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Voices/Mga Tinig, edited by Ang-See, et al.

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whatever it is I want to hold, that I want others to hold, too." As such, he allows us only a glimpse of some of the deeper feelings and dynamic thought behind many of the short verses.

Nonetheless, the central story of the collection is ultimately revealed to be cyclical, the concluding essay retaking many of the earlier themes—memory and loss—and projecting it toward a future. To encounter *Story* is to experience a poet's journey outward and back into himself and into his past and the people in it—an exercise in self-definition that involves a negotiation with language and creative expression.

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Voices/Mga Tinig. Edited by Teresita Ang-See, Caroline Hau, and Joaquin Sy. Manila: Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran, 1997.

In their Preface to the revised edition of *Philippine Literature: A History and Anthology*, Lumbera and Lumbera noted that "the declining prestige of New Criticism, whose rigorous aesthetic norms had previously functioned as a Procrustean bed on which Filipino authors and their works were measured, has opened a gap in the critical evaluation of literary works. The gap has allowed the entry of hitherto marginalized authors, genres and themes into the mainstream of Philippine critical discourse."

Thus began the opening of spaces for writings from the borders. Women writers gathered their works together and published them in *Filipina 1* (1984), *Filipina 2* (1985), and *Ani*, March 1998 issue. Later, they would write about their bodies and the many lineaments of desire in *Forbidden Fruit: Women Write the Erotic* (1994). Along with them came the landmark anthologies of the gay and lesbian movement: *Ladlad, An Anthology of Philippine Gay Writing* (1994), *Ladlad 2* (1996), and *Tibok: Heartbeat of the Filipino Lesbian* (1998). All these anthologies explored new topics and themes in two languages—English and Filipino—with audacity and bravado.

Now comes another anthology that further enlarges our definition of a national literature. It is written not in two, but in three languages, and it puts on the spotlight a minority generally absent in our literary discourse. Teresita Ang-See, Caroline Hau, and Joaquin Sy worked together in editing *Voices/Mga Tinig: The Best of Tulay*, a fortnightly Chinese-Filipino Digest published by World News Publication, Inc. and Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran, Inc.

In her perceptive Introduction, Miss Hau quotes Charlson Ong's definition of Chinese-Filipino literature as those "written by Filipinos primarily for Filipinos." That definition is bold, subversive even, for in one stroke it embraces those writings that used to occupy the margins of pages, if not the margins

of our consciousness. Mr. Ong continues: "[Its main practitioners] are Filipinos of Chinese descent, usually natural-born citizens, whose first language is often Filipino or Amoy (or a mixture of English, Tagalog and Hokkien)."

But Miss Hau's discourse on the "Chinese Filipino" goes beyond language and the shifting tides of the generational divide and political loyalty. "Chinese Filipino is just as implicated in questions of nationness, identity, and imagination. . . . For those whose literary orientation puts them squarely within the tradition of Jose Rizal rather than Lu Xun, writing about 'being Chinese' is an act of negotiating the spaces between silence and stereotype, survival and extinction, desire and denial. These imperatives cannot leave even the most basic assumptions about self and society unexamined. Whether it is the question of straddling cultures, of refuting or confirming racist stereotypes, or of claiming the right to belong or not belong, the texts in this collection productively intervene in issues fundamental to Philippine realities."

This anthology shows us the intervention of literature in such Philippine realities. In R. Kwan Laurel's story called "Amah," Franklin's old mother suffers from a "disease [that] ate the insides of a person." The main character's grandfather visits her and they talk about China. The story affirms the persistence of memory, like a wall that can shore up the ruins of one's identity. The grandfather muses: "We had to fight one another [in China] just to get dog manure because the soil was so poor. We came to the Philippines because they said the streets were paved with gold. Now those of us who managed to go back are probably the happiest. Here nobody beyond Ongpin understands us. It is only here that we can truly be Chinese. You go out of this street, and it is a foreign country."

Later, the old cancer victim and her lonely neighbor put up a restaurant called "Little Sister." It makes money, but in the end their paths diverge, and the ending is as sharp yet as subtle as anything you can imagine.

Jacqueline Co's "Growing Up Chinese in the Philippines" has the simplicity and clarity of its title. Spot the difference between your childhood in the 1970s and that of Miss Co's. "I had no trouble speaking Tagalog as most of my mornings outside of school were spent watching television reruns of movies featuring Susan Roces, Nora Aunor, and a caboodle of their leading men. In the evenings, it would be a toss-up between 'Oras ng Ligaya' and 'Tawag ng Tanghalan.' For movies, we watched with equal enjoyment the hilarity of Dolphy's 'Facifica Falayfay' and the dexterity of Bruce Lee's high-flying kicks. I did not find it odd that I enjoyed Nancy Drew's mystery books as well as the *Kislap* nobelas and *Wakasan* komiks. I craved *tuyo*, *santol*, green mangoes, and *bagoong* as much as I relished my *sancha* (hawflakes), cow label (beef jerky), and *hopia*. Although we own many pairs of chopsticks, we are more at home using spoons and forks. When we get sick we ingested Chinese herbal concoction as well as aspirin."

And, yes, not every Chinese-Filipino family is as wealthy as the stereotype makes them out to be.

Miss Hau also contributes two lovely fictional works, "Stories" and "The True Story of Ah To," which trace the junctures and disjunctures of the past and present. Joaquin Sy writes graceful poems in Filipino, while Melchor C. Te has a story called "Ang Lotto" which glitters with the ironies of a de Maupassant story. The other works can be edited—their narrative lines made clearer, their images made sharper, their prose pruned. But then again, that may just be the unabashed formalist in me speaking.

Be that as it may, this book is a welcome addition to the monument of Philippine writing that is built with every book, every poem, story, essay, and play that we all write.

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Balagtasan: Kasaysayan at Antolohiya. By Galileo S. Zafra. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999. 281 pages

University of the Philippines Professor Galileo S. Zafra has just made a substantial contribution to Philippine literature by way of *Balagtasan: Kasaysayan at Antolohiya*, his first major critical work.

There are several reasons for this. First, it is the most definitive study on *balagtasan*, although Zafra was quick to admit the difficulty of retrieving the complete text of any oral tradition such as *balagtasan*. Second, it is not restricted to history and anthology. It also explores the rhetoric of *balagtasan* as essentially inseparable from its thematic concerns. And unlike other scholarly writings, it obscures the distinction between apparently trifling chronicle and in-depth textual explication, for Zafra himself moves easily from narrative to critique.

This book offers us a rare opportunity to rediscover *balagtasan*, the most popular literary form—and probably the national pastime—from 1924 till before the war.

The book's detailed account on the origin of *balagtasan* reveals that, just like any other form of cultural expression, the *balagtasan* is a product of history. But Zafra quickly disabuses us of the notion that the poet Francisco Balagtas and *balagtasan* are essentially one and the same thing. He adds, however, that the poet himself inspired the birth of *balagtasan*, primarily as a form of resistance against unwarranted colonial legacies. After all, much has been said and written about *Florante at Laura* as an allegorical masterpiece that subtly subverted the colonial order.

The book also explains how *balagtasan* evolved from the *duplo*, whose main aim was to liven up the bereaved. Zafra also emphasizes that one of the most significant features of *balagtasan*—as contrasted from the *duplo*—is its