Geographically speaking, the Republic of the Philippines is an Asian country, surrounded by Asian neighbors. To the north — within sight of the northern islands — is Formosa. Beyond Formosa is the Chinese mainland with which the natives of the Philippine Islands have been in contact from time immemorial through Chinese traders, and later through Chinese immigrants. West of the Philippines are the countries of Indo-China: Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam. Beyond them is Thailand; south of them are the Malay States; and farther south is the great archipelago now called Indonesia. Closest to the Philippines, southwest of Mindanao and Palawan and accessible by motor launch or sailing vinta, is the great Asian island of Borneo from which — according to the tradition embodied in the Maragtas and other Visayan epics — the great waves of migration came which pushed the Negrito aborigines into the mountains and made our islands a Malayan archipelago.¹

The Chinese influence upon Filipino culture has been profound, as evidenced in Philippine arts and crafts as well as in the fact that a large proportion of present-day Filipinos have Chinese blood in their veins. That this influence antedates the Spanish conquest of the Philippines is a well-known fact that has received dramatic confirmation in the recent excavations at Calatagan and elsewhere.²

Racially, the Tagalogs, Visayans, Pangasinans, Bicolans, Ilocanos and other ethnic groups in the Philippines are closely allied to similar

¹The Maragtas epic tells of the coming of the Bornean chiefs, led by Puti and Sumakwel, to Panay Island, via Palawan, and thence to southern Luzon. Two texts, that by Santaren and that by Monteclaro, have been translated into English and published in the Sarawak Museum Journal of Borneo (VII, June 1956, 22-52; and VIII, December 1957, 51-99).
ethnic groups in Borneo, as ethnologists and anthropologists are coming more and more to realize. The Philippine languages and dialects belong to the Malayo-Polynesian family which, as Professor Dyen informs us, comprises nearly one-eighth of all the languages of the world.3

Thus, from a merely geographical, ethnological and linguistic point of view, the Filipinos are an Asian people, and their seven thousand islands scattered over that part of the ocean where the great Pacific becomes the China Sea belong to that East of which Kipling wrote, with perhaps a touch of the snobbery and self-assurance typical of his day, that East was East, and West West and never the twain should meet.

The interesting thing, of course, is that, while Kipling was writing those words, East and West had met — and are meeting — in the Philippines. Two accidents of history, which in a providential view of history were not accidental, have brought the Islands into prolonged and intimate contact with the West. One was the coming of Magellan in 1521, the other the coming of Dewey in 1898. Both events were turning points in the cultural as well as the political history of the Islands. The coming of Spain brought Christianity and the Greco-Roman civilization; the coming of America brought democracy and the English language.

Of course, as in all human affairs, these blessings were not unmixed. The Spanish conquest brought religion, European culture, and nationhood — for the Filipino people would not have been one nation but a conglomeration of tribes were it not for the Spanish conquest; but it also brought a harsh colonial yoke which the people tried to shake off in sporadic revolts, culminating in the great revolution of 1896 and the establishment of the First Philippine Republic in 1898 and 1899. The American conquest, on the other hand, brought greater freedom, greater economic progress, greater social mobility, better hygiene, and a greater regard for the common man; but it also brought the tawdry literature of the magazine stands, the mores of Hollywood, and a type of mass education that, paradoxically, has made genuine culture the possession of a very few.

When all these factors have been taken into account, it becomes evident that the Philippine Republic differs from its Asian neighbors in that it belongs not only to Asia but also to the West. The Filipino is both Oriental and Occidental, and in this dual citizenship lie both his destiny and his conflict. To be at home in both worlds is his peculiar perfection; to be confronted with both worlds is his peculiar burden. His greatest danger is that he might eventually belong to neither. The Filipino may become an effective bridge between East and West, or he may become an outcast of both East and West. And since literature is the product of a culture and the expression of a cast of mind, it is by coming to terms with both horns of this dilemma that Philippine literature will become great, in whatever language it may be written.

II

The question of language is crucial in any discussion of Philippine culture. The chief fact in Philippine literature up to the present is precisely this: it is an inchoate literature in many languages.

When the Spaniards came to the Philippines in the sixteenth century, they found a people with an astonishingly high degree of literacy. In 1602 — eighteen years before the Puritans landed at Plymouth Rock, twenty-eight years before the Catholics landed in Maryland, while Shakespeare in England was writing his great tragedies — the Spanish Jesuit missionaries in the Philippines sent one of their number, Father Pedro Chirino, as their procurator to represent them in Rome. His Report on the Philippine Islands was published in Rome in 1604 and is one of the major documents of Philippine cultural history. “All these islanders,” he says, “are much given to reading and writing, and there is hardly a man, and much less a woman, who does not read and write in the characters used in Manila, which are entirely different from those of China, Japan and India.”

The “characters” that Chirino referred to were the abakada or native alphabet consisting of three vowels and thirteen (or, as some say, twelve) consonants, which was common to Tagalogs, Visayans and Ilocanos and other ethnic groups in the Philippines. The alphabet

4P. Chirino, Relacion de las islas Filipinas (Rome, 1604; 2nd ed. Manila, 1890). An English translation is in Blair and Robertson, The Philippine Islands, Vol. XII.
being syllabic, every consonantal symbol stood for a consonant followed by a vowel. This meant that final consonants, with no vowel to follow, had to be supplied by the reader from the context. This, obviously, was difficult for Europeans whose vocabulary in the native languages was limited; but it offered no difficulty to the natives, as Father Chirino relates: "By means of these characters, they make themselves understood and convey their ideas marvelously, he who reads supplying with much skill the consonants which are missing."

Fascinated by this strange manner of writing, Father Chirino was even more intrigued by the languages themselves, and especially by Tagalog: "It was the Tagal that pleased me most and which I most admired. I found in this language four qualities of the four greatest languages of the world: Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Spanish; it has the abstruseness and obscurity of the Hebrew, the articles and distinctions . . . of the Greek, the fulness and elegance of the Latin, and the refinement, polish and courtesy of the Spanish." In thus ranking Spanish among the "four greatest" in the world, Chirino was only following in the illustrious footsteps of Charles V, whose well-known boast it was that he spoke French to men, Italian to women, German to his horse, and Spanish to God; but Chirino's praise of Tagalog showed genuine insight which has been shared and echoed by later linguists.

Chirino's enthusiasm for the native languages was shared both by his Jesuit missionary colleagues and by the missionaries of the four great religious orders to whom the evangelization of the Islands had been entrusted, namely, the Augustinians, the Dominicans, the Franciscans, and the Augustinian Recollects. This enthusiasm was shown in many ways, notably in the kind of books they wrote and printed. The first two books printed in the Philippines (1593) were catechisms: one in Chinese, the other in Spanish and Tagalog, with

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5Chirino, Relación, Ch. XVII (Blair and Robertson, op. cit., XII, 242-243). On the native Philippine alphabet, several works may be consulted, including Cipriano Marcilla, O.S.A., Estudio de los antiguos alfabetos filipinos (Malabon, Philippines, 1895), together with the corrections and animadversions by W. E. Retana, Los antiguos alfabetos filipinos, nota bibliografica (Madrid, 1895). A recent mimeographed Bibliography of the Ancient Philippine Syllabaries (University of the Philippines library, 1953) by Professor Gabriel Bernardo includes 177 items.

6Relacion, Ch. XV (Blair and Robertson, op. cit., XII 235-236).
the Tagalog text printed in both the Roman and the native Tagalog characters. A third book, also in Chinese and with interesting illustrations, was also printed in 1593 being a “treatise on the true God, on the Church and on natural sciences” by the Dominican, Fray Juan Cobo. All three books were printed under Dominican auspices. The Dominican, Fray Francisco Blancas, wrote several devotional works in Tagalog. His grammar of the Tagalog language appeared in 1610. In that same year, the Jesuit, Father Cristóbal Jimenez, published a Visayan translation of Cardinal Belial-mine’s Catechism. The same Catechism was translated into Ilocano in 1621 by the Augustinian, Fray Francisco López. In 1613 a Vocabulary of the Tagalog language was published by the Franciscan, Fray Pedro de San Buenaventura. A catechism in the Pampango language was published in 1621 by the Augustinian, Fray Francisco Coronel. The Augustinians, Fray Alonso de Méntrida and Fray Martín Claver, published a Vocabulary of the Visayan language in 1637. And so on, throughout the early history of Philippine printing.

While the missionaries were learning the native languages and their mode of writing, the native Filipinos were learning the Roman alphabet and the Spanish tongue. “They have learned our language and its pronunciation and write it even better than we do,” says Father Chirino. Morga corroborates this testimony. “The native boys,” he reports, “present dramas and comedies both in Spanish and in their

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7The Doctrina Christiana en lengua española y tagala of 1593 is now in the possession of Mr. Lessing J. Rosenwald of Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, who has donated it to the Library of Congress. He has published at his own expense a facsimile edition of it, edited by Edwin Wolf (1947). To Mr. Rosenwald I am deeply grateful for entertaining me in his Jenkintown home and allowing me to inspect both this and other items of his priceless collection of incunabula. The Chinese Doctrina, of which a copy is in the Vatican, and the Chinese treatise, of which the only known copy is in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, have both been published in facsimile and commented upon by Carlos Sanz, Primitivas relaciones de España con Asia y Oceanía (Madrid, 1958). The Chinese Doctrina had previously been reproduced and described by J. Gayo Aragon O.P., Doctrina Cristiana: primer libro impreso en Filipinas (n.p., n.d., but issued by the University of Santo Tomas circa 1951).

8On the history of Philippine printing, the basic work is J. T. Medina’s La Imprenta en Manila (Santiago de Chile, 1896). Additions to this catalogue were made by Pérez and Güemes (Manila, 1904), by Medina himself (Santiago de Chile, 1904), and by Retana in several works (Madrid, 1899, 1906, and 1911).

9Relación Ch. XVII (Blair and Robertson, op. cit., XII, 243-244).
own language very charmingly.” Morga adds that in the schools conducted by the missionaries, the children were taught not only religion and the Spanish language but also some artistic accomplishments, such as singing and the playing of musical instruments, in which, he says, the Filipinos were adept.10

In 1663, a history of the Jesuit missionary effort in the Philippines was published in Madrid, written by Father Francisco Colín, but based largely on Chirino’s manuscript. In it Colín mentions three of the best-developed art forms in the Philippines: the song, the dance, and story-telling at banquets.

They intersperse their banquets with songs in which one or two sing while the others respond. Their songs (as is the case with other peoples) are for the most part their old tales and legends. They dance to the sound of bells, shaped like basins or little vessels of metal and rung rapidly and continuously, for the dances are warlike and impassioned but with measured steps and movements, occasionally lifting (their feet?) and keeping them suspended in air. Holding in their hands a towel or a spear and a shield, they make meaningful gestures brandishing the one or other, all in time. Or with nothing in their hands, they suit the movement of hand to the movement of feet. Moving, now slowly, now fast; now advancing, now retreating; they work themselves into a frenzy and then calm down again; coming close together and then drawing apart — all with elegance and grace.11

Those who have seen the Bayanihan and the Far Eastern Dance Group, which recently toured Europe and the United States, can well understand why Fathers Chirino and Colin were so delighted with these Filipino dances: “The dances,” they continued, “have been judged not unworthy to grace our Christian festivals.” Even then, however, the western influence was already beginning to be felt, for they added: “The young people and the children now dance and play musical

10 Antonio de Morga, Sucesos de las islas Filipinas (Mexico, 1609). The passage cited here is on p. 206 of the Madrid edition (ed. Retana. 1909; English trans. in Blair and Robertson, op. cit., XVI, 152.)
11 F. Colin, S.J., Labor evangélica (Madrid, 1663; new edition, annotated by Pablo Pastels, S.J., 3 vols., Barcelona, 1900-1902) I. 63 Translation mine. (For a different translation, see Blair and Robertson, XL, 67-68.)
instruments in our (Spanish) manner, and they sing in a fashion that none of us could improve."

It would seem from all this that at the beginning of the Spanish conquest a high cultural level had been attained and that the stage was set for the development of a genuinely Filipino literature which would be respectable in quality and considerable in bulk. How was it, then, that by the beginning of the nineteenth century, two centuries after the Conquest, no such literature had arisen?

Some native arts and crafts — woodcarving, sculpture and the dance — persisted even after the Conquest and remained vigorous throughout the centuries of Spanish colonial rule. These arts were native, although strongly influenced by European, Indian, and Chinese art. But with literature, as with music, it seems that the native art itself disappeared, and new beginnings had to be made in a borrowed idiom and with borrowed subject matter.\(^{12}\)

So much was this the case that the Spanish savant, Vicente Barrantes, member of the two Royal Academies of Language and of History, could state categorically in 1889 that the Filipinos had no culture of their own and no past to be proud of. "Son los filipinos raza sin historia." It was a waste of time, he said, to look for any evidence of intellectual ability among the Filipinos: "Pierden el tiempo los quo buscan en la historia de Filipinas datos que demuestren la potencia intelectual de la raza tagala."\(^{13}\) Barrantes, of course, was no admirer of Filipinos, and he leaned too heavily on a source which was neither sympathetic nor accurate, namely, the celebrated letter of the Augustinian, Fray Gaspar de San Agustín, to which we shall return later. Rizal, in a spirited rejoinder published in Barcelona that same year, neatly disposed of Barrantes and his sweeping assertions.\(^{14}\) But the fact that in 1889, three centuries after the Conquest, a Spanish academician could find no trace of native Philippine culture is itself

\(^{12}\) On this aspect of Philippine music, see Jose Maceda, "Maguindanao Music," *Philippine Studies*, IX (1961), 666-671. On Philippine architecture, sculpture and painting, see the articles by Femando Zobel in *Philippine Studies*, passim.

\(^{13}\) V. Barrantes, *El teatro tagalo* (Madrid, 1889), Ch. I. Barrantes was reacting to Pedro Paterno's work (*La antigua civilizacion tagalog*, Madrid, 1887) as well as to certain statements by Mallat (*Les Philippines*, 2 vols., Paris, 1846).

\(^{14}\) Barrantes y el teatro tagalo (Barcelona, 1889). This 23-page pamphlet has been reprinted and translated into Tagalog by the Institute of National Language.
significant: it argues to an arrested development, or even a retrogression, in that culture.

How explain such cultural stagnation, or even retrogression?

III

Some writers blame the disappearance of the early culture upon the missionaries, who, it is said, in their zeal to stamp out idolatry, destroyed the books of the pre-Spanish Filipinos. This accusation needs critical evaluation. "The missionaries, on their own testimony, destroyed certain writings which they considered pernicious to faith or morals. Chirino mentions one instance in which a book of magic ritual was destroyed because it included an explicit pact with the devil." Some missionaries in Mexico are said to have destroyed all native writings with a ruthless zeal which we today deplore as misguided. But whether the missionaries in the Philippines were as ruthless in their zeal to destroy all native literature, including epics and songs, is a point that needs greater documentation than has hitherto been presented.

It should be remembered in this connection that the pre-Spanish Filipinos had, properly speaking, no "books." They were highly literate, but they had no literature. In the first place, they had no paper, no writing tablets except bamboo tubes and the leaves or bark of trees. They knew no pen except the primitive stylus, until the Spaniards taught them the use of the sharpened quill.

In the second place, some of their epics were far too long to commit to writing, though, remarkably, not too long to commit to memory.

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15 Relacion, Ch. XIX (Blair and Robertson, op. cit., XII, 254).

16 An example of meager documentation in support of a sweeping assertion is found in Teofilo del Castillo’s Brief History of Philippine Literature (Manila, 1937), pp. 13-14. He says that “most of the writings in existence at the time (of the Conquest) were burned by the Spaniards, who thought thus to weaken the native religion...” In support of this statement, the only authority cited is Francis Burton Harrison, The Cornerstone of Philippine Independence, p. 21, who in turn makes a similar assertion but without offering proof.

17 Chirino, Relacion, Ch. XVII; also Colin, Labor evangelica, Ch. XIII, No. 93 Blair and Robertson, op. cit., XL, 51-52). The Ayer Collection in the Newberry Library, Chicago, has photographs of early Philippine writing which appear to have been made with a brush, somewhat in the Chinese fashion and with the squid’s fluid for ink.
The *Hinilawod* epic of Panay, recently transcribed by J. Landa Jocano, goes to a thousand printed pages. A similar length is reported by José Maceda who has tape-recorded the Maguindanao epics of Cotabato.\(^{18}\)

Because these epics took several days to chant, they had to be handed down by oral tradition from one generation to another. Thus, both by necessity and by preference, Philippine literary art was largely oral. It abounded in songs, proverbs, riddles, and stories, few of which were ever written down. The songs were sung and the stories were told by people who had heard them from their elders. The people delighted in oratory and in debates, much of it in verse. In short, the literary activity of the early Filipinos was a highly social art, evolved by a gregarious people to enliven their festivals and those communal occasions of which Filipinos were, and are, extremely fond.

Such an oral art, recorded only in the memory and kept fresh by wit, was doomed to perish unless the wit itself was kept alive. If then the art perished or stagnated, it was because the Filipino mind had become dull, jaded, stagnant.

What had happened to the Filipino mind?

Two answers have been offered to this question. One was that of Barrantes, Gaspar de San Agustin, and other Spanish writers; the other was that of Rizal. The Barrantes-San Agustin thesis was that the Filipino mind was dull by nature; Rizal’s, that it had been rendered dull by slavery under the Spaniards.

Barrantes contended that the Filipinos were incurably lazy. Since laziness is inimical to any kind of intellectual development, it was obvious, said Barrantes, that the Filipinos had none but themselves to blame for their cultural poverty. Whatever literary culture they possessed, he said they owed directly or indirectly to Spain.

Barrantes, of course, was not an expert on Philippine affairs. He had little firsthand knowledge of the Philippines. He derived much of his information from a famous letter by an Augustinian friar, Caspar de San Agustin, written in 1720, which circulated in manuscript and was later transcribed into various books, including those of Delgado, Sinibaldo de Mas, and Sir John Bowring. It was Fray Gaspar’s

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contention that the Filipinos were so depraved that even their so-called virtues were in reality vices.\textsuperscript{19}

Fray Gaspar was not the first to make the accusation. As early as 1630, another Augustinian, Fray Juan de Medina, had remarked pointedly that the Jesuit missionaries in the Visayan Islands were wasting their time writing books in Visayan. The labor, he said, far exceeded the fruit, for no indio would buy a book, and even if he had a copy he would be too lazy to read it.\textsuperscript{20} Neither Gaspar de San Agustín nor Juan de Medina represented the official position of the Augustinian Order. The works of Fray Francisco López in Ilocano or of Fray Alonso de Métrida in Visayan were enough to refute the allegations of their brethren who were less sympathetic to Philippine culture. But the letter of Gaspar de San Agustín had done its work, and Barrantea was only one of many who believed that the Filipinos, as a nation, were essentially inferior.

That, at any rate, was one view. The other was Rizal’s. In his essay, \textit{Filipinas dentro de cien años}, which appeared in four installments in Barcelona and Madrid in 1889 and 1890, he offered another explanation of the cultural poverty of the Filipinos:

\begin{quote}
Scarcely were the Islands annexed to the Spanish Crown than the Filipinos had to sustain with their blood and toil the wars of conquest which the Spanish people waged in obedience to their ambitions. At a terribly critical time when the Filipino people was undergoing a change of government, of laws, of customs, of religion and beliefs, the Philippine Islands were depopulated and impoverished by these wars.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{19}Gaspar de San Agustín, O.S.A., was in the Philippines from 1668 to 1724. Among his works was a Tagalog grammar (\textit{Compendio del arte de la lengua tagala}, Manila, 1703) and a history of the Spanish conquest of the Philippines (\textit{Conquista de las islas Filipinas}, Madrid, 1698). His famous letter on the depravity of the Filipino occupies 100 pages m Blair and Robertson (XL; 183-283). Father Delgado’s refutation appears \textit{ibid}. 283-295. Delgado was in the Philippines about the same time as San Agustín (1718-1755). His history bears the long title: \textit{Historia general sacro-profana . . . de las islas del poniente llamadas Filipinas} (Manila, 1892).

\textsuperscript{20}“Hay entre ellos insignes lenguas bisayas; y aunque imprimieron el Belarmino en ella, pienso que fué más la costa que el provecho, porque pensar que el indio ha de comprar libro, es cosa de risa; y cuando lo tenga, de pereza no lo leerá. Esta es la razón de no haberse impreso mucho en todas las lenguas que hay por acá.” (Cited by Medina, \textit{La imprenta en Manila}, pp. 11-12).
The result, Rizal said, was that the Filipinos were bewildered by their own metamorphosis. "They lost all confidence in their past, all faith in their present, and all hope for the future." The cultural result of this loss of self-confidence was thus described by Rizal:

Thus a new era began for the Filipinos. Little by little they lost their ancient traditions and their culture. They forgot their native alphabet, their songs, their poetry, their laws, in order to parrot other doctrines that they did not understand . . . The race became thus cheapened and degraded in its own eyes. The people became ashamed of their own traditional customs in order to imitate whatever was foreign and incomprehensible . . . 21

IV

At the time that Rizal was writing those words, a literary renaissance was well under way among Filipinos both at home and abroad. This sudden flowering must not be thought of as a freakish thing without antecedents. It had its roots in the past. There had always been an intellectual elite in the Philippines, though it is not clear how large this elite was. From the beginning of the seventeenth century several colleges had existed in various parts of the archipelago. Chief of these were the two universities: the Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomás, founded by the Dominicans in 1611, and the Jesuit College of Manila, later renamed the University of San Ignacio, which was founded in 1601 but which was suppressed when the Jesuits were expelled from all Spanish dominions in 1768.

It is natural to suppose that intellectual interests always existed among this elite. But from the second decade of the nineteenth century an intellectual ferment was observable in the Islands which increased in intensity as the century advanced. Political and economic, as well as cultural, events in Europe were largely responsible for the cultural awakening that now took place in the Philippines. The Peninsular War, the Spanish Constitution of 1812, the varying fortunes of the

21 The installments appeared in *La Solidaridad* on 30 September, 31 October, and 15 December 1889, and 31 January 1890: the first two in Barcelona, the last two in Madrid. The entire essay is reprinted in Retana’s *Archivo del bibliófilo filipino*. Vol. 5 (Madrid, 1905). (My translation)
Spanish Cortes, the alternate granting and curtailment of freedom of the press, the perpetual conflict between Spanish liberals and Spanish conservatives — all had their impact upon the Philippines. One of the results of these various movements was the introduction of the newspaper to the Islands and the rise of Philippine journalism. Meanwhile, the Romantic movement in Europe had its effect upon the Filipino mentality, which during the nineteenth century took on a distinctly romantic cast.

The transporting of ideas from Europe to the Philippines was facilitated by several major developments. One of these was the independence of Mexico and other Latin American countries: the Philippines, previously ruled by Spain through the Viceroy in Mexico, was brought politically closer to the mother country. Another development was the improvement of transportation and communications, as a result of the opening of the Suez Canal, the invention of steam navigation, and the invention of the telegraph. Meanwhile, the growing opulence of some Filipino families allowed an ever-increasing number of Filipinos to go abroad for studies or for business. Some Filipinos took up permanent residence in such centers as Madrid, Barcelona, Paris or London. Thus, the intellectual currents of Europe began to be felt even in the backwaters of “the islands of the setting sun.”

This literary renaissance in the Philippines expressed itself in several ways. Its earliest manifestation was an outpouring of romances in Tagalog verse. These were called awit (song), or corridos — a term of uncertain derivation.22

These verse narratives were based on the literature of European chivalry and the lives of the Saints. Barrantes, whose name has already been mentioned, made a collection of these publications which he placed on exhibit in the Philippine Exposition in Madrid in 1887. The entire collection is now in the Newberry Library in Chicago as part of the Ayer Collection. The earliest of these corridos was printed in 1816.

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22At least two theories have been advanced. Pardo de Tavera (Biblioteca filipina, No. 701, p.114) believed that the word was a corruption of ocurrido—an event. Barrantes, on the other hand, gave a more prosaic derivation: “Corridos, cuyo nombre no significa en puridad otra cosa que papeles volantes que de mano en mono corren.” (El Teatro tagalo, pp. 20-21).
Pardo de Tavera, in his *Biblioteca filipina*, mentions forty-eight titles, of which the majority were printed in Manila between 1854 and 1874.¹³

The titles are sufficient indication of the nature of such works: Prince Orontes and Queen Talestris; Gonzalo de Córdova and the Princess Zulema; Don Jaime del Prado, son of King Henry and Queen Elizabeth of Hungary; Count Urban of the Kingdom of Ireland and the Princess Rosamunde, daughter of King Albert of Italy; the Twelve Peers of France; Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp; and so on. It is remarkable how durable has been the appeal of this romantic literature to the poor and ignorant, who found in these incredible stories some escape into an enchanted land so different from the drab realities of their existence. As late as the 1930’s, a Visayan weekly in Cebu was printing serially the story of Roland and the Twelve Peers of France, to the delight of the same people whose children or grandchildren are today being entertained by the sentimental productions of many of the Tagalog films.

One of the corridos (or awit, as Professor Bernardo insists that it should be called) has attained the stature of a classic. It bore the title: *Pinagdaanang buhay ni Florante at ni Laura sa cahariang Albania* . . . (Events in the Lives of Florante and Laura in the Kingdom of Albania...). The title went on to explain that the story was based on the historical paintings depicting the Greek Empire, and that the story was rendered into Tagalog verse “by one proficient in the same.” The work bore only the author’s initials — F. B. His real name was Francisco Baltasar, more popularly known as Balagtas, a Tagalog poet born in 1788 and who died in 1862.²⁴

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²⁴ The full title in Tagalog was: *Pinagdaanang buhay ni Florante at ni Laura sa cahariang Albania, Quinuha sa mad-lang cuadro histórico ó pinturang nagsasabi nang manga nangyari nang unang panahon sa Imperio nang Grecia, at tinulá nang isang matouin sa versong tagalog*. Many editions of this work have been printed. (See, e.g., Pardo de Tavera, *Bibl. fil.*, No. 722. Professor Gabriel Bernardo has compiled a fuller list of editions in “Francisco Balagtas and His Florante at Laura”, *City Gazette*, Manila, 16 March 1943, pp. 219-228.)
A second manifestation of the explosion of literary energy in the nineteenth century was the development of a theater both in Spanish and in the native languages. Filipinos have always been fond of dramatic representations, a fact noted by the missionaries from earliest times. Many of the religious practices of an extraliturgical character, like the symbolic processions of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, were introduced by the missionaries as pedagogical devices that appealed to the people’s dramatic sense. Comedies of various kinds were popular in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Fray Gaspar de San Agustín complained in the letter already quoted that Filipinos were so fond of comedies and farces that no feast was considered complete unless a comedy was performed. Many of these plays were printed, as Fray Gaspar noted.

In the nineteenth century, this native interest in the drama received considerable reinforcement from two sources. One was the establishment of theaters in Manila, beginning with that of Binondo which was already in existence by 1840. By 1866 there were four theaters in the Manila area, and the government felt obliged to issue a prohibition against theatrical performances held outside these theaters.25

The other influence was that of the colleges, where plays were performed as a regular feature of academic life and where the future playwrights and actors received their early training in drama. Among the colleges were those of the Jesuits, whose attitude toward the drama as a part of liberal education is well known and whose contribution to the development of the Filipino theater has been attested by both Retana and Barrantes. The Jesuits, expelled from all Spanish dominions in 1768, were allowed to return to the Philippines in 1859, and promptly accepted the invitation of the City of Manila to establish a school for classical studies: the Ateneo Municipal de Manila. It was for the Ateneo stage that José Rizal, who had graduated Bachelor of Arts from that College in 1878, wrote his masque in praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1880. It was called Junto al Pasig, which he

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described as zarzuela en un acto y en verso: a musical play in one act and in verse. The music for it was composed by Echegoyen.  

VI

The name of Bias Echegoyen recalls another manifestation of the cultural renaissance of the nineteenth century. He was a music teacher in the “Escuela de Tiples” of the Manila Cathedral and the founder of the music store and publishing house, “La Lira.” He was a Spaniard. But there were many native-born musicians who participated in what can only be described as an explosion of musical energy. Diego Perez composed several pieces, among them a medley of Filipino airs called “Cantares filipinos.” Among his pupils was Dolores Paterno who set to music her brother’s lyric: “Flor de Manila,” which today is still sung under another title: “Sampaguita.” Leonardo Silos who composed a Kundiman in 1875 was the father and grandfather of noted musicians. Pedro Castañeda, a pianist of Santa Cruz in Manila, composed a danza. Juan Nakpil, a music teacher, composed a well-known piano piece, “Recuerdos de Capiz.” Natalio Mata and his son Manuel, organists of the church of Quiapo, composed many pieces of religious and profane music, some of which were awarded prizes in the musical competitions of 1882 and 1895.

At least one musician gave up his life for his country: Francisco Roxas, a violinist, who was shot at Bagumbayan by the Spanish Government upon the outbreak of the Revolution of 1896. He left behind several religious compositions, including a Magnificat and an Ave Verum. Bibiano Morales and his son Ignacio, choir masters and organists in the Manila Cathedral, were also directors of “zarzuelas.”

Among the first to produce Italian opera in the Philippines was Jose Canseco, Jr. and his musical company from Pandacan and other districts of Manila. Canseco composed a zarzuela, a polonaise, several pasodobles, religious hymns, and set to music some songs written by

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26 The text of Junto al Pasig and of Rizal's other poems is in Jaime de Veyra's edition of Poesias de Rizal published by the National Library (Manila, 1946). Junto al Pasig was performed by students of the Ateneo de Manila in Spanish, English and Tagalog during Rizal's Centenary Year, 1961. A more mature performance had previously been given by the Jesuit students at Novaliches in 1948.
Lorenzo Guerrero. Canseco, while serving as musical director to the Spanish Regiment stationed in Zamboanga in the 1890's, invented an instrument designed to facilitate harmonization and musical transpositions. He called it "tonopsis mecánica," and it won a prize in the St. Louis Exposition in 1904.

Other composers were more prolific still. Marcelo Adonai, who learned music as a child from singing in the church choir of San Agustín in Intramuros, wrote four funeral marches, several quartets and quintets for strings and harmonium, two Masses for voice and orchestra (one based on Philippine, the other on Gregorian themes), a Te Deum, an Offertory, a Dies Irae, a Salve, an Ave Maria, and other religious pieces. He also wrote descriptive pieces on native themes: among them, "La Tarumba de Pakil" and "A Obando." He was still alive and composing at eighty in 1927.

Simplicio Solis, professor of music at the Ateneo de Manila, had studied music in the Escuela de Tiples which he entered in 1872 at the age of eight. He left behind a long list of works, including two symphonies, a Tagalog opera (libretto by Aurelio Tolentino), and the music for several plays and musical comedies. Manuel Lopez, a teacher at the Escuela de Tiples and at the Instituto de Mujeres, also wrote the music for several zarzuelas in Spanish and Tagalog, two of them with librettos written by Rosa Sevilla de Alvero. One of Lopez's religious compositions — a hymn to the Virgin — was awarded a prize in 1904 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Another prolific composer was Ladislao Bonus of Pandacan, who composed an opera ("Sandugong Panaginip") for which Patemo wrote the libretto. Bonus was among the many Filipino composers who set to music Rizal's well known "Song of Maria Clara."27

VII

The literary ferment of the nineteenth century showed itself, above all, in the development of the Filipino novel in Spanish. Some of these novels were written by Filipinos, like those of Rizal or Pedro Paterno. Others were written by Spaniards assigned to the Philippines, like the novel *Pepin* by Antonio Chápuli Navarro, published in Madrid in 1892, or the two-volume *Misterios de Filipinas* by the military officer and civil governor of Davao, Antonio García del Canto, published in Madrid in 1859. García del Canto tried his hand at verse in the religious legend called *El misionero*, printed in Binondo (Manila) in 1873. The attempt was apparently unsuccessful, to judge from Tavera’s comment: *Es posible que esto sea lo más malo que se ha impreso en Manila:* “This work is probably the worst ever printed in Manila.”

The renaissance of the nineteenth century was not confined to strictly literary works like verse and fiction. There was an an awakening of interest in the sciences, particularly as they affected the Philippines. The establishment of newspapers and the rise of Philippine journalism gave an outlet and an incentive to lucubrations on Philippine history, linguistics, archaeology, folklore, geography, ethnology, and other areas of knowledge. The Philippine Exposition in Madrid in 1887 provided a further stimulus for major works in these fields. Paterno’s *La antigua civilización tagalog*, Isabelo de los Reyes’ *El folklore filipino*, and Pardo de Tavera’s *El sanscrito en la lengua tagalog* were all published in that year: the first two in Madrid, the third in Paris. Nor was this activity confined to those Filipinos who had a chance to travel abroad. Father Jose Burgos, one of the three Filipino priests executed by the Spanish colonial government in 1872, and who had never been abroad, left behind some forty-five manuscripts on Philippine mythology, history and similar subjects.

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27bis *Bibl. fil.*, No. 1151.
VIII

In this literary renaissance of the nineteenth century, the outstanding figure was Jose Rizal, an extraordinary person by any standards: a man of letters who was also a man of science; an idealistic poet who was also practical-minded enough, when the need arose, to build his own house, construct a small irrigation dam, establish a school and clinic (being a physician), and mold with his own hands the huge relief map of Mindanao which is still the chief attraction in the plaza in front of the church in Dapitan.

Rizal's two novels were both published in Europe: *Noli me tangere* in Berlin (1887) and *El filibusterismo* in Ghent (1891). Both created a storm in the Philippines when copies reached the Islands. For these and for his other writings, Rizal paid with his life in 1896. While in his death cell at Fort Santiago awaiting execution, he wrote a memorable poem called *Ultimo Adiós* — Last Farewell. The manuscript was smuggled out of prison on the eve of his execution, in a small kerosene lamp which he gave to his sister. The poem is rhetorical in places, but tender, rich in fancy, melodious with internal rhymes, full of hope, without bitterness, while taking a hard look at a hard fact — the fact of death by musketry. Death in any form is hard for a young man of thirty-five. In this poem he indulges the poetic fancy that to smell a flower that grows over his grave would be to kiss his soul; that whenever the sound of a guitar is heard on a dark night, it would be himself serenading his country. It is not all fancy, however. He sees death as a duty, on the Other as a liberation. It is a duty, because one must be ready to die, whenever and wherever required by one's country: *el sitio nada importa* — the place matters not. And it is a liberation, for death puts an end to servitude, and he who dies goes to where there are no tyrants nor slaves nor torturers; *dónde la fe no mata* — where one is not put to death for what one believes; *dónde el que reina es Dios* — where God alone is ruler.

The most striking image in the poem is that of the dawn in the third stanza. Since he was to die at daybreak, let his blood be tinged with gold by a ray of the sun just rising, and thus add color to his country's new dawn.29

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29The critical edition of the *Ultimo Adiós* is that by Jaime de Veyra: *El Ultimo Adios de Rizal, estudio critico-expositivo* (Manila, 1946).
The gift of verse came to Rizal quite early, and it stayed with him all his life. One of his best-known lyrics is the Song of Maria Clara in the novel of which she is the heroine:

Dulces las horas en la propia patria
donde es amigo cuanto alumbr closely el sol.

In another well-known poem he has left us a charming description of his rustic retreat during his Dapitan exile: a nipa hut which he built in the forest by the sea a short distance from the town:

Cabe anchurosa playa de fina y suave arena,
al pie de una montaña cubierta de verdor,
plante mi choza humilde, bajo arboleda amena,
buscando de los bosques, en la quietud serena,
reposo a mi cerebro, silencio a mi dolor.

(Beside the wide beach of fine soft sand,  
at the foot of a mountain green with foliage,  
I built my humble hut in the shade of the trees,  
seeking from the forest — in the unbroken silence —  
rest for my weary brain, quiet for my sorrow.)

His cottage, he says, was flimsy, but it had one great virtue:

Su techo es frágil nipa, su suelo débil caña,  
sus vigas y columnas maderas sin labrar;  
nada vale, por cierto, mi rústica cabaña;  
mas duerme en el regazo de la eterna montaña,  
y la canta y la arrulla noche y dia la mar.

(Its roof is only nipa, its floor bamboo,  
its beams and posts rough-hewn timber.  
My little hut would fetch nothing in the stock exchange.  
But it sleeps in the embrace of the eternal mountain;  
it is rocked and sung to sleep night and day by the sea.)

That is romantic poetry in the best tradition. What a wonderful body of literature the Philippines might have produced in the Castilian tongue, if wars and revolutions and the near-sightedness of governments had not stunted its growth!

The beach in Dapitan is no longer wide. In many places it is quite gone, eaten away by the sea. This in itself is a symbol of the literary
renaissance of the nineteenth century which produced Rizal and other Filipino writers whose medium was Spanish. It is a bygone era. For while Apóstol and Guerrero, Recto and Bernabé, Balmori and Barcelón were writing poems that would have been appreciated in Spain or South America, a generation of Filipinos had grown up that could no longer understand the language in which they were written. Professor Antonio Abad to this day writes novels in Spanish: a brave thing to do since so very few read them. And the trustees of the “Concurso Literario Zóbel de Ayala” find it progressively harder to award their yearly prize of a thousand pesos for the best Filipino composition in Spanish.

IX

A new literary renaissance has been taking place in the Philippines during the past few decades of this century — this time, in English. How English came to be spoken in the Philippines is a long story and too well known to repeat here. Suffice it to say that by 1928, three decades after the language had been introduced in the Islands, so much was being written in English as to justify the publication of an anthology of “the best twenty-five” short stories published in Manila during that year. It was edited by a young man who had attracted public notice in somewhat disparate ways: he had been the first to win the annual Free Press award for the best short story, and his expulsion from the University of the Philippines (allegedly for indecorous writing) had been a much-publicized fact. His name was José García Villa. Today, of course, Villa is an internationally known poet whose reputation is quite secure; but at that time he was a young man and the anthology which he edited showed the signs of youth. Its significance, therefore, did not lie in its contents but in the fact that Villa had chosen those twenty-five stories (as he tells us in his Preface) “out of approximately six hundred narratives” published in Manila during the twelve-month period from January to December, 1928.30 Six hundred stories is an enormous number. Obviously, the Philippines was experiencing another explosion of literary energy, and English had come to stay as the common literary medium.

Villa himself attributes his own literary awakening to his reading of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. It was not long before Villa's stories were being published in American journals and included in the yearly compilations of the best American stories. The editor of those compilations, Edward R. O'Brien, wrote the Preface to Villa's book of short stories, published by Scribner's in New York in 1933, entitled *Footnote to Youth*.

But Villa is best known as a poet. His early poems were published in Manila in two volumes under the auspices of the Philippine Book Guild. His more mature work has been published in New York in three volumes. The latest of these volumes carries an introduction by the British poet. Dame Edith Sitwell, who expresses her admiration for the Filipino poet in enthusiastic terms. Dame Edith came across Villa's poetry in 1944. Thinking that he was an American, she included five of his compositions in her anthology of American poets which appeared in London in 1951 under the title, *The American Genius*. To one of the poems she appended the following note: "In this poem and in many others . . . the author has introduced an entirely new method of rhyming. 'The principle involved,' he says, 'is that of inverted consonants.'"31 Dame Edith eventually discovered the poet's true nationality and she has described her first reactions to his poetry as follows:

> In the late summer of 1944 I received a book of poems from America, by an author hitherto unknown to me.

> I learned afterwards that the young poet in question hailed from the Philippines, and is at present living in New York. I learned also that his book has been acclaimed by the principal critics of America as a work of genius and had had, in America, an enormous success. But this I did not know at the time, and even had I known it, an enormous success does not necessarily prove that an author is a great or even an estimable writer.

> Opening the book *Have Come, Am Here*, I received a shock. For my eyes fell upon Number 57, a strange poem of ineffable beauty, springing straight from the depths of Being. I hold that this is one of the most wonderful short poems of our time, and reading it, I knew that I was seeing for the first time the work of a poet with a great, even an astonishing, and perfectly original gift.

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31In Villa's system, *Rome* would rhyme with *more*. 

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The British poet concludes her essay with the following accolade: "The best of these poems are amongst the most beautiful written in our time."

The "enormous success" of Villa's book in 1942, to which Dame Edith refers, may have damaged his subsequent poetry, for it was in Volume Two, which appeared seven years later, that he adopted the use of the comma after every word, a usage which now distinguishes his poetry. To this usage he ascribes a magical potency which others consider mere affectation or eccentricity. Nevertheless, the chorus of praise that had greeted the earlier volume could not be silenced either by the commas or by his personal eccentricities which are often disconcerting. He was hailed as "the most important new poet in America in a decade" and his poetry as "the most original poetry of the last several years." Well-known critics and poets were among those who acclaimed him: Conrad Aiken, Marianne Moore, Mark Van Doren, Louis Untermeyer, David Daiches.32

X

Although there is not as yet a significant body of Filipino poetry in English, there are many poets whose work appears in the weekly magazines or in the quarterlies, and whose slender volumes of verse are published in limited editions either in Manila or in the United States; Leonard Casper has edited a small anthology of the work of the six poets whom he considers outstanding.

There is also a growing number of Filipino novels in English, though few are of superior quality. Carlos Bulosan, Celso Carunungan, Stevan Javellana and Edilberto Tiempo have had their books published in America. Juan Cabreros Laya and N. V. M. Gonzalez, whose books have been published in Manila, have received public recognition from the Philippine Government for their literary work. Nick Joaquin and Kerima Polotan (Mrs. Juan Tuvera) have won the Stonehill Fellowship for their novels in progress.

32Villa's books include: Many Voices (Manila, 1939); Poems (Manila, 1941); Have Come, Am Here (New York: Viking Press, 1942); Volume Two (New York: New Directions, 1949); Selected Poems and New (New York: McDowell-Obolensky, 1958). In addition, Villa has edited several volumes of verse, including one in Celebration for Edith Sitwell (New Directions, 1948).
There are essayists and scholarly writers in the Philippines whose work would undoubtedly command world attention if there were an effective way of publishing their writings and distributing them abroad.

The best work that is being done in English, both in quantity and quality, is in the short story. Various factors have favored the development of this mode of writing. One is the relative ease with which stories could be published, and the relative difficulty of finding publishers for novels, poems, or nonfiction works. Another is the incentive given the short story by the yearly prizes offered by the Free Press and the Palanca Awards. A third is the fact that Filipino writers often have little time for composition, since writing does not pay. The writers are also journalists, teachers, businessmen, physicians, or even ambassadors and public officials. That means that novels and long essays, as well as scholarly studies, are often out of the question; but a short story might be managed by a writer who really wants to find time for his craft.

A wide variety of subjects is treated in these stories, Manuel Arguilla tells lyrical tales of barrio life in the Ilocos. N. V. M. Gonzalez writes of the kaingin settlements in Mindoro. Arturo Rotor, a physician, writes about prisoners, Gregorio Brillantes explores the problems of the young and of the middle class. Bienvenido Santos is interested in two kinds of dislocation: that of the Filipino expatriates in the United States, and that of the highly educated who try to return to the scene of their humbler youth.

The most humorous are those by Alejandro Roces, whose tales of cockfighting have managed to combine the most audaciously improbable plots with the most realistic re-creations of character and attitude. The best-known of his stories, originally entitled “My Brother’s Peculiar Chicken,” tells of a fowl that fights like a rooster but looks perplexingly ambiguous in gender. The matter becomes the subject of heated debate between two brothers, whose wrangling soon involves their parents, their friends, a poultry-raiser and a town philosopher. Unable to decide the issue, they put it to the test in the cockpit, where the chicken demonstrates its masculinity by disposing of its fierce opponent. And having thus removed all doubt as to its gender, it proceeds to destroy all certainties by laying an egg.
One of the best writers in contemporary Philippine letters is Nick Joaquin whose subject is the loss of the cultural heritage which Filipinos had inherited from Spain, and the consequent break between the Filipinos of an older generation and those of the new. This break in tradition is explored most forcefully in Joaquin’s only drama, with the not very original title, “Portrait of the Artist as Filipino.” The central action in the play involves the disposal of a painting, unseen by the audience, in which the artist portrays Aeneas bearing his father Anchises away from the flames of Troy, with this peculiarity, that the face of the father is identical with that of the son, both being the face of the artist himself. This play, first performed in the open air among the ruins of the old Walled City of Manila, produced an extraordinary sensation and it has since had an unprecedented success. Part of the play’s force lies in the compelling rhetoric with which the author evokes the grandeur of the old walled city, the Noble and Ever Loyal City of Manila, farthest outpost of an empire that began with the conquest of Granada and the discovery of the New World. But much of its force undoubtedly comes from the controversial and provocative subject of cultural dislocation which the play explores.  

It is, then, in this vigorous and sophisticated literature in English that the hope of Philippine letters chiefly lies. It is a self-conscious literature, and this may be one of its weaknesses; but it is also a daring literature, unafraid to experiment.

It is not yet a great literature. What it needs is a greater attention to form and structure, a wider vision, a more searching insight, and above all, that added dimension by which Shakespeare and Dante and all truly great writers have tried to present the depths of the human mystery — the theological dimension. This theological dimension, visible in the literature of India and other Oriental countries, is strangely absent from much Philippine writing.

There is also hope in the growing interest being shown in other aspects of Philippine culture: Philippine folk dances, Philippine wood-

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33Other contemporary writers: Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, Edith Tiempo, Gilda Cordero Fernando, Aida Rivera, Estrella Alfon, F. Sionil Jose, Francisco Arcellana, Alejandro Hufana, Alberto Florentino, Wilfrido Guerrero, Carlos Romulo, Leon Ma. Guerrero, Horacio de la Costa, and many others. I have discussed some of these writers at length in my little book, Bamboo and the Greenwood Tree (Manila, 1961).
carving and sculpture, and other Philippine crafts. This renewed interest may eventually result in the development of a distinguished body of literature in Tagalog, Visayan, Ilocano and other Philippine languages, which will be superior to the sentimental, machine-made literature that finds its way into the cheap weeklies and the Tagalog films. A nucleus can be found in the more robust, often anonymous, but paradoxically more sophisticated type that finds its way, for instance, into the songs that the people sing, or the comedies that the people laugh at. This sophistication sometimes expresses itself in hyperbole. By way of example, and by way of conclusion, we might quote from a Visayan love-song:

Ming dag-um ang langit ug nagitngit na,
mingtago ang bulan sa panganud,
kay sila nasilag sa imong kaanyag,
hay ikao labao man sa kaanindut.

(The heavens are darkened, they are cast in gloom;
the moon has hidden herself behind a cloud;
for they are envious of thy great beauty,
for thou hast surpassed them all in loveliness.)

That is ironic hyperbole, the kind that fools nobody. It illustrates a quality of sophistication that permeates Philippine humor and Philippine thought.

Will the Filipinos ever evolve a great literature? If they do, will it be in English? Spanish? Tagalog? Visayan? Or in several languages at once? Only time can tell. ☞