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## **Philippine Cultural Transformation: Philippine American Literary Relations**

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## PHILIPPINE CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

**PHILIPPINE AMERICAN LITERARY RELATIONS.** By Lucila V. Horsillos. Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1969. xvi, 200 pp.

One of the most interesting aspects of Philippine cultural history is the transformation that resulted from the American occupation of the Philippines. When the Americans came in 1898, they found a people that had already been in contact with Western ideas and Western culture for three centuries. But although that cultural contact had profoundly influenced the majority of the people, it had not succeeded in making them homogeneous. The people were divided, geographically, into linguistic groups. There was also a sharp cleavage, vertically, between the educated class who spoke Spanish, and the masses of the population who spoke little or no Spanish but were perfectly at home in their own regional tongue.

Yet they were a nation that was by no means uncultured. They had their own cultural patterns, their own sets of values, their own well-developed arts and crafts, and to a certain extent their own literature.

They were a nation, moreover, that had a brief experience of self-rule. It had taken the Spaniards several months and one division of eleven thousand men to destroy the two autonomous republics in Cavite. Dissolved temporarily by the Pact of Biaknabato, the inchoate Philippine Republic was again being reestablished at Malolos, with a constituent congress engaged in framing its Constitution.

By a decision strangely out of character with American principles and professions, the United States destroyed that republic and annexed the Philippine Islands by force of arms. In one of the bloodiest wars then on record, the Filipinos resisted American annexation for two years. Then they surrendered to the inevitable and accepted American rule. They also accepted the new language imposed on them.

Whatever hesitations their fathers and grandfathers may have had, the younger generation of Filipinos accepted the English language with such enthusiasm that within three decades a Filipino literature in English had developed. It is a vigorous literature which has continued to develop until the present.

No language can be imposed upon an entire nation without imposing with it the cultural matrix that goes with that language. Like a tree, a language comes with its soil and bears its own kind of fruit. The English language that was taught to Filipino children in the public schools of Ilocos Norte or Pangasinan or Leyte or Mindanao

was embodied in a culture. It was the language spoken in America, taught by Americans, contained in American books, periodicals, comics, films, advertisements. What effect this had upon the culture of the Islands can be readily imagined.

But it need not be imagined. It can be studied: for its manifestations were palpable.

That is the background of Philippine-American cultural relations. Perhaps no relationship has ever begun so inauspiciously. Perhaps also, no relationship was ever transformed so quickly from the hostility of the first few years to the warm friendship of the succeeding decades. That warm friendship itself is an interesting phenomenon and deserves serious study. The hardboiled American general who vowed to make Samar a howling wilderness in 1900, could not have believed his ears had he been told that in 1942 Filipino civilians in Samar and elsewhere would risk their lives to protect Americans in hiding.

Obviously, something had happened in the four decades between 1898 and 1941 to effect this change of attitudes. Obviously too, such warm friendship as did develop could not have been without its cultural effects. Actually, what had taken place was a cultural transformation of enormous proportions that manifested itself in almost every phase of life and society. The cultural history therefore of those four decades must be a fascinating thing to study.

The book under review, written by Professor Lucila V. Horsillos of the University of the Philippines, is an attempt to study that cultural history from the point of view of "Philippine-American literary relations". The author is a professor of English and comparative literature who has obtained her doctorate from the University of Indiana.

There is a good deal of useful information in the book. Miss Horsillos mentions some interesting things in the Philippine literary history. For instance, the publication in the *Philippines Free Press* in 1907 of "the first known Filipino poem in English" by Justo Julianco. (Its title is given by Miss Horsillos both in her text and in the index as "Sursum Surda", sic.) There was also the first Filipino novel in English, by Zoilo Galang. The short story by Paz Marquez Benitez entitled "Dead Stars" (published in the *Philippines Herald* in 1925) is rightly considered significant. Miss Horsillos also mentions the work of foreign teachers and editors. Among them: Dean and Harriet Fansler, A. V. H. Hartendorp, and the Australian T. Inglis Moore. (Strangely enough, the work of other American professors is not mentioned, particularly those in the private colleges whose influence may have even been more pronounced.)

Regarding the literary scene in the Philippines during the early years of American rule, Miss Horsillos contents herself with quoting

the following passage from an article by Hartley Bartlett published in Michigan in 1936: "there appeared new editions of old favorites and also the works of a generation of writers who had awaited the opportunity to express themselves but could do so only according to the old literary tradition. Almost all of the American period was therefore characterized by an exuberant output of old-fashioned poetry for which the older generation was hungry, but which was beginning to be outmoded before it appeared." That is a very important fact in Philippine literary history, and Miss Horsillos might have done well to document it.

She mentions other interesting developments. As the Spanish-language newspapers folded up (to be replaced briefly by a Spanish section in bilingual newspapers, which in turn also was abandoned) the number of writers in Spanish dwindled. On the other hand, there was abundant writing in the vernacular Philippine languages. "The period from 1900 through the 1930's was exuberant with Tagalog literature," says Miss Horsillos. She might have added that it was also exuberant with Visayan and Ilocano literature.

But with all these interesting things in it, this book is disappointing. Perhaps the trouble is with methodology. It is perhaps an inappropriate approach to the subject in hand. For instance, we are told of "the sudden rise of the novel, a preponderance of poetry, and the popularity of the zarzuela." What a wonderful book might have been written to document that one statement—which in this book remains undocumented.

There are a few interesting insights in this book. One of the truest (from this reviewer's biased point of view) is the suggestion that, from reading American textbooks in the schools and American periodicals elsewhere (and doubtless also from seeing American films), young Filipino students had formed an ideal of America as a utopia, peopled by wealthy and successful citizens. That is an important fact in the Philippine cultural history: it is a pity that Miss Horsillos merely mentions it without pursuing it farther. If she had, she would have given us the perfect explanation for the strange mixture of nostalgia and bitter disillusionment in such a book as Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*.

If we must be frank (and in scholarly matters we have to be) this is the basic difficulty with the book under review. It makes statements—many of which are doubtless true—but without coming to grips with the actual works that would give substance to the statements.

To cite only two examples (many more could be cited). On page 75 we find this statement: "Edna St. Vincent Millay could have inspired Trinidad Tarrosa Subido's intense and personal lyricism and

preoccupation with love." She *could have*: but did she? Why could the Filipino poetess not have been influenced by other poets—by Keats or Shelley or Elizabeth Barrett Browning? That is a question that can be answered only by examining Tarrosa Subido's text: but we are given no text, only an assertion.

Again, on a preceding page we find this statement: "Angela Manalang Gloria's intense lyricism and passionate romanticism were derived probably from Edna St. Vincent Millay...." Again: *derived probably*. No proof.

Perhaps the author may have thought that no proof was needed. In which case we are in the realm of personal impressions, of surmises, of statements whose truth is taken for granted without documentation.

Which may explain the rather startling statement on page 2: "Proofs of the existence of a pre-Spanish tradition were lost with the destruction of Philippine incunabula." To be destroyed, the Philippine incunabula must have existed. How do we know they existed? Does the author seriously suggest that printing existed in the Philippines before the coming of the Spaniards? If so, where is the proof for such a novel suggestion? (Don't say: "The proofs were destroyed when the incunabula were destroyed.")

This kind of assertion renders the scholarship of the book suspect. Perhaps it is not a finished book. Since the author certainly knows her subject, may we express the hope that she will write a more carefully documented and more critically oriented work on this same subject? It is a subject worth writing about, for those four decades from 1898 to 1941 were among the most important decades in Philippine history.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

## THE PHILIPPINES AFTER AMERICAN RULE

UNITED STATES-PHILIPPINE RELATIONS, 1946-56. By Sung Yong Kim. Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1968. iv, 158 pp.

Dr. Sung Yong Kim examines the political, economic, and military relations between the Philippines and the United States covering the first ten years after the withdrawal of American sovereignty. The decade under consideration is, of course, both significant and unique. It is significant because it was during the period that the initial details of "close and special" ties with the United States, after the