

Essays on
**THE PHILIPPINE NOVEL
IN ENGLISH**

Edited by Joseph A. Galdon

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Editor's Preface

THE HISTORY OF THE PHILIPPINE NOVEL in English represents a classic case study of the development of a literary genre from birth to relative maturity. The novel in English in the Philippines is less than sixty years old, and the total number of published novels is less than one hundred. Yet, in that brief span, the novel has developed from early experiments with theme and technique in a borrowed language to the relative sophistication of form and content in a language that has, for all practical purposes, become native, at least for the authors who have chosen to write in it. The emergent voice of the novelists in English records the development of a significant literary form in Philippine literature.

The eight novelists in the present collection have been chosen to represent that development. They are not necessarily the best of the writers, but their work is certainly representative. Galang and Kalaw emerge at the very beginning of the development in the 1920s and are an index to both the vertical and the horizontal derivation of the Philippine novel at its birth. Javellana and Laya are representative of the novel midway in its development. Sionil Jose, Gonzalez, Santos, and Nollado indicate the variety of voices that emerged in the postwar period. The most conspicuous absence here is that of Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, but that has been studied at length elsewhere. The year 1979 is a good point at which to end a case study of the Philippine novel in English, since the paucity of competent novels in recent years and the deteriora-

tion of English in the past ten years indicate that whatever form the Philippine novel takes in the 1980s, it will be radically different from the postwar novel of the past twenty-five years, as well as the early novel of the first twenty-five years.

Literary criticism proceeds by accretion. The first task of the critic (more research than criticism) is the recovery and fixation of the text. Once the text has been stabilized, the second task is that of criticism proper, the study of the text itself (form and content), and of the text in relation to external influences (social, psychological, historical, etc.). The first level of criticism in this second stage is often necessarily general and preliminary. It attempts to plot the lay of the land and fix some basic guide-points for further exploration on a second level. The third stage of criticism is comparative, and fixes the relationships of authors within a national as well as an international and historical framework. It is only in this third stage that a history of a national literature or of a genre can be properly written.

The essays in this book are second-stage criticism—preliminary studies in themes and techniques, and tentative efforts to situate a novel within its social or literary context. They are landmarks for further study. They are not attempts at a literary history of the novel in English, nor even a complete survey of the novel. They are simply emergent voices from a rich and varied chorus that still remains to be heard.

There is relatively little competent criticism of the Philippine novel in English in print. Innumerable graduate students have written theses on various novels and novelists, but these are often fairly shallow summaries of plot and theme, and the best of them are difficult to track down, since no adequate bibliography of theses in Philippine literature in English exists. Critical articles in Philippine periodicals present the same problem of discovery and retrieval. The nine essays in the present collection are a modest attempt to remedy the situation and to provoke further discussion of the Philippine novel in English. Despite the negative attitudes of critics in many quarters, Philippine writing in English is a significant part of Philippine literature and will probably continue to be so for the foreseeable future.

Essays on the Philippine Novel in English does not attempt a complete survey of the Philippine novel in English—either in

depth or in extent. Since a number of the better-known novelists have been studied extensively in various other articles and books, the focus of research in the Department of English at the Ateneo de Manila over the past few years has been on the lesser-known and less-criticized novelists in order to fill in the lacunae in a critical survey of the Philippine novel in English. These essays are certainly meant to be complemented by the studies of Joaquin, Polotan, Casper, Enriquez, and Quirino in *Philippine Fiction* (edited Joseph A. Galdon, S.J., Ateneo de Manila, 1972). Since so little critical work has been done on a number of the authors studied in this collection, the intention of the critic has been, in most cases, simply to present an initial and preliminary survey as a basis for further criticism. The present collection of essays, therefore, is only one more step toward a definitive critical study of the Philippine novel in English.

The essays in the book were all written by Ateneo de Manila faculty members or students. Most of them were presented as lectures on different occasions at the Ateneo, and represent a variety of critical approaches. Since they were intended, in most cases, to explore relatively unknown areas, the depth of literary scholarship, as well as the critical techniques, vary from author to author and from critic to critic. The primary purpose of the Department of English at the Ateneo was to provide a fairly broad foundation for further, more detailed, studies in Philippine writing in English.

I am grateful to the members of the Ateneo de Manila Department of English whose scholarship and interest in Philippine writing in English have made this volume possible. It is their hope, as well as mine, that this collection will be of some service to scholars and students of Philippine Literature.

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JOSEPH A. GALDON

*Romance and Realism:
The Philippine Novel in English*

IN APPROACHING THE PHILIPPINE novel in English, the critic has many paths to choose from.¹ He might choose to be analytic—take the novels one by one and analyze them individually. Or he might be synthetic—attempt to perceive literary or thematic patterns that run through the individual novels. Both approaches would be largely chronological, although the synthetic approach would be less dependent on chronology. I shall attempt to be largely synthetic.

The critic might be biographical and attempt to relate the novels to the biographical data of the authors. *A Season of Grace*, for example, is set in Mindoro because N.V.M. Gonzalez was brought up there. Or the critic might be psychological and lament the absence of Philippine sensibility in the contemporary Philippine novel in English, or sociological and insist that the Philippine novel reflect the revolt of the masses. He might trace the history of ideas reflected in the various novels from 1921 to 1978. I am afraid that I will be none of these explicitly, and yet a little bit of all of them unconsciously. I am by nature and training happily eclectic.

A lecture delivered at the Institute of Philippine Literature, Ateneo de Manila, 3 May 1978.

1. In the remarks that follow I am obviously echoing Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1973).

Finally, the critic might concentrate on theme or on technique, on content or on form, vision or stylistics. I shall try to do a little bit of both.

In the present study, broad as it is, I attempt to provide a brief survey of current scholarship in the field, to indicate possible areas for further research, and to encourage scholars and students to venture forth on the still largely uncharted seas of Philippine literature. In the course of the study I shall indicate a number of articles which I consider significant for the study of the Philippine novel in English. The bibliography of this article contains a list of some 100 Philippine novels in English, both in alphabetical and in chronological order, and a brief list of some twenty-five articles on the Philippine novel in general. The latter list is pitifully short and indicates the state of criticism of the novel in English. I hope that these bibliographical lists, as well as my comments in the course of the article, will provide a road map, however sketchy, for the aspiring critic of the Philippine novel in English. Some of my views, I realize, can be disputed. I hope that they provoke further study and discussion of the Filipino novel in English.

FOUR THESES

Allow me to enumerate four theses or propositions with regard to the Philippine novel in English:

1. There is, in Philippine literature, a solid (and growing?) tradition of the novel in English.
2. That tradition is distinctively Filipino, not alien or foreign, or at least no more so than the vernacular novel is alien.
3. Apart from language (which I consider an accidental and not a substantial difference), there are no major differences between the Philippine novel in English and the Philippine novel in the vernacular.
4. The Philippine novel in English has been neglected in recent years because (mortal sin of criticism) it has not been accepted on its own terms, but has been asked to be something that it could not be.

Propositions 1 and 2 can be proven quite easily, I think. Proposition 3 is a hypothesis that needs further investigation and

substantiation by critics competent in both English and vernacular literatures. Proposition 4 is a bias that would be difficult to prove, given the present state of literary criticism in the Philippines, but it is a bias that I feel proceeds from a viable insight or intuition.

With these propositions in the back of our minds, let us now proceed to a brief survey of the Philippine novel in English.

PATTERN AND TRADITION

The most recent and the most complete study of the Philippine novel in English from a critical point of view is the master's thesis of Abdul Majid bin Nabi Baksh submitted to the University of Malaya in 1970 and published in *The Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review* in the same year.² Majid dates the birth of Philippine fiction in English with the 1910 issue of the *College Folio* which printed the first two Philippine short stories in English—Victoria Yamson's "Brown and White" and Joaquina Tirona's "Nora and Chiquito"—and the birth of the Philippine novel in English with Zoilo Galang's *A Child of Sorrow* in 1921.³ From 1921 to 1966, Majid lists sixty-four Philippine novels in English.⁴ A bibliography of Philippine novels in English in the fifty-seven years from 1921 to 1978 would list close to 100 novels. Even that list would certainly be incomplete.

In any event, the achievement is significant. A novel in English was published within twenty years of the introduction of English into the Philippines and the publication of almost 100 novels in fifty-seven years is an impressive accomplishment. Not all of these novels are masterpieces, of course. For, as Ifor Evans remarks, "Though the novel is a great art, it is also an art which

2. Abdul Majid bin Nabi Baksh, "The Filipino Novel in English," *The Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review* 35 (March-June 1970): 1-2.

3. Ibid., p. 3. Carunungan is more pessimistic about the Philippine novel. See Celso Al. Carunungan, "The Idle State of the Filipino Novelist," *Solidarity* 1 (January-March 1966): 65-69.

4. Majid, "The Filipino Novel," pp. 151-55.

admits of much mediocre talent."⁵ Evans's remarks, although primarily intended for English literature, are certainly valid, perhaps even more so, for the Philippine novel in English.

There is no doubt of the existence of the Philippine novel in English. With some understandable lapses, the production of the novel in English has been fairly consistent over the past fifty years. Melanie Talag's *Sanchezes of Old Manila* and Ricardo M. Octaviano's *Salidum-ay Diway* bring the tradition up to date, and there are persistent rumors in the coffee shops and on the cocktail circuit of authors at work on novels in English in the various corners of the Noble and Ever Loyal City of Metro Manila and of the provinces as well.⁶ I do not think we need belabor the obvious any longer. There is a significant tradition of the novel. The novel in English is alive and well in the Philippines.

The very complexity, if not the richness of that tradition, complicates the problem for the critic. "We need a vantage point, for the novel is a formidable mass, and it is so amorphous. . . . It is most distinctively one of the moister areas of literature—irrigated by a hundred rills and occasionally degenerating into a swamp."⁷ Oversimplification, particularly for the critic or literary historian, is a serious fault and yet the imposition of a pattern is often helpful or necessary, subject to further refinement and nuance, for a deeper understanding of a tradition. "Pattern by itself," Daiches says, "does not make literature; it must be the kind of pattern which communicates insight."⁸

TRADITIONAL PATTERN

There have been several critical attempts to indicate the patterns of Philippine writing in English, which are applicable to the novel. The traditional pattern is that followed by *Brown*

5. Ifor Evans, *A Short History of English Literature* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1946), p. 151.

6. Melanie V. Talag, *The Sanchezes of Old Manila* (Manila: National Book Store, 1978); Ricardo M. Octaviano, *Salidum-ay Diway* (Quezon City: R.M. Octaviano, 1978)

7. David Daiches, *The Study of Literature for Readers and Critics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1948), p. 80. Daiche's comments are certainly applicable to the Philippine novel in English.

8. *Ibid.*

Heritage, which divided Philippine writing in English into the period of apprenticeship, 1900-1930; the period of emergence, 1931-1944; and the period of awareness, 1945 to date.⁹ Bienvenido Lumbera had used the same pattern earlier in 1964, but perhaps the credit for the pattern should be given to Virginia R. Moreno in her discussion of the Philippine short story in English in 1952.¹⁰

Period of Apprenticeship

P. Santillan-Castrence describes the "period of apprenticeship" as follows:

As anyone interested in Philippine literature knows, the time-range of this period is indefinite, some investigators placing it from 1910 to 1924, others from 1900 to 1930. . . . Perhaps the more reasonable classification for the literary time-range is that given by Virginia R. Moreno in her account of the Philippine Short Story in English. She describes the years 1910-1924 as "a period of novices with their exercises both in fiction-making and the use of the new language; 1925 to 1931 was the period of phenomenal growth among the practitioners in the art." Indeed the question one inevitably asks when reading the works towards the end of the limit of the period, 1930, is whether the word *apprenticeship* is a misnomer or not, considering the fact that 1930 is about midway between the earliest inception of English into Philippine life and now. It should be mentioned also that a few of the writers of the period showed such a mastery of language and thought-expression even during the early part of the period that the term "apprentice" would not fit at all, except in the context of time definition.¹¹

This is the period that pioneered Filipino literature in English and is characterized by the quickness with which Filipino authors produced works in a language entirely foreign to them. There

9. Antonio G. Manuud, ed., *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Tradition and Literature* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1967), pp. 546-633.

10. Bienvenido L. Lumbera, "Philippine English Literature: A Survey Outline," *Trends in Philippine Literature and Drama*, mimeographed (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1964), pp. 44-49; Virginia R. Moreno, "A Critical Study of the Short Story in English as Written by Filipinos from 1910 to 1941 with an Anthology of Representative Stories" (M.A. thesis, University of the Philippines, 1952).

11. P. Santillan-Castrence, "The Period of Apprenticeship," in *Brown Heritage*, p. 546.

was no special preoccupation with technique in writing. "There was a theme . . . in which a moral, a message, if you wish, had to be brought home to the reader, and the writer worked away at his or her material in easy-time consecutiveness, confusing no one, and leaving no one in perplexity or in curiosity about possible valuable hidden meaning in the story not made immediately patent at a first reading."¹² Santillan Castrence concludes her description of the period:

One saw in the output of the early years of Filipino literature in English an eagerness for the person who thought he possessed the language to see too soon, it seemed, what he could do with the newly-acquired commodity.¹³

To this period belong Galang's four novels—*A Child of Sorrow* (1921), *Visions of a Sower* (1924), *Nadia* (1929), and *Springtime* (1929), as well as Fernando Castro's *The Images of Three Stars and a Sun* (1927-1928), Ernest Lopez's *His Awakening: A Romance of Manila and Hollywood* (1929), and Maximo Kalaw's *The Filipino Rebel: A Romance of the American Occupation of the Philippines* (1930). Except for the literary historian, only the novels of Galang and Kalaw have any particular merit, but Galang, in particular, deserves a good deal more study.

Period of Emergence

Herbert Schneider, S.J., described the period of emergence in *Brown Heritage*:

The overall concern of writers and critics alike during the Period of Emergence of Philippine Letters in English was the creation of a national literature. At first critics thought that a national literature could be had if writers wrote about simple barrio life, the rugged virtues of simple folk, tropical nature and the greatest national heroes—that through this subject matter something of the Malayan spirit could be caught.

What gave lasting direction, however, to Philippine letters were the diametrically opposed critical theories of Jose Garcia Villa and Salvador P. Lopez. Villa made our writers conscious of the fact that a writer is first an

12. Ibid., pp. 547--49.

13. Ibid., p. 550.

artist. This means that the writer's excellence or lack of it depends on his ability to so structure his experience that it illuminates at least in part man and life. If a writer's craftsmanship is weak, no subject matter, regardless how serious and deep, can save him from bad writing. Lopez and the forces and changes to which Lopez gave expression turned the attention of the writer to the real Philippines. He made him see his country and his people as he never saw them before.¹⁴

The two main characteristics of the period were the more conscious Filipinization of writing in English and the growing realization of the necessity of craftsmanship and artistic consciousness. The novelists of the period include Felicidad V. Ocampo (*The Lonesome Cabin*, 1931; *The Brown Maiden*, 1932; *The Woman Lawyer*, 1935; *Portia*, 1936 and 1937), Luis Serano (*The Man Who Waited*, 1932), Felipe S. Cortez, Leon Ma. Guerrero, Jose J. Reyes, D.L. Francisco, Hernando R. Ocampo, Victoria Lopez, Consorcio Borje, N.V.M. Gonzalez, and Juan C. Laya. In Schneider's analogy the imitating child that was Philippine literature became, in the period of emergence, the self-discovering adolescent.¹⁵

Period of Awareness

The final period in the traditional pattern of Philippine literature is much more difficult to define, and each critic seems to have his own interpretation and nuances. For the sake of pattern-making, let me advance one possible interpretation of the period, by interpreting "awareness" as the awareness of self and the search for self-identity. "The oldest and most recurrent theme in history and literature is perhaps that of the search for something once possessed but lost now. . . . In the Philippines, the awareness of such loss has been expressed in the search for a Filipino identity."¹⁶ I have described this search for a Filipino identity in the fiction of the postwar period in the introduction

14. Herbert Schneider, "The Period of Emergence in Philippine Letters (1930-1944)," in *Brown Heritage*, p. 588.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 575.

16. Majid, "The Filipino Novel," p. 93.

to *Philippine Fiction*.¹⁷ It is the characteristic of novels like Tiempo's *To Be Free* (1972), Santos's *The Volcano* (1965), Gonzalez's *The Bamboo Dancers* (1959), Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (1961), and Jose's *Tree* (1978).

One other dimension emerges in the novels of the period of awareness, and that is the gradual universalization of the Philippine novel in English. Majid describes the growing craftsmanship in the novels of this third period and the emergence of what he calls the "outward development of the novel":

The growth of the Filipino novel does not consist only in the recreation of the texture and feel of experience but also in the manner in which this is communicated. Through the use of symbol and image, communication is rendered artistically indirect; theme and plot are so well integrated as to be indivisible while style and technique are one and are inseparable from the theme. All these provide a measure of the growing complexity of the art of the Filipino but that is not all, for, as significant as this "vertical" growth, is the "outward" development of the Filipino novel in English.

This "outward" development of the Filipino novel is its outward movement from the parochial to the international. The symbols used reveal this clearly for they are no longer individualistic or Filipino but have an identity with the mainstream of world literature. Gonzalez, for example, creates the equivalent of the biblical tree of life and exploits the traditional symbolic value of water, while Connie's dream sequence in Joaquin's novel parallels the symbolic purgation of the protagonist in T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. The drawing upon recent anthropological and historical studies as in the Fisher King myth attests to the kinship of the Filipino novelist to his counterparts elsewhere in the world.¹⁸

Majid divides this third period in the development of the novel—the period of awareness—into several subdivisions.¹⁹ He speaks, for example, of the novels of social concern (1950-1960), and includes the novels of Fernando Castro (*Let There be Light*, 1954; *The New Light*, 1956), Agustin Misola (*Cries from the Furrows*, 1964), Donato V. Santos (*Filipino Valour*, 1956), Consorcio Borje (*Girl in the Night*, 1960), Celso Al. Carunungan (*Man of Graft*, 1961; *Flood of Corruption*, 1961-1962), Jacinto

17. Joseph A. Galdon, ed., *Philippine Fiction: Essays From Philippine Studies 1953-1972* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1972), pp. xi-xvii.

18. Majid, "The Filipino Novel," p. 119.

19. Ibid., chapters 4, 5, 6.

C. Borja (*The Honorable Juan Abusado*, 1961), and N.V.M. Gonzalez (*A Season of Grace*, 1954). His second group of novels are called novels of change and identity, and include Tiempo, Joaquin, and Santos (discussed above) and Antonio E. Sta. Elena (*A Voyage of Love*, 1961), Emigdio Alvarez Enriquez (*The Devil Flower*, 1959), and Silverio S. Baltazar (*Your House is My House*, 1966). Majid's third classification under the period of awareness discusses the novels of ambition and integrity, and includes Linda Ty-Casper (*The Peninsulars*, 1964), F. Sionil Jose (*The Pretenders*, 1962), Kerima Polotan Tuvera (*The Hand of the Enemy*, 1962), and Bienvenido Santos (*The Volcano*, 1965; *Villa Magdalena*, 1965).

THEME PATTERNS

Another approach to the Philippine novel in English can be deduced from N.V.M. Gonzalez's remarkable article "The Difficulties with Filipiniana" in *Brown Heritage*.²⁰ In that article Gonzalez enumerates the major themes that have preoccupied the writers of the Philippine novel in English. "The lover's quarrel with the world that our writers have described may be classified under four specific heads," which are chronological as well as thematic.²¹ The first, Gonzalez says, is the familiar enough theme of the barrio and the city. It was a common theme through the novelists of the thirties and has reemerged in various forms in the postwar novels as well. One thinks immediately of novelists like Galang, Ocampo, Gonzalez, Laya and Santos, among others. The second theme is Rizal's hope of the Fatherland and includes the novels of freedom, integrity, social justice, and the uplift of the masses where idealism "is at its purest." It is most evident in the novels of the forties and the fifties. The third theme is that of the Lost Eden.

A similar idealism operates, though not with a sense of reform but in the mood of longing in . . . the theme of the Lost Eden. This comes in the form of an appreciation of the virginal, Eden-like quality of a never-never land that could be the here and now but for the exploiters, the tormentors

20. N.V.M. Gonzalez, "The Difficulties with Filipiniana," in *Brown Heritage*, pp. 539-45.

21. Ibid.