

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Philippine literature in English is composed of the works in poetry and prose written by Filipinos in the English language. It constitutes, in the overall literary landscape, a larger stream than that written in Spanish, a much smaller stream than that written in the vernacular languages like Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilongo, Ilocano, Waray, Pampango, Pangasinan, Bicol, but certainly the most visible one because of its exposure in the educational system and its accessibility through publications. Despite the difficulty of drawing lines to delineate periods, to determine generations, to distinguish between those who began and those who followed, those who taught and those who studied—and then became colleagues—the period 1900-1930 has been called the Period of Apprenticeship (Manuud 1967:546), the learning time; 1930-1944, the Period of Emergence, in which voices matured and spoke on their own; and the succeeding years the Period of Awareness or simply the Modern Period.

Philippine literature in English began in the first decade of the 20th century, soon after the establishment of the educational system. The first American teachers arrived in 1901; the Philippine Normal College was established in 1901, and the University of the Philippines (UP) in 1908. The decision to use English as the official medium of instruction for all public schools was the seed for the growth of a literature in English in a country that had at least eight major vernacular languages and had been colonized by Spain for more than 300 years. Since none of the vernaculars had been used in formal education, and Spanish had not been formally taught to the Filipinos until after 1863, English seemed to the products of the educational system the only logical tongue in which to write. It was the language of learning, the language of the models they read, and eventually the language of the publications friendly to their work. Outlets for their writing included the *Philippines Free Press*, founded in 1905; the *College Folio* at the University of the Philippines, 1910; the *Philippines Herald*, 1920; the *Philippine Magazine*, 1924.

When asked why he wrote in English, Bienvenido N. Santos answered “. . . I think I fell in love with the sound of the English language” (Alegre and Fernandez 1984:219). From sound, appreciation progressed to meaning, and by the second decade a number of writers had started trying their hand at writing verse, among them Fernando Ma. Guerrero, who also wrote in Spanish, Juan F. Salazar, Maximo M. Kalaw, M. de Gracia Concepcion, Natividad Marquez, Procopio Solidum, Maximo M. Kalaw, Cornelio Faigao, and Fernando Maramag, whom poet-critic Gemino Abad calls (1989:392) “our first important poet in English.”

By the 1930s the work of Luis Dato, Trinidad Tarrosa-Subido, Abelardo Subido, Aurelio Alvero, and especially Angela Manalang-Gloria and Jose Garcia Villa attested to the maturity of both tradition and the individual talent. The lyrical gift of Manalang-Gloria showcased in *Poems*, 1940, was nurtured within a quiet life as

a student in a convent school, then at the UP, as literary editor of the *Herald*, and as wife and mother. Jose Garcia Villa published his first poem at 15, and at 17 wrote “The Coconut Poem” that led to his suspension from the UP and self-exile in the United States among kindred spirits like Marianne Moore and Edith Sitwell. There he has since lived, received awards and published, his last poem being “The Anchored Angel” 1953, one of his “comma poems.”

The short story, literary historian Bienvenido Lumbera calls “the showcase for the skill and art of Filipino writers using English” (1982:111). In 1925 was published Paz Marquez-Benitez’s “Dead Stars,” the first short story as such in craft and structure, as differentiated from earlier sketches and short narratives. Even today one is impressed by its sensitivity and skill, and by the speed with which Filipino writers had learned to handle the language and in it render Philippine experience.

By the 1930s the work of Arturo B. Rotor and Manuel E. Arguilla, the finest short story writers of their time, had been published. “Where Rotor was the sensitive chronicler of the inner life of the Filipino in the city [*The Wound and the Scar*],” writes Lumbera, “Arguilla was the meticulous painter of the country scenes in his best-loved stories *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife and Other Stories* where he captured the gentle aspects of Philippine rural life” (1982:111). They were followed by Bienvenido N. Santos whose *You Lovely People*, 1955, and *Brother, My Brother*, 1960, embraced the Tondo of his childhood and the United States of his involuntary exile; N.V.M. Gonzalez whose *Children of the Ash-covered Loam and Other Stories*, 1954, explored the “ash-covered loam” of his native Mindoro; Narciso G. Reyes, whose stories of gentle encounters are set both in Bulacan and in the city; Estrella Alfon whose *Magnificence and Other Stories*, 1960, is an early and true woman’s voice; and then Nick Joaquin, who spoke of generations and of heritage, and whom Abad identifies as “Doubtless our greatest writer in English—poet, short story writer, novelist, playwright, journalist, historian” (1989:384).

The first novel in English was written in 1921: *A Child of Sorrow* by Zoilo M. Galang. More successful was Juan C. Laya’s *His Native Soil*, 1941, which won the first prize in the 1940 Commonwealth Literary Awards, and has as hero a Filipino intellectual who returns from study in the United States to confront and modernize his hometown and its traditions, politicians, ignorance, and superstitions.

By the time of the Commonwealth Awards, writing in English had developed a world, a readership, and support structures. The center was undoubtedly the University of the Philippines, to which came the best and the brightest from the provincial high schools, and where membership in the UP Writers’ Club, founded 1927, was accolade and entry into publications. The work of campus writers was published by the *College Folio*, which became *The Philippine Collegian*, and the *Literary Apprentice* but also by national newspapers and magazines like *The Philippines Free Press*, which came to have a famous and fruitful yearly short story contest; the *Graphic*, in which Jose Garcia Villa later ran a Roll of Honor; *The Philippines Herald Mid-Week Magazine*; *The Sunday Tribune Magazine*

that became *The Sunday Times Magazine*; and *The Philippine Magazine*, the most respected literary magazine of the time. Editors like A. E. Litiatco and A.V.H. Hartendorp not only encouraged, but actually invited, even solicited their work. The established writers were later anthologized in the *Philippine Prose and Poetry* series, the first textbooks to feature works in English by Filipinos exclusively.

The writers themselves would get together—at Loreto Paras-Sulit’s father’s store or at school—to talk about their work. Their small world revolved around publications, editors, and teachers. Paz Marquez Benitez’s English 111, Creative Writing, was famous for having had students like Bienvenido Santos, C. V. Pedroche, Maria Kalaw Katigbak, Salvador P. Lopez, sit-ins like Arturo B. Rotor, and not only for exposure to stories and techniques, but for the encouragement that made students believe in themselves as writers. Much later some became editors themselves—Paz Marquez-Benitez of *The Herald Magazine*, Angela Manalang-Gloria of *The Herald Mid-Week Magazine*— and often journalists, at which time the panciteria or noodle house Wah Hing, near the *Manila Times* office, became a meeting place in which it was said that even the waiters were budding literary critics.

Writers from the University of Santo Tomas published their work in *The Varsitarian*, founded 1928, and those in the Ateneo de Manila, notably young poet-playwright-essayists Leon Ma. Guerrero and Horacio de la Costa, in *Wings*, 1931-32, *The Ateneo Monthly*, founded 1922, and *The Guidon*, founded 1926.

A major essayist emerged from this milieu: Salvador P. Lopez, whose book *Literature and Society*, 1940, also a winner at the 1940 Commonwealth Awards, espoused the idea of the writer committed to society, the writer who “believes ... that he has a place in this scheme of universal progress and that whatever he can do to help is a worthy contribution to the upward movement of life” (Lopez 1940: 169). He called “the dogma of Art for Art’s sake ... the mark of a decadent generation, advanced and defended most stoutly by those who have irretrievably lost something of the vitality of nature through vicious self-indulgence...” (Lopez 1940: 167). This brought him up against Jose Garcia Villa, who has said: “To me the art of writing comes first, not the content” (Alegre and Fernandez 1982:294).

Thus came about what has been called the “Villa-Lopez controversy,” which was not an actual controversy between the two named, but an encapsulation of the questions of the time that were not answered and did not end then: should one write for art’s sake, or for society? The Commonwealth Awards indicated a leaning towards the latter, when R. Zulueta da Costa’s *Like the Molave*, 1940, was awarded P1,500, and Jose Garcia Villa’s *Poems by Doveglion*, 1940, P500. The controversy was to reverberate through the nationalist movement in the 1970s and into the present.

The times also produced an important critic: Manuel A. Viray, poet and short story writer, who wrote critical essays and reviews of literature and painting until

he joined the diplomatic service and was assigned abroad. Jose Garcia Villa's comments in his "Roll of Honor" articulated, through his choices, a critical standard that was generally accepted by the writers.

The 1940s and 1950s, before and after the war, bustled with much literary activity around and beyond poems and short stories. The Veronicans—Francisco Arcellana, H.R. Ocampo the painter, Narciso Reyes, Estrella Alfon, Manuel Viray, Delfin Fresnosa, Lazaro Espinosa, N.V.M. Gonzalez, and others-brought out the first "little magazines," *Story Manuscripts* and *Expression* (later to become Veronica), with the members' "unedited and unexpurgated" stories.

Francisco B. Icasiano, Vicente del Fierro, Oscar de Zuñiga, Armando Malay, and the Subidos entered journalism, as did Nick Joaquin. This meant the development of the essay—in the form of columns, commentary and criticism—alongside the verses and short stories they wrote and/or published.

After the Japanese occupation, Stevan Javellana's novel *Without Seeing the Dawn*, 1947, captured in a moving tale the cruelty and the bravery of the war years. Carlos Bulosan left for the United States, taught himself to write, and wrote *America Is in the Heart*, 1946, about the painful reality of the American dream. The first Palanca Awards were given out in 1951—to Juan T. Gatbonton, Francisco Arcellana, and Edith Tiempo for the short story, and to Alberto Florentino for the one-act play *The World Is an Apple*, 1959. The first Palanca award for poetry was given only in 1964, to Carlos Angeles for *A Stun of Jewels*, 1963.

Although the first Filipino play in English had been written in 1915 ("A Modern Filipina" by Araullo and Castillejo), it had taken some time for the Filipino to learn how to handle the nuances of English dialogue, making the drama develop later than poetry and fiction. In those years the playwrights Severino Montano, Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero, and Alberto Florentino showed their expertise, and what aspects of Filipino life could be expressed in English on stage. Guerrero's plays were especially popular in schools and with drama groups, because they were about the middle class, the students, the professionals who by then were the English speakers, and thus recognizable on stage. Montano's Arena Theater and teacher performers took drama in English to the provinces, to places where there were no stages, and thus into theater-in-the-round in parks, plazas, and school grounds. Florentino's plays ventured into the life of the poor in the slums.

The succeeding generations of writers had the advantage of an established tradition and publication venues, as well as of training beyond the classroom. Edith and Edilberto Tiempo, for example, trained in the United States and returned with doctorates. Their studies fed not only their teaching, but eventually the Silliman Writers' Workshop, which they established in 1952, and which most writers in English from the 1950s to the present have attended as fellows, observers, and lecturers. Many other writers have attended Paul Engles' Creative Writing Workshop at the University of Iowa—from Ricaredo Demetillo to Rowena

Tiempo. Others went to the United States for postgraduate studies, like Gemino Abad (whose training as critic did not impede his progress as poet, and later enabled him to chronicle the tradition in the valuable work *Man of Earth: An Anthology of Filipino Poetry and Verse From English, 1905 to the mid-50s*, (1989) and later Ricardo de Ungria, Jose Dalisay, Fatima Lim. Others were awarded US government travel and writing grants and scholarships, all of which show the strong and continuing American influence on Filipino writing in English.

Back in the classrooms, the language continued to be English, and so the 1960s generation of Kerima Polotan-Tuvera, F. Sionil Jose, Ophelia Alcantara Dimalanta, Gregorio Brillantes, Gilda Cordero-Femando, Aida Rivera-Ford, Tita Lacambra-Ayala, Emmanuel Torres and others wrote English easily and well, and did not think of writing in any other language.

The emphasis on the language was only the beginning. The Anglo-American models for writing, and thus the techniques and trends, came from overseas. Where the older writers spoke of the influence of Sherwood Anderson, Wilbur Daniel Steele, and Erskine Caldwell, the next ones spoke of Walt Whitman, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway, and then of T. S. Eliot, e.e. cummings, the French symbolists, and later of Borges, Calvino, Kundera, and the Latin American novelists. Inevitably, the writers' ambitions turned overseas as well. This is the impulse that made Jose Garcia Villa choose to live and publish in the United States. Later, Bienvenido N. Santos would decide to live there and become one of the expatriates he wrote about, when Martial Law made returning to the Philippines a chancy prospect. N.V.M. Gonzalez would pursue his writing and teaching in California, and the United States would become the refuge of writers from different generations, such as Manuel A. Viray, P.C. Morante, Carlos Angeles, Alejandro Hufana, Wilfrido Nollado, Luis Francia, Luis Cabalquinto, and Rowena Tiempo. The writing world out there seemed like home to those who had grown in the language and the tradition.

Wilfrido Nollado's novel ***But for the Lovers***, 1970, might serve as illustration. It was written and published in the United States, and, writes Lumbera, "would seem to sum up the motifs and themes of the search [for identity] as the writer in English had pursued it for an entire decade." The subject matter is "the history of Filipinos during the Japanese Occupation," and although "a work of epic proportions and intention, ... [celebrating] the grace and hardiness of the Filipino people in a literary language that is the poet's own personal creation, a language recognizably English but heavily interlaced with Tagalog and Spanish epithets and puns, making for a truly awesome display of verbal splendor," the novel has found a limited audience among Filipinos, "not only because of the language employed but also because of the complex technique fed by a tradition of avant-garde writing quite alien to many Filipino readers" (1982:247). It is also largely unavailable in the Philippines, both because of circulation patterns and price, as are most books published in the United States.

The tradition has been carried on in the Silliman Writers' Workshop, and in the UP Creative Writing Center, established in 1965, which sponsors yearly workshops; also in the textbooks that carry as models the works of Anglo-American writers and Filipinos writing in English, in the national newspapers and magazines, and in the continuing use of English as the principal medium of instruction at all levels in the educational system.

The upsurge of nationalism in the late 1960s came about because of a web of factors: the continuing search for a national identity, obsessive in a nation twice colonized; the influence of the anti-imperialist ideas of Claro M. Recto; government policies on economic nationalism; the consciousness that broke out into the student nationalist movement; the political events that triggered these; and more questioning.

The consciousness brought about what has been called "the language problem." Suddenly English did not seem the only logical language for writers of Philippine literature. Why should they not use a Philippine language to express Philippine reality? What nuances of the culture could a vernacular express that English could not, coming as it does from a different cultural matrix? What readers did English reach? What readers did Tagalog, Cebuano, Filipino reach? These questions had earlier bothered writers like Casiano T. Calalang, who asked, in an essay in the *Philippines Herald Magazine* in 1927, p.8: "How Shall We Write?" He pointed out the characteristics of Tagalog: floridity, sentimentalism, and preachiness. Although these may seem undesirable from a Western perspective, Tagalog "is able to engage and express our characteristics." Since American English is rooted in a different culture, how is the Filipino writer to use it to "reflect our characteristics as a people?"

At almost every writers' conference from the 1960s onward, the "language problem" has been discussed. As a result, choices were consciously made, some writers abandoning English for Filipino, others staying militantly—sometimes apologetically—with English. Jose F. Lacaba, for example, who was writing English verse in college, started experimenting with what is now called *bagay* poetry, and has become a major poet and translator of poems in Filipino—but still writes prose in English, e.g., his book on the First Quarter Storm, *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage*, 1982. His brother Emmanuel Lacaba did not engage in the debates, but moved from English to Filipino when he cast his lot with the masses. His two books, *Salvaged Poems*, 1986, and *Salvaged Prose*, 1992, were published posthumously. Poet-critic-playwright Bienvenido Lumbera now writes poetry and plays in Tagalog, criticism and literary history in English and Tagalog. Poet Cirilo Bautista writes poetry in both languages, as do many younger poets.

Rolando Tinio, whose work for his master of fine arts was a volume of poetry in English, returned to the Tagalog of his childhood, thus uncovered a vein of vision and memory, and has since written poetry only in Tagalog. He has also translated major dramatic works into Tagalog, but continues to write essays in English.

The “language problem” entered the consciences of writers and thus the streams of English and vernacular writing, but interrupted neither. It simply called for a choice, which meant as well a choice of subjects, audiences, and methods. And thus does Philippine writing in English continue to the present.

Today the whole tradition is accessible, continuing, the writers able to reach each other and interact. A member of the very first generation, i.e., (those who began writing in the 1930s), Bienvenido Santos wrote consistently—novels (*What the Hell For You Left Your Heart in San Francisco*, 1987) and memoirs (*Memory’s Fictions*, 1993; *Postscript to a Sainly Life*, 1994)—until his death in 1996. Of the next generation, the writers of the 1940s and 1950s, Francisco Arcellana and Nick Joaquin have been named National Artists. Arcellana, who holds in his memory the history of Philippine literature in English, having associated with, as colleague and teacher, almost the whole dynasty, still holds the center at the UP Creative Writing Center workshops. Nick Joaquin has in the last decade published plays, a new novel, poems, essays, biography, history. N.V.M. Gonzalez continues writing and publishing, as do Edith and Edilberto Tiempo, who also continue the Silliman Creative Writing Workshop. Carlos Angeles and Manuel Viray, who had both considered their writing careers closed, have recently published volumes of poetry: *Bruise of Ashes*, 1993, and *Morning Song*, 1990, respectively.

The writers of the 1950s and the 1960s include Gregorio Brillantes; Ophelia Alcantara-Dimalanta, whose latest volume of poems was launched in 1993; F. Sionil Jose, whose Rosales novels have been translated and/or published abroad; and Emmanuel Torres, whose *The Smile on Smokey Mountain and Other Poems*, 1994, has received much favorable critical attention.

The current generation has the above as “elders,” and as leaders the original members of the Philippine Literary Arts Circle (PLAC): Gemino Abad, Alfred Yuson, Cirilo Bautista, the late Alfredo Salanga, and Ricardo de Ungria. All are published and prize-winning poets; Yuson has also written a novel, and Abad several volumes of criticism as well. They are also central to *Caracoa*, which Yuson edits, the only and longest running poetry magazine extant. Abad, Bautista, and de Ungria are connected with universities, and thus also teachers of younger writers.

The Palanca Awards continue, with separate awards for English and Filipino works, and are a kind of landmark for the writer. Winning a Palanca award, for published or unpublished work, is a coming of age. The Manila Critics Circle, established 1981, which gives the yearly National Book Awards, evaluates books in English and any other Philippine language together and equally, recognizing the reality of the many languages of Philippine literature. This is headed by Isagani Cruz, himself a playwright in Filipino and critic in English and Filipino.

The very few dramas in English submitted to the Palanca Committee, in contrast

to the bountiful harvest of dramas in Filipino, illustrate the state of the form. Almost no plays are being written in English, because there is little opportunity for staging them. Alberto Florentino, seeing the illogic in having Tondo folk speak English on stage, translated his plays into Filipino decades ago. The plays of Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero are now staged mostly in translation. Despite the success of Nick Joaquin's *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, it has had more performances in the Tagalog translation, *Larawan ng Artista bilang Pilipino* than in English. A later play, *Fathers and Sons*, was staged only in translation, and others, like *Tadtarin*, *The Beatas*, and *Camino Real* were each staged once or twice.

It is in poetry that the most activity is being seen. Poems are being published in the national magazines, and although still treated as fillers, they are steadily there. This and appearance in school publications are the usual first step for young writers, the second step being a slim volume of one's own. Poetry readings are held at universities and cafes, which gather poets, readers/listeners, and would-be poets.

Among the most notable poets of the current generation are Ramon C. Sunico, bilingual writer, whose book *The Secret of Graphite: Poems in 2 Tongues*, 1989, has poems on facing pages that are not translations but separate renditions of experience, and Marjorie Evasco, whose finely crafted *Dreamweavers*, 1987, sings an authentic woman's song. In the same 1991 Contemporary Poetry Series appeared Eric Gamalinda's *Lyrics From a Dead Language*, Fatima V. Lim's dual volume *Wandering Roots, 1978-1988*, and *From the Hothouse, 1989-1990*, (In his introduction to the book, Isagani Cruz calls her "the most accomplished young Filipino poet of our time"), Danton Remoto's bilingual *Skin Voices Faces*, and de Ungria's *Decimal Places*. Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas' *Mountain Sacraments* came out in the same year, as did Luis Francia's *The Arctic Archipelago and Other Poems*. The other names to whom attention must be directed are: Jim Agustin, Cesar Ruiz Aquino, Juaniyo Arcellana, Grace Monte de Ramos, Herminio Beltran Jr., Merlinda Bobis, Ma. Luisa Aguilar-Cariño, Fidelito Cortes, Jose Y. Dalisay Jr., Simeon Dumdum Jr., Felix Fojas, Hilario Francia, Marne Kilates, Fanny Llego, Edgardo Maranan, Lina Sagalar Reyes, J. Neil C. Garcia, Cesare Syjuco, and Merlie Alunan-Wenceslao.

The short story certainly continues to be written, but has fewer outlets since *Midweek* ceased publication and the *Sunday Inquirer* reduced its pages, contenting itself with one Summer Reading issue, thus leaving only the *Philippines Free Press*, which has revived its short story contest, and the *Graphic*. Notable works include Jose Y. Dalisay Jr.'s *The Old-timer and Other Stories*, 1985, and *Sarcophagus and Other Stories*, 1992; Charlson Ong's *Men of the East and Other Stories*, 1990, and *Woman of Am-Kaw and Other Stories*, 1992; Alfred Yuson's *The Music Child and Other Stories*, 1991; and Eric Gamalinda's *Peripheral Vision*, 1992.

The Filipino novel in English has a 70-year roster of some 100 titles,

many of them still being read, studied and reprinted: Bienvenido Santos' *Villa Magdalena*, 1965, *The Volcano*, 1965, *The Praying Man*, 1982; N.V.M. Gonzalez's *Season of Grace*, 1956, and *The Bamboo Dancers*, 1959; Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, 1961; F. Sionil Jose's—*The Pretenders*, 1962, *Mass*, 1983, *Tree*, 1978, and *Po-on*, 1984; Edith Tiempo's *His Native Coast*, 1975, and *A Blade of Fern*, 1956; Edilberto Tiempo's *To Be Free*, 1972; Stevan Javellana's *Without Seeing the Dawn*, 1947; Linda Ty-Casper's *The Peninsulars*, 1964, *Awaiting Trespass*, 1985, *Wings of Stone*, 1990; and others. To the roster have more recently been added Yuson's *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café*, 1987; Gamalinda's *Planet Waves*, 1989, *Confessions of a Volcano*, 1990, and *The Empire of Memory*, 1992; Asundon Grajo Uianza's *Bamboo in the Wind*, 1990; Edith Tiempo's *The Alien Corn*, 1992; Lina Espina-Moore's *The Honey*, *The Locusts*, 1992; Erwin Castillo's *The Firewalkers*, 1992; Ninotchka Rosca's *State of War*, 1988, and *Twice Blessed*, 1992; Jessica Hagedorn's *Dog Eaters*, 1990, and Jose Y. Dalisay's *Killing Time in a Warm Place*, 1992. The varied forms of these last additions have ranged from the traditional renditions of story, history and memory, to genre-expanding, convention-breaking tales, and show the liveliness of the form, and the surety that no final statements can yet be made about the Filipino novel in English.

The essay is alive and lively in the newspapers and magazines, and in collections like Carmen Guerrero Nakpil's *The Philippines*, 1989, Yuson's *Confessions of a Q.C. House-Husband*, 1991; Conrado de Quiros' *Flowers From the Rubble*, 1990; Salanga's *A Personal Chronicle*, 1991; and Nick Joaquin's *Culture and History*, 1988, and his Quijano de Manila (his journalistic pseudonym) books like *Reportage on Politics and Other Essays*, *Language of the Street and Other Essays*, 1980. In recognition of this, the Palanca Awards Committee has in the last decade awarded prizes for informal and formal essays.

Manila is not the center of writing in English, although it is the center of publication for it. Rosca, Hagedorn, Viray, Angeles, Luis Francia, Marianne Villanueva (*Ginseng and Other Tales*, 1991,) and Cabalquinto write in the United States. Antonio Enriquez writes fiction in Cagayan de Oro; Tita Lacambra-Ayala writes her poems, and Jose Ayala his stories in Davao (their son Joey Ayala wrote stories in English, but is better known for his songs in Filipino); Elsa Martinez Coscolluela, one of the few practicing playwrights in English, writes in Bacolod; Ma. Luisa Aguilar-Cariño writes and teaches in Baguio; the Tiempos are Dumaguete based, but may soon be writing from the United States, with daughter Rowena; Lina Espina Moore's base is Cebu.

What then are the fruits of eight decades of Philippine writing in English? Certainly a harvest of poems, short stories, essays and novels more bountiful than in any other country in which English is a second language, except perhaps India. Definitely an elaboration of the forms of literature, for although the original and continuing models are largely from Anglo-American sources, these have been cross-pollinated by Asian and native forms—the *haiku*, the *tanaga*, the *pasyon*, the *awit* and *korido*, the *sarswela* and *komedyang*, the *bugtong* and *balagtasan*— in

ways obvious and hidden.

Part of the harvest is a lively book trade. Despite the economic crisis, books are published by large and small presses, in ways peculiar and special to a developing country. Paper being locally the most expensive element in the publication process, all kinds of paper are used—kraft, newsprint, handmade, trimmings, surpluses—in small runs that would be thought uneconomical and impractical in other countries. Textbooks are no longer dependent on foreign sources, but are filled with local works.

Because of the language, books in English circulate principally to schools and to the educated elite. There is no popular market for writing in English, because the local romances, which proliferate in bookstores, rental outlets, newspaper and market stalls, are being written in Filipino.

The kernel of the harvest, however, after the winnowing and the bundling of sheaves, is this literature. Its germ is Philippine reality, as rendered in this alien language adopted and adapted through history. Certainly it is in a Filipino English or, as Abad puts it, a language from English—“found (reinvested from a given natural language) to establish its forms/in our imagination”(1989:2-3). It is English as no other national would use it, having been given its shape by the effort to bend it around a culture not native to it, but to another language. If, as Calalang found, it was not suitable for the rendering of some elements of Philippine life, e.g., flora, fauna, food, then the English writer turned to those elements that were suitably rendered—and that became the subject matter of Philippine writing in English. Certainly it has been suitable for the experience of the educated, the urbanized, the exiled, and the alienated. It is effective in the analysis and criticism of modern living. It is the language of access to global experience, and also the language with which the world outside can have access to our inner world.

As British English has changed with the Empire writing back, so has American English changed, with its former colony writing back. And so have American perceptions of the countries’ mutual experience—the Filipino-American years and relations—changed, with the ex-colonials talking back.

The current emphasis on the teaching of the national language, its use in government, media and art, has caused Philippine writing in the vernacular to develop as it should have done long ago. It has not, however, reduced the audience for writing in English, for this remains what it always was—the educated elite, who speak and live the language. It has, however, made sure that all, especially those who do not have access to English, have access to Philippine language and literature and thought.

The writers in English continue to have their place in the Philippine sun. Although their writings cannot reach the mass majority or influence their thinking, they are anthologized, published in textbooks, the national newspapers and

popular magazines, collected into volumes, encouraged by grants, workshops, courses, forums, symposia, and critical attention. They also and more importantly feed and develop the minds of the young writers who will take their place someday. • D.G. Fernandez

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