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A Hundred Years after the *Noli*: The Three Centennial Novels in English

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The three novels in English that won in the Centennial Literary Contest are very different in their approaches to imagining the nation. And yet, in some of the most important aspects of constructing a narrative of the nation, they stand in very much the same position in relation to its colonial experience. The importance of narratives in understanding current attitudes about the Philippine experience makes it imperative that these three valorized novels are studied closely and as a set. This paper argues that these novels fail to liberate for they adopt a cavalier attitude towards history and fall prey to the cultural logic of late capitalism.

Keywords: narrative, (post)colonial literature, Philippine history, state, late capitalism, centennial novels

Surely the idea that literature is important to the formation of a nation was what prompted the Estrada administration to sponsor a one-of-a-kind literary contest to celebrate the centennial of Philippine independence from Spain. The large cash prizes alone in this cash-starved nation, a million pesos for the first prize winners of the different divisions, should be enough indication of the importance of literature to the country, at least in the minds of some government bureaucrats and functionaries, or perhaps more accurately, the importance of being perceived a patron of Philippine literature, thus being a patron of the heroic, of the novelist José Rizal. Philippine national consciousness in its crucial beginnings had Rizal's novels to help Filipinos imagine themselves as a community

(Anderson 2003, 26–27). After all, how many countries in the world can boast of a novelist for a national hero? We are probably the only one. Whatever is said about Rizal’s attitude towards revolution, “it is impossible to read *Noli me tangere* today in the way a patriotic young Manileño of 1897 would have read it: as a political hand-grenade” (Anderson, 2004, 232). Even if the *Noli* is read differently today, Resil B. Mojares (1998, 140–41) is correct in saying that Rizal’s novels “remain to date the most important literary work produced by a Filipino writer, animating Filipino consciousness to this day, setting standards no Filipino writer can ignore.”

The four novels—by Eric Gamalinda, Charlson Ong, Alfred Yuson, and Azucena Grajo Uranza—that won the 1998 literary shebang show many traces of Rizal’s *Noli*. Nevertheless, the novels of the first three authors—I concentrate on their work because these authors had attained canonical status in Philippine literature long before the Centennial Literary Contest was held—do not have the strong sense of history of Rizal’s novels. The three Centennial novels approach the theme of the contest in very different ways, yet with the question of how to portray the Philippine colonial experience, Gamalinda degrades the Filipino, Ong avoids the issue altogether, while Yuson tries to put a positive spin on the whole imperial project. Although the novels won in a contest meant to celebrate the centennial of Philippine independence from colonial rule (a timeline that is also problematic in that nearly half of that centennial the country was under direct American tutelage), there is much to be desired in their use of Philippine history. In fact, they have only cut and pasted certain historical moments, and have ignored history altogether. This is probably what is meant by our living in “an age that is at one and the same time profoundly ahistorical and avid for historical narratives and

narrative reinterpretation of all kinds—an appetite, as it were, for poststructural gossip (including the newer histories) that is something like a compensation for the weightlessness of a fall out of history unlikely to last long” (Jameson 2000, 3–4).

These are novels that the authors themselves have embedded in the narrative of nation. One should think that, all the more, they cannot escape history. As it turns out, the writers do as they please with the history of the Philippine colonial experience, the single most intense and longest collective experience of the nation. This attitude is due to what Fredric Jameson defines as a certain kind of postmodernism or, more aptly, the cultural logic of late capitalism. Jameson (1999, 18) argues that the age of late capitalism, or the age of multinational capitalism, or what we have come to call globalization, involves a commodification of everything. Since multinational capitalism has become so fluid, respecting no borders or laws, the system supports the relativism that a certain kind of postmodernism is pursuing:

The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time. The past is thereby itself modified: what was once, in the historical novel as Lukács defines it, the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project—what is still, for the redemptive historiography of an E.P. Thompson or of American “oral history,” for the resurrection of the dead of anonymous and silenced generations, the retrospective dimension indispensable to any vital reorientation of our collective future—has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum. Guy Debord’s powerful slogan is now even more apt for the “prehistory” of a society bereft of all historicity, one whose own putative past is little more than a set of dusty spectacles. In faithful conformity to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as “referent” finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us nothing but texts.

The Centennial Literary Contest

We must remember that the Centennial Literary Contest was initiated by the Estrada administration in the first year of its assumption to power, and that the

government of Fidel Ramos had just left the scene trumpeting its success in hosting the APEC Summit in Subic and the ascension of the Philippines to the global stage with the signing of the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade. Although the Asian financial crisis had begun to plague the economy in the last year of the Ramos government, there was still no clear understanding at that time of the full devastation globalization was to bring to Third World countries like the Philippines.

As much as the state has always used literature and the arts as either deodorant (Marcos with the Cultural Center of the Philippines) or furniture (Ramos with the revival of the National Artist Award) in crafting their narrative of the state, this contest is a mere bow in the direction of Rizal. There is not any single event in Philippine history, since the time of Quezon, when the state has shown itself to be taking literature seriously. The only rulers in the Philippines who took literature seriously, too seriously, were the Spanish civil authorities and the Spanish friars during the time of Rizal. Quezon himself found it necessary to sponsor the Commonwealth Literary Prize after being prodded by writers and their patrons, using the rationale of heralding the beginning of the project of nation and to enact a provision of the constitution that mandated the government to encourage the arts (Agoncillo 1990, 216). Estrada was also prodded by writers and their patrons, principally Blas Ople, to continue the Ramos centennial project with a literary contest.

What is noteworthy is that, just before the so-called Asian economic crisis, which began in 1997, there was an illusion that globalization was working for the Philippines. In fact, the speech of then President Fidel V. Ramos (1996, 2) on 12 June 1995¹ commemorating the ninety-seventh anniversary of Independence Day, at the Quirino Grandstand, is entitled “Our time has come”:

My beloved countrymen: I am confident that, finally, our turn has come to rise as a dynamic and progressive country in the Asia-Pacific region.

Over the past decade, we have seen many of our neighbors rise one after the other to take their place in the ranks of the newly industrializing countries.

Now, I say to all: Our time has come.

At that time of Ramos' speech, the Philippine economy was being floated by a highly speculative stock market, and this casino-like economy would peak with Estrada's BW stock market scandal, which would loot billions of pesos from thousands of big and small-time investors. The consumerist ethos of anything goes so long as there is something of value to be sold and bought, whether money or land or talent, was reaching its peak during the August 1998 awards night of the Centennial Literary Contest. People were investing money in the stock market, like Manila Mining during Ramos's time and BW Resources during Estrada's time, and reaping as high as 1000 percent in just a few weeks. The series of bankruptcies hitting the papers were thought of as mere blips on the radar screen of global capitalism.

When Estrada agreed to the Centennial Literary Contest, there was much optimism that the boom days would be back soon. The first time such a large-scale literary contest was held was in 1940 during the Commonwealth period of Manuel L. Quezon. But there is an important difference between the Quezon and Estrada governments: the former was operating with a budget surplus (Ybiernas 2003), while the latter was operating with a huge budget deficit. During the Commonwealth years, Philippine goods still entered the United States without tariffs. This difference is instructive in showing us how the economies of the two eras affected the canonical literature produced during those times. Although the Philippines was a colony of the

United States during the Commonwealth period, I would argue that our cultural production showed its semiautonomous character from the colonizer precisely because the poverty and destruction was only later to start full speed with the Second World War. Thus, it was possible for Filipinos to think of a truly independent Philippines, even if images of poverty had also begun to make their appearance in works like H.R. Ocampo's oil on canvas called "The Contrast" (1940).

The onset of globalization that began after the Second World War gradually depleted that semiautonomy until full globalization, or late capitalism, got a firm grip of the Philippines. Before the war, the Philippines enjoyed a trade balance with the United States, which set up the country's total dependency to the latter, although this fact would not be revealed until after the war (Agoncillo 1990, 349–70). Of course, Jose Garcia Villa, the arbiter of taste at the time of the Commonwealth days, is the best proof that the ideology of separating literature from history had already begun in the 1930s and the 1940s.

The three Centennial prizewinners in the English novel category are works that are largely formed within the hegemonic ideology of global capitalism. They show a cavalier treatment of Philippine history, and they are able to do this without any trouble, and even gain the nod of the state through the literary establishment, largely because of the cultural logic of late capitalism. As Jameson said in an interview: "(Andy) Warhol is emblematic of one feature of postmodernism and the same goes for Paik. They allow you to analyze and specify something partial, and in that sense their activities are surely original: they have identified a whole range of things to do and then moved in to colonize this new space" (Stephanson 1989, 70). Artists like Warhol give us a specific image, but

rob that image of its history. His take on Marilyn Monroe, for example, robs her of her historicity, yet her image as made by Warhol continues to work and earn money today. We watch a film on Gandhi made by Hollywood (Columbia Pictures, 1982), but the film is actually selling us an image of Gandhi (a harmless, uncomplicated, and asexual Gandhi), robbed of the history of the person and the country he was fighting for. As the film made waves around the world, people in India wondered what the fuss was all about as the celluloid Gandhi bore no resemblance whatsoever to the historical one.

Narratives and Liberation

We must take note of the word “narrative.”² Exploding the artificial borders that separate fiction and history, Paul Ricoeur (1991, 2) puts forward a basic hypothesis: “the common feature of human experience which is marked, organized, and clarified by the act of story telling in all its forms, is its temporal character. Everything that is recounted occurs in time, takes time, unfolds temporally; and what unfolds in time can be recounted.” Narratives are essential to our lives. They order and make sense of ourselves as beings-in-the-world. Emplotment is the instinctive and human effort to make sense of the various movements, or flux, into one cohesive story. History as social science, therefore, cannot just forget about narratives because it always needs them in order to talk about action, which necessitates movers, shakers, victims, goals, accidents, interactions, and products. Narratives make sense out of chaos (ibid., 5).³

Identity is not something one is born with, but we form ourselves in our encounter with signs and symbols. Life is difficult. Ricoeur points us to an outlook that “meaning does not originate in the conscious reflecting subject, but comes to him from the outside,

from his encounter with certain thought-provoking symbols mediated by his culture. Meaning is the result, not of a work of constitution, but an effort of appropriation” (Madison 1995, 79). Meaning is not something to be merely accepted as a given, it is a process of making meaning.

Texts offer us possibilities of seeing our lives without having to live these possibilities in the material world. Thus texts are capable of mediating the world and its events into stories of understanding, or misunderstanding. Texts provide us with ways by which we can fashion ourselves. The awareness alone of the importance of narratives in a person and a nation’s life is already a big step towards getting a hold of these stories, and (re)directing these to more emancipating imaginings.

Narratives can oppress or liberate. But great literature, as Chinua Achebe (1990, 153) has pointed out, “does not enslave; it liberates the mind of man. Its truth is not like the canons of an orthodoxy or the irrationality of prejudice and superstition. It begins as an adventure in self-discovery and ends in wisdom and humane conscience.” N. V. M. Gonzalez (1995, 160–61) has acknowledged writers like Achebe:

Perhaps the novelists who have been most remarkable in foreshortening horizons—that is to say, in making provisions in their craft for the vicissitudes of history and the shifting of horizons—are those of Africa, India and the Caribbean. The reader of Western novels familiar with the bearers in Kipling’s and porters in Hemingway’s stories will find in the pages of South African and Caribbean writers evidence, among other things, of the shifted equilibrium. Thematic ideas are now fleshed out in non-White characters, nor do novels have necessarily to deal with great events. The writers prefer great themes instead. There is quite a difference, we know. Thus the spell of Amos Tutola has cast with his myths.

Another way of looking at narratives is to realize “that history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes

through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious” (Jameson 1981, 35). It is in the spirit of this awareness of the power of narratives, but also of the power of the cultural logic of late capitalism, that I offer my reading of the three Centennial novels. After treating each novel separately, I will discuss a few more issues that affect all three.

The First Prize: Gamalinda’s *Sad Republic*

Let me begin by quoting Bienvenido Lumbera’s (2000) online comment about Eric Gamalinda and his prize-winning novel in order to highlight Gamalinda’s stature in the Philippine literary community:

Eric Gamalinda, author of the prizewinning *My Sad Republic*, is looked up to as the shining hope of the Philippine novel in English. This, by virtue of the ease with which he has been able to break into U.S. literary publications, is a sign that he has the requisite linguistic artistry that makes editors take note and that he is into the temper of the contemporary scene as this is perceived by the reading public in the U.S. The publication of *My Sad Republic* puts the novel within the reach of the local public for fiction. So much interest is focused now on Gamalinda’s work.

I take a contrary position. My view is that Gamalinda’s *My Sad Republic* is a book written with the Hollywood-or-bust dream (see figure 1). The novel is peopled by savages and fools. It begins with the hero, Isio, cracking the head of a landlord open with a bolo because the latter has refused to kneel before him as one would to a pope in Rome. The book ends with a note from the author on the historical accuracy of his portrayal of an actual person, Isio, pope of Negros, who up till now is celebrated in Negros for his resistance to the Spaniards and the Americans. Gamalinda (2000, 391) states: “I found the obscurity of the Pope’s life an interesting parallel to the obscurity of the Filipino-

American War, a war that nonetheless changed the destinies of the people of the Philippines and the United States.”

I do not know what the author means when he says the destiny of the United States has changed in its encounter with Filipinos. Certainly a country where many of its people hardly know we exist cannot be compared to the Philippines, where it is estimated as many as half a million Filipinos died as a result of the Philippine American War, yet most Filipinos now hanker for America and all things American.

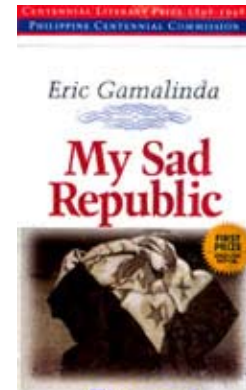


Figure 1

There were many millenarian movements at the time of the Philippine revolution and the numerous studies of peasant uprisings show the potent use of religious symbols in their battles. It is surprising to find the author using a real person, an actual local hero, to trivialize this historical fact. Using an imaginary person or name will not change the story at all. Perhaps Gamalinda needs the cloak of history to give a semblance of believability to what is otherwise a badly written novel. This is not to say that a fantastic story cannot be a believable story. It is just that Gamalinda fails to convince. In his attempt to be a Gabriel Garcia Marquez, he needs the help of Isio, a person who fought Spain and America in Negros, to tell his much-hoped-for readers in New York that “no, this is real, this happens in the Philippines.”

One of the last to give the Americans a hard time in the Philippines, Isio in the novel is nothing more than a spurned lover who could have become a docile farm hand had he been loved and cared for by the beautiful hacendera. The use of a local historical figure should have been handled with more care, the way Gamalinda would if it were

Jesus Christ, Malcom X, or José Rizal. Since the whole thing is fictionalized, even trivialized, there is absolutely no need for the appearance of Isio, pope of Negros. Isio, after all, is not a Rizal, a Mabini, or a Del Pilar, names that haunt the national consciousness and whose lives have become narratives that play a major role in our country's historical discourse. With Isio, pope of Negros, there is nothing to subvert in the first place. There is, however, much to be retrieved. There are many millenarians then and now, there is no excuse for the use of Isio's name. Surely, Gamalinda would not have attempted such a cavalier treatment of Isio if Isio still had clout among the elite, which he had for a time during those difficult days of the Philippine revolution.

The discovery of a mysterious and magical locket that will "keep him safe from non-Christians who still traversed this part of the island (Negros) and killed for sport and ate human hearts" (ibid., 12) starts it all. This locket will be the holy grail of the novel and the symbol of the protagonist's love and life, which he will give as an offering to the beautiful hacendera. However, in a series of miscommunications and misadventures, he will be provoked to lead a revolution against the oppressors and colonizers to reclaim his true love for the woman. But then, as the matriarch of the novel says: "Love is a fragile, useless thing. It decomposes easily in the tropic heat" (ibid., 93). In fact, all throughout the novel, the Americans and the landlords are the voice of reason; if they are wrong, it is simply because they have misunderstood the situation, but they always have their hearts in the right place. The masses are a superstitious and gullible lot in this country where "gossip travels fast in this part of the world. Nothing else does, unfortunately" (ibid., 34).

It is a land where, in the evenings, one is afraid to sleep:

He didn't sleep by day, because he knew the guards could be at his heels, and he didn't sleep at night, because he was afraid the night's creatures would make a

meal out of him. After three days and nights his mind was in a state of ether and everything seemed to have the quality of bangungot, that fitful dream from which no man ever awoke.

Only men had it, and only among brown people. The nightmare we inherit, like our sorrow. He began talking to himself. Keep moving. Don't fall asleep. (Ibid., 120)

The only pure evil in Philippine society in this novel are the friars who, if they are not scheming against the natives, or trying to make quick money, are somewhere down on their knees in the act of licking a woman, at one time even putting an unconsecrated host inside a vagina:

The Parish priest of a town too far from anything to matter was inserting a sacred host into the lips of a native girl's vagina. The priest (let's call him Padre Batchoy) was on his knees, a position he found necessary but uncomfortable, because he was not used to kneeling and his massive weight made his kneebones ache. He was a naked as the tonsure on his head, which showed pink, shiny oasis in his otherwise roughly textured hair. Leaning over to insert the host, his body wobbled with both discomfort and pleasure, sending out a faint sound of water. (Ibid., 174)

A hundred years the *Noli*, Gamalinda has decided to outdo Rizal in the area of antifriar sentiments. No complexity, sheer black and white: All the friars break all their vows and are, without doubt, sex-starved maniacs; the natives are petty and superstitious; and the Americans, true to their color, are lily-white. Jaime An Lim (1993, 10) has noted that the *Noli*, although clearly antifriar, "is actually not single-minded and doctrinaire as might be expected." Padre Damaso is definitely a more developed, complex, and imaginative character than Gamalinda's Padre Batchoy.⁴

The way the workers are dismissed off the land because they are not baptized Catholics (Gamalinda 2000, 99) is simplistic in its treatment of not only the land

problem, but ignores the complex feudal relationships in an agrarian society. This novel simplifies the world, when the best of literature has always shown its complexity.

The spurned lover as revolutionary needs a guide to fight for the millenarian utopia. What is the impulse to keep this character Isio going? He is a simpleton, and the passion of his love for the hacendera cannot sustain the narrative. Isio, a man who quotes the Bible as perhaps most millenarians in the Philippines do, conveniently finds a copy of the U.S. Constitution on a priest who has just been captured, a friar unimaginatively called Padre Batchoy. This “subversive document” (ibid., 177) is to be the guiding light for the fight against Spain. The gullible Pinoy has the good sense to appreciate a great thing when he sees one. Never mind if the pope, Isio, needs Padre Batchoy to interpret the document for him, since it is in English, when throughout the novel Isio has absolutely no problem talking to the Americans. With the American Constitution, he has found a reason to continue fighting.

When the Americans introduce Isio to the wonders of an overhead projector, he immediately declares its inventor, Lumier, a prophet (ibid., 277). Indeed, entertainment as Pinoy salvation is now in full swing. In fact, the Americans as the voice of reason and benevolent friends are deployed all over the novel. After Isio’s rapt amazement with the projector, he takes the American, Colonel Smith, to a tailor where the American will be amazed that a suit made for him is “worthy of the streets of New York City” (ibid., 279). One cannot help but speculate that this suit is really Gamalinda’s metaphor for his novel that he hopes will be worthy of New York. As guest of honor to the victory celebration for the liberation from the clutches of Spain, the colonel graciously agrees to attend but only reluctantly, for he has to remind Isio: “This is your revolution, not ours” (ibid.).

Gamalinda in that one sentence has been able to negate tons of historical documents about how the United States government maneuvered to steal from Filipinos the victory of their revolution. Of course, even the Americans can be brutal in this novel, as when they administer the water cure to torture Martinez, Isio's right hand man, who is later allowed by an American soldier to escape. That benevolent American soldier will write his mother:

Mother: My duties here are over at last, and I shall be glad to be home for Thanksgiving, far away from this wicked land, where a white man seems to forget that he is human. (Ibid., 354)

In the end, the Filipino fighters who already control Negros are beaten in the last major battle they are to fight against the Americans. This is due to days of uncontrollable sex, an atmosphere that two young lovers have ignited. Those are days of great, uninterrupted sex, but in the end our guys just don't have any energy left to repulse an attack. I can already hear the colonizers reacting to this scene: "The bloody natives just cannot stop breeding like rabbits." Thus, people abandon the pope in the novel because they want to "join the world of the living" (ibid., 375). Indeed, what a sad republic.

But who is Pope Isio? According to Gamalinda (ibid., 391):

Isio, Pope of Negros, was transported to the new Bilibid Prison in Manila in 1908, and was handed the death sentence. General James Smith became Governor of the Philippine Islands soon after the arrest, and commuted Isio's sentence to life imprisonment. Isio died in jail in 1910, an unknown and ordinary bandit. Aside from what is available in American library records and folk legend, little else is known about the Pope of Negros, and I took the liberty of fictionalizing his life as well as his meeting with General Smith. I found the obscurity of the Pope's life an interesting parallel to the obscurity of the Filipino-American War, a war that nonetheless changed the destinies of the people of the Philippines and the United States.

Let me quote from one of the books, acknowledged by the author Gamalinda in the same page as the quotation above, as one of those he has read to study the life of Isio, the pope of Negros:

After an arduous trek to the summit of the mountain, the Civil Guards reached a plateau where they encountered more than a thousand men in battle formation. As the natives began to circle the government forces, that latter gave shouts of “Long Live Spain!” “Long Live the Queen Regent!” “Long Live the Captain General!” and “Long Live the Queen Regent!” and “Long Live the 22nd Regiment of the Civil Guards!”—to which Isio’s group countered with “Long Live Rizal!” “Long Live Filipinas and its Liberty!” and “Death to Spaniards!” (Aguilar 1998, 169)

Let me quote from the same book about Pope Isio’s vision:

Papa Isio had envisioned a theocratic form of government that essentially would have replicated Spanish rule, in contrast to the planters’ move to secularize the state....Isio was absolutely against American rule, for he saw himself as the rightful successor to Spain. The government he would establish was to be the vanguard in defending a sacrosanct faith the natives had learned to call their own. Isio envisaged Negros and the Filipinas he would inherit, together with “brothers” from Luzon unshackled from colonial domination, in order that people might be free to be like Spaniards, and Isio to rule according to the Catholic ideals the friars had failed to uphold. (Ibid., 182–83)

A hundred years after the publication of the *Noli*, a novel Rizal wrote to assert Filipino dignity, Gamalinda’s novel attempts to use the Philippines as exotic material to please New York, the center of his world. He will one day discover that the most astute readers in New York are not interested in sad republics anymore, nor will the most astute readers in the Philippines.

It is not an exaggeration that “(Joseph) Conrad is the precursor of the Western views of the Third World which one finds in the work of novelists as different as Graham Greene, V. S. Naipaul, and Robert Stone, of theoreticians and polemicists whose specialty is to deliver the non-European world either for analysis and judgment or for

satisfying the exotic tastes of European and North American audiences” (Said 1993, xviii). Gamalinda simply falls into this long tradition.⁵

The Second Prize: Ong’s *Embarrassment of Riches*

The most successful among the Centennial novels in imagining the Philippines is Charlson Ong’s *Embarrassment of Riches* (see figure 2), which, ironically enough, he is able to achieve by imagining a country not the Philippines. Although there is a danger that the novel will be read by some as an allegory of the Chinese capturing power in the Philippines, one does not get the feel that this novel overly simplifies

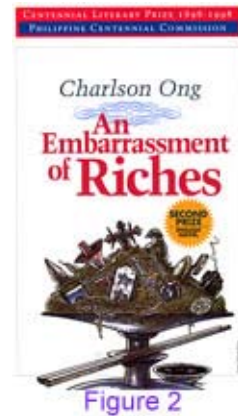


Figure 2

the nation. Ong uses an imaginary land, Victorianas, to play with the country’s many problems without the pressure of having to deal with the grand narratives of Philippine history. On occasion, one also gets the feel that, like the other winners in this contest, this novel had been rushed to meet the contest deadline. Thus, I thought some of the scenes unconvincing, such as the one in which a lacquered box meant to contain the secrets of the Tantivo family is left by the protagonist, almost carelessly, to a mere acquaintance (Ong 2000, 186).

If there is anything a work of art such as a novel can and should do, it is to make us understand without reducing the issues of the world into a battle between black and white. Although one of the characters, Charles Miyazawa, describes Victorianas as a “small, sad island” (ibid., 300), it is hardly due to the essentialist reasons that haunt Gamalinda’s sad republic. The only seeming similarity of Ong’s novel to Gamalinda’s is that a priest, who eventually becomes a cardinal, is also a sex-starved money grubber

(ibid., 312–13). Other religious leaders, like Mike Verano (an obvious copy of El Shaddai leader Mike Velarde), are equally shady, if not all out corrupt and corrupting.

The novel starts out with a description of Gen. Artemio Azurin declaring himself “President for Life” (ibid., 20), just like in any other banana republic, but the problems are really more complex. The sheer difficulty of holding the country together is exposed, as various interests vie for the right to control its destiny. Almost like in a whodunit thriller, Jeffrey Tantivo goes home to Victorianas (like Rizal’s Ibarra in the *Noli*) to help his friend Jennifer Sy run for president although he is really on a mission to uncover the multiple layers that hide the actual killers of his father (again, almost like Ibarra, except the latter finds out about his father’s murder only after he arrives in the Philippines). While trying to unmask the real killers (and almost every major character in the novel becomes a convincing suspect), the narrator/protagonist goes through a roller coaster ride of disappointment and discovery as the nation struggles to stay together as a nation.

Jeffrey Tantivo begins the book by recounting why he has gone back to the island-nation. The country’s dictator has just died, and his friend, Jennifer Sy, a daughter of the richest man on the island, has decided to run for the presidency. His sister is a leader of the insurgency, and the suspected killer of his father has transformed himself from a businessman to a charismatic religious leader. As the novel progresses, we meet characters like a military colonel, who leads a coup against his half-sister, Jennifer Sy, a drug addict under the control of one of the old family friends of the Tantivo family. In the end the narrator even discovers that his real father is Alfonso Ong, a shrewd businessman who seems to have genuine affection for him, but is also in need of his kidney to survive the coming new millennium. An assassination plot that can wipe out some of the nation’s

leading scums also goes wrong, since Jeffrey Tantivo does not have the heart to hurt innocent children (reminding one of a scene from the Al Pacino movie *Scar Face*). This brief rundown of what happens in the novel should give us an idea of the intricate and vast network of connections and blood relations among the characters that make up this complex novel; as there is nothing simple in the entanglements that threaten to choke the country. In fact, many of those who seem to have good intentions for the country, like Jennifer Sy and Jeffrey Tantivo, find themselves in exile, leaving the country to criminals, fanatics, and opportunists as Victorianas breaks apart into small kingdoms.

The strength of the novel is that it never appears to succumb to the temptation to essentialize the country, nor does it seem to fall into the trap of exoticizing the Filipino experience. It is easy to caricature the Filipino, for most historical accounts that pretend objectivity are really writing in the eyes of the colonizer. Up until now, the term “damaged culture” has become so much a part of the journalistic description of the Philippines, a term taken from an article by James Fallows entitled *Damaged Culture* (*Atlantic Monthly*, November 1987). This article has been incorporated in his book on Japan, which in effect says that democracy cannot work for Pinoys who have remained tribal:

Individual Filipinos are at least as brave, kind, and noble-spirited as individual Japanese, but their culture draws the boundaries of decent treatment much more narrowly. Because of this fragmentation, this lack of useful nationalism, people treat each other worse in the Philippines than in any other Asian country I have seen. (Fallows 1994, 369)

National Artist F. Sionil Jose, one of Fallows’ native informants, is quoted as saying:

“It would be easier if the Americans were just sons of bitches,” F. Sionil Jose had told me the first time I met him, early in 1987, a year after the fall of Marcos. “Then we could have just kicked them out with no regrets, like the Indonesians

can talk with the Dutch very directly. 'We kicked you in the ass. It's over.' It's still all very complicated and jealous here." (Ibid., 373)

Jose thanks the Americans for the educational system they have introduced to the country, or else he will "still be on top of a water buffalo in my village today. We have that to be grateful for" (ibid.). Yet he also acknowledges that "at least in our minds, we have to kill the American father" (ibid.). Jose fails to connect the education system introduced by the Americans to his great white father.

Charlson Ong seems able to escape such a trap because his novel does not seem to hope for a possible readership in New York, or to negotiate a fat contract in Hollywood. Perhaps he is hoping to hit the *New York Times* bestseller list, we do not know, but he does not give us the feeling that he compromises his novel by writing something that is guessing at what the Western literary establishment is suspected to be looking for in the next big hit. There is no apparent trivialization of Pinoy culture. Certainly, if one is to look at a novel like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (first published in 1958), there seems to be little Achebe is willing to compromise, and somehow this has enabled him to find a large audience in the world, because he presents a genuine picture of his country. Genuine here is simply to speak of a people without bending images to give a taste of the exotic. There are many reasons (mostly political) why a Third World novel commercially succeeds in the West or gets the nod of international award-giving bodies, but crafting a work to approximate the changing taste of the literary establishment does not seem to be one of them (Gonzalez 1990, 70). *Things Fall Apart* has been reprinted in the Everyman's Library series in 1992. This is a signal that postcolonial literature has now entered the margins of the New York literary and publishing establishments.

Unlike Ong, Gamalinda is not able to escape the trap, perhaps because he thinks of the Philippines as hopeless, perhaps this is why he has migrated to America, and now finds it necessary to pander to the image or spectacle of the Filipino as damaged goods, as beyond redemption. There is absolutely no hint of the American colonial government's hand in the problems of the country in Gamalinda's novel, when the colonizer roams its every chapter, if not as a character, then as the voice of the narrator, or as the writer's much hoped-for New York reader.

Ong's novel ends almost like Nick Joaquin's play, *Portrait of an Artist as Filipino*, where the narrator pledges to remember, to live, and to sing the song of remembrance for the sake of all the people in the past. In the case of Ong's narrator, Jeffrey Tantivo, it is "for all of my people who drift in a sea of uncertainty. I live for all who keep vigil in the night of the world awaiting a certain daybreak" (ibid., 425). Jeffrey Tantivo, a writer, pledges to endure, which, at the moment, is enough, it is already a victory. The problems of religiosity and opportunism show a country virtually ungovernable.

But is Ong really able to escape the trap of simplifying the Philippines? If we follow the idea that narratives are crucial to our understanding of ourselves and our nation, then the question is inevitable: Why is there hardly a hint of colonization and the problems it has spawned in Ong's novel? That absence in the novel is glaring, and Victorianas as Philippines is complex, but very incomplete. Colonialism is absent from a novel that has won a prize in a contest that is supposed to celebrate and interrogate the centennial of Philippine independence from Spain. Colonialism can even be reasonably

argued as continuing up to now, in more subtle neo-colonial forms, and its ability to hide itself, as shown by this novel, is proof of its success.

Ong has achieved this brilliantly by alluding to the colonial experience when referring to the actual Philippines:

The colonial government treated the island with benign neglect, and hardly any Spanish official ever set foot on the Victorianas except when obligated to collect revenues on pain of death. Only the Jesuits deemed the Victorianos fit for evangelization and sent friars to the island following their brief expulsion from the Philippines during the 17th Century.

For nearly five hundred years Spain left the natives, Chinese, mestizos and few hundred white colonists to their own devices. Although Victorianos can prove to be as militant and committed to political ideals to the point of death as any other people, they found little to revolt for and nearly no one to revolt against under Spanish rule. (Ibid., 15)

On the Americans in Victorianas:

The Americans came at the turn of the century and built some roads—including the George Washington Avenue, which remains the major thoroughfare in San Ignacio—schools, theaters, soda fountains and a post office. But the island was of little strategic value to the U.S. in its bid to open up China for Virginia tobacco and after the first eager waves of engineers, architects and Thomasites, the number of Americans on the island dwindled to less than five hundred shortly before the outbreak of World War II.

In keeping with its famed tradition, the Victorianas Island militia defied the U.S. military governor's order to resist the invading Japanese flotilla and simply surrendered. Fearing a ploy, the Japanese executed the handful of American officials, left behind a battalion of raw recruits and sailed on. World War II was a nonevent in Victorianas. (Ibid., 17–18)

Ong's novel then begs the question: What is it that we are supposed to be trying to be free from? We want to be independent of what? The answer is ourselves, which in the end, without the colonial and neocolonial experience, is too reductive. Without the author intending it, the novel ends up following James Fallows' line of thinking. Fallows (1994, 361–70) tells us that we have blamed the Marcoses, the Americans, international banks,

God, Rousseau, but still the only conclusion he draws is that he is “dealing here with a damaged culture” (ibid.). Victorianas, as the imaginary Philippines, was set up to avoid having to engage the difficult grand narrative of colonialism. Grand narratives after all are the ultimate enemies of postmodernism, and the novel suffers because of this ideology.

The Third Prize: Yuson’s *Voyeurs and Savages*

The blurb at the back of Yuson’s book says it all: “Who is watching whom? Who is savaging whom?” This is the gist of the novel that takes us all the way back to the time when the voyage from the Philippines to the St. Louis Exposition is being organized. The novel is actually a mosaic of different periods in Philippine history up to the emails of Filipinos who are a part of the diaspora. Yuson is very clever in his use of



actual historical documents, droppable names, emails, news items. Some may call this a lazy strategy to beat the Centennial Literary Contest deadline, but it is clever nonetheless. The author manages to weave together a quilt of relationships between Filipinos and their colonizers. Just like Rizal’s novels, there is an effort to represent the vast panorama of Philippine society. But the novel eventually loses its edge when it points towards the Filipino’s equality in being voyeurs of the West and the Westerner, to eventually even holding their own in the United States. This is actually an illusion. The actuality of course is rather grim. Rather than Eileen Tabios and Eric Gamalinda objecting to a racist food review of a Filipino deli that appeared in the *Milwaukee Magazine*, which is highlighted

towards the end of the novel (Yuson 1998, 178-179), what we have are teachers becoming domestic helpers. Filipinos are now cleaning the latrines of the world.

In the determination of the author to fit his characters to his thesis, the characters fail to come alive, and thus appear like cardboard, one-dimensional, puppets whose strings are not even cleverly hidden. There are dialogues that go through great lengths in trying to convince the reader that these Americans are actually sincere in their project of carrying out the white man's burden, perhaps misguided, but sincere nevertheless. I will not argue with the motives of the characters, but the conversations are so contrived, whatever the author hopes to achieve is simply lost to me. Take, for example, this excerpt from a monologue:

One thing I can say about these savages...and don't take offense, guys, ah'm not serious, just essaying mock-Republican...they sure as hell know how to make fulfilling moonshine. This stuff ain't bad, for something made out of that bland white stuff ah cain't stand. And ya know, fellas, ah was down in Manila, where they grow all these towering coconuts... They have something just as sweet when it's freshly tapped from near the crown. They clamber up like chimpanzees, faster than you can say toddy, and draw out this sweet stuff, from the upper pith ah believe, and pour it into these stoppered bamboo poles strapped to the monkeys' backs, and they slide down and give you a cup, hell, sweetest thing, coco wine. (Ibid., 47)

When a Filipina bar girl is found strangled in a motel, the supposed American killer is spirited out of the Philippines, beyond the long arm of the law. Pinoys like Mando Aguinaldo, a descendant of Emilio Aguinaldo, organize a party that hits back by killing the killer's buddies (ibid., 118). It is in this kind of tit for tat that the author hopes to show the guilt and innocence of both parties in the accidents of history. But this kind of attitude does not help any, in fact it erases the complex reasons that make imperialism possible.

My objection is not to the fact that the novel tries to portray a more confident and hopeful Filipino. The objection is in putting a positive spin to the colonial experience of the Philippines, which has largely been barbaric, and up until now we have not recovered from its ill effects. The ill-effects are hardly seen in this novel. The empire strikes back through emails against a racist food review in the *Milwaukee Magazine*, when in actuality the diaspora, which includes many Filipinos educated in the best universities in the country, are also part of the drain that has happened to the Philippines. The dropping of names like Mailene Paterno, identified as a daughter of a former senator of the republic, a graduate of the State University, whose family owns the franchise of 7/11 stores in the country, a descendant of Pedro Paterno, a member the Philippine elite at the time of Rizal, is symbolic, at least as presented in the novel, of a useless ruling class whose contribution to the republic has been to send our dollars abroad to have the right to use a name of an American chain of stores, hardly even having the imagination to build their own chain of stores. Although Yuson is hoping this will be read as Filipinos holding their own in a globalizing and hybrid world, it does not work. The danger, in fiction, of using names of people who actually exist or existed in the non-virtual world is that many resonances are bound to crop up that the author does not at all intend.

Let me quote at length from the novel which is quoting from a supposedly actual historical account of the St. Louis Exposition:

In collecting and installing this very complete and instructive exhibition of the Philippine population, their social status, and the economic resources and present development of the islands, the Civil Government had the free use of the fleet of the United States transports plying between islands and across the ocean to our Pacific ports. And yet the collection and installation cost \$1,500,000, of which all but the \$200,000 was paid by the Philippine Government. In organizing the work Governor Taft had the co-operation of the local provincial authorities and commercial organizations, and the details of selection, classification and

installation were placed under the general direction of Doctor W.P. Wilson, of the Philadelphia Commercial Museums, and under the direct personal supervision of Doctor Gustavo Niederlein, of large experience with colonial exhibits. With him in the field work were associated Señor Don A. Pedro Paterno, President of the Philippine Senate under Aguinaldo, Doctor Leon Guerrero.

The reaction of the novel's narrator is quite revealing:

Names, names...

Taft Avenue was a main street in Manila which the usual arbiters of political correctness, RP-style, had long been clamoring to rename after a nationalist senator long deceased. That was how Meynard remembered it before he was informed otherwise by the Standard editorial. He hadn't heard of the bill seeking to honor Papa's Lolo-Tito Miong. As far as he knew Taft still reeked of smoke belching jeepneys despite a rapid transit line running overhead on unattractive slabs of grimy cement.

Wilson was another popular street, in San Juan, if only for the commercial establishments, mostly eateries, that had mushroomed on its short strip. Used to be strictly residential, of a genteel quarter. But it's safe from any possible attacks on nomenclature. Wilson had somehow turned into a common name in Pinas, especially among the relatively lower-class mestizos de entresuelo, as they were called.

The Paternos too were of San Juan. Old illustrious family. He once had dinner at their mansion's garden, hosted by the pretty Mailin, English Major at U.P., Senator's Daughter and heiress to the local franchise of 7-11.

Leon Ma. Guerrero, obviously a son of the cited orig, was one of the better translators into English of Rizal's novels. Also served as Ambassador to the Court of St. James. His son David cut his teeth in advertising work in Hong Kong, before having his Dad's Noli and Fili translations reissued in the mid-90s. Now Manila-based, this cheeky grandson does wild take-offs on Monica Lewinsky in a tv commercial for a mobile company. (Ibid., 148-49)

From the quotation above, one can only conclude that U.S. imperialism and transnational capitalism have been successful in colonizing every facet of Philippine life. There is simply no escape. *Voyeurs and Savages* hopes to show the reader that, from the beginning to the present, we have been watched, but we have also have been watching. We have been viewed as savages, as we have also been viewing the colonizers as

savages. They have savaged us, but we in turn have also savaged them. But from the long quotation above, it is evident that the Filipinos have been watching too closely, as our dreams and aspirations in life have become entwined with the United States. The colonization has been devastatingly complete, for there is nothing left to conquer in the Philippines and the Filipino mind. That we live in a hybrid world is true, but how we have become a hybrid people in the first place is the story the novel has evaded, if not distorted. It has not been a fight among equals, it has been a lopsided war, heavily tilted for the colonizer. If the Philippines had not been a country depleted of its resources and underdeveloped by over three hundred years of Spanish conquest, America is unlikely to have dared enter our shores as combatants against Filipinos, which is the same story in Vietnam, Panama, Grenada, and now Iraq.

The State and Literary Contests

The colonization of the Philippines, a continuing United States project, has not been complete. At around the time the three Centennial novels were being written or about to be written, fiction like Caroline S. Hau's "The True Story of Ah To"⁶ (11 January 1997), a story that tries to retrieve the role of Chinese communists in the Hukbalahap movement, an important but unknown aspect of Philippine history, had been published in the *Philippine Free Press*; and in visual arts, works like Santiago Bose's *Free Trade* (1998), a work in mixed-media that not only ridicules globalization but connects it to colonization, were being conceptualized. Bose's work will eventually be the cover illustration of the book *Vestiges of War* (2002), edited by Angel V. Shaw and Luis H. Francia. Glenn Anthony May's *Inventing a Hero* (1997) had its Philippine edition published by New Day Publishers, and the firestorm it created certainly contributed to the

debate about historical accuracy, colonial historiography, and the methodologies involved in constructing a narrative of and for the nation. The period showed great interest in reissuing history books that are deemed important or classics. In 1997, Horacio de la Costa's *Light Cavalry* was reissued, a book meant to commemorate the 4th centenary of the founding of the Society of Jesus, written in the year of the Commonwealth Prize. The de la Costa book was about to be launched when the Second World War intervened, and it was only eventually launched in the year 1997, the eve of the Centennial Literary Contest. This was also the time when the University of the Philippines Press, to celebrate the centennial year, started reprinting Teodoro Agoncillo and Cesar Adib Majul's books, including Resil Mojares's *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel* (1998). The Ateneo de Manila University Press also began reprinting the books of John N. Schumacher, S.J., Horacio de la Costa, S.J., and Reynaldo C. Ileto.

The only explanation I have for the three Centennial novels being so far away from the history they seek to depict, yet gaining immediate canonical status, is the dominance of the cultural logic of late capitalism. The year 1997 was also the time that the largely forgotten Jose Garcia Villa died and his works started to enjoy a revival, culminating with the publication of *The Anchored Angel: Selected Writings of Jose Garcia Villa* (1999), edited by Eileen Tabios; and *The Critical Villa* (2002), edited by Jonathan Chua. Both works are postmodern efforts to revalorize and conscript Villa into postcolonial and nationalist projects. Thus far, this reinvented Villa is a valiant effort to stretch what is beyond stretching. In the repackaged Villa, the reactionary and apolitical can become politically oppositional; the colonial enforcer can become revolutionary. This is an attractive Villa, especially to some Filipinos who have decided to migrate to

the metropolitan country, the United States, yet find it necessary to rationalize their decision to become Filipino-Americans. This is the point of Aijaz Ahmad (2000, 84-85):

Interwoven into these patterns of immigration is the ambiguous status of the incoming graduate student who comes from elsewhere, who studies under the full weight of the existing canonicity, who rebels against it, who counterposes other kinds of texts against so-called canonical text, especially if any are available from his or her own part of the world. These other kinds of texts become, then, the ground, the document, even the counter-cannon of her or his national self-assertion. This choice corresponds to the ambiguities of an existential kind, precipitated by the contradictions of the metropolitan, liberal, predominantly white university. It is by nature a site of privilege, and the student comes with the ambition of sharing this privilege....Out of these miseries arises the small academic elite which knows it will not return, joins the faculty of this or that metropolitan university, frequents the circuits of conferences and the university presses, and develops, often with the greatest degree of personal innocence and missionary zeal, quite considerable stakes in overvalorizing what has already been designated as "Third World Literature"—and, when fashions change, reconciles this category even with poststructuralism. This, too, is now a fairly familiar pattern.

The image of Che Guevarra is now used to sell food, t-shirts, cigars, and even vodka. Che Guevarra the great revolutionary has become domesticated and has since been conscripted by late capitalism as salesman, while Villa the reactionary has now become a postcolonial, to some even revolutionary, writer. To further quote from Ahmad (2000, 70-71):

Theory itself becomes a marketplace of ideas, with massive supplies of theory as usable commodity, guaranteeing consumers' free choice and a rapid rate of obsolescence. If one were to refuse this model of the late-capitalist market economy, and dared instead to *conclude* a conversation or to advocate strict partisanship in the politics of theory, one would then be guilty of rationalism, empiricism, historicism, and all sorts of other ills—the idea of historical agents and/or knowing subjects, for example—perpetrated by the Enlightenment. One major aspect of this particular drift in the theory of the grand masters was summed up succinctly by Lyotard, no small master himself: the age of Marxism is over, 'the age of the enjoyment of goods and services' is here! The world was, in other words, bourgeois.

Villa certainly has had a massive impact on Philippine literature, which is worthy of study and attention, but Gamalinda's *My Sad Republic* is actually the sad culmination of Villa's logic and dreams.

The three Centennial novels have a unique position in the history of Philippine literature, not only because of the size of the prize their authors have taken home, but also because it is only the second time Filipino novels got their impetus, sustenance, and reward all from the state. It is only the second time the state had formally called on writers to, without stating, and probably without knowing it, validate the dominant ideology. Some of the leading writers and academics of the University of the Philippines were even mobilized to work as contest administrators and judges to ensure the prestige of the imprimatur to be given by the state,⁷ in much the same way that the Commonwealth Literary Prize had Carlos P. Romulo as chair and other personalities of the University of the Philippines.⁸ Gamalinda and Ong were later published by the University of the Philippines Press, while Yuson was published by Anvil Publishing way ahead of the two.

The whole centennial project started with the Ramos government, which constructed a vast complex located in Pampanga that contained all sorts of kitsch that supposedly represented the high points of Philippine history. Even now that it has closed, the complex has been hounded by controversy and allegations of corruption that run in the hundreds of millions of pesos. Until today people call for the jailing of the guilty in what has come to be called "the centennial expo scam." Estrada's entry into the centennial project with the Centennial Literary Contest is one of the least controversial among the many centennial events, and certainly one of the least controversial among

Estrada's many other endeavors as president of the republic. Hardly anybody questions the need to encourage our writers to produce more books. The winners of the Centennial Literary Contest have been hailed in media and academe. Joseph Estrada (1998, 123) even declared during the awards night that he would double the prize to celebrate the centennial of the Malolos Congress. The Malolos Literary Prize never became a reality for various reasons, the lack of funds being one of them (President Ramos, by most accounts, left the government coffers empty), and the coup mounted against Estrada's criminal administration certainly another major reason for the nonevent. The Commonwealth Literary Prize, which Quezon also pledged to continuously support, at least had the Second World War to blame for the nonevent.

The state has conducted occasional literary pageants under the auspices of the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the National Commission on Culture and the Arts, which includes the National Artist Award. Quezon's Commonwealth Literary Award, however, was the only time, before the Centennial Literary Contest, that the state called on the country's writers to submit entries in the different genres in English, Spanish, and Tagalog with the project of nation in mind. The Commonwealth prizewinners were awarded P2000 each, a tremendously large amount at that time, considering that in 1938 Francisco Arcellana considered himself a rich man for being paid P30 for a story (Alegre and Fernandez 1987, 48) and Arturo Rotor also considered P30 for a story at that time to be good money (Alegre and Fernandez 1984, 189). It is instructive how Filipino writers then and now grapple with the idea of nation. The winner then for the novel category is Juan C. Laya with the landmark novel *His Native Soil*. It is described by Bienvenido Lumera (1995, 8–9) in an essay on the nationalist literary tradition:

In 1941, the novel *His Native Soil* by Juan C. Laya picks up the motif of the returning native intellectual first noted in Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*. The dilemma of Laya's Martin Romero is that of the Americanized Filipino intellectual. He returns to his hometown in the Philippines after his studies in the U.S. and in all earnestness tries to apply what he had learned abroad to the socio-economic problems he encounters at home. The end of the novel shows a baffled and frustrated Martin returning to the U.S.

Emmanuel Torres (1979, 57–58), who also directly links Laya's novels to the project and style of Rizal's novels, notes:

Laya, the New Critic would say, is no writer of fine writing. His model, if he has one, would be John Steinbeck, another carpenter, perhaps one of the best, but a carpenter just the same. In the judgment of the New Critic, both are insufferably vulgar, but this is true only in the original sense of the word *vulgus*, meaning the common people. Laya's is nothing if not fiction about ordinary working-class/peasant citizens. In his two novels he deals with a society, a community of such people as they interact on one another, invoking community standards of behavior and aspiration in one way or another. The language, the English, he chose to write in is not the sort that would make the purist of the Queen's English sit up and wax ecstatic over. It attempts to transliterate vernacular modes of thinking and feeling (which accounts for a certain quaintness in Laya), frequently lacks stylistic polish, shows lapses in syntax if not grammar, time and again has trouble with metaphors which are clumsily handled. But the tone of it all somehow works in a disarmingly naïve way to serve the cultural setting, the rural/folk culture, of his Ilocano characters, descendants of several generations of farmers in Pangasinan.

Jaime An Lim (1993, 80–81) discusses the context of Americanization in the novel and contradicts Lumbera's reading of the novel's ending:

The process of Martin's de-Americanization is gradual testing of the validity of his adopted values in the context of the native traditions. His various failures have taught him a valuable lesson in the durability of his own heritage. In accommodating his own people's values, he also reclaims his place among them. When he decides to marry at last, it is not the American mestiza, Virginia Fe, whom he chooses; it is Soledad, the quintessential Filipina with her lack of guile and her inner strength. Accompanied by his wife-to-be, he leaves Flores again because he needs the space and freedom to try out larger dreams, to begin his self-renewal just as the land continually does its own, but not back to America, as some readers mistakenly think. America is the past. Martin's decision in the end is to give up his woolen coat, a prized possession that he proudly brought home from America, is a symbolic act.

Just to drive home the point about Laya's sensibility, I quote Epifanio San Juan Jr. (1996, 197), this time commenting on and connecting Laya's second novel to his Commonwealth prizewinner:

Perhaps only with Laya's *This Barangay* (1950), wrestling with the problem of alienation and class warfare first broached in *His Native Soil* (1941) is the national experience of war, the supplanting of U.S. bourgeois democracy by Japanese militarism, articulated in archetypal utopian discourse, with the introduction of what Bakhtin calls a dialogistic principle of organization. This represents a significant breakthrough, surpassing the mimetic illusions contrived by Stevan Javellana or Edilberto Tiempo, and complementing the monumental epic project of Hernandez's *Bayang Malaya*. For in Laya's novel, we find the tribal/organic paradigm invoked not to nostalgically revitalize the past but to interrogate and critique the present (competitive liberal ideology immanent in residual character-types: Lt. Aldecoa, etc.) and coax the embryo of a collective future into birth. A nascent dialectic of individual and community evolves, discriminating and working out the multi-layered contradictions within the generic frame of a secular romance.

N. V. M. Gonzalez, who got honorable mention, received P500 for his landmark novel *The Winds of April*. Resil Mojares (1998, 337) considers it an important occasion when "the Filipino novel takes on a definitive qualitative change, manifesting the stylistic and thematic traits that have been taken to be distinctive of the English branch of Philippine fiction." What does this mean? At least for Mojares, the Western form of the novel in English had been made Filipino, just like Rizal had made the novel in Spanish a work of a Filipino. This is quite an achievement, especially if one realizes that English was barely half-a-century old in the Philippines, and what was considered the first successful Filipino short story, "Dead Stars," was only sixteen years old. Rizal had the advantage of over three hundred years of Spain in the Philippines behind him.

When the majority of writers were coming out of the University of the Philippines, Gonzalez was living in Romblon and Mindoro, watching peasants moving with the planting season, and later on, instead of pursuing a university degree, he was

forced by economic necessity to contribute to Manila's literary magazines and become a fulltime journalist, thus never earning a college diploma. In effect, he was never a part of the metropolitan scene at that time.

It is only Mojares who sees similarities between Gonzalez and Villa, yet the comparison is apt. Villa is the last writer one would think of in the same breath as Gonzalez, but I think they both signaled the first high point of Philippine fiction in English, which began with Paz Marquez Benitez's "Dead Stars."

Like Villa, Gonzalez is distinctly a craftsman, but, unlike Villa, Gonzalez's works maintain a very strong reference to the native experience, a fact explained partly though not wholly by the nature of the medium in which the gifts of the two lie. Even as the individual sensibility is both the filter and the focus in *Winds of April*, the novel does not only concretize distinct peddlers, immigrant workers and homesteaders in the provincial hinterlands, at once indissolubly bound to the land and, like wraiths, almost adventitious in their existence. (Ibid., 339)

The appearance of the work of NVM Gonzalez and Jose Garcia Villa during the Commonwealth contest also signaled a parting of ways as to the kind of audience the Filipino writer in English would write for, and as much as I am tempted to say that N. V. M. Gonzalez's choice won out in the end, the reality shows that both roads still attract Filipino writers of various calibers and persuasions.

In the short story category, Manuel Arguilla won P2000 for his landmark collection, *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife*, while Estrella Alfon got P500 for her landmark *Collection of Stories*. In the essay category, it was S. P. Lopez for his landmark work *Literature and Society*. For poetry, no full prize was awarded. Rafael Zulueta y da Costa's landmark collection entitled *Like the Molave* garnered honorable mention, with a cash award of P1500, while Villa got P500 for his landmark collection *Poems by Doveglion*. In the category of biography, no full prize was awarded, but

Filipino Life—An Autobiography by P. C. Morante and *Aide-de-Camp to Freedom* by Teodoro M. Kalaw got P500 each. No award was given out for drama and history (Romulo 1973, 74–75). All the top prize-winning entries somehow grapple with the same themes the three Centennial winners grapple with in their novels, with the difference that the Commonwealth prizewinners (with the exception of Villa), had tried to distance themselves from the colonizer and seek a road independent of the United States. The care and concern for the question of how to define the country after independence is evident. The difference is largely due to the fact that history grounds the winners of the 1940 Commonwealth Literary Contest, at a time when cultural production was still semiautonomous from the economy, while fifty-eight years later the present crop of writers writing the latest canon hardly care about history, when the cultural logic of late capitalism has pervaded every facet of life in cities that are far removed from the feudal aspects of rural life. The media culture, however, has penetrated even the nipa hut in the farthest mountainous areas that have a satellite hookup, celebrating the image over substance.

The time of the Commonwealth Prize was in the United States the time of writers like John Steinbeck, who had published his *Grapes of Wrath* in 1939, and Ernest Hemingway, who had published *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1940. Carlos Bulosan's short story "The Laughter of My Father" was published in the *New Yorker* in 1942. The United States was just emerging from the depression years. There was much uneasiness in the world as war was raging in some parts of the globe, while in other parts war was looming on the horizon. The United States entered its consumerist age only after the war, when its leadership, together with its economic barons, sold the idea to the American public that

consumerism was a patriotic duty to building the United States as a powerhouse economy.⁹

This was also the time, 1945, when the Philippines was on its knees from the destruction brought about by the war, and the one-sided economic and military bases agreements were tied by the United States to aid that would be given to the Philippines. The Philippines as a cheap source of raw materials, as a lucrative dumping ground of goods, and as a base for U.S. military power began our entry into the era of late capitalism. There was hardly any illusion of benevolence in the leadership of the United States at this point. We had been declared independent, and if we get screwed, it was no fault of our benevolent American colonizers. James Fallows (1995, 363) ridicules this notion of United States responsibility for our woes: “This line of analysis is popular in the Philippines but is more easily disposed of.” His point is countries like Japan were occupied by the United States, but they have become powerful nations; he ignores the unique and long history of colonization of the Philippines altogether. Globalization for the Philippines was to begin, which brought with it and supported the beginnings of a certain kind of postmodern ideology that would later be seen in the market segmentation and commodification of everything.

It is interesting to note the common character of most of the winning entries in the Commonwealth Prize, a contest held almost on the eve of the Second World War. From an excerpt of the poem “Like the Molave,” for example, we see the typical attitude, with the exception of Villa, of all the winners of the 1940 project of nation:

XIX

Not yet, Rizal, not yet.
The glory hour will come.

Out of the silent dreaming,
From the seven-thousandfold silence,
We shall emerge, saying: WE ARE FILIPINOS,
And no longer be ashamed.

Sleep not in peace.
The dream is not yet fully carved.
Hard the wood, but harder the blows.
Yet the molave will stand.
Yet the molave monument will rise.
Gods walk on brown legs.
(Abad and Manlapaz, 145–46)

The biographical note of Rafael Zulueta Y da Costa (1989, 416) from the anthology *Man of Earth*, edited by Gémino H. Abad and Edna Z. Manlapaz, is revealing of those times:

When *Like the Molave* was published, Zulueta was asked “very nicely to resign” from his teaching post at La Salle because the book was anti-American; neither could he land a job as proofreader in the *Free Press* or the *Manila Times*. He ended up doing private tutoring. His critics too—“the little Darlings of the UP campus” and “the clique of poets who worship at the altar of Villa”—took him to task, calling *Molave* “the triumph of tripe” and “pretended Whitman,” which his riposte was, “Villa writes very bad e.e. cummings.” He had of course his defenders in S.P. Lopez, A.E. Litiatco, Armando Manalo, and Nelly Burgos. The writing of the *Molave*, says Zulueta, was “the deepest experience of my life. I do not know of any other time in my life when I lived more fully, more deeply.”

Commodification and the Marginalized

Clearly, in spite of global capitalism that has made Filipinos a people who do not read their own writers (some of us must now be reading with the sprouting all over the place of bargain bookstores that peddle remaindered and second-hand books from the United States, further eroding our local publishing industry), because of Rizal, there is a valorization of the Filipino writer and his work.

Emblematic of this paper’s argument is how Yuson’s book cover that used photographs of the Cordillera people created controversy because the heirs of the

photographer, Eduardo Masferré, have demanded for a part of the earnings of the book. I interviewed several writers who mistakenly thought it was the heirs of those in the pictures who wanted money, thus with much laughter and derision, this was treated as just a shakedown, and that since commercial trade of Philippine fiction writing has no substantial monetary earnings to speak of, and the pictures are not part of the contest, the heirs of those whose images illustrate the book entitled *Voyeurs and Savages* are not entitled to anything.

But commerce does not only mean money. It also means prestige, academic tenure, and accolades. Yuson's relationship with the images of the Cordillera people used in his book is reflective of the commodification of everything, and the deprivation of the historical significance of everything. Gamalinda shows this ahistorical attitude in his treatment of a local hero whose role in the fight against Spain and the United States we have yet to fully understand. If Isio, pope of Negros, still has heirs who care about his legacy, they certainly must ask Gamalinda for an apology and compensation. Since the whole colonial experience has disappeared in Ong's novel, he has in effect silenced the most number of characters and stories from the national experience; thus, there is no one who can step up to him and ask for a share of the prize. The novel of Ong has no stand or perspective on independence, revolution, and colonization. Instead of becoming a powerful book, the novel, in the end, is just a pleasant whodunit, with the real criminals missing from the story.

The attitude that to demand compensation from these writers is a simple economic wet dream is the same point of view shown by Richard Armitage, then the point man of the United States in the last military bases negotiations (currently a deputy to Secretary of

State Collin Powell in handling Iraq) held in Manila, when he was given notice by the late Foreign Affairs Secretary Raul Manglapus of the shortfall in the actual aid the Philippines had received as compensation for the United States' use of Subic and Clark: "I am not putting a price tag on Philippine honor and sovereignty. I am not an accountant, I do not stand next to a cash register when conducting foreign policy" (Bengzon 1997, 71). Talk of exchange and money appear like dirty subjects, demeaning if spoken by the marginalized who are supposed to have no history or even biological needs. In actuality, sired and trained in the language of global capitalism, many of the oppressed now refuse to be used to benefit solely the powerful. They also want a share of the pie. They want in on the racket.

The photos used by Yuson can be found in the book on Eduardo Masferré (Gale de Villa 1988), photos that are still available as postcards in some antique shops. There has yet to be an extensive study of Eduardo Masferré's powerful images of the Cordillera people. As a young man and photography enthusiast he had gone into the business of selling these photos to tourists looking for souvenirs of the Cordillera people. It was not a lucrative business, thus he had to support himself by other means, like working for a mine company and as a school teacher. Nevertheless, just like Yuson, he profited from the images of the Cordillera people, not only economically, but in terms of prestige and accolades, his photographs having gone on extended tours with the Smithsonian Museum and other institutions abroad. The book of his photos attest to the stature he has achieved. He once said: "Some local people thought that it was like Hollywood where a man could make a fortune from pictures. They thought I should give them money" (ibid., 10). When I got to talk to his son Pancho Masferré over a mobile phone on July 30, 2004, he said:

“We have never had problems with the natives, they have never asked for money for the pictures.”

What is instructive is the origin of his impulse to take the pictures. According to Gale de Villa (*ibid.*, 7):

In a 1911 copy of the *National Geographic* that his family had kept, Eduardo first saw photographs of the Cordillera people. In 1911, 1912 and 1913, *Geographic* carried a series of articles by Dean C. Worcester, Secretary of Interior of the Philippines. The 1911 article, about sports introduced to replace headhunting, contained over fifty of Worcester’s photographs. Meant to record events and give the American public an impression of the ‘wild man at home,’ as the text said. The pictures made a lasting impression on Eduardo.

Yuson’s book uses the photo of a bare-breasted “young woman smoking a cigar” for his cover, and the back of the book uses “investigating a camera,” which is reminiscent of the scene in Gamalinda’s book when Pope Isio declares the inventor of the overhead projector a prophet. The only picture of a Caucasian in Yuson’s book is a small vignette of a woman. The vignette is beside the much larger photo at the cover of the “young woman smoking a cigar.” Inside the book, the last pages have three more pictures of Cordillera people. John Berger (1980, 56) writes: “In the private use of photography, the context of the instant recorded is preserved so that a photograph lives in an ongoing continuity. (If you have a photograph of Peter on your wall, you are not likely to forget what Peter means to you.) The public photograph, by contrast, is torn from its context, and becomes a dead object which, exactly because it is dead, lends itself to any arbitrary use.” One wishes that indeed the claimants were the heirs of those Cordillera people whose images have been used in Yuson’s book, thus it will not only be a financial claim (which can mean sustenance of their life); it will also be a claim that those pictures still have life. But the sad truth is the Masferrés are continuing to benefit from the images of

the Cordillera people. This is the continuation of the St. Louis Exposition narrative thread, which actually began when Spanish conquerors also exhibited Filipinos in Europe, to the consternation of Rizal, especially when a Moro woman died from the cold (Schumacher 2002, 73). Both exhibitions of Filipinos were used to justify the colonial project, and to amuse the powerful.

Ernest Mandel (1999, 475–76) writes:

The repressive function of enforcing the rule of the dominant class by coercion (army, police, law, penal system) was the dimension of the State most closely examined in classical Marxism. Later, Lukács and Gramsci laid greater emphasis on its integrative function, which they ascribed essentially to the ideology of the ruling class. It is obvious, of course, that class domination based solely on repression would be tantamount to an untenable state of permanent civil war. In different modes of production or concrete socio-economic formations, the integrative function is predominantly exercised through different ideologies: magic and ritual, philosophy and morality, law and politics; although to a certain extent each of these different superstructural practices performs such a role in every class society. The reproduction and evolution of these integrative functions is achieved through instruction, education, culture and means of communication—but above all the predominant categories of thought peculiar to the class structure of every society.

Gamalinda, Ong, and Yuson's novels reaffirm the ideology of late capitalism, and the nod given by the state is no accident. It is the job of the state to promote the ideology of the ruling elite, and the Centennial Literary Contest is an exercise in the reaffirmation of that dominant cultural logic.

History and the Fetishes of Late Capitalism

Who the audience of the work will be as decided in the writer's mind is of primordial importance to the task of writing, as is made obvious by the three Centennial novels. Gamalinda wants to have New Yorkers as his readers, thus totally erasing the role of the United States in looting the country. Yuson wants those like him to read his novel; the

global Filipino, the Filipino who easily crosses borders due to his privileged position in transnational capitalism. It is no surprise that Yuson occasionally mentions in his essays his admiration for Fidel Ramos, the president who ushered us into transnational capitalism's version of globalization.¹⁰ Ong, by keeping quiet about the whole complex and painful colonial experience, wants everyone to read him.

Fiction writers, as much as they have the right to claim that their imagination should be free to construct anything, are obliged to inform themselves not only of the vast and complex histories of their subjects, but they must know the politics they themselves are espousing. Literature is not benign. To join and win in the grandest state-sponsored literary contest quadruples their responsibility.

Chinua Achebe (1990, 44) wrote in 1965: "Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse—to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of years of denigration and self-abasement." I use Achebe extensively in this paper because there is no Filipino writer who (not even Carlos Bulosan who is certainly also formidable) equals his international stature as a postcolonial writer, thus highlighting the fact that with *Things Fall Apart* (1958) postcolonial literature has been with us for a long time now. Achebe can write the way he does in 1958, nearly half a century ago (a little late when compared to the Commonwealth prizewinners) and long before postcolonial theories and literature became a fad, because he knows that literature and its images are used to capture and maintain power, and he has decided to use literature as a weapon of the downtrodden. Chinua Achebe has consistently and convincingly argued that literature has for too long a time been an important tool of imperialism.

The manner of the presence or absence of the Philippine colonial experience in the three centennial novels show how, in spite of traces of Rizal's *Noli*, we no longer understand the power over our individual and collective imagination of years of living under colonial rule. Globalization and its postmodern ideology have triumphed as the dominant ideology. The utter disregard of Philippine histories in the three novels, the ability to get away with this, and even get the nod of the state through the literary establishment are symptomatic of late capitalism's particularizing a past to suit the moment. To disregard history is, at the very least, convenient.¹¹ Convenience, after all, is one of the great fetishes of late capitalism.

There is no attempt in this paper to compare the Ramos and Estrada governments to the Marcos government, even if some of the personalities that were involved in the Centennial Literary Contest have worked under or with the three (plus the Aquino administration, four) governments, and now with the Macapagal-Arroyo administration, five governments, thus showing a continuity that is not at all surprising (e.g. Blas Ople, Marcos labor secretary, constitutional commissioner during the Aquino administration, senator during the Ramos administration, later chair of the Estrada Centennial publications committee, and until his death foreign affairs secretary of the Macapagal-Arroyo government; Adrian Cristobal, supreme Marcos apologist/intellectual and Social Security System administrator, later overall chair of the Estrada Centennial Literary Contest and publisher of Estrada crony Mark Jimenez's *Manila Times* (a paper founded in 1898 by an Englishman to cater to the Americans, control of which has since been rotated among various factions of the elite); Rony Diaz, Marcos general director of the National Manpower and Youth Council of the Department of Labor, senior aide of

conservative labor leader and senator Ernesto Herrera under the Ramos administration, later chair of the judges for the English novel of the Estrada Centennial Literary Contest, and now publisher of Macapagal-Arroyo crony Dante Ang's *Manila Times*). The point is that the state, under the leadership of various personalities, has found the combination of history and the arts and the University of the Philippines as useful to their hold on power, or at least the combination is a good ingredient to their crafting and inserting themselves in their version of the national narrative, and ensuring the continuity of the state's ideology.

It is uncanny how the three personalities cited above (Ople, Cristobal, and Diaz) are not only associated with the Marcos regime, but were directly involved in formulating the rationale behind the start of the mass selling and export of Filipino bodies as labor to the "world market." The Ramos government, in its enthusiastic efforts to be deemed a world leader of capitalism's version of globalization while maintaining the state's coffers, has perfected the narrative of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) as heroes, while Estrada has always fashioned himself as the champion of the working class. Yet in the three novels that captured the Estrada Centennial prizes, the histories of the marginalized (people who make the illusion of the Filipino and the Philippines as global citizens possible, and whose bodies are used as firewood to run the engine of global capitalism) are glaringly absent.

The three Centennial novels show an attitude towards history that can only be explained by the triumphant march of global capitalism and the continuing marginalization of Marxism (ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union) as a tool of analysis, both of which have been detrimental to the ability of many to connect the dots

to a new kind of imperialism, a monopoly imperialism (not monopoly capitalism) that has no other imperial power to compete with it,¹² neither Britain, now reduced to following orders from the United States, nor Russia, whose practice and utopian vision of a certain kind of socialism have been totally rejected by the people it purports to serve. Marxism is still the critical theory that makes possible the understanding of the current fluidity yet power of late capitalism.

The three Centennial winners have taken it upon themselves to (re)write the history of the Philippines in their novels, while sharing the ethos of Francis Fukuyama's postmodern declaration that history as we know it has ended, and in the process they have shown themselves to be in the clutches of U.S. global hegemony.¹³ Both times the state sponsored a literary contest that encompassed most of the conventional genres, it has been noted by observers, like Agoncillo (1975, 201) on Quezon and Cristobal (1998) on Estrada, that the respective presidents of the Republic wanted to be present during the literary awards night, and I still say this is because of the mystique of the writer in the Philippines that comes from Rizal as the ultimate Filipino intellectual.

The overall chair of the Centennial Literary Contest, Adrian Cristobal, assessed the Centennial awards night: "THE 'PRO-POOR rhetoric' that the elites deplore in President Estrada, however, sits well with writers who sympathize with the oppressed and downtrodden of society. Writers call themselves 'starving' and describe themselves as 'outcast.' A socially adjusted man of letters is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms." One can't help but think that he should not have been too quick in valorizing the Philippine literary establishment as rebel. Cristobal goes on: "Unlike many politicians who tell writers what their duty is to society (write about the bright side of life and all

that) President Estrada extolled what they have done through the centuries for their fellowmen, from the Propaganda Period that gave us Rizal, Lopez Jaena, Del Pilar, etc. to modern times that gave this country Jose Garcia Villa, Amado Hernandez, Nick Joaquin, Francisco Arcellana and N. V. M. Gonzales [*sic*], not to mention the ‘instant literary millionaires’ of the Centennial Literary Prize.” To lump Rizal, Lopez Jaena, Del Pilar, Hernandez, Joaquin,¹⁴ and Gonzalez together with Villa and Arcellana, is to say there is no difference between writers who are very conscious of working with and within history, and writers who insist on being ahistorical. Cristobal himself, therefore, makes a very ahistorical statement, an attitude supported by the ideology of late capitalism. This is symptomatic of the reason our images of Rizal as the ultimate Filipino intellectual continue to haunt us today. Rizal during his trial “disavowed support for the revolution, not because it was morally wrong but because it was inopportune. Obviously, for him, abstract ideals have deadly practical consequences” (Lim 1993, 24).

¹ In 1995 Emmanuel Torres as *Philippine Studies* guest editor published (43: 383-418) an excerpt from Charlson Ong’s *An Embarrassment of Riches*.

² Paul Ricoeur (1991, 20) writes: “Perhaps, indeed, every temporal process is recognized as such only to the extent that it can, in one-way or another, be recounted. This reciprocity that is assumed to exist between narrativity and temporality is the theme of my present research. Limited as this problem may be compared with the vast scope of all the real and potential uses of language, it is actually immense. Under a single heading, it groups together a number of problems that are usually treated under different rubrics: the epistemology of historical knowledge, literary criticism applied to works of fiction, theories of time (which are themselves scattered among cosmology, physics, biology, psychology and sociology). By treating the temporal quality of experience as the common reference of both history and fiction, I make of fiction, history, and time one single problem.”

³ See Reynaldo C. Ileto’s *Filipinos and their Revolution* (2000) where he is able to deftly demonstrate the power of narratives in the life of the Philippines as a nation, from the debate surrounding Andres Bonifacio to Benigno Aquino as martyr to the Centennial

celebrations at the Luneta, as outgoing President Fidel Ramos and incoming President Joseph Estrada expertly weave themselves into the national story.

⁴ John N. Schumacher, S.J. (1998, 66) writes: “Nonetheless, the important role that the Filipino clergy could play in rallying the masses to the Revolution did not escape the revolutionary leaders, whatever their own personal attitudes to the clergy might be. The Filipino priests were especially important to satisfy the demand for priests to provide religious services once the friars had either been forced to flee to Manila or had been taken prisoners. Contrary to the common stereotype of mass hatred for the friars, the truth rather would seem to be that the mass of ordinary people were grieved by the loss of their friar parish priests, and serious discontent could have surfaced, had there not been Filipino priests to take their places.”

⁵ Reynaldo C. Ileto (1998, 207) writes in reaction to those, like Milagros Guerrero, who privilege colonial archives (it is instructive in the light of Gamalinda’s novel): “Those who want to pursue this matter will want to consult the classics of Philippine history for their antecedents. Sadly, however, they won’t get very far, for these books basically provide an account of the Filipino people’s emergence from a dark age of colonial rule. Superstition, ignorance, fanaticism, timidity, and the like are the ideological features of this dark past. Instead of an articulation of the categories of meaning implicit in them, subjects of this sort are simply given a negative sign and generally dismissed. The archives, again, are partly at fault for not providing direct access to popular mentalities. Sharing the blame, however, must be the view that only educated, middle-class Filipinos thought, while the masses were kept mesmerized by the fanfare and spectacle of pop culture with its irrational, sentimental, and escapist attributes. This view, applied to popular religion, originates from ilustrado propaganda against the friars, which was transformed into a general statement about society.” Gamalinda’s *My Sad Republic* also won a citation from the Manila Critics Circle in 2000.

⁶ The story is available from http://www.geocities.com/icasocot/hau_ahto.html.

⁷ The judges for the Centennial novel in English (Rony V. Diaz, Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo, and the late Nieves Epistola) have all been connected at one time or another with the University of the Philippines. Caroline Hau (2000, 126-127) writes about the University of the Philippines during the Marcos years and describes a certain kind of history writing that is “arguably nurtured within the very pores of the state; flourished by virtue of the attempt on the part of an increasingly centralized authoritarian regime to legitimize itself through a series of state-sponsored projects aimed at promoting an official ‘national culture’ capable of speaking to and for the so-called Filipino people.”

⁸ Teodoro Agoncillo (1975, 214–16) writes: “This period, which extended from approximately 1930 to the outbreak of World War II in 1941, was dominated by the writers of the University of the Philippines: Federico Mangahas, Salvador P. Lopez, Jose A. Lansang, Francisco B. Icasiano, Amando G. Dayrit, Arturo B. Rotor, Manuel E. Arguilla, Bienvenido Santos, and the women writers Pura Santillan-Castrencia, Maria Kalaw, Maria Liuna Angela Manalang-Gloria, Trinidad Tarosa, and a few others, many

of whom are still around writing about their experiences or are engaged in activities directly related to physical survival.” The members of the board of judges for the English division are: Carlos P. Romulo, Jorge Bocobo, Cristino Jamias, A. V. H. Hartendorp, Vicente M. Hilario, Dean S. Fansler, Vidal A. Tan, Conrado Benitez, David T. Boguslav, Vicente G. Sinco, Paz M. Benitez, Walter J. Robb (Romulo 1973, 74).

⁹ Lizabeth Cohen (2004, 114) writes: “A wide range of economic interests, ranging from strident anti-New Deal big businessmen to moderate and liberal capitalists to labor and its allies on the left, endorsed the importance of mass consumption to making a successful reconversion from wartime to peacetime, although each came to value mass consumption for its own reasons. All of these interest groups feared a postwar depression with rampant unemployment as had followed World War I, and hence whatever their particular vision of reconversion, they favored taking immediate action to promote prosperity. Surprising pent-up demand and flush savings accounts from cashed-in war bonds, made quick action all the more crucial. But from here priorities diverged. The conservative business interests that the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce represented sought to build on their hard-won defeats of price control and the Full Employment Act of 1946, which passed, which would have obligated the state to provide jobs if the private sector failed to create them (as the compromise Employment Act of 1946, which passed, did not). Business conservatives continued their efforts to dismantle New Deal-inspired government intervention in the operations of free enterprise. For them, more private investment leading to increased productivity was the route to economic growth and postwar prosperity, but the profits they sought from more efficiently produced and cheaply priced goods still depended on a dynamic mass consumer market.”

¹⁰ Alfred Yuson (2002) writes online about a book project sponsored by the Financial Executives of the Philippines: “Another exemplary speaker was Asian Institute of Management (AIM) Pres. Roberto de Ocampo. Baritone-voiced and always with the mind to offer concise, clear appraisals of conundrums found in the business or morality context, the former President Fidel V. Ramos liked to call him “Tiger Bobby” which was characteristically sharp and downright enlightening. I had interviewed him once before, for a videodocu while on the coattails of a presidential state visit that also served as a business blitz through several European countries, in those days in the mid-’90s when the Philippines seemed well on its way to stability owing to FVR’s and De Ocampo’s own (as finance secretary) commendable thrusts and policies. I threw him a couple of off-the-cuff questions at the end of our interview.” De Ocampo formerly worked as an executive of the IMF-World Bank, and was instrumental as finance secretary in opening the flood gates to the neoliberal ideals of globalization.

¹¹ I use the word history when referring to the collective histories of the Philippines, and use histories when emphasizing the Filipinos’ many significant, but largely unknown and undocumented, narratives and events.

¹² Fredric Jameson (1999, 301) makes a distinction between imperialism (as monopoly capitalism) and late capitalism (as multinational capitalism). The invasion of Iraq, under the leadership of United States CEO George Bush, Jr. shows us that multinational capitalism is also now monopoly imperialism.

¹³ Antonio Gramsci (2000, 196) writes: “For the philosophy of praxis, ideologies are anything but arbitrary; they are real historical facts which must be combated and their nature of instruments of domination revealed, not for reasons of morality, etc., but for reasons of political struggle: in order to make the governed intellectually independent of the governing, in order to destroy one hegemony and create another, as a necessary moment in revolutionizing of praxis.”

¹⁴ The kind of history of Nick Joaquin is still a subject of debate. Edel E. Garcellano (2001, 248) writes: “If, for instance, Alice G. Guillermo denies the recuperation and positive historicizing of Nick Joaquin by Epifanio San Juan Jr., on the basis of the former’s subscription to Spanish colonialism as a necessary ‘evil’ in the formation of the so-called Filipino national identity, doesn’t she likewise imply that to accept San Juan’s advocacy of recuperation for the icon of the Ermita tribe is tantamount to re-inserting San Juan himself into left-wing discourse? That, in fact, to allow the recuperation of Joaquin [fascism in effect as a socialist subtext] is to likewise recuperate San Juan’s concept of ‘humanist essentialism’. . . strikes us as an idealist and ideological quest for ‘human essences’ above and beyond the particularities of different societies . . . a quest which thus becomes extremely vulnerable to imperialist totalizing where definitions are laid down according to the terms of dominant powers [Guillermo, ‘Subversions of Desire as Metatext’].”

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