

### *The Naught of What-is, What-ifs, and What-nots*

As the digital clock that lay beside my bed lit up and displayed the time: 2:37 a.m., the deeper dark of the night came to meet me as I lay there with my phone on my hand. I was then reminded of an old story that my grandmother used to tell me in order to make me sleep early. She said, “*Sige ka, kapag ikaw gising pa ng alas tres ng madaling araw, makikita mong susunduin ka ng mga multo.*” And just like that, I would hide underneath the covers and press my eyelids together firmly, forcing sleep to dawn upon me.

Seventeen now, always needing the late nights to comply to school requirements and to accommodate the inescapable teenage existential dread, I have come to the conclusion that what my *nanay* had told me was false. Still, there would be nights where I would find myself sitting up at three in the morning, looking at the full-sized mirror that sits on the corner of my room, waiting for the spirit world to come and merge with ours: sort of like hanging on to this story that I’ve been led to believe was true.

I was sat upright, facing a word document as the clock blinked and beeped lightly: 2:55 a.m. and an article that I was supposed to write remained nothing but a blank space. It was due at noon later that day, and progress was nowhere to be found as I found myself at a complete loss of words, clueless as to how I would go about writing. As a campus journalist, there is always something that gets stuck in our brains: “*Journalists are always seeking for truth. Journalism is always leaning towards the truth, however painful that may be.*”

Upon hearing that, I still didn’t know how to translate my thoughts into words. What is the truth, anyway? Do we really know what sets truth from lies?

Leaning back on my seat, I took a deep breath and closed the word document, promising myself that I’ll work on it in the morning. Logging in on my Netflix account, I decided to watch one of

my comfort shows—*Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*. Someone introduced it to me way back, and since then I have not grown tired of it. I re-watch it for so many reasons—first of which is its take on the concept of truth.

In the show, Truth is characterized as an eye, which stands as a symbolism regarding seeing things and gaining perspective with regard to what is already existing. By looking at things from different angles and observing them, the closer we are to getting to the truth. However, there are obstructions in our perspectives such as pre-existing beliefs and prejudices that will hinder us from seeing things as they truly are and passing objective judgement. In this universe, there is only one absolute truth that everyone must follow: you are not greater than god. When someone violates that rule, they face Truth and it will punish them for ignoring such truth. And so, when the main villain of the show rids himself of the seven deadly sins in order to be greater than human, Truth tells him that he failed to see the world through the perspectives that having his desires have. But he no longer has these [desires], therefore he suffers the fate of never knowing anything.

A very simple argument can be derived from that: everybody has their own version and definition of what the truth is, and there is no passing moment that that definition is slammed by another argument. The challenge here is that our view of the truth is closely influenced by our perspective and that every definition we come up with it is closely influenced by our perspective as well. In our world, there is no entity called Truth to lead us on, only humans left to their own devices.

And as I sat there in defeat of the article I have to work on, I'm left to wonder about what perspective I had to have to justify the matter of the monsters at three in the morning.

We've got all sorts of stories like these that we hang on to—Santa, Easter Bunny, jumping during New Year's Eve to grow taller. We cling to these as if they are gospel, which is a manifestation of

what the truth is—we may be in pursuit of it, but we are seeking the version of the truth that satisfies us. But really, it circles back to the earlier question: *what is the truth?*

For argument's sake, let's say that the truth is a statement—a factual statement—about the way that the world actually is. An example, an apple is red. We consider that as a truth. However, since it has been posed that we have different perspectives of the truth, the “red” of the apple might be green for colour-blinded people. And what exactly is this shade of red? Scarlet? Sangria? #FF6347? RGB (255,0,0)?

According to postmodernist philosophers, everyone's experience of the world is different even in the smallest details, where everything is a product of individual perspective. Because of such, it is impossible to declare an “absolute truth”. Even if we have connected beliefs, by which we draw those similarities as the truth, we are still unable to make a close claim to what the truth really is, or if it even exists. Even with a lack of understanding of the truth and the absolute truth, we are happy to live our lives abiding with our communally agreed truths. Even with that, misleading information still exists in our everyday life; or own clouded judgement, biases, the things we allow to influence us, the opinions we allow to influence us, and every other obstruction to our perspective that keeps us from seeing the absolute truth.

And while arguments about what is truthful can easily be correlated to external events—in this era of fake news and media-centric propaganda—there is a deeper rooted pursuit of the truth that exists, one that's just as heavily influenced by circumstances and surroundings, and perhaps the harder truth to come by: the internalized truths.

**3:45 a.m.** Still sitting there, in front of the blank word document, still stuck with typing a few words and taking them back. It's during these hours where there is no one else to talk to, which allows me to spiral down a pit of questions that lack answers. We want to know what to do with

our lives, living among so much of the same kinds of people who share the same interests as us and we are searching for our own kinds of authenticity. Cue the questions: *What's it all for? What am I really? Is this what I'm ought to do?*

These truths are influenced by how others perceive us, how society looks at us, and the current trends that we try to keep up with. We rely on these and their offerings of truth to satisfy our need to know, i.e. BuzzFeed quizzes, Twitter 'astrology' posts, and Tumblr accounts that tell you who you are. With these satisfactions, we feel like we've got it all figured out. We're chasing after realities behind the things that surround us and our existence, but when we reach a conclusion that will fail to satisfy us, we also fail to take in those truths and we deny them, like Shakespeare's Hamlet whose idealism is struggled when his expectations of everyone is shattered by their true nature, followed by him breaking the unrealistic expectations he set for himself. In response to this, he resorted to violence and self-destruction towards him and his relationships.

However, there is something quite admirable about Hamlet. The action that he's supposed to take is postponed because he tries to obtain more knowledge about what he is doing. Do ghosts actually exist? Is the ghost really his father? Similar with our Fullmetal heroes, they all accept the unknown quantities of life and wants their actions to be based on the general rule of truth. This, we need to adapt as well.

**4:15 a.m.** "How do we even know what the truth is?" I ask myself.

*We don't.* The most fundamental truth that we know is that we know nothing. A famous poet named Voltaire once said, "*doubt is unpleasant, but certainty is absurd*". While we settle one doubt and move to another, we will not be able to sit in true certainty. Therefore, the only way to avoid foolishness is to continue seeking for the truth. Frankly, there is still so much to learn about the world and ourselves. We are prisoners of our own worlds and this manifests itself through

beliefs that we once accept as fact but actually turn out to be false. With that, the only way to tackle this is to accept that everything that we currently know can be a misinformation in itself, because being open to such knowledge and the abhorrent rejection of your knowledge allows you to accept more things and get closer to the absolute truth.

There has to be constant scrutiny of things we consider as truths, for the evolution of those things allows us to improve upon the laws by which the fundamentals of our existence are based on. The main characters of FMA:B knew this, whereas they swore to learn more about alchemy to figure out a greater truth than what they currently know now. Hamlet knew this, whereas he continued to look at things with uncertainty in order to find more evidence before he passes on judgement. As you take in the fact that you know nothing should also come the want to know something.

**5:30 a.m.** As the sun slowly rises, I once again look in the mirror, remembering my *nanay's* story. Perhaps these monsters have taken on a different form: when we're up late at night and are in pursuit of the truth behind things that surround us, from the smallest things to life's biggest questions, and they shape-shift to truths we're continuously chasing day by day.

And perhaps one fine morning, one fine mourning, we will get to see them and hold them in our hands.