

Arts and Letters

by Jose A. Lansang

A DISTINCTION needs to be made at the start. The writer who is cognizant of the social functions of literature and art is not exactly the same as the writer who is conscious of the organic relationship that should exist between literature and national growth. Better yet, one must distinguish between literature and art which have social functions and literature and art that have pertinence and significance to national growth. To fix in the mind in concrete terms what is meant here, let us consider that *Ivanhoe*, for instance, or *Treasure Island*, or *Hamlet*, or to come down to recent headlines, Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* represents literature which has important social func-

tions; it entertains, it ennobles, it deepens one's understanding of the appetites, the aspirations and daydreams, the personal problems of certain characters in the story, which is to say, more or less, in relation to the society in which the characters live.

The literature, on the other hand, which has relevance to what, in contemporary language, we call national growth is easily recognizable as rather much different from the works that have just been cited. Dickens' novels depicting the exploitation and degradation of adult and child workers in the early decades of the English factory system, the essay of Emerson entitled *The American Scholar*, some stories of the

French writer Alphonse Daudet, and certain novels of our own foremost literary figure, Jose Rizal, come readily to mind when one thinks of literature that has importance to the concept of national growth. In the novels of Dickens alluded to, one feels the growing pains, as it were, of British industrial greatness; in Emerson's essay which has been called "the American declaration of cultural independence," one thrills to the conscious assertion of a distinctive national purpose by the American poet-philosopher; in Daudet's stories, one catches a little of the passion of many Frenchmen for national greatness which, it may be noted, is the reported obsession of Charles de Gaulle today; in the Zola works meant here, like *Germinal* or *The Debacle*, the memorable point made is that perversities of human passions, especially among the leaders of a society, can and do undermine the forces that make for healthy national growth; and, of course, in Rizal's *Noli* and *Fili*, unique among the literature of nations, one finds a rigorous and noble self-examination and self-criticism, "sacrificing everything in the interest of truth, including self-pride itself," in order to bring forth the primary essentials a nation must have in order to begin to grow.

NOW, IF THE state and private institutions are to encourage the arts—and the arts, as used here, obviously include literature—and since the theme of this conference is "The Filipino Writer and National Growth," then the kind of literature I have just cited is the kind our writers today should be encouraged to emulate. What kind of literature the state and private institutions should encourage twenty or fifty years from now on may be left to future speakers in future conferences of this sort to determine. For the here and now the kind of writing which should be encouraged, whether in English or in Tagalog, should be that which has pertinence and relevance to our problems of national growth. This is not to bend the neck of literature to the yoke of a particular purpose. To change metaphor, this is not to open the floodgates to the unsettling and destructive waters of propaganda. This is merely to render sensible and humble obeisance to the established relation between literature and life, or as some would prefer to put it, between life and literature.

[Life today in the Philippines is, as undoubtedly it also is elsewhere, hard pressed but full of expectations. It is harassed precisely by problems of national growth and problems of adjustment to an international order

that has changed much from what it was when today's 30-year-olds were young; and which is changing with a dizzying pace from year to year, even from month to month. The problems of growth are stark, unrelenting, and clamorous. The population increases with the regularity of the tides, the expansion of the means of subsistence lags far behind, per capita income is chronically low, unemployment is increasing by the month, and all essential services from telephones to barrio roads and schools have long been outstripped by the surge forward of population growth and of hopes and desires for a better life. Discontent and confusion are naturally rife, though a stubborn hope that something could be done to improve matters persists in the breasts of more and more Filipinos who have begun, or are beginning, to look at reality with more wide-open eyes and, perhaps, clearer understanding. It is beginning to be seen by many Filipinos that widespread poverty exists in their midst because their country is undeveloped economically. It is beginning to be understood likewise by an increasing number of Filipinos that their country, with its rich and varied natural resources, remains undeveloped and poor in terms of per capita income and genuine material and cultural progress because the nation, as a whole, has

not completely shaken off its colonial habits of thinking and of doing things which naturally developed during four centuries of subjection by Western peoples. Thus, it became inevitable that the great awakening now taking place among Filipinos concerns the reassertion of their nationalism, the increasingly firm determination to shake off colonial habits of thinking and of doing. Like all other peoples that are newly sovereign, Filipinos now want to practice and live by the principles of self-determination which, ahead of them by centuries, Western sovereign peoples have practised and lived by, with great benefits to such Western peoples in terms of material and cultural progress.

THE QUESTION to ask at this point is: What is meant by national growth? And what aspects of the problem of achieving it have pertinent relations with art and literature? The substance of national growth is economic development and cultural progress. When one speaks, therefore, of the relation between the Filipino writer and national growth, one actually speaks of the relation between the Filipino writer and the problems of economic development in the Philippines today with which Filipino artistic or literary work may have, or must have, some connection or

relation. The answer to the question, though rather a complex one, may be simplified by going to the core of the problem of economic development itself. It may be said, I believe, with fidelity to known facts, that the major obstacles to economic development and cultural progress in the Philippines today are two. First, the overwhelming dominance of alien interests in the national economy, and second, the prevailing lack of knowledge and understanding among Filipinos of the necessary measures and policies, or pattern of citizen behavior, which could be adopted by them in order to correct that anomalous situation. Figures released by a research team of the National Economic Council only a couple of weeks ago revealed starkly how disproportionately large alien interests are in the Philippine economy. In round figures, the research team said, about 80% of the country's foreign trade was dominated by aliens, and about 70% of domestic commerce was similarly controlled. Now, from various Filipino quarters have come all sorts of suggestions and proposals on how this foreign dominance over the economy may be corrected, and the very variety of the correctives offered, some of which indeed are contradictory to one another, is striking evidence of the general lack of knowledge and understanding of the mea-

asures which, with fairness and justice to all concerned, could and must be undertaken in order to reduce effectually the control of foreign elements over Philippine economic life.

Remembering at this juncture De Quincey's well-known differentiation between what he called "the literature of knowledge and the literature of power," I may say that both the state and private institutions in the Philippines today should encourage and support the production of more Filipino writing which serves to inform truthfully and objectively, as well as comprehensively, on the intimate and complex relations between economic activities and interests on the one hand and social and cultural development on the other. Through such writing, more Filipinos will in time acquire sufficient knowledge of a few fundamentals, which are commonplace in the science of economics, such, for instance, as the elementary fact that a predominantly merchandising economy, together with a high consumption tendency, must remain unbalanced because basic production activities are not sufficiently profitable in such a type of economy. But, too, what De Quincey meant by what he called "the literature of power" needs to be encouraged and supported also by the state and private institutions because this is the literature

which enlightens the emotions and moves the wills of men. In short, there must be more Filipino writing which serves to increase our people's knowledge of the nature of their economic and social problems and difficulties, and at the same time, also more Filipino art and literary efforts along lines of what de Quincey called "the literature of power," for it is this which could generate or inspire the emotional and volitional drives that are necessary so that the Filipinos, after getting to understand various aspects of the problem of national growth, may have the will and the determination to undertake those necessary measures and undergo the requisite self-discipline which could bring about their true economic development and cultural progress.

IT IS ONE thing, however, to say that the state and private institutions should encourage certain lines of art and literary efforts and productions and entirely another thing to expect that such kinds of efforts and productions would, in fact, be encouraged and actually attempted and their cautious maneuvers to reduce the dominance of foreign interests over their respective national economies. It may be noted, at this point, that perhaps the most relevant force for closer friendship and understanding be-

tween Filipinos and Indonesians has been the revelation made by President Sukarno himself during a visit to this country some years ago that the life and writings of our Jose Rizal, the very specimens of literature of national growth mentioned earlier in this paper, were required studies in the schools in Indonesia. In other words, Filipinos and Indonesians may come to know and understand each other's native dances and songs quite well, but that would not necessarily make them mutually loyal friends. Rather, it is common knowledge of a literature of national self-criticism and of protest and dignified fulmination against the abuses of foreign interlopers, such as Rizal essayed in his writings, which can create binding friendship and genuine mutual sympathy between the Indonesian and the Filipino. It is pertinent, likewise, to note that Rizal succeeded in writing important specimens of both "the literature of knowledge" and the "literature of power," in accordance with De Quincey's definitions, and such writings have demonstrated their validity and efficacy not only in increasing the Filipinos' national consciousness, and perhaps also the Indonesians' own national consciousness, but also—and this is most relevant to the argument of this paper—in increasing solid foundations of mutual understanding between the

Indonesians and Filipinos. If, then, the state as well as important private institutions in the Philippines truly desire—as they profess to desire—a genuine development of understanding and cultural closeness among neighbors, it should certainly be consistent and logical for them to encourage and support, nay, actively sponsor, the production or writing by Filipino artists and literary men of the kind of arts and letters that can be effectively promotive of such understanding. And the works of Rizal can well serve as among the models for such efforts.

THE SECOND of the compelling forces that virtually demand state as well as private institutional encouragement of the kind of art and letters I have cited is the drive which all advanced democratic countries today pursue, the drive to readjust the traditional institutions of democracy to the demands and unprecedented requirements of the space age. One notes, for instance, in America a frantic overhauling of educational practices and postulates, in England a vigorous campaign to re-establish the free trade system of an earlier time, in France drastic constitutional reforms which resulted in the emasculation of parliamentary powers. This is not exactly a sign that democracy as a system and a way of

life is facing a crisis, but it surely indicates that important readjustments are being made in its traditional institutions and practices, all because of the challenge of the Soviet system thrown in all undertaken. On the one hand, the state and private institutions must first have compelling motivation and justification for giving support and encouragement to the kind of art and literary efforts desired and, on the other hand, the artists and writers themselves must also derive strong inspiration from some compelling source which would move them into attempting and executing artistic and literary works of the kind, or along lines deemed to be relevant and useful to national growth. Fortunately, one may note, there are compelling forces in our society today, as there undoubtedly are in other societies similar to ours, which demand that state and affluent private institutions alike promote arts and letters of the type suggested here for encouragement. There are at least two distinct forces which one may note offhand. One is the natural drive today among neighbor nations, especially if they be of similar economic and political predilections, to cultivate closer cultural relations and mutual understanding. With the annihilation of space and time by present-day electronic communications and jet transport facilities,

closer and mutual understanding among nations has become indispensable to the progress, the prosperity, and the security of each. It is the same force which compels all peoples to prepare themselves for an international order which can only prosper and become stabilized through a reduction of all causes of serious suspicions and misunderstandings. For the Filipinos at present, one of the urgent imperatives in their national life is the development, as rapidly as they can manage to attain it, of closer and mutual understandings with neighbor peoples in Asia. When and as they do begin to act seriously and constructively in pursuance of the dictates of such an imperative, they will naturally find perhaps that the principal avenues towards mutual understanding lie precisely along the massive similarity of the problems of national growth, which all of them individually as nations have been wrestling with since the return of their independent sovereignties. The Filipino and the Indian, just as the Indian and the Indonesian, or the Burmese and the Filipino, can best promote mutual closeness and understanding among themselves on the basis of increased knowledge about each other's particular difficulties in the struggle for progress and growth. It may also be observed that perhaps it is not mutual

knowledge and understanding between, say, Filipinos and Ceylonese, of their respective traditional dances and ancient tribal songs which will truly bring them closer as friends, but rather a mutual appreciation and thorough knowledge of the problems and difficulties now being experienced by these peoples, first, in their parallel efforts to achieve national homogeneous cultural integration; second, in their similar aspirations to derive better returns in the world market for their copra and coconut oil, and third, in fields to the older and, until recently, dominant world powers. Now, then, a deeper understanding on the part of Filipinos of the reasons for, as well as the nature of, such readjustments which are being made in the traditional institutions of older democracies should at least be of important and urgent concern to both state and private institutions in our country. And how may the people attain that deeper understanding unless more and more works by Filipino writers of the type that belongs to "the literature of knowledge" and dealing with such readjustments are produced in abundance, with competence and analytical power? To put the matter in another way, one may say that for the preservation and invigoration of the democratic system itself, both the state and private institutions must

actively concern themselves with the promotion of "the literature of knowledge," because it is this type of literature which can most speedily increase popular understanding of the issues on which freedom itself is fighting for survival.

There remains to consider now the possible source of inspiration for Filipino artists and writers. The state and private institutions may be disposed to provide support and encouragement for the creation of certain kinds of artistic and literary works, but what if the artists and literary men themselves lack the inspiration to produce such works? In the view of this observer, one of the strongest sources of inspiration for artists and writers is nationalism. I may even hazard the surmise that perhaps most Filipino works of art and literature in recent decades lack the vigor of originality and the polish of conscientious craftsmanship because it is only recently that Filipino nationalism has begun to reawaken. At any rate, a casual look at the history of the literature of England, France, Russia, the United States and our own would indicate that many of the masterpieces produced by these nations are not only infused with the nationalistic spirit, but were created during periods of high national pride and confidence, which are important ingredients

of what we call nationalism. One need not dwell on the masterpieces produced during what have been called "the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth" or on the almost chauvinistic literature of the long self-confident period of Queen Victoria or on the passionate love for France and all things French that shines forth from most French literary masterpieces. It would be more striking and more instructive to consider perhaps that one of the lasting impressions one gets after reading Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is that of the mystic indestructibility of Russia, which the great novelist somehow managed to convey, because obviously such was his nationalistic faith. I mentioned casually Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* earlier. If one ponders on the merits of this work, what comes off as the work's most outstanding attribute? In the view of this reader, though his perusal was hurried and inattentive, it is the Russian author's obvious deep pride in the Russia that was, and his passionate concern over the ultimate fate of the Russian people and their traditional values that give the novel its power and strongest appeal. In other words, it is the nationalism of Pasternak, rather than his acid observations against the mores of collectivism, which gives weight and substance to this particular work of his.

The validity of nationalism indeed as a protean source of inspiration for art and literary masterpieces may be elaborated upon at length, but this is neither the occasion nor the time for it. The only question which needs to be asked finally is: Assuming nationalism to be a powerful motivation for the artist's and the writer's work, will its inspiration necessarily bring forth "the literature of knowledge" and "the literature of power" which are most pertinent and relevant to the problems of national growth? The answer, I am sure, is yes. For the truest and greatest force of enlightenment and understanding

is always love for freedom and love for one's own people and land is the simplest, though the largest, element of nationalism. In sum, then, the state and private institutions in the Philippines today would do well to support and encourage, simply and forthrightly, but to the utmost of their resources available for the purpose, the production of nationalistic arts and letters. The Filipino writer and national growth can only become most meaningful to each other in the inspiring, many-colored light of nationalism. So, at least, I believe.

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Me, First

Two Texans visiting California soon vied with each other in the novel ways of spending their money to make an impression. After several rounds of gala entertainment, one suggested: "Let's take a taxi from Hollywood to New York City." The other agreed immediately. They hailed a cab and said, "Take us to New York City." As they started into the cab, one Texan said: "Let me in first—I'm getting off at Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street."

Poor Luck

A pair of Texas ranchers were riding the range when they stopped for a bit of chow. As one cleared some ground for a fire, he scraped the sod back from what turned out to be a rich deposit of gold. "Clem," remarked the other, "we better remember this place in case the price of cattle goes down."