identities, and futures” (Manalansan 368), doing so through the complex invocation, challenging, and reframing of shame and *hiya*.

## Chapter 2: Double Movements of Shame and Transcultural *Kapwa* in Patrick Rosal's *Brooklyn Antediluvian*

In his essay “A Pinoy Needle in a B-Boy Groove,” Patrick Rosal details his time having performed as a dancer and DJ and describes the aesthetic elements of breakdancing: “Everything is in the transitions, quick cuts from one thing to another without losing the beat, the busy layers, the leaps, its crescendos, decrescendos and sudden a capella” (qtd. in Ponce 207). As Martin Joseph Ponce argues in his analysis of Rosal’s collections *Uprock Headspin Scramble and Dive* and *My American Kundiman*, Rosal not only borrows from hip-hop’s “quick cut” aesthetics of “transition” in terms of form but in terms of “cross-culturality” (207), further arguing that his use of hip-hop “interrogat[es] not only the rigidity and possessiveness of racially coded art forms but also the very premise of distinctiveness” (211). Rosal’s Filipino American poetry, Ponce argues, “intimate[s] ... collectivities that come into being in serendipitous ways and that cohere around cultural practices rather than racial identities” (211). The question of what it means to be Filipino American or to define Filipino American art is less crucial to Rosal’s work than the question of what Filipino American art can encompass and do.

Rosal continues this “serendipitous” intimation of collectivities and his interest in “quick cut” aesthetics” in *Brooklyn Antediluvian*. The cross-cultural ethical engagement Rosal calls for in this collection, however, is also notably brought on by his invocations of shame. Outward expressions of melancholy are crucial to Rosal’s work. In an interview about the collection, Rosal explains the importance of his own sorrow, which exists for him as more than a straightforwardly negative affect and more as a tool that gesture towards collectivity:

I want so much to be connected to my sorrow because as a Filipino, as a man indoctrinated into American masculinity, I've been cut off from sorrow. And I want that sorrow to contain not just my private injuries; I want this sadness —maybe one day—to hold many, many, many kindred sorrows. I have this bit of faith in me that those sorrows get transformed when we begin to see them in relation to one another. (Lantern Review)

While Rosal repeatedly uses the word sorrow, I argue that he may just as well be describing the essential ambivalence of shame. Rosal's interest in his sadness containing both his "private injuries" and "many kindred sorrows" resonates with Sedgwick's observation that shame makes a "double movement ... toward painful individuation" and "toward uncontrollable relationality" (37). His belief in the transformative power of sorrow upon being able to observe its relational qualities further resonates with Sedgwick's call not to see shame as straightforwardly good or bad but as a "structuring fact of identity" with "powerfully social metamorphic possibilities" (64).

The quick cuts of the poems in *Brooklyn Antediluvian* are informed not only by the playfulness of breakdancing but by this double movement of shame; Rosal's speakers frequently describe individual experiences marked with shame that move the poem in unexpected directions both geographically and temporally. The shame-driven *voltas* in several of his poems often turn towards descriptions of the past, which speakers reveal to be inflected by complex, violent histories of colonialism. The sorrow that Rosal emphasizes in his work often manifests as a shame over the dislocation of identity as a result of such histories. However, while Rosal's poetics of shame often feature speakers expressing such shame as an intense self-consciousness, these expressions of shame often involve gesturing at a broader collectivity united by this shame rather than, as Ponce has

argued, particular “racial identities” (211) like that of “Filipino” or “Filipino American”. Instead, the shame that drives Rosal’s poems allows his work to be imbued with a trans-temporal, transcultural *kapwa*; the expressions of the painful, shameful dislocation of Rosal’s speakers creates a shared identity rather than one based on temporal period, race, or nationality.

“Uptown Ode that Ends on an Ode to the Machete” is an exemplary poem of such a work, its first stanza lovingly describing a night out in “El Barrio” (14), a colloquial term for the New York neighborhood of Spanish Harlem, before its second stanza describes a “pilgrimage” to a place “where men forge by hand the machetes / of the Philippines” (45–46). The first stanza, set in the present tense, is highly specific in its geographic and temporal details, mentioning the specific Brooklyn bus station of “Franklin and Fulton” (2), the names of his acquaintances Willie, Orlando, and G-Bo, and particular temporal periods: “it don’t take / three minutes for [the speaker] and Will to jump / on the dance floor” (6–8), and it is “not even five-past- / midnight” (13–14) when Will suggests going home. The uptown section is written in a highly colloquial cadence, as if the speaker is telling a story to a close friend who is familiar with the specific regional slang, names, and references used throughout. The “uptown” section of the poem is also marked by signifiers of a variety of cultures; the speaker mentions “sipping on Barrilito” (14), a Puerto Rican brand of rum; imitates the Cuban rhythm of the “cáscara” (15); and describes the dance of the partygoers as a “bámbula” (19), a dance set to a drum used in West African rituals. This first section is dominated by constant motion, emphasized by long run-on sentences and frequent enjambment that mimics “G-Bo spinning one ill cut after another” (15), only coming to a stop when his

“Dear Brother Will” (20) tells the speaker “We are all trying to get home” (22). Will’s comment can be interpreted as an expression of his wanting to leave the party, but is also used by Rosal to highlight the dislocation experienced not just by himself as a Filipino American, but by the “motley flock” (20) participating in a blend of various practices from diasporic cultures for whom the notion of “home” is complicated. The word “trying” notably emphasizes Will’s statement as an attempt. The section begins with a unified “hailing” of a taxi that transports the speaker and Will to a dance floor, and it ends with a unified hailing borne out of a desire to move again; unlike the beginning, however, this desire to “get home” remains a constant attempt that is left undescribed and unfulfilled.

The speaker’s offer —“Allow me to translate” (23)—begins the second stanza and may not only mean that they will elaborate on Will’s “home” statement, but attempt to move the poem as a whole toward an exploration of this complicated notion of “home”. While the poem’s setting significantly shifts away from this description of a night in uptown, the title, which indicates that the “Uptown Ode *Ends* on an Ode to the Machete” (emphasis added), clarifies that the uptown ode is being continued into this second section. To understand the cross-cultural nature and importance of the dancefloor to the residents of the “neighborhoods of America” (24) like El Barrio that Rosal describes, the reader must understand the residents’ pain and, importantly, their shame. While the motion of the speaker and his friends in the first stanza is largely defined by their own agency, a part of the beginning of this second stanza is dominated by stasis as actions are *done to* and *around* his addressee; for someone to have “inherit[ed] the tradition / of summoning disgruntled angels” (38–39), they must first have “been broken

by the ocean” (29), and have been “split ... down” (30). The introduction of these conditions is a sudden shift from the motion and partygoing atmosphere of the poem thus far. As Sara Ahmed writes, shame is an “intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself” (103). Ahmed’s is a fitting description of the self-consciousness offered up by the speaker in listing these conditions. The condition that one must “stand / at the front door of an ancestral house / with a black saint staring down” at them (32–34) is especially marked with shame, in which its addressee is made to imagine themselves in a position where they are witnessed by a symbol of a towering religious ideal that is linked spatially to the ancestors’ living space. As Ahmed describes, “[t]o be witnessed in one’s failure is to be ashamed: to have one’s shame witnessed is even more shaming” (103). While there is a high level of specificity in all of these poetic descriptions, the speaker moves away from allusions to specific cultural practices in the first stanza. With the exception of the “black saint” that adds an ambiguously religious element to the pain that Rosal claims is essential for the inheritance of “tradition,” the speaker’s conditions are that of a more general diasporic pain that is not central to any particular culture. The collectivity Rosal intimates here through this inheritance of tradition is not based in race or nationality, and in this section of the poem it is not even based in specific “cultural practices” as Ponce argues about Rosal’s earlier work, but by a shared shame. In imagining “you,” a hypothetical addressee, as someone marked with this shame, Rosal even gives the reader the possibility of becoming part of this collectivity as well by partaking in the shame of attempting and failing to “get home.”

Rosal’s speaker goes on to describe a pilgrimage to the Philippines. The lines describing this pilgrimage immediately follow a clear distinction between the addressee’s

experiences and the speaker's own: "Bless you and your saddest secrets, / but I ..." (43–44). Up until this point in the poem, there have been no overt references to Filipino culture, but only upon establishing the speaker's own shared shame in their "saddest secrets," does Rosal's speaker offers the pilgrimage to the Philippines as a kind of origin story of the dancefloor and the desire to "get home" through a markedly Filipino lens. The shame in the first part of this second stanza is dominated by moves "toward uncontrollable relationality", but the turn towards this personal, culturally specific story demonstrates how shame also moves one "toward painful individuation" (Sedgwick 37). At the same time, however, there is still a stripping back of the specific geographic and temporal detail of the first stanza; even in describing a "pilgrimage to the exact / place where men forge by hand the machetes / of the Philippines" (44–46), more specific temporal and geographical placenames of the first stanza are effaced. While it may be tempting to describe this scene in primordial terms, as if the "exact / place" was the "home" to which Rosal's speaker specifically was trying to return to. But while this scene is described in the past tense, setting it prior to the uptown adventure, with the verb "forge" being used in the present tense clarifying the sense that these cultural practices are ongoing parallel to what is happening in New York in the first stanza. Rosal's speaker describes how the forgers "dropped their mallets in quick / cut time" (56–57); where the word "cut" was used in the first stanza to denote a transition between one song in a DJ mix to another, "cut" is here used to refer to the rhythmic quality of the mallets. The continued tradition of machete-forging appears to literally cut the perceived time difference between the two different settings of the poem; notably, the poem does not end

with the description of the speaker's pilgrimage (thereby imitating a successful attempt at getting "home") but instead returns the setting to "neighborhoods in America" (62).

At the poem's conclusion, the specificity of Filipino machete-forging tradition gives way again to a more general description: "hard / is turning down the fire hard enough, / so you could kiss the knife and make it ring" (62–64). The final aural image of the knife ringing at once recalls the musical nature of machete-forging just as well as it does the speaker's description in the first stanza of tapping a "corny cáscara with a butterknife / like I'm Tito Puente" (15–16). Rosal's speaker offers the particular ways in which shame has inflected him and can be used to explain the homesickness and shame that might inflect him as a Filipino American, but pushes towards a more general image to imply that these feelings can connect various members of diaspora rather than separate them. The repeated images of cutting, as described by the DJ's cuts, the machete's cuts, and the cut that visually separates the poem's two stanzas serve to demonstrate both the difference and interconnectedness of diasporic experiences. The poem ending on a "ring" may even be compared to the linear shape of the machete; Rosal's poem rejects a linear return to "home" but is interested in a more circular understanding of what getting home might entail that does not emphasize a simple move towards a supposed country of origin. The "fire" that Rosal's speaker says must be "turn[ed] down" may be read as a metaphor for the intensity of diasporic shame that may injure those in its direct vicinity but is nonetheless crucial for allowing the "ring," which is representative of a transcultural and trans-temporal interconnectedness, to be heard.

"Instance of an Island" continues Rosal's interest in cutting across time, particularly splitting between a description of an idyllic vacation island and its invented

colonial past as a leper colony. The predominant sense of shame that exists in this poem comes from the historical erasure of this island's potentially shameful colonial past; the speaker opens by noting that "One way to erase an island is to invent / a second island absolved all of the sounds / the first one ever made" (2-3). The word "invent" here, along with descriptions of "plastic pontoons" (6) and "TV voices" (9) emphasizes the artifice of a present-day island that seems to lack any traces of colonial violence. Rosal's speaker writes that "We don't know / who concocted this one" (3-4), but it is significant to note that the original use for the island for a leper colony is also an invention, one deliberately foregrounded by Rosal. Although this trans-temporal cutting exists within a totally fictional setting, Rosal demonstrates how embracing the shame of an uncertain, ambiguous historical past can encourage the formation of an ethical connection between the past and present in a productive manner.

The imagined past of the island revolves around Filomena and Josefa, two lepers who have been exiled to the island who become close friends who play guitar together. As lepers rejected from society and treated merely as "sick cargo" (22) by an emperor, the two are objects of social shame, and in imagining the policy that led to their exile to an island later converted into a resort, Rosal invites readers to feel shame over this colonial violence and its erasure. Significantly, Filomena and Josefa do not express shame in themselves, but their shared abjection and love of song brings them together. A clear parallel can be drawn between the "[t]wo pink lovers / in matching swimwear" (10-11) who "gaze into the sea / and think of infinity" (13-14) and Filomena and Josefa's own intimate relationship that "looked past the bay / toward the violent waters that first carried them / here" (50-52). The pink lovers, who are not provided with individual

identity or clearly differentiated, are able to have a shared sublime isolation in looking at the “infinity” of the water; meanwhile, the seemingly infinite water is what separates Filomena and Josefa in which they grew up. At the same time, it is this expulsion of their shameful bodies that allows for Filomena and Josefa’s artistic partnership to blossom.

The historical erasure that necessitates Rosal’s mythmaking is paralleled by Filomena and Josefa’s own musical improvisation: “What they couldn’t remember, they made up” (60). Rosal’s enjambment constantly puts the existence and even the use of their music in question; in noting that “everything they made up disappeared / past the lagoon and over the ocean” (61–62), Rosal foregrounds both the erasure and lack of documentation of early diasporic artistic production, as well as the ways in which this imagined art continues to hold influence. Rosal’s note that “you can invent a song so big / it will hold the entire ocean” (79–80) strongly mirrors Rosal’s desire for his own diasporic artistic production to express a sorrow that contains “many kindred sorrows.” Even if Josefa and Filomena’s story is firmly set in the past, Rosal uses present tense in writing that “you *can invent* a song so big” (79, emphasis added), implicitly framing Josefa and Filomena’s imagined artistic collaboration as a call to continue creating art in the face of shameful historical erasure. While the “second island” appears to be “absolved of all the sounds / the first one ever made” (2–3), it does not absolve the shame of the silence, and Rosal’s repeated foregrounding of the idea that Filomena and Josefa’s story is fiction only heightens the shame of this silence. The diasporic art that both the pair of lepers and Rosal engage in notably does not attempt to resolve this shame either, with the poem concluding that the guitar, rather than bringing Filomena and Josefa together, leaves “nothing left in the unbroken world / to possibly make them whole” (84–85). It is

the shameful policies that brought Filomena and Josefa together, and Rosal's own sorrow and shame, that allows for the creation of diasporic art that conceives of shame as a means of bringing people together. While the details of Filomena and Josefa's lives clearly mark them as outcasts from the Spanish empire, allowing a reader to very easily imagine the title island as one in the Philippines, the generic title "Instance of an Island" and Rosal's insistence of the possibility of art that can "hold the entire ocean" gestures at a broader diasporic approach to shame and art rather than an explicitly Filipino American one. As in "Uptown Ode", "Instance of an Island" is a work that is both circumscribed by diasporic shame and demonstrates the ways this shame can build unlikely interpersonal connections across both time and space.

"Brooklyn Antediluvian", as both the title poem and the final one in the collection, brings Rosal's interest in shame's double movement toward oneself and others, and the way in which this affirms transcultural and trans-temporal *kapwa*, to its culmination. The speaker of the poem's own recollection of a shameful encounter leads directly to a long meditation on the various ways in which shame moves and changes names. The first few stanzas of the poem begin with a similar colloquial tone of storytelling and a geographical and temporal specificity similar to that of the first stanza of "Uptown Ode," with the speaker noting that it is "about three o'clock / on Tuesday, Montrose Ave" (9–10). At this specific place and time, the speaker encounters a child who "looks [him] up and down / in my doorway" (9–10) in a way reminiscent of the "black saint staring down" at Rosal's speaker's front door in "Uptown Ode," and points out that the speaker's "I-heart-Brooklyn sweatshirt" (14) supposedly "don't fit" (15). The shameful encounter triggers a shift in the poem towards etymological contemplation, in

which Rosal's speaker considers the seeming unfittingness of the name "Montrose" and his own similar name, once again exemplifying shame's double movement; Rosal is made to feel intensely self-conscious, considering the unfittingness of his own name in Brooklyn, which "in Spanish, means / rosebush" (25-26) and in "Old Norse / ... means field of horses" (31-32), but in doing so also feels an "uncontrollable relationality" to these various etymological origins.

The poem then moves towards imagination and, in a similar manner to "Instance of an Island," Rosal creates a deliberately mythicized origin story of his name that foregrounds the shameful, violent colonialism that led to the movement of names in the first place; he notes a Scottish field called Rosal that contains a "village sacked and looted by English dukes" (27). Rosal combines these fictionalized origin stories with meditations on the movement of the names of his family members, tracking the various ways in which they were made to change; Rosal writes of his mother changing her name after she married his father, "as goes / the Western tradition" (87-88), but also considers how both her old name Gelacio and her new name Gelasius have origins that are borne by movement and particularly, Spanish colonization of the Philippines, frequently highlighting the violent nature of these name changes: "along with cannons / and garottes, whetstones and coffers, Gelasius' / name was in the freight that came to a simple / village just inland from the Philippine Sea" (100-103). Rosal makes it clear that his mother is one "brown body" among many who transports the names of colonizers across the globe and that this necessarily means that her "old name vanishes" (93-95); the overwriting of an old name not only occurs in the change from Gelacio to Gelasius, but in the Spanish naming of Gelacio itself. Intimately related to this colonial shame,

Rosal also elaborates the ways in which religious shame leads to his family's forced relocation; Rosal describes how his father, a priest, flaunted the "rules" of the "prescribed mysteries of their faith" (136–137) by impregnating his mother, and that the couple had to escape Chicago's "tsismis" (a Filipino word for gossip) and move elsewhere. Rosal makes clear that his very presence in Brooklyn is the result of both a sprawling legacy of shameful colonialism and the related, more direct form of religious shame that is indelibly tied to this colonial history. Under the weight of all this shame, Rosal repeatedly writes that his name effectively means "nothing" (43, 56) and is "so empty you could put any landscape into it" (67). Rosal's shame induces a sense of intense self-negation, but he also crucially sets up that this self-negation may actually allow for a kind of cross-cultural flexibility that allows him to structure his identity around "any landscape."

"Brooklyn Antediluvian" frequently cuts around both in time and space, employing both mythic origin stories and personal family history to unpack Rosal's shameful unfittingness, but also frequently returns to Rosal's present-day encounter with the child that forced this contemplation of shame in the first place. These transitions back to the present-day frequently consider how the history he elaborates not only lives on in his unfitting presence in Brooklyn, but in the child's. After the elaboration of the history behind his mother's name change, Rosal also mentions that "[i]n Greek, her name means / full of laughter" (108–109) and makes a connection between this alternate name origin and the child's laughter: "You could say, they make a sound that contains / my mother's name and I could track that / happy fracas from Bushwick to Kent" (112–114). Shortly after elaborating the circumstances of his parent's shameful departure from Chicago that led his father to Brooklyn, Rosal "wonder[s] how many centuries / have left some

American evidence in the name / of this thin-framed kid” (148–150). Rosal foregrounds how the shameful history that led to his own unfitting presence has also, in some way, led to this child’s unfitting presence and how his own movement means that the fluidity of names carries on to the present-day and to generations that will succeed Rosal. While Rosal makes it clear that there has been significant pain in the shame of this constant name changing, he also repeatedly foregrounds the ethical connection he is able to share with a stranger because of the shared historical legacy that imbricates them. The child’s race or ethnic origin is never discussed, but as in Rosal’s other work, “Brooklyn Antediluvian” intimates an unexpected ethical connection not just as a result of shared cultural practices but a shared complicated history laden with shame.

“Brooklyn Antediluvian” is a poem that relies on form, being almost entirely composed of couplets that fit Rosal’s back-and-forth dialectical approach to history and fall in line with Rosal’s interest in having his poems “find [their] form dialectically—anti- and synthetically—with (and against)” the “circumscriptions” that affect his language (Lycurgus). The repetitive nature of this form mirrors the inescapability of Rosal’s own shame and of the weight of shameful history that continues to affect both himself and the child. It also may be read paradoxically as a mirror of a desire to fit into a strict poetic ideal, similar to a constant desire to have one’s name fit or at least not mean “nothing.” Significantly, the poem deviates from this strict couplet form in four locations. The first deviation, 200 lines into the poem, involves the second line of the couplet being heavily indented in a manner similar to the first line of the second stanza of “Uptown Ode” and occurs shortly after the consideration of how colonial

“governor’s tables ... were first hewn, / hammered, and hand-lacquered by men / and women who never got to eat” (196–198):

“Listen:

our names

were taken.” (199–201)

Beyond mirroring the hewing involved in the creation of the tables or being emblematic of Rosal’s “quick cut” aesthetics, the indentation here may also be read as a marking of historical erasure of names that were violently “taken” as a result of colonialism. Rosal forces this shameful silence to directly implicate the reader by using this indentation by unexpectedly breaking the well-established form of the poem and using the imperative “Listen”. If “Instance of an Island” may be thought to indirectly ask for reader shame at historical erasure, the 100th stanza of “Brooklyn Antediluvian” effectively breaks the fourth wall and calls on the reader to recognize this erasure in a strikingly direct manner. The erasure and gap in recorded history breaks from the ideal, non-indented couplets established in this poem, and in failing to meet this poetic ideal, Rosal also emphasizes that one’s name could never fit following the shameful legacies of colonialism.

Silence, erasure, and direct address are all crucial to the following two deviations from Rosal’s couplet form, which both involve three-line couplets where the second line is indented and addresses a location. Rosal imagines a rebellion in which those who are implicated in colonialism reclaim their old names and present them back to their colonial governors, but stresses that their claims remain unrecognized by these holders of power

who “refuse to listen” (214) and merely “plug their ears with their fine royal wool” (217). This silent refusal of the governors to listen, occurring shortly after the form-break that earlier called the reader to listen, leads to another unexpected form-break as well as a temporal and geographical shift that seems at first to return to the specificity of the first few stanzas of the poem: “Oh, Montrose, / four stops from the river and six from Union Square” (218–219). In a poem already marked by frequent temporal and geographical shifts, Rosal defamiliarizes the reader by addressing his present location but immediately returning to earlier unspecific myth in describing how “the woman who kept watch over the horses, / lived long enough to take her name back” (220–221). If the earlier stanza directs the reader to “listen,” the surrounding stanzas against this second form-break implicitly call on the reader to also “[keep] watch” at how violent colonial history, the silence of those in power, and the myths that are necessarily created in the face of some of this history’s erasure continue to directly impact the present and future.

Rosal proceeds to imagine a deadly flood in his mythic origin story, one implicitly linked to real-life contemporary natural disasters that occurred in the United States and the Philippines that Rosal earlier brings up: “Katrina, Sandy, Ondoy” (286). Shortly after imagining how a mythic flood left behind a yard-hand and “took the horse” (304), the poem once again breaks form with a three-line stanza that asks “Metropolis, / do you hear me? Young man?” (305–306). The address here is simultaneously more vague, referring to “Metropolis” rather than a particular city, but is also a return to the “Young man” of the present that incited the poem in the first place. If the first form-break addressed a general historical silence and the second addressed the silence of colonial rulers, this third form-break addresses the silence of present-day cities in general and of the boy that

reminded Rosal that he “don’t fit.” Rosal expresses a fear of the inability of present and future generations to recognize the shameful, violent history that he elaborates on in the poem, especially when the “books packed in a middle-school satchel” (317) that the boy is assumed to carry are inscribed with “half-truths and full lies” (316). Although Rosal’s shame leads him to form an ethical connection with the child, an unawareness of this shameful history that Rosal writes about might mean that the child, and the reader, are unable to consciously join in the collectivity that Rosal intimates. Beyond a failure at having his name fit as expressed all throughout the poem, the form-break here may also signify a fear that his calls to recognize the fluidity of names that has emerged out of historical erasure and colonial violence ultimately fall on deaf ears. In addressing “Metropolis” and the “Young man” rather than a specific place, Rosal expresses a worry that the sweeping, deadly, floodlike effects of colonialism remain unrecognized not just by those in power, but by society at large.

Throughout the poem however, Rosal frequently points to the ways in which the fluidity of names and historical erasure following this shameful colonialism can be used as a positive tool by the people whose names have been taken from them. Rosal writes that the emptiness of his name allows him to “put a lake inside it” (68) before elaborating further on an imagined mythical origin story. As in “Instance of an Island,” the mythmaking that Rosal engages in is offered as a counter to the “half-truths and full lies” of dominant cultural narratives that do not adequately address colonialism. Rosal uses a collective “we”, one that links the reader, himself, the boy, and the “grandfathers / and grandmothers” who have done so for “more / than four hundred years” in his call to “make it up” (312–314). In pointing out how “children drown here, just like they do /

everywhere: Manila, New Orleans, / Brooklyn” (334–336), Rosal suggests that colonialism’s deadly, future-threatening effects implicate a broad, collective “we” that spans all throughout space and time. It is the fact that “There’s not a name that fits” (336), however, and the shame that comes with this fluidity, that allows for this collectivity to be named. If water is used as a metaphor throughout the collection for the separation, destruction, and erasure brought on by shameful colonial history, the last lines of “Brooklyn Antediluvian” stress an agency to control and create floods oneself: “You could flood an avenue with storm-/water or roses” (337–338). Rosal does not reject the pain of the shame of having a fluid name, nor does he shy away from the violent sources of this shame but, instead, considers how this shame can be used as a positive tool that creates an ethical connection between those who are shamed.

The final deviation from the strict couplet form occurs at the poem’s close, in which the final line enacts a standalone stanza: the way in which a name can be used as a curse could be both “a calamity” and “spring” (341). The collapsing of the couplet form into a single line at the poem’s close announces the inseparability of the calamity of the “painful individuation” that shame brings about and the possibility of new ethical connection that comes with the “uncontrollable relationality” shame brings on as well. If *kapwa* is the recognition of a “shared inner self with others” and the idea that “one is not and should not be separated from others” (David 48), *Brooklyn Antediluvian* is an exemplary work of Filipino American creative production that aims to affirm *kapwa* in a way that extends across both time and space and calls for future creative production that aims for the same thing. This intercultural, intertemporal *kapwa* is affirmed not just through Rosal’s exploration of shared cultural practices, as Martin Joseph Ponce has

argued, but by a shared shame of colonialism and its accompanying historical erasure. Rosal's work does not aim to define what constitutes Filipino American art, but demonstrates what unexpected connections it could reform or create through the use of shame that implicates Filipino Americans and members of diaspora at large. Rosal also calls on readers of his work to listen and participate in this creative production as well, using direct address to include his readership among the "others" that should not be separated from his "inner self." As I will demonstrate with Barbara Jane Reyes's *Letters to a Young Brown Girl*, however, *kapwa* and shame implicate different people (and different readers) in significantly different ways, and the use of direct address has its own limitations. I argue, however, that both the shame of the relation that can be created by this direct address, and, paradoxically, the shame of the limitations of this address, can allow for the formation of an ethical responsibility in a manner different from Rosal's approach.

### Chapter 3: Epistolary *Hiya* in Barbara Jane Reyes's *Letters to a Young Brown Girl*

If *Brooklyn Antediluvian* intentionally cuts across temporal and geographical boundaries to affirm an intercultural *kapwa*, *Letters to a Young Brown Girl* may be read as targeted toward a much more specific demographic: the young brown girls of the collection's title. Feminist critiques of *kapwa* have pointed out the ways in which definitions of *kapwa* offered by the first scholars of Filipino Psychology did not consider how gender played a role in how *kapwa* involved a person; as Andi T. Remoquillo explains, "Filipina American girls ... experience higher pressures to behave in respectable manners through hyper-surveillance of their sexuality and expectations to silently obey parents' orders" (12). Remoquillo further notes that there are pressures that make the affirmation of *kapwa* more difficult for women in diaspora, including the "socio-emotional pressures of assimilating to the dominant culture, intergenerational trauma, and internalized perceptions of Filipino inferiority/Western superiority" (11). If Rosal demonstrates the ways in which shame may affirm a trans-cultural *kapwa* in his work, Reyes examines how the added pressures of being a young brown girl in diaspora make it more difficult to affirm a *kapwa* that over-emphasizes sameness at the expense of the nuances of intersectional experience. Furthermore, if the related Filipino notion of *hiya* is a "virtue of a person that controls individual wants for the welfare of the other person" (Lasquety-Reyes 77), Reyes's work explores the specificities of how young brown girls are forced to control individual wants more intensely than most, having to meet the possibility of being shamed for not meeting feminine ideals.

Both Reyes and Rosal, however, do not shy away from demonstrations of this shame. *Letters to a Young Brown Girl* is often bluntly specific about the mistreatment of young Filipinas and the shame they are made to feel because of their gender and race. Reyes's use of direct address significantly contributes to this bluntness. In documenting the ways young brown girls are shamed, Reyes creates a reading experience that itself evokes shame from young brown girl readers who may see representations of their own shame reflected in her writing. In an interview about the collection, Reyes describes how Filipina Americans reading texts by other Filipinas can allow them to see how they may "[dream] something entirely different than what was circumscribed for them" but also notes how "the experience of being truly seen for the first time is intense and frightening" (Silva). If Filipina Americans are subject to hyper-surveillance under the conditions of both Filipino and Western feminine ideals, Reyes also emphasizes the ways in which Filipina Americans are simultaneously made to feel invisible, secondary, and unable to speak about their experiences. *Letters to a Young Brown Girl* evokes shame in young brown girl readers that may cause a pain that is "intense and frightening" and is also necessary as a means of counteracting a life lived "entirely unseen" (Silva).

Jeremiah Lasquety-Reyes provides two related kinds of *hiya*, one that he terms "*hiya(p)* that involves the "shame, shyness, or embarrassment" (66) expected out of typical English translations of *hiya*, and a second kind he refers to as "*hiya(v)*" that is "a kind of conscious self-control" (66) and "a virtue of a person that prevents other people from suffering *hiya(p)*" (69). In attempting to provide Filipina American readers new ways of thinking differently from "what was circumscribed for them" (Silva), Reyes writes with *hiya(v)*, attempting to paradoxically remove the *hiya* of other readers by

confronting the *hiya*(p) they are made to feel by their gender and race status. I will henceforth refer to Reyes's attempt at evoking *hiya*(v) through the explicit use of direct address as *epistolary hiya*. Reyes's epistolary *hiya* provides Filipina Americans with an alternate ideal of how to live (and notably, how to write) that shifts the focus of shame from fulfilling traditional Filipino and Western ideals and toward a stronger sense of relation with other brown girls.

At the same time, the speakers within some of the poems of this collection express shame at the inability of their poems to ever fully address the shame of young brown girls. Reyes's epistolary *hiya* is self-aware; as I will explore, such awareness of what seem to be ethical, formal, and linguistic failures recalls Timothy Bewes's idea of shame as "an event of incommensurability" (3) that exists at the very act of writing because the "formal possibilities open to the work are incommensurable with, or simply inadequate to, its ethical responsibilities" (1). Nonetheless, in stark contrast to the shame brought on by traditional Filipino and Western ideals, Reyes's work forms shameful relations between brown girl speaker and brown girl imagined reader that communicate an ethical responsibility towards all brown girls, reframing *hiya* as a way of uniting those who live against the complex interplay of Western and Filipina shame as explored throughout the collection. Reyes foregrounds the possibility of forming these ethical connections not just despite, but *because of* the possibility of the shameful inadequacy of language.

The poems in the first section, titled "Brown Girl Designation," establish the ways in which the very nature of being a young brown girl is tied to shame of one's gender and race. The use of anaphora throughout this section lends a sense of crushing repetitiveness

to these reminders of feminine ideals. In much of the collection's opening poem, "Brown Girl Fields Many Questions," Reyes makes heavy use of anaphora, repeating the phrase "what's it like" before creating a catalog of examples of racist, misogynistic rhetoric Filipina Americans face. Reyes's examples foreground the paradoxical hyper-surveillance of Filipina American bodies that coexists with their invisibility and silencing, describing "what it's like to have white people coming up so close, gawking and poking at your flat little nose, your little body" (22–23) as well as "what it's like to be locked in for your own good ... so that no one can hear your soft, soft asking voice" (29–30) and "what it's like when they push you off the sidewalks and into the gutters" (33). Reyes's catalog highlights how fetishistic attention of Filipina American bodies occurs simultaneously with racist desires to render Filipina Americans silent and invisible.

While "Brown Girl Fields Many Questions" details ways in which Filipina Americans may be shamed by Western ideals and fail in the gaze of white people, the collection also notably demonstrates that this shame can also come from traditional Filipino ideals. "Brown Girl Breaking" also makes heavy use of anaphora, repeating the phrase "Remember when they said," before detailing ways in which Filipina Americans may be shamed because of failure to meet various Filipina ideals. The very fact of being born a woman rather than a man is a source of shame: "Remember when they said to your face, no brothers, such a shame. It's too bad you weren't born a boy" (2–3). As in "Brown Girl Fields Many Questions", Reyes also makes clear that Filipina ideals also expect a paradoxical adherence to hyper-surveillance and invisibility, recalling how a Filipina elder might ask "Why can't you be more blushing, more tremulous ... more

weepy, faint, contoured, dimpled” (11–12). Reyes imagines this elder comparing “you” to María Clara, a character in Filipino writer Jose Rizal’s novel *Noli Me Tángere* known for her demureness; this comparison demonstrates a longstanding demure Filipina ideal that coexists with previously established Western ideals. Filipina Americans, Reyes emphasizes all throughout the collection, are shamed for failing to meet these ideals and are encouraged not to challenge or even express frustration or pain of this shame: “A lady ... does not frown, smirk, or slouch. A lady does not quarrel in public, place her needs before others” (41–42). Reyes’s foregrounding of how Filipina Americans are expected to be “more self-sacrificing” (20) demonstrates the limitations of an understanding of *kapwa* that does not account for gender difference, or of *hiya* as a similarly gender-neutral positive Filipino ethical value. As the poems in “Brown Girl Designation” repeatedly show, Filipina Americans are made to suffer more shame brought on by both Filipina and Western ideals and are forced to exhibit a higher sense of the “conscious self-control” that *hiya(v)* entails for others beyond themselves.

Sara Ahmed writes that such cultural ideals are “given to us through the practices of love” and that “we feel shame because we have failed to approximate” these ideals (106); in the case of the brown girls Reyes elicits with her writing, dealing with this shame is intensified by the promises of love brought on by accustoming oneself to these ideals. As restrictive as it may be, meeting a traditional Filipina ideal may be seen as a way of connecting oneself to the Filipino community, which is especially significant to Filipinas in diaspora who are physically distant from the Philippines and experience alienation with Western culture. If ideals that bring on shame involve “the desire to be ‘like’ an other, as well as to be recognised by an other” (Ahmed 106), Reyes frames her

poetry as text that recognizes its brown girl readers and gestures at alternate ideals, both cultural and literary, that its readers can look toward. Such recognition entails writing in detail about the kinds of *hiya(p)* that brown girls experience, already a departure from the feminine ideals of silence Reyes writes of throughout the collection. Combining this thorough examination of brown girl *hiya(p)* with the foregrounding of direct address to brown girls all throughout the collection leads to a reading experience that Reyes acknowledges may be “intense and frightening” (Silva) but also one that forms an intimate connection built on this shared *hiya(p)*.

Beyond merely providing an inventory of the sources of Filipina American *hiya(p)*, Reyes’s epistolary mode often makes more direct attempts at reaching out to brown girl readers. In “Brown Girl Fields Many Questions”, the repetitive “what it’s like” statements are interrupted by an italicized stanza that temporarily shifts the poem’s mood from righteous anger to one of vulnerable contemplation. Reyes makes another reference to the Filipino literary canon: “*who will remind you of Bulosan’s songs of love<sup>1</sup> (this meant something to you once)*” (45–46). Beyond the *hiya(p)* brought on by racist, sexist rhetoric explored elsewhere throughout the poem, the parenthetical “this meant something to you once” may be read as an attempt to induce shame in readers who specifically experience a disconnect from Filipino literary canon and tradition. At the same time, this parenthetical may also be read as a critique of the idea that restoring one’s

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<sup>1</sup> Reyes refers here to the Filipino American author and poet Carlos Bulosan, a canonical figure in Filipino American literature.

connection to the Filipino literary canon, whether through reminders of Rizal's María Clara or the work of Bulosan, is enough to fully counter Filipina American *hiya*(p). Reyes's speaker goes on to pose another question, now evoking the title of Bulosan's novel *America is in the Heart*: "*who will remind you where the heart is (there, between your third and fourth rib)*" (46). Rather than foreground the reader's relation with the United States, the parenthetical in this line again answers the question literally, putting emphasis on the reader's physical body. Such physical emphasis contrasts with the fetishistic attention detailed in a number of the "what it's like" statements, marshalling the potentially uncomfortable close intimacy suggested by this description towards a critique of *hiya*(p) itself.

In the italicized stanza that concludes the poem, Reyes emphasizes the speaker's own vulnerability in the face of a supposed reader. Following a series of lines that rhetorically ask how the brown girl reader continues existing in spite of the weight of constant shame, Reyes's speaker shifts to a pleading tone: "*how aren't you afraid, sister, were your parents afraid, how did they teach you to be so steel, please teach me / how to be steel like you*" (76–77). In contrast to a shame incited by Western or traditional Filipina ideals, the speaker exhibits, and simultaneously models, a shame at not being more like a hypothetical "steel" reader. The use of "steel" as an adjective might be read specifically as a desire to maintain strength in the face of oppression but may also connote a paradoxically shameful desperation to rid oneself of affect altogether; "steel" may also be read homophonically as "still." Reyes's last lines in this poem recognize a desire to feel nothing or be unmoveable in response to oppression. Her explorations of the seeming inescapability of this shame all throughout the first section of this collection

that follow this poem show that this is ultimately not viable. Expressing a total lack of affect runs the risk of aligning oneself with traditional feminine ideals to be silent in the face of this oppression, as expressed in her description of how traditional Filipina ideals dictate that one must not “frown, smirk” (41) or “quarrel in public” (42) in “Brown Girl Breaking.”

Reyes instead advocates for intentionally affective responses, which may occasionally take the form of an angry speaking out, as seen at the conclusion of “Brown Girl Hustle” where her speaker describes “sing[ing] / karaoke, loud, and off key” and tells a hypothetical oppressor “you really cannot quiet me” (38–39). But Reyes’s use of epistolary *hiya* in her modelling of a shameful need to become more like the reader also validates *hiya* as a response specifically when this *hiya* centers other brown girls. Despite ending on a note of anger at larger societal oppression, “Brown Girl Hustle” also earlier demonstrates how Reyes’s speaker not only recognizes the brown girl reader but also expresses her own desire to connect: “I need to tell you I / see you” (8–9). As in the conclusion of “Brown Girl Fields Many Questions,” Reyes models a shameful need to connect with another brown girl in contrast to the shameful need to reach traditional/Filipina ideals. Even in rare instances in which Reyes’s speaker advocates instead for silence, Reyes’s focus still emphasizes connection with other brown girls. At the conclusion of “Brown Girl Manifesto: #AllPinayEverything,” Reyes’s speaker writes that “Because so much depends upon vacuous speech” it is “best to refrain / from all human voice; because when we sit with ourselves ... / this is how we will learn to listen—” (25–27). In response to how shame may lead brown girl expression to be thought of “vacuous speech,” Reyes’s speaker here leans into this shame and advocates

for what might initially be characterized as a shameful acquiescence to feminine ideals of silence in response but is actually an expression of “conscious self-control” that foregrounds the speech of other brown girls. The em-dash at the end of the poem leads directly into the “Brown Girl Mixtape” section of the collection, in which every poem is titled with a song performed by a brown girl, a designation that Reyes defines cross-culturally. In addition to elaborating on all the ways in which brown girls are shamed, Reyes also uses *hiya* to express a need to form ethical relations with other brown girls.

A crucial aspect of Reyes’s use of epistolary *hiya*, however, is her awareness of its limitations; despite her clear desire to connect with a brown girl reader through *hiya*, Reyes demonstrates several ways in which such a connection can fail to form. Reyes acknowledges, for example, that readers of the collection may not actually be brown girls. Reyes begins the collection by problematizing her use of the words “you” and “we” in the first place; to return once again to “Brown Girl Fields Many Questions,” Reyes uses a legalistic tone in writing that the word “‘you’ may indicate a ‘hearer of unspecified identity,’ a second person narrator such that / the ‘you,’ is really meant to be an ‘I,’ a ‘we,’ regardless of whether the hearer, onlooker or reader / wishes to be included or addressed” (4–6).

Reyes again suggests the possibility that brown girls read her work and explicitly do not wish to be addressed, but by describing the addressee as a “hearer of an unspecified identity,” Reyes goes on to further acknowledge the possibility of readers who are not brown girls reading her work; Reyes forces both resistant brown girl readers and readers that are not brown girls to occupy a brown girl subjectivity while reading her work, regardless of their own wishes. Reyes also comments on the word “we,”

specifically calling attention to a linguistic difference between English and Tagalog: “the English “we”, is crude, lacking in the specific exclusive and inclusive distinctions of the Tagalog ‘tayo’ and ‘kami’” (9–10). Tayo and kami are Tagalog words that both roughly translate to we, but tayo includes the person being addressed in that we while kami does not. While Reyes foregrounds the distinction between the different groups these words refer to, she continues using “we” regardless as a way of remaining intentionally ambiguous about who her poems are addressing, thereby expanding this epistolary *hiya* to include readers who are not actually brown girls. One of the risks of expanding this readership, one that Reyes also acknowledges, is creating gaps of understanding for non-brown girl readers; the very fact that Reyes does not translate “tayo” and “kami” in her sentence speaks to a decision to make non-Filipina readers secondary to her work. While one might note that epistolary *hiya* may not be as effective at forming ethical orientations around brown girls for non-brown girl readers, this intentional sidelining of non-brown girl readers ironically allows one to better understand what it means to be a brown girl reader who has frequently been sidelined reading English-language literatures dominated by white male subjectivity, a problem Reyes specifically discusses in the final section of the collection also titled “Letters to a Young Brown Girl.”

It is in this final section that Reyes highlights the larger limitation of epistolary *hiya*: a doubt that this *hiya* can ever effectively “[prevent] other people from suffering *hiya(p)*” (Lasquety-Reyes 69). While the poems in “Brown Girl Designation” dealt with broader brown girl experiences, the poems in this final section, all titled “Dear Brown Girl,” foreground the experience of writing as a brown girl. If Reyes elsewhere uses epistolary *hiya* to shift reader ethical orientation away from the fulfillment of Western or

traditional Filipina ideals and toward the care of other brown girls, she specifically focuses this section on Western literary ideals and a call for writing for brown girls that centers brown girls as readers instead. In the first of the “Dear Brown Girl” poems, Reyes brings up racist criticism of brown girl language: “They will say, your language lacks finesse, your words low” (1). In the penultimate poem of the collection, Reyes reclaims “low” language and gestures for their ability to form kinship with other brown girl writers: “Our kin forage, and from what is deemed low, cultivate light” (8). Multiple poems in this section deal explicitly with shifting focus from Western literary readership to thinking of a hypothetical readership of brown girls. The final stanza of the third “Dear Brown Girl” poem points to a historical lack of poetry specifically for brown girls: “Dear Brown Girl, nobody ever read your poems back then. And then again, none of those / poems were for them, di ba?” (15–16). Several “Dear Brown Girl” poems open with rhetorical questions that express that literature made specifically for brown girls may appear to attract a small readership, but that this readership depends on this reading; the fifth of the poems begins “What if nobody cares, except your brown sister fighting for air as she is trampled / underfoot” (1–2), while the seventh similarly opens “What if nobody reads you, but every young, hungry brown girl who crosses your path” (1). Reyes advocates for brown girl literary expression that ignores the fulfillment of canonical traditional Filipino literary ideals as well as Western literary ideals, instead focusing on literature made specifically for other brown girls.

Despite her advocacy for (and modeling of) a literature that centers brown girls, there are several moments throughout this section that express a kind of doubt, or even shame in the efficacy of the speaker’s writing. The second poem in this section ends with

the line: “I want to say so much about silencing and time” (9). This line perhaps suggests an irresolvable inability to write fully about “silencing and time” in a brown girl literary context. The second stanza of the fifth “Dear Brown Girl” poem is presented as a cautionary tale against brown girl writers that ignore other brown girls to write for white male readership that will continue to denigrate their work anyway. The final line of this stanza however, raises an issue common to all English-language writers of diaspora, one that implicates Reyes as well: “They are impressed by how well you mimic their language” (12). Reyes foregrounds the shameful possibility that the use of English at all limits the validity of postcolonial critique if it can be considered mere mimicry of a language with greater cultural value, implicitly emphasizing that it is impossible for English-language writers of diaspora to write detached from colonial inequality.

Some of Reyes’s most doubtful, shame-filled lines in the collection appear in the final poem, where she expresses doubt about her use of epistolary *hiya* throughout the collection. Early in the poem Reyes writes “I am sorry if what I say here are not the things you want to hear from me” (4), an expression of shame at the possibility that her epistolary *hiya* may be unwanted by other brown girl readers, and ultimately ineffective at truly “prevent[ing] other people from suffering *hiya(p)*” (Lasquety-Reyes 69). Reyes plays with the definitions of redefining Filipino cultural values, writing of *kapwa* not as “seeing the self in others” but as a “sanctuary as a shared selves” (15) and pointing out that, despite popular translations of “*hiya* as shame; others translate it as prosperity, a dignity that comes from the inside (the *loób*), and this is a lot different from shame” (61). Such redefinitions follow the scholars of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* in correcting deployments of these cultural values by Western scholars towards the development of an “alleged

Filipino mentality” of “sanctioned dependency and subordination” (Pe-Pua 55). Despite this correcting of the meaning of *hiya*, Reyes continues the theme of Filipina Americans being made to feel shamed, pointing out the paradox of being shamed for not feeling enough shame and expressing too much shame: “People say, why aren’t you ashamed. / People say, why do you broadcast our shame” (69–70). Shame, for both brown girl readers and brown girl writers, appears inescapable regardless of Reyes’s desire to rid others of it and be rid of it herself.

Such a view of shame in writing bears significant similarity to Timothy Bewes’ notion of shame as an “event of incommensurability” (3) observable in all writing because the “formal possibilities open to the work are incommensurable with, or simply inadequate to, its ethical responsibilities” (1). Reyes uses epistolary *hiya* to form ethical bonds between brown girls despite the shame thrust on brown girls who fail to meet Western and traditional Filipino ideals, but frequently expresses doubt at the ability of epistolary *hiya* to effectively perform this failure. Her own use of language, whether to use *hiya* in a positive ethical manner or to disconnect *hiya* from Western ideas of shame, ultimately fails to remove shame from both writer and reader. However, the very foregrounding of this limitation of epistolary *hiya* is, somewhat paradoxically, critical to its deployment by Reyes in an ethical manner. Writing about Bewes’s analysis of shame, David Callahan writes that he conceptualizes shame not as “shameful inadequacy, but rather an ethically responsible materialization of the writer’s disavowal of the role of the comforting explainer, or the organizing agent of history” (68). Reyes clearly expresses no interest in acting as such a “comforting explainer,” and while she deconstructs the ideals

that induce shame in brown girls, she harbors no illusions that this literary deconstruction will remove shame entirely.

Callahan further writes that Bewes conceives of shame as a “positive tool” that “forces very different cultural flows into conjunction in a writing which refuses mastery over its material—and which makes of this lack of mastery its principal matter” (70). It is not just that Reyes’s writing “refuses mastery,” but that she advocates for brown girl writing that explicitly refuses mastery; rather than contest racist critiques of her writing as “low,” she reclaims the word in a positive sense. Reyes writes of her father creating art from garbage, and rather than denying that she wasn’t “ashamed of his junk” (51), she reclaims her “father’s junkyard scavenge” as her “unruly poetic statement” (67). If Reyes’s poetry is insistent on creating the “experience of being truly seen” (Silva) for brown girl readers, her statement that “[i]f art is a series of fine lenses, then the shame is not hard to see” (76) emphasizes that, like Bewes, shame is inextricable to her writing and from all writing. In a similar manner to critiques of deployments of *hiya* as a form of “rationalization for the ongoing negative state of affairs and the enduring deprivation besetting Filipinos” (Manalansan 365), Reyes further notes how the necessarily shame-filled writing may perpetuate harmful stereotypes of brown girls and Filipinos as backwards or incomplete: “Beneath these lenses, we are misfitted parts jammed together, ... / we are sad little colonies, hoarding second hand items” (77–78). At the same time, shame works to justify the writing of a “we” in the first place; shame not only allows for the ethical connection made between brown girls in Reyes’s writing but is necessary for it amid a shared oppression.

Throughout the collection, Reyes does not shy away from the *hiya* of brown girls, nor does she shy away from the possible limitations of her epistolary *hiya* to form connections between brown girls. Toward the end of the poem, Reyes appears to change her mind about being “sorry”: “I am not sorry if the things I am saying here are not the things you wished to hear” (96). Rather than being a statement that attempts to do away with shame, this line may be interpreted as a recognition of the importance of readers feeling the shame that her epistolary *hiya* evokes to truly spur a feeling of brown girl relationality. If all writing, for both Bewes and Reyes, is laden with shame, the alternative would be not writing at all. But as Reyes has already explored throughout the collection, refusing to write amounts to an acquiescence to the very ideals that have shamed brown girls, and furthermore forecloses any possibility of creating ethical connection with other brown girls. The final lines of the poem emphasize the importance of writing with brown girl subjectivity despite the inescapability of shame, and in a final invocation of epistolary *hiya*, turn the question back on the reader: “I don’t think that we should stop making art from our loób. / Do you?” (99–100)

In *Letters to a Young Brown Girl*, Reyes bluntly explores the kinds of shame Filipina Americans face under the conditions of Western and traditional Filipina ideals, making use of epistolary *hiya* as a means of evoking shame out of brown girl readers that shifts ethical focus from fulfillment of these traditional feminine ideals to the forming of ethical connections with other brown girls. Reyes recognizes limits to this epistolary *hiya*, acknowledging the continued pain of the inability of her writing to truly absolve brown girl readers of other shame; it is this recognition, however, that paradoxically allows for the possibility of ethical connection.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

The poetry of Patrick Rosal and Barbara Jane Reyes are vastly different in tone and form, but both poets are united in their interest in Filipino American shame. Both explore the violent, historical origins of the shame that implicates Filipino Americans and the particularities of the pain that this shame brings. Rather than advocating for a prideful rejection of this shame, both instead stay with shame, demonstrating the ways in which shared shame can unite people, including readers, in a call towards ethical responsibility to everyone implicated by this shame. Significantly, while both poets explore the intricacies of a particularly Filipino American shame, the uniting effect of this shame is not limited by one's proximity to Filipino American identity. In *Brooklyn Antediluvian*, shame intimates collectivities that go beyond temporal and geographical boundaries. The epistolary *hiya* in *Letters to a Young Brown Girl* not only addresses brown girls, expanding the scope of the collection beyond Filipina American women, but also explicitly implicates non-brown girl readers into brown girl subjectivity. If Martin Manalansan has criticized the usage of *hiya* as a means of suggesting a "monolithic notion of Filipino and Filipinx American national character or personality" (366), Rosal and Reyes are both less interested in using shame as an exclusive, essentializing force as much as they are interested in how shame can form connections beyond ethnic identity. It is also significant to note that Rosal and Reyes also demonstrate shame over the idea that their writing may fail at forming such connections, sharing a Bewesian understanding of shame as an inescapable affect that accompanies the very act of writing. Despite this acknowledged possibility of failure and their exploration of how shame can never be done away as a result of the violent legacies of colonialism,

both writers encourage the continued creation of diasporic art that is aware of shame's inescapability but marshalls this shame as a positive tool capable of fostering ethical engagement.

While *Brooklyn Antediluvian* and *Letters to a Young Brown Girl* are both works of poetry that explore Filipino American shame, the two collections alone cannot be thought of as representative of the breadth and formal variety of contemporary Filipino American poetry. A more expansive exploration of a Filipino American poetics of shame might entail a close reading of works of Filipino American poetry where shame, and affect at large, is less directly addressed. Oliver de la Paz's *The Diaspora Sonnets*, for example, is a collection that can be characterized as highly formalistic and also affectively muted; largely consisting of sonnets whose titles begin with "Diaspora Sonnet," Paz's attention to the sonnet's traditionally strict form parallels his own affective restrictiveness. Filipina American poets Eileen Tabios and Kimberly Alidio frequently eschew conventions of lyric poetry altogether, often blending together autobiography, historiography, and language poetry to create form-defying works with varying degrees of affective restriction as well. While shame may not be as explicitly thematized in these works as it is in Rosal and Reyes's work, it is worth investigating how these works also express a Bewesian shame over the inadequacy of language to represent, among other things, shame itself; as Alidio asks, "Can feeling, sensation, affect, somatic epistemes, or temporal states of dailiness be adequately represented in language?" (5)

While this thesis focuses particularly on the Filipino cultural values of *kapwa* and *hiya*, further research is also needed to examine how other Filipino cultural values

elucidated by scholars of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* can be interpreted as sites of affect in works of Filipino American poetry, literature, and creative production at large. If my reading of Rosal's and Reyes's work demonstrate how these cultural values can be effectively marshalled to foster ethical engagement of those that are not necessarily Filipino American, it is also worth investigating how *kapwa* and *hiya* may be read in works of art by those who are not members of the Filipino diaspora, or how other emotions similarly associated with a national character, like *han* in Korean culture and *hiraeth* in Welsh culture, might be marshalled in a similar or different manner.

Rather than characterize shame as an exclusively negative emotion, Filipino American poets working today are frequently writing both against and with shame, acknowledging the ways in which shame causes "painful individuation" while also enabling them to explore how it allows for newfound forms of "uncontrollable relationality" (Sedgwick 37). Patrick Rosal emphasizes that shame circumscribes language, but as a growing corpus of contemporary Filipino American poetry suggests, shame also invites the creation of a more expansive language that invokes and challenges shame in novel ways.

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