

Wages of Resistance: A Consideration of Time in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*

By Laura A Wright

The Manila International Film Festival is the First Lady's latest whim... The workers are busy day and night, trying to finish the complex for the film festival's opening night, which is scheduled in a few weeks. Toward the end, one of the structures collapses and lots of workers are buried in the rubble. Big news. Cora Camacho even goes out there with a camera crew. "Manila's Worst Disaster!" A special mass is held right there in Rizal Park, with everyone weeping and wailing over the rubble. The Archbishop gives his blessing, the First Lady blows her nose. She orders the survivors to continue building; more cement is poured over dead bodies; they finish exactly three hours before the first foreign film is scheduled to be shown.

—Jessica Hagedorn *Dogeaters* (130)

Set during the 1960s martial-law reign of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990) depicts a Philippines racked by civil unrest and gross class inequality. Her novel interleaves fact and fiction in a multitude of genres, reinforcing the sense of chaos during this period. She frames the novel in the story of a young girl, Rio, whose upper class family has a minor role in Manila's political system. Rio's story is interrupted with other voices such as the mixed-race male sex worker, Joey Sands; a working-class couple, Romeo Rosales and Trinidad Gamboa; and the daughter of Manila's most outspoken opponent of the military regime, Daisy Avila. More than offering a character-driven *bildungsroman*, these different narrative threads intertwine to create a story of Manila that critiques class injustice. In the novel, Hagedorn focuses on the lower-class characters, depicting what she calls "less exalted creatures" (Collins 1226). Her novel works to humanize the lowest classes of Manila, condemning the capitalist system responsible for their tenuous existence.

In the epigraph that begins this paper, Hagedorn describes the vast discrepancy between laborers and the upper class. In this passage, the "whim" of the First Lady causes the death of unnumbered and unnamed workers. Hoping to cultivate international interest in the Philippines and to increase her own stature within her country, the president's wife asks that Manila be "swept and reswept" and adds a new coat of paint to the hovels of the poor (130). These superficial changes cover over the causes of poverty and her responsibility to Manila's lowest classes. Her actions culminate in the collapse of a building that literally buries these undesirable bodies from view. The ensuing ceremony, ostensibly held in honor of the deceased laborers, instead becomes a spectacle starring the Archbishop and the First Lady. These powerful,

Laura. A. Wright is an assistant professor in the English Department at the University of Montana Western. She is currently working on a manuscript about the impact of book prizes on multiethnic American literature.

wealthy figures use the deaths of the poor to cement their positions of power in an unjust capitalist system.

However, these dead do not stay buried. Confronting the German director of one of the International films screened in the First Lady's "cultural center," a coworker of Joey Sands says "Did you know how many workers were crushed to death when part of your film center fell on top of them? [...] They were rushing to build that so-called cultural center where your censored films are being shown – for the first and probably the last time – to a big-shot audience" (134). Joey looks askance at his friend, thinking "I've never known him to be bitter, or to give a shit about a bunch of workmen" (134). Hagedorn authorizes Joey and his colleague, themselves victims of class hierarchy, to speak on behalf of the buried workmen. In recounting the incident a second time, Hagedorn gives the last word on these deaths to Manila's undercaste, undermining the First Lady and Archbishop and underscoring the significance of the lost lives.¹

The repetition of this scene, despite the variation of speaking characters, draws attention to its importance. Using the formal elements of her novel, Hagedorn offers a pointed critique of class. Hagedorn's interplay of the literary and the material in her text requires a methodological fusion that can account for the novel's form as well as its politically-conscious content. Bringing Karl Marx's discussion of time from *Capital* into conversation with Gérard Genette's narratological theories of duration and frequency, I argue that Hagedorn's depiction of time through scenes of Romeo Rosales and Trinidad Gamboa at work and at leisure deliberately undermines the systems of power in the novel. Drawing particularly on Genette's conceptualization of narrative duration and frequency, I highlight how the formal representation of waged workers counters the fetishization of commodities and the capitalist system. My methodological approach offers a constructive way of reading what otherwise may seem like minor characters while underscoring the politics inherent in close reading.²

According to Genette, duration takes two forms: the length of narrative time that an event takes place in the text and the literal number of pages an event takes place in (35). For purposes of this analysis, I will be concerned principally with the latter as it allows one to compare one moment in relation to other textual moments on a quantitative basis. Frequency in Genette's framework refers to the "repetitive capacities of the story" (35). A consideration of frequency draws attention to those textual occurrences that repeat throughout a text in various settings. Barbara Foley modifies this definition slightly to argue that frequency "signifies patterns of repetition and stress that enable a writer to convey meaning in an unambiguous way" (267). Applying this formulation to the case of *Dogeaters*, the "unambiguous meaning" centers around class critique.

By working with duration and frequency, I attend specifically the characters of Romeo Rosales and Trinidad Gamboa. Romeo and Trinidad are frequently mentioned but seldom the sole focus in criticism of Hagedorn's text. For instance, Crystal Parikh's chapter "'Come Almost Home': The Impossible Subject of Human Rights" from *Writing Human Rights* briefly discusses Romeo in relation to his death. Parikh discusses Romeo in terms of his "absent presence" as his

¹ I deploy "undercaste" consciously to indicate those characters, like Joey Sands, who are not engaged in wage labor. While Joey is a sex worker and a DJ, his position is highly precarious. I will use "working-class" to designate wage workers, such as Romeo and Trinidad, and "upper class" to classify those characters who are members of the political elite or capitalists.

² Such an approach may also offer a useful method for teaching the text. By thinking of the novel as material (ie. In terms of its construction as text) and as simultaneously representing material conditions (ie in terms of the lives of these workers), we can model a critique of New Criticism while still utilizing that theoretical schools' tools.

death is alluded to in gossip after he is detained by authorities (103). Using the repetition of Romeo's last moments, she argues for the injustice of his death as an additional example in Hagedorn's discussion of human rights. In centering my analysis on Romeo and Trini rather than using them as supplemental examples, I argue that these characters demonstrate Hagedorn's attention to the working-class and serve to critique global networks of capitalism that emerge in the Philippines. Discussing these and other lower-class figures, Patrick S. Lawrence writes "This not only prevents any one position from claiming a privileged perspective, it also forecloses the idea that *any* perspective might be privileged entirely; all positions of power vis-à-vis narrative information are temporary and relative, and the reader quickly learns to treat them as such" (27-28). Following Lawrence's argument about how changing narrative perspectives decenters privilege, I argue that Romeo and Trinidad particularly offer an important critique of socioeconomic power within the novel. Integrating Marx's discussion of time as a measure of value or exploitation underscores the larger ramifications for these characterizations. Further, this fusion of methodological approaches provides an essential multidisciplinary approach that considers the novel as a cultural product, while also situating it in a political and material context. As Lisa Lowe reminds us in *Immigrant Acts*, "the question of aesthetic representation is always also a debate about political representation" (4).

My argument for Hagedorn's class critique builds upon an extensive criticism of the colonial ties between the U.S. and the Philippines in *Dogeaters*.³ Nerissa Balce-Cortez's "Imagining the Neocolony," Pamela Thoma's "Of Beauty Pageants and Barbie: Theorizing Consumption in Asian American Transnational Feminism," and Rachel Lee's chapter in *Imagining the Americas of Asian America* discuss these issues while also addressing the novel's formal qualities. Balce-Cortez discusses the fragmentation of the novel's narration and the ways in which it constructs history and reality with Hagedorn's inclusion of other genres. She describes the novel as a "cinematext...a montage, a text borrowing from the idiom of filmic representation" (105). She claims that this fragmented text provides a "critique of late capitalism and the neocolonial relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines and/or a desire for history, a narrative of the homeland" (114, italics original). Thoma likewise draws on the elements of spectacle in the novel and argues that the occurrence of one of the novel's pivotal events, the crowning of Daisy Avila as a pageant queen, at the midpoint of the novel emphasizes its centrality in the narrative itself. Lee likewise sees the novel's form as having a powerful influence on the plot as she addresses critiques of the postmodernist repetition within *Dogeaters*. Lee emphasizes the feminist difference that happens through repeated events or narratives. Her argument provocatively emphasizes the experiences of marginalized women—wives, mistresses, daughters etc.—in critiquing the Marcos regime due to these figures' standing as the "perpetual nonsubjects of history" (82). My essay extends this work through considering additional structural qualities in the novel and focusing on characters that have been relatively underassessed in the existing body of scholarship. I draw formal attention to the overall ordering (another of Genette's narratological terms) of Hagedorn's text by showing the interconnections with class.

Central to my argument of the structure of time in Hagedorn's novel is Karl Marx's conception of how a capitalist system uses time to figure human value and, potentially, devaluation. While returning to Marx's original formulations may seem anachronistic in terms

³ Earlier critics of the novel, such as Faye C. Caronan and Shu-Ching Chen, note the economic and cultural imbalances the novel highlights, depending primarily on a cultural-materialist methodology to expose the transnational flows of capital and imperial influence.

of the scholarly responses to the novel outlined above, his discussion of labor, time, and the ideological structure of the commodity fetish remain relevant in this application due to their emphasis on the fundamentals of exchange. By returning to this formative text, I draw attention to the building blocks of capitalism in order to complement Genette's discussion of some of the fundamentals of narrative. In *Capital Volume I*, time underlies the most basic level of Marx's economic system: the commodity. In essence, the commodity exchange actually represents the exchange of labor-time with an equivalent quantity and quality of labor-time. Marx's simple model becomes more complicated when a capitalist purchases the labor-time of a worker, as is the case in *Dogeaters*. When the labor-time of an individual no longer belongs to him or her, the capitalist can manipulate time in order to exploit the worker. Exploitation can take place through the redefinition of the "working day" by the capitalist employer, for instance by the "small thefts in the course of the day" of workers' mealtimes and other breaks (Marx 352). Further, the use of time becomes a means of understanding the value of commodities or, in the case of the capitalist, of understanding the value of people.

Marx begins his study with an analysis of the commodity, the "elementary form" of the capitalist system (126). However, the commodity can be distilled to an even more "elementary level" since "congealed labour-time" makes up the value of a commodity (Marx 130). This phrase offers an important moment of analysis when considering Marx's larger philosophical project.⁴ Rather than operating exclusively in a material register, however "congealed labour-time" conjures both the concrete and the abstract in a single expression. "Congealed" typically refers to some physical substance and "labour" represents the performance of some work whereas "time" is an intangible entity. It is this blend of material and conceptual that makes up a commodity. Marx demonstrates the complex composition of commodities when he discusses the factors that effect "congealed labour-time":

[Labour-time] changes with every variation in the productivity of labour. This is determined by a wide range of circumstances; it is determined amongst other things by the workers' average degree of skill, the level of development of science and its technological application, the social organization of the process or production, the extent and effectiveness of the demands of production, and the conditions found in the natural environment. (130)

These "variations" include the physical conditions of the work such as the "natural environment" and the "technological application" of science as well as the more immaterial "degree of skill" of the workers; the conjunction of the material and immaterial mirrors Marx's formulation of labor-time. Marx ultimately summarizes the relationship between labor-time and the value of the commodity thusly: "In general, the greater the productivity of labour, the less the labour-time required to produce an article, the less the mass of labour crystallized in that article and the less its value. Inversely, the less the productivity of labour, the greater the labour-time necessary to produce an article and the greater its value" (Marx 131). Time forms the basis of value between two unlike objects and, in a capitalist system, will have a strictly monetary value. In her depictions of how characters spend and lose time, Hagedorn shows how this value can be reclaimed.

⁴ I do acknowledge that the particularities of this phrase may be a result of translation. Nonetheless, the latent possibilities of the expression present an interesting moment in Marx's argument.

In approaching a literary work such as Hagedorn's novel, Genette's narratological terms provide a productive means of translating Marx's theories onto a literary medium. Since neither Trinidad nor Romeo engage directly in the production of commodities, working instead in service-sectors of Manila's economy as a clerk and waiter (respectively), the correspondence between their work and Marx's notion of "congealed labor time" enables the intermediary presence of Genette's framework. Considering Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Genette identifies three ways of understanding time in a novel:

The time-category itself can be divided into three sections: the first concerned with the relationships between the temporal *order* of the events that are being told and the pseudo-temporal order of the narrative; the second concerned with the relationships between the *duration* of the events and the duration of the narrative; the third dealing with relationships of *frequency* of repetition between the events and the narrative, between history and story. (25 italics original)

As I indicated above, previous critics of *Dogeaters* deal most extensively with issues of order in the novel; they discuss the disruptions to a linear telling of Hagedorn's story and the implications for these interruptions for narrativizing history (Lee; Balce-Cortes). However, Genette's account of the narrative structures of duration and frequency provides an opportunity for a new reading of time in the novel. Of these three terms, Genette claims that frequency has "in general received much less critical and rhetorical attention" than duration and order (31). Frequency, then, will provide the primary focus of my analysis with some additional consideration of duration in *Dogeaters*.

Frequency and duration seem particularly significant in light of their potential linkages to Marx's system. Frequency's connection with Marx's theory of time manifests in the repetitions of an economic system. On a macro level, repetition occurs as capitalists exchange money for a commodity in order to acquire more money, an M-C-M exchange (Marx 248). On a more local level, the exchange of commodities and money still occurs as artisans exchange goods for other goods. In a capitalist system, however, individual workers exchange their labor for pay. They repeat this action every day as laborers arrive at work but also take on repetitive tasks in their unskilled roles. The exchange of labor for pay allows labor time to "congeal" to form the commodity, determining the value of that commodity. The frequency of working for wages and the manner of that work occurs daily, even hourly in Marx's system; Hagedorn's novel both depicts work and uses frequency to show the potential for individuals to be overlooked or devalued in a capitalist system as they perform by rote a repetitive series of tasks.

In addition to the scene of the buried workers that begins my essay, Hagedorn uses narrative frequency to illustrate the relationship between the working and upper classes and the hold of capitalism on both groups. Trinidad Gamboa, a member of Manila's working-class, contemplates acquiring a second job at SPORTEX, a large department store owned by Manila's most elite family. Before beginning work at SPORTEX, she "spent hours browsing through the chilly, air-conditioned floors, avoiding the scorching heat outside. She fingered the overpriced dresses and tried on patent leather shoes, dreaming of the day she could use a salesgirl's twenty-percent discount" (53). Trinidad fantasizes about the products that she cannot buy for "hours," spending her time idealizing these products.

She falls prey to what Marx terms the "commodity fetish" as she forgets the labor that went into the creation of these products (Marx 165). She indulges in the fantasy of these items

though they conceal “the social character of private labour and the social relations between the individual workers” (165). Further, she also forgets the labor that she herself will have to expend in order to purchase them; Trinidad rhapsodizes over the prospect of the “salesgirl’s twenty-percent discount” and overlooks the hours of her own life she will have to sell to earn the discount and then to afford SPORTEX’s products. She fetishizes these objects and the lifestyles they represent, metaphorically burying the role that she herself plays in their production and propagation. She ignores both the hours spent in the manufacture of these goods as well as the hours she will have to spend working to acquire them.

The action of browsing in the department store is almost immediately repeated in the next chapter as Rio, the primary focalizer for the novel, describes her own, upper class approach to SPORTEX. Rio narrates that “Dolores [Rio’s mother] spends hours at SPORTEX with Pucha’s mother, my *Tita* Florence. As usual, they will return without any purchases, complaining loudly of crowds, snooty salesgirls, and exhaustion. ‘*Que Ba*, I think those people just mill around the store because it’s air-conditioned!’ *Tita* Florence sniffs in disgust” (55). The duplication of the scene parodies Trinidad’s experience in SPORTEX. Though Rio’s family can afford SPORTEX’s “dresses” and “patent leather shoes,” they too use the department store as a means of recreation. In attempting to gesture towards Rio’s family’s class standing, her *Tita* Florence mocks “those people,” Manila’s working and undercaste, who use the store for its air-conditioning. Her mockery merely reflects back onto her, however, when it becomes clear that her goal in SPORTEX is much the same as Trinidad’s avoidance of the heat and fetishization of commodities.

The fantasy of spending and of establishing the class standing that such spending would indicate is a desire of both the working- and upper classes in these scenes. In the iterations of these passages, Hagedorn draws both classes closely together. She uses frequency across multiple narrative voices to show the significance of SPORTEX and its totalizing role in Manila. These moments ultimately demonstrate that SPORTEX, and the capitalist that owns it, has the most power in relation to these other characters. The influence of the Alacran family, the owners of this department store, is indeed far-reaching as they appeal to all economic groups in Manila both in terms of their working hours but also in terms of their leisure time. Through the use of frequency, the desire to spend, to be part of SPORTEX’s clientele, overwhelms members of both classes.

The gleaming corridors of the department store do not hold the same awe for all of Hagedorn’s characters, however. Though he sees the same store as the other characters, Trinidad’s lover and fellow member of Manila’s working-class, Romeo Rosales, does not feel the same compulsion to buy. Repeating the description of the store once more, Hagedorn introduces small differences that demonstrate a critique of capitalism. Focalizing through Romeo, Hagedorn again examines SPORTEX:

He sees the impressive façade of SPORTEX looming from a distance, promising air-conditioning, escalators, seductive displays of imported merchandise, and innocuous, piped-in Muzak...He hated being in the store. He always dreaded meeting Trinidad in the dingy employee’s lounge located in the dark and dirty recesses of SPORTEX’s vast, subterranean basement. The store never failed to make him feel poorer and shabbier than he actually was, especially when the salesclerks seemed to make a point of ignoring him the few times he ventured into the men’s department. (Hagedorn 160)

Unlike Trinidad, Romeo detects a discrepancy between the store's "façade" and its treatment of its employees. SPORTEX places its employees in a "dingy" and "dark" corner of the basement, hiding them from view when they are not making sales; this effectively buries these living employees as the First Lady buried the deceased workmen in the wreckage of the "cultural center." When Romeo attempts to shop, he finds himself "ignored" by the clerks, who correctly identify his class position and determine that he cannot afford to actually make purchases. He is relegated to window shopping and resents being categorized in this way; unlike the other window shoppers, Trinidad and Rio's family, Romeo is assigned this activity against his volition. In the recurring frequency of this scene, Romeo observes the ways in which SPORTEX denies individual agency and exerts its control over the occupants, clerks and shoppers, of the store. He resists their influence by refusing to enter the gleaming displays, casting off the "poorer" and "shabbier" vision of himself.

In revisiting SPORTEX through Romeo, Hagedorn uses narrative frequency to demonstrate how characters can critique patterns of oppression. Each version of a visit to SPORTEX repeats with difference, stripping the shining façade recounted in the earlier iterations of the shopping plaza to show its grimier underpinnings. One significant component of this difference, however, is the gendered nature of the time spent in SPORTEX. Romeo demonstrates that the allure of the store can be rejected, but only because he feels uncomfortable with the window shopping of Rio's female relatives and because he is able to sacrifice his female partner to its clutches. To a large extent, he relies on Trinidad's labor to feed him and keep him clothed in acrylic shirts with "pale silver thread woven into the shiny blue fabric" (126). His negative assessment of SPORTEX occurs directly as a result of Trinidad's support of his theatrical endeavors. Without her selfless labor as a clerk, Romeo would not be able to pursue his ambitions. However, later in the novel and despite his mother's protestations, Romeo resolves to let go of both Trinidad and SPORTEX. Romeo attempts to spend his time elsewhere, spending his labor time and leisure time in other pursuits.

Hagedorn's novel uses narrative frequency to critique capitalism, but duration also plays a role in this critique. Genette's notion of duration also seems to accord with Marx's description of time. Providing an example of duration in Proust's text, Genette counts how many pages Proust spends for particular moments, finding that a dinner scene fills as many pages as a year elsewhere in the novel. His quantitative study allows Genette to support his assertions for Proust's groundbreaking role as a novelist, one who deviates from classical notions of synchrony in order to offer a new understanding of time. In more contemporary novels such as Hagedorn's, duration can also be used to determine how an author considers time. By layering Marx's consideration of "congealed labor time" with Genette's terms, new understandings of narrative form arise. Fusing these methodological approaches can suggest new lines of inquiry such as how are characters' time apportioned by the author? Do characters own their own time or is it spent for them by a capitalist who has purchased their labor? How much of the novel does the capitalist control versus the workers under his or her hire? Turning to Hagedorn's novel, the affiliation of Genette with Marx shows the influence of the capitalist system in the Philippines.

Hagedorn uses duration to emphasize how much of her characters' time is spent at work. For instance, Trinidad is first introduced at her place of employment, the Odeon movie theatre, and most subsequent scenes revolve around her labor. Her life outside of work, eating with Romeo at restaurants or spending time with him, is framed and limited by her employment. Even her relationship with Romeo begins while she works behind "the window of her cashier's booth" (47). Though her initial impression of Romeo marks him as a "movie star" and as

“younger and better looking than her idol, [the actor] Nestor Noralez,” Romeo’s view of her is less flattering (49). He constantly identifies her by her job title rather than her name, calling her the “smiling cashier” or the “determined cashier” (50; 47). Lawrence comments on this interplay of gazes, discussing how it shows the objectification of each by the other (30). Significantly, Trinidad in particular is objectified by her role in a capitalist system and not just Romeo’s gaze. Trinidad’s work demarcates her identity in both her thinking and in her interactions with others. She eventually manages to seduce Romeo with her passion for film and her ability to buy him dinners and movie tickets. Though her parents had cautioned Trinidad that paying the bills “meant a woman was easy and desperate,” she is anxious to buy a way into Romeo’s affections (48). In describing Trinidad in a letter to his mother, Romeo explains that she is “a good girl” and is “hardworking” (128). However, her ability to get him “great clothes” and her “discounts on everything” are the traits with which he begins his letter (127). Despite her other qualities, it is her purchasing power that Romeo values most. Their relationship becomes one of exchange, an exchange governed by Trinidad’s ability to work and the time she spends as a cashier at the Odeon and at SPORTEX.

While I have previously examined Trinidad’s leisure time in SPORTEX as an example of frequency, she begins to spend even more time within its air conditioned walls once she becomes an employee. She thinks about her work while she’s out with Romeo and even their meeting times are governed by her work schedule in the department store. Once Trinidad begins working at SPORTEX, she falls even more under its thrall. Hagedorn explains:

Trinidad loves her job, holds dear the small prestige associated with being an Alacran employee. She works long hours without any breaks, isn’t paid overtime, rushes through her lunch in less than forty minutes and gratefully accepts her meager salary. There are no fringe benefits or medical insurance attached to her job, aside from the twenty-percent discount on “All SPORTEX items purchased.” For her, the discount is valuable and the job is fulfilling, keeping her in constant touch with the amazing lives of the rich and their wives. (160).

In this passage, not only does Hagedorn describe Trinidad’s working conditions, but she reveals that Trinidad feels great joy in her exploitation. She devalues her own labor, “rushing through lunch” and working without overtime. Though in control of her time, Trinidad willingly relinquishes it out of “love” and the “small prestige” of association. Trinidad is “grateful” to be a part of SPORTEX and to feel connected to the powerful Alacran family in any capacity. Though the conditions of her employment keep her from acquiring one of the “amazing lives of the rich,” her proximity to this class seems to provide enough reward in itself. Hagedorn depicts Trinidad as mindlessly and utterly devoted to her work, an emphasis that is underscored by the amount of time the reader encounters Trinidad at work or thinking about work.

The duration of the narrative time in which Trinidad works is extensive and shows no sign of changing or improving her lot. Trinidad is depicted as working for six pages, sixty-six percent of the total time she appears as a focalizer in *Dogeaters*. The quantitative measure shows Hagedorn’s emphasis on Trinidad’s work and labor. Even when the narrative is focused through Romeo and his responses to their relationship, Trinidad is first and foremost perceived as a worker. He met her at her workplace and her workplace continues to be their meeting point later in their romance. Hagedorn seldom reveals Trinidad in any setting outside of work, nor does she show any sign of this character’s dissatisfaction with her position.

Unlike Trinidad's dependence on her labor for her identity, Romeo attempts to reject this categorization. Romeo demonstrates that his subjectivity is not based on his labor both in terms of the frequency with which he is shown at work and in terms of the duration of his work. In each of the three chapters that feature these characters, Romeo discusses his passion for film and for acting. In the scene that introduces Romeo, he appears at leisure rather than at work as he attends a showing of a new film. It is his resemblance to the cinema star Nestor Noralez that initially sparks Trinidad's romantic interest. His identity is depicted in terms of the silver screen rather than his place of work, providing a direct contrast with Trinidad, the cashier. Later in the novel, in a chapter narrated in the first person by Romeo, he renews his resolve to enter the film industry and writes to his mother about his plans. While he does mention his work in his letter, this is relegated to one paragraph. Indeed, much of the paragraph about his work is taken up with discussing his plans for his next audition and how he hopes his work in the country club will allow him to network with the right people to break into acting (128). His cinematic ambitions counter his role as a worker and offers him a sense of escape. However, as Lee and Balce-Cortez point out, the cinema is not free from the imbalances of power of capitalism and colonialism, particularly as American popular culture dominates the cultural imagination of the Philippines. However, Lee also identifies the cinema as potentially transformative. She argues that Rio's desire to produce rather than only consume film becomes a means for her to escape her country and to revolt against the heterosexual and patriarchal nationalist structures that seek to objectify her. Building from this argument but shifting the focus of analysis to Romeo, I argue that Hagedorn uses the frequency of his goals and the relative infrequency of his working day to show how little Romeo is defined by his status as a waged worker.

Only one scene depicts Romeo at work and it occurs retrospectively as he considers his life, his relationship with Trinidad, and his desire to become an actor. Indeed, Romeo distances himself from Trinidad due to his discontent with his job as a waiter at a country club owned by the same family as Trinidad's beloved SPORTEX. In the scene of Romeo's work, he approaches Mr. Chen, his supervisor, in order to ask for a promotion after "two years and four months" of faithful service (164). Mr. Chen rebuffs Romeo's attempt to speak with him, much less ask for a promotion, saying that the country club owner "is anxious for current evaluations of all our employees" and that they intend to "cut back after the holidays" (165). Mr. Chen attempts to convince Romeo to feel grateful for his menial role and to have no aspirations for future promotion. In fact, Mr. Chen uses capitalism's development of a "reserve army of labour" as a threat to Romeo's position and to emphasize Romeo's disposable role (Marx 784). Indeed, he demonstrates Romeo's inferiority from the very beginning of their interaction by forgetting Romeo's name and forcing him to speak in English. Mr. Chen establishes complete dominance over Romeo, proving to Romeo that there is no hope for betterment in this position.

Acting for Romeo seems like an opportunity for escape from his oppressive place of work, but his obsession with acting shows his intense indoctrination in a capitalist system as he falls prey to his own ideologies. Marx and Engels explain the intense captivation of ideologies, particularly ideologies of capitalism by claiming "the phantoms of their brains have gained the mastery over them" (1). Romeo is entirely owned by these "phantoms." He fails to see cultural production as playing into this system, though the investments of the government and the palliative responses to the movies show this to be true throughout the novel. Though Romeo craves the celebrity of acting as a way of escaping his working conditions, Hagedorn uses narrative frequency to show that this desire is imbedded in naiveté about the intersection between capitalism and cultural production. Through multiple depictions of Lolita Luna, the famous

actress, offscreen, Hagedorn reveals that what Romeo takes for success is only another type of exploitation. Lolita appears in scenes where she is restless and dissatisfied with her fame (136-140) and uses drugs to cope with her relationship with a powerful political player (170-178). Indeed, the duration of Luna's scenes in the novel offscreen far exceeds her time onscreen, showing the difficulties and the privations of her living conditions. Romeo's investment in this system is critiqued within the structures of the novel itself, an irony the reader can observe from their vantage but one that he cannot grasp.

Romeo feels the impact of his illusionary ideology when bullets rip through his body on his way to meet Trinidad for lunch. He has resolved to quit his job, to break up with Trinidad despite her financial support, and to dedicate himself to becoming a movie star. In a brief, two-paragraph interlude, men in "khaki pants and shirts" gun Romeo down in the street (168). He thinks he recognizes one of these men as a security guard for a movie production company that he had met a few days previously, but cannot definitively place the man. While it may seem that the system Romeo works against has the last word, the extreme brevity of this scene emphasizes the actions of Romeo's life rather than his shooting. Hagedorn uses the longer duration of Romeo's life to outweigh the moment of his assassination by the military police.

The scene of Romeo's shooting is the last that focalizes the story through his or Trinidad's perspective. However, Hagedorn returns to these working-class characters once more as an American journalist interviews the First Lady. In this scene, Hagedorn uses structural frequency to condemn the power structures in the Philippines. The interview begins with a discussion of fashion as the First Lady attempts to prove her interest in Filipino products and design. She emphasizes the role of the Philippines as a global exporter and her own position in the advancement of this trade. Even in this relatively low-stakes discussion, "She has been lying cheerfully to [the interviewer] all morning, and they both know it" (217). The First Lady thrives on imported goods, constantly devaluing the economy and the workers of her country. As the interview progresses, it takes a political turn to Romeo's shooting. The First Lady describes Romeo as an "assassin," a "brilliant and sophisticated young man," who had planned the death of Senator Avila, the outspoken opponent of her husband's presidency (219). The interviewer prompts her story, redirecting her to a different vision of Romeo as "a waiter" who was "shot down in the middle of a busy intersection, in broad daylight" (219). The two opposing stories in this scene, compounded with the earlier narratives of Romeo and Trinidad, destabilize the First Lady's assertions. Though the First Lady seems to hold this position of power, the repetition of the other narratives of the shooting, combined with the very brief duration of the event itself, overshadow her words. Hagedorn's structures of time in *Dog eaters* maintain a resistance to the First Lady's power, highlighting her lies and the class injustices she perpetuates.

Dog eaters overtly addresses many instances of class inequality in Manila. However, by attending to the structural matters of frequency and duration within the novel, a powerful critique of capitalism emerges. While my emphasis in this essay has been on Trinidad and Romeo, my methodological framework could also productively explicate the relationship the powerful General and the actress Lolita Luna, American tourists and the sex worker Joey Sands. Through a multidisciplinary frame that unifies the formal characteristics of the novel with an understanding of Marx's theory of political economy, Hagedorn powerfully reconsiders class hierarchies and dynamics of power during this period. Her novel shows that though the attempts may be made to bury the working-classes, like the construction workers with which I began this essay, their voices cannot be ignored.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for the numerous readers, starting with Chris Vials, who have engaged with my ideas in this essay. Each of the anonymous readers at *Asian American Literatures: Discourses and Pedagogies* offered invaluable feedback to help guide my thinking and improve this work. I appreciate their time, expertise, and thoughtful interventions.

Works Cited

- Balce-Cortes, Nerissa. "Imagining the Neocolony." *Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism*. 1:1 (1993): 95-120. *MLA International Bibliography*.
- Caronan, Faye C. "Colonial Consumption and Colonial Hierarchies in Representations of Philippine and Puerto Rican Tourism." *Philippine Studies*. 53:1 (2005): 32-58. *MLA International Bibliography*.
- Chen, Shu-ching. "(Trans)National Imaginary and Tropical Melancholy in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dog eaters*." *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*. 31:1 (2005): 95-121. *MLA International Bibliography*.
- Collins, Michael. "'I'm Interested as a Writer in Less Exalted Persons': An Interview with Jessica Hagedorn." *Callaloo: A Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters* 31.4 (2008): 1217-1228. *MLA International Bibliography*.
- Foley, Barbara. *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993.
- Genette, Gérard. "Order, Duration, and Frequency." *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*. Ed. Brian Richardson. Columbus: Ohio State UP., 2002.
- Hagedorn, Jessica. *Dog eaters*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Lawrence, Patrick S. "Rehistoricizing Differently, Differently: American Literary Globalism and Disruptions of Neo-Colonial Discourse in *Tropic of Orange* and *Dog eaters*." *Asian American Literature: Discourses and Pedagogies*. 7(2016) 15-38.
- Lee, Rachel. *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.
- Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.
- Parikh, Crystal. *Writing Human Rights: The Political Imaginaries of Writers of Color*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2016.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume 1*. St. Ives, UK: Penguin Books, 1990.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The German Ideology*. Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2011.

Thoma, Pamela. "Of Beauty Pageants and Barbie: Theorizing Consumption in Asian American Transnational Feminism." *Genders*. 29 (1999). *MLA International Bibliography*.