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**Eileen Tabios. *Dovelion: A Fairy Tale for Our Times*. AC Books, 2021, 309 pages. ISBN: 978-1-939901-19-4.**

<https://www.acbooks.org/dovelion>

Eileen R. Tabios' *Dovelion* is a slipstream work of fiction. It has characters, and a plotline develops, slowly, in the background, like a novel. Some of this work is fictional, some autobiographical. The central site is in an imagined place, Pacifica, which is supposedly connected to the Philippines (where Tabios was born before moving to the United States). But rather than autofiction, the narrative is a work of Indigenous futurism as it shifts among strands of transcolonial experience. "Transcolonial," not postcolonial, is the better term to describe the book's political critique, to suggest how imperial powers have dominated Indigenous peoples like those of the Philippines and how their influence continues and will continue in myriad guises globally. The author is simultaneously a rebel against erasure of Indigenous sovereignty and a visionary who offers new expressions of cultural traditions and personal wholeness.

Indigenous futurisms writers generate literary and other artifacts that revise western European literatures. With her textual inventions, Tabios disrupts the expectations of English-language genres. Poetry, geography, political science, dialogue, prose poetry, culinary arts, visual art critique—all wend their way through the sequential and gradual unmasking of the characters in *Dovelion*. This is Tabios' method of character development. There is a through-line present in the novel-like book: a Marcos-like dictator and his family terrorize the populace and exploit the environment, until overthrown. Two lovers are children of enemies. The woman's pregnancy results in a child and then grandchildren who commingle bloodlines of the feuding families. Events occur and recur in the narrative fabric, like revisited memories.

Tabios' body of work includes other experiments with form, including invention of the tercet form hay(na)ku. Several of these are embedded within the work: "When I bleed / I camouflage / tears" and "When I weep / I camouflage / blood" (71-2). Each diary-like section begins with a day and month, but no year. The dates are not sequential, but instead seem random. Tabios created a random language generator for her project *Murder Death Resurrection: A Poetry Generator* (2018), so the nonlinear system for dates in *Dovelion* is consistent with the author's modus operandi. Jumbled dates suggest entry into an alternative time, where linear sequence is irrelevant. Like oral tradition stories, the same incidents repeat with varying emphases. Point-of-view shifts

among characters. Thus, *Dovelion's* underlying scaffolding is a three-dimensional clothesline upon which to hang moments of all shapes and sizes.

All entries begin with the fairy-tale phrase "Once upon a time." The chapter entitled "12 April" illustrates one of the unexpected directions of the prose; it begins with reflections on the love affair and proceeds to a quotation from "the poet Eileen R. Tabios," who is, the narrator avers, "a strong influence on my work" (60). The book's narrator and author separate here and elsewhere and re-engage, as Tabios interrogates the act of authorship.

Sequential chapters, one through twenty-five, order the book, an overlay on the randomly dated subsections. And Tabios further divides the book into three overarching sections that create another mapping: "There ~~Was~~ Is," "There ~~Became~~ Is," and "There ~~Will Be~~ Is." English verb tenses collapse into a single tense of presence. Time is a recurring concern of the book.

Decolonization through restructuring of language and genre is one dimension of *Dovelion*. Another is revitalization of Indigenous values. Tabios writes about her book *Murder, Death and Resurrection: A Poetry Generator*:

I also wanted to deepen my interrogation (and disruption) of English which had facilitated twentieth-century US colonialism in my birthland, the Philippines. . . . I wanted to develop a consciously closer link to the Filipino indigenous value of "Kapwa." "Kapwa" refers to "shared self" or "shared identity" whereby everyone and everything is connected." (*Jacket2*, June 2, 2019)

*Dovelion* defines, explicates, reveals, and dramatizes the timeless value of "kapwa." A "nanny" first explains the term in the book as "despite diversity, *One is All and All is One*" (57). In another embedded quotation from the author's own writings, she explains a poetics that expands on the meaning of kapwa:

The human, by being rooted onto the planet but also touching the sky, is connected to everything in the universe and across all time, including that the human is rooted to the past and future—indeed, there is no unfolding of time. In that moment, all of existence—past, present, and future—has coalesced into a singular moment, a single gem with an infinite expanse. (*DoveLion* 60, originally published in *The Awakening*, 2013)

The author also explains kapwa in terms of the science of physics, explaining that "it's not only a cultural belief. Various physicists have long proposed time is not linear. Some call time a dimension of spacetime and, thus, [time] does not pass because spacetime doesn't" (156). The theory is a praxis. The restoration of the intact, healthy

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culture is predicted by its onetime existence in the past. The Filipino child's tale "An emerald island sits upon a blue sapphire ocean and both glow under the beam of a 24-carat sun" is a continuous refrain throughout the narration and a continuous expectation.

Islands are a motif in *Dovelion*, from the invented island country of Pacifica to the Philippines to a "large grey building" where the two lovers meet in isolation. Each individual is a discrete "island" of individuality, which links to others through sex, children, and social relationships. Kapwa links each person. Unspoken is the John Donne poem, "No man is an island," but it is present nonetheless as all writings in all time exist simultaneously in Kapwa time.

Tabios does not allow decolonization principles to devolve into rhetoric without action. Rather, she previews a future where enemies reconnect in alliances against dictatorships. She shows how the restoration of a continuous concept of time corrects the fallacy of linear time, where the past falls off the left-hand edge of the page and can be ignored (like nineteenth-century US treaties with Indigenous nations). Tabios offers options. She recognizes June 12, the day the Philippines overthrew Spanish rule, through an imaginary website *June12.com*. She restores Indigenous values in new form. *Dovelion* is a blueprint for further investigations into a future where Indigenous knowledge structures the narratives.

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### Works Cited:

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