

THE WORLD, THE TEXT, AND S. P. LOPEZ

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Abstract

The paper studies Salvador P. Lopez's position as a secular critic by analyzing his milieu during the Commonwealth period, criticism of his collection *Literature and Society*, and the content of essays from the same collection in light of the debate between "art for art's sake" and proletarian literature. The theoretical framework used is Edward Said's secular criticism.

Keywords

Philippine Commonwealth literature, Philippine literary criticism, proletarian literature, secular criticism

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According to Filipino critic E. San Juan, Jr., Salvador P. Lopez's *Literature and Society* (which was published in 1941) "serves as an indispensable landmark from which we can measure the distance we have traversed in the depth, scope, and precision of our critical theorizing" ("From Jose Garcia Villa" 196). It is for this reason that we should consider the collection as an important contribution to Philippine literary theory, if not to Philippine postcolonial criticism (given Lopez's support for proletarian literature versus the "art for art's sake" movement which dominated Philippine literature in English). Since this study serves to contribute to the continued commentary on Philippine criticism, and given the varied criticism of Lopez's views, it should be worthwhile for us to study Lopez's arguments and criticism of his texts in depth.

Assessments of Salvador P. Lopez's statements on literature and culture have been as varied and as contradictory as the critics who have studied him. For one, Lopez has been hailed as the "father" of the "proletarian trend," although many other earlier writers had been using literature to express the sufferings of disenfranchised Filipinos, including Andres Bonifacio, Jose Rizal, and Lope K. Santos. Other critics have called Lopez, who was a member of the Philippine Writers' League, a defender of the proletarian cause, and yet some of the literary prizes awarded to the league came from the Commonwealth Literary Awards, then sponsored by the Quezon Administration which was sympathetic to Filipino

fascist supporters (Constantino 387).

On the other hand, there are less flattering portrayals of Lopez. Some critics claim that he was a “liberal imperialist” and an “Americanized bootlicker” (de Guzman 50), but likely only because Lopez, like many Filipino writers in English, was raised in a public educational system administered by US colonizers and sympathizers. Others claim he was a “literary dictator” but several essays in his book *Literature and Society* espouse freedom, liberal humanism, individuality, and creativity, like “Freedom is Dangerous,” “Return to the Primitive,” “Individualism versus Individuality,” and “The Making of a Writer.”

These contradictory perceptions suggest that S. P. Lopez is an intellectual whose writings on literature cannot easily be labeled, let alone dismissed in a few sentences. There is, therefore, a need to evaluate Lopez’s writings on literature in a more comprehensive light, a task which the majority of Lopez’s critics have perhaps failed to achieve. To remedy the “Lopez question” requires a re-evaluation of the idea of an “intellectual” or “secular critic,” a role that Lopez played when he wrote the essays that were collected in *Literature and Society*.

The Lopez question may be stated this way: how do we explain the contradictory view—raised by two sets of critics—that Lopez is the “father” of the “proletarian trend” but also a “liberal imperialist” and “Americanized bootlicker”? We can probably answer this question by applying Edward W. Said’s theory of secular criticism, which argues that intellectuals have to work within the same dominant discourses that propose a consensus ruling the arts that they seek to challenge. In this case, as an intellectual, Lopez had to work in universities or for newspapers that supported the US-backed and pro-capitalist Commonwealth government while promoting the working man’s cause through a support of proletarian literature.

For Said, three points should be considered when one studies secular critics (a designation for critics, intellectuals, and authors): their background, the historical milieu in which they wrote, and the content of their texts (essays, films, novels, etc.). These three components can work in conflict with each other or with themselves, and this conflict reveals a contrapuntal world populated by power relations, contrapuntal individual behavior, and polyvalent texts. Given the character of this world, a secular critic has to work, first, “outside and beyond the consensus ruling the art,” and second, “between a dominant culture and totalizing forms of critical systems” (Said, “Secular” 5). In other words, the secular critic is situated in dominant ideologies and institutions that he also has to challenge. At the same time, he is aware that the centers of authority and his own voice are themselves contrapuntal and contradictory because their meanings are, like identities,

constructed by and within the same contrapuntal world.

We may apply Said's three points to an analysis of Lopez as a secular critic by assessing criticism of Lopez's *Literature and Society*, Lopez's Commonwealth milieu, and texts from *Literature and Society*.

AN ASSESSMENT OF CRITICISM OF LOPEZ'S *LITERATURE AND SOCIETY*

One of the earliest critiques of Lopez's theories comes from Jose Garcia Villa, who claims that Lopez's "aesthetic sensibilities are underdeveloped" and show no signs of development ("Four O'Clock" 259). Lopez responds and argues with Villa in several essays, such as "On Villa's Political Credo" (later included in *Literature and Society* as "So No: A Theory of Poetry"), where he claims that the fundamental principle of writing is communication, thus negating any argument that claims that "poetry is its own justification" (148). He later revises his stance in "Villa," where he states that although Villa's theories remain questionable, his poetry has begun to exhibit "ordered beauty" and has acquired "grace as well as power" (116). In an essay written six years later (1938), Villa insists that "although I *am* inclined to the Left politically and economically, still I *do not mix my politics and economics with my art*. It is for not mixing these together that Mr. Lopez assails me and has seen my literary perdition" ("Best Filipino Short Stories" 178).

In 1939, in an essay entitled "Villa Speaks in 'Many Voices'" (later added as "The Poetry of Jose Garcia Villa" in *Literature and Society*), he declares Villa "an important literary figure" in "the field of Filipino literature in English" ("Poetry of Villa" 152). Finally, in 1941, he maintains that Villa is "a redouble enemy of sham," and that his later poems have become "a sharp commentary on the foibles of man and the society that environs and nurtures him" ("Poem Must Hold Fire" 5), a point Deanna Ongpin Recto raises as proof of Lopez's acceptance of Villa's work (60).

However, four months earlier, Lopez writes that Villa "was never intellectually or emotionally equipped to receive and transmit the deep social passion and the expansive democratic visas of Whitman, and it is not to him that we must turn for the full-blooded realization of the Whitman tradition the Philippines," but to Rafael Zulueta da Costa and his poem "Like the Molave" (Lopez, "Gods" 10-1). (Ironically, Lopez contradicts himself when he praises Zulueta da Costa for writing a "patriotic poem, a glowing celebration of the national he cites that two fatal temptations to art are sentimentality and "declamation which becomes more blatantly histrionic still with every accession of the patriotic fire.")

In an interview from the early 1980s, Lopez insists that the enduring theme of Filipino writing has been “the struggle of the poor and the oppressed for a better life,” that he “did the right thing” because “things” have never changed, with “the same basic issues” and “the same problems” still taking place (“Lopez” 167). In 1984, he once more suspects that he had been right regarding his call for proletarian literature (“50-Year-Romance” 7), repeats the same argument regarding social problems growing worse in a 1990 interview with Conti (82), and in a 1990 essay asks “whether the body of (Villa’s) work has served to illuminate any nook or cranny of the Filipino predicament, the Filipino experience, the Filipino destiny” (*Parangal* 34). Eventually, he states that “to us Filipinos he will always be the eternal exile, completely alienated from his own, and he will have nothing whatever to say to us or those who will come after us” (34).

In 1939, in response to Lopez’s “Orienting the Filipino Writer” (the essay is entitled “Literature and Society” in *Literature and Society*), where Lopez insists that “the first article in the credo of the writer” is progress and it is that credo that helps him make “a worthwhile contribution to the upward movement of life” (“Literature and Society” 19), Francisco Arcellana claims that “orientation is a function of discovery in the sense of Consciousness, Awareness, Identification,” where an individual must first realize “how he should stand with regard to society” (6). Arcellana’s stance is problematic given the possibility that identity is partly modified by one’s environment.

In the preface to *Literature and Society*, Edgar Snow writes that Lopez was able to “look upon society more broadly as a free citizen of the world,” and to express a mature recognition for independence in a shrinking world (xi). Snow probably refers to Lopez’s liberalism, as seen in Lopez’s views concerning proletarian literature. And yet the contradictoriness of Lopez, as seen in his support for English and the use of literature to preserve culture despite the country’s problems in education and literacy, reveals that he was in some sense not “free.”

Carlos P. Romulo believes Lopez’s *Literature and Society* ably interpreted “the literary tradition of the Philippines with intelligence and perception” and recalled to Filipino consciousness “the canons that had been evolved and established by the previous literary tradition,” those of Francisco Balagtas, Pedro Paterno, Jose Rizal, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Lope K. Santos, and others (160). Romulo’s argument is questionable because most of the examples in *Literature and Society* are either Western or Philippine literature in English. Lopez himself believes that Romulo’s views are overstated, and that the essays should be rightfully judged for their clarity and force of expression rather than as an interpretation of Philippine literary tradition (“Past Revisited” 7).

Leopoldo Y. Yabes studies the form of Lopez's essays and writes, "Lopez had all the opportunity of developing into another Fernando Maramag or another Ignacio Manlapaz," and believes that Lopez maintains the "basic sanity of both," besides possessing actual academic training to become a cynic. However, even as he sees Lopez as, at best, a "free thinker" whose work was "absorbingly interesting," "profitable," "reflective, philosophical" (38-9), he also sees Lopez as one who belongs "to the school of scientific materialism," who fought with Manuel Colayco on religious readjustment, wrote on Friedrich Nietzsche, and discussed the works of Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera (40-50). Lopez's scientific materialist slant is often overlooked by most critics and will be studied further in this paper.

Vidal L. Tan, Jr. characterizes Lopez's views on literature as both literary and philosophical; based on the view that the poet as specialist expresses "the sublime and deep emotion felt in a more vague way by the peasant" in contrast to poets like Villa who refuse to "understand the common people better than they understand themselves"; and idealistic (54-5). Actually, Lopez's view is that literature is communication. Thus, it can express human experiences creatively, which in turn can entertain readers and encourage them to reflect on social issues.

Lucila V. Hosillos writes that the negative results of American influences may have been reinforced by Lopez's "functional-proletarian view" (143), but her statement remains speculative and unsupported.

Petronilo Bn. Daroy believes Lopez was a critic who "thought of literatures having a direct, if not obvious, relation to the social and political actuality" and who "demanded that literature be committed" because Lopez perceived "that so much of the power of literature (depended) on a sustained romance with the facts of society and the body politic" ("Politics of Literature" 102). However, this study later shows that the Philippine Writers' Guild (which Lopez supported) was against any form of "literary dictatorship," thus implying that Lopez likely did not "demand" that literature be committed.

In another essay, Daroy claims that Lopez "is too abstract" because Lopez "does not illustrate his theoretical notions with a concrete analysis of his work." Furthermore, Lopez "does not take into account the complex processes and relationship of culture and society" (Daroy, "Aspects" 262). Unlike Recto, who believes that Lopez goes beyond Matthew Arnold by showing that the purpose of literature is not simply to criticize life "but also to be an instrument of equality and social order" (65), Daroy believes that Lopez fails to achieve the "texture of assumptions" of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (262). Lopez's essays are likely "too abstract" because they were part of magazine and newspaper columns.

Furthermore, the other essays of the book depict different facets of writing and literature, from the vocation of writers to the discursive power of literature to proletarian literature. Finally, the book is a collection of essays on life and literature, not a treatise on literature. Of course, that does not mean that the critic is not obliged to find some underlying theories about literature from the collection, which this study aims to show. Also, Daroy's second essay discusses what might have been the effect of support for the use of English on Filipinos' perception of US culture, a point that will be discussed in a latter portion of this study.

Nick Joaquin notes that as a "revered literary (dictator)" Lopez had little impact on writers, and his "'proletarian movement' was never taken seriously" (160). He adds that when Lopez returned from his diplomatic work, he became "a cosmopolite rather out of tune with the postwar nationalist movement" (157). Joaquin also writes that Lopez's proletarian literature was, like parlor-pinkism, "one more fashion imported from America" (160-1).

Joaquin's comments, however, are problematic. The worn-out fears of "literary dictatorship," originating in the 1930s with Litiatco's essay, had since then been alleviated by the League's assertion that they are against literary dictatorships (Litiatco 60-9). Moreover, Joaquin's essay is dated August 1963, which was a time of relative economic and national security, and several years before the Martial Law crisis and the emergence of protest literature. Furthermore, instances of calls for committed literature take place throughout history (such as social realist movements in the Soviet Union and Mao's Cultural Revolution) and often in response to political or economic crises. Finally, Joaquin implies that he prefers views of literature not imported from America or from any Western country, perhaps rather views imparted by a non-cosmopolite to the Filipino masses.

Deanna Ongpin Recto, on the other hand, believes that Lopez based his criticism of Villa on the principle of effective and clear communication, "which is after all the fundamental principle upon which all art and literature is based" (58). She adds that Lopez's definition of proletarian literature goes beyond Matthew Arnold's "criticism of life" by seeing literature as "an instrument of equality and democratic order" (65). However, Recto also argues that Lopez "tends to be too facile and dogmatic in making distinctions between the "decadents" and the socially conscious/writers, often regardless of the artistic excellence of the first group and the clumsiness and doubtful literary merit of the other" (65-6).

As for Lopez's criticism, Recto writes:

[His] criticism [is] too abstract, often failing to define concretely those particular aspects of literature which he termed vital and “socially conscious.” His main emphasis revolves around general aims and the commitment of the writer, only rarely and then vaguely referring to particular works and writers to illustrate his theories. (66)

But Lopez is not always dogmatic in the way he views “decadents” because in several essays from *Literature and Society* he praises Villa, as well as Romantics like John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Second, as started earlier, the essays were originally published in newspapers and magazines.

Ricaredo Demetillo writes that Lopez was committed “to progress and political change, high seriousness, and revolution” (“Dimensions” 39), and that Lopez’s “ontological foundation is that of the proletarian school derived from Karl Marx,” which insists that “literature should serve the ends of political change” (40). Demetillo, however, is not certain whether or not Lopez advocates “violent revolution” (40). Still, he finds Lopez’s notion of finding something political in everything as narrow, since writers “project the human condition of their time in all its manifold aspects, not merely the political” (40).

In another work, Demetillo writes that “Lopez was asking poetry to support a sociological program” (*Authentic* 295) and that such a program “is a mixture of half-truths, ironically blind to its implications, and confused” because it insists on valorizing only literature that have “the power to create social change” (305). Moreover, Demetillo believes that Lopez’s criticism is confused “because it insists that man is primarily a political animal” and excludes the fact that the writer is also “a feeling creature basically, with intelligence and imagination that complicates everyone of his experience” (307).

Lopez’s intellectual influence do not lie primarily with Marx, but with several intellectuals, ranging from Marx to Arnold to Nietzsche, and more important, to American leftists who advocated proletarian literature that did not narrowly disallow creativity nor singularly insist on propaganda. Also, Lopez’s essays reveal that he does not advocate the need for literature to merely serve the ends of political change. Rather, he insists that literature is, in fact, political (or worldly), and that his hope is to see more writers who are both creative and responsible in dealing with social issues. Finally, Lopez does not advocate violent revolution but advises writers to act as socially concerned critics, ready to expose underlying truths in society and to defend civil liberties.

Herbert Schneider, S. J. writes that Lopez stresses two things: “first, whether he likes it or not the writer is involved in the society in which he lives; secondly, since his writing

influences that society, he must take a part in changing it for the better" (583). He adds that for Lopez "the very heart of literature is communication" (596). Finally, like Demetillo, Schneider sees Lopez's criticism, as belonging to the proletarian school, which focuses more on content and function rather than craft. And, Schneider adds, thanks to Villa's "healthy counter-influence," the country "never got proletarian writers" but "works of lasting literary merit" (587).

In response to Schneider, one can ask, If the basis of literature is communication and if that involves evaluation of texts based on "the degree that it either helps or hinders the reader as a member of society" (586), then is that not the basis for determining whether texts are of "lasting literary merit?" Also, Lopez's essays show that not only does he support proletarian literature, he also promotes creativity, studies the practical needs of writers, and notes the way literature can also entertain readers. This explains why several essays in the same collection discuss the Propaganda movement, journalism, the need to make money from writing, the necessity of capitalism, the impossibility of utopia but the need for some form of social progress, the way in which writers discuss issues other than art, the need for using less advanced literary forms in English so that readers would be able to appreciate texts, truth, power, and beauty. Lopez's framework is based on literature as communication on several levels: as a mode of production (both financial and ideological), as political (or worldly), and as discursive (the ability to influence sociopolitical behavior). The notion of the "proletarian writer," then, rests on several degrees, from the notion that everyone is a proletarian writer by virtue of texts being worldly to the argument that some writers remain "decadent aesthetes" because they do not realize the discursive power of texts that they produce.

Noel V. Teodoro, in a study of the radical tradition in the Philippines, makes the same claims as Recto regarding Lopez's essays lacking development, and adds that "nowhere in *Literature and Society* is US imperialism mentioned. And though S. P. Lopez raised the issue of the class struggle in literature, he, nevertheless, accepted subsidy from the Commonwealth regime (238).

Lopez's milieu provides probable reasons for these claims, as he was raised by an educational system strongly influenced by Americans, like many Filipino writers in English, strongly influenced by an Anglo-American literary tradition, and, like some members of several writers' club in Manila, awarded by the Commonwealth regime for his writings. Lopez also stated in one interview (discussed in a latter part of this study) that he was unaware of the effects of US imperialism and thought that fascist movements in the country posed a greater threat. It should be noted, though, that Teodoro's study of radical

Philippine literature gives several examples of Lopez's contemporaries who spoke against US imperialism.

Leonard Casper, who in *The Wounded Diamond* agrees with Demetillo in claiming that Lopez was merely asking writers to support his sociological program (102), writes in an essay for *Philippine Studies* that "still another 'god-goal,' a less class-divided society, has been promoted by Marxist/Maoists" such as E. San Juan whose group remains "dogmatic, manipulative, and coercive" (Casper "Pluralistic" 39). He notes that the origins of this group are found in the "controlled didacticism" of a patronizing and reductive Philippine Writers' League, whose manifesto of 1940 (the source of the manifesto is probably *Literature Under the Commonwealth*, 101-3) was: "We thus arrive at the paradox that, in order to preserve the individuality which he would defend against the world, the writer must cease being single, isolated, rugged individual" (40).

Casper adds that Lopez, a member of the League, eventually contradicts this manifesto years later. He refers

not [to] the Lopez whose naïve liberalism of the 1930s, expressed in *Literature and Society* (1940), brought him an inflated reputation of which even he has grown weary; but [to] the Lopez whose mature liberalism required him to say, in his "Literature and Freedom" address of 24 February 1978: "The greatness of a literary work depends to a great extent on the degree of artistic autonomy which is enjoyed by the creator." (40)

Casper, however, misinterprets the manifesto quoted above, since the paradox involves a struggle between "individualism" and "individuality." For Lopez, "individualism" involves selfishness, denying social realities by substituting it with myth, and using writers' craft for its own sake, and "individuality" the assertion of the creative and hopeful self in defense of the freedom of others, a topic Lopez discusses in "Individualism vs. Individuality."

As for the Casper's reference to Lopez's 1978 conference, E. San Juan., writes:

There is no doubt that underneath the pluralist facade of empathy for "Filipinism" lurks a rigid casuistry that feels no scruples in lifting out of context and so distorting a statement from S. P. Lopez's 1978 lecture against Marcos' press censorship and repression of writers. ("Problems" 72)

E. San Juan, Jr., in his book *The Radical Tradition in Philippine Literature*, also provides a manifesto on the “concrete task of Filipino intellectuals and creative artists” which is “the imagination of the class struggle and its faithful depiction” (106). He sees the Philippine Writers’ Guild (or League) as part of a revival of a revolutionary tradition originating with the propagandists, and Lopez’s actions as a response against the rise of Fascism and Villa’s “decadent narcissism,” which San Juan believes reflects the “servitude rationalized by the Filipino elite” (107). In “From Jose Garcia Villa to Amado V. Hernandez: Sketch of a Historical Poetics,” he adds that Lopez’s *Literature and Society* “serves as an indispensable landmark from which we can measure the distance we have traversed in the depth, scope, and precision of our critical theorizing” (196). Similarly, Hidalgo writes that “Soledad Reyes claims that Lopez’s work was the first example of literary theory in Philippine literary scholarship” (7). (Hidalgo’s source is Soledad Reyes’s “Philippine Literary Studies, 1970-85: Some Preliminary Notes” from *Philippine Studies* 35 (1987), first quarter, 71-92.)

San Juan’s first point is similarly problematic for Lopez is against violent revolution or class struggle, and in some essays shows tacit support for capitalism. Although Lopez believes that the material wealth of the rich was built on the labor of the poor (as seen in his essay “The Making of Millions,” reminiscent of Emile Zola’s *Germinal*, where workers labor beneath and above the earth to provide for “Big Shot’s” gold tooth or sugar and coffee) (215), he also believes that capitalism can actually work hand-in-hand with social welfare, given that the problem is basically one involving productive capacity. He implies that fixing a minimum wage is necessary, that competitive activity can actually increase it, and that “panaceas” such as “soaking the rich” or “sharing the wealth” are illusory (“A Little Difference” 191).

In a two-part magazine article on *Literature and Society*, Domingo Castro de Guzman claims that S. P. Lopez is “pre-philosophical,” and is therefore an unimportant writer. Lopez’s essays are merely orations, and he, like many “older writers,” is

chiefly responsible for this unjust and corrupt society. [He] obscures the real nature of proletarian writing, of progressive committed writing, inevitably diluting it into a form of opportunism and opportunism favors the system of oppression and militates against the national movement for the liberation of the poor and oppressed” (50; pt. 1)

Also, by rejecting surrealism and expressionism, Lopez commits two fundamental errors: “first, the real proletarian writer must address his writings solely to the working class,

and second, that the workers and peasants are necessarily pre-surreal and pre-symbolist" (50-1). De Guzman questions these claims by showing that proletarian writers must also address students and intellectuals, who themselves can help the working class, and that local genres such as the *talinhaga* (allegories), *bugtong* (riddles), *salawikain* (saying), *duplo* (a poetic game), and the *pasyon* (Passion play) are themselves expressionist, symbolist, and surrealist.

However, De Guzman's claims about Lopez being "pre-philosophical" lack scholarly insight, and his claim that older writers like Lopez caused corruption in society is questionable. Moreover, Lopez uses a form of "proletarian literature" that focuses on the political or worldly nature of texts and the need for bourgeois writers to express crucial social issues, and he never supports fascism in his writing. Lopez's proletarian literature may be based on the admission that capitalism and power relations will always be part of society. Finally, Lopez may be referring to Filipinos' understanding of surreal or symbolist literature written in English and not in Filipino.

In Part II of his article, de Guzman claims that Lopez's

reduction or limitation of progressive literature to formal conservatism has for its hidden premises the following : (1) that the sole locus of the ideological struggle is the psyche of the oppressed and (2) that the oppressed are too simple-minded, ignorant and low for the consumption of advanced, sophisticated, non-conventional literary forms and modes. (37; pt. 2)

De Guzman also fears that young writers might give up their "ideological allegiance," experimentation in literary form, and "the use of the English language" to a "virulently hegemonic" "Lopez tradition" where "progressive writers can only be progressive provided they inhibit themselves from contesting the ideology of oppression within the psychic of the oppressors themselves" (38). De Guzman writes that he takes the term "Lopez tradition" from a 1981 Asian PEN speech given by Isagani Cruz. The speech is probably "The Space-Time Scholar: Literaturwissenschaft in the Philippines," where Cruz says Lopez established "the 'social conscious school of criticism,'" refuted Villa's "'aestheticism'," and "ignored the literary craft in favor of socio-political content" founded on the "'Lopez tradition'" (126-7).

De Guzman insists that since ideology involves beliefs and prejudices, then its sole locus is obviously the psyche. However, Lopez never claims that the oppressed are too simple-minded; rather, he believes that Filipinos who are not proficient in the English

language will have difficulty reading literature using advanced forms of the language. Finally, the “virulently hegemonic” tradition promoted by Lopez is one main characteristic of many intellectuals, which involves negotiating within and between dominant discourses.

Still, de Guzman’s points regarding Lopez’s support for the use of English as a medium of instruction and capitalism should be noted if one attempts to connect them with aestheticism. This point will be discussed in a latter part of this paper.

Elmer Ordoñez briefly mentions a rebirth of S. P. Lopez with the return of postcolonial discourses and the demise of New Criticism (“Literary Legacy” 140), and provides more details on that statement through a short analysis of the Commonwealth period. In “Literature During the Commonwealth,” Ordoñez writes that standard authors of English (in contrast to marginalized voices, such as Central Luzon peasants writing protest literature) who formed the Philippine Writers’ League established “a broad antifascist” front to challenge Japan and Falangist supporters in the country (19-23). During the postwar era, increasing isolationism from social issues encouraged critics to employ “New Criticism,” where proponents like Demetillo and Edilberto K. Tiempo attacked Lopez, Arguilla, and former members of the League for issuing “pedestrian literature” (26-7). Finally, Ordoñez adds that ironically, what the League had warned about regarding the rise of fascism without the vigilance of writers and other people was unheeded by the League’s critics, and thus led to a renewal of protest literature during the Marcos era. Echoing Lopez’s comments about the Marcos situation being no different from the fascist attacks of the Commonwealth era, Ordonez writes:

The Commonwealth writers were to learn what the League president (Mangahas) meant when the war came in December 1941. As Cristino Jamias noted after the war: “It was total intellectual blackout. The enemy was everywhere.” Some thirty years later, the Filipino people were to experience more palpably the local variety of fascism. (28-9)

In an undergraduate thesis, Vincent Conti completes a study of “the life and works” of Salvador P. Lopez, where he “situates Lopez, the writer, within a definite socio-historical context” (6) and concludes that Lopez was “steeped in the exclusively American educational system” and in the “great debate between literature as ideology and literature as pure art,” and was “instrumental in furthering the development of Philippine writing in English” (62). However, except for a survey of works, no emphasis is given on a study of Lopez’s literary theories.

In 1976, Lopez assesses his own collection of essays and concludes that it establishes a link between writers and communities despite criticism from the extreme left who insisted that he remains “a purveyor of bourgeois values” and from formalists who claim “that the sole purpose of literature is to arouse pleasure in the beautiful” (“Past Revisited” 7). His book is “relevant not only to many of the problems that beset our nation but also the dilemmas which confront the Filipino writer.” He refers to several essays from the book to prove his point: “Literature and Society,” “Proletarian Literature: a Definition,” and “The Future of Filipino Literature in English,” “Of Love and Besides,” “Revolt in American Letters,” “So Not: A Theory of Poetry,” and “The Poetry of Jose Garcia Villa.” He argues that except for “The Future of Filipino Literature in English” (which he believes is too optimistic), the essays affirm all of his arguments and allows him to give the following conclusion: first, the writer is a creator as well as a keeper of values; second, in order to be true to his art, the artist must recognize the necessity of understanding the society that moulds his being and that of his fellowmen; and third, the writer is committed to truth so that he can use art and literature to help bring about progress, change, and development (14-5). Lopez’s assessment suggests that he was neither a *falangista* (Fascist sympathizer) nor an ardent supporter of Socialism or Communism. Rather, he was concerned with the need to encourage value formation in society, multiculturalism, and progress for all citizens under a healthy and democratic capitalist system.

In general, the critiques of Lopez’s work are based on one or more of the following points: that Lopez’s texts on literature are too abstract or dogmatic, that they are sufficient for encouraging the production of committed literature, that they are based primarily on liberal humanism. As for Lopez’s intellectual formation and activities, the following points are raised: that he was merely a cosmopolitan who was infatuated with American culture, and that he was an intellectual who initiated a tradition of encouraging socially committed and protest literature.

The critiques seem to operate on a simplistic cause-effect relationship that denies the complexity and contrapuntality of Lopez’s world and criticism. For example, since Lopez is against art-for-art’s-sake, then he must be against creativity; his awards from the Commonwealth regime makes him a liberal imperialist; since he was influenced by American leftism, then his views are merely faddish; his theoretical framework is based purely on Marxism, despite his assertions supporting the creativity of writers, capitalism, and democracy.

A more fruitful assessment of Lopez as a secular critic should follow Said’s theory concerning secular criticism, which consists not only of studying the intellectual formation

of the critic, his world, and his text, but also the contrapuntality that characterize all three facets.

THE WORLD OF S. P. LOPEZ

Lopez's milieu during the Commonwealth period consisted of academic work at the University of the Philippines, writing for newspapers, journals, and magazines, meetings with intellectuals, Filipino writers in English, and labor or peasant movement organizers, and travel to US and European cities. In the much larger milieu, Lopez was caught between two contending forces: a US-backed Commonwealth regime and public education system and the anti-*falangista* struggles taking place not only in the country but in other parts of the world as well. In several ways, various factors from this milieu produced a consensus of "art for art's sake" and Lopez's views on proletarian literature which challenged this consensus.

The first factor that produced the consensus ruling the arts was the emergence and dominance of the English language. The Philippine public education system stressed the use of the English language, a policy strongly encouraged by the American-controlled Bureau of Education during that period (Lopez, "Hon. Lopez" 106). In a paper on Philippine writing in English, Pertronilo Bn. Daroy writes that English, which had been then a medium of instruction for education since 1900, later became the official medium of bureaucracy, a requirement for employment, and the reason for the creation of the middle class ("Aspects" 249).

Lopez's education background clearly stressed this focus on the English language. With access to American textbooks (Lopez, "Lopez" 158), Lopez received a pre-tertiary education and went on to the University of the Philippines, where he was influenced primarily by two teachers: J. Inglis Moore, an Australian literary professor and advisor of *The Literary Apprentice* from 1929-1930, and Dherindra Nath Roy, an Indian philosophy professor ("Literature and Society" 36). Moore encouraged Lopez to take up English Literature (specifically, courses on Elizabethan, Romantic, and Victorian literature) ("Lopez" 158-9), and Roy influenced him to shift to the Philosophy Department for his MA (and the chance to join the faculty). He was formed by his work on the social philosophy of Trinidad Pardo de Tavera ("Hon. Lopez" 101). Thus, it can be said that his educational training was a confluence of an Anglo-American literary tradition and Western-oriented educational background, which were dominant at that time.

This type of education must have fostered an infatuation for the English language, paving the way for a focus on analyzing literary craft and writing skills. The influential factors were certainly in place: exposure to traditional Western literature and a need to master the English language.

Such factors are seen in the UP Writers' Club, which Lopez joined after it was formed by Jose Garcia Villa, Arturo B. Rotor, Loreto Paras, and others. Lopez was admitted into the group as a member of the third batch of applicants consisting of Amador T. Daguio, Conrado V. Pedroche, Amando G. Dayrit, and Arturo M. Tolentino ("50-Year Romance" 6). In another interview ("Lopez" 160), Lopez mentions that he belonged to the "second wave" of applicants to the club, whose original members were Villa, Federico Mangahas, Casiano Calalang, Loreto Paras, and others. The aim of the group was "to elevate to the highest pedestal of possible perfection the ENGLISH language in the Islands" and to introduce the members as "faithful followers of Shakespeare" through publications like the *Philippine Free Press* and later, the *Literary Apprentice*. The Club's shibboleth was "ART shall not be a Means to an End, but AN END IN ITSELF" (Icasiano, "Beginning" 1-2). This view was strongly encouraged by their supporters, including Dr. George Pope Shannon of the English Department (3), if not by other organizations, such as Jose B. Lansang's Philippine Book Guild, which encouraged the use of English through the book series *Contemporary Philippine Literature Series* (which featured Filipino literature in English), and student publications like *The College Folio*, *The Philippine Collegian*, *The Green and White*, *The Varsitarian*, and *The Quill* (Daroy, "Aspects" 249)

Thus, a series of events led to the development of the "art for art's sake" views of writers like Litiatco and Villa: the encouragement of the use of English for business, education, and government; the training students received from foreign professors, writing organizations, periodicals, and publishers; and the focus on literary techniques and writing styles in order to imitate Anglo-American writers.

The second factor that influenced the consensus ruling the arts was the veneer of democratic ideals established by the Commonwealth regime, consisting of policies such as Quezon's Social Justice Program and the Share Tenancy Act which were supposed to placate peasants protesting against feudal systems and to reassure landowners and *falangistas* regarding securing their property (Constantino 380-2).

This influence on Lopez is seen in his essays on the Commonwealth government in *Literature and Society*, where he shows appreciation and respect for Quezon's efforts to establish some form of economic equality in the country. He writes how leaders like Quezon and Osmena mastered American democracy in order to establish possibilities

for self-government (Lopez, "Quezon-Osmena" 89). He justifies Quezon's "dictatorial" tendencies by stating that all leaders are in some ways demagogues. Besides, such a quality is offset by leaders who possess "outstanding personal qualities" (89). These leaders include Quezon and Osmena, who have "born rich fruit" in "political competence, social consciousness and economic intelligence" (91).

In another essay, Lopez writes about the "millions of our people who have never known what prosperity is" and live "a hand-to-mouth existence upon the inadequate charity" of the wealthy ("Little Commonwealth" 107), and argues that the solution is based not merely on economic reform but on proper governance. Lopez enjoins Quezon's call for a dispassionate view of the matter instead of reactionary "defeatism." He concludes by stating that the solutions are stabilization of the national economy and national security (106) but led by "free, democratic institutions" (113).

The connection between efforts made by the Commonwealth regime to encourage democracy and the emergence of the English language can be seen in various policies initiated by the regime that view democracy and economic or social justice in line with "civilization" and the appreciation of art. Lopez himself asserts this connection in one essay by showing how the Commonwealth regime supported events like the Commonwealth Literary Contest (which encouraged Philippine writing in English) and the use of English for commerce despite Quezon's policy which adopted Tagalog as the national language ("Future" 237-40). The effect was, according to Petronilo Bn. Daroy, a use of English based on "middle class consumption," or Filipino infatuation with fashion, movies, pop songs, etc., that defined Philippine writing in English ("Aspects" 250).

This "middle-class consumption" was influenced by capitalism, a final factor that influenced the consensus ruling the arts. During the Commonwealth period, capitalism in the form of export orientation became the primary key for "linkage to world capitalism," and promptly established the need for large haciendas and more control of land and industries by capitalists (Constantino 350). The establishment of large, land-owning corporations with more foreign trade and an Americanized administration for government and business promptly eventually established an ideology of democracy built upon trade and globalization. These, in turn, encouraged the use of English as a medium of instruction, American textbooks, and an educational system that valorized American culture (Constantino 318).

If one can argue that the infatuation with American culture through mass media shares common traits with the "art for art's sake" view of literature in the sense that both may partly value literary texts for their entertainment value, then one can conclude that a

combination of democratic ideals, capitalism, and infatuation with American culture led to dominant discourses that encouraged the use of the English language and an “art for art’s sake” view of literature and writing. In which case, by supporting the use of English and capitalism, Lopez ended up strengthening the same consensus ruling the arts that he sought to challenge through proletarian literature.

However, several factors also encouraged writers like S. P. Lopez to challenge the consensus ruling the arts.

First, he believed that his training in both the humanities and the social sciences did not make him a “purely literary artist” like Jose Garcia Villa and Francisco Arcellana, but eventually allowed him to pursue journalism with the help of Carlos P. Romulo, who was by the time Lopez finished his MA in 1933 the publisher of *The Philippines Herald* (Lopez became a daily columnist and magazine editor for the paper) (Lopez, “Lopez” 161). It is possible that this interest in the social sciences and the humanities, a main task Lopez claims to have maintained throughout his life (162), served as the main reason for the evolution of his views on literature. Compared to writers who operated in terms of a Parnassian, extreme Left, or populist-based view of literature, Lopez’s multi-disciplinary approach led to essays that allude strongly to political thinkers and western artists, to political crises in the country, and to abstraction concerning literature and society. Lopez adds that the milieu during the Commonwealth period was “special” compared to what took place in other Asian countries because he and his fellow writers were influenced by intellectuals like Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Jefferson, and German and French socialist writers like Karl Marx (“50-Year Romance” 7). The fascination for American culture that must have taken place due to US colonial rule may have been tempered by skeptical thinking brought about by an education received from the same source.

Second, Lopez encountered another group of intellectuals while he was writing for the *Herald* (ironically, the same *Herald* that deplored the government’s tendency to pamper the masses) (Constantino 384) consisting of left-wing supporters and pro-labor leaders like Pedro Abad Santos and Luis Taruc (both members of Lopez’s “Beer Club”), whom Lopez perceived as “extreme left” compared to his moderate “left-of-center” stance (“Lopez” 174). Influenced by American libertarian and leftist writers like Steinbeck, Snow, and Hemingway, and by Philippine anti-fascists, Lopez and his fellow writers formed the Commonwealth Government-supported Philippine Writers’ League, whose objectives were to establish a cultural center for Filipino writers in order to address pressing literary problems, to maintain friendly relations with writers from other countries, and to defend

political and social institutions that ensured peace and protected civil liberties (Mangahas, "Beginning" 14). Thus, Lopez negotiated the prevailing consensus in the arts established by the Commonwealth regime and art-for-art's-sakers by supporting the US-backed Commonwealth government and by corresponding with its opponents (see also Recto, "Critical Survey," 63).

Just as interesting as this form of negotiation, however, is the contrapuntality of the world Lopez inhabited. For example, the much-admired Commonwealth regime was actually helpless against the dictates of American industry and local capitalists, as in the case of policies like the 1933 Share Tenancy Act, which landlords refused to follow (Constantino 382). Furthermore, while Lopez and other writers clamored for the use of English and the establishment of a national language and literature, a majority of Filipinos lacked a sufficient education system that would have allowed them to benefit from learning English.

According to Arcilla, when it came to education, "the Philippine Commonwealth government ... was either powerless or seemingly did not care to improve the life of the ordinary Filipino." For instance, only 45 percent of children of school age (7-17 years old) attended school by 1939. Furthermore, a "diminishing rate of promotion" existed (112).

In 1938, 77 percent of those who had finished Grade One went on to Grade Two, but only 63 percent went on to Grade Three, and 48 percent went on to Grade Four. Of those who finished the four primary grades, only 14 of 15 percent were enrolled in the Intermediate Grades. Of these, less than 5 percent were in Grade Five. In the United States, 22 percent went beyond Grade Four, while in Japan 99 percent of the children finished the six-year compulsory primary school program. Also, the 10 percent increases between 1935 and 1938 in school budgets were unable to "match the 40 percent growth rate of pupils in the primary schools for the same period" (Arcilla 112).

Even literacy levels were affected. In 1938, Manila had the highest (80.7%), "while 7 provinces had a rate of more than 60%, 10 had less than 40%, and two with less than 20%" (113). Nationwide, the literacy rate in 1938 was 48.8%, even lower than the rate twenty years earlier (49.2%) (Arcilla 113).

Furthermore, the importance of forms and techniques for writing, literature, and language, issues discussed by members of the UP Writers' Club, the Philippine Writers' League, and other organizations, seemed moot given a more pressing problem of the period: the lack of reading materials. For example, the total circulation of dailies and weeklies reached 1,478,108 in 1937, consisting of hundreds of publications using the dominant languages (English, Filipino, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese), which is actually a

small number if one considers the total population of the country (16,000,303 by 1939) (Arcilla 111-3). Moreover, only 43 cities and towns out of more than 1,000 had printing presses and publications, with 2/3 (and 6/7 of the circulation of reading materials in the Philippines) located in Manila. Finally, even public libraries were lacking, numbering less than 70 in the whole country by 1939 (Arcilla 114).

Meanwhile, during a period of intense debate on the merits of socio-political literature between the Manila-based and well-educated members of the “Art for Art’s Sake” movement and the Philippine Writers’ League, equally intense political and economic upheavals were taking place in the country. During the Commonwealth period, the country was just moving away from the market crash of 1929, which saw “prices of basic export crops drop drastically,” which in turn led to mass unemployment or cuts in wages among urban workers, cuts in income of the peasantry, disputes with landowners over increased land rentals, and the dismissal of tenants due to unpaid debts (Constantino 369). Similar events were also taking place in the United States, leading to the rise of American Marxism (Leitch 11). (American leftists included Granville Hicks, who edited *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology*, James T. Farrell, who was at odds with Hicks, Max Eastman, and Michael Gold.)

The market crash of 1929 revived numerous causes, ranging from tenant discontent to fronts against the American regime itself. The included the rise of peasant groups such as the *Katipunan Magsasaka* (League of Farmers) in Baliwag, Bulacan, the *Union de Arrendatarios* (Union of Tenants) in Nueva Ecija, and the *Pambansang Kaisahan ng mga Magbubukid* (PKM) (National Union of Farm Workers) in 1930. Armed secret societies like Patricio Dionisio’s *Tanggulan* (Prisons) were also formed. Protests over the eviction of tenants by officials of the Tunasan Estate in San Pedro, Laguna took place, while strikes were held in Tarlac, Nueva Vizcaya, Bataan, Iloilo, and Negros Occidental. The Commonwealth period also saw the growth of Communist movements like the *Congreso Obrero* or *Kapisanan ng Anak-Pawis* (League of Workers) (later, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines), and the rise of the Socialist Party headed by peasant leader Pedro Abad Santos (Constantino 269-379).

Challenges to the Commonwealth regime and *falangistas* were issued by Benigno Ramos’s anti-colonial *Sakdal* (Accusation), and by a popular front composed of leftist groups like the anti-Hitlerism Rally at Plaza Moriones led by the Philippine Young Congress, the Civilian Emergency Administration, and the Civil Liberties Union (which Lopez himself supported) (Constantino 373, 389). (See also Teodoro, “Radical Tradition,” 222-6, 230-1.)

Moreover, both Lopez and the *falangistas* noted rising fascist activity in Europe and in Asia. On the eve of the Second World War, whose seeds were already being nurtured through the German Nazi Party and various fascist organizations in Spain, Italy, and Japan, fascist movements abroad gave birth to local fascist organizations which countered the popular front. These included Andres Soriano's *falangista* movement, Francophilia among the Spanish priest in UST and Letran, and radio programs sponsored by the Ateneo de Manila (Constantino 106).

Much later, Lopez admitted that he had been blind to the connections between the "exploitation of the poor" and "the American colonial regime" ("Hon. Lopez" 103-4). Instead of US imperialism, he saw local *falangistas* as the major cause of economic crises, and stressed encouragement through more civil means of the Quezon administration to act on the matter. He believed the Japanese threat and European fascism must have distorted his views of American imperialism, given the type of education he received (where the horrors of the Philippine-American war were not stressed), and led to his "infatuation, not just with the language, but with the American culture, with American civilization" (106). And yet he believed that the same America that worked hand-in-hand with the local gentry in oppressing peasants who challenged the "feudalistic structure" of Philippine society also gifted intellectuals with the love for freedom and the heritage of democracy ("Lopez" 163).

Much of the contrapuntality of Lopez's milieu can be seen in James Allen's memoirs. Allen, an American Communist who once owned the *Journal of American Chamber of Commerce* (Allen 22), claimed that although several anti-government and left-leaning groups like the Toilers League, the Socialist Party of Pampanga, the *Sakdalistas*, and the Aguinaldo's National Socialist Party had existed in 1934, only small number of their peasant followers and laborers understood the complexity of Marxist struggle since their main concerns were the abolition of *cedulas* (certificates), tax relief, and measures against usury. With that, a popular front hardly existed outside cities since peasants were "largely ignorant" of fascism (13-4).

An interesting account in the memoirs refers to the formation of the "Beer Club" by Allen's editor Walter Robb. It consisted primarily of young Filipino writers "who in the columns of the English press carried out a sort of journalistic guerrilla skirmish against the dictatorial tendency of the Commonwealth" (22). They would often grow excited when someone would bring copies of *New Masses* or when some American Communist would appear and speak up, and would claim, in an elitist way, that vernacular writers were closer to the people but lacked the means to express advanced trends of thought (22-5). If this is the same "beer club" mentioned in an earlier part of this paper, can one argue that

Allen was referring to Lopez and other supporters of proletarian literature?

Finally, Allen believes that these writers talked about “proletarian literature,” but needed to overcome their own elitism first:

The Filipino intellectual was somewhat in the position of a man without a country. He was distrusted by the masses because of his elite origin and because he had served the colonial Spanish power over the centuries and then the American, a client of Spanish culture in the past and now of American culture . . . The progressive Filipino intellectual was now trying to find his way back to the heritage, even to the mass-based Bonifacio tradition, and to his own people. And he was struggling also to escape from the spirit of accommodation in which he had been bred. (25)

This probably prompted the older intellectuals to see these young writers and American Communists like Allen as contemptuous and alien, and as “parlor pinks” by short story writers (26).

In Allen’s account one finds the tension found within intellectuals of the Commonwealth period, and perhaps even within intellectuals today: how to break away from an incessant elitist pedestal and to translate theory into an action immediately responsive to the needs of a majority of the population. Much of this tension, an integral component of complexity and contrapuntality found among secular critics, will be discussed in the latter part of this paper; for now, it can be established that the secular criticism of Lopez is shown in the way he was shaped by the assumed consensus of the Commonwealth regime and fellow writers, by the way he attempted to challenge these dominant discourses through a call for committed literature, and by the way his actions became contradictory in the light of historical realities that affected the nation.

The contradictoriness of Lopez’s milieu can best be seen in an introduction to a chapter on Commonwealth literature by Josephine Bass Serrano and Trinidad Mago Ames. Serrano and Ames write that the following qualities characterized literature during the so-called “Emergence Period” (1935-1945): the purposeful creation of a national literature, full control and use of the English language, experimentation with literary forms, and the emergence of socially conscious writers, writers who focused on craft, and the Veronicans (Serrano and Ames 43). The term “emergence” is also used by Schneider and other literary historians.

There was, perhaps, a flowering of Philippine literature in English, but for whom?

The majority of peasants and laborers who rarely received sufficient education and who suffered immensely in the hands of capitalists and *falangistas*? Or a minority consisting of urban-based, educated writers (Joaquin's "parlor pinks") who talked about the "writer's craft," the need for strengthening the use of the English language, and the need for capitalism "with a human face" amidst a teeming mass of poverty and oppression unaided by a helpless local government and intelligentsia?

AN ANALYSIS OF S.P. LOPEZ'S LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

The axiom from which Lopez's arguments stand is "literature is communication." From this axiom the rest of Lopez's ideas are developed: literature and writers as part of the world; literature as discursive; and literature as having political ends.

For the first point, Lopez writes,

It has long been universally recognized that man is a "political animal," whatever else he may be. The writer, therefore, who works upon the belief that man is a mere fancier of golden words and beautiful phrases, has missed the essential element in man. He works in a vacuum and therefore works in vain. ("Calling" 232)

For Lopez, art allows individuals to use their senses to the fullest and to "savor" the beauty of life by describing things that are "most worthy of our worshipful dedication" ("Letter" 48). These things include nature and virtue. Thus, what is beautiful is what is perceived as good and worthy in life.

However, life may also consist of suffering and ugliness. The producer of art, in this case the writer, is certainly not blind to the harsh realities of this world, and ultimately realizes that literature can no longer be used "as a means of escape into the realm of pure fancy" ("Of Love" 125). Furthermore, beauty is no longer seen as something appealing to the senses but the hidden truth in major crises.

Thus, man becomes a "political animal," which nullifies the argument that the writer "is a mere fancier of beautiful words and golden phrases" ("Calling" 232). Writers, like their texts, are part of the world. Thus, one cannot assume that individuals can separate themselves from society and that texts exist for their own sake.

This first argument (that literature is worldly) is an important component of Lopez's

axiom on literature as communication, which consists of encouraging discussion and, among other things, of exposing power relations in society. This discursive characteristic of literature, which is Lopez's second point, may be noted in the following quote:

The world has soul as well as body. Writers who consider themselves keepers of the word may not ignore the fact that it has a physical body and possesses qualities of sound and color, fancy and imagination. But the word is more than sound and color. It is a living thing of blood and fire, capable of infinite beauty and power. It is not an inanimate thing of dead consonants and vowels but a living force—the most potent instrument known to man. ("Literature and Society" 175)

Lopez believes that the text empowers writers by allowing them not only to depict the world but to invite readers to respond, resulting in interaction and struggle between individuals and texts, which underlies the discursive quality of literature and is expressed in his response to the consensus ruling the arts. For example, in his critique of "art for art's sake," he starts with the UP Writers' Club's motto, "art shall not be end, but an end in itself," which he sees as problematic because it denies the power of both the writer and his text to empower individuals to speak and act. Writers never write for themselves ("Of Love" 119), and their texts not only "express, imply or suggest" various aspects of life ("So No" 148) but also invite people to express "differences of opinion" ("Dream of Tolerance" 104). Thus, there exists constant interaction and struggle between writers, texts, and readers. Writers engage with the world by expressing aspects of it through their texts. Such expression may be creative and should encourage readers to react in different ways, thus paving the way for diversity in thoughts, actions, and identity.

One application of this invitation towards identity and diversity may be seen in Lopez's beliefs concerning multiculturalism. Using travel as an analogy, he believes that such an experience leaves us "breathless with admiration of other countries" while teaching "us to admire things that pertain to others in order that we may more deeply love our own" ("Homecoming" 235). It is, of course, fine to contemplate more avidly the "'glorious past' of (one's) country" ("Return" 18), but since "every age creates the instruments by which the livelihood and social relationship of the people are promoted and enriched" (22), since it is unreal to assume that one can "talk of a 'native Filipino culture,'" and since there exists growing "internationalization of culture," then "cultural isolation" is not only questionable but "fatal" (24). And one of the tools that can be used to join the

country to a global community is the English language ("Future" 241-2).

Lopez's point in that these two applications lead to empowerment for the reader and the writer. Thus, the writer is a "political animal" not only because he is part of the world but because he interacts with it.

Still, several degrees of worldliness may exist such that the same texts that empower may also work against the marginalized. For example, a literary work may marginalize oppressed communities by focusing only on things of beauty, like birds, flowers, pretty *nipa* (a thatch made of palm leaves) huts, and happy farmers, thus creating "falsifications of life" ("Revolt" 135). What is hoped, then, is that degree of worldliness which gives texts the ability to expose political and economic oppression by describing a "dilapidated hovel infested with vermin," or a "peasant pinched with hunger and crushed by usury" ("Revolt" 135-6).

Since literature "has soul as well as body" and is "capable of infinite beauty and power" ("Literature and Society" 175), then why do writers choose to ignore such qualities? Lopez believes political and economic chaos worldwide revises and reinforces such a choice. Because of fear and insecurity, writers choose to return to the "untroubled Shangri-la of art" (181), that is, the "Art for Art's Sake" movement, which contradicts the fact that the writer is a political animal and that it is through "fruitful contact with others" that his "heart, mind and soul are enriched" (182). The writer's choice is that he "either believes that man is improvable because he has the innate capacity to correct his errors or he is convinced that man is eternally demeaned beyond any possibility of redemption" (188). Thus, his writing has to "result in something that he can lay his hands on as good and useful" (188) and his role as a writer has to be progressive (189).

Lopez reminds his readers that he is not trying to dictate on writers or turning literature into propaganda (189). Rather, he believes that by being aware of the social content of literature, a writer's creativity is not hampered but is in fact enhanced. And this he sees even if writing has to be an occupation, a point that he reminds readers by quoting Dr. Samuel Johnson: "No man but a blockhead ... ever wrote except for money" ("Writer and His Reward" 192). Of course, this does not mean that the writer should "prostitute his art by his lust for comfort and luxury." Rather, it is to write for people who, in turn, will be intelligent enough to receive and accept his work (192, 194).

In conclusion, literature is discursive, or is able to produce power and is inscribed in power, by exposing power relations in society and by influencing writers to challenge such relations. These power relations, among others, are hidden truths, ignored by those who support the argument of art for art's sake or who try to escape from such truths through

ignorance; for Lopez, they eventually defeat themselves by denying their own political nature and by implicitly supporting a defeatist view of life. By exposing oppression, encouraging a progressive view of society, and combining sincerity through awareness of the social content of literature with craft, the writer produces texts that are appreciated by many and his creative freedom is not threatened.

How is the discursive power of literature deployed for social change? Lopez answers this question by discussing the potential use of proletarian literature towards initiating political change:

All writers worth the name are, whether they are conscious of it or not, workers in the building up of culture. Since economic injustice and political oppression are the enemies of culture, it becomes the clear duty of the writer to lend his arm to the struggle against injustice and oppression in every form in order to preserve those cultural values which generations of writers before him have built up with slow and painful effort. ("Calling" 232-3)

He believes that "power is the outcome of recognition, and power in the hands of the artist becomes valuable, according to this view, not of itself alone and for its own sake, but as power used for all just and beneficent purposes" ("Of Love" 119), and one beneficent purpose is an effective revolutionary end. Citing Paine, Rousseau, and Lenin, Lopez claims that journalism, a form of literature, can "forge the revolutionary unity of the masses." He sees it in the Propaganda movement, in Philippine journalism, the libertarian tradition ("Fifty Years" 207-9), but more important, in proletarian literature.

For him, the literary text "is the result of the interaction between the forces working within the writer that impel him to expression and the forces that induce him to communication" ("Proletarian Literature" 216). Lopez combines the thoughts of Ludwig Lewisohn who believes that literature is a "continuous interpretation of experience in a dynamic world" (see Lewisohn's "Literature and Life" for an extended commentary) and John Strachey who believes that literature attempts "to illuminate some particular predicament of a particular man or a particular woman at a given time and place" and sees the writer as influenced physically and mentally by his milieu (216-7). Thus, Lopez solidifies his claim that the text and the writer are worldly because they interact with each other and with the world in which they are immersed.

Next, Lopez describes the world, and taking his ideas concerning "schemes and motives of power" and combining it with his Marxist beliefs, he writes that social classes

exist. And since literature is part of that culture of social classes, then literature is also mired by such distinctions. From that point he arrives at the definition of “proletarian literature.”

A proletarian work is “the interpretation of the experience of the working class in a world that has been rendered doubly dynamic by its struggles” (218). Lopez alludes to the assumption that literature is worldly and that the world is mired by class struggle. However, the literary work need not depict the plight of the proletariat by describing, say sweatshops or strikes. Rather, the proletarian writer must be aware of the social forces that encourage this class struggle, and from there depict the complexity of society (222). By expressing the various aspects of that class struggle in a creative manner, the proletarian writer’s goal is fulfilled, which is to propose “new human values” in place of the old (226).

In contrast to proletarian writers, bourgeois writers as those who thrive on “nationalistic or aristocratic sentiments,” who veil truth behind “religious and mystical consolations,” and who glorify “the individual at the expense of the many” (219). In other words, bourgeois writers assert old norms, values, or tradition to justify oppression and prejudice, and discourage intellectual freedom and civil liberties.

Proletarian literature has four characteristics: first, it is based on an attitude of hope and in a belief that man and his world are, in the long term, progressive; second, it is revolutionary (but not in the violent sense); third, it is functional to different degrees (from being political by virtue of being part of the world to initiating changes in society); and fourth, it is realistic because it tries to unearth the “contradictions that underlie human action” (220-1).

Finally, Lopez makes it very clear once more that he is not denying writers their creative freedom. In fact, he believes that the proletarian writer uses different literary techniques “to produce a creative work out of the materials that he has selected in such wise that the object of propagating an idea or espousing a cause must appear incidental and yet at the same time a necessary consequence of the work as a whole” (220-1).

Thus, the proletarian writer’s goal is to use creative texts to espouse a cause, hopefully one that fosters and protects the freedom of members of society, especially the freedom of the marginalized. This freedom involves “freedom of thought for all,” and “thought in all its form and manifestations, in writing or in speech—the absolute freedom of printing and reading, and the absolute freedom of meeting and talking.” Its result is the subversion of an established order, and that subversion is justified only when that order is repressive (“Freedom” 12). Moreover, the proletarian writer believes “in freedom of thought and its corollary liberties of speech, press, and assembly because it is only through

the exercise of freedom and the tolerance it inevitably begets that tendencies to violence can be overcome" (14). Thus, he believes in democracy and in tolerance, but not in repression and in violence (15).

That freedom carries with it the burden of responsibility. The youth cannot be taught "to have no purpose beyond their own selfish little ends" ("Joy in Life" 51). Rather, they must be seen as "democratic, progressive and anti-Fascist in their attitude" ("Young Man's Country" 70). Presumably, the same can be said of proletarian writers.

In addition, the freedom to write anything that one wishes and freedom based on responsibility may clash. For Lopez, "individualism" means looking out for oneself and ignoring others, a "doctrine of dog-eat-dog," thus leading to "the desire for profit and the love of power." In contrast to this, "individuality" denies that notion of profit or power and challenges individual freedom only when it violates "the higher autonomy and freedom of the group" ("Individualism" 173-4). If applied to proletarian literature, one may see the proletarian writer (and the secular critic) as driven by individuality and not individualism.

Lopez believes in asserting one's individuality. In fact, he believes that is what makes the writer an artist in the first place. But this freedom eventually means the freedom to publish, to be read, to profit both materially and ethically from such tasks ("Calling" 230-1), and with that, the writer cannot deny the fact that his welfare is eventually based on the welfare of his readers. And if the general readership consists of marginalized social classes, then he knows what his true goals are.

In conclusion, Lopez's theoretical framework is based on the assumption that literature is communication. As such, texts are worldly, and so are their writers and readers. These individuals are enmeshed within social struggles influenced by texts and their world. The text, then, is also seen as discursive, and can influence human thoughts and actions. In relation to this, Lopez believes that in order for society and even literature to thrive freedom must thrive, and for freedom to thrive, civil liberties of individuals must be protected. Since the writer produces texts that can influence human thoughts and actions, then it is his responsibility to use such texts to ensure the preservation of freedom and other social aspects necessary for the preservation of society, such as culture.

In many ways, Lopez's views concerning proletarian writers are remarkably similar to Said's views concerning secular criticism. And yet like Said's secular criticism, Lopez's proletarian literature may also be problematic. Lopez asserts that progress is the main goal of literature and yet he also believes that literature is discursive. If the same discursive power that exposes power relations may also hide them, then how is progress assured?

Is proletarian literature defined by writers, readers, or both? For example, assuming

that one sees dada poetry as non-proletarian for various reasons, is it possible that others familiar with German history and Marxist theory see the same as challenges against German authoritarianism, if not as expressions of emerging liberalism following the First World War, and thus as proletarian? This point implies that several other factors, from the language in which the text is written to allusions found in it, may lead to differing interpretations from readers, and in turn different conclusions on whether a text is proletarian or not.

Moreover, if one connects Lopez's earlier comments about the power of literature in exposing truths over depicting objects of beauty, then how does one describe, say, a novel that depicts only beauty but is written by a proletarian writer? If, "indeed, a novelist may be proletarian" as long as he "recognizes the nature and intensity... and the potency" of class struggle and believes in "true justice and the logic of history," then can one assume that everything that he writes should be defined as "proletarian literature"?

Third, how does one resolve Lopez's call for proletarian literature and his insistence in other essays in the same collection that writing, scholarship, and academic work remain disinterested (Lopez, "Some Reflections" 11-2; "Academic Freedom" 9)?

Finally, Lopez sterilizes proletarian literature by describing it as "clean, wholesome and vigorous in intent," and that perception may be idealistic. Is it possible that due to the complexities of the production of texts, other factors can also play roles in developing that intent? For example, Lopez already quotes Johnson's assertion in another essay regarding blockheads who write for reasons other than to make money. Does that imply, then, that there exists a chance that proletarian writers may at several points be forced to write in order to support the consensus in return for financial support? Also, what can we conclude about Lopez's assertion that the power of texts lies in their ability to allow readers to express differences in opinion? What happens if a reader's interpretation of the text was not the intent of the writer?

S. P. LOPEZ: THE CRITIC

Much of Lopez's beliefs may have been influenced by his background in philosophy coupled with exposure to American leftism during the late 1930s and early 1940s, prompting Yabes to refer to Lopez's views as belonging to the school of scientific materialism. One illustration of this may be seen in Lopez's critique of Villa's comparison of physics and mathematics to a poetic credo based on some mystical form of energy ("So

No” 142-3) and “the familiar dogma that poetry is its own justification” (148). Lopez’s own stance is based on literature as communication, where poems are poems “only if they express, imply or suggest any aspect of life and truth, of knowledge of any object of thought and feeling” (148). As shown in the earlier section consisting of an assessment of criticism of Lopez’s essays, subsequent reassessments of Villa’s work involve a move beyond literature as communication, to a realization of the power and purpose of such a principle.

In 1938, Lopez proposes a new form of romanticism, based not on scorn for the past, but on “passion for the future” (“Romanticism” 150). He sees this future as renewed cooperation between peoples of different cultures, with writers fostering freedom of expression (“Calling” 230). This is analogous to his view of forces outside writers, social consciousness, written on the basis of “newspaper headlines,” that is, worldly events. (“Poetry of Villa” 163).

A year later, Lopez combines his views on literature as communication and discursive in the essay “Revolt in American Letters,” where the text becomes a tool to expose not only beauty in the way most people would envision it but beauty as ugly and harsh truths (“Revolt” 135-6). In addition, given increasing economic and political crisis worldwide, he sees greater need to protect freedom and to secure social and economic justice (“Young Man’s Country” 72).

Finally, after his exposure to American leftist thought from visits to the United States and his meetings with pro-labor and pro-peasant organizers during the second half of the 1930s and the formation of the Philippine Writers’ League in 1939, Lopez combines his thoughts on literature as communication, as a tool of power, and as a means to challenge fascism. The result is “Proletarian Literature.”

Note that Lopez’s development as a literary theorist is parallel to his own three-level theoretical framework. Starting from the main assertion that literature is communication, he shows how it is also a tool for power. Given the crisis of the Commonwealth period, he establishes that use of power towards aiding anti-fascism, based on his political stance concerning freedom.

Lopez’s theoretical framework is complex, as seen in the degrees of worldliness found in his assertions, in the pragmatism he offers to writers, in the libertarian attitude he promotes towards speech and writing, in his analysis of social classes and class struggle, and in the manner by which he views the influence of tradition and culture on individuals. What is equally interesting, though, is the development of his beliefs concerning proletarian literature after the publication of *Literature and Society*.

His views concerning the discursive feature of literature have been discussed earlier: however, even as he elaborates on the beneficial views of discourse, he also talks about its ability to control and dominate. For him, not only is knowledge power, but power is also knowledge:

that is to say, power commands knowledge: it can buy, hoard and ration knowledge, or it can advance knowledge as well as diffuse it. Knowledge can be manipulated so that it becomes a monopoly of the few who can afford it, or it can be shared so that it becomes the heritage of all. ("Culture and Diplomacy" 64)

Lopez applies this assertion to his claim that Western principles may not always be applicable to the Third World situation ("Paper at Symposium" 1), which in turn questions the nature of proletarian literature itself, being based on Marxist views.

With regards to proletarian literature, Lopez sees his essay "Proletarian Literature: a Definition" as over-emphatic, admits that his word is not final, and implies that it is eventually up to the writer to decide the ends of his work ("Past Revisited" 11-2). Lopez does not belong to what Farrell perceives as reactionary leftists who enforce reductive views of literature based merely on its functions to aid the proletariat or on a base-superstructure relationship. Rather, like the Philippine Writers' League, he professes to the creative ability of artists, just as Farrell and Marx insist on both the functional and aesthetic qualities in art. Instead of seeing artists merely as craftsmen, he argues that artists are also philosophers ("Proletarian Literature" 224).

Of course, Lopez does not forget that of all needs, the economic ones seem to be the most basic. Lopez uses this assertion to state his views of proletarian literature remains valid after nearly five decades because the same economic and political problems that existed during the Commonwealth period still exist today:

That was the milieu of that time. Now looking back, I sometimes ask myself: Have things really changed? And my answer is: Not really! The same basic issues are still there; the same problems are still around. In some ways, they have assumed even more dangerous dimensions and deeper disguises. For this has been the enduring theme of Filipino writing the struggle of the poor and the oppressed for a better life. That sounds as if I'm saying "I told you so!" a temptation which I occasionally can't resist. (Lopez "Lopez" 167)

He repeats this point in another interview:

In our society now, that's the assumed struggle between the "haves" and the "have-nots," between the landlords and the peasants. It's still the same. For example, what's the difference between the *Hukbalahap* problem of that time and the current problem of Hacienda Luisita? It's still the same. You see, the basic issues haven't changed. (Conti 82)

But he also implies that that the struggle may no longer be that "serious" and that the idea of "proletarian literature" may have to be modified: "But I maintain that the true burden of literary activity must concern itself with the life of human beings. It need not be proletarian. I was proletarian only because at that time, the struggle between the rich and poor was really serious" (Conti 83-4).

In several essays written during the 1970s and 1980s, Lopez repeats his views concerning freedom, democracy, progress, the expression of free speech, sensitivity to culture and the arts, and liberalism, for him all essential themes in arguments concerning literature. For example, he believes that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, consisting of principles espoused by European philosophers, is one of the greatest "doctrines in the history of liberty" ("Without Freedom" 7). In another essay, he argues that Filipinos must learn to reject historical inevitability, and must find the power to shape the future by dealing with the present ("Social Change" 7). In a third essay, he challenges Yabes's earlier assertions of Lopez's theories as based on scientific materialism by claiming that the salvation of humanity lies not in the sciences but in poetry and philosophy, where one can find human sensitivity and imagination ("Federation" 7). Finally, he writes about liberalism that favors "distribution of power" and is hostile to anything that concentrates it ("Faith of a Liberal" 14), perhaps recalling the days of anti-fascist activities during the Commonwealth Period and becoming aware of the growing crisis taking place after the Aquino assassination.

On multiculturalism, Lopez admits that his expectations regarding the future of Philippine literature in English were "exaggerated, even hyperbolic." He states that he "was writing under the influence of the euphoria that preceded the Commonwealth Literary Contests of 1940" ("Past Revisited" 14) perhaps not yet aware of the long-term problems in the Philippine public education system. In other talks, he also asserts the futility of bilingualism as a means of encouraging reading ("Pleasures of Reading" 9) and the need "to set our sights somewhat lower than we did in the forties" ("Does English" 10).

In any event, his goal appears to be a form of nationalism that is based not on the choice of a national language but on action, based on a mapping of arguments made by John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine ("Nationalism" 3, 8).

Finally, with regards to proletarian literature in relation to the "Art for Art's Sake" movement, Lopez continues reasserting his call for committed literature. He envisions the need for artists to be not only craftsmen and philosophers but also teachers. He admits to the dominance of the art-for-art's-sake school as seen in works by artists who deny their responsibility to society, and sees the school not only as a reaction or escape from societal problems, but the result of the failure of "educative forces to inculcate among people the meaning of art and its function in society" ("Artist as Teacher" 4).

In 1990, Lopez writes one of his last essays on literature, an essay remarkable in the sense that it echoes everything he stood for fifty years earlier, and that concludes with a renewed call for committed literature, inspired by Amado V. Hernandez. In "Literature and Freedom," Lopez writes that there exists an organic link between literature and freedom on two levels: writing as an act of freedom, and the social responsibility of the writer.

On the first level, he believes that the writer's autonomy is circumscribed by rules of literary craftsmanship, often stemming from Western tradition, the taste and laws of society, and reactions from readers. However, the writer can also challenge these boundaries, especially when they are dictated by totalitarian or oppressive regimes. Following the Hegelian dictum "freedom is the recognition of necessity," he believes that writers will eventually recognize and challenge such oppression, because "freedom is a seamless web," and any "imposition of constraints" will affect "all human faculties," even "the creative imagination" ("Literature and Freedom" 2-33).

However, on the second level, given the point that a writer needs creative freedom, he "owes a certain loyalty to the very principle of freedom itself." Given that he is part of a "common humanity" and "human heritage of love and compassion" (33-4), then it is his responsibility to protect that freedom, both his and that of his fellowmen.

To illustrate his arguments, he discusses three National Artists: Jose Garcia Villa, Nick Joaquin, and Amado V. Hernandez. He does not "begrudge" Villa's fame, but wonders whether Villa's work has actually contributed to "the Filipino predicament." Villa will always remain the "eternal exile," and "will have nothing to say to us or those who will come after us." Joaquin, though, is the best Filipino writer in English, committed "to the loyalty, decency and love of Filipinos." But it is only Amado V. Hernandez who is "a profoundly committed writer," one who loved the poor, hated oppressors, and "suffered prolonged punishment for his beliefs in the freedom and dignity of man." And for all that

“he was awarded only when he was safely dead” (34).

Essays and interviews published after *Literature and Society* reveal a degree of contradictoriness in Lopez’s intellectual development. Lopez’s evaluation of proletarian literature range from the illogical (where he implies that he was too over-emphatic because he discouraged creativity, when in fact his original essay expressed otherwise) to the absurd (where he insists that the plight of the poor in the past was not that “serious” but later claims economic conditions have never changed). Finally, he is forced to lower his expectations regarding the emergence of English amidst difficulties in the education system. And yet despite all these contradictions Lopez continues to support committed literature and civil liberties five decades later. He claims that economic and political crises have even become worse, which he argues merely strengthens his resolve to challenge any movement that asserts rugged individualism and authoritarian rule.

In conclusion, Lopez’s theoretical framework is based on the belief that literature is aesthetic, based on communication, and political. Also, a proper study and appreciation of texts is based on the realization that they depict power relations in society which threaten civil liberties. Given that, it is the responsibility of writers to protect civil liberties by exposing, through proletarian literature, the manner by which citizens are oppressed.

In addition, the commitment to proletarian literature does not deny the writer his right to practice creativity or to experiment with literary form. Rather, the writer’s freedom to do so is dependent on the economic and political freedom of members of his society. Thus, the goal of the writer is not only to entertain his audience but to use his work to promote diversity of opinion and to protect the civil liberties of members of society.

Lopez’s framework challenged the “art for art’s sake” movement which was the consensus ruling the arts and was driven by the study of American and European literature and by a growing cosmopolitan attitude among Filipino writers (Lopez, Villa and other writers would travel to different parts of the world, meet writers like Edgar Snow and Hemingway). However, the contradictoriness of Lopez’s milieu is also shown through his emphasis on the use of English (which proletarian readers might not have mastered), his support for the US-backed Commonwealth government, and his need to work within a US-controlled capitalist economic system.

Given this theoretical framework and the contrapuntal characteristic of his milieu, one can argue that Lopez is a secular critic because he challenged the consensus ruling the arts while working for US-backed ideological apparatuses.

CONCLUSION

In one of his Reith lectures, Said advises listeners not “to accuse all intellectuals of being sellouts just because they earn their living working in a university or for a newspaper,” and not “to hold up the individual intellectual as a perfect ideal, a sort of shining knight who is so pure and so noble as to deflect any suspicion of material interest” (*Representations* 69). The reason for the first point is commonsensical: an intellectual does a great deal of thinking, reading, and writing, and these activities usually involve work in places like universities or for media. And if universities and newspapers require surplus wealth to continue operations, then it would be difficult, if not impossible, for an intellectual or his employers not to work without any material interests involved.

In which case, the claim that Lopez is a “liberal imperialist” and an “Americanized bootlicker” is correct, since he did call for various forms of freedom (as seen in his promotion of proletarian literature) while working for apparatuses that supported US colonial (or post-colonial) rule, such as universities and newspapers. On the other hand, it is unlikely that his views supporting proletarian literature would have been heard unless he had received financial support (and even an award) from the same dominant discourses. From these two points, the most logical assessment we can make of Lopez is that he is a secular critic, one who negotiates between dominant discourses (such as the US-backed Commonwealth government) or beyond the consensus ruling the arts (“art for art’s sake”). We may also add that following Said’s theory in general intellectuals are secular critics.

The ability to negotiate between contending forces (in this case, proletarian literature versus “art for art’s sake”) can also be seen in Lopez’s essays, which support freedom of thought and even “art for art’s sake” but not at the expense of the needs of the working class. It can also be seen in Lopez’s suggestion that capitalism should, and can, work with social welfare to ensure the protection of rights of the working class (to which proletarian literature is dedicated) while not diminishing the benefits of the former. Finally, it can also be seen in Lopez’s renewed call for proletarian literature but not at the expense of the writer’s freedom, which should include appreciation of texts from other nations.

Changes in one’s milieu may encourage a secular critic to re-assess his previous views. In Lopez’s case, it meant renewing the call for proletarian literature but also bearing in mind significant changes that had taken place in the Philippines, including worsening crises in education and in politics.

Given these three points, we offer the following response to the “Lopez question”: Lopez is a secular critic, which explains why he is both a “liberal imperialist” and a “father”

of the “proletarian trend.” He is not a “sellout” or an “ideal” for Philippine postcolonial criticism; rather, he is an intellectual who has to negotiate with dominant discourses in order to publish views that may be outside the consensus ruling the arts. His social position and the diversity of ideas found in *Literature and Society* express the contradictoriness not only of a secular critic but also of the world in which he operates. Thus, any assessment that promotes an “either-or” view of a critic (e.g., he either works for dominant discourses or against them) becomes flawed because it is not grounded on the phenomenon that the critic and his text are and will remain part of and react to a contrapuntal—and changing—world.

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