

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

A Pluralistic View of Filipinism in Literature

Leonard Casper

Philippine Studies vol. 27, no. 1 (1979) 38–52

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

A Pluralistic View of Filipinism in Literature*

LEONARD CASPER

What could be less unexpected than those nations whose political independence has been achieved only recently and whose anxious struggle for economic independence continues should direct the same energies toward a larger cultural separatism? Both pride and curiosity compel a people, too long measured against someone else's models, to recover a past of their own and plan for a future based on new consistencies. Yet it is critical that this movement — in which Filipinism has a unique role in Asia — take the form of an examination, rather than precipitous sanctification, of premises pure and simple. Otherwise self-recovery can deteriorate into self-suffocation.

Openmindedness will be most clearly signaled when the question, "What is Filipino about Philippine literature in English?" can be considered real, rather than rhetorical; and can be treated with the same seriousness now being given the question: "What is Filipino about literature in Iloko, Hiligaynon, Cebuano, and other vernaculars?" Perhaps it was the imminent threat of *all* literatures' being carelessly swept aside, like so many marble chips from a national monument, which has directed scholarly attention — particularly these past 10 years — to the vast intercyclng of word and world, in the Philippines. Attitudes toward the proper relationship between literature and society, so long expressed in doctrinaire or sentimental fashions equally inflexible,¹ seem now to require at least rationalization. And in this process of definition and documentation, modes of reconciliation or at least of tolerance of pluralistic perspectives conceivably may emerge. Already several

*The essay is condensed from a series of seven lectures delivered at the Ateneo de Manila in mid-1978, while on a research grant from Boston College.

1. For an extended critical history, see the author's "The Critic of Philippine Literature as Provocateur," in *Philippine Studies: Present Knowledge and Research Trends*, ed. Donn Hart (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1974), pp. 71-94.

attitudes can be distinguished among those held by literary historians, toward the function of literature.

POSITIONS ON LITERATURE'S FUNCTION

Perhaps because so much of recent scholarship has been devoted to the recovery and explication of pre-modern literary forms, one of the more prominent positions now apparent attempts to preserve folk conventions. Folk literature, whether recorded orally or in popular print, is described as motivated by the need/desire to provide community and continuity among a people. Its typical composition is analyzed, by Venus Salangang, as including "the principle of didacticism in art, either in a moralistic or nationalistic way"; a "romantic nature," expressive of the "emotional and personalistic nature of the Filipino" and visible in fantasies of love, adventure, spectacular heroics, nostalgia for pastoral simplicity, and the like; a "tradition of metaphor" based on mimesis (and originating in spiritism?); and a tradition of "formalism" in the sense of codified and authorized formulas as model precedents.²

The didactic motive of folk literature was reinforced under Spanish regimes which merely diverted the direction of instruction from animism toward the Trinity; from tribal solidarity toward manageable political units within sound of the *poblacion's* church bells. Late in that era, literature was equally serviceable to the revolutionary/reformist purposes of the Propagandists.

During the past dozen years, diversion toward still another "god-goal," a less class-divided society, has been promoted by Marxists/Maoists in the role of an elite vanguard. At its farthest extreme (perhaps in E. San Juan's more imperious social tracts³) the partisanship of this group inclines to be dogmatic, manipulative, and coercive. Even the more moderate position exemplified by Bienvenido Lumbera's "Philippine Criticism: Breaking Through and Away"⁴ seems determined to close discussion, rather than

2. Venus Salangang, "Directions for Philippine Literary Criticism," *Budhi Papers: Essays in Literature 1* (1977): 20-21.

3. See "Combat U.S. Imperialism and Its Reactionary Ideology in Our Art and Literature," *Asian-Philippines Leader* (15 and 22 September 1972), pp. 10, 14, 40-42, 43-44; also "Acknowledgments," *Introduction to Modern Pilipino Literature*, ed. E. San Juan, Jr. (New York: Twayne, 1974): "The contemporary literature in English written by Filipinos being second rate and obsolescent, and the other vernacular literatures being impoverished and quite immature . . ."

4. Speech delivered at Third Philippine PEN Conference, 5-6 December 1977, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila.

open it. Lumbera dismisses the possibility that literature in English has contributed or ever could contribute to defining the Philippine experience and aspirations, and predicts, vaguely, a complete reversal in rank for writers now held in esteem or dismay. Curiously, both extremists and moderates, though appealing to the past to authorize a didactic role for literature, are determined to rid society of selected folk behavior patterns, such as the fatalism of *bahala na* or the dependency systems of nepotism and *compadrinazgo* which allow landlordism, oligarchy, and one-man rule to prosper.

An entirely different set of Filipino writers might be characterized by their opposition to an alleged social commitment which, in its controlled didacticism, is patronizing and reductive. Social concern for these others lodges less in ideologies (text) than in people (texture) — or, more accurately, in persons differentiated without divisiveness. Its techniques rely, therefore, not on platitudes disguised in allegorical narrative but on circumstantial realism — on particularization. Its instructional urges are subtle, even subliminal, because it seeks experiential, not doctrinaire, narrative modes. Its logical equivalent would be induction, didactic groups being strongly deductive. It has no fixed policy to impose, though by empathy it reproduces the experience of individuals, by extrapolation it produces a pluralistic view of a relatively open and evolving society. Its adherents, wittingly or otherwise, seem to subscribe to the view expressed in the Philippine Writers League manifesto of 1940:

We thus arrive at the paradox that, in order to preserve the individuality which he would defend against the world, the writer must cease being a single, isolated, rugged individual.

A counterpart statement of the support which the community owes to individual freedom from group constraint has been provided by S. P. Lopez. Not the Lopez whose naive liberalism of the thirties, expressed in *Literature and Society* (1940), brought him an inflated reputation of which even he has grown weary; but the Lopez whose mature liberalism required him to say, in his "Literature and Freedom" address of 24 February 1978:

The greatness of a literary work depends to a great extent on the degree of artistic autonomy which is enjoyed by the creator.

The entire address is a Miltonic defense of the informed and gregarious conscience against authoritarianism.

Still one more category of writers can be recognized: those interested exclusively in self-expression, either exploratory or simply adulatory. Jose Garcia Villa and his would-be imitators epitomize this severance from society. However, not every author extensively dependent on "first person singular" techniques is nuclear to this circle. An interesting investigation could be directed, for example, toward the different implications of the "I" poems of Villa, Abadilla, and Amado Hernandez. Similarly, although the public statements and glittering literary styles of Virginia Moreno and Nick Joaquin sometimes indicate a romantic reserve or indifference, the social realism of Moreno's "Straw Patriot" or *The Onyx Wolf* (1969) and of plays by Joaquin or his collected essays on the *ilustrados* of the Revolution bear better testimony to the innermost concern of such artists.

It also must be noted that, although in the spectrum just described, the didacts and the egotists occupy the extremes, they are similar in their tendency toward reduction or abstraction, as in their often fanatic sense of election. They represent one-man rule, oligarchy, in-groups: *kami*, not *tayo*.⁵

CLARIFYING PHILIPPINE TRADITION

Such categories are offered not as a definitive view of the literary complex in the Philippines, but as one systematic approach among many now possible among scholars. Even closed minds can make certain discoveries which, allowed to be publicized, contribute to discussion of possible lineages and linkages not considered vital by the discoverer. For example, the conflict between folk- or Christian-oriented authoritarianism and the more recent radical authoritarianism (Salangasang rejects, as foreign intrusions, "the dialectic philosophy of Salvador P. Lopez and Epifanio San Juan")⁶ may be a sign of intellectual health rather than "dis-ease." Similarly, any complaint against the destructive effect of rigid conventions in folk vernacular literature is answerable to the recognition that literary formulas also exist in English; and to the further fact that "imitation" of either vernacular or English models often results in varieties of adaptation indistinguishable from experi-

5. See the author's "*Kami/Tayo: A Theoretical Division of Philippine Literature*," *Solidarity* 11 (January-February 1977): 30-33.

6. Salangasang, "Directions," p. 20.

mentation or accidental mutation. Any writer with a genuine imagination — that is, versatile sensitivity — knows that even work intended to conform to specification often develops a direction and destination of its own.

Above all, attempts can proceed to distinguish the dead hand of convention from a living Philippine tradition, now that criteria such as Salang's are available and subject to clarification and qualification. Questions rise with such plenitude and precipitation that they can hardly all be registered, much less be tentatively answered. What are the irreducibles of Philippine culture, the clear-cut core of cultural constants inevitable (and desirable?) in any inheriting process? If they are so irreducible as to be instinctual, is instruction in them necessary? If solidarity is one of those constants, why even in vernacular literature is group (*tayo*) narration so rare a mode and single narrative focus so common? Is it possible that communitarianism in the Philippines traditionally has been less monolithic than communism in Mainland China (or in Kampuchea) today? Are not the offensives against, and defenses of, regional literatures clues to a greater heterogeneity than sociology's ordinary generalizations might allow? Are individualism, ethnic identity, provincialism, nationalism, and internationalism compatible? In what proportions? With what assigned priorities? Is the Filipino fulfilled through political association alone? Or more significantly through *compadrazgo*?⁷ If literature participates in culture, and culture responds at least in part to physical changes, does the increase in numbers of Filipinos and in urbanization and even in grain production and leaseholdings change the basic nature of the Filipino at all?⁸ Is the alleged core of irreducibles a system of achieved actualities, or of abstract ideals? If the latter, are they not equivalent to goals; and is not change implied, in the desire to approach/approximate such goals? Is the notion of change and the construction of a common enterprise to direct that change not one form of *bayanihan*; does it not contradict that form of *bahala na* which argues: whatever was, is; and whatever is, is right? Are there not, indeed, many such crucial counter-tensions in Philippine society, some of them

7. See Donn Hart, *Compadrazgo: Ritual Kinship in the Philippines* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1977).

8. See Russell J. Chatham and Edward K. Hawkins, *The Philippines: Priorities and Prospects for Development* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1976).

signs of a healthy, because various and therefore potentially flexible, pluralism? Is not objective, disciplined scholarship, at present so prolific, itself a force bringing to balance the sentimentalism and loyalty-leading-to-prejudice discernible in "the Filipino way"?

RELEVANCE OF PHILIPPINE LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

The existence of such questions at least justifies reconsideration of Philippine literature in English, no longer in terms of its already proven quality, but in terms of its relevance, its availability to the native consciousness or conscience. It has been often noted, for example, that within that literature such obsessive motifs as the "search for the true father" reflect a long history of not multiple cultural infusions but, especially, subjugation to colonial rule and to the continuing presence of alien economic interests. How ironic, it is added, that such exposes should be in a language which itself is foreign to native feeling! Is the Filipino writer in English unconsciously struggling against the very language that he uses? Perhaps. But it is equally conceivable that the "search for the true father" also reflects the confusing web of patronage (father-substitution) in *compadrazgo*; a sense of self-dispossession (frontier destruction by slash-and-burn provincianos or corporate lumbermen); a dream of community that remains unfulfilled, a country undiscovered, largely because the future promises in its own way to be no less uncomplicated than the past, as the social spectrum broadens, relations with overseas Filipinos (in the millions) have to be acknowledged in any ethnic identification; etc. Besides, that motif of frustration/alienation is more than matched in Philippine literature in English by resilience, a powerful sense of resurgence.

Surely the stories of Bulosan, Arguilla, and N. V. M. Gonzalez are Filipino not just in the authenticity of landscapes and utensils and idiom, nor the recreation of timeless rhythms of change, but in their willingness to surrender their narrative to the sensibilities of women, children, and peasants. These are the socially oppressed, the no-accounts; nevertheless, it is not their victimization but the dignity of their durability that emerges. The writer proves their worth by their substantiality, not by premise either sentimental or doctrinaire. The reader is not told to care; he is presented with

persons worth caring for. The same underwriting allows/requires the reader to participate in this discovery and to refer to his own feelings as resources. Such consideration of "the least" is as demonstrably Filipino as its contrary, the compulsion to follow a single leadership, the "first, foremost, and only" syndrome.

The same tribute to endurance appears in Andres Cristobal Cruz's stories of Tondo. The attempt to maintain folk solidarity even as large numbers emigrate to the city in search of a means of living is as often frustrated as it is satisfied. Not the raising of class consciousness so much as the crossing of class lines in an appeal to the conscience of the wealthy and powerful recreates, within urban structures, patterns of patronage once dominant in the rural areas. Plantation owners once regarded their tenant farmers with a degree of *noblesse oblige*, compensating for inequities by their presence and concern. But during the Japanese occupation, landlords turned absentee, some later even converting their investments into corporate enterprises in Makati. The organic relationship between owner and tenant disintegrated to the point of provoking extensive revolt.⁹ Then as ex-tenant followed ex-landlord to the city, attempts were made – not very successful, given the fewer opportunities for *damay* relations – to reestablish a system of patronage. Cruz writes of the courage of the underprivileged, suffering a new dispossession. In addition, through the dilemmas of young Ismael del Mundo torn between direct identification and association with the poor and the chance to save himself and them by means of a political career (what means can be safely risked for the sake of compassionate ends?), Cruz dramatizes the situation of those large numbers of "committed" writers and liberal technocrats who joined the very establishment they swore to alter.

Looming figures of conscience dominate much of the work of Nick Joaquin: for example, Marasigan in *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, or the elder Monzon in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*. But even where such personifications are not provided, one is constantly made aware in his stories and plays of the necessary burden of history which present and future must bear: culture seen as the coexistence of primary and secondary, "prim-

9. This is one of the central themes of Benedict J. Kerkvliet's *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California, 1977); see also John A. Larkin, *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (Berkeley: University of California, 1972).

itive" and "civilized," physical and supersensory dimensions in man ("Summer Solstice"); the uneasy reconciliation of disparate inheritances; the darkest of ambiguities ("The Order of Melkizedek"). Unless Filipinism is defined so that Filipinos fall outside the circle of all that is profoundly significant in human nature (the ultimate alienation!), such fiction intersects Philippine realities again and again. More directly relevant to the understanding of minority problems, provincial peculiarities, changes in social behavior and the idiom of the streets, along with scores of other subjects, have been his extraordinary essays for the *Philippines Free Press*, only now selectively and gradually being reissued. Joaquin's sense of history is not simply of the past, as has sometimes been charged, but of its contemporary day-by-day accumulation.

Alejandro Hufana too has revealed and not merely recorded Philippine culture, his lifelike presentations owing much to ethno-historians but adding more, through provision of imaginative detail beyond what is allowed the social scientist. In addition to the authenticity of portraiture, in *Poro Point* (1961), and the folk-riddle tightness of lines, there is a pride beyond *hubris*, a coalescence among poet-seer, his ancestors, and his contemporaries, a fusing of mythic and historic, timeless and timely, counterparts that can only be called epic, because of its scope, its depth, its accessible seriousness. Even when group identity is being urged, there is the same enormous respect for individuation (diversity within unity) which apparently compelled years of revision for the creation of his equally long Nazi verse narrative, *Sieg Heil* (1975), which might otherwise seem foreign to Filipino interests.

It is this same proclamation of society as preserver of individual rights which prompts so many of Ricaredo Demetillo's lyric poems, in volume after volume, as well as his own epic impulse. *Barter in Panay* (1961) reconstructs the Maragtas folk-tale about the thirteenth century settlement of the islands by barangays fleeing the tyranny of Brunei. Is it less Filipino because its clear, clean narrative line avoids the perhaps more typical musical pageantry and melodrama of the *dularawan* production, *The Golden Salakot* (1969), provided by Jose Lardizabal? It can be argued that Demetillo's is the more powerful, because more credible, for avoiding such extravaganzas. In its theme Demetillo's version even carries special relevance, the difficulty of containing rebellion

against tyranny so that not anarchy but a generative order (conveyed by the marriage contract between Datu Sumakwel and Kapinangan) can result.

His sequel, *The Heart of Emptiness is Black* (1975), extends these thoughts: law is not enough to humanize society, unless it is moderated by a sense of justice. (On a more personal level, love reconciles the two extremes of irresponsible desire and unresponsive social codes of conduct.) The very flaws in this play prove its theme, for art too is an ordering process (as countless examples from Demetillo's *Masks and Signatures*, 1968, testify), yet needs to be humanized; and, in this instance, unfortunately his characters have been reduced to poster figures in a campus demonstration.

In a poetic manner demonstrably different from Hufana's or Demetillo's, Cirilo Bautista in *The Archipelago* (1970) and portions of *Charts* (1973) nevertheless provides personal access to the past. By means of torrents-of-consciousness, not steady streams, he recreates both the inner turmoil of such early discoverers and conquerors as Magellan, Legaspi, Salcedo, and Goiti; and the adventures and confusions of historic partitionings of the world, along with the reordering of the Pacific peoples. Far from dismissing these segments of the past as anti-Filipino, by an act of supreme empathy he assumes the sensibilities of those who so drastically altered the course of Philippine events.

EMPATHY OF HISTORICAL FICTION

Of the best writers of historical fiction it may be said, in all seriousness, that instead of using facts to stimulate the imagination, they develop an intuitive empathy which authenticates those facts. Insight provides credibility, a sensory access and animation to otherwise inert data banks. Fiction's seemingly paradoxical hold on truth derives from the "power of presence" which it affords. Edilberto Tiempo's short stories (*A Stream at Dalton Pass*, 1970) consistently display this capacity to summon both the daily details of human communion and therefore the promise of improvement in the "undeveloped country" which is the Philippines:

Not just the graphic descriptions, but especially the infusion of human warmth into handled objects (exact opposite of materialism's replacement

of personality) constitute one important dimension of Tiempo's realism¹⁰

That the author's skill at documentation sometimes exceeds the experiential quality of his fiction is painfully evident in *Watch in the Night* (1953), but the opposite is true in the revised edition of *To Be Free* (1972).

This latter novel's Filipinism is apparent in the lasting relevance of its subject — half a century of intricate rural Nueva Vizcayan life; and its themes — as customs are challenged with the passage of time, how does one sort out routine values from those genuine rituals whose preservation needs championing; what organic, communitarian relationship is viable, now, between non-Christian minority and the overwhelming Christian mass, between ex-slave/tenant and master/landlord? The persistent dilemmas created by the need to distinguish independence between nations, from the degrees of freedom requisite or desirable within one's own nation are well-illustrated by the Alcantara brothers' experience with social democracy, and with permissiveness within their family. If one can conceive of a literature valuable because of the questions it raises and at least as "useful," therefore, as a literature of resolutions, Tiempo's novel must be respected not just for the discussions it contains, but more for the discussions it provokes.

By the same logic, Linda Ty-Casper's *The Peninsulars* (1964) contributes to Filipinism by being the first novel to treat seriously the interior disorders which made Manila vulnerable to invasion, in the eighteenth century, as well as by its concern with power structures which victimize the intended beneficiaries. Despite personal characteristics which make the governor-general complicated and endearing, in his own way he is as much a glory-seeker as is the royal fiscal. Their ultimate difference is that the governor-general has a conscience which informs him of his feverish betrayal of the very people he has a sworn obligation to serve. The point of this "book of the magistrates" — that one must not pursue self-interest at the expense of others but only through honoring of a social contract or, preferably, through the trials of love — is as timeless as the confusion-of-loyalties theme which continues through the other books of this trilogy, not yet published. Nevertheless, subject and theme alone cannot make these

10. Casper, "'Social Realism' in the Stories of Edilberto Tiempo and Ninotchka Rosca," *Solidarity* 8 (July 1973): 69.

works "Filipino," any more than can the nationality and citizenship of their author. Real fulfillment here means that landscape and mindscape, research and insight, are rendered as one. Within that mutual dependency is mirrored the necessary interlock of lives which sets the novel's visible pattern; and from *that* consistency rises the sense of exaltation one can feel, in *The Peninsulars*, in the midst of outrage and waste.

PROTEST LITERATURE

Each of these works in its own way is part of a literature of criticism and protest, defined broadly, inasmuch as each warns of some threat to a core Filipino value. So too is Kerima Polotan's fiction, though the protest is more typically against the abuse of women by a double standard, than of one economic class by another. True, *The Hand of the Enemy* (1962) seems to dramatize the conflict between barrio integrity and metropolitan corruption, as well as the decline of a true sense of magistracy (stewardship) into concealed but self-centered majesty. Yet that impression may well be misleading, due to the haste with which a fragmentary manuscript was rushed before the Stonehill judges (to the exclusion, for example, of such significant pieces as "The Giants" and "The Tourists").

When the novel is reconsidered in the light of *Stories* (1968), what emerges is a central concern with selfhood recovered with a vengeance. Then sensuality in excess becomes indistinguishable from lust for power.¹¹ Passion displayed is intense but cold; narcissistic; at times almost autistic. Resistance to fecundity, among her female characters, may engage one's sympathies — until it is transformed into vindictiveness bent on destruction (including the suicidal fatalism of the novel, with its view of life itself as hostile to the living?). If Polotan's writing seems anti-Filipino in both this extreme self-love and radical negativism, yet it is almost conventional in its attempt to restore full rights to the Filipina, confined by centuries of colonialism. Unintentionally, this violent contradiction in her work epitomizes much of the problem of those nationalists who most threaten Filipinism by imposing on it an image unnaturally pure and rigid and simplistic.

11. Cf. the author's "Desire and Doom in Kerima Polotan," *Philippine Fiction*, ed. Joseph A. Galdon, S.J. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila, 1972), pp. 133-45.

To the radical complaint that too many writers in English acknowledge their middle class origins — and, by implication, loyalty¹² — one could reply that as this class grows, it deserves its share of attention or representation. But (the natural rebuttal would be) literature is more than representationalism. Granted: and writers of the caliber of Gilda Cordero-Fernando, Gregorio Brillantes, Bienvenido Santos, and F. Sionil Jose have in fact gone beyond mere description of the middle and upper classes, to requiring them to account for their stewardship, their obligation to God and man. Their art lies precisely in their refusal to engage in the age-old game of *epater les bourgeois* by stereotyping members of that class.

In both *Butcher, Baker, Candlestick-Maker* (1962) and *A Wilderness of Sweets* (1973), the principal strategy of conscience employed is contrast-by-juxtaposition, from story to story, between haves and have nots. The earlier work of Gilda Cordero-Fernando tends to emphasize the frivolousness of the wealthy, the triviality of their problems. The more recent volume, in addition to repeating the techniques of alternation, finds common cause between the classes in the theme of aspiring but frustrated love. At the level of plot, what overlies this theme is a series of infidelities: a teen-age girl, from the abandoned-bus housing district, torn between her poor lover and a faith-healer father-surrogate; an aging professor infatuated with a young girl; a matron involved with fantasies of a “dust monster,” as a result of the constant absence of her working husband; a boy who chooses guerrilla warfare to remaining with his sweetheart; an attempted adultery, after a husband’s desertion.

The social equivalent of these flings at infidelity is not difficult to reconstruct. Clearly the author expects more from those who *have* more, the *nouveau riche*. At the same time she is aware that the Filipino tradition of service often degenerates into self-service. Nevertheless, she is not satisfied with chiding those who betray or fail others; her perception is more positive. She sees that there is a real, a basic human bond which unites both rich and poor. It is expressed in their common dream of love-as-fulfillment. And the author respects this dream, despite its discouragement by poverty, war, age, and fits of unreason, because it is only this act

12. See Petronilo Bn. Daroy, “Aspects of Philippine Writing in English,” *Philippine Studies* 17 (April 1969): 249-65.

of faith in the possibility of life's being better which, finally, offers any resistance to despair, in the face of loss or guilt. It is not *class-consciousness* that Cordero-Fernando provides – that might merely provoke more hostility and frustration – but *social-consciousness*, awareness of the shared condition, the reliance of person on person, across class lines, for the strength required for resilience and renewal. The only hope lies in love.

Juxtaposition is also the strategy of conscience dominant in the stories of Brillantes, but juxtaposition of members of the same class or even the same family, rather than of street people with the elite. Whether or not loss of privacy and private means, which naturally accompanies poverty, is conducive to a sense of community, certainly Brillantes implies that material improvement allows, and may encourage, an independence indistinguishable from isolation. A quarter of the stories in *The Distance to Andromeda* (1960) use a rotating point of view to dramatize an uncustomary – by Filipino standards – compartmentalization of family lives, an alienation between generations, a literal as well as figurative lack of communication. However, Brillantes is at least as concerned with metaphysical as with social dimensions; and occasionally conveys a mystic apprehension of man-man and man-God affinity which causes a different level of speechlessness. Then the cosmic space suddenly seems radiant with divine love; and if those insurmountable distances can be crossed by an imaginative leap more agile than light itself, surely there must be hope for human communion even in the absence of conventional communication. Of course, the programmatic mind, solicitous of direct social action at the barricades, can claim such confidence is irrelevant because unrealistic. Brillantes, nevertheless, seems attuned more to Teilhardian evolution than Maoist revolution.

The same activist mentality can dismiss as sentimental the work of Bienvenido Santos. Yet his empathy with countless Filipino Dreamers, suffering literal or figurative exile from the core culture they revere, is a model of commitment rarely matched by his critics. The authenticity of their desperate struggle to maintain self-esteem and compassionate brotherhood, in the slums of Sulucan or the second-class ghettos of Chicago, shows the honesty of Santos's reportage, the intactness of his own loyalty. He can perceive what is "foreign" in the native; that is, Santos is often at his best when he exposes the betrayal of Filipino by Filipino. Yet

he carefully undercuts the pain and exhaustion, the distances, even the courage, the recoveries, to avoid any emotional blur.

Only if one accepts the cliché that "Filipinos are naturally sentimental" and includes the arbitrary, therefore irresponsible, demagoguery of radicals as examples of native emotionalism, does Santos ordinarily seem un-Filipino. His work is richest when a balance is found between restraint and romance. For example, the success of *Villa Magdalena* (1965) as a dramatization of the evils of excessive ambition in an undeveloped but opening society can be contrasted with that rare failure, *The Volcano* (1965). The latter novel assigns to itself the 30 years between 1928 and 1958, and the theme of the fragility/instability of Philippine-American relations in those years; but it treats these important matters as if they had no real significance, by reducing the characters of both nationalities to caricatures. Contrariwise, not only is the household in *Villa Magdalena* available as a symbol of the dream of community, but many characters are richly realized and therefore give human dimension to the themes of betrayal and infidelity, making them flesh and blood issues — as fiction must; as even the political dogmatist finally should.

Anyone who has read the journalistic essays and editorials of F. Sionil Jose, or who has — objectively — followed the socio-political concerns of *Solidarity* (deliberately echoing *La Solidaridad*) must find it difficult to consider him an effete or captive writer. At the same time, although he has set a general theme or orientation for each issue of the magazine he edits, his genuine liberalism prevents him from censoring or altering any viewpoint which he prints.

This same evenhandedness rescues *The Pretenders* (1962) from becoming a facile allegory, contrasting the virtues of God-fearing mountain men, with the vices of urban capitalists. Just such a division shapes the surface story. Bitfogel, the interested spectator, laments the corruption and subsequent suicide of his friend Tony Samson which he blames on the blinding effect of ambition in a society where upward mobility is suddenly possible and, typically, achieved at the expense of one's fellow men. Nevertheless, even though the *reflex* of the novel evokes sympathy for Tony as victim of un-Filipino-like opportunism, *reflection* on the less obvious structures suggests less that culture entropies as the *damay* society diminishes under the impact of urbanization than that it is in

the very nature of a *damay* society to place the actual face-to-face community before any abstraction of loyalty to a larger entity: province, region, nation, mankind. While on one hand *The Pretenders* seems an indictment of Samson's betrayals of his Ilocano roots, on the other hand a striking resemblance is shown, for better or for worse, between tribal/ethnic allegiance among Ilocanos and the nepotistic/capital-protective "kami-ism" of the Villa family. The effect of these ambiguities in the novel is to provoke new insights into Filipinism, rather than simply to dramatize conventions and platitudes.

CHRISTIAN/FILIPINO VISION

Clearly then, writers on the order of Cordero-Fernando, Brilantes, Santos, and Jose are anything but apologists for class oppression. Though their concern with understanding as a proper preliminary to judgment makes them prefer neither to classify people at all nor to rely on stereotyped characters, their critique of society derives from a basic Christian/Filipino postulate: from those who have more, more is expected. To the extent that the middle class has the greatest mobility (including, for the *nouveau riche*, the recency of "arrival"), that expectation of a capability of response rises and rises. Furthermore, literature in English about the wealthy classes or the impoverished would seem most likely to be bought, read, and (in advanced institutions) studied by — though not exclusively — those who can afford such matters. The implication of that likelihood is that writers in English, by appealing to the conscience of well-off readers rather than to class-consciousness, nourish a faith that division and conflict are not inevitable; that those who sometimes have abused their authority, by excess or negligence, can still be appealed to and turned around, without resort to barricades and assassinations.

The alternative to this Filipino dream of unity, of the body politic healed and healthy, may best be dramatized not by any utopian fantasy of classlessness but by nightmarish anarchy (as in Wilfrido Nollado's *But for the Lovers*, 1970, a parable of decadent grotesques waiting, vainly, to be liberated). In place of such self-devastation, Philippine literature in English conceives of a diversity without divisiveness, and offers that vision as its contribution to a new, a truer, a pluralistic view of Filipinism.