

THE LITERATURE OF THE FILIPINOS

Leopoldo Y. Yabes

Part II

IV. American Colonial

A number of interesting works depict the Filipino society in transition from the late Spanish colonial to the early and middle American colonial regime. Among them are Claro Recto's "Solo Entre las Sombras", Nick Joaquin's "La Vidal", Paz Marquez's "Dead Stars", Wilfrido Guerrero's "The Old Teacher", and Kalaw's *The Filipino Rebel*. As would be expected the authors are inclined to be more sympathetic to the previous than to the existing regime. Joaquin is more hostile to the existing regime than any of the more competent writers. "La Vidal" is the sto-

ry of the degeneration of a well-born, conventbred woman who originally married a poet of the Revolution and who ended up marrying the unscrupulous physician, a product of the American regime, who had practised abortion on her as a result of her love affair with a man after the death of her first husband. The portrait of La Vidal, the woman, is quite unflattering. "Solo Entre las Sombras" is also the story of two sisters, the older belonging to the Spanish-educated generation, who find themselves in love with the same man, who is married to the older sister. The more aggres-

sive and unscrupulous of the two, the younger sister bears a child of the brother-in-law. The revelation is too much for the older girl and she dies from shock, leaving her husband and her sister to suffer the consequences of their crime, which is considered as very grievous. "Dead Stars" is a quiet picture of the quiet but relentless change in the cultural milieu taking place in the early third decade of the century. "The Old Teacher" is the story of an old classroom science teacher at the University of Sto. Tomas who uses both Spanish and English as languages of instruction. Educated in Spanish he is not quite at home in English, but he has to use the language once in a while because the young generation in the colleges and universities had been brought up in English. *The Filipino Rebel*, a longer work, gives a more detailed picture of the conflict between the passing and the up-and-coming generations.

One cannot escape noticing, however, that the American democratic tradition was slowly permeating Philippine society as reflected in the writings of the younger artists during the third decade. The tradition-bound society at the turn of the century has been transformed into the

freer society found in many of the stories of Casiano T. Calalang, Arturo B. Rotor, A.E. Litiatco, Fernando Leño, Loreto Paras, Paz Latorena, Jose Garcia Villa, and Salvador P. Lopez, and in some of the dramas written by Carlos P. Romulo, Jorge Bocobo, Buenaventura Rodriguez, and Vidal A. Tan before the close of the third decade. This note of freedom became more evident during the later years of the American colonial regime and during the early years of the Commonwealth. The impact of American democracy and technology was felt in all segments of society but particularly those that had gone to school under the American-built Philippine educational system. As might be expected, most of the leadership of this movement came from the University of the Philippines, the capstone of that educational system.

V. *Late American Colonial and Commonwealth*

This covers the last years of the American colonial regime, the establishment of the Commonwealth, and the outbreak of the war, when there was a resurgence of nationalism. This period may be traced to the beginning of the American business depression and the passage, largely be-

cause of pressure from economic groups adversely affected by Philippine products entering the American market free of duty, of the law by the American Congress granting independence to the Philippines after a ten-year transition period. Of course it should end around the year of Philippine independence.

This was an era that began with hopes for the new independent nation that was a-building, despite the worldwide business depression which ushered in the Hitler regime, and wound up in the maelstrom of war. It was a great era for the Filipinos both as individual members of the national community and as the national community themselves.

Two representative works in the earlier part of this period were Salvador P. Lopez's *Literature and Society* (1940) and R. Zulueta da Costa's *Like the Molave* (1940). Although critical of the faults and shortcomings of their own people, both young men expressed faith in their people's ability to build a strong independent nation. One of them dreamed of "gods walking on brown legs". The other did not believe merely in aestheticism but in full-blooded proletarian literature.

Both of these works won major prizes in the Commonwealth literary contests which were established in 1939 by President Manuel L. Quezon upon the strong recommendation of the Philippine Writers' League, to promote the development of literature in English, Tagalog, and Spanish, which derives its importance from its treatment of socially significant problems. There was heated controversy over this avowed objective of the Writers' League. This quarrel raged for more than two years, and was put to a stop only after the awarding of the prizes in the second year of the contests, when the Japanese attacked the Philippines in December 1941. That attack was the most cogent argument for the stand of the League.

Carlos Bulosan's *The Laughter of My Father* (1944) is a burlesque on Philippine small-town and country life during the early years of the period. But his *America is in the Heart* (1946), although it begins as a picture of poverty and social degradation in both the Philippines and the American west coast, ends on a note of faith in American democracy as a result of the heroic performance of the Filipino and American soldiers in the Battle of Bataan. Juan

C. Laya's *His Native Soil* (1941) is the story of a Filipino repatriate from America who, after being told his further stay in America was no longer welcome, could not adjust himself in the society to which he had returned. It is not an inspiring picture of pre-war Philippine society in a small provincial town. His next novel, *This Barangay* (1950), however, which is about life in wartime Philippines, is a reaffirmation of faith in a better future for the country because of the war and enemy occupation.

Three other novels about the war strike the same note of faith in freedom and democracy as a way of life for the Philippines. Javellana's *Without Seeing the Dawn* (1947), as the title indicates, is an eloquent affirmation of that faith. It shows most elements of the population as contributing their little bit for the liberation of the country from the invaders, including even the prostitute who did service to the Japanese soldiers in the hope that her disease would be contracted by the enemy soldiers. E. K. Tiempo's *Watch in the Night* (1953) and *More Than Conquerors* (1959), especially the latter, echo the same note as Javellana's novel. The spirit shown by the conquered in

the latter novel was more indomitable than that of the conquerors. The leading woman in the story, who is the mistress of a Japanese officer, makes possible the freedom of a Filipino prisoner who had been condemned to death, at the cost of her own life.

Although not written in the same vein, Nick Joaquin's *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* (1952) is nevertheless a glorification of the Old City of Manila, and all that it stood for, which had been destroyed by the war. It is a picture of the pre-war Walled City — especially of a Catholic family and its head, the artist, who refused to compromise his own integrity as a Filipino and as an artist for greater affluence.

VI. National and Contemporary

The national scene since 1946 has not been very clear; in certain areas it is quite confused. The development of the Filipino nation-state since its establishment has not been very steady; in fact it has been reflected in much of the literature produced. Only a few of the representative works of this period can be discussed here.

Rigodon (1956), a full-length play by A. O. Bayot,

gives a picture of the rich land-owning and globe-trotting class of our society. The main woman-character, however, is given a social conscience and rebels against her own class. Although dealing with an aspect of Philippine-American relations during the war years and a little after, *You Lovely People* (1955), by B. N. Santos, will hold more significance during the present period because of the as yet unremoved irritants in Philippine-American relations. In *La Via: A Spiritual Journey* (1958), Ricaredo Demetillo points out the way to spiritual bliss from the spiritual morass of the present, not through asceticism or mortification of the flesh but through the proper exercise of the psychosomatic functions of the body. "We have begun to see authoritatively," the poet says in his preface, "that nature herself has set up sex as the amative bath to invigorate the human psycho, a reservoir which can last almost indefinitely unless its sources are dammed up by fears and guilts." It ends with a beautiful because positive and harmonious song to the "Lady," a goddess of beauty and begetter of gods and poetry. "Fairy Tale for a City" by Estrella Alfon seems to have a theme simi-

lar to that of *La Via*, but the voyager fails to attain bliss at the end of the voyage and discovers, to his dismay, spiritual hypocrisy instead.

The Women Who Had Two Navels (1951), another of Nick Joaquin's pieces indicting Filipino society of the present, describes the *sub-rosa* activities of two Filipino women commuting between Manila and Hongkong in the post-war years. A story depicting sordid life, it leaves one with a feeling of puzzlement that there could be such a Manila as pictured by Joaquin, a city of dirt and slime — a veritable human wasteland. N. V. M. Gonzalez's latest novel, *The Bamboo Dancers* (1959), also pictures Filipinos in relation to other peoples, a broader subject matter than that dealt in his previous novels. The action involves America, Japan, and the Philippines, and the characters include Filipinos, Japanese, and Americans. As the title itself indicates, the novel seems to be symbolic of the opportunism of present-day Filipino society. Like the skillful bamboo dancers, the Filipino's main ambition seems to be to get along cleverly and well in life and his chief concern is not to get caught in the toils of the law.

VII. *The Past Few Years*

Notwithstanding the obvious lack of a sense of direction in creative work during recent years, there has been much productive activity nevertheless, especially during 1960. And that is what seems important — to be productive. Sooner or later the writers will find their own bearings and feel a new sense of direction. A self-respecting independent people will rediscover their own integrity as a people and this discovery will inspire the birth of a new literature, which will be a faithful expression of a reinvigorated national soul. There has been a perceptible trend toward such a direction. The Republic Cultural Heritage Awards could be a sign of such a reawakening to the possibilities of the future on the basis of the national heritage.

The promotional aspect of this literary movement has been reenforced during the past year. In addition to the Palanca memorial, Free Press, and Zobel awards in literature and the Standard Vacuum Awards in journalism, there is now the Stonehill fellowship award for the novel in English, sponsored by the Philippines Center of PEN International. The University of the Philippines for its own

part held literary contests in the novel, drama, poetry, and short story in connection with its golden jubilee. And of course there was the first post-war National Writers' Conference held in Baguio late in 1958 under the auspices of the Philippine Center of PEN International. Modestly, it can be claimed that that conference had a catalyzing effect on the writers, not necessarily towards a more intense nationalist direction, but certainly towards more intense creative activity. Also, the visit of such great international figures like the philosophers Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Sidney Hook and of such lesser lights as Edmundo Blunden, James Saxon Childers and Hortense Calisher could not but have stimulated more intellectual and creative activity.

Therefore there is hope of more and better literary production in the near future.

VIII. *Some Observations*

As an expression of the experience of the Filipino people through the centuries, Philippine literature, as roughly outlined in this short study, constitutes a rich source of material for the study of a variegated culture with great potentials for de-

velopment. As a result of acculturation to more advanced cultures of both East and West, the culture of the Philippines today represents a unique product of the blending of basic Oriental traits and assimilated Western elements. Although still retaining many of the characteristics of the Oriental "status" society, the Filipino people are slowly emerging into the essentially "contractual" society of the modern Occident. The society described in *Bantugan* and *Maragtas* is different from the society pictured in *Noli Me Tangere* and *Urbana at Felisa*, while the society pictured in the later works is quite different from the society that constitutes

the matrix of *Without Seeing the Dawn* and *Rigodon*. There is definitely more freedom in the later than in the earlier Philippine societies, even if the basic factors are not changed.

With the cultural influences now at work, which are reflected in contemporary Philippine writing, it should not be difficult to evolve in the Philippines a new and vigorous cultural system that will embody in itself the choicest elements of both the Western and Eastern cultural traditions. A cultural system of this kind should be in a good position to contribute to peace, understanding, and goodwill among the peoples of the world.

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LAUNDRY-DRYING IN THE ROOM

The washing needs no longer to be hanged out on the line. An electric dryer will dry it conveniently inside the room. The Francksche Eisenwerke Company of Adolfshutte-Dillenburg in Hesse makes an "Oranier" Laundry Dryer, a small white box with six bars over which the laundry is hanged. Drying requires from 30 to 90 minutes according to the type and wetness of the washing. An electric blower drives warm air of 60 degree centigrade from top to bottom. The dryer is mobile with wheels, and it can be used for heating the room also. It takes a charge of 10 lbs., including nylon and perlon.