

# *Philippine Writing in English: Postcolonial Syncretism Versus a Textual Practice of National Liberation*

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**F**OR THE FIRST TIME since the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the fall of Bataan and Corregidor to the Japanese military invaders in 1942, the Philippines dominated the world's attention for a few days in February 1986: an urban mass insurrection of over a million people overthrew the long-entrenched Marcos dictatorship without firing a single shot, in the face of tanks and soldiers armed to the teeth. Scenes of this uprising were televised throughout the world, images exuding an aura of the miraculous. Distanced from the original event, those images and representations which mediated this singular event became an inspiration to the popular rebellions that soon exploded around the world, particularly in Eastern Europe, China, Pakistan, Haiti, and other countries in the Third World.

But like most Third World societies plagued by colonial underdevelopment (from the time of its conquest and annexation by the U.S. in 1898 up to the present), the Philippines today, although nominally independent, still suffers the classic problems of neo-colonial dependency: its economy is controlled by the draconian rule of the IMF-World Bank, its politics by semi-feudal warlords, bureaucrats, and military officials beholden to Washington, its culture by the U.S. mass media and Western information/knowledge monopoly. With over seventy-five per cent of sixty million Filipinos extremely impoverished, the Philippines also has (despite some attenuation) the only viable nationalist guerrilla insurgency in all of Southeast Asia. The fate of the U.S. military bases as well as the U.S. business, cultural, and political interests will soon be

decided by the unfolding of these contradictions in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

What happened to this much-touted U.S. experiment in colonial entrepreneurship that claimed to produce the “showcase of U.S. democracy” in Asia after World War II? Why did it fail? From the beginning, the entire discursive apparatus of U.S. academic scholarship has been committed to providing an explanation for this historical vicissitude. Challenged by mounting popular resistance from the late sixties on, the rationale for the U.S. support of the Marcos dictatorship—from Nixon to Ford, Carter, and Reagan—for almost two decades has drawn its logic and rhetoric from the scholarship of American historians, political scientists, and sociologists. The gravity of the crisis of U.S.-Philippines relations can be gauged by the “axe grinding” of Stanley Karnow’s 500-page production entitled *In Our Image: America’s Empire in the Philippines*, published in 1989. Karnow’s journalistic and popularizing summary of over eighty years of massive American archival and theoretical labour to understand the dynamics of the U.S. involvement with the Philippines has yielded only the most banal but not invidious conclusion: the effort to Americanize the Filipinos partly succeeded in terms of introducing the forms of institutions like electoral democracy, mass public education, civil service system, and so forth; but it completely failed in altering traditional “Filipino” values, in particular those sanctioning the patron-client relationship.

Now this theme of “imperial collaboration” between the Filipino elite and the U.S. colonial administration has been a recurrent leitmotif in the canonical apologetics of U.S. diplomacy since W. Cameron Forbes’s two-volume inventory of the U.S. accomplishment in the Philippines, *The Philippine Islands* (1924). It was extended to the Commonwealth years by Joseph Hayden’s *The Philippines: A Study in National Development* (1942) and elaborated against the background of Cold War geopolitics by George Taylor’s *The Philippines and the United States: Problems of Partnership* (1964). But these texts have now been compromised by the realities of poverty, social injustice, racism, and exploitation exposed by Filipino intellectuals, among them Filipino writers and artists who have courageously risked their lives to

oppose U.S. imperial oppression since the forcible annexation of the islands in 1898 up to the Marcos dictatorship (1972-86), its latest postcolonial reincarnation.

Logos yields to the immediacy of praxis. Given the intensifying threat of Filipino nationalism to expunge once and for all the myth of U.S.-Philippines "special relations," the project of the contemporary U.S. scholarship on the Philippines (as demonstrated by the works of David Steinberg, Theodore Friend, and particularly Peter Stanley) is to re-conceptualize the experience of U.S. imperial domination as an equal partnership of Filipinos and Americans. This new interpretation would centre on a refurbishing of the patron-client paradigm; the notion of reciprocal obligations entailed by it would arguably serve as the theoretical framework within which one can then exorcise the burden of U.S. responsibility for what happened in the Philippines from 1898 to 1946 by shifting the cause of the failure of American tutelage to the putative shrewdness of Filipinos in "manipulating" their masters. "We tried to do our best, but. . ." This is the thesis of Peter Stanley's *A Nation in the Making: The Philippines and the United States, 1899-1921* (1974), an argument replicated by Karnow and numerous commentaries before and after the February "people power" insurrection. A dialectical twist of historical sensibility seems to have occurred. The sharp contrast between these revisionary texts and previous works critical of U.S. imperialism — to cite only the most available, James Blount's *The American Occupation of the Philippines* (1912), Leon Wolff's *Little Brown Brother* (1961), and Stuart Creighton Miller's *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines 1899-1903* (1982) — may be read also as a defensive mechanism set into play to counter a resurgent movement of anti-U.S. imperialism around the world in the wake of the Vietnam debacle and the renewed revolutionary struggles in Central America and elsewhere.

The issue needs to be clarified further because of its impact on contemporary cultural politics in the Philippines. In reviewing a volume edited by Peter Stanley entitled *Reappraising an Empire: New Perspectives on Philippine-American History* (1984), Robert B. Stauffer acutely points to the dogmatic ideological framework

of the new revisionist historians cited earlier. The revisionary thrust of scholars employing the paradigm of patron-client linkage instead of a concept like dependency within the capitalist world-system is meant to recast the exploitative relationship of dependency into a reciprocal one where responsibility is equalized if not dispersed. By downplaying any serious American influence and inflating the role of Filipino subalterns, Stauffer contends, Stanley and his colleagues make "empire" into a romantic ideology: "it is as if to give a Victorian legitimacy to past conquests and in so doing to justify . . . future imperial ventures" (103). Since a seemingly immutable patron-client pattern of relationship determined political life during U.S. colonial ascendancy, Filipino nationalism is relegated to the "manipulative underside of the collaborative empire," a phrase which euphemistically reformulates McKinley's "benevolent assimilation proclamation" of 21 December 1898, the foundation of the U.S. rule over the island colony. Reviewing Karnow's book in *The Nation* (5 June 1989), Peter Tarr cogently identifies the fallacy of the new apologetics in the "Immaculate Conception" view of American imperial policy as a glorious and selfless civilizing mission, part of the march of Anglo-Saxon progress over the conquered territories and subjugated bodies of African slaves, American Indians, Mexicans, Chinese workers, and others from the founding of the pilgrim colonies to the closing of the western frontier at the end of the nineteenth century.

Of all the varied instruments mobilized by the U.S. to dominate the Philippines after the violent suppression of its revolutionary forces in the Filipino-American War of 1898-1902, culture was the most powerful and enduring in effect. In general, culture here can be defined as that ideological sphere of representations in which hegemony (in Gramsci's terms, the moral-intellectual leadership of a social bloc avowed by consent of the ruled) is defined, organized, destroyed, reconstructed. In its quest for hegemony, U.S. colonialism harnessed the educational system as the chief vehicle of "benevolent assimilation," of acculturation. Within the educational sector of what Althusser calls "the ideological state apparatus" and other disciplinary regimes of the colonial formation, it was the English language that forged the chains of acquiescence to the superior racial power. The first Filipino writers in

English (for example, Paz Marquez-Benitez, Jose Garcia Villa) were educated in the University of the Philippines founded in 1908; their writings were first published by the college journals. English displaced both Spanish and the vernaculars as the primary symbolic system through which Filipinos represented themselves, that is, constituted themselves as colonial subjects with specific positions or functions in the given social order. It was through English that the Filipinos, especially the organic intellectuals of the emerging middle class, represented and validated their linkage to the norms and projects of U.S. imperial dispensation. The Filipino historian Renato Constantino emphasizes this use of the ruler's language as the root-cause of the Filipino's miseducation: "The first and perhaps the master stroke in the plan to use education as an instrument of colonial policy was the decision to use English as the medium of instruction. English became the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past and later was to separate educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen" (47). In short, the implantation of U.S. imperial ideology in the Filipino psyche and the routine of everyday life cannot be dissociated from the use of English in business, government, education, and media; this instrumentality of language acted as the synthesizing force which unified an ensemble of social practices through which the public and private identity of the Filipino as colonial subject was constituted and subsequently valorized.

But what I think transformed the Filipino into the ideal colonial subject was not just his Americanization through language and with it his internalizing of a decorum of submission—an imaginary relation to the real conditions of existence—which at the minimum guaranteed survival. That decisive conversion occurred with William Howard Taft's policy of "Philippines for the Filipinos," a slogan more revealing for its opportunist rhetoric than for its substance. It was really a strategy of cooptation articulated in terms of equal exchange, as manifested in Taft's words: ". . . and when the Filipino, in seeking a position in executive offices where English is the only language spoken, fits himself, as he will with his aptness for learning languages, in English, he will have nothing to complain of, either in the justice of the examination and its marking or in the equality of salaries between him and Americans doing

the same work" (Veneracion 61). What this hegemonic strategy performed with finesse is its formal conversion of a relation of domination into a relation of exchange, an exchange of services, a contractual relation. Maurice Godelier observes that "no domination, even when borne of violence, can last if it does not assume the form of an exchange of services" (161). With this mode of representing colonial oppression as a service rendered by the powerful, a form of exchange carried out in the colonizer's language which establishes a reciprocal commitment (analogous to a voluntary compact) between the parties involved, the consent to be dominated is won and the sublimating bondage of the Filipino sealed. The Filipino *ilustrado* T. H. Pardo de Tavera expressed an opinion which, though initially disclaimed by the "nationalist" bloc, became the implicit principle of the elite platform of achieving independence through gradual reforms: "After peace is established, all our efforts will be directed to Americanizing ourselves; to cause a knowledge of the English language to be extended and generalized in the Philippines, in order that through its agency, the American spirit may take possession of us, and that we may so adopt its principles, its political customs, and its peculiar civilization that our redemption may be complete and radical" (Veneracion 60).

Seen from this orientation, the question of language — of replacing English with a "national" language — appears as the most crucial site of political struggle in the Philippines ever since the converted cattle ship *Thomas* brought the first five hundred American teachers of English into the country. Despite some progress, the question is still unresolved.

In Third World countries, this foundational question cannot be detached from its complicity with major ideological and political struggles. Writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe (in Africa), Edward Brathwaite and Wilson Harris (representing the Caribbean and South America), and Raja Rao (representing Asia) have rehearsed the sociocultural context and ideological resonance of the debate over language as medium of imaginative expression and intellectual reflection in their respective societies (Ashcroft 38-115). In the Philippines, the question of language has been sublimated into the politics of affirming — more pre-

cisely during U.S. colonial rule, gesturing toward — national self-determination. Syncretism, a process of abrogation and appropriation of the alien tongue, and the invention of hybrid inter-languages have never been considered viable options.

Over the years of anti-imperialist struggle, the sign has genuinely become the site of what Deleuze and Guattari call “deterritorializations” — the index of “minor” discourse. By 1986, the “language problem” cannot be dissociated anymore from the quest for national-popular sovereignty. After heated exchanges in public forums and special hearings, threats of boycott and sabotage from non-Tagalog speakers, the Constitutional Convention of 1986 agreed to reaffirm “Filipino” (based on a modified Tagalog base) as the evolving national language of the land. This was the sequel to a political-cultural battle that has been waged since the early decades of this century. Although English continues to be used predominantly in business and in government, Filipino-in-the-making as propagated by the mass media — television, films, and radio — has practically become the *lingua franca* throughout the islands. A systematic program of replacing English with Filipino in all universities is now under way so that within the next two or three decades, the use of English as the traditionally sanctioned medium of intellectual expression will be gradually phased out. Eventually writing in English will be relegated to the museum and antiquarian archives. What are the deeper implications of this struggle over English as the language of aspiration, of social practice and artistic expression?

In essence, the conflict over language is a struggle for hegemony. Who will articulate the sovereignty of the nation, the identity of the Filipino people? In their monograph *Neo-Colonial Politics and Language Struggle in the Philippines* (1984), Virgilio G. Enriquez and Elizabeth Protacio-Martinez have forcefully presented the nationalist perspective in the context of a broadly based mass movement for genuine political, economic, and cultural liberation. They advance the view that the possession of a national language is an essential precondition for autonomy. They contend that the continued use of English in an American-oriented educational system (in textbooks, curriculum, and methodology) not only suppresses the democratic aspirations of the Filipino masses

but also “undermines Filipino values and orientation and perpetuates the miseducation and captivity of the minds of the Filipino people to the colonial outlook” (3). For them, the English language symbolizes the belief in the superiority of American culture, values, society, as we have noted earlier; thus it can only serve the exploitative and oppressive ends of American power. To oppose the persisting effects of an inherited dependency syndrome manifest in the neocolonial structures of the economy, government, schools and in the institutions of civil society, linguistic nationalism must be promoted to insure the cultural survival and preserve the unique identity of the Filipino people. Pursuing the logic of this pedagogical and heuristic endeavour, Enriquez and Protacio-Martinez demonstrate their case by showing how American psychologists have wrongly ascribed to the Filipino character behavioural patterns (like *utang na loob* or *hiya*) based on a wrong, basically Eurocentric, construal of their meanings and context of reference. In the process of arguing that research in psychology should proceed by searching for the “right words” in the vernacular languages that “will truly reflect the sentiments, values and aspirations of the Filipino people,” and not through superimposing Western concepts, Enriquez illustrates how the repertoire of significations condensed in the word *kapwa*, for example, captures a truly indigenous mode of social interaction. The vernacular registers the mutations of what is both national and popular. The genius of the native languages is thus shown to be the most accurate reflection of the Filipino psyche contextualized in its interface with local and global environments. Here in this micropolitics of psychological linguistics, it seems that the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis of language as shaper of one’s world-view is resurrected with a vengeance.

Now it is precisely this hypothesis that Filipino writers in English seem to have implicitly rejected when they chose English as their privileged medium of artistic expression. Of course, the choice is not a genuine free choice given the constraints of limited literacy, limited access to resources like channels of publication, audience, rewards, and so forth; on the other hand, it expresses more than a mere aesthetic decision. A politics and an ethics of writing are implied. No one has really explored this terrain of personal responsi-



bility and complicity; this essay is only scratching the surface.

In assessing the fate of English as a literary medium in the Philippines for the last half century, the noted linguist Andrew Gonzalez has come up with an ambiguous but ultimately ironic conclusion. Gonzalez has documented the process whereby the code or signalling system of the English language "was transferred without its cultural matrix" and this resulted in a variety of Filipino English with distinctive speech patterns in accord with "Filipino styles of thought." This is a phenomenon underlying the development of diverse kinds of English — conceived now as an international idiom no longer fixated on a British or American model — spoken and used in Jamaica, India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and elsewhere. When it comes to discourse patterns evinced in Filipino prose, Gonzalez notes the phenomenon of a new contextualization of English, the "transplantation of English structures and poetic discourse applied to a new environment, a new cultural matrix" (148). Pointing out that since the indigenous discourse conventions and techniques of a native tradition have all been practically destroyed by Spanish and American colonization, the indigenous creativity of Filipino writers has been released in their appropriation of a new language and the need to innovate within this new system. In the process, however, their imagination has been circumscribed by its strict adherence to the Western canonical tradition. Discourse structure and grammatical code are all foreign; only the reference hierarchy, themes or *topoi*, and their cultural matrix are Filipino. Hence Gonzalez's judgment that Filipino poets write poetry in the English language concerning Philippine topics, realities, and themes, "but there is no Filipino art form to speak of as transferred from the indigenous culture to the new tongue. There are no traces in this literary language born of academic and English schooling and modelled on the poetic experiments of America, of the local traditions of versification and poesy" (149). Is that proof then of "indigenous creativity" or self-induced alienation and repression?

Obviously, Gonzalez's mode of divorcing form from content, diverse signifying practices from changing historical circumstances, essentially fails in its attempt to grasp that peculiarly Filipino "creativity" he is positing. While acknowledging Gonzalez's lin-

guistic expertise in canvassing conformities to and deviations from the code, his account ignores the whole contextual field of writing practices that critics like Voloshinov/Bakhtin, linguists like Jakobson, Halliday, Ferruccio-Landi, and other social semioticians have brought to our attention particularly in the last two decades. In my previous books, particularly *Toward a People's Literature* and *Only By Struggle* where I analyzed classic texts like Juan C. Laya's *His Native Soil*, Stevan Javellana's *Without Seeing the Dawn*, and other canonical works; and especially in *Subversions of Desire* where I provide extended metacommentaries on the major writings of Nick Joaquin, by consensus the leading Filipino writer in English, I concretize the parameters of the "sign," a privileged locus of ideological contestation, within the "uneven and combined development" of the Philippine social formation.

Indeed, Filipino writers read the West — the canonical discourses of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, T. S. Eliot, Faulkner, and Hemingway — but they write their hermeneutic responses with an Eastern signature. As I have indicated earlier, this dialogic conjuncture derives from the historical specificity of the Philippines as the only U.S. colony in Asia at the turn of the century, a focal point of condensation and displacement for numerous conflicting political, ideological, economic, and social trends. The Philippines conceived as the site of contradictory forces and heterogeneous actors with their own transitional genealogies is what underlies the allegorical, ambiguously modernizing imagination of Nick Joaquin which I have already examined in a dialectical critique of his major texts in *Subversions of Desire*. Likewise, the narrative art of Carlos Bulosan cannot be understood without the rhythm of oral storytelling and the strategic inversions of folklore pervading the stories in *The Laughter of My Father*. Nor can one comprehend his syncretic alchemy of mapping events in *America is in the Heart* which combine picaresque motifs and autobiographical notations without contextualizing it in the experience of peasant unrest in Pangasinan and the hardships of migrant labor and racial violence in the West Coast — the existential "lived experience" of Filipinos in the master's territory. (Both those aspects I have thoroughly explored in *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle*.) The same is true with the

prison writings of Father Ed de la Torre, Jose Maria Sison, and others; with recent oppositional texts and emergent cultural practices particularly in the spheres of musical and theatrical performances, and in what has now become in our postmodern milieu the hegemonic cultural signifiers: film and television. One example of recent work whose form is conditioned by historic impulses and circumstantial pressures is the underground novel *Hulagpos* (*Break Free*, 1980), a realistic but also polemical critique of the Marcos martial law regime. While the plot is ostensibly patterned after Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, its techniques of montage—abrupt cuts and syncopated juxtaposition of incidents—and collage of characters clearly derive from *inter alia* the method of the serialized novels in the weekly comic books popular among the masses today and from the techniques of the avant-garde cinema.

It might be instructive to sketch briefly the dialectical cross-breeding between the autochthonous tradition and modern Filipino writing in English with three examples. It seems to me that contrary to Gonzalez's assertion of a dichotomy between native sensibility and alien tongue, a subtle intertextuality obtains in their transactions. In this sense Jose Garcia Villa's poetic art cannot be reduced to a matter of imitated prosody such as "reversed consonance" or "sprung rhythm." Again, here, form and substance cannot be so easily disjoined. Villa is the exemplary case of the offspring of *ilustrado* gentry who rejects his class origin but paradoxically valorizes the caste privilege of the artist. This cannot be understood except as a revolt principally against the commercial, materialistic, philistine milieu of colonial society. Despite his ultra-vanguardistic alienation, Villa's art cannot deny the influence of over three hundred years of Spanish-Malayan cultural interaction. If we compare the design and texture of Villa's representative texts in *Selected Poems and New* (1958), with its characteristic surface of aphoristic verbal play and quasi-parody (even pastiche) of metaphysical conceits, with the native tradition of didactic and allegorical indirection—from the pre-Christian riddles, oratory, and *dagli* (vignette) to Balagtas's epic *Florante at Laura* to the satires of Rizal and M. H. Del Pilar, we can begin to understand how and why his individualist revolt in the colonial milieu of the twenties and thirties assumed the form

it took, such as exile, adoption of masks, and aristocratic distance. This genealogy of modernist Filipino writing can be concretely illustrated by comparing the tropological scheme of the first stanza of Villa's poem No. 123 —

What, is, defeat?  
 Broken, victory.  
 Darkest, sanctuary,  
 But, solider, far.  
 Than, the, triumphal, star.  
 (Villa 101)

— with a poem (transcribed by a Spanish priest/lexicographer) dating back to pre-colonial times when Indian, Arabic, and Chinese cultural currents blended in the Malayan aesthetic intelligence:

Ang sugat ay kung tinanggap  
 di daramdamin ang antak  
 ang aayaw at di mayag  
 galos lamang magnanaknak.  
 (Lumbera 9)

(Freely translated: "When one submits himself/to wounding,/ the intensest pain is bearable;/when one is unwilling,/even the merest scratch/can fester.")

As for the invention of an authentic Filipino discourse in the short story anchored in the peasant *habitus* (Bourdieu's term) and the ethical milieu of an organic community, it might be sufficient to present a synecdochic example, such as the nuanced tonality and figurative resonance of this passage from Manuel Arguilla's "A Son is Born," whose peculiar mix would be difficult to find in Chekhov, Maupassant, Hemingway, or any other Western practitioner of this art:

My mother's face was small in the growing dusk of the evening, small and lined, wisps of straight, dry hair falling across it from her head. I could see the brown specks on my mother's cheekbones, the result of working long under the sun. She looked down upon Berting and me and her eyes held a light that I dimly felt sprung from the love she bore us, her children. I could not bear her gaze any longer. It filled me with a longing to be good and kind to her. I looked down at my arms and I was full of shame and of regret.  
 (Lumbera 177)

My third example of the hybrid and syncretic nature of neo-colonial discourse production is different from the first two instances. Here the linguistic code of English is seized and subdued, refunctioned to serve emancipatory ends, when it is incorporated into a modernized form of the *sarsuwela*, a theatrical spectacle mixing songs and dances, with a melodramatic plot of threatened romantic love suturing the unravelled “thickness” of contemporary social and political issues. Introduced by the Spaniards in the nineteenth century as a popular form of entertainment, it has been Filipinized by major artists like Severino Reyes, Vicente Soto, Mena Pecson Crisologo, and others. Here is a passage from Nicanor Tiongson’s *Pilipinas Circa 1907*, a rewriting or adaptation of Reyes’s 1907 play of the same title which has been cross-fertilized by the “seditious” drama and novels of the first decade, the paramount cultural signifiers of anti-colonial resistance. In Tiongson’s script, the anticipated overcoming of American economic-political power is symbolically enacted by the ironic chorus of modernizing “girls,” part of which I quote below. The second stanza may be read as an emblematic specimen of counter-hegemonic renegotiation of the dominant linguistic code:

Ba’t nga ba may Pilipino  
 Na masyadong atrasado  
 Dumaong na’ng Amerikano  
 Ay! pusakal pa ring Indio!  
 [Why are there Filipinos  
 Who are still so backward  
 The Americans have already landed  
 But my, they’re still wild Indios!]

I do not know to them  
 I do not know to them  
 We do not know to them!

Kundi kay William Mckinley  
 [If not for William McKinley]  
 We are still swinging from a tree  
 Walang statue of liberty . . .  
 [We wouldn’t have a statue of liberty . . .]  
 (Tiongson 46-47)

Given this complex historical background absent in most literary histories, writing in English in the Philippines is an ideological practice firmly imbricated in the conflicts and problems of subaltern existence. Unless the production of such discourse is historically situated, one cannot grasp its power of producing meaning, of communicating what Foucault calls knowledge/power, of mobilizing people into action. This imperative of historicizing literary form becomes more compelling if we accept Earl Miner's theory that Asian poetics is fundamentally affective-expressive rather than mimetic or dramatic like European poetics in general, a distinction originating from incommensurable cultural-social disparities (82-87). This is why I suggest that it is important to situate Filipino literary expression in the specific historical conjuncture of forces — the transition from colonial dependency to national-popular autonomy — I have outlined above. While everyone recognizes the axiom that the linguistic system (Saussure's *langue*) is self-contained, a differential system of signifiers structured in binary oppositions, it is also the case that (as Voloshinov/Bakhtin has shown) *parole* or speech is what sets the system in motion and generates meaning among interlocutors in the speech community (65-106). Speech acts or performances of enunciation are social not individual phenomena. In other words, discourse is always intertextual; the world, the concrete historical life-situation of the speakers and horizon of listeners, is a necessary constitutive element of the semantic structure of any utterance (Todorov 41-45) so that the character of any discourse cannot be fully understood without reference to its intertextuality, its axiological embeddedness in social process, in the thickness of circumstances. To separate code from the context of enunciation is thus to annul discourse, to negate utterance in its modalities of communication and artistic expression. This is the reason why I would strongly endorse the deployment of, in Mary Louise Pratt's words, a linguistics of contact instead of the conventional linguistics of community in order to displace the "normative vision of a unified and homogeneous social world" and foreground instead "the relationality of social differentiation" (59). This linguistics would decenter community, highlighting instead "the operation of language *across* lines of social differentiation," focus-

ing on modes and zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups and on "how such speakers [with multiple identities] constitute each other relationally and in difference, how they enact differences in language" (60). Tiongson's *sarsuwela*, Villa's poems, and Bulosan's fiction may thus be conceived as attempts to explore the operation of an aesthetics of contact between U.S. hegemonic culture and the Filipino artistic response to it.

There is a striking correspondence between the subject-position of the writer in the Philippines and in Latin American societies, given the historical parallels in their colonial domination by Spain and by their subordination to U.S. economic-military supremacy. Investigating the literary institution as an ideological practice in Central American revolutions, John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman remark that the "ideological centrality of literature in Latin America has to do with the effects of colonialism and capitalist combined and uneven development in the region, which have left intact and/or specially marked elements of earlier cultural formations that have become extinct or marginal in the metropolis" (15). I concur with this stress on the uneven, non-synchronized field of forces — textual practice being one force — where precisely a hegemonic politics becomes the only feasible, unifying, sustainable strategy for confronting a militarily and economically superior enemy. Unlike Ruben Dario's poetry or Ernesto Cardenal's Christian-Marxist symbolic repertoire, no contemporary literary text — except perhaps the writings of former political prisoners like Sison, interviews of charismatic personalities like Bernabe Buscayno or Father Edicio de la Torre, or certain poems of Amado V. Hernandez — has so far exercised the role of a central ideological signifier that could generate a national-popular culture with overwhelming mass appeal sufficient to mobilize an interclass bloc which could successfully challenge the U.S.-supported oligarchic elite and its intelligentsia. A likely candidate for this status would be the cinema-texts of Lino Brocka and of Kidlat Tahimik (if the latter's films are thoroughly popularized), or the aura of myth and fetishism surrounding certain film personalities like Senator Joseph Estrada. But the future cannot be totally mortgaged to past or present achievement. In this interregnum, I consider the primary and urgent task of

criticism to be the revitalization of texts and the invention of a wide range of cultural practices that would fulfill the function of such a charismatic signifier in a severely fragmented society which is nevertheless structured in dominance by reactionary ideology and a mendacious politics of dependency. Without this emancipatory practice of critical reading and its mediation of meaning, literary texts can be used to advance the opposite end of reproducing and reinforcing subalternity. This critical praxis entails the risk of historicism, of invoking a teleology based on superimposed values and convictions. However, since everyone is implicated in historical becoming and is (sometimes without knowing it) forced to take sides in a struggle whose stakes are life or slow death for millions of Filipinos, I take this risk. It is a price that must be paid for unfolding the power of literature—the submerged Orphic voices prophesying the revenge of the oppressed generations in limbo, victims of injustice and calculation of profit; prophesying the fulfillment of dreams, hopes, desires — not only in interpreting our personal and communal experiences but also in changing the direction of our lives.

A convergence of my position as a Filipino intellectual based in the metropolis and an unprecedented nationalist resurgence in the Philippines situates my critical commentaries and researches as necessary interventions in the realm of cultural politics. For that matter, anyone engaged in a critical commentary on Philippine culture is always a participant in the arena of ongoing political and ideological antagonisms. My larger ongoing project (in which this essay functions as a heuristic mapping of the terrain) of assessing English writing in its historical inscription is modest, however; it is basically revisionist in a sense antithetical to that of Karnow's *In Our Image* and mainstream scholarship mentioned at the outset. It is revisionist in conceiving of literature in the Philippines as an ideological practice of national liberation, the paradigm of an alternative emergency politics with a national-popular agenda. It is fundamentally counter-hegemonic because it strives to articulate the Filipino subversion of the "received," legitimizing identity imposed on it by the metropolitan power and reproduced by local institutions. Finally, it is oppositional in its effort to construct a sovereign Filipino identity in the process of rereading and rewriting



the U.S. inscription of the Filipino subject-position in the text of Western metaphysics and its ethical-political instrumentalities. Revision then is a form of what Nietzsche calls "creative destruction." In this reconstructive task, I share the burden of responsibility with my Filipino brothers and sisters in numerous organizations in the homeland, in Europe and elsewhere, committed to egalitarian social justice, participatory democracy, and true national independence.

Despite the particularistic impulse of constructing indigenous signifiers, the context-specific vernaculars, of each national or regional literature, a Third World intellectual shares a general orientation with all those who have past affinities, common obstacles in the present, and visions of a cooperative future. This does not signify a totalizing and homogeneous orientation where differences are erased; what is needed is a dialogic (if not dialectical) horizon of communication. Can a Filipino writer, given the confluence of Asian, Spanish, and Anglo-Saxon experiences of his community, really choose to be singular and idiosyncratic? How could that be demonstrated? This essay in fact explores the conjunction and disjunction between a Eurocentric discourse of autonomy (initiated by Enlightenment thought) and an embattled sensibility trying to define itself in opposition, trying to assert what could be native or indigenous, relationally speaking. I take comfort in the thought that this is not a solitary enterprise. In the community of Third World intellectuals, I have found inspiration in the examples of Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Lu Hsun, Che Guevara, C. L. R. James, Adolfo Sanchez Vasquez, George Jackson, and numerous Asian and African partisans of popular democracy. But some theoretical demarcations sometimes need to be drawn.

Within the framework of dependency/world systems analysis, the Australian critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin have emphasized the hybrid and syncretic nature of postcolonial writing, mainly Commonwealth writers from former British colonies, in their theoretical synthesis *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). While I agree with their fundamental thesis of a dialectical relationship between metropolitan and peripheral cultures and the impossibility of recuperating "an absolute pre-colonial cultural purity," I disagree with the corollary belief that it is impossible to

create a national formation geared to realizing autonomy within the given hegemonic global system—in the post-Persian Gulf War, the “New World Order” of capital. Whether through mimetic or allegorical modes, in either imaginary or symbolic registers or both, the quest for national autonomy (even though the post-modern configuration of “nation” appears problematic) seems inescapable (see Bhabha). It is not enough simply to multiply ingenious deconstructive rereadings and rewritings of the European or American historical and fictional records. Ashcroft claims to legislate what Third World/postcolonial artists should do: “These subversive manoeuvres [mentioned before], rather than the construction of *essentially* national or regional alternatives, are the characteristic features of the postcolonial text. Postcolonial literatures/cultures are constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices” (196). I ask: why “rather than”? A foreclosing judgment punctuates the aporia of postcolonial normative speculation and immediately suspends dialogue. Is it possible that we are confronting here once again, resurrected in the guise of unsolicited “friendly” advice, the imperial hubris of Western logocentrism and powers?

But can we, “the hewers of wood and drawers of water,” not decide for ourselves? Is a clean break foreclosed? Are all the boundaries fixed? Can we not stake new ground? We in the decolonizing societies of the Third World of course understand the historical predicament and susceptibilities of a settler state like Australia and its “White Australia” heritage (Miles 90-98) so that we have no illusions about the heterogeneity and radical Otherness of postcolonial theory arising from even the sub-metropolitan centers. But reversals and disruptions are bound to happen, as Gramsci observes: “A historical moment . . . is rich in contradictions. It acquires a personality, it is a moment of development in that some basic activity of life dominates others and represents a historical ‘advance’ . . .” (Thibaudeau 19).

Subterranean rumblings charged with “auguries of innocence” can be heard even from hitherto pacified frontiers like New Caledonia, “zones of occult instability” (Fanon’s phrase) like Timor, the former Spanish Sahara, and large parts of the Amerindian regions. I am hopeful that from the struggles of peoples in Haiti

and El Salvador, South Africa, Palestine, Northern Ireland, Eritrea, and other outposts of the Empire, new theories and practices of popular resistance art will spring — not just one or two but many, and only then will a real dialogue or colloquy with the West begin. As Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin have discovered in the darkest days of European fascism, the new is permanently possible and in the fullness of time will blast the continuum of history.

In the meantime, I would urge partisans of the emancipatory imagination in the “postcolonial” zones of “occult instability” to engage in inventing new modes of renegotiating the terms of the hegemonic discourse and articulating it toward a collective project of national-popular liberation. This oppositional task is unavoidable if we want to challenge the disciplinary regimes of imperial power. It can be dialectically merged with that of producing alternative, even utopian, discourses and practices. One task in this project is propaedeutic or heuristic in nature: the effort to draw up a provisional cognitive mapping of one terrain in which the fates of two cultures, two peoples, have been joined — a radical, deconstructive rewriting of how U.S. hegemonic culture has read and “produced” the Filipino, more precisely the “truth/knowledge” concerning the Filipino; how the subaltern engendered by interlocking if polarized and antithetical cultures (Malayan, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, North American) has finally begun to speak and act — perhaps to curse, like Caliban — in a new language, all signs of a new beginning.

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