

**AB Literary and Cultural Studies**

**Course: Introduction to Literature and Literary Studies (Core Course)**

Topic: *Ars Poetica* (The Art of Poetry)

Theme: The Pain of Style

Text: “Style” by Cirilo F. Bautista, *National Artist for Literature*

See text @ <http://cordite.org.au/poetry/philippines/style/>

Method: Online Learning: Self-paced reading, discussion thread, reflection writing, creative writing

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**Objectives:**

By the end of the lesson, the students should have:

1. Examined the conceptual meaning of “style” and its metaphorical illustrations;
2. Applied close reading in analyzing the poem;
3. Appreciated the beauty of metaphoric language and expressions;
4. Reflected on their own mother and their relationship with her; and
5. Pondered on the theme of pain in relation to self, other human beings, and society.

**Module for Online Session**

Activity	Teacher’s Procedure	Student’s Tasks	Online Tool Options
<b>Selfie with Mother</b>	Ask the students to take a selfie photo with their mother and share. Ask them to write a short caption about their mother.  Option: Students can post an old childhood photo with mother.	Take selfie with mother and share with class. Write a short caption to describe mother.	* Facebook Group * Canvas * Google Classroom * Blackboard
<b>Poem Reading</b>	Demonstrate a reading of the poem, with proper enunciation and emotional resonance.	Listen to the reading.	* Audio-video recorded reading * Zoom meeting
<b>Close Reading and Discussion</b>	Post a short write-up or lecture on <i>arts poetica</i> .  Provide guidelines or rules in discussion thread.  Ask questions for discussion: 1. What is style, according to the poem? Why is style not about freedom? 2. How is mother’s cigarette-smoking “a fable of pain”?  Ask follow-up questions: 1. What is the poem saying about the art of poetry? (clue: According to the second	Read the lecture and discussion guidelines.  Read and meditate on the poem.  Answer the questions posted, react to classmate’s posted views, or extend their viewpoints.  Answer follow-up questions.	* Discussion thread via FB group, email group, or Canvas Discussion, Google Classwork, Blackboard Collaborate  * Zoom meeting

SAMPLE MODULE FOR ONLINE LEARNING (based on the Kilgore Model)

	<p>stanza, how does language function in style? What is the metaphorical link between the language of poetry and the craft of cigarette-smoking?)</p> <p>2. Beyond the mother-child relationship, what is the poem's commentary on society?</p>		
<b>Reflection Writing</b>	Ask the students to reflect and write more about their mother. Does she have any unusual act or habit? Describe, narrate an anecdote. What do you think of this unusual act/habit of her? Do you consider your mother has style? In what sense?	Reflect and write about mother and the uniqueness of her style.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Facebook Group</li> <li>* Canvas Assignment</li> <li>* Google Classroom-Classwork</li> <li>* Blackboard Learn</li> <li>* Online Journal or Blog</li> </ul>
<b>Option: Writing a Fable of Pain</b>	Ask the students to write a fable (of pain) about their relationship with their mother. Tell them to embellish their narrative with touches of creativity and imagination.	<p>Write about their relationship with their mother in the form of a fable, reflecting on the joy and pain of relationship. Add creative touches and metaphorical statements to make the fable interesting.</p> <p>Post and share the fable online.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Facebook Group</li> <li>* Canvas Assignment</li> <li>* Google Classroom-Classwork</li> <li>* Blackboard Learn</li> <li>* Online Journal or Blog</li> </ul>

**Output:** Photographs, Discussion, Reflection, and Creative Writing

**Assessment:** Rubrics

**Sample Rubric:**

Areas	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Interpretation and Analysis	Accurately provides more than one definition of "style" as a concept in accordance with the poem; quotes adequate verses from the text to support their idea/concept; and discusses extensively and insightfully the meaning of the poem.	Adequately defines "style" as a concept in accordance with the poem; quotes at least one verse from the text to support their idea/concept; and discusses adequately with at least one insight the meaning of the poem.	Defines at least one concept of "style" in accordance with the poem; does not quote verses from the text to support their idea/concept; and discusses the meaning of the poem in merely one statement.	Inaccurately defines "style"; does not quote verses from the text to support their idea/concept; and discusses minimally the meaning of the poem.
Communication Skills	Articulates with good grammar, cogency, and coherence of a good essay.	Articulates with adequate grammar, cogency, and coherence of a satisfactory essay.	Articulates with slight errors in grammar, adequate cogency and coherence.	Articulates poorly with fragmented sentences, grammatical errors, and lack of

				cogency.
Reflection/Fable Writing	Shows strong evidence of good reflection by their lucid storytelling, personal expression of feelings and thoughts about mother, and adequate use of metaphors and imagery to support their narrative.	Shows adequate evidence of satisfactory reflection by their storytelling, personal expression of feelings and thoughts about mother, and at least one metaphorical illustration to support narrative.	Shows slight evidence of satisfactory reflection by their storytelling, minimal expression of feelings or thoughts, but does not use metaphors and imagery to support their narrative.	Shows poor evidence of reflection by a generalized form of storytelling with lack of details and little expression of a feeling or a thought; does not use metaphors and imagery to support narrative.

### Answer Key/Critical Notes on the Poem

#### 1. *Arts Poetica*

An *ars poetica* is a poem that speaks about its own art. The persona is invariably the poet himself/herself, who muses about the nature of a poem, or the act of writing poetry. Michael Weigers, editor of the anthology *This Art: Poems about Poetry* (2003), says of *ars poetica*: “To write about poetry is to believe that there are answers to some of the questions poets ask of their art, or at least that there are reasons for writing it.”

For a more conceptual exegesis on *arts poetica*, see:

Glossary of Terms: Arts Poetica, Poets.Org <https://poets.org/glossary/ars-poetica>

“Ars Poetica and the Essay” by Chris Arthur, *World Literature Today*

<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/blog/cultural-cross-sections/ars-poetica-and-essay-chris-arthur>

#### 2. Analysis of the Poem “Style”

The situation in “Style” is: a child watches his mother smoking as she does the laundry. The child persona is amazed at how his mother possesses a strange skill of smoking a cigarette inside her mouth. It is to him, a “miracle” and an “unusual thing.” His mind calls it “style.” He states, “Style is the perfection of design, a habit / of usage that strives after elegance.” His initial observation of his mother bespeaks of admiration at her skill. He likens her style to that of the rhythm of language, the perspective of a landscape, or the sound of raindrops over a lake (see second stanza).

The child persona goes on to observe that his mother seems to have attained “a solitude / in working out a peace of mind or a pattern” through the constant repetition of a dual act – the simultaneous efforts of smoking cigarettes and washing clothes (see third stanza).

At length, the persona perceives that ironically what the mother has perfected is the art of routine, in the “here and now, immersed in soapy water.” For all her “art,” however, the mother suffers in her efforts, the family is poor, and she therefore washes clothes every day to earn their living. This is her fate, there is no other way: “Mother did not have to choose.” The persona cogitates, “To be where one suffers / is to suffer everywhere, so to get somewhere / you must construct a fable of pain to soothe the ache.” The art of routine enables the mother to accomplish her work, it is her way of confronting the reality of suffering. The effort of smoking (with a burning light inside the mouth) is perhaps the lesser pain that hides many an unshed tear and soothes the greater ache within her. “[I]n her hands, every squeeze on clothes a validation / of her history, the ragtag ghost army of it . . .”

And the child persona concludes: “Style is not about freedom.” A person may achieve faultlessness or elegance with an ordinary act or skill, to the point of making it her “art.” But ironically, the monotony of it does not lessen the dullness of life, and even binds her to it. She is not free in that sense.

From another perspective, the monotony is in the daily washing of dirty clothes—the repetitive exertions of soaping, rubbing, rinsing, and squeezing. Cigarette-smoking, on the other hand, is the “unusual thing.” It is the perfected fable, the art of resistance against the tedium and hardship of life. In the mother’s heart, there exists an ember of freedom.

The poem, in its poignant rendition, is more than a child’s reminiscence of his hard-working mother. It is the poet’s censure on the entrapment of poverty; it is an innate expression of yearning for a deliverance from the snare of mundanity. It takes a child’s memory and a poet’s intelligence to re-construct a metaphoric imagining of the uncommon and liberate a mother from her muted state.

Source: Lua, Shirley O. “The Filipino Poets and a History of Pain.” *Puisi Wadah Suara Kemanusiaan* (Poetry and the Voice of Humanity). Ed. Mohamad Saleeh Rahamad. Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia Berhad (Institute of Malaysian Translations and Books) and PENA (Malaysian National Writers Association), 2016. 67-79.

### Suggested References

#### Other Poems by Cirilo F. Bautista Available Online

“Exile,” “During the War”

<https://philippinesgraphic.net/2018/05/19/poems-by-cirilo-bautista/>

“The Sea Cannot Touch”

<https://ph.asiatatler.com/life/what-the-sea-cannot-touch-remembering-cirilo-bautista>

“In Praise of Sardines,” “Henry Miller in Paris,” “Five Poems from ‘Salt Crown,’ a 15-Sonnet Cycle”

<https://www.esquiremag.ph/long-reads/notes-and-essays/cirilo-f-bautista-national-artist-for-literature-a1512-20180507-lfrm>

#### About Cirilo F. Bautista

Baytan, Ronald. “Intensities of Signs: An Interview with the Visionary Cirilo F. Bautista.” *Likhaan* 6. *The Journal of Contemporary Philippine Literature*. (2012): 207-236.

Chua, Johannes L. “Cirilo F. Bautista: A Writer’s Writer.” *Manila Bulletin*. 11 Dec 2004.

NCCA Order of the National Artist for Literature

<https://ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/culture-profile/national-artists-of-the-philippines/cirilo-f-bautista/>

Ranario, Radney. “Homage to a National Artist for Literature.” *Philippines Graphic*, 2014.

<https://philippinesgraphic.net/2018/05/19/cirilo-f-bautista-a-glimpse-an-homage-to-a-national-artist-for-literature-2014-by-radney-ranario/>

Untivero, Dorynna. “What the Sea Cannot Touch: Remembering Cirilo F. Bautista.” *Tatler Philippines*, 2018.

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#### Studies on Cirilo F. Bautista and His Poetry

Cruz, Isagani R. and David Jonathan Bayot. *Reading Cirilo F. Bautista*. Manila: De La Salle U Press, 1995.

Talusan, Meredith Ramirez Talusan. “Which Tongue To Speak With? Philippine Poetry and the Nature of Language.” *Postcolonial Text*. 5.1 (2009): 1-16.

#### References on Poetry

Bautista, Cirilo. *The House of True Desire. Essays on Life and Literature*. Manila: UST Publishing, 2010.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *This Craft of Verse*. Ed. Calin Andre Mihailescu. Harvard U Press, 2002.

Dobyns, Stephen. *Best Words, Best Order. Essays on Poetry*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996.

Hirsch, Edward. *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry*. Harvest, 1999.

Nims, John Frederick and David Mason. *Western Wind. An Introduction to Poetry*. MacGraw-Hill, 2005.

Perrine, Laurence. *Sound and Sense. An Introduction to Poetry*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Harcourt Brace, 1987.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. Trans. Stephen Mitchell. Vintage, 1986.