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Death and the Inoperative Community in the Works of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Merlinda Bobis

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[*Abstract*]

Gabriel García Márquez's short story "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" ["El ahogado más hermoso del mundo," 1968] and the novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* [*Crónica de una muerte anunciada*, 1981] and Merlinda Bobis's novel *Fish-Hair Woman* (2012) and short story "O Beautiful Co-Spirit" (2021) feature unusual scenarios of death: the arrival of a drowned man's corpse at an island; the inaction of the community to stop the foretold death of a supposedly-innocent man; a woman with long hair that can fetch dead bodies at the bottom of the village river; and a Filipino Catholic and a Malaysian Muslim working together to prepare an Italian Catholic's corpse for a funeral. These narratives demand critical attention as all deaths make the community's existence meaningful as they alter its social reality. Looking into the works of the aforementioned Colombian writer and Filipino writer and unveiling how death affects the community, this paper relies on Jean-Luc Nancy's theory on death and inoperative community.

Keywords: magic realism, death, inoperative community, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Merlinda Bobis

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Ⅰ. Introduction

Colombian fictionist and Nobel Prize in Literature laureate Gabriel García Márquez weaves narratives that confound readers around the world with beauty that is both worldly and unworldly, whether it be in short form or in novel form. This literary characteristic can easily be seen in his short story "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" ["El ahogado más hermoso del mundo," 1968] and the novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* [*Crónica de una muerte anunciada*, 1981]. Similar to his other writings, these two narratives are evidently influenced by German novelist Franz Kafka. As pointed out by Sam Jordison (2017), García Márquez has "twisted…ideas" but with a straightforward narrative voice:

> You get a special sense of wonder through describing a world where ice is no more or less remarkable than a ghost who keeps bothering you in your bathroom, a world where the risk of children being born with pig's tails is accepted as a fact of life. (*The Guardian* 9/05/2017)

This is what makes him stand out among his fellow fictionists not only in Colombia and Latin America but also the world. His works baffle readers with stories that seem to be laid out with irresolvable problems as well as otherworldly characters and settings, thus putting García Márquez among the best magic realist writers. The short story and the novel mentioned above create tension between the magical and the real.

The same can be said about Filipino writer Merlinda Bobis and her works. Although unlike Gabriel García Márquez who wrote in his native language, Bobis writes mainly in English, and this is in part to her having migrated to Australia. This migration does not remove her identity as a Filipino writer, but rather it expands her worldview as well as her role becoming the writer who "clearly embodies the push and pull between different cultures and languages. Yet, the liminal space that seems to inhabit never means disruption or affliction" (Granado 2003: 39). Her works like the 2012 novel *Fish-Hair Woman* and the 2021 short story "O Beautiful Co-Spirit" reflects this liminality, which adds to and strengthens the very foundation of magic realism in her works.

Thus, in this essay, I utilize the aforementioned works by Gabriel García Márquez and Merlinda Bobis. Although the two writers are from different countries and have written in different languages, the similarities in their works are outstanding because of the use of magic realism, notwithstanding several references within the respective texts to the colonial histories of Colombia and the Philippines, both of which were former colonies of Spain. In addition, all texts to be utilized in the essay have similar theme: death. For example, García Márquez's short story, "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" is about a dead man's corpse being found by children who are playing by the beach. The story is not about solving the crime or identifying the dead man, but instead it is about the community being immersed into the existence of the handsome dead man. The corpse creates an atmosphere that divides the community at first yet also unite them in the end. The novel *Chronicle of Death Foretold* does not start with a corpse, but it starts with the knowledge that the main character, Santiago Nasar, is about to be murdered. This "foretold" death is known by the whole community, yet somehow, his death still occurs, because several members in his community has refused to stop it due to grudge or laziness, or simply because unfortunate instances have prevented his friends to save him. The whole novel is in the perspective of a narrator who has returned home to interview the witnesses and investigate Nasar's death that occurred twenty years ago. In this sense, the novel is a puzzle put together by the community through sharing their stories. On the other hand, Merlinda Bobis's short story "O Beautiful Co-Spirit" is about a Filipino woman asked by her estranged neighbor to help her prepare the corpse of the latter's roommate-lover for a funeral. Other than the argument the two parties had years ago, the two begin to work together for the dead despite their obvious religious and cultural differences. Lastly, the novel *Fish-Hair Woman* tackles the story of a woman blessed with extremely-long hair that she can move on her own to "fish" out the corpses in the village river.

In this regard, I explore the concept of "community" by first looking into its traditional understanding and then following Jean-Luc Nancy (1991)'s notion of "inoperative community."

Because one prominent theme in all works is death, I also examine how death unsettles the community. This paper posits that Gabriel García Márquez and Merlinda Bobis have proven in their works that the knowledge of death, or rather the reminder of the finitude of one's existence, is what brings the community together through sharing.

Ⅱ. The Arrival of Death and the Community in Question

According to J. Hillis Miller (2011), individuals are "preexisting subjectivities" that are part of a bigger group or collectivity. The communication among individuals is often understood as an understanding of having "similarities" (i.e. "the other is like me"). Moreover, these subjectivities, being part of a collectivity, becomes separated from "the outside world" (Miller 2011: 13, 7). Thus, because this collectivity, or community, depends on the idea that the outside world is excluded for it to exist, there is a foreboding feeling of fear of being invaded, or "the terror of invasion" (Miller 2011: 10). Miller (2011:14) states that the community creates a "community" or "collective" consciousness, in which the idea of death is suppressed. Pierre Bourdieu (1995: 27) adds that an individual needs to be part of social groups and engages in "networks of relations" where he or she has to be under certain "controls and constraints." Participation then, according to Bourdieu, creates "the *illusio*": the acknowledgement of the community's laws (Bourdieu 1995: 167).

One of the earliest works that redefine the notion of community is Benedict Anderson's seminal work on nationalism, *Imagined Communities* (1983), which dismisses the notion that "nations" are natural or unavoidable. Viewing the nation as a cultural construct, Anderson (2006: 6) defines "nation" as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." Although this notion of community is "imagined" and will not be concretized in some way, it does not mean it is not real: "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members,

meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (ibid). Thus, Anderson's notion of community, more specifically, the nation, is the kind of community that is very much familiar (if not the most familiar) "style" of modern community.

In *The Conflagration of Community*, Miller (2011: 6) provides models of the society. The common model is the organic society which has "institutions, laws, and conventions." However, Miller adds that there is another model of community, and this notion is highly influenced by the works of Giorgio Agamben, Georges Bataille, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Maurice Blanchot. This is the inoperative community. According to them, the idea of being together is a myth. In *The Inoperative Community,* Nancy (1991) posits that "being together" is "sharing," and not being fused into a communion. Borrowing from Bataille, Nancy emphasizes singularity, communication, the other, and finitude:

> Community is revealed in the death of others; hence it is always revealed to others. Community is what takes place always through others and for others […] A community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth (Nancy 1991: 14-15).

Although this rejection of the notion that the community is formed via "togetherness" may show the similarity or even an underlying link between Anderson's "imagined community" and Nancy's "inoperative community," there are still substantial differences between the two notions of community. Pieter Vermeulen (2009: 96) notes that imagined community centers itself within the idea that the community is formed based on people living within the same country, the inoperative community, on the other hand "starts out from the violence and exclusions that traditional forms of community have produced in order to conceive of more ethically aware forms of community." Moreover, the idea of death between these two communities are different: in the imagined community, death is glorified via the promotion of self-sacrifice not only as meaningful but also a huge contribution to the community; while the inoperative community "resist[s]… that process of abstraction" (Vermeulen 2009: 97). Despite the seemingly irreconcilable

differences between Anderson's and Nancy's communities, Vermeulen posits that there might be "a complementary rather than oppositional relation between the notions" in such a way that Nancy's "inoperative community" may be perceived as "an ethical addition that corrects the imagined community's tendency towards exclusion and totalization" (Vermeulen 2009: 96).

To avoid using the traditional idea of community, Nancy uses the terms "singularity" and "singular being" when he talks about the individual. Blanchot (1988) later on expands on Nancy's idea of inoperative community through "unworking," coining the term "the unavowable community." This alternative model of community, the inoperative community, theorized by Nancy, undoes the traditional myth of togetherness through the notion of finitude. In this regard, I posit that the works of Gabriel García Márquez and Merlinda Bobis portray the inoperative community vis-à-vis the introduction of death.

As mentioned earlier, the most commonly accepted model of community is the one with commonality: language, values, laws, beliefs, and institutions. In this model, communities are formed based on the members and their propriety, as well as their cooperation, formed bonds and acceptance of cohabitation with other individuals (Miller 2011: 16-18). In this community, there is a sense of belonging, home and identity. In other words, this model is somewhat a property. In all the works we are discussing in this essay, this model of community exists at first.

In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, we see how important traditions are in the community. The narrative exists because of a traditional event (the marriage) that happened the night before the murder of Santiago Nasar. During those moments, the community celebrates with the Vicario family for having their youngest daughter get married to the rich, young man who recently arrived in town. On the other hand, the short story "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" portrays a community where everyone seems to be fine with their everyday life. Eventually, several members of the community feel unease when an unusual object suddenly appears by their shore. The same can be said in the aforementioned works

of Merlinda Bobis. In her novel, the village people live their usual lives, working in their farms, going to church every Sunday and having celebrations during their patron saints' days. In "O Beautiful Co-Spirit," Bobis writes about how a woman living in silence in a building where everyone seems to have agreed to live by themselves as long as they do not disturb one another.

To be more specific: the importance of traditions and norms in the community in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* also becomes the medium for starting the narrative. In the novel, we see Angela Vicario, the newly-wedded wife, being returned to her family by her groom on the night of their consummation, because after they have had sex, no blood stain appeared on the matrimonial sheet. In other words, the husband feels betrayed by Angela Vicario for not being a virgin before marriage.

Bayardo San Roman, the groom, drags Angela Vicario back to her family home and kisses her mother thanks and goodbye. Pura Vicario, the mother, feels ashamed by the discovery that her youngest daughter is not a virgin, so she beats her until she names the man who has taken away her virginity. Angela refuses to reveal the identity of the man responsible, perhaps because this will surely destroy the family's reputation and honor. Because she believes that this will save her honor, and because she thinks other people would do the same, she names Santiago Nasar as the culprit because of his reputation as a rich womanizer. The value of honor is also seen when the narrator of the novel interviews both Pedro Vicario and Pablo Vicario, the twins and brothers of Angela, as well as the Santiago's murderers. They talk about their conversation with the town's priest:

> "We killed him openly," Pedro Vicario said, "but we're innocent."
> "Perhaps before God," said Father Amador.
> "Before God and before men," Pablo Vicario said. "It was a matter of honor." (Garcia Marquez 2003: 49)

Perhaps the importance of honor and value is also the possible reason why almost everyone has done nothing to stop Santiago's death. Everyone in the community knows that Santiago is about to

be killed, yet they do nothing. The twins are eventually pardoned, and the bride and groom eventually reunite 17 years later.

However, looking at the novel as a depiction of the traditional notion of community is unfulfilling and is disgraceful to the otherworldly beauty of the magic realist text. If we look at the novel in Nancy's lenses, we will see his idea that the actual experience of community has a different direction, and that is "incompletion" or the lack of totality. According to Nancy (1991), individuals experience community not as "work" that singular beings produce, but as "unworking" (*désœuvrement*), which struggles against the work that the community has acquired traditionally. He also adds that our perception of ourselves as "absolute" and away from the outside world, does not coincide with the ontological connectivity. One must acknowledge that each person is a singular being characterized by "being-outside-itself" (Nancy 1991: 24) and by the interrelated essence of "being-in-common." This leads then to the inoperative community, which does not rely on understanding the community based on identity and foundations. For Nancy, singular beings are open to one another and in constant state of change.

Miller (2011: 93) also explains that the community is constantly destabilized by the imminence of death. This parallels Nancy's notion of the *la communauté désoeuvrée*, or the "unworked community," which is a group of individuals bound by the experience of finitude while being unable to know one another wholly. In the short story, the arrival of a dead man, at first, does not destabilize the community. The whole community has reacted the way they are supposed to act: innocent children play with the corpse upon discovery, not realizing that the plaything is a dead man; the male villagers bring the corpse to town and go to the other villages to identify the man; and the women take care of the corpse in case his family comes to retrieve the body or for proper funeral. It was only until the women have had too much time being with that corpse when the disruption occurs:

> Fascinated by his huge size and his beauty, the women then decided to make him some pants from a large piece of sail and a shirt from some bridal linen so that he could continue through his death with

> dignity. As they sewed, sitting in a circle and gazing at the corpse between stitches, it seemed to them that the wind had never been so steady nor the sea so restless as on that night and they supposed that the change had something to do with the dead man. They thought that if that magnificent man had lived in the village, his house would have had the widest doors, the highest ceiling, and the strongest floor, his bedstead would have been made from a midship frame held together by iron bolts, and his wife would have been the happiest woman. They thought that he would have had so much authority that he could have drawn fish out of the sea simply by calling their names and that he would have put so much work into his land that springs would have burst forth from among the rocks so that he would have been able to plant flowers on the cliffs. They secretly compared him to their own men, thinking that for all their lives theirs were incapable of doing what he could do in one night, and they ended up dismissing them deep in their hearts as the weakest, meanest and most useless creatures on earth. They were wandering through that maze of fantasy when the oldest woman, who as the oldest had looked upon the drowned man with more compassion than passion, sighed: "He has the face of someone called Esteban." (Garcia Marquez n.d.)

After several glances at the corpse, they have all agreed that the man's name is Esteban. They imagine what his life could have been, how he would have been as a living man, and how much joy he could have brought to the villagers. However, when the male villagers have come back home with no new information about the dead man, "the men thought the fuss was only womanish frivolity." While the women are glad that no neighboring villages "own" the corpse (so now they can keep it), the men want to get rid of the "newcomer once and for all." This scenario reflects what Nancy (1991: 26) calls as the inevitable "exposure" of the organic community to the "outside," which is symbolized by the corpse, leading to the undoing of the community itself. In a sense, the corpse has contaminated the community, similar to what Jacques Derrida states: that all communities will attempt to preserve themselves from outside contamination because they are open to what Derrida (2002: 87) calls "the other, the future, death, freedom, the coming or love of the other, the space and time of spectralizing messianicity beyond all messianism."

The same rings true to Bobis's short story "O Beautiful Co-Spirit." Although the story opens with Farah and Pilar already in the morgue to see Lucia's corpse, Pilar, whose perspective we follow mainly in third-person narration, remembers that she was in the morgue because of what happened the night before. We learn that Farah and Pilar are "just polite 'hi-hello' neighbours now, barely speaking to each other after that thing with the birds" (Bobis 2021: 2). However, unlike their usual short greeting by the stairs, Farah stops Pilar, who was taking out trash and minding her own business, to ask if she would come with her the next day to the morgue. The request is awkward because Pilar even remembers how Lucia berated her years ago for removing the bird feeder outside the building. Moreover, Farah does not even recall Pilar's name. The reason why Farah asks Pilar to come with her was because of acknowledged ignorance of Catholicism. Farah, being a Malaysian Muslim, wants to prepare and honor Lucia's corpse the "Italian Catholic" way. However, she does not know anyone else who is Catholic among her neighbors. She also simply presumes that Pilar is Catholic because she is Filipino. However, despite being baptized as Catholic, Pilar does not think she can do any Catholic prayer or ceremony at all for the dead: "And not all Catholics are the same. I really don't know the prayers. And maybe Italian Catholics do things differently" (Bobis 2021: 3). Nevertheless, Farah begs her to come because it was better than nothing. Here in this awkward scene, despite the absence of the dead body, we see two individuals already being affected by reminder of finitude as they set aside their differences for the sake of a corpse. Their everyday lives are disrupted by someone's death, even though one of them is not even remotely acquainted to the dead. Unbeknownst to them, as they set aside their religious differences, Pilar and Farah form a community.

Meanwhile, *Chronicle of Death Foretold* depicts the role of ego in the community. We can say that Santiago Nasar, because of his womanizing tendency, is egotistic, and, therefore, is an easy target for anything related to the "outside contamination." Moreover, the community easily turns on him, resulting in his foretold death. Nancy states that any egocentric tendencies are rejected by the inoperative community:

> Community is what takes place always through others and for others. It is not the space of the *egos*—subjects and substances that are at the bottom immortal—but of the *I*'s, who are always *others* (or else are nothing). If community is revealed in the death of others it is because death itself is the true community of *I*'s that are not *egos*. It is not a communion that fuses the *egos* into an *Ego* or a higher *We*. It is the community of *others*. (Nancy 1991: 15)

In *Fish-Hair Woman*, the portrayal of the rejection of ego in the community is different from that of *Chronicle of Death Foretold*. In one of the earliest chapters of the novel, we see Tony McIntyre, an Australian writer who has come to explore the Philippines to search for an inspiration for his writing, regrets coming to Estrella's village because of a strange event that occurs every now and then since the beginning of the Philippine government's attempt to eradicate rebels from the mountains. Dead bodies find their way to the village river and turn the river water unpalatable. Having a long hair that she can manipulate, Estrella is tasked to fish the dead bodies out of the river. While everyone prays and wishes that the dead body is not one of their people, Tony McIntyre disturbs the calmness by being hysterical, exclaiming that he regrets coming because of what he is seeing. It is not because of his white skin or being Australian that automatically alienates him from the village, but because of his selfish act of uproar that disturbs the silence for the dead being salvaged from the river. While everyone else prays for everyone's lives, Tony McIntyre makes a scene about himself. What follows is the suspicion of him being a spy for the government or even simply being gay due to a perceived effeminacy, which is unacceptable during those times. Estrella, whose perspective we follow, also assumes that some of her neighbors probably thinks that Tony McIntyre is there to take away their prized possession—Estrella and her hair. All of these suspicions may not have been started if not for Tony McIntyre's ego and his overt disregard of what is earlier called the "community of I's."

Miller (2011: 14) also posits that individuals remind themselves their mortality, their finitude, even within traditional communities, as evident in the cemeteries as essential spaces for collective experience. On the other hand, the ontological instability of the

community comes from the imminence of death as well as from the uncertainty (or "un-workability") of death on the other:

> The death upon which community is calibrated does not operate the dead being's passage into some communal intimacy, nor does community, for its part, operate the transfiguration of its dead into some substance or subject—be these homeland, native soil or blood, nation, a delivered or fulfilled humanity, absolute phalanstery, family, or mystical body. Community is calibrated on death as on that of which it is precisely impossible to make a work (other than the work of death, as soon as one tries to make a work of it). Community occurs in order to acknowledge this impossibility, or more exactly—for there is neither function nor finality here—the impossibility of making a work of death is inscribed and acknowledged as "community." (Miller 2011: 14–15)

All the works of Gabriel García Márquez and Merlinda Bobis mentioned in this essay are consistent with Nancy's statements. As mentioned earlier, community and "being-with" emerge clearly upon the encounter of death, becoming unworkable. Nancy (1991: 15) further states that community "occurs in order to acknowledge this impossibility, or more exactly—for there is neither function nor finality here—the impossibility of making a work out of death is inscribed and acknowledge as 'community'." Bobis's and García Márquez's works seem to suggest that we can learn nothing from death because, once dead, we lose the chance to learn whatever it may teach us. The islanders in "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" have never learned anything at all from the corpse, even though it has altered the community; the narrator in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* does not uncover whether or not Santiago Nasar's death is just; in "O Beautiful Co-Spirit," the narrative ends with the beautifying Lucia's corpse and we learn nothing despite all the memories she associate with the rites they have performed; and lastly, Estrella still exclaims that at the end of her act of fishing the dead, she and her hair remain as possessions of her village. What happens is that all the characters in the aforementioned texts almost make use of fiction or imagination: The islanders imagine Esteban the Corpse as a living man; the neighbors have inconsistent and somewhat unrelated stories about the death of Santiago Nasar;

Pilar remembers the stories of her grandmother; and Estrella writes to her readers and wishes that the readers will never witness death itself:

> You who read this, may you never need to pretend that you have forgotten. May you never know the kinship between fishing for the dead and killing. The first time, you break, so you practise the art of forgetting. You teach your gut to keep whole. I am seamless, you tell yourself. You breathe in deeply then let go and thank heaven it's not you in the water. This is an artful exercise, this conversation between the lungs and gratitude. (Bobis 2012: 11)

All narratives ponder upon death and the fears and the experience of witnessing death. Esposito (2010: 123) states that:

> It's true, therefore, that the death of the other returns us to our own death, but not in the sense of an identification and even less of a reappropriation. The death of the other instead directs us again to the nature of every death as incapable of being made properly one's own *[inappropriabile]*: of my death *as* his since death is neither "mine" nor "his" because it is a taking away of what is properly one's own, expropriation itself. Here is what man sees in the wide-open eyes of the other who is dying: the solitude that cannot be lessened but only shared. The impenetrable secret that joins us *[ci accomuna]* together as our "last"[.]

In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* the narrator interviews several of his neighbors, exposing their experiences not only of Santiago Nasar's death but death in general. One instance is when the narrator asks the butchers whether or not "the trade of slaughterer didn't reveal a soul predisposed to a human being" (52), and the response is a protest: "When you sacrifice a steer you don't dare look into its eyes" (ibid). One butcher also mentions that he cannot eat the meat of the animal he butchered and another says that he cannot butcher a cow he has known for a long time, especially if he has drunk its milk.

Santiago Nasar himself has an experience with death. His father's death has forced him to stop studying to manage the family ranch (Garcia Marquez 2003: 8). Moreover, the family maid

mentions that she remembers how horrified Santiago Nasar was when she "pulled out the insides of a rabbit by the roots and threw the steaming guts to the dogs" (Garcia Marquez 2003: 10). Victoria Guzman, the maid, says that it has taken her twenty years to understand "a man accustomed to killing defenseless animals could suddenly express such horror" (ibid). The narrator also notes that most neighbors recall that the weather during Santiago Nasar's death was "funereal," as if foreshadowing his impending death, just like how his dream has warned him about his murder (Garcia Marquez 2003: 4). In a sense, Santiago's death is already foretold before it has occurred not only by his murderers but also by the prophetic scenes that happened. For example, his mother, a known seer and interpreter of dreams (as long as her stomach is empty), fails to see the meaning of her son's dream as an omen. Trees in dreams are accepted as bad omens by the community. She misunderstood the trees with birds. Divina Flor also has a vision of Santiago Nasar holding a bouquet of roses, which would turn out to be similar to how he carries his intestines at the end of his life. Moreover, Clotilde Armenta, the proprietress of the milk shop, remembers Santiago as being dressed in "aluminum": "He already looked like a ghost" (Garcia Marquez 2003: 15).

The narrator in the novel never explicitly states his own opinion about Santiago's death, except when he says that Santiago died without understanding his own death, but even this opinion is shared by the whole community. This may seem to avoid engaging with moral and ethical issues of the murder. As seen in the varying and various statements of his neighbors, we never reach a satisfying resolution in understanding Santiago's death. Perhaps the narrator stands as a representative of the community as well as the novel's readers in witnessing death. In other words, the community and the novel's readers identify themselves with Santiago Nasar despite the detachment the narrator tries to keep as a journalist.

Both the narrator and Santiago's entire community seem to want to use his death to predict their own:

> FOR YEARS we couldn't talk about anything else. Our daily conduct, dominated then by so many linear habits, had suddenly begun to

> spin around a single common anxiety. The cocks of dawn would catch us trying to give order to the chain of many chance events that had made absurdity possible, and it was obvious that we weren't doing it from an urge to clear up mysteries but because none of us could go on living without an exact knowledge of the place and the mission assigned to us by fate. (Garcia Marquez 2003: 96-97)

The community has a need to position their own end alongside Santiago's in a much larger context ("assigned…by fate"), displaying the desire for conclusion. The whole novel, as the community's chronicle, is their attempt to have an understanding, or even a foretelling, of their own death. And this is evident when the narrator tells the unusual "future" of his neighbors, such as Flora Miguel, Santiago Nasar's fiancée, being prostituted after running away with a lieutenant, Aura Villeros, the midwife, who, after hearing Santiago's death, needs to use catheter to urinate, and Don Rogelio de la Flor, who is in good health, died after seeing Santiago's corpse. So how does one "go on living without an exact knowledge of the place and the mission assigned to (them) by fate?"

On the other hand, the corpse in "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" is not part of the community of the islanders, but rather it becomes part of it. At first, the drowned man cannot fit in the community, not only for being dead, but because of his size. No bed can fit him, not even a table sturdy enough for his wake. However, Esteban the Corpse seeps into the everyday lives of the community. The naming of the corpse as "Esteban" is, in itself, an act of introducing the corpse into the community, as well as creating its own being. Though he cannot express his humanity (one may even say that he has already lost it after death), the community starts providing the corpse its own identity, thus starting the process of Esteban belonging to the community. In his death, Esteban and the whole community become alive. The community moves for the dead man, despite it not being able to move on its own. Though the corpse cannot partake in the community, the community thinks otherwise. Esteban both exists and does not exist because of the community's action, while death brings life into the community. In a way, the drowned man stabilizes and destabilizes the community.

In "O Beautiful Co-Spirit," Pilar recalls the steps in preparing the dead: "*Labaran. Bestihan. Ayusan. Para hermosa*" (Bobis 2021: 5). Although Farah has invited Pilar specifically because she is Catholic, the ritual she does is not really connected to Catholicism, but rather a ceremony done by some Filipinos. After they learn that Lucia's body is clean ("Labaran" or "wash"), they dress her up ("Bestihan" or "dress") and then the story ends with an "ayusan" ("grooming"). However, as they do each of this step, Pilar remembers her past experience of helping her grandmother in the preparation of a dead body. The two then share brief moments of enlightenment when it comes their own cultures. Because of the silence of the room, Pilar and Farah seem to grapple in the dark for some connections beyond the room. They turn to language and see how certain words are similar in their native languages, like the word "kindness." Farah says that it is "kebaikan" in Malay, and Pilar explains that in Bisaya it is "kabootan," which literally means "co-spirit," while also adding that it is "kagandahang-loob" (literally "beautiful inside" or "goodness") in Filipino. In response, Farah whispers to Pilar that because of what Pilar has done now, she is Farah's "beautiful co-spirit." This talk about "beautiful co-spirit" echoes Nancy's thoughts in the sense that the awkwardness between Farah and Pilar has dissipated and has given way to a small community.

Ⅲ. Conclusion

The aforementioned texts by Colombian write Gabriel García Márquez and Filipino author Merlinda Bobis depict the inoperative community through their sharing of experiences with death. As seen in both texts, the self (or the "I") does not juxtapose itself with the other, but rather it is the "exposure" of the self toward the other. Nancy (1991: 29) states:

> Only in this communication are singular beings given—without a bond *and* without communion, equally distant from any notion of connection or joining from the outside and from any notion of a common or fusional interiority. Communication is the constitutive

> fact of an exposition to the outside that defines singularity. In its being, as its very being, singularity is exposed to the outside.

This is what Nancy calls "finitude compearing," which is an act of sharing at the moment of awareness of one's finitude. In both texts, the individuals are aware of the existence of other individuals, thus they become the other of the other. This intensifies in the moments of reminding themselves of their own finitude: the arrival of the drowned man's corpse and the collective recollection of Santiago Nasar's murder. Both texts then, though having the characteristics of magic realism, are vivid portrayals of the finitude of human being and the collective awareness of one's finitude.

Both Gabriel García Márquez and Merlinda Bobis have the capacity to write narratives that seem out of this world, yet also very much similar to the world we know. This paper has tried to understand the García Márquez and Bobis' understanding of community with the help of Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of inoperative community. García Márquez and Bobis seem to question our traditional understanding of community through their narratives. Though the texts are written under the magic realist genre, García Márquez and Bobis's works are anchored in reality, as they mirror what we are as a community in the face of death.

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