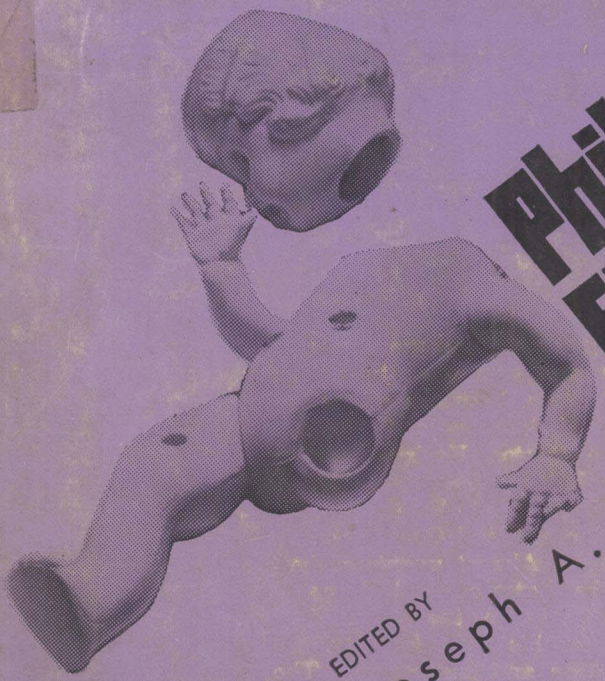

Philippine Fiction

EDITED BY

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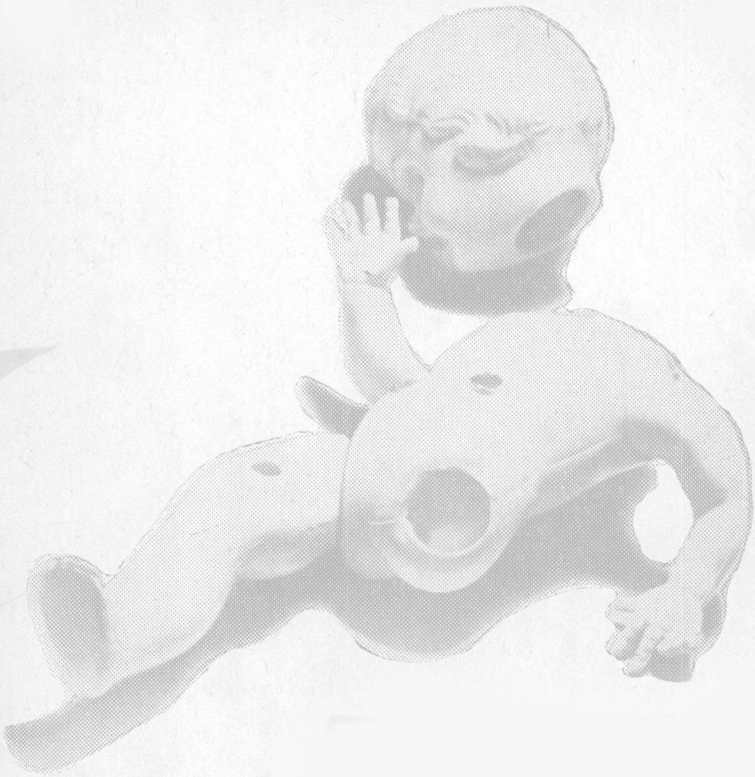

PHILIPPINE FICTION

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PHILIPPINE FICTION

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Preface

PHILIPPINE FICTION is a collection of essays on Philippine fiction in English gathered from the first twenty volumes of *Philippine Studies*. It is also intended as an anniversary volume to commemorate the first twenty years of publication of *Philippine Studies* by the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus and the Ateneo de Manila. It therefore pays tribute to the editors and writers who have made *Philippine Studies* a significant contribution to Philippine culture over the years.

I am grateful to Antonio V. Romualdez, then editor of *Philippine Studies*, who first encouraged me to undertake this project in 1969. I am also grateful to the present editor of *Philippine Studies* and to the staff of the Ateneo de Manila University Press who have made the project a reality. If the present volume provokes discussion or provides insights for those interested in Philippine literature, our efforts will be amply rewarded. If the volume encourages others to continue the important work of Philippine literary criticism, we will consider our efforts more than successful.

JOSEPH A. GALDON

JOSEPH A. GALDON

Introduction

READING OVER the critical essays on Philippine literature in the first twenty volumes of *Philippine Studies*, one is struck by the common denominator that occurs time and again in the critics' evaluation of Philippine writers of fiction in English. Almost every critic underlines the theme that the Filipino is a stranger in his own house. Over and over again, the Filipino is pictured as an outsider, a kind of Asian Mearsault, searching for his identity, struggling with alienation of one form or another, plagued by frustration and *angst*. If fiction reflects reality, the Filipino is the existential man of Asia.

THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Much of the fiction of the postwar period in the Philippines is the story of the Filipino as pilgrim, in search of his past. Joaquin's Connie Escobar says: "I must know what I am...and how can I know that if I don't know where I came from?" Joaquin's own preoccupation with the "nostalgic, torch-lit world of the past" is an attempt to identify that past. Lourdes Busuego Pablo laments the "social amnesia" which refuses to admit the existence of three hundred years of the past. But the Filipino's odyssey is also a search for the present and the future, a theme which occurs in "Three Generations" and in the

picture of Aeneas carrying his father on his shoulders from the ruins of Troy.

Brillantes uses the adolescent in many of his stories as a symbol of that same search for the self, for a past and a future. In "The Light and Shadow of Leaves" Pepe makes a journey back home again and waits impatiently for the morning and the future. In much of Brillantes's writing, life is a journey and man is a pilgrim.

In Polotan, the symbol of *Homo Viator*, Man the Pilgrim, is the woman. "The constant figure in Polotan," Casper writes, "is the woman without identity... the outcast who might as well be outlaw." Both the adolescent of Brillantes and the woman of Polotan, of course, are symbols for a Filipino Everyman. The adolescent struggles to find himself, flits back now and then to the security of the past of childhood, rebels as responsibility and the necessity of choice are thrust upon him. For Polotan, the woman, too, struggles toward self-discovery and self-identification. She lives very often as a stranger in her own house, an exile in her own country.

The *Bamboo Dancers* are also strangers in the house, and Gonzalez's novel "traces Ernie Rama's long journey into light, his gradual realization that all the time he was trying to run away from himself." Perhaps that sentence from E. de Jesus is also a description of the Filipino struggling toward the light, gradually realizing that all the time he was trying to run away from what he really was. Perhaps, as Gonzalez's title puts it, the stranger in the house should "look on this island now."

The search and the journey are pervasive symbols, then, in the writers of Philippine fiction. Much of the search is a quest for an unknown and undiscovered goal. Much of the journeying is aimless wandering that perhaps is part of the search. The goal must be discovered before it can be pursued. But the journey theme centers on three main areas—cultural identity, the barrio-city contrast, and the theme of illusion and reality.

It is a truism and a cliché by this time that the Philippine search for identity is also the agonizing search for a cultural identity. Gonzalez's Ernie Rama is the "prototype of a genera-

tion of Filipinos alienated from their own cultural heritage." The problem of Philippine identity is, in Armando Manalo's phrase, the "collision of cultures" and the "consequent disorganization of standards and the search for new values." Enriquez's *Devil Flower* with its inversion and deliberate destruction of the Maria Clara image, is another attempt to picture that collision and the resulting dislocation of values.

Lumbera has pointed out that the dominance of this theme in the writers of Philippine fiction in English is the mirror of the writers' own disorientation and search for synthesis in the conflicting movements of Philippine culture. Looking at the problem in another way, Philippine writing in English is adolescent. Just as the adolescent struggles toward maturity, testing now this identity, now that, tasting this experience and now that, so the Philippine writer in English is still struggling toward the maturity of his vision.

Part of that search for identity is also reflected in the barrio-city contrast which occurs in so many of the writers. Both Bernad and Leonard Casper have commented on that theme and its misinterpretation in "The Sounds of Sunday" and *The Hand of the Enemy*. Galdon has a discussion of the relevance of that theme in *The Devil Flower*. Perhaps the basic failure in the search for identity has been the failure to reach an adequate synthesis of the city and the barrio in the writer's portrait of the Filipino. The search must continue until the fusion is achieved or until one element overshadows the other.

The theme of illusion and reality is also closely related to the search for identity. It occurs in Joaquin, Brillantes, Gonzalez, and others. Isagani Cruz studies this theme at some length in his discussion of Rotor. The struggle to separate illusion from reality is the struggle of modern man, and the failure to distinguish the two is the cause of much of modern man's tragedy. *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* is illusion and reality made terrifying real. Hong Kong is illusion and Manila is reality. The terror is that the exile lives in illusion, alienated from reality.

ALIENATION

The second basic theme in Philippine fiction is the theme of alienation and the failure to communicate. This is reflected most clearly in the theme of the exile that recurs time and again among writers of Philippine fiction, particularly in the postwar period. Hong Kong in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* is the symbol of exile as well as of illusion for the Filipinos—for the Monsons, Connie Escobar, Paco Texeira, and Rita Lopez. Constantino comments on the Hong Kong exile-symbol: "Two generations that had lost each other here met in exile." Many of Joaquin's other stories tell "of members of different races trying to reach across and understand each other."

Brillantes's characters are perceptively portrayed as strangers in their own house. Bernad says that "in some subtle way they are estranged from their families, though not outwardly. There are no noisy quarrels. They are, in an even more subtle way, estranged from themselves." The pattern that recurs again and again in Brillantes, as Locsin says, is "the frequency of the failure of the characters to understand one another's motives and actions, and their constant inability to communicate their thoughts. . . . He writes of barriers both natural and unnatural, separating individuals." Brillantes's own summary of "The Distance To Andromeda" is that it is about "the distance between human beings and between them and God." Locsin's "Exiles: Gregorio Brillantes's Andromeda and Other Stories" is an analysis of the levels of that isolation and failure to communicate in the stories of Brillantes.

Alienation of course is very real in the stories of Bienvenido Santos because he writes most clearly about the Filipino as exile. *You Lovely People* is the story of the Filipino in exile in the States, "a picture of dislocation, of emotional and cultural starvation." "The Day The Dancers Came" is the allegory of the Filipino in exile. Santos's protagonists, Bernad says, "can no longer stay at home, so they go away. Or they go abroad expecting to find a home and find none. Or they don't go away. They keep coming back home, only to find that there is no home to come back to."

Alienation is the result of a more basic failure to communicate or to understand. Brillantes uses distance as an image for this failure. Joaquin uses the generation gap, and Santos uses the exile to illustrate the failure to communicate. Isagani Cruz says that Rotor uses the theme of the inner cell to describe the alienation of the individual from his world. The inner-cell theme is "the struggle to transcend the past, to get out of the inner cell a man has built around himself. . . a failure to relate to others." The failure to communicate, either because of inability or insecurity, complicated by the failure to discover one's self, drives a man into the inner cell, touching no one, touched by none. This is not uniquely Filipino, of course. It is as universal as man. But it is remarkable how the group of critics under study have turned time and again to this theme.

The theme of alienation recurs elsewhere in the fiction of the Philippine writers in English. Linda Ty Casper's *Peninsulars* are outsiders with a twist—outsiders in the Philippines. Arensmeyer quotes Leon Ma. Guerrero's comment that Rizal was perhaps more truly a European than a Filipino. The outsider remains the most dominant theme in Philippine fiction in English. Gonzalez's stranger is the real Filipino of the twentieth century.

ANGST

The result of alienation is loneliness, frustration and, at its worst, a devastating bitterness. Joaquin's world of fiction is perhaps most obviously haunted by this frustration. Furay talks of "the tangled world of human motivation" in Joaquin "which is admittedly a welter of complexities" and says that Joaquin's characters are "for the most part, introverted, self-commiserating, impulse-ridden hysterics." *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* is clearly intended to portray a world in which the inhabitants struggle agonizingly against the metaphysical traps of human tragedy that are brought about by the human condition. Emerson's "hindrance of our private satisfactions

by the laws of the world" will always leave us frustrated. The absurdity of the world in which we must live will always result in angst.

The same theme is evident in Brillantes, most clearly perhaps in the Romanos of "The Living and the Dead." Cecilia Locsin-Nava says that Brillantes's characters "are initiated early into a state of loneliness brought about by isolation" and Brillantes himself labels it "the innate listlessness stamped on mortality." Bernad writes that the heritage of Tiempo in his story of that title is the heritage "of pain, sickness, defeat and the pain of death." If a man is doomed to search forever, to be always trapped in the inner cell, he condemns himself to a life of frustration and bitterness.

Lumbera has written of this kind of desolate loneliness in *The Peninsulars*—"a fearsome condition . . . driving men to dreams of glory that taint them with corruption which in turn results in extinction, both metaphysical and physical." That desperate loneliness is "the result of isolation of one individual from another. . . .the isolation of people who do not feel at home in the land they inhabit." It is the desperate loneliness of strangers in their own house.

Leonidas Benesa says that Polotan's *Hand of the Enemy* and much of Polotan's fiction are concerned with the "women in hell," the women betrayed, the angry women—"angry at their husbands, their friends, their condition, at the world, at themselves." As Casper says, "the typical Polotan story is bitter with the experience of loss and betrayal. . .an angry elegy for the lost dream of self." Her women are tortured women, lonely women, frustrated women, bitter women. For them, "life is the enemy. A man has wounds it cannot heal, a woman has wants it can not give, and everyone burns with a fatal fever."

It is remarkable how the theme of the outsider recurs in the critical works of Philippine fiction in English in the first twenty volumes of *Philippine Studies*. The titles of many of the works reflect that theme: "The Pretenders," "The Exiles," *The Peninsulars*, "Look Stranger, On This Island Now." The

critics are almost unanimous in their characterization of the Filipino as a stranger in the house. The unanimity is not at all surprising. It merely underlines the fact that, at least in the eyes of the writers under discussion, the Filipino is a man of his age—searching for his identity, plagued with loneliness and the failure to communicate, searching for love, struggling toward self-discovery. It is both consoling and sobering to realize that the Filipino is one with the men of his generation and his world.

Contents

H. B. FURAY

The Power and Greatness of Nick Joaquin

THE RECENT VOLUME of Nick Joaquin, *Prose and Poems*[1] contains stories, poems, a play. It is the stories alone I shall be concerned with here. They are more read and more important and will be given treatment accordingly; and it is not fair, stories done with, simply to wave at the poems and the play in passing, which is all we would have space for.

First off, Joaquin's writing has power and elements of greatness. This is a careful statement and should be read as such. His writing also has certain defects—both of omission and commission. It is the nature of these defects that puts the tone of reserve in my statement.

Defects in themselves do not necessarily cancel out the greatness of a writer, any more than they do that of a man. The writer may have defects in the sense that there are some things he simply cannot do. In this sense some of the very finest writers are defective, and no one holds it or should hold it against their claim to greatness; no human being, since he is human, is equally competent in all lines. What we do make the judgment of greatness on is what the writer does have, not what he does not have. If, in the abilities he does have (supposing always that they are worthy abilities and not mere trivia), he has surpassed a certain level of excellence, he is commonly called great; and never mind berating him because,

1. Nick Joaquin, *Prose and Poems* (Manila: Graphic House, 1952).