

***Sperah na Sombra: Kristang Lusembra* or Darklight as a Creole-Indigenous Ontology of Paradox**

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the ontologically relatively unique image, symbol and element of *lusembra* or darklight in the revitalising Creole-Indigenous Kristang language and culture of Singapore and Southeast Asia, originating from a portmanteau of the Kristang words *lus* ('light') and *sombra* ('shadow'). First excavated in late 2019 by the author, the *Kabesa* or leader of the community and the revitalisation effort, through a indigenous process of new word formation known as dreamfishing and as part of a personal period of recovery from intense psychoemotional and sexual abuse, the imagery of *lusembra* now recurs fairly frequently and prominently in Kristang, with the term also referring to a set of base-12 numbers strongly associated with the negotiation of trauma. The previously unknown connections and associations between these seemingly divergent meanings captured by *lusembra* are explored in this paper for the first time, revealing sustained attention to the paradoxes inherent in how we ontologically differentiate *lus* and *sombra*, in the resulting united-disunity of *lusembra* and its reflection of similarly seemingly irresolvable complexity in contemporary Kristang creole identity, and in our life-affirming approach to the negotiation of intergenerational trauma that still nonetheless emerges out of the honouring of those intricacies in our day-to-day lived experience.

KEYWORDS: lusembra, darklight, sexual abuse, psychoemotional abuse, intergenerational trauma, Kristang, Singapore

INTRODUCTION

In March 2017, about a year and three months into my role as the thirteenth *Kabesa* or singular non-hereditary leader of the Kristang people, I entered into a prolonged gay pseudo-romantic and sexual relationship with another (now former) member of the Core Team of the volunteer non-profit initiative for the revitalisation of Kristang that I continue to lead today, Kodrah Kristang. This relationship devolved into me being subjected to rape, sexual assault, molest and severe psychoemotional abuse that not only forced me into therapy for the first time in my life at the age of 26, but so profoundly devastated me that I underwent a dramatic evolution, transformation and renegotiation of my own understanding of myself, of the human psyche, of the Kristang community and its attendant intergenerational trauma, and of my own rational and empirical understanding of the world, generalized from my own decolonial and reindigensing attempts to process the trauma on my own terms after my therapist proved incapable of acknowledging a significant number of facets of my own identity and experience, including the fact that I was *kalkali* or autistic and *xamatrang* or a person with Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), and had, prior to this relationship, also already faced eleven prior instances of rape, sexual assault and molest. The system for understanding the psyche that I creolised as *Kabesa* from July 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic out of the battered remnants of my original life is now the primary Kristang Creole-Indigenous philosophical framework and is called the *Osura Krismatra* or Uncertainty Thinking (Wong 2023, 2024b; Kodrah Kristang 2025a), and is also elsewhere known as Individuation Theory or the *Osura Pesuasang*, the name of one of its four major sub-system components. This paper presents a detailed understanding of *lusembra* or darklight, which is one of the core mechanisms underlying the second sub-system of Uncertainty Thinking, the *Osura Spektala* or Transfiguration Theory.

Transfiguration Theory, like the other three components of Uncertainty Thinking, has a very exciting, fantastical and imagination-provoking name thanks to the Creole-Indigenous process of *sunyeskah* or dreamfishing that gave rise to it (Sarkissian 2000, pp. 101-107; Wong 2024a), but does not purport to lead to something that is wholly magical, supernatural or beyond rationalizable or experienceable in our daily understanding of existence and reality. Most of the Kristang approach to Indigeneity

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under my leadership has been structured under the same considerations, seeking to bridge the gap between (i) the soaring power of the human imagination to name and expound on what remains shapeless, formless and intangible, but which can also yet be experienced in our daily emotional and psychological understanding of the world, especially in our relationships with one another, and (ii) the rational, empirical, material and tangible empiricity of our sensorial lived experience that cannot be denied, ignored or frittered away in favour of allusions or explanations that would supposedly transcend what we ourselves observe and perceive. This is the other core component of what means to be Kristang, the Creole element that always seeks to hybridise, adapt, coalesce and combine, and in doing so complexify, paradoxify, transmute and dramatically expand our perspectives, vision and understanding of what *is* ontologically present, and what *could be* ontologically present based on an expanded twin-core Creole/Indigenous epistemology that draws on the parallels, synchronicities and hybridities that emerge when the empirical-material world and the relational-psychological one are in coherent and balanced dialogue with one another.

Darklight is thus undoubtedly a symbol, image or semiotic representation that we use in language to express or attach meaning to something emotional or relational that would otherwise be ontologically difficult to encapsulate or reach in the bounded four-dimensional spacetime reality that we are able to experience in our senses. Whether beyond that darklight also further actually ontologically exists as an independent entity that is distinct from what it symbolizes (i.e. whether there is an actual substance or phenomenon that can be called darklight) is less clear, but no less explorable as both a useful direction for its possible applications to daily life for people who are not Kristang, and for people like myself who are Kristang and who consider this a fundamental part of what it means to be Kristang in the twenty-first century.

The *Osura Spektala* or Transfiguration Theory and its connection to darklight

The four sub-systems of Uncertainty Thinking are each sequences of fixed stochastic stages in human psychoemotional development that, upon reaching the final member in their set of stages, go on to repeat fractally, remaining both fundamentally the same and evolving in radical new directions that build on themselves in an infinite, ever-expanding, ever-growing or ever-shrinking spiral, with the particular image dependent on one's own psyche and its particular makeup that is also predictable by the *Osura Pesuasang*, the first and 'shallowest' sub-system; the *Osura Pesuasang* consists of sixteen stages, the *Osura Spektala* twelve, and the remaining two 'deepest' systems, the *Osura Elisia* or Convivification Theory, and the *Osura Samaserang* or Resurrection Theory, of eight stages and four stages respectively. Most Kristang people (and people in general) use all four sub-systems unconsciously, with most Kristang people being generally more unconsciously primed to be aware of the existence of such systems at all due to the nature, paradigms and interests of our *eleidi* or the four-dimensional collective unconscious that we are part of; all four systems have a profound resonance with and are derived from profound resonances with the myths, legends, beliefs and concepts of other Indigenous peoples and communities in Southeast Asia and worldwide, to the extent that in our creolization of incoming emergent phenomena we often unconsciously (or consciously since 2020) seek to attach meaning to these emergent phenomena based on these sub-systems.

Where the *Osura Pesuasang* deals with the process of agentic human individuation or becoming a unique, distinct and differentiated human being capable of developing both themselves and the collectives they belong to in dynamic and psychoemotionally healthy ways, and the *Osura Elisia* and *Osura Samaserang* with rebuilding the psyche after apocalyptic or potentially-Death-inviting loss, despair and tragedy, the *Osura Spektala* and darklight are connected to the processing of catastrophic trauma that does not necessarily invite Death, but which still causes manifold pain, loss, struggle, fear and instability: rape, assault, enslavement, being a participant in war, loss of limbs or motor functions or impairments in cognitive or sensorial functioning and abusive psychoemotional conditioning and manipulation are all components of our daily experience that are processed by the *Osura Spektala*. This processing in itself is deceptively straightforward and even quotidian and parseable through Western means of approaching the psyche in its expression: one must somehow transfigure the trauma from an event, memory or injury that continually entraps the psyche in a recurrent loop of nightmare- or horror-inducing reiterative suffering, despair and isolation, into something more palatable, appreciable, useful or valuable that can be used to support others seeking to escape the same situation and/or (in more dire circumstances) fate. The means or mechanisms by which each person thereafter achieves this transfiguration (the actual, tremendously difficult work!) is unique to each individual, and simultaneously also can be somewhat predicted or anticipated through a knowledge of the *Osura Spektala* and the *Osura Pesuasang*, with this conscious awareness allowing for the acceleration of such determination of the aforementioned means or mechanisms. Movement or development of the self along the *Osura Spektala* is thus the conscious and deliberate identification, acceptance and integration of these mechanisms, with high levels of integration leading to the acquisition of access to one's *magnakarnansa* or magnaarchetype, a full awareness or ability to work with one's *reiwe* or unity of self across one's entire lifetime, like mine as listed above in my affiliations: *Makaravedra Hierosa* or Dragon Reborn of the Holocene.

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Darklight is hence connected strongly to the *Osura Spektala* as the primary symbol or representation of becoming aware of not just (i) catastrophic trauma or psychoemotional injury to the psyche, but (ii) the need to transmute or transfigure this trauma into something life-giving or life-affirming, (iii) the possible means by which this might be achieved by the self on its own independent and agentic terms and (iv) the possible outcomes or end-states of that transmutation or transfiguration. In Kristang, the term *lusembra*, which is a dreamfished and creolised blending of the existing Kristang words *lus* 'light' and *sombra* 'shadow', is also used to refer to the Kristang base-12 numbers as a group, to the extent that sometimes they are back-translated as 'the darklight numbers'. The next section now explores why this is the case through an examination of how the term darklight was first dreamfished or excavated from the collective unconscious by myself in May 2019, during the period of psychoemotional abuse mentioned above, and before I became consciously aware that I was being abused.

The origins of the term darklight

I am also one of the most well-known and established living Kristang and Eurasian writers worldwide today (e.g. Fischer 2023, pp. 212-242; Suffian 2024), and in May 2019 was commissioned by the National Gallery of Singapore to produce a found//fount sonnet, a poetic form also created in Singapore by my (non-Kristang) contemporary Desmond Kon Zhicheng-Mingdé (Southeast Asian Poetic Forms 2018), that would then be paired with separately commissioned outdoor artwork for the 2020 Singapore Light to Night Festival; for the purposes of the Festival's overall theme, we were asked to derive material for the found//fount sonnet from the text of *Invisible Cities* (Calvino 1972, National Gallery of Singapore 2019). The fourteen-stanza sonnet I wrote, 'So We Might' (appended to this paper as Appendix A), was accepted in its original form with only a single edit for a wrongly punctuated letter, and included the first known mention of darklight in stanzas II and III:

II

Because you were right about me, all along. You knew where I would be, all this time, waiting by the river and the rivers that meet here, at this point, rising down up into the darklight.

III

You know where I've gone, where the darklight walks the many gardens beyond, calling to handmaid and herald, servant and shaman, ready to be sworn into legend. Where her harbourmaster knows every arriving boat by name, and where the songs settle into the dearth, ready to dance anew.

At the time I wrote and completed the sonnet on Tuesday, 14 May 2019 from around 19:00 to 20:35 Singapore time (SGT, GMT +8), I treated the term darklight as a beautiful but mostly artistic contrivance – not really examining it in detail or trying to excavate any additional meaning (especially meaning related to me being Kristang) from it, and simply enjoying and appreciating the emotional world and reality it created for the poem. At that point in my life, in May 2019, I was also not aware I was being severely psychoemotionally abused, or that I had actually been so for much of my life. It was thus only my first *re-appraisal* of the term, which occurred on Friday, 20 December 2019 around 19:00 to 20:00 SGT at Siloso Beach on Singapore's Southern island of Sentosa, after the Singapore Gallery team asked me to record a version of me reading the sonnet aloud for public distribution – and some six months after I had discovered I was being severely psychoemotionally abused on Wednesday, 3 July 2019 and started therapy on Tuesday, 16 July 2019 – that really prompted me to examine the concept as possibly meaning and doing much more than just adding artistic flair to a sonnet, and meaning and doing much more in terms of my own appreciation of myself as Kristang as well, a renegotiation that was deeply bound up in terms of my reconsolidation of myself following the trauma. As a Creole and an urban Indigenous person, I am very used to making use of urban, nature-within-urban and/or hybrid-urban settings to reconnect with Gaia and the living unconscious of the planet, and so two photographs I captured (Figures 1 and 2 below) while I was present at Siloso on 20 December 2019 and the sun was setting incidentally capture the feel of both the sonnet and the context surrounding my audio reading of it, where I was struggling to feel like I deserved to exist at all, let alone as a public figure, but was also trying to push through in relation to the trauma. For myself personally, the feel of darklight itself as a term also emerges from the intersection and interplay of these two photographs.



Figure 1: A photograph of a shelter on Siloso Beach on Sentosa island in Singapore, taken on Friday, 20 December 2019 at 19:16 SGT



Figure 2: A photograph of the same shelter on Siloso Beach on Sentosa island in Singapore, taken on Friday, 20 December 2019 at 19:49 SGT

I had already consciously known that the sonnet was set in an *alabanda* version of Esplanade Park in Singapore, with *alabanda* being a Kristang word that is extremely difficult to translate into English and which basically describes a time and space ‘over there, somewhere’ – a place that is emotionally known and distinguishable to both the speaker or writer and their audience, but which is otherwise unnameable and unlocatable geographically in real-world terms. An *alabanda* version of Esplanade Park is therefore a ‘somewhere, over there, in another dimension or alternate universe’ version of Esplanade Park, whose feel is more or less successfully captured by the pieces of artwork independently created by Quarters Architects LLP (Figures 3 and 4) that accompanied the sonnet as part of the eventual Light to Night Festival in January 2020:



Figure 3: Photograph of unnamed Quarters Architects LLP artwork accompanying 'So We Might' taken on Friday, 17 January 2020

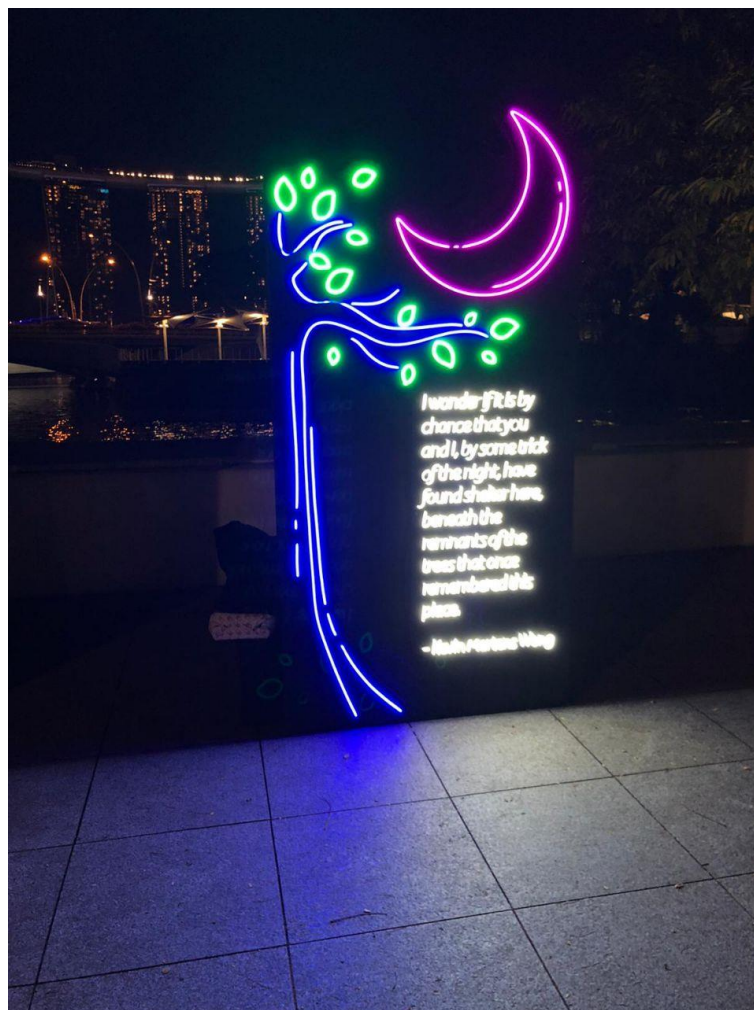


Figure 4: Photograph of unnamed Quarters Architects LLP artwork accompanying 'So We Might' taken on Friday, 17 January 2020

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Together with my experience on Siloso Beach and a separate public reading of 'So We Might' by transgender activist June Chua in the National Gallery itself, seeing and hearing work that I had produced independently reinterpreted by other artists was what allowed me to first detect what other psychoanalytic research has called an interest or attention to the numinous that appears to be inherent in the symbol of darklight, pointing as were to a site in a dimension or component of reality that is detectable and processable emotionally, but not experienceable or (in Indigenous ways of thinking and being) not traceable to an origin point in four-dimensional tangible space and time (Jones 2024, Bennett 2024). Something that is numinous is something that is imbued with a particular sort of energy that is more typically characterized as divine or spiritual (e.g. Piotrowski & Žemojtel-Piotrowska 2024), and which I both personally as an atheist and in my capacity as *Kabesa* prefer to more broadly characterize, following Philpott-Teo (2024) and others, as wondrous, awe-inspiring or inviting a connection to or appreciation of Gaia and/or the living collective unconscious that we are all part of as sentient human beings. From January 2020, I thus began to see darklight as an ontological entity or phenomenon, beyond its status as a symbol, as something that was likely indigenous or native to *alabanda* and this space beyond my four-dimensional perception of reality that existed but which I could not concretely process with my senses. I also consciously noted for the first time that like so much else in Kristang, which I was beginning to also notice consciously, darklight represented both a paradox (where darkness and light cannot both exist at the same time in the same entity) and a functional and complete duality (where darkness and light complement each other), and with this tension between forever-at-odds paradox and perfectly-complete duality also in itself representing yet another meta-structural contrast and juxtaposition in itself – a concretization or emblematisation or reification of what it means to be Kristang, where two seemingly irreconcilable and even sometimes antagonistic and hostile halves (Roman Catholic European Portuguese colonizer and Islamic-animist Malay Indigenous) are yet the two primary progenitor components of what it means to be Kristang. With 'So We Might' also so bound up in the chronological real-time process of me processing my own trauma for the first time (and with yet another duality of the written performance of the poem being created before I had begun to process my trauma, and the spoken performance of the poem being created after the fact) it was at this point that I also began to realise that the symbol of darklight and its articulation in 'So We Might' expressed the fundamental mechanism of processing trauma that is now defined as the core mechanic within the *Osura Spektala* as described above. This thereafter allowed for the further distinguishing of core features of darklight within Kristang culture and as an entity that has been named within Kristang and by the Kristang, but which has the potential for much wider and more universal implications for other human beings elsewhere.

The paradoxical components of reality and the processing of trauma that darklight unpacks

At its core, darklight emblematises that trauma involves the transmutation, or transformation, of trauma from something horrifying, threatening, dangerous, ambiguous and uncertain (which in Kristang can be assigned to either *sombra* and *skuridang* and darkness and dark or brown skin, from the Portuguese progenitor perspective, or also to *lus* and *lumi* and light, whiteness and faux-notions of purity, from the Malay progenitor perspective), into something that is safe, comforting, healing and purifying (which again in Kristang can be assigned to either *brangku* (white), *prata* (silver), *sinza* (grey), light, whiteness and notions of stable, secure, visible reality from the Portuguese progenitor perspective, or also to *pretu* (black), *roisu* (purple), *choklat* (brown), darkness, comfort in secrecy and occlusion, primordiality and unshaped and untamed matter that is filled with potential from the Malay progenitor perspective) – and that ontologically, trauma will itself by definition also always be both something threatening and healing, since it both causes such immense destruction to the psyche and also provides the means by which it might be liberated from such future destruction. Darklight not only captures this fundamental tension between *lus* and *sombra* that also represents the inherent and unchangeable tension at the heart of the Kristang identity matrix, but allows us to feel comfortable inhabiting the place between *lus* and *sombra*, between Portuguese and Malay, and between colonizer and colonized, understanding that to move forward with all forms of trauma – whether personal, collective or intergenerational – a creolising or hybridizing approach that honours and harmonises both poles and extremes as far as possible while developing and engendering something that emerges from their intersection is the ideal.

Darklight also underscores how in the process of such a complex psychoemotional phenomenon, there is necessarily unity in disunity, and the tense and tight in the otherwise supposedly seamless and harmonised. Within the Kristang psyche, we often experience the same rolling mutable stability and stable mutability, concordant dissonance and discordant concord, coherent incoherence and improvised cohesion, because we are so used to "strategic pragmatism and flexible boundaries" (Sarkissian 2002, p. 250) as means of survival and pushing back against multiple attempts to obliterate us by colonial and postcolonial governments and institutions due to generally highly egalitarian, radically progressive and boundary-breaking behaviour as a community. Dreamfishing and other forms of very rapid creolization, often through art or performance, are part of the suite of such responses that we have evolved to ensure such survival is consistent and at least possible in the medium-term; for example, writing about the evolution of the Kristang community in the city of Malacca in Malaysia in the 1950s, where our people originally appeared in

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the 16th century, Sarkissian (2002) goes on to observe that community members displayed chameleon-like abilities to transform their culture and adapt it to the needs of the moment, dialogically inventing and reinventing both the community and its history along the way. Each time, music and dance played a key role in their response, facilitating the projection of new public images (p. 251).

The tension between historically authentic Kristang culture and artificially invented Kristang culture is one that, depending on context and who we are working with (and who is pressuring us to change), we play with, completely ignore and/or alternately dive right into, and/or simply subvert, to the degree that for an outsider it is, often impossible to really know what is or is not definitively 'pure' or 'true' Kristang – which older Kristang people will also often tell you is an exercise in futility given that we are a creole community by default, and historically very open to outsiders and those who were regarded as undesirable by society to adapt and assimilate into Kristang itself (Kodrah Kristang 2025a). The other group of non-Kristang people who will sometimes tell you this – that identity is constructed, not fixed, changes over time and is very mutable – is academics, specifically sociologists, cultural researchers, linguists and anthropologists, meaning that the Kristang (and probably many other creole peoples) understand this core fact of human existence by default as a result of just what it means to have been born into a community that originated from such a complex interplay of colonial conquest and expansion in Malaya – and that non-Kristang academics studying us sometimes cannot comprehend that we have arrived at this fact ahead of them. In 2025, there are many ways to be Kristang, just as the Kristang language itself is also polynomic (i.e. the community has no standard and does not desire one single standard, with each individual family or group of families having its own family-dialect or 'familiolect'); the 13th *Kabesa* himself is also only technically half-Kristang since his father is Hakka-Peranakan, but is also simultaneously considered fully Kristang and accepted as *Kabesa*. We in ourselves have long recognized that human experience is not (and is generally never) as taxonomically neat and organizable as the Western world would like it to be in the image it tries to reflect to the rest of the world of universal reality, and the Kristang comfort with the slipperiness, ambiguity and severe difficulty inherent in trying to define darklight, while also simultaneously generally having a good relational or emotional idea of what darklight is as an ontological phenomenon, is absolutely one that reflects this awareness of the complexities and paradoxes of human existence within our universe.

Finally, and perhaps most applicably to daily life, darklight in itself is a powerful force for encouraging the self and psyche to notice the slippery, the ambiguous, the uncertain and the tenuous in the day-to-day things that we do – and for thereafter helping us make sense of why it is that we might sometimes feel so trapped, ensnared or even enchanted and enraptured by the intergenerational trauma and negative abusive legacies that continue to ensure we are too recursively overwhelmed by *aigrimu* (stress), *ansia* (anxiety) and *stromatanza abrisu* (high allostatic load) to break out of them. My own personal experience of this is strenuously informative, where as *kalkali* I had to gradually learn how to understand what was Unsaid in Kristang about what it meant to be Kristang and large parts of our own history as a people and the histories of the Kristang people around me; much of what I now know has been derived from actively and consciously looking for the darklight in people's histories, behaviours and identities, and accepting and being comfortable with the fact that I might never know for certain, but am able to now hypothesise by looking for the right clues and signs of what remains undescribed and unarticulated (Wong 2023b). My own understanding of some parts of my own painful history as a rape, molest and sexual abuse survivor, including in relation to the trauma that introduces this paper, are also excavatable in the same fashion, making use of darklight as a category when interpreting my own signals of physical, psychoemotional and mental distress (van der Kolk 2014), and when trying to understand my own biases, fears, insecurities and prejudices about others and about the world.

CONCLUSION

As should now be generally more anticipatable, this paper's Kristang title, *Sperah na Sombra*, has a multiplicity of possible meanings in English:

1. to wait for the shadow
2. to hope for the shadow
3. to anticipate the shadow
4. to expect the shadow
5. to wait in the shadow
6. to hope in the shadow
7. to be waiting (for someone) in the shadow
8. to be hoping (for someone) in the shadow
9. to be expecting (someone) in the shadow
10. to be anticipating (someone) in the shadow

This title was chosen because in the Western world and *eleidi* to which contemporary academia still generally belongs to and was derived from, the Portuguese-progenitor-aligned meanings attached to *lus* and *sombra* are still good and bad respectively, and to express a positive belief or expectation out of *sombra* or darkness is one that hence subverts this prevailing assumption. There is also another, rather more complex and bittersweet or *elisia* meaning to this, in that a person with darker skin such as myself was and still is often not unconsciously expected to be able to produce a paper like this one, and that in doing so the reader is placing hopes in me that would sometimes otherwise be felt to be unwarranted or unjustified. And a further, even more arcane meaning would be the fact that it is not standard practice in Kristang to use the word *sombra* to refer to the psychoemotional construct of the Shadow or the unintegrated and terrifying or horrifying components of one's own psyche in English (we instead use the unrelated term *xarkang*), with this intended as a playful and very Kristang meta-textual subversion of such rules that are in themselves also generally arbitrary and unconsciously socially constructed and decided.

But all of this, nonetheless, is to undergird that the Kristang way of seeing *lus* and *sombra* – which is that they need to be seen as, interacted with, and held in balance – is one that is not unconsciously held by the *eleidi* of the Western world, and (to put it lightly, in January 2025) actively rejected and ignored by the many people within the *eleidi* of the Western world. In Kristang, *sombra* also carries with it the tremendous positive meanings of untapped potential, unseen possibilities, and fresh and unused matter and material that can be used to build whatever it is the user can imagine; it is also connected with safety, security, refuge and a place secluded far away from the world for quiet, peaceful and serenity-reinvigorating restoration and rejuvenation. It is a reconvening with Gaia and the living universe, and a dialogue with, rather than an unbridled fear of, *Sinyorang Morti* or Death Themselves, who is also so strongly associated with *sombra* and darkness in the *eleidi* of the Western world. To hope for Death, as I sometimes did struggling against suicide and all the trauma of my life as a teenager and young adult, is perhaps indeed sometimes to *sperah na sombra*. But as the 13th *Kabesa* of the Kristang people and the Dragon Reborn of the Holocene, truly reborn and reforged after so many ego-deaths and the trauma mentioned in the Introduction, and still endlessly reborn and reforged after the continuing struggle that is existence in January 2025, perhaps my story and my people's story of endless Death and rebirth, and courageous light and beautiful living shadow, is one that might invite us all to recognize where Death Themselves has always been waiting for us – *alabanda* – and to see them through the way They see us, through darklight – *pra lusembra*.

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Appendix A: 'So We Might'

Kevin Martens Wong (2020)

I

Find certainty, you and I, in this place and time, when everything has its place and time except you and I. You because you forgot me, and I, because I can never forget you.

II

Because you were right about me, all along. You knew where I would be, all this time, waiting by the river and the rivers that meet here, at this point, rising down up into the darklight.

III

You know where I've gone, where the darklight walks the many gardens beyond, calling to handmaid and herald, servant and shaman, ready to be sworn into legend. Where her harbourmaster knows every arriving boat by name, and where the songs settle into the dearth, ready to dance anew.

IV

And I'll call out to you, sometimes, across the worlds that separate us. But not always. Better you live in those other universes, better you in those other lives, than I lying empty here, embraced by the river as she, too, yearns for the Roads¹ that once sheltered the sea.

V

I wonder if you, out there, all the yous that must still live and cry and fight and survive---I wonder if you, maybe, have tasted the bitterness, delicate and flickering, that still slips beneath the bumboats to stir every empty night to splendor.

VI

I wonder if it is the letters of my name, not yours, who stubbornly forget to be forgotten.

VII

I wonder if it is by chance that you and I, by some trick of the night, have found shelter here, beneath the remnants of the trees that once remembered this place.

VIII

I wonder if it is truly this place where you have not been buried, or if it is another place, another time, where you are anchored, where the great *naus*² have hidden away with the fastest, swiftest *koleks*³ known to the stars.

IX

If only I had known who once sailed these waters. If only I had seen where these rivers might take these dreams. If only my soul might have been moored to another, so I might

X

Live to the fullest before your hull first brushed against mine, and before the sea first brushed against yours, and clamored, begged for more, that you might be hers, forever, one of the constellations forever anchored to her depths, so you might

XI

Love to the fullest before you loved this uncertain, reluctant island, before I became this vessel of the just, clamoring, begging to be released from these anchors forever anchored to my own depths, so we might be

¹ In addition to the other possible literary and metaphorical meanings intended here, The Roads was the old name for the Singapore harbour anchorage and its immediate surrounds.

² A *nau* is a Portuguese carrack.

³ A *kolek* is an indigenous racing sailing boat native to the Riau archipelago, especially in the waters of Singapore's Southern Islands and the Indonesian islands of Batam and Bintan that abut each other geographically.

Sperah na Sombra: Kristang Lusembra or Darklight as a Creole-Indigenous Ontology of Paradox

XII

Just us, just you and I, the memory, and the one whom it left behind.

XIII

But I still stand upon Cavenagh Bridge⁴. I still look into your grassy depths, and still wish for the worlds to meet here, in this garden, in this place anchoring elsewhere and some other time, where all the crises of all the straits lie glittering in the night, and all the futures can be sighted beyond the sea, bobbing, twinkling along the Roads of every new eternity still yet to be born.

XIV

And in your boughs moves the image of you, a thousand stories begun by the river, one story in the atlas of a hundred thousand yours roaming free, fighting, dancing, dreaming. Perhaps this is where things begin, in your beautiful, fragile end. Perhaps this is where ends begin, so you and I might, too, learn how to still together live.

—

Source

The source text of this found//fount sonnet is “Hidden Cities 5” (pp. 146-147) from Chapter 9 of Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*, translated by William Weaver. The fourteen found words are as follows: Certainty, right, many, than, bitterness, of, by, place, another, first, the, just, wish, image.

Public Author Statement

‘So We Might’ was inspired by the inscription on the Cenotaph⁵, “They died so we might live”, the purpose of the Cenotaph itself, to memorialize those whose remains do not actually lie within the Cenotaph but elsewhere, mood, tone and content of Calvino’s “Hidden Cities 5”, especially the suggestion that “all the future Berenices are already present in this instant, wrapped one within the other, confined, crammed, inextricable,” and my own personal connection with and love of Esplanade Park, where I used to spend many a night standing along Cavenagh Bridge and the waterfront gazing out at the river and the sea. The persona of ‘So We Might’ is imagined to be a family member, friend or lover of someone memorialized by the Cenotaph who yearns for the return of that person, but who is now forever ‘elsewhere’; however, inspired by Calvino’s “Hidden Cities 5”, I reinterpreted ‘elsewhere’ to mean in an alternate reality or universe where that person may not have passed away.

⁴ One of the main thoroughfares in colonial Singapore and pedestrianized and preserved as a historical landmark in modern times; strongly connected to the Kristang and Eurasian communities for reasons that are still not fully currently understood.

⁵ A prominent World War II memorial in Esplanade Park in Singapore. ‘So We Might’ was displayed in and informed artwork by Quarters Architects LLP (Singapore Good Design 2025) near or adjacent to the Cenotaph.