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Nobody Would Remember Me Now: Class, Time, and the Refused Return in Bienvenido N. Santos's *Scent of Apples*

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Abstract

Scent of Apples by Bienvenido N. Santos is considered a classic in Filipino-American literature, but analyses of it are mainly biographical and do not offer an interpretive method. This study analyzes the short story as a cultural text, adopting a qualitative research approach that combines hermeneutic close reading and reflexive thematic analysis within the cultural materialism framework proposed by Raymond Williams, while considering Hall's definition of cultural identity and Boym's categories of nostalgia. The analysis includes nine verbatim quotes, coded and reduced to six themes: arithmetic of absence, Co-ethnic hunger and the economics of recognition, the frozen homeland, barren ground and the geography of class, the residual archive, and the refused return. The data show that Celestino Fabia is in a marginal position because of his class status, his ethnically marked rural labor, and the impossibility of returning home. He preserves his culture not through messages but through objects and hospitality. Compared with migration studies from 2020 onward, the story's emotional architecture makes sense in the modern context of migration in the Philippines.

Keywords: cultural criticism, Filipino diaspora, Bienvenido N. Santos, structures of feeling, reflective nostalgia

1. Introduction

Labor migration in the Philippines is part of a larger picture, depicted as a fundamental backdrop rather than merely an event. The craftsmanship of patterns of being employed abroad originated back in the mid-1970s, and in the course of the next fifty years, the ways of using migration for economic purposes have been grafted onto the national model of governance, which resulted in the creation of a machinery of state administration, moral vocabulary, and particular kinds of family arrangements that are almost impossible to find elsewhere. Consequently, the available literature has become predominantly sociological and has made significant contributions to studying how care takes place across borders, how kinship relations change, and how people suffer psychological problems caused by ongoing severance due to overseas employment. However, the literature fails to explain the inner feelings connected with departing, including how distance affects an individual's mentality and how one keeps living the past in the present in the form of memories.

The Scent of Apples is the tale in the only book that Santos published in the USA, and it has served as the text through which generations of Filipino students have been introduced to the notion of exile. The economy of storytelling is too disturbing. A Filipino writer working as a guest lecturer comes to Michigan in the time of war. After the lecture, Celestino Fabia, a farmer who has not met another Filipino for many years, approaches him. Fabia invites him to his home in Indiana, where the narrator meets Fabia's wife and son, has a simple meal, and receives a jar of apple jam. Nothing is settled. The two men go away, and Fabia refuses to communicate anything about him to the Philippines. Within this narrow frame, Santos raises several issues later studied by migration studies experts: what happens to identity when return is impossible, the role of objects in cultural issues in the

absence of community, and how class determines migrants' visibility.

Santos's writing was influenced by his personal experiences. He came to the United States in 1941 under a scholarship program by the government of the Philippines. However, he got stuck there because of the outbreak of the Pacific War, forcing him to travel during the war as a representative of the Philippines-in-exile. The notion of exile became significant again after the declaration of martial law in the Philippines in 1972. Critics studying Santos's work have paid due attention to his biography, but the attention is often excessive. This is why the stories are viewed as purely autobiographical accounts, and when critics take themes from them, they move on without understanding how those themes came to exist there.

Meanwhile, the resources for the study of diasporic literature have undergone radical changes. The fields of memory studies and postcolonial criticism have converged and begun treating memory and forgetting as intertwined rather than opposing processes, studying cultural identity through the analytical lenses of material and affective traces (Parui, 2024). Diasporic material studies have shown the importance of objects that allow migrants to remember their homeland while also connecting them to the idea of separateness (Zeng, 2024). The study of the intergenerational transmission of memory in diasporic fiction has shown how family history is transmitted as a process of rupture (Butt, 2024). The scholarship that has been dedicated to issues around repatriation and criminalized migrant bodies has changed the idea of desire to go home from a mere and sentimental idea into a political one (Chemmachery, 2024). Nevertheless, this theoretical framework has not yet been applied in Santos's research.

The selection of cultural criticism as the key method requires justification because different methods are definitely applicable to the text. The formalist approach could explain the compression in the story and the use of the apple symbol, yet it views society only as the setting rather than the reason for the phenomenon in the story. The psychoanalytical approach could reveal the reasons for Fabia's melancholy, but it will complicate the understanding of a mental condition presented by the author as a collective one. A postcolonial analysis would correctly stress the American colonizer-colonized relationship as one that allowed Fabia to migrate, but it might place more importance on this than on class division, which is also significant in the story. Cultural criticism is preferred in the framework of cultural-materialist analysis because it allows us to consider all of them and treats a literary text as a space for deducing different factors. It allows us to say that the literary work relates to all of them and makes it possible to challenge those factors at the same time.

This study analyzes *Scent of Apples* and employs a qualitative approach, presenting it through selected quotations in the form of a qualitative report. The analysis is guided by three research questions: What themes represent concepts of exile, marginalization, and cultural survival in the text, and how do the interpretations correlate with any particular situation? How do the text material and spatial characteristics represent cultural identity? Finally, how should the findings be interpreted in terms of reading the works of Filipino authors living in the diaspora today? This study contributes in three ways: providing sufficient methodological arguments for reading the classic text; re-evaluating Santos's work; and offering implications that may impact education and policymaking in a society that has become a labor exporter.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Memory, Materiality, and the Postcolonial Literary Text

The meeting of memory studies and postcolonial literary criticism has transformed the way diasporic literature is interpreted. According to Parui (2024), both domains examine the intersections that emerge when cultures collide, through which identity is established and destabilized simultaneously. Moreover, acts of reconstruction in diaspora narratives are often interpreted as anticipatory activities. The model introduced differs from the previous understanding, in which the migrant was viewed as an individual abandoning one culture and adopting another. The given model introduces the idea of entanglement, whereby forgetting and remembering co-exist, and cultural identity is not preserved through continuous life in a common community but through material symbols and shared rituals. The perspective introduced by Butt (2024) allows for applying the analysis to family narrative, showing how memory, rather than recollection, of partition and displacement is preserved through generations, making the rupture a legacy for people who never experienced it. Chemmachery (2024) shows how the need to return home, which remains powerful even after death, is used in diasporic fiction as a political claim against the government.

Two aspects of this area of research apply directly to Santos' situation. The first aspect is that this research argues that the diaspora experience of returning home is both time-related and space-related, meaning that a migrant is cut off not only from a place but also from a period of time. The second focuses on what is tangible and trivial. Earlier literature focused on general indicators of cultural retention, while newer literature examines identity through familiar, ordinary things such as meals, signs, and common furniture.

2.2 Diasporic Objects and the Material Archive of Belonging

Investigations in material culture reveal that things play an important part in the formation of identity among migrants. Marschall (2019a) defines memory objects as personal objects that trigger involuntary memories of one's country of origin, culture of origin, and relations prior to migration, showing how utilitarian objects can acquire this function over time. Pechurina (2020) adds that household objects are symbols of identification, acting as indicators of identity; in this way, one object could mean a country for an outsider and a relation for its owner. Zeng (2024) extends the category, explaining that diaspora objects serve as both ties to one's native land and reminders of detachment from it; these two functions give this type of object its emotional dimension.

The literature gives vocabulary to the picture that appears towards the end of Santos's tale. The pale-colored photo appears as a memory object, not a sentimental prop, thus acting like an archive—a unique, degrading, portable storage of the culture to which the owner has their only connection. The process of degradation matters because, unlike a community, an object cannot renew itself, and this fading of the image makes it possible to understand the attrition of the identity contained within it.

2.3 Filipino Migration As a Lived Structure

Modern scholarship on Filipino migration provides a basis for assessing the emotional implications of the story. Parreñas et al. (2025) examine the institutionalization of labor migration and its impact on the value attributed to migrants and their experiences. Ballaret (2023) examines changing care patterns and shifts in the roles of migrants and their family members. de los Reyes & Yue (2026) claim that children left behind have a contradictory role in the migration process: they are justified by it while their point of view is never taken into consideration. Bryceson (2019) notes that families undergoing migration tend to see migration as cyclical rather than a one-off event, whereby separation is constantly negotiated as family members age.

Two more areas need to be considered. Research on older migrants shows that staying long-term in another country does not mean they settle there; this phenomenon is called existential loneliness, as opposed to simply feeling lonely, and has been described in this context (Olofsson et al., 2021). In accordance with the research done by Jang & Tang (2022), loneliness is dependent on the age of the immigrants when they moved abroad and the family situation, and may lead to depression.

2.4 Diaspora, Mediation, and the Historicity of Silence

One last aspect casts a shadow over treating Santos as timeless. Research by Kianpour et al. (2026) brings together over ten years of scholarship on social media storytelling, diasporic identity, and collective memory, arguing that digital stories can both preserve memories and create communities while undermining individual and collective identity. Research on communication practices among Filipino migrants shows that smartphones create spaces where communication and separation are managed, yet the technological divide does not eliminate social problems or the gap between those who have access to communication technologies and those who do not. Motahane (2025) and Panossian (2022) explore identity reconstruction in African and Middle Eastern social environments, respectively, showing that migrants' inner lives are expressed through the terms on which they are accepted into the host society.

Fabia's silence, then, is not the human condition. It is the condition of a poor, rural, non-white migrant in a specific communicative and legal regime. Reading it as universal flattens exactly the historical specificity that cultural criticism exists to recover.

2.5 Existing Criticism of Santos and the Identified Gap

Criticism of Santos falls into three main categories. The oldest and most reliable category is biographical criticism, which interprets Santos's fiction as transposing his own wartime experience and later exile. This criticism helped to establish the historical context of Santos's stories, but it also tends to view them merely as evidence. In the second category is thematic criticism, which points out how themes of alienation and homesickness, or the failure of the American Dream, appear in the stories. While this criticism identifies relevant issues, it rarely explains how it obtained this information, which makes it incompatible with current academic standards of evidence. The third, and more recent, category of criticism takes into account the Filipino-American literary canon and examines how heteronormative and nationalistic ideas appear in the texts and in their reception.

No reading that merges these three obligations has been done to date: a well-established analytical methodology, textual materials from the latest research in diaspora, memory, and emotion studies, and an ongoing consideration of class differences in the figure of the migrant in Santos' work. This absence is significant because, without methodology, the interpretation cannot be verified. Without contemporary theory, the story becomes superficial, as it remains limited to the insights of the time of writing. Finally, the lack of class analysis allows the story to be read as a general narrative about migrants' aspirations, which contradicts its own details.

3. Theoretical Framework

The research context is defined through the concepts of cultural materialism articulated in the works of Williams, cultural identity discussed by Hall, and types of nostalgia by Boym. According to Williams (1977), the concept of 'structure of feeling' serves as one of the main instruments of analysis: it indicates social experience and condition before becoming widely accepted and recognized. The term has been further developed in recent empirical studies; it has been defined as a principle for analyzing sensations, impressions, and practices based on experiences in material environments, with the additional finding that residual and emergent structures exist simultaneously rather than one after another (Vanke, 2024).

Williams's three types of cultural elements—dominant, residual, and emergent—structure the analysis. Dominant is the mid-century American system that defines Fabia's role as an agricultural worker, and assimilation is the price of membership. Residual refers to the cultural world of the Philippines that he carries with him, which is no longer supported by an existing community and survives in memory, in hospitality, and in one photograph. Emergent is the hybrid household he has constructed and where his son will have to take on his father's heritage, which cannot be passed on completely.

Hall's assertion that cultural identity is the product of both process and existence, occurring in history rather than outside it, inhibits the analysis from interpreting Fabia's Filipinoness as a static identity in a merely troubled state. Boym's opposition between restorative nostalgia, which attempts to reconstruct the lost home, and reflective nostalgia, which relishes nostalgia but admits that actually returning is impossible, provides the idea for the conclusion of the story. Fabia's abstaining from getting in touch with home can be interpreted as not only resignation, but also as the moral reality of reflective nostalgia.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study is built on a qualitative interpretive framework that combines hermeneutic close reading and reflexive thematic analysis. Close reading draws on literary-criticism tools, including attention to word choice, imagery, narrative structure, and silence in a text. Reflexive thematic analysis offers a methodological process for moving from textual minutiae to interpretation, which, like the approach of cultural studies scholars, emphasizes the researcher as an active, not neutral, participant in the process of interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The integration is purposeful: literary criticism has been criticized for lacking methodological rigor, while thematic analysis applied without an understanding of literature reduces works of fiction to sociological statements.

The dataset consists of the highly acclaimed short fiction *Scent of Apples*, originally published in Santos's book in 1955 and later reissued in 1979 by the University of Washington Press as part of a collection of stories with the same name. The basic analytical unit is either the utterance or the descriptive passage. The study pointed out an important feature of the text: the short story was published in multiple versions, and although there were very few word differences and no standard way of lineation. Consequently, the excerpts are presented by location, without specific line numbers, and when two versions differ significantly, both are included in the analysis. This is considered a limitation for exactitude rather than a limiting factor for interpretation, because it is necessary to say that the variations refer only to the form of wording rather than to the content.

The analysis was conducted in six stages. The first stage involved reading the text three times without taking notes to familiarize oneself with it. In the second stage, pieces of text dealing with exile, marginality, temporality, materiality, and the persistence of culture were extracted word for word, and segment codes were developed (E1-E9). The third stage involved semantic coding of each extract in terms of manifest and latent meaning. In the fourth stage, all codes were grouped into potential themes. The fifth stage involved testing the potential themes against the whole text to check whether they covered what was expressed and whether they were internally coherent, which led to merging some themes because they denoted the same thing at different levels. The sixth stage involved naming and defining the established themes and reporting them together with the extracts that support each theme.

The sample exemplifies the process of coding logic in action. For instance, excerpt E3 was assigned the codes "duration of absence stated" and "return probably denied." The semantic coding registered an important syntactic dimension that semantic coding did not reveal: the sentence changes from a full clause on departure into a two-word future, and the contributing clause mitigates the gravity of the statement for the listener but leaves it unchanged for the speaker. The explicit code used here was "foreclosure realized grammatically." The code formed clusters with those from E1 to establish the thematic content of the arithmetic of absence. If a code could not be related to any particular lexical or syntactic feature of the excerpt, it was eliminated; thus, two codes referring to Fabia's supposed emotions regarding his wife were dropped, as there was no relevant textual evidence.

Credibility is achieved through an intensive process with the text and by presenting excerpts that support claims so that the readers can verify whether the evidence matches the interpretation. Dependability is supported by an

audit trail showing how the text is processed into code and theme, including the elimination of two non-operational candidate themes. Confirmability is achieved by separating what the text says and what the analysis means. The transferability of the results is claimed at the theoretical rather than statistical level because the themes are intended for use in the analysis of other working-class exile narratives, not in research about a statistical population.

5. Findings

Six themes were generated from nine excerpts. Table 1 presents the excerpt corpus with codes and thematic assignment; the themes are then discussed in turn.

Table 1. Excerpt corpus, codes, and thematic assignment

Code	Verbatim excerpt	Speaker or source	Theme
E1	"I have been here a long time—more than thirty years."	Celestino Fabia	T1
E2	"I've seen no Filipino for so many years now... So when I saw your name in the papers... I come right away."	Celestino Fabia	T2
E3	"I left the Philippines more than twenty years ago and have never been back. Never will perhaps."	Celestino Fabia	T1
E4	"I want to find out, sir, are our Filipino women the same like they were twenty years ago?"	Celestino Fabia	T3
E5	"We're just poor farmer folk, you know, and we don't get to town very often."	Celestino Fabia	T4
E6	"...barren land overgrown with weeds in places. All around were dead leaves and dry earth. In the distance were apple trees."	Narrator	T4
E7	"Ruth is a country girl and hasn't met many Filipinos. I mean Filipinos younger than I, cleaner looking."	Celestino Fabia	T2
E8	"an old picture of a very old-fashioned Philippine woman in native dress" (variant reading: "The faded figure of a woman in Philippine dress could yet be distinguished.")	Narrator	T5
E9	"No... Thanks a lot. But, you see, nobody would remember me now."	Celestino Fabia	T6

Theme 1: The arithmetic of absence

What he brings up first is the duration, given twice in different forms. In E1, he has been in the USA for more than thirty years; in E3, he has left the Philippines more than twenty years before. The difference is not so much an error in the text as a marker of the perception of exile as an approximate accumulation instead of a precise moment. The concept of time spent abroad has overtaken any other markers of identity in Fabia's description of his life.

The process that arithmetic engenders is dispossession. The concept of time, as expressed in the first equation, is presented not as an accomplishment or resultant possession, but rather as the measure of absence. Equation 3 illustrates this process through syntactic simplification. The sentence starts off as a neutral assertion about departure, adds a double negative that marks the closure of the past ("have never returned back"), and fades into a two-word future in "Never will." "Perhaps," the trailing element does not revitalize the situation. It serves as courtesy rather than being a hopeful desire of the speaker. Thus, the grammar of the statement presents the closure it verbalizes.

Theme 2: Co-ethnic hunger and the economics of recognition

E2 documents the triggering situation for the event. It had been a long time since Fabia had encountered any other Filipino, and reading about the talk by a fellow countryman immediately prompted action. The quick succession of responses- reading and going, in this case, being together without breaking it down at all- is notable. What is being sought is not knowledge, but recognition of being identified by somebody for whom one's being a Filipino does not need any explanation.

E7 reads this hunger complex on a sentimental level. Fabia introduces his wife by stating that she has met a

limited number of Filipinos, then qualifies it with a caveat that casts doubt on what he just said: she has met few Filipinos older than he is who are "better looking." The self-definition establishes two folds of meaning. It reflects acceptance of the hierarchy of races among Americans where Filipino laborers were considered dirty, but it also marks the internalization of the hierarchy as a self-deficiency rather than exposing it. Fabia is not just cut off from the life of other Filipinos; he is cut off because of the fact that he has absorbed the assessment of the kind of Filipino he is by the host culture.

The theme also uncovers a discrepancy that goes unresolved in the tale. While the narrator possesses a lecturing itinerary, education, mobility, and travels with official authority, Fabia is a farmer who relies on reading about the narrator in newspapers. Although they are both from the Philippines and in foreign lands, only one returns. Their different experiences of the encounter also frame Fabia's experience as a recognition of the narrator's mere detour. Santos refuses to sentimentalize this disparity, and interprets the moral weight on the narrator instead of Fabia: the narrator, who represents the thinking Filipino reader, is challenged to see Fabia, who is there without the countries creating means for him to see him.

Theme 3: The frozen homeland

The question that Fabia has been waiting to ask in E4 is whether the Philippines still exists in its past form. The way the question is phrased is quite correctly vague. The question asks whether Filipino women are "the same as they used to be twenty years ago", thus placing the standard of comparison not in present-day Philippines but in his memory of how it used to be. Hence, the place he is asking about is an archived place and, as a result, the question cannot be answered as posed.

There are two consequences of this. First, while Fabia's exile is geographical, it is also temporal. Even if he were to return, he would not gain what he is looking for, as he wishes to recover a time period, not a place that would remain unchanged. The second follows from the fact that the question indicates the speaker's awareness of the query's futility. Asked by a person who believed confidently that his homeland had remained unchanged, such a question would not be necessary. The interrogative form shows that the speaker acknowledges that a change has taken place.

Theme 4: Barren ground and the geography of class

The portrayal of marginality in the story is materialist rather than psychological. The E5 phrase also frames Fabia's social-class positioning in terms of apology and justification, as she belongs to an impoverished peasant community with little contact with civilization. This notion involves double marginalization because it denotes a withdrawal from urban and American life and, at the same time, from any Filipino community that might be present in the town. Poverty, along with rurality, creates a type of isolation that neither circumstance would create on its own.

E6 presents this context spatially. The way to Fabia's farm is depicted as a wasteland, with patchy vegetation, leaves, and dry land. Only from afar can one see apple trees. The picture is not aesthetic. It provides an objective counterpart in a life where America's abundance is present but far away. The apple trees sit in the distance like the American wealth that attracted Fabia. The title illustrates this: he can smell the fruit, but does not have it available.

The theme indicates that the apple has an economic history. Growing apples in the American Midwest relied on seasonal and underpaid workers. With workers like Fabia in the field, apples cannot be considered innocent signs of American abundance. The fruit is too valuable, and thus it requires the sweat of a worker like Fabia. This shows that someone like Fabia cannot be present when the apple consumer eats the fruit. When Fabia gives the narrator the apple jelly, he not only offers the product of his work but also proves the value of what he has created.

When we consider E5 and E6 together, we can see that the main character is not referred to as a migrant but as a manual-worker migrant. The fact that these characters are being mentioned makes a big difference in how the extract is taught and cited. Fabia does not belong to the category of professionals whose displacement is justified by status; rather, he is simply a hardworking individual who goes unnoticed in both of the countries he belongs to.

Theme 5: The residual archive

The object E8 serves as a cultural sign in the story. The photograph, visible on the dresser, features a woman in Philippine apparel, and one version is so faded it is impossible to recognize. The photograph is a personal reminiscence, tied to a specific life, a national sign that is perceptible to all Filipino visitors, and a replacement for the community as the bearer of culture. While a living, vibrant Filipino community would renew identity through speech, food, and ritual, Fabia relies on a solitary photograph to meet this goal, and photographs are silent.

The decline captures the essence of the theme. A community undergoes renewal; an item decays. The alternate interpretation, in which the character is still recognizable, conveys a memory-related caution: the archive may be understandable in the moment but will not remain so forever. This distinction helps distinguish Fabia's cultural persistence from cultural continuity. He possesses such a cultural background that allows him to keep his cultural identity as it is kept in a document rather than as a way of life. The finding agrees with the studies proving the existence of the phenomenon when diasporic object connects immigrants with their country of origin and shows their separation from it at the same time (Zeng, 2024) as well as with the studies saying that the power of memory objects is based on the absence of the relations (Marschall, 2019b).

In addition to the image, the discussion points out another, more abstract form of evidence: hospitality. Fabia's compulsion to take the narrator back to his house and provide him with food shows a form of social system typical of Filipino culture, which nobody would expect him to follow in Indiana. The fact that this social system continues to exist even without someone to practice it is the strongest proof in the story that the narrator's cultural identity is not just a thing of the past but still relevant.

Theme 6: The refused return

E9 is both the moment of the crucial statement within the story itself. It is also the most misinterpreted part of the narrative. When offered to send the news of him to the Philippines, Fabia says no. The rejection consists of three elements: a straightforward refusal, a polite remark, and a statement that seems to be an established fact. "Nobody would remember me now" is said without a hint of self-pity or pleading.

The reader may be tempted to think that what Fabia conveys is defeat, and that interpretation is acceptable. However, the analysis reveals the opposite. Throughout the narrative, Fabia tries to connect with others, moving from place to place, inviting people, asking questions, and presenting himself. At the very moment when a way back to the home country is possible, Fabia shuts it down. This rejection is not passive. It is the realization of the only power that Fabia possesses, i.e., the decision regarding how he would like the process of recollection to take place.

In addition to everything else, an aspect of the rejection connects to previous generations, and it is never specified in the narrative. Fabia's son has a Filipino father living in Indiana who has no Filipino community to belong to, no contact with the Philippines, and who thinks of his homeland only as a land he remembers not much of. By refusing to reopen the way back, Fabia takes away not just his own chance to return but also his son's chance to have something more than this photograph. Whether this act is a sign of protection or resignation remains unclear, and the interpretation does not attempt to answer this question. What is clear is that it is his decision and the last important act he has made.

This is reflective nostalgia rather than restorative nostalgia as explained by Boym (2001). Fabia does not try to rebuild the lost home because he does not believe that it can be found again. He remains in the state of longing and refuses the false hope of a return that cannot be done. In the end, there is no reconciliation; instead, the narrator is left with a jar of jelly and an unresolved debt.

6. Discussion

The six themes illustrate an organization of sensation that corresponds to Williams's idea: the experienced manner of being that is characteristic of certain historical conditions. The prevailing category in this narrative is the American agricultural economy of the mid-20th century, which takes away Fabia's work but leaves him no room for cultural identity. The surviving category is represented by the culture of the Philippines, which exists only through photos and certain practices; the becoming category shows Fabia's family creating a future that Fabia cannot inherit. Vanke's (2024) demonstration of the coexistence of the residual and emergent categories can also apply here: Fabia does not switch from the world of the Philippines to the United States but lives in between.

Three conclusions deserve special attention. First, class takes precedence. Theme 4 shows that Fabia's marginalization occurs due to being part of the rural labor economy together with his nationality, making the usual teaching of his story as one of homesickness insufficient. Recent migration studies have pointed out the same thing in the opposite way, showing that the evaluation of migrants' lives results from the type of labor they belong to (Parreñas et al., 2025). The Filipino professional abroad is not in the same exile as the Filipino farm worker, and Santos describes the latter.

Second is loss's temporality. In theme 3, Fabia's home can be described as archived rather than merely remote. This occurrence corresponds to the description of memory and post-colonial writing, indicating that remembering and forgetting intertwine while remaining related, and showing that diasporic identity is formed by different material proofs rather than a shared life (Parui, 2024). Moreover, this is well studied in terms of generational memory, where the rupture is passed on as an inheritance to those who have never gone through it (Butt, 2024). Fabia's son will inherit a Philippines that exists only in his father's memory, which is already a case

of passing and loss.

The third aspect is that of the historicity of silence. It is easy to interpret E9 as a universality about exile, which is an appealing reading in itself from a pedagogical point of view. Nevertheless, it is wrong, for the isolation of Fabia must be understood with reference to the particular communication regime that existed, whereby to establish contact meant writing letters, sending money, and being literate, and so it was possible for the connection of the poor peasant to the village he left some two decades before to disappear. Studies on migrants' digital practices show that the conditions of their separation today must be constantly managed, and co-presence maintained across space; however, they also show that technology does not remove social problems, and a divisive gap separates those with access to technology from those without. Kianpour et al. (2026) demonstrate that digital narratives can preserve diasporic memory while destabilizing it at the same time. The comparison underscores Santos's merits because he documented a particular kind of disappearance that is now much rarer due to infrastructure development but has not entirely disappeared.

The research results relate to the emotions of migrants who are growing old. For example, themes 1 and 6 depict a man in his late middle age living alone among people of his culture abroad. According to Olofsson et al. (2021), existential loneliness among older migrants may be considered a stronger form of loneliness than normal isolation. Moreover, Jang & Tang (2022) say that loneliness among older migrants is connected to the quality of family relationships and depression. For example, the words Fabia says to the narrator show this problem long before it was defined in shared professional literature.

Another aspect to consider is the form. The fact that the narrator is a first-person witness rather than an omniscient narrator relates to its cultural claim and is not accidental. Because the story is told by a narrator—an educated citizen of the same nationality—the narrative structure is not coincidental. Fabia becomes accessible to the writer only because someone else can send her story to the world. Santos, who is in the same situation while traveling during the war, seems to understand this point. What can also be noticed is that the situation in which Fabia is placed cannot gain a complete narrative form. Therefore, the narrator's unwillingness to use inner monologues of Fabia or to allow her any chance for redemption could be regarded as an indication of the narrative constraints, something that cultural criticism that considers only plot elements would miss.

To conclude, the research encourages a re-evaluation of the conception of resistance within the frameworks of diasporic narratives. Fabia performs no actions of noncompliance, nor does he manifest any critiques. However, Theme 5 demonstrates the continued use of cultural preservation through various means, including hospitality, while Theme 6 observes an act of autonomy through avoidance of return. Hence, a cultural critique that relies only on declarative resistance will not find any protests here.

7. Implications

In terms of diaspora literary theory, Santos has been shown to benefit from analytics produced for South Asian, African, and Middle Eastern diasporic literature, whereas mid-century Filipino American writing has not yet achieved its potential for theoretical illustration. The concept of residual archive is proposed here to represent a degraded materiality that replaces lost communal transfer.

The results call for rethinking pedagogy in migration-sending societies. While this story is often taught as a tale of nostalgia and longing for family, the analysis shows that its more relevant content concerns class, racialized labor, and the idea of coming back. Teaching this story in a classroom in the Philippines, where many students have a parent living abroad, means providing students with this information instead of sentimentalizing it. Moreover, this excerpt-based method shows a path from textual evidence to interpretative claims, making it a useful method in class.

According to the research, the study has contributed to vocabulary but not a prescription for policy-making. Philippine migration governance has been shaped by remittances and the protection of workers. The emotional aspect that Santos sketched out has no accompanying form of redress. Integration programs should consider the finding in Chapter 6 that the biggest barrier to returning home might not be financial but lies in returnees' conviction that their families are unprepared to welcome them.

8. Conclusion

Scent of Apples has endured sixty years of teaching in Philippine literature because of its emotional clarity. However, this paper found that emotional clarity masks a more complex narrative of exile than is usually assumed. Through six themes that rest on nine textual extracts, it was demonstrated that Celestino Fabia's situation is shaped by social class, racialized agrarian labor, and a historically ruptured past; that his cultural identity originates in a degrading photograph rather than in a community or through declaration; and that the refusal to communicate with his family is an assertion of independence rather than of resignation.

In recent migration studies, the situation remains the same. The method of separation has changed immensely,

but the perception of migration hasn't changed at all. A country that has spent decades developing its economy to make its citizens leave has created many theories about what migrants bring back home. Santos focuses on what was not sent back. The man smells the apple trees while in a desolate field, even though the trees are far away. Moreover, according to the story's logic, he has never had access to them.

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