UTHEAST ASIAN WRITING

Maynila

AND OTHER EXPLORATIONS

E. Aguilar Cruz

EDITED WITH A FOREWORD BY GREGORIO C. BRILLANTES

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Raya Books is a division of Editorial Associates Limited, a cooperative of Asian journalists working in Hongkong. It is devoted to publishing books on Southeast Asia, with emphasis on the five nations grouped in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *Raya* is the Malay word for "great." The publisher's imprint comes from a design depicting "man"—a folk motif from the Ifugao cultural community of Northern Luzon in the Philippines.

AND OTHER EXPLORATIONS

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Maynila and Other Explorations is one in a series of books devoted to Southeast Asian writing that we are doing. There are many creative writers, of novels, short stories, poems, essays and dramas, working in the region today. Whether they write in their own language or in a Western one, few of them are read outside their countries. Through this series we hope to help them speak to wider audiences in Southeast Asia.

E. Aguilar Cruz, born in 1915 in Magalang, in the Philippine province of Pampanga, has been "drawing or painting constantly" since he was seven, when he had a private teacher in drawing. He also took music lessons as a young boy, but this eventually gave way to art since it was presumed that he would be the painter in the family. He enrolled at the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Manila but quit after a year, as he was confined to painting "stuffed birds and ketchup bottles" and was impatient to do figures and landscapes of Mount Arayat and Manila Bay. After that brush with formal art instruction, during which he learned "how not to paint," he began writing and in 1932 had his first short story published in *Graphic* magazine. As one of the Philippines' pre-war fictionists in English, he merited at least 20 mentions in Jose Garcia Villa's annual selections and twice made that poet's prestigious "Roll of Honor." In 1938 Aguilar Cruz joined the *Graphic* staff as a feature writer. He has since devoted himself to his twin careers and made his mark in both. He was Editor of the *Sunday Times Magazine* from 1946 to 1949, when he became Associate Editor, then Editor in Chief, of the *Daily Mirror*, which post he held up to 1972, besides serving as chief editorial writer of both the *Manila Times* and the *Daily Mirror*, and producing a stream of columns, articles and essays for various publications. He was one of the artist-founders of the Dimasalang Group and has participated in some 20 group shows in Manila. For his contributions to Philippine art and journalism, Aguilar Cruz received the Pro-Patria Award from the President of the Philippines in 1961. Since 1973 he had been writing a column on the socio-cultural scene in Metropolitan Manila for the *Times Journal*, until recently, when he was named Permanent Philippine Representative to the UNESCO in Paris.

Foreword

MY INTRODUCTION to E. Aguilar Cruz and his works took place in an atmosphere, literally, of cold formality—in a conference hall late in December, in Baguio. That was in 1958—the decade of Dulles, the SEATO, and the lengthening shadow of something called, one was to learn later, the military-industrial complex: for nationalists, then a beleaguered minority, a season of chill winds. The rather frosty setting of the National Writers Conference seemed to have been decreed by the weather of the world, and Aguilar Cruz helped fuel the fire being tended by such elders of the tribe as President Garcia and Senator Recto, with his paper entitled "Language and Responsibility of the Filipino Writer."

We all needed that particular warmth and light, especially those benighted ones among us who sought illumination only at alien hearths; and Aguilar Cruz, though he will shrug off the title, was—still is—one of the more devout keepers of the flame. He went about warming up frigid spirits, and not just at the Bontoc Bar, either. No overnight commission from a burning bush, not to mention fervent symposium organizers, his fidelity to "Filipino First" shaped what he felt and wrote long before Mr. Garcia's slogan and the Baguio conference; and apart from the range and relevance of his concerns, it is the span, the tenure of his zeal, harking back as it does to the 1920s, that gives this collection of his essays, columns and reviews its singular authority.

BUT IT was later, on a typically warm and humid day in Manila in 1962 or thereabouts, that I began, I think, to really know Aguilar Cruz. The place was anything but cold and formal—no air conditioning, and open to the sidewalk—where you could walk in without being given the once-over by security guards; casual, but with serious overtones, like his prose style. The P & P Bookshop run by Jess Po on Recto Avenue was a modest, rectangular establishment like its dozen or so neighbors, and like them patronized by the students who swarmed in ever increasing numbers in the vicinity. What distinguished P & P from the

rest was that it drew a sort of postgraduate clientele, as did its larger twin, the one called Popular, managed by Jess Po's brother Joaquin, on Doroteo Jose some blocks away, off Rizal Avenue. In fact, the same folks who had long since finished college or dropped out composed one browsing group known to the brothers Po. One was likely to run into them at the Recto store as on Doroteo Jose; they visited both places out of habit, sometimes out of necessity, as when somebody with a terminal case of compulsive reading couldn't find the book he was looking for at one shop and would be enjoined to try his luck at the other. The Pos took care to stock up on literature far more progressive and arresting (they did catch the attention of certain police authorities) than the American bestsellers, and to their regular customers—writers and journalists among them—settling for another bookseller was out of the question, for reasons that verged on the mystical.

The spiritual, in fact, the theological, was what had prompted Aguilar Cruz to drop in at Jess Po's shop that morning I happened to be hanging around, prolonging a coffee-break from the copy desk of the *Free Press* a short walk away. I was a newcomer in the trade, and generally held editors in awe, especially cigar-smoking pros; and I watched fascinated as he poked around among the shelves, looking, he said, for *Summa Contra Gentiles*. It seemed there was some doctrinal point, some fine scholastic distinction St. Thomas Aquinas had made, which he—not the saint but the worldly-wise editor—had to look up; he had lost his copy of the Angelic Doctor's work. He found the book, all right—an Image edition, as I recall it. Visibly pleased with the outcome of his search, he seemed to weigh the book in his hands, peered thoughtfully at the pages, as though about to compose a reply in a private dialogue with the Dominican theologian, paused to comment on the old dialectics of the New Scholasticism, before going on his way, down the crowded street, toward Florentino Torres and the *Manila Times* building and his desk crammed, I imagined, with books that bore his annotations—more notes on heaven and earth than were dreamt of in a newspaperman's philosophy.

Aguilar Cruz walking out of P & P and down a busy Manila street, Aquinas in hand—the image, even now in a less fanciful age, suggests and sums up a great deal about the man who is skeptical, to put it mildly, about the labors of churches and ecclesiastics. His interests are not Roman but catholic, allowing him to enter into minds and modes of thought where perhaps less hardy nationalists fear to tread. Eloquent in English and Pilipino, he is loyal to Pampango and has a passion for reading "everything" written in French. The writer shares with the

painter in him a respect for details, even if these have to be sought out in texts or theses excluded from the native canon. To the task at hand he never fails to bring the requisite equipment—a felicitous style, a sense of values, an instinct for perspective, maybe a passage from Aquinas or Sartre or *Aklatang Bayan,* or nothing so remarkable as a camera, which was what he was carrying when I next ran into him, not long after our Recto meeting. A roving intelligence who would not be confined to the anatomy of ideology or of the fairer half of humankind, he was on his way to take the Sta. Mesa train at Tutuban and have a look at, of all things, the underside of a new overpass.

THE RECTO underpass probably wasn't even on the drawing boards when the building which housed the old P&P Bookshop burned down, years ago, and Jess Po has since gone back to Doroteo Jose. A generation of browsers has come of age without any recollection of Joaquin's posterity or the Recto store that had been so hospitable to such as they. The skyline has changed over much of Manila, and so have the feel and appearance of many of the streets that walkers in the city like Aguilar Cruz loved to explore.

Manila is not the same; yet Manila is what it has always been. The same may be said of one of Manila's most loyal citizens—a thatch of graying hair has replaced the bristly crew cut of the *Daily Mirror* editor; he has given up cigars for a pipe or an occasional mellow cigarette; he seems more withdrawn, detached somehow; but it's the same Abe Cruz one sees coming down a street in Ermita; the same A-beh, originally of Magalang, Pampanga, who wore tuxedo and tongue in cheek to formal affairs, and who once knew as well as the keyboard of his Remington all the nooks and crannies in the old *Times* neighborhood in Santa Cruz, the side streets and alleys between the Avenida and Misericordia. He still walks with the same purposeful stride, bent slightly forward. The face is moonshaped, the cheeks chubby as ever, and the eyes have retained their humorous, rather impish gleam, as though amused even as they meditate on the passing scene.

Of the latter, Aguilar Cruz has contemplated a long parade, and what he has written as a result is enough to fill a book, which, finally, he has permitted to happen. Over the years, for all the prolific ease with which he filled uncounted reams of copy paper, he would not be rushed into the publication of a book, of a size and weight harder to discard than the daily paper or weekly magazine he wrote for. It was as though he were so devoted to his journalist's vocation, addressing himself mainly to his daily or weekly audience, the mass of newspaper and mag-

azine readers, that he had neither the time nor the inclination to adopt another format. But friends and colleagues, his readers too of long standing, wouldn't take it sitting down, and persuaded him of late to yield to what may well be popular demand—a selection, at least, of his pieces, for the complete works couldn't possibly be contained in one hefty volume.

His assent, though, proved to be just the beginning of an enterprise that became more involved and extended than anyone, including the author himself, had imagined; for again, perhaps out of the same sense of vocation, a blend of pride and humility, he had neglected to keep a file of his works, unlike some of his confreres with their forgettable outpourings and their anxious courtship of posterity. Some essays he couldn't recall writing were eventually dug up by a librarian; columns he had forgotten about were tracked down in somebody's scrapbook by the journalism-student friend of a friend; and so on, until the selection began to take shape, over a late Chinese lunch near where he now maintains a studio, in Ermita. Characteristically, he talked less about his book than about the history and ramifications of Chinese cuisine, although he maintained that, contrary to what some people had been led to believe, he couldn't by any stretch of the palate or the peritonium be classified as a gourmet.

BUT A classification of the pieces in this collection is in order, considering the volume and variety of the feast that is offered the reader. Some data, then, to soothe the bilious bibliographer . . . The shorter pieces, which make up the bulk of the book, first appeared in the author's "The Soap Box" column in the *Weekly Women's Magazine,* in the 1950s. The longer articles were originally published in *The Sunday Times Magazine, This Week Magazine, The Philippines Quarterly, Comment,* and *Expressweek*. One exceptionally recent piece is the 1974 article, "Wild Grows the *Nilad*," from *Expressweek*, used here as a postscript to another that appeared a decade earlier. "The Other Luna" made up the main text of a monograph published in 1975 as part of a cultural series by the Bureau of National and Foreign Information of the Department of Public Information. Most of the columns bore only "The Soap Box" label when they first saw print; the titles they now carry have been provided to facilitate a schematic arrangement, not a strict pigeonholing, by the way, since most of the pieces sort of interlap—a character portrait is also the remembrance of a landscape, political commentary shades into sociology, a treatise on folklore concludes with an analysis of history. The longer pieces bear their original titles.

Such matters as titles and publication dates are not of the essence, of course. It's the writing that is the heart of the matter, and not least of the values, the causes which are dear to the heart of our author, is the art of being eminently readable. Others may be as concerned and knowledgeable as he is about Filipino culture and history, the dimensions and dynamics of our nationhood and identity. But they succeed only in subverting it all, making it all dreary and unappetizing by wrapping up their wisdom in prose that's either invincibly pedestrian or so agonizingly obscure that it has to be unraveled by a computer. Like Nick Joaquin and Kerima Polotan, Aguilar Cruz is a natural and cannot write weary, stale, flat, unprofitable stuff even if he tried—an inherent courtesy, among other things, prevents him from inflicting on us anything resembling those tedious tracts rancid with midnight oil, those ponderous solemnities encrusted with jargon and intended for interment in some grave tome. He remembers, comments, criticizes, instructs; he explores the genesis of the name "Maynila," speaks of signboards and street names, ponders designs in architecture and furniture, reminisces on provincial recipes and childhood games, compares the merits of coffee and chocolate, examines the psychology of a crowd at a boxing match, recalls the glories of opera and stage, reflects on our relations with the Chinese and the Americans, discusses the uses of English and the future of Pilipino, dissects the nature of democracy and defines the values of Filipino nationalism—and always the voice is clear, precise, properly modulated, humane, firm but gentle, strong without rage.

All this makes it a pleasure indeed to meet Aguilar Cruz, in a conference hall, in the streets of Maynila, in the pages of this book: a writer, an artist and a gentleman superbly faithful to craft and country.

GREGORIO C. BRILLANTES

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Part One
MAYNILA

The Word Is Maynila

WHEN BLAIR and Robertson were preparing their 55-volume collection of writings about the Philippines in Spanish times, one of the scholars that they requested to supply footnotes was Thomas Cooke Middleton, a member of the Augustinian order at Villanova College in Pennsylvania. On the work of an unknown writer of Legazpi's time (1571-72) Middleton commented:

"Manila is derived from the Tagal word, *manilad*, meaning 'a place overgrown with *nilad.*' "

This explanation has satisfied scholars and laymen alike for the past 50 years. It has certainly been the most plausible of the three or four etymologies offered so far. Still, it leaves serious doubts about its accuracy, and for a simple reason: it assumes that only *nilad* and no other word is possible.

Suppose, for instance, that there was a word *nila* in the Tagalog vocabulary? Then the origin of Manila would be no other than the name which Tagalogs still use—Maynila.

Recently I thought I would explore unfamiliar byways and try to find the missing verbal link. The search started with the most likely source, the B & R itself. But nowhere in the entire two volumes of indices, with their amazing wealth of detail, could I locate *nila.*

However, I did find Middleton's reason for picking the *nilad*, "which is the name of a small tree bearing flowers."

About 1650, or some 250 years before Middleton, Fray Domingo Fernandez Navarette, a Dominican, had written: "The City of Manila is called Mainila, which means marsh or mire; our people cut out an *i* and the name became Manila."

Middleton doubtless had read Fernandez Navarette. His thinking may have been along this line: if the place was a marsh then the most likely plant to be growing in it in the old days would have been a mangrove swamp tree called *nilad*; therefore Manila derived from Maynilad.

Middleton gives one other possible explanation, which, however, he evidently considered dubious. "Some writers claim," he added wryly in his above-mentioned footnote, "that the name is a corruption of Maydila, from the Tagal words *may* and *dila*, meaning 'the place that has a tongue,' alluding to the tongue-shaped island formerly at the mouth of the Pasig River."

Again, Middleton was evidently referring to the record of 1571-72, which states: "This village of Manila is situated on a tongue of land extending from east to west between the river and the sea." By my own, and none too scientific calculation, this landspit must have been the present site of Fort Santiago. I cannot conceive of this ground disappearing; on the contrary, silting must have widened it, causing the tongue of land to disappear.

There is, of course, more to be said for Maynilad than for Maydila. It seems to me that it would have been far easier to drop the final *d* from the former than to exchange the middle *d* for an *n* in the latter.

Just the same, even Middleton's seemingly correct explanation is doubtful. Why should it have been necessary to drop the *d* from Maynilad when the native tongue is not only perfectly capable of pronounc-