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## The Spanish Tradition in Nick Joaquin

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# *The Spanish Tradition In Nick Joaquin*

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LOURDES BUSUEGO PABLO

## I

Considerable interest has been shown of late in the writings of Nick Joaquin. He is unquestionably one of the abler literary figures on the contemporary Philippine scene. Even the casual reader cannot miss the power of his stories. His play, *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, has attracted wide attention during its recent performances—ten years, incidentally, after the play was written. With all this interest, it is to be wondered if the casual reader really knows what Mr. Joaquin is trying to say.

The local critics have been very enthusiastic in their praise of his writings, his stories in particular. Mr. Yabes finds in these stories signs of enduring merit.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Arcellana acclaims him as "the most distinguished living Filipino writer," and his stories as "quite simply the finest Filipino short stories ever written."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Manalo adds that

while it may be premature to hail Joaquin a genius of an international order (as one or two critics have already done), the time is just ripe for Filipinos to recognize that he is the first really first-rate writer to come out of this country since the Americans introduced their language here.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Locsin observes:

We have read stories by many of the new American writers. These stories are competent, significant, clever, curious, full of tricks. They are the works of bright intelligences, skilled arti-

sans, etc. There is only one thing wrong with them. They do nothing to you. You are not changed by them. Changed, not in the sense of being reformed, but as a man is changed after a profound experience. The stories of Joaquin are an experience.<sup>4</sup>

Villa speaks of Joaquin as the only Filipino writer who, in his opinion, possesses "real imagination—that imagination of power and depth and great metaphysical seeing—and which knows how to express itself in great language."<sup>5</sup>

Hence Mr. Joaquin is not merely a skilled craftsman in his chosen art but also a sincere and eloquent writer with a message, a message truly significant in the sense that it is thought-provoking and capable of changing the local literary world. One critic says:

His writings possess a depth of feeling and insight and creative energy unmatched by local writers. And he seems to be the only one whose stories combine a raw-boned realism and dynamic spirituality lacking in most of the anemic stuff printed these days.<sup>6</sup>

It is strange how Nick Joaquin can, nevertheless, be misread and misjudged, when his basic thesis ought to be obvious if one would only exert a little effort to probe conscientiously into the problems and solutions offered by his play and stories.

The 1952 issue of *Sands and Coral*, the literary annual of Silliman University, carries a book review of *Nick Joaquin: Prose and Poems*, entitled "The World of Nick Joaquin" by Dolores S. Feria, "ordinarily a reviewer with a fresh slant on things and a keen eye for what is significant."<sup>7</sup> Armando Manalo, reprinting some passages of her book review in his literary column, "Fair Game," in *This Week*, calls it the most disappointing piece in the annual, because she judges superficially, and completely misses the main point of Joaquin's stories.

As a specific illustration, Mr. Manalo first takes up one particular argument. Mrs. Feria accuses Joaquin of lapsing into "unconvincing sophistication" when he treats the young-

er generation. Mr. Manalo asks to whom she refers, because "it is futile to generalize on the character of Joaquin's younger generation; they form an assortment fully as varied as the characters that compose the older generation." And here he repeats his conception of Joaquin's point of view:

If they [Joaquin's younger generation] have a common trait, it is that, let loose in a kind of unformed middle world, they are plagued by worse doubts and try, however ineffectually, to mediate between a dying and an actual set of standards. In their hesitations, their occasional brashness and unexpected delicacies of spirit, lies the tragic conflict between the integrity of the past as Joaquin sees it and the corruption of modern life.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Manalo then takes to task Mrs. Feria's summary estimate of Joaquin. He says:

The world of Nick Joaquin, according to her, is the "nostalgic, torch-lit world of the past" and his "most brilliant performances are undoubtedly found when he gives full rein to his sense of the past."

At the same time, this world is "very narrow—narrow in the sense that it is largely an impressionistic and romantic world of his own experiences."

These are poisonous and misleading half-statements and give a completely false idea of the nature of Joaquin's achievement. To begin with, it is gratuitous to note the connection between the writer's "most brilliant performances" and his "sense of the past." One may ask: in what stories of Joaquin does this sense of the past *not* operate?<sup>9</sup>

The point is certainly well taken. For in *all* of Joaquin's stories is found an awareness of the value of our Spanish past, the past which with its precious Christian heritage, Joaquin adopts as a standard of comparison to uphold before the morally confused and spiritually barren modern world. Mr. Manalo's appears to be the only acceptable interpretation of Joaquin's preoccupation with the past.

In his stories the past exists as a standard, a norm, as the textbooks say, with which to compare and against which to judge the imperfect present.<sup>10</sup>

Mr. Manalo defines Joaquin's problem as the problem of Philippine civilization, the collision of two cultures, "the

consequent disorganization of standards, and the search for new values." Obviously this is no narrow concept of life. For in all his studies, Nick Joaquin seeks not only to picture the present moral and spiritual degradation, but also to inspire the reader to look for a remedy and in presenting glimpses of a vigorous and healthy past leads the reader to discover therein the solution of the present.

Among the more renowned Filipino writers today, it would seem that Nick Joaquin alone has something definite to say, something clear-cut to propose. He does not become lost in the modern muddle of agnosticism and atheism, sadly common in contemporary literature. His purpose is always unmistakable, his message lucid. Mr. Viray describes the Joaquin short stories as "stories about the transient quality of the flesh and the necessity of faith in a vicious world."<sup>11</sup> He says that Nick Joaquin "works on the assumption that there should always be an implicit attitude in a story" and in Mr. Joaquin's stories this implicit attitude is "the redemption of the spirit."<sup>12</sup> Mr. Torres, as we have seen, awards Joaquin the distinction of being the only local writer who effectively combines "raw-boned realism and dynamic spirituality," which he claims is sadly lacking in the anemic writing found in the Philippines today.<sup>13</sup>

It is evident that Nick Joaquin, more than any other living writer in the local scene, deserves the potent literary leadership now obviously missing.

## II

A study of Nick Joaquin's prose writings reveals that he emphasizes in them the necessity of restoring a national awareness of our Catholic Spanish heritage. The Filipino has a three-fold historical heritage: the Oriental-Malayan, the Spanish, and the American. It is obvious that he cannot afford to ignore any one of these. Yet for reasons that will be seen, our Spanish cultural heritage has been obscured, and therefore (Mr. Joaquin contends) must be rightly interpreted and portrayed in its true colors if historical truth and cultural balance are to be restored.

Even if one does not accept Joaquin's thesis, at least for reasons of literary appreciation one should be familiar with that thesis. His stories will be far more comprehensible if the reader is aware of the author's purpose in writing them.

#### ECLIPSE OF THE SPANISH TRADITION

To say that the influence of Spain in the Philippines has been strong and enduring is obvious. Yet today, many, not only among the masses but also among the more intellectual, have tried to ignore this heritage. We cannot simply turn our backs on what has been an integral part of our national formation: yet that is precisely what has been happening. Le Roy said fifty years ago:

In a good deal of what has been written of late regarding the proper policy for the United States to pursue, it seems to have been assumed that Spanish domination in the Philippines may practically be disregarded. . . . Such an attitude comes from sheer ignorance, and nothing less, though there goes with it something of the narrow-minded race-prejudice which sneers at the Spaniards of today as "decadent" and "one of the lesser breeds." But the sober, enlightened historian cannot cultivate such narrowness, any more than he will in future be influenced by the hysterical misrepresentations of Spain which culminated in the American press in 1891.<sup>14</sup>

That this eclipse of the Catholic Spanish tradition is a fact can be shown in contemporary Philippine writing. One has only to thumb through any of the recent Philippine anthologies of short stories or the local literary organs in order to uncover ignorance of the Spanish colonial period and its cultural values.

Where the period is not completely ignored, it is usually distorted. Of historical distortion, the writers of the Revolutionary period in Philippine history, such as Graciano Lopez-Jaena and Marcelo H. del Pilar, furnish sufficient evidence. In their zeal to eradicate the admittedly oppressive aspects of Spanish colonial administration, they also managed completely to ignore, even deliberately to obscure, the benefits derived from Spanish colonization.

One of the causes, therefore, of the eclipse of the Spanish Catholic tradition is this prejudice against the Spanish colonial system (and by implication against the Church), which was generated by the national movement and the revolution, and which is still very much alive.

#### ANTICLERICALISM

Contributing no little to this prejudice is the peculiar manner in which the tinge of anticlericalism has crept into Filipino nationalism. Discrimination and abuses committed by some of the less worthy of the Catholic clergy led eventually to the questioning of the faith they preached. This led to a bitter clash between the Church in the Philippines and the reform propagandists (many of them in Europe and befriended by, if not members of, the Masonic society) who were at the head of Filipino nationalism and the movement for independence. The Catholic Church, moreover, being logically associated always with the Spaniards who brought Catholicism into the country, was only too soon branded "reactionary," and accused of being opposed to the liberal aspirations of a freedom loving people. Unfortunately this erroneous conclusion has persisted in some quarters influential enough to matter, and has made the task of a fair and impartial estimate of our Spanish past doubly difficult.

#### LA LEYENDA NEGRA

Prejudice against Spain was further heightened by the "black legend" of the Spanish villain in Anglo-American literature, which Filipino writers adopted and spread among our people, thus adding fuel to the people's resentment against all things Spanish. Bannon and Dunne, in their book on Latin America,<sup>15</sup> have made a study of this *leyenda negra*, this "myth which has known a hardy life and only now is dying much too slowly." Its origin has been difficult to determine.

All of a sudden it appears full-grown and vigorous. It is the "record" of Spanish cruelty, brutality, stupidity, cowardice, colonial mismanagement, lust for gold, intolerance, despotism—and

other ingredients at will, provided they are all sufficiently uncomplimentary.

Possibly it was the Dutch who first used it in their battle for independence from Spanish domination, but it was soon

turned to good advantage by those who hated Spain and the religious loyalties which she fought for and sought to retain for herself. As time wore on, it became gospel truth in many quarters, accepted without questioning; and under its inspiration, for centuries, the story of Spanish colonial enterprise has been told. As a result, people have come to believe that the men of the Iberian Peninsula were everything which respectable and honorable humans seek to avoid.<sup>16</sup>

The emphasis was laid on the "inhumanity" of the Spaniard, and what contributed a great part of this emphasis was the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. This "Protector de los Indios" without wishing to do so provided the propagandist with incontestable evidence for almost anything he wished to say against the Spaniards. For Las Casas, in his desire to gain a hearing for the Indians, was so enthusiastic in his efforts that, without seeking to alter the truth, he tended to over-emphasize the dark side and pick out details of horror and cruelty that he hoped would move the Cortes to legislate in favor of the Indians.

Men of other nations, envious of Spain's good fortune in the New World, seized upon this condemnation of the Spaniards by one of their own, translated the works of the Dominican, and broadcast them throughout Europe.<sup>17</sup>

Later, the Black Legend was made to serve the cause of religious hatred and rivalry in the life-and-death struggle between Catholic Spain and Protestant England in the 16th century. A generation of Englishmen grew up learning to hate the very name of Spain and everything for which it stood or was supposed to stand, and taught this attitude to its children as unquestioned and unquestionable truth—and their children did the same. "Nationalism and religion became inextricably entwined, and hatred for Spain was a red thread in the pattern." England was in turn joined by the Dutch and the French Huguenots in these sentiments.



. . . Cruelty and brutality were the themes of the legend in its first century or more. Without discarding these elements later writers added cowardice, stupidity, and bungling to the list of Spanish characteristics.<sup>18</sup>

Madariaga explains this prejudice against the Spaniards, adding another motive. He says:

Love of tribe made it necessary for England, France and Holland to blacken Spain; for the richest and most majestic empire the world had seen was for three hundred years the quarry out of which England, France and Holland built their own. These three nations had to justify themselves . . . Men could not bear the burden of guilt . . . Spain had to be wrong so that France, Holland and England, and later the United States, could be right. And as of course Spain was in fact wrong as often as any human nation is apt to be, all that was necessary was to generalize and multiply the facts she herself obligingly provided while dropping under the table the faults human nature made the other three bring forth. Hence, Spanish history as it is written.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE ADVENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE

Another factor which must be considered as leading to the eclipse of the Catholic Spanish tradition is the immediate tangible appeal and prestige of American culture which tends to overshadow our Spanish heritage. It is rather evident that since the turn of this century there has been a slow but steady decline of Spanish culture, especially evident in the decrease of the Spanish-speaking population in the Philippines. Hayden asserts that: "For forty years Spanish has been gradually losing the advantage which it had in 1900 as the only Western Language widely spoken in the Islands."<sup>20</sup> And together with this decline is a corresponding increase of imitation of American culture. The Filipino, says Florence Horn,

adopts American customs promptly and precisely. The educated Filipino speaks idiomatic American-English . . . His conversation is a brisk parody of your own . . . slang idioms. A month or so after "screwball," "oomph," "Fifth Column," or "heel" have come into common usage in the U.S., they have been adopted by the Manila Filipinos, 7800 miles across the Pacific.<sup>21</sup>

The diffusion of the English language has been wide-spread, aided mostly by the public-school system introduced here by

the Americans. Here again, the Spaniards have had their share of adverse criticism. They have been accused of failure to establish an extensive system of popular education. Bannon and Dunne speaking of the parallel condition in Latin America, say:

It must be remembered that, rightfully or not, up to comparatively recent times educational opportunities were not as widely offered nor considered as important as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries... Hence colonial Latin America should not be censured for having failed to do something which no European country at home was doing. Later ages have brought a changed viewpoint on this question of education but that does not justify a blanket condemnation.<sup>22</sup>

In this question of the level of Spanish Colonial education, we have a clear example of a condition which in fact reflects no discredit upon Spain, but has been distorted by propaganda and made a reason for holding a low opinion of our Spanish past. Obviously there is need of objective appraisal. Nick Joaquin points out in his essay, "The Naval de Manila":

Henry James has noted what an infinite amount of history it takes to form even a little taste. Merely from his viewpoint, the esthetic one, it should be instantly apparent how little we can afford to spare a single one of our four hundred years of conscious history. Towards our Spanish past, especially, it is time we became more friendly; bitterness but inhibits us; those years cry for a fresher appraisal.<sup>23</sup>

This is why we must not turn our backs on our Catholic Spanish heritage. The fact that we have done so may very well be one of the reasons for the lack of a great Filipino literature—because there is no solid, true, and integral cultural and traditional background to nurture our writers.

For this lack of a great literature must indeed be one of the consequences of the eclipse of the Catholic Spanish tradition. After all, great writing is "whole" writing, that is to say, writing that springs from, and utilizes the whole of, the writer's cultural heritage. How is it possible to produce great literature when there has been a distortion of truth, this blotting out of three hundred years of tradition that comprise our Spanish heritage?

In addition to this lack of wholeness in Philippine literature, there is also a lack of continuity, which came about when the literary medium was changed from Spanish to English, just when the Filipino writer was approaching command of Spanish. Indeed, the Filipino writers, having just captured the feeling of the Spanish tongue and mastered it; and just about the time when they could have created literature of a "Golden Age" in Spanish, as presaged by the excellent output of Apostol, Balmori, Recto, and Pardo de Tavera—to name but a few—these writers were constrained by history to speak a new tongue. Filipino writing had to start from scratch again. For suddenly the old writers, these bards in Spanish, found themselves singing to an ever decreasing audience. Soon they were supplanted in the reading public's attention and affection by the younger group of writers in English with a new cultural background and a different set of values. The history of the Filipino short story in English supplies the rest of the tale.

One obstacle, however, began to appear to prevent the immediate ushering in of our "Golden Age of Literature." Just at this time when they had acquired freedom and when there had been made available for them the inspiration of wider contacts, our writers had to learn and master a new language—English.<sup>24</sup>

One reaction to this cancelling of our immediate past, has been the vogue of pre-Spanish Culture. Entering an age caught in the vortex of modern confusion, lost in an unending maze of shifting values and blinded by prejudice—in an attempt to reach out and hold on to literary or cultural standards without the oft-hated Spanish overtones, one trend has been to hark back to the "freedom and dignity" of our pagan forefathers. Incidentally Le Roy, without falling into the opposite error of terming the early Filipinos "primitive," characterizes as "fantastic tales" claims concerning the existence of a highly developed society at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards.<sup>25</sup>

Another result of the dominance of English has been the indiscriminate copying of American culture, with not only its

unquestionable contributions to modern progress, but also its plethora of undesirable "isms"—materialism, pessimism, naturalism, existentialism—most of which originated not from the United States, it is true, but with which we have become acquainted in American writings.

### SOCIAL AMNESIA

The lack of wholeness and lack of continuity which characterize Philippine literature today and which retard and hamper the production of great writing here can be attributed to this "social amnesia" of even literate Filipinos, covering a period of almost three centuries during which the characteristic institutions of Philippine society were formed.

Who knows what would have happened to us had not the Spaniards conquered all the islands that comprise the present Philippines? We would perhaps not have been what we are now, a whole, one, and distinctive nation. "Spain brought together under her control the peoples of a country lacking national unity."<sup>26</sup> In January 1936, President Manuel L. Quezon declared:

. . . But above all, we owe to Spain the preservation for the benefit of our own people, of the soil of our country, as well as the laying down, by means of religion and education, of the foundations of our national unity. It is thus, that the Archipelago, composed of numerous and isolated islands, which in 1521 was discovered by Magellan and was but a geographical expression apparently, without any common interest or aspiration, is today a compact and solid nation, with its own history, its heroes, its martyrs and its own flag, a people uplifted by a consciousness of its own personality, feeling a sense of worth and inspired by a high vision of its great destiny.<sup>27</sup>

Thus we owe to the Spaniard the welding together of our different regional tribes into one central, indivisible, fully integrated nation. True, we were called "indios" and treated like children; there were discriminations and abuses ("mistakes which, in the words of the poet, were 'crimes of the times and not of Spain'"<sup>28</sup>); but in all fairness it must be said that Spain never really lost her moral scruples—which

is more than can be said of the other colonizing countries of the time. As Joaquin puts it:

To accuse the Spanish, over and over again, of having brought us all sorts of things, mostly evil, among which we can usually remember nothing very valuable "except, perhaps," religion and national unity, is equivalent to saying of a not very model mother that she has given her child nothing *except* life.<sup>39</sup>

The origin of most of our present writing, which is also perhaps indicative of the times, is muddled thinking; the result is a confused and aimless literature. There is need in this day of unrest and unbelief for going back to some solid, basic fundamentals to anchor to, and in this attempt, our Spanish past with its rich spiritual tradition can be most helpful.

In such a confused literary atmosphere as that which prevails today in the Philippines, the times cry for a fresh approach, for a new and vigorous literary leader who can bring to our literature the impetus, the direction towards a return to basic Christian values. And just such a leader is Nick Joaquin.

#### JOAQUIN'S LEADERSHIP

In his self-confessed mission as a writer, Nick Joaquin is a sort of "cultural apostle." For in all his writings this fact is vividly and acutely presented—that Filipino culture and the Filipino nation as a nation, is unfulfilled, incomplete, and immature, untrue to itself, a "bastard" civilization, because it has insisted on obscuring its deepest, profoundest heritage, a heritage of faith and belief, a heritage which twentieth-century man is trying to disown in his desire for materialistic substitutes—the heritage of its Catholic Spanish past. As Nick Joaquin points out in his stories, the solution to modern ills can be found in the virtues of the past. It has been said that Joaquin "dissects the violent waste-land of so-called modern culture, and diagnoses the evils of the present age in terms of the sturdy virtues of the living past."<sup>40</sup> "In his stories, the past exists as a standard, a norm, as the text-

books say, with which to compare and against which to judge the imperfect present."<sup>31</sup>

This leadership is truly necessary in the present state of Philippine Literature. Mr. Gabila effectively appraises the Philippine literary scene when he says:

The bulk of present-day writing is devoid of any explorative quality. With so much of history, so much of diversity of custom and tradition, so many phases of the contemporary scene to limn, portray and even crusade against, the creative writer falls back on the old over-used themes, limits himself to war experiences, frustrations in love, incidents of the life domestic. All these are valid themes, and once upon a time they seemed to be the only themes worth writing about. But now there are other thirsts, other hungers; newer experiences, newer horizons. And until we explore and exploit, feel more and write less superficially, we shall fail to serve the need for a vigorous, alert, perceptive and ranging literature.<sup>32</sup>

He proceeds to point out what must be done:

It seems to me there is a great and urgent need today for a more conscious, organized effort to produce pieces of more enduring literary value, to build up a literature native unto us and closer to our realities, to paint, so to speak, with the brush of history . . .<sup>33</sup>

And to paint thus with the brush of history, the writer must have that "sense of the past" (i.e., the awareness of the importance of the influence of the past on the present) which Mr. Joaquin, more than any other local writer, possesses. Any endeavor to understand Mr. Joaquin's main purpose as a writer will be rewarded by the discovery that the road on which Mr. Joaquin travels is the very one which Mr. Gabila has pointed out.

### III

It remains now to consider how in his individual written works Joaquin conveys this message. Let us examine first his play, and then his stories.

#### THE PLAY

Mr. Joaquin's lone play *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* presents the conflict between a dying classic European

culture and the brash and materialistic culture of modern times. The painter of the portrait is Don Lorenzo Marasigan, who after years of artistic unproductivity paints his masterpiece. The work creates a stir and attracts droves of visitors, both admirers and curiosity-seekers, and there are offers to buy it. Don Lorenzo presents the painting to his two spinster daughters, Candida and Paula, who with him are representatives of the past culture.

The old artist and his two daughters are being supported by Don Lorenzo's only son Manolo and a married daughter Pepang. The financial condition of the family is difficult and one way out of the straightened situation is to sell the picture to an American who is willing to offer a large sum for it, enough to make Paula and Candida financially independent. But the sisters consistently refuse to sell; to them the painting stands for their father's idealism which the modern world has condemned as impractical and fool-hardy.

As the play opens Don Lorenzo has not spoken to Candida and Paula for a year. The rift between them came when on one occasion they berated him for his impractical idealism, and accused him of being responsible for their poverty. Now the painting in effect gives them their release. For in the sale of the picture he has given them the opportunity to break with the past and with him.

The painting depicts Aeneas carrying his father on his back as Troy burns in the background; but both Aeneas and his father are painted with the face of Don Lorenzo. Pepang goes to the heart of the painting's symbolism when she remarks: "Now he has only himself to carry himself..." For that is exactly what Don Lorenzo wished to portray—that the present generation had been disloyal to the traditional beliefs and ideals of the past. He was alone in his concern for them.

From the start, Joaquin makes use of sudden and striking contrasts, placing in juxtaposition the grace and dignity of the past, and the brashness and skepticism of the present.

The glaring difference is felt the moment Bitoy Camacho steps into the Marasigan sala. Bitoy is an old family friend who has been a participant both in the waning cultural tradition of the past age, and the callous opportunistic trend of modern times. He has returned as a reporter interested in Don Lorenzo's painting.

Candida tells him that the painting "affects people in a very strange way." "Well, we explain — we explain to everybody. And then they ask: Who is Aeneas? Was he a Filipino?" The picture is hated by all the young moderns who view it. Tony Javier says: "The damn thing's always looking at me... Oh, I hate those eyes, I hate that smile, I hate the whole damned thing!" Manolo sneers: "But look at Mr. Aeneas up there... He's carrying his father forward with him, along with all the family idols." Pete, Cora and Eddie, bright young members of the newspaper world, revile the choice of "the most hackneyed theme in art," the Trojan War. When Cora, with unexpected discernment, tells Pete that Don Lorenzo is the Angel of Judgement come out of the past, Pete exclaims:

Well, I'm the present—and I refuse to be judged by the past. It is the past rather that has to be judged by me! If there is anything wrong with me, then the past has something to do with it.

Don Perico, poet turned politician, patterned (according to the author himself) after Claro Recto, answers these attacks indirectly:

Oh, I am amused when I hear these young critics accusing your father of escaping into the dead world of the past! And I pity these young critics! When we were their age, our minds were not so parochial. The past was not dead for us—certainly not the classic past... Aeneas and Bonaparte were equally real to us, and equally contemporary... It was as natural for Pepe Rizal to give his novel a Latin title as for Juan Luna to paint gladiators.

And in another very pertinent passage he felicitously explains the dying away of the past generation of writers who could have headed a Golden Age of Philippine Literature:

To feel that driving urge, that imperious necessity to write poetry, a poet needs an audience; he must be conscious of an audience—



not only of a present audience but a permanent one, an eternal one, an audience of all succeeding generations... Well, poetry withered away for the writers of my time because we knew that we had come to a dead end... We could go on writing if we liked—but we would be writing only for ourselves—and our poems would die with us... They were written in a dying tongue; our sons spoke another language... Who among the young writers can read my poems? The fathers of the young poets of today are from across the sea. They are not our sons; they are foreigners to us, and we do not even exist for them.

The essential elements in the conflict are obviously the sincere idealism and the high integrity of a past whose vivifying feature is its Faith (exemplified by Don Lorenzo, Candida, Paula, and their old friends), and the opportunistic materialism and moral indifference, not to say downright laxity of the modern age of the atheist and the agnostic (exemplified by Tony Javier, Susan, Violet, Elsa, Charlie, the newspaper people; in short—the younger generation). True, the conflict appears to be between *Art* and *Money*, but these are merely the tangible expressions of the more basic elements of the *Spirit* vs the *Material*.

To be sure the picture appears to be oversimplified rather than accurate. This is because, in a play, issues have to be simply drawn, clear-cut, with a minimum of shading in order to enable more effective and striking dramatic presentation.

Nevertheless this is not to say that Nick Joaquin is totally unaware of the many subtle implications involved in his thesis. In the utterances of his characters, Tony Javier, Bitoy Camacho, Don Perico—not to speak of Pete, the editor, vociferous in his contempt for “living in the Past” and not *doing* anything much in the present (but talk of the past)—one can see that Joaquin has portrayed them as aware of forces other than those obviously depicted.

Tony Javier says: “So he fought in the Revolution... I went hungry and got kicked about just the same in spite of that old Revolution he’s so damn proud of.” Or speaking to Candida and Paula: “When you were going off to your fine

convent school in your fine clean clothes, I was wandering about in the streets—a little child dressed in rags, always dirty, always hungry.” Bitoy Camacho reminisces about his hard and harsh manhood:

I said goodbye to that house, goodbye to that world—the world of Don Lorenzo, the world of my father... I told myself that Don Lorenzo and my father had taught me nothing but lies... The truth was fear—always fear—fear of the boss, of the landlord, of the police, of being late, of being sick, of losing one’s job. The truth was no shoes, no money, no smoking, no loitering, no vacancy, no trespassing, and beware of the dog... It was a hard world but it was the truth—and I wanted nothing but the truth... I had rejected the past and I believed in no future—only the present tense was practical.

Even Don Perico is made to say:

Oh Candida, life is not so simple as Art... I went into politics with the best of intentions—and certainly with no intention of “abandoning poetry.” Oh, I dreamed of bringing the radiance of poetry into the murk of politics...

These reservations are present and Mr. Joaquin is aware of them. But it is not his purpose to stress them. He is concerned in the play with the claims of the Past and has them finally triumph in Paula’s destruction of the painting and the daughters’ reconciliation with their father.

#### THE SHORT STORIES

The thesis of Joaquin is also a distinct and unifying thread which holds his short stories together, and which, together with his undeniable artistic merits, gives these short stories the meaning, significance, the power which make them distinctive.

The pertinent application in the story “Three Generations” is that the laying over of one culture on another naturally results in considerable turmoil: which is here personified in young Chitong. The author portrays Chitong as carrying within him the natures of both his father and grandfather and, despite some inner confusions, emerging the best of the three generations. Thus the author leaves a note of

hope: the Philippines is rich in cultural heritage and has but to wake up to the fact and walk towards the road of fulfillment.

There are several other stories of Joaquin which have the same setting (the Spanish Colonial period) and the same purpose (to give a glimpse into the life of our Spanish past). Three of these, "The Mass of St. Sylvester," "The Legend of the Virgin's Jewel," and "Legend of the Dying Wanton," show the Catholic tradition dominant. In a fourth "Guardia de Honor," the plot revolves around one situation—the traditional participation of two generations of the same family in the annual *Naval* rites in honor of the Virgin. He tells two separate stories. Josie, the modern girl, is planning to run away with a married man, taking along the family emeralds—heirlooms worn by the women of her family in the traditional *Naval* rites. Weirdly, past and present overlap and she finds herself in the same room with Natalia, her mother's great-great-grandmother, dressing for the *Naval* procession. A girl with a deeper faith and much stronger will, Natalia repudiates predestination and the "inevitability of fate," while Josie, the weaker modern girl, succumbs to it. The theme is Christian freedom against pagan fatalism, and Joaquin makes no secret that his sympathies are with Natalia, the heroine of the old world.

Another group of stories contains "A Pilgrim Yankee's Progress," "It Was Later Than We Thought," and "The Woman Who Had Two Navels." They are all laid, not in the past, as are the previous stories, but in the present. In "A Pilgrim Yankee's Progress," we have a story of the friendship between a Filipino family and an American soldier. The story is set during the early liberation days, but the inevitability of the persistence of the past is the underlying theme of the story as against the more obvious over-all theme pointing out the difficulties in mutual understanding encountered by people of different races and upbringing. The past of the Yankee catches up with him as does that of Pepang and Edong with them.

In "It Was Later Than We Thought," we see the state of men's souls on the brink of World War II. And it is not a pleasant sight. In the small and intimate family circle of the Cabrerases, in the chronicle of their ills, we see, as if in capsule form, all the indications of the general decay of a sick society, which is after all what one expects to find in a world which has turned its back on God and eternal values. This message is brought home by Father Noe Cabrera, who is the only healthy figure in the whole sickly scene.

"The Woman Who had Two Navels" is a vivid picture of moral decadence. In this strikingly unforgettable, at times shocking tale, Nick Joaquin denounces with great power and fury, with sharp insight and deadly sarcasm, with relentless strokes and telling effect, the world of godless culture. It is quite a jolting story and there are parts of it that bog down from crude energy, but as a picture of decay, it is unforgettable.

Joaquin is at his best when he indicts the evils of the present. But even in his modern tales, the past is always present. Doña Concha (and the *grandpères* of young Newman) stand for it in "A Yankee Pilgrim's Progress"; Father Noe Cabrera, with his impregnable faith of the ages in "It Was Later Than We Thought"; Doctor Monson in "The Woman Who Had Two Navels."

As we delve deeper we discover that Joaquin's preoccupation with the past is not merely a romantic sighing for the "good old days," nor the nostalgic musings of a modern man for an older, more gracious and far-off era; no, not even the search for a national symbol (though that is by itself sufficient motivation). Not so much all these, as the desire, the great, overwhelming desire, to preserve the past of age-old beliefs, of orthodox faith, of spiritual and moral conviction.

There is a great possibility that Nick Joaquin will be called a biased partisan. For it would seem that he has very little good to say of the modern era, and very little bad of the past. He has painted a portrait of the times and presented it in black and white, with none of the grey half-

tones that do exist in life. Thus he is apt to concentrate on the good points of one side to the detriment of the other, leaving out Spain's defects, America's virtue's, faults of the past, virtues of the present. This partial viewpoint, while adversely affecting the greatness of his effort, has justification in his purpose.

Joaquin has stressed the virtues of that particular segment of the historic past, the Catholic Spanish era, in order to restore the cultural balance upset by the current trend of emphasizing "American civilization." Too much emphasis has been placed of late on material and economic progress; too little on moral and spiritual values. And this tendency has penetrated into all fields of human endeavor, including the literary sphere. Nick Joaquin, by spotlighting certain valuable aspects of our Spanish past and its Catholic heritage, is performing a vital role in restoring a balanced national outlook. He is doing what should be done. However, in high-lighting some features and ignoring others, he has perhaps lost somewhat in "world vision." This is regrettable but quite inevitable in the task he has set himself to do.

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<sup>1</sup> Leopoldo Y. Yabes, "Fifty Years of Filipino Writing in English," *The Literary Apprentice*, (March 1951), 98.

<sup>2</sup> Francisco Arcellana, "Towards the Great Filipino Novel," *The Philippines Quarterly*, I (March 1952), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Armando D. Manalo, "Fair Game," *This Week*, VII (June 8, 1952), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Teodoro M. Loesin, Introduction to *Nick Joaquin: Prose and Poems* (Manila: Graphic House, 1952), p. xi.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in the dust jacket of *Nick Joaquin: Prose and Poems*.

<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Torres, "Poet of Two Worlds" *The Sentinel*, IV (March 15, 1952), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Armando D. Manalo, "Fair Game," *This Week*, VII (June 1, 1952), 17.

<sup>8</sup> *This Week*, VII (June 8, 1952), 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Art. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *Art. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Manuel A. Viray, "The Filipino Writer and His Public," *The Literary Apprentice*, (April 1952), 155.

<sup>12</sup> "'Contingency' and 'Insight' in Some Filipino Stories," *The Literary Apprentice*, (March 1953), 64.

<sup>13</sup> Emmanuel Torres, "Poet of Two Worlds," *loc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> James A. LeRoy, *Philippine Life in Town and Country* (New York 1905), p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> John Francis Bannon and Peter Masten Dunne, *Latin America: An Historical Survey* (Milwaukee 1947).

<sup>16</sup> *op. cit.* p. 235

<sup>17</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> Salvador de Madariaga, *The Rise of the Spanish American Empire* (New York 1947), pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Hayden, *The Philippines: A Study in National Development* (New York 1942), pp. 634-635.

<sup>21</sup> Florence Horn, *Orphans of the Pacific* (New York 1941), p. 1

<sup>22</sup> Bannon and Dunne, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

<sup>23</sup> Nick Joaquin, "The 'Naval de Manila,'" *Philippine Review*, I (October 1943), 46.

<sup>24</sup> Teofilo del Castillo, *A Brief History of Philippine Literature* (Manila 1937), pp. 353-354.

<sup>25</sup> James A. Le Roy, *Philippine Life in Town and Country* (New York 1905), p. 293; and *The Americans in the Philippines*, Vol. I (Boston 1947), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Catherine Porter, *Crisis in the Philippines* (New York 1942), p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> *Messages of the President* Vol. II, Part I (Manila 1937), cited by Hayden, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Hayden, *op. cit.* p. 10

<sup>29</sup> "The 'Naval de Manila,'" *loc. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Emmanuel Torres, *art. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> Armando D. Manalo, "Fair Game," *This Week*, VII (June 8, 1952), 9.

<sup>32</sup> Antonio S. Gabila, "Contemporary Writing," *The Literary Apprentice*, (April 1952), 160.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 159.