



MODERN
PHILIPPINE
SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY



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The bird-shaped design on the title page is called *sari-manok*, a festive symbol, derived from photograph of a brass rouge container exhibited at the Mindanao Folk Arts Village, Davao.
Drawing by Richard Kurman.

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MODERN PHILIPPINE SHORT STORIES

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*For Linda and Pipit
green circuits of the sun*

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INTRODUCTION

THE SHORT STORIES which Jose Garcia Villa wrote as a student at the University of New Mexico and, later, in a walk-up Greenwich Village apartment cannot withstand the increasingly professional inspection of Philippine critics. Nevertheless, no Filipino writer wholly or willingly relinquishes his recollection of Edward J. O'Brien's high enthusiasm for Villa's prose. *The Best Short Stories of 1932* was dedicated by O'Brien to Villa, one of whose stories was included in that year's collection while eleven others were indexed among the distinctive. In addition, *Clay*, the mimeographed magazine migrant with Villa from New Mexico to New York, was declared a prospective rival to *Story*, itself otherwise unequalled, according to O'Brien, anywhere in the world. Villa was in self-imposed exile less than three years when Charles Scribner's Sons published *Footnote to Youth*, a collection of his short fiction. This substantial achievement, O'Brien declared in his introduction, placed Villa "among the half-dozen short story writers in America who count." Just as Filipinos cannot forget Villa's nomination for the 1943 Pulitzer Prize in poetry, they are obliged to remember how O'Brien compared him with an earlier "discovery," Sherwood Anderson.

Rarely are stories from *Footnote to Youth* anthologized now, nearly thirty years later. Almost none are re-readable. What O'Brien described in them as the "classical reticence of form" is, more accurately, segregation of routine incident in

enumerated paragraphs resembling stanzas. To nearly all the stories a judge's comment, on the 1929 occasion of Villa's having won a *Philippines Free Press* literary award with a semi-allegorical fable, is appropriate: ". . . in spots there are traces of actual characterization. . . ." Although O'Brien prophesied a career for Villa as novelist, the writer himself found his sense of symbol and of cycle, his embarrassment when required to sustain narration, the sometimes bizarre wrenching of his words more appropriate to experiments with compact lyric poetry.

Yet Villa continues to be celebrated, not as one of the earliest Filipino writers of short stories in English nor as one of the best of the forerunners for all his faults: but as the envied *arrivé*. Those very countrymen from whom he disassociated himself so long, in so many ways, share his apotheosis abroad. While the Philippine nation, still on probation, slowly proved its right to political independence, significant writers were choosing English—a minority language—for their fiction, again and again, to test their equality among those whom they admired in America. How else, except by such motives of friendly comparison, can one explain the remarkable development of short fiction represented in this collection, after only sixty years of English in the islands? Lesser writers have been satisfied with imitation. The more mature have been rewarded with self-discovery, as surely as Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski was, by the stringencies of public meditation in a foreign mode.

In 1900, it would have been impossible to predict such progress. American administrators, attempting to propagate general education for the first time, adopted English temporarily as the language of instruction in the absence of any native national language or textbooks. Characteristic of a cross-roads culture, the Philippine national anthem was written in Spanish, under American rule, by a Filipino. After partial

self-government was established in the 1930's, Quezon as the Commonwealth's first President encouraged the gradual transformation of Tagalog into a medium for inter-island communication and commerce. Nevertheless, in 1940 he offered generous national awards to literary works in English or Spanish, as well as in Tagalog.

Twenty years later the contest of languages and literatures still continues, in schoolhouse and press room. Although only the Commonwealth prize winners in English were ever published, this fact alone is no guarantee that a replacement will never be found for English, now that nationalism is at high pitch in Asia and Africa.¹ One can only say, reading the stories of Gonzalez, Joaquin, Daguo and Santos and realizing the folkways and historical accidents which might have been expected to prevent their appearance, that the unlikely has happened before and may happen again.

Because Spain's colonial administrators withheld education from impoverished *indios*, depriving them of any secure share in the Spanish renaissance, Spanish exists today largely as loan words, visibly modified, in Tagalog. Courses in the language are compulsory at the college level, but these have been protested by mass student rallies. The modern Filipino is likely to argue that the only literature of importance to him since Pigafetta's journal of Magellan's death, is the work of the Propaganda and Revolutionary periods, the nineteenth century's last two decades. The novels and essays of men like Rizal were written in Spanish and published in Madrid, in hope of changing colonial policy at the summit, and later were smuggled into the Philippines. As a result, Rizal, in spite of never having counseled armed revolt, was executed publicly as a traitor. His countrymen consider it ironic, under such cir-

1. See the author's discussion in "The Great Accommodation: Filipino-English," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LIX (Spring 1960), 184-91; as well as "Reconnaissance in Manila," *Antioch Review*, XVII (Autumn 1957), 316-26.

cumstances, not to complete that historic rebellion by reading Rizal, del Pilar, Lopez-Jaena and others in Filipino vernaculars. Consequently, Spain's contributions to Philippine religion, its civil code, courtship, family folkways, the arts of jai-alai, food and dance will undoubtedly survive linguistic and literary legacies far less engrained.

When American generalship failed to clarify its intention as liberator of a Philippine people already in open, organized revolt against Spain since 1896, it too found hostile critics and endured a two-year "Fil-American War." The Malolos Constitution (drafted in Spanish and advocating adoption of the Spanish civil code) declared the country an independent republic under Aguinaldo, in 1899. All the vernaculars and Spanish itself—in the skilled accusations of Claro Recto and Teodoro Kalaw—were used to denounce as treachery America's decision to "civilize and Christianize" Filipinos who had been Catholics for centuries and whose culture was ancient! Only the Democratic Party's immediate proposal of Philippine independence as a campaign issue and Taft's remarkable civil rule could ameliorate the initial ill-feelings. Occupation troops in the *barrio* often served as teachers until mass public education could be systematized. By the time that most modern Filipino writers were born, the good will of America was clear (however errant, occasionally, its implementation); so there was no longer widespread resentment that English, rather than one of nine major native languages, had become the language of instruction.

Despite absence of a compulsory attendance law, the number of public school children rose from two hundred thousand in the last days of Spanish rule (indicative of last-minute increases in admissions because of public discontent) to two million under the Commonwealth.² Partly these statistics are

2. Robert Aura Smith, *Philippine Freedom, 1946-1958* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 44.

accounted for by improvement in public health as well as in education. Infant mortality dropped from 80% to 5.4% by 1933. Americans found tuberculosis, malaria, and dysentery endemic, beriberi prevalent, leprosy widespread, cholera and smallpox killers: gradually Philippine sanitation became an example to the Orient. Writers who reached manhood in the midst of a fearful depression were consoled by the knowledge that their life-expectancy had increased from eighteen years to forty-six.³ At the same time, participation in civil service and self-government gave this survival pattern more than statistical significance.

Although the convention which in 1934 drafted the Commonwealth's Constitution (adopted by the Republic, as well, in 1946) was multilingual, the Constitution itself was couched in English. The choice was dictated in part by the necessity of submitting the Constitution to the President of the United States; in part, by a people's gratitude for having been permitted exercise of their right to self-respect. The exceptional bravery of Filipinos which, during World War II, restricted movement of Japanese garrisons mainly to principal port areas was, similarly, an act of loyalty not only to their American allies but equally to their own proud aspirations.

Meanwhile, the importance which Philippine vernaculars had first assumed under the Commonwealth when an Institute of National Language was established with American approval, was augmented by their use as the language of underground conspiracy and, later, by the fact of the Republic's official independence. President Ramon Magsaysay's contribution to the movement was a practical one, a demonstration of personal fluency in several vernaculars while he tried to redeem democracy from disrepute by literally bringing government to the people. No world capital except Warsaw had been

3. *Sociology in the Philippine Setting*, ed. Chester Hunt, Richard Collier, et al. (Manila: Alemar's, 1954), p. 303.

more devastated than Manila during World War II. Moral damage done thousands of displaced persons multiplied in the presence of black markets and war surplus goods. President Roxas' sudden death in office and Quirino's weakness in the face of his party's corruption fed the nation's cynicism, abetting the Hukbalahaps' agrarian revolt against absentee landlords. Magsaysay, dedicated to restoration of domestic order, went daily among the *provincianos* and even held Cabinet meetings in the field, until his personal example of moral severity rallied the people.

Nevertheless, for a portion of the new generation the prospering of Tagalog was less inspirational than was the confidence coined by national recovery. These few individuals, while appreciative of the need for domestic solidarity, refused to let their country become wholly insular again. They used English so that their voices would carry overseas, just as the Philippines herself honored foreign commitments and assumed full international character in the U.N., the Korean War, SEATO and the Pacific Charter, as well as at the Bandung Conference.

The divisions between Philippine writers due to indecisions about the role of languages has been difficult for literature to endure. Increasingly the language of instruction for elementary grades is not English but the National Language, based on Tagalog, indigenous to roughly one-third of the population. In a typical provincial school, English is allotted thirty minutes daily throughout the first two elementary grades—with classes averaging between fifty and eighty children, often present on half-time basis.⁴ Nearly half these students are

4. From Clifford H. Prator's mimeographed First Annual Report: Philippine-UCLA Language Program, August 1958, Appendix A-7; and confirmed in the Third Annual Report, June 1960. An initial stage in this ICA-Rockefeller-supported program has been the arrangement of elaborate field consultations, so that contrastive analyses can be made, for the first time, between English and Philippine languages. The exploratory procedures employed are the most prac-

forced, by economic necessity, to leave school before their fourth year and return to non-English-speaking communities. Even for the rest, English is actually a second (or third) language, despite the fact that lectures and textbooks are in English.

The circulation of Manila's daily newspapers in English (65 per cent of which are sent to the provinces) outnumbers, six to one, combined Chinese, Spanish, and Tagalog sales; but this ratio is reversed, one to four, among weekly magazines in which fiction appears, and some 300,000 comic books published fortnightly in Manila are all in the vernacular. So are all movies produced locally, although foreign films enjoy equal popularity. Where is the audience for the imaginative writer in English? What incentive drives him to write as well as he does even though publication of his book is delayed for months, to be squeezed in quickly by the press between run-offs of comic books and political broadsides? His book may win awards for beauty of type and binding, only to lie in warehouses afterwards, unpromoted except by the author's personal attention. Why does he bother? What persuasion urges him to give his best to Sunday supplements which, by Wednesday, may become torches for burning out nests of termites?

Partly the compulsion originates in the irresistible call of the white collar. In Spanish times knowledge of the language of the elite was required in a clerk, the highest position to which any *indio* might presume. (Intermarriage and especially distribution of power was encouraged only between the Spanish and former princes, or *datus*, who had become major landholders—*caciques*. The lot of the *mestiza* was enviable.)

tical ever applied to the Philippine language situation. The resultant descriptive grammars should be valuable to the Institute of National Language, whatever the ultimate disposition of English itself, as the normal schools and Philippine government bureaus assume full responsibility for the program beyond its initial phases.

Such a motive goes far to explain parallel phenomena: why today there are four teachers for every teaching position; or why, in a primarily rural country, there are four law students for every college agricultural student (in the U.S. the numbers are nearly even).⁵ English has become identified with the educated classes—and office opportunities; while education, often an end in itself, is chiefly regarded as a status-symbol . . . nevertheless, no explanation will be complete which ignores the writer's faith, his capacity for dreams, his pride in achievement.

For pay and popularity the formula writer generally turns to Tagalog or Cebuano. With some notable exceptions, whose numbers have grown since the Palanca memorial awards for literature in the vernacular as well as in English were inaugurated in 1950, the more outstanding Filipino writers have chosen English for entrance to their insights. If they have accepted a limited readership, it is because they have felt their truths would be distorted by present traditions in the vernaculars. Artificial elegance, a Victorian sensibility, grand melodrama and elaborate plot contrivance (to compensate for skin-thin characterization)—these are "literary" conventions which do not respect experience. The writer's dilemma long has been that to be widely read, he cannot be profound, he dare not disturb false images. To write honestly *about* his people he must risk not writing *for* them. The quality of so much of English fiction in the Philippines depends on the difficult decision to put craft and art first, and to let readers founder if need be. Lately, however, serious attempts at bilingualism have been made by men of reputation in English. And should the time come when all major Filipino workers have to be read in translation, such men, far from having surrendered their integrity, will have improved literature in the vernacular

5. *Sociology in the Philippine Setting*, p. 397.

through their own encounters with Western concepts of organic form and fidelity to character. Far from being a pious hope, this recognizes the past salvage of their integrity from those privative human circumstances which have surrounded and informed the Philippine writer-as-citizen.

The impulse towards conservatism in the Philippines owes less perhaps to centuries of colonialism than to the rural nature of her society. Her estimated coal reserves are of such low grade that at best they could support only a small steel mill.⁶ Most of her iron ore, therefore, has been sold to Japan for manufacturing. In the absence of oil deposits of her own, her claim to oil fields in North Borneo (within the jurisdiction of the Sultan of Sulu, a Philippine citizen) may prove crucial but shows little promise of prospering in international courts.⁷ Meanwhile, the Philippines only now is beginning to enjoy fractional compensation through hydroelectric power.

Consequently, 40 per cent of the gross national product is still agricultural; 80 per cent of her population lives in small fishing *barrios* or on farms. Much of the rice land traditionally has been cultivated by tenant sharecroppers who, far from earning subsistence, annually have increased family indebtedness to grand *hacenderos*. The birthright of the young has been stark poverty in provinces such as Pampanga, once 70 per cent tenant-tilled, whose Candaba swamps used to be called Huklandia during the postwar revolts. Although Spanish rule ended slavery, it strengthened previous class distinctions by accepting former *datus* as *cabezas de barangays* (heads of subdivisions of a *pueblo* or municipality) or as *caciques*—large landholders and tax collectors. As a result of such special privileges for the few, many former freeholders

6. Warren S. Thompson, *Population and Progress in the Far East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 341-45.

7. Conrado Villafuente, "Disputed North Borneo," *Panorama*, X (April 1958), 15-20 *passim*.