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LITERARY CRITICISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

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(1) Literary criticism as an art form is only a few decades old in the Philippines. The high moments in the arts in the West have also been high tides in critical thinking. The term "criticism" itself is most unwelcome word because as a people we still harbor a considerable amount of colonial mentality. Our over sensitiveness to criticism — literary or otherwise — is an evidence of a lack of maturity. If it is any comfort Emerson decried a similar attitude in the United States a century and a half ago. Almost four hundred years of Spanish repression enervated the tongue and beclouded the mind of the Filipino. The last quarter of the nineteenth century produced a few liberated Filipinos, privileged to study in Europe, and when this little group articulated their protests they addressed them mainly to political and social amelioration and, to a limited degree, to religious inequality, as in the case of the three martyred priests garroted in 1872. Moreover, there were no significant works to comment on, except the two novels of Rizal published in Germany at the beginning of the last quarter of the century, which reached Manila clandestinely. And indeed the two books foreordained his execution in 1896.

(2) It was not until the 1930s when world literature was introduced into the educational curriculum and a modicum of literary criticism began to emerge. Our lack of critical orientation has resulted in our clutching at faddist ideas like deconstruction and postmodernism, when we should have been grounded on the germinal works of Plato and Aristotle, summarized and expanded by Horace and Longinus and from whom the crucial ideas they set forth have been further extended and developed, refined and validated by their successors: St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio in medieval criticism; in the Renaissance by Vida, Scaliger, Castelvetro of Italy; Du Bellay, Malherbe, Boileau of France; Sir Philip Sidney, Bacon, Ben Jonson of England; Dryden, Racine, Pope, Samuel Johnson in the neoclassical period; Schiller, Lessing, Kant, Goethe, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley in the Romantic period; Arnold, Henry James, Howells in the second half of the nineteenth century; and in our century, Benedetto Croce, I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot, among others. These are the leading literary critics, most of them the dominant cteative writers of their time, who have shaped critical thinking in the last two thousand years. Other eminent critics listed in a standard textbook as Smith and Parks' *The Great Critics* who have reaffirmed and enriched the germinal ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, and Longinus: Cicero, Seneca, Quintillian, St. Jerome, Robertellini, Chapelain, Coneille, Gascoigne, Addison, Reynolds, Goldsmith, Robert Steele, Emerson, Whitman, Taine, Hugo, Thackeray, Meredith, Hazlitt, Lamb, Tolstoy, Ruskin, Walter Pater, Empson, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, and about thirty others.

(3) Several schools of criticism have sprung since Plato who established didacticism and whose followers included St. Augustine, St. Jerome, Ruskin, and Tolstoy; comparative criticism first discussed by Samuel Johnson and finding echoes in T.S. Eliot; estheticism promulgated by Walter Pater and finding a parallel in Poe who had a marked influence on the French decadents — Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarme, and Valery; the new humanism of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer Moore; the New Criticism whose practitioners included the most respected contemporary critics like I.A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom. But like the New Critics who have adopted the exegetical procedure of the first century critic Longinus, those classified with the other schools have enriched and validated the generative ideas of Plato, Aristotle, and Horace.

(4) Fifteen years or so ago I got a minor shock when an American Ph.D. from a respected American university, on seeing a reading list for an M.A. comprehensive examination, remarked: "What are the Greeks doing in a program in English?" Obviously the man had not heard of the *Poetics* of Aristotle, Plato's *Ion* and *The Republic*, *Ars Peotica* by Horace, and Longinus's *On the Sublime*. Thus the propagator of deconstruction and postmodernism do not surprise us.

(5) In the Philippines — per capita it has more colleges and universities than any other country in the world — there may be only half a dozen schools, or fewer, that offer a course in literary criticism. On the tertiary level there is probably only one school which requires literary criticism for English and literature majors. Consequently, there is almost a complete absence of independent critical thinking all around, the teacher considering what a book may say about a piece of work irrefutable, and the student accepting his teacher's statement as gospel.

(6) Earlier I mentioned deconstruction, which a good number of Manila critics considered as the way to interpret a literary work. Deconstruction is associated with the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930 —) who maintains that all texts are inherently ambiguous and subject to conflicting interpretations, no matter what their authors may intend. Corollaries of this view are that language cannot be used to communicate objectively and that all claims to absolute knowledge are false. Going by this criterion the Manila deconstructionists go on to say that a reader is entitled to his own interpretation of a literary work, so that it may have as many interpretations as there are readers.

(7) To ascribe meanings that were never intended is to do injustice to the work and to its author. Criticism has validity when it has seen the intention of a given work. It is business of critical power, says Arnold in the "The Function of Criticism," to see the object as it really is. The critic, according to Mencken, must get into the mind of the artist. In summarizing the central problem of all modern criticism, J.S. Springarn in "Creative Criticism" says: "I re-dream the poet's dream." And he goes on, quoting Carlyle: "What has the writer proposed to himself to do? And how far has he succeeded in carrying out his own plan?" Carlyle, in his essay on Goethe, almost uses Goethe's own words when he says that the critic's first and foremost duty is to make plain to himself what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his eyes, and how far, with such materials as were afforded him, he has fulfilled it. "What has the poet tried to do, and how has he fulfilled his intention? What is he striving to express and how has he expressed it?"
After the critic's "re-dreaming the poet's dream," the eminent Italian critic Benedetto Croce goes on: the critic articulates his interpretation in such a manner that his criticism becomes another form of art.
On a scale of 1 to 10, the astute critical reader can get a score of 10 in meaning identification. Is it not possible that peripheral meanings may reside in the work? Of course they may be perceived; in fact they are a part of the creative process; they are inherent in the work, because a skillful writer usually aims to produce echoes to his original intention. Dante's four approaches — literal, symbolic, moral, analogical — to understanding meaning fall very well within the ambit of the Goethe-Carlyle-Arnold-Croce-Spingarn canon. William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* gives the fullest insight into the intentional use of the peripheral tangential approach in the creative process.

(8) If the critic cannot or refuses to, as a starting point in evaluation, see the object as it really is, he has no business being a critic.

(9) The failure to see the object as it really is is partly due to a shabby kind of reading. Close reading, which is essential to intelligent critical thinking, is considered a fanatical, extravagant preoccupation. The heart of critical interpretation is critical reading. How can one see a piece of work as an artistic composition without seeing the artistic interaction and relationship of its component parts? But you destroy a work of art by dissecting it, some people say. Any piece of work that cannot stand close scrutiny is no work of art at all. This is not saying that Sophocles or Shakespeare or Milton is faultless.

Indeed, as Ben Jonson says of Shakespeare, "Would that he had blotted out a thousand lines." But the faults of the truly great are insignificant beside their virtues. The truly great in spite of their faults.

(10) Critical reading quite often is not easy, passive reading. Shakespeare is not easy reading. Without careful scrutiny the reader wonders about Shakespeare's divagations as illustrated when Shakespeare takes time to soliloquize on the implications of the verb *shall* in *Coriolanus*. When the reader discerns the relevancy he becomes not only an active reader but also a co-creator.

(11) Non-critical reading is quackery. Anything that at first appears obscure or incomprehensible is slightly dismissed, and so John Donne or Gerard Manley Hopkins or James Joyce gathers dust. There is no more distressing statement than the following, made by a Filipino critic reviewing a local quarterly: "Of the four poems in the issues I like A — 's best because he has the greatest clarity." As though clarity or obscurity ultimately decides the success or failure of a work.

(12) The usual result of uncritical reading is the impressionistic approach which certain critics in the century take. An example is the following statement made by Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil, one of the judges in the *Philippines Free Press* short story contest:

(13) Of the fifty odd short stories eligible for the Philippines Free Press *contest this year, "The Wings of Madness" by Fransisco Arcellana moves me most. It is as intense, as baffling, as disjointed as life itself. I was fascinated by the brooding, neurotic pace; the quite frenzy; the flawless prose. Of course, it is not perfect, it is not even up to other Arcellana stories. It does not seem to hang together, I suppose short story experts would say it is not a story at all. But I thought it was the best of the lot.*

(14) To begin with, if "it does seem to hang together," and the supposed "short-story experts may say it is not a story at all," why did she choose it as "the best of the lot"? To consider Arcellana's story "the best of the lot" because "it moved me most" is an example of affective fallacy. In defining the term in relation to poetry (a term applicable to all literary forms), W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M.C. Beardsley speak of affective fallacy as "a confusion between the poem and its result (what it is and what it does) …. It begins by trying to derive the standard of literary criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. (15) The result…is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear."

(16) This impressionistic attitude is evident in Teodoro Locsin's critical introduction to Nick Joaquin's first book. In discussing "The Summer Solstice," for example, he says, "The story is a masterpiece. I have read nothing like it. It is a terrifying experience." He goes on to relate how the story had not failed to touch an American woman. "We have read stories by many of the new American writers. These stories are competent, significant, clever, curious, full of tricks. They are the works of bright intelligences, skilled artisans, etc. There is only one thing wrong with them. They do nothing to you." The essay closes with the sentence-paragraph: "The stories of Joaquin are an experience."

(17) Comparing Joaquin's stories with those of "many of the new American writers" (who would include his own contemporaries like John Updike, John Cheever, Flannery O'Connor, Donald Bartheleme, Bernard Malamud, and even Eudora Welty and Katherine Anne Porter whose story collections were published in the 1950s) shows Locsin's gross lack of understanding of the short story. (I have more comments on Locsin's statement about "The Summer Solstice" being a masterpiece in the later part of this essay. All I can say now is that it has no inevitability and internal consistency.)

(18) If we were to apply Locsin's and Carmen Nakpil's criterion to music, Sinatra and Elvis Presley were great artist because they made American female teenagers swoon, whereas Bach and Beethoven may send a lot of people to sleep.

(19) The impressionistic attitude has resulted in overrating Manuel Arguilla who gives a penetrating insight into a scene, an incident, or a character but does not achieve a full-bodied realization of the short story genre in many of his works. Arguilla's position in Philippine fiction is significant and secure, especially for the new semantic dimension with which he endows the native scene, but the impressionistic school in which he seemed to be oriented circumscribes him. This is most unfortunate because Arguilla, who was head and shoulders above his contemporaries as a craftsman, had he lived longer, could predictively have mastered the short story form and contributed much more to Philippine literature.

(20) That a work "moves me" is a legitimate, indeed essential, element, but to make it as the major criterion in evaluation is valid only when the artistic necessities are met. More important: the critic must show why it moves; in this respect Longinus is exemplary.

(21) Incidentally, one way a writer achieves optimum emotional impact is to juxtapose contrasting scenes or situations. One example is the murder of King Duncan — made more hideous because Macbeth commits it when his king is his house guest, followed by the Porter's knocking — on the castle gate. Hazlitt's comment on this is a brilliant piece of textual criticism. More obvious examples of contrasting juxtaposition are in music. In Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* a very haunting passage is hedged by a savage jungle cacophony. In a better known work, Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, a lyrical melody comes suddenly in the midst of big-city dissonance. Closing the first act of Leoncavillo's *I, Pagliacci,* Canio, the clown, even after discovering his wife's infidelity, sings one of the most moving arias in operatic literature, "Laugh, Player — laugh for the grief…." On the other hand, long movements of cloying music in the piano concertos, particularly the second, of Rachmaninoff, sound almost maudlin; he redeems himself by going easy on the lyricism in the *Paganini Variations*. After Tchaikovsky there is diminishing vigor in Romantic music because of the increasing schmaltziness.

(22) Another critical fallacy is a confused focus on a man and his work, the tendency of a critic or a literature teacher to be intimidated by a writer's name, so that he loses perspective. In addition to doing a collection of short stories on a grant from the U. P. Creative Writing Center which appointed me the 1990 National Fellow in Fiction, I was asked to give a lecture on a topic chosen for me: Carlos Bulosan and his works. I was not happy about the topic because I did not — do not — have a high regard for his writing. Except for two stories which have limited success, his fiction is uncouth. Following are the closing lines of the 26-page paper printed as the last essay in this book: "Bulosan's reading (his list included Dreiser, Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Caldwell, Steinbeck, Faulkner, Hemingway) was superficial. His grotesque characters are participants in a series of jokes and are not funny in terms of humor in the hands of Mark Twain. Bulosan saw only the husk, not what the husk contained…. Bulosan's failure as a writer is a failure of sensibility, the price he had to pay for failing to understand and perceive the qualities of the best fictional works of the twentieth century that he openly and with arrogance, despised."

(23) I had not realized that the U.P. convocation was intended to honor Carlos Bulosan and that the Creative Writing Center had a deep veneration for him. During the open forum I was made to feel like a Philistine in hallowed Hebrew territory. Two reasons for the veneration: [1] Bulosan's accomplishments as a labor leader among Filipinos and Asians on the Pacific coast, from California to Alaska; [2] the publication of Bulosan's works by Harcourt Brace during the Second World War. But these are extraneous to literary evaluation. Indeed much of Bulosan's writing has something to do with Filipino workers in the Pacific coast, but his articulation is inartistic, and he has no sense of form. After the fall of Bataan and Corregidor the Americans wanted to know the Filipinos, who had fought and died with their soldiers, in a war that was mainly America's. Fortuitously Bulosan was on American soil to supply Harcourt Brace with the cock-and-bull stories about his largely mythical

country. Publication in itself is no guarantee of literary quality. Book publishing is primarily a business proposition.

(24) Perhaps a better example than Bulosan is Jose Garcia Villa, the unquestioned literary dictator in the Philippines in the 1930s. After his expulsion from the University of the Philippines by President Jorge Bocobo, a fanatical Methodist, for publishing "indecent" poetry, he left for the United States. In New Mexico, he edited *Clay*, a magazine in which some of his stories appeared. Later in New York he opened a writers' workshop and after quitting story writing he announced he was concentrating on literary criticism which he believed would be "monumental." *Footnote to Youth*, Villa's story collection, published by Scribner in 1933, "places him among the half-dozen short story writers in America who count," according to British critic Edward J. O'Brien, who wrote the introduction. His annual selection of the "best" stories published in the Philippines in the 1930s was awaited with high expectation and a little terror. Villa was like Jove descending from Mt. Olympus to dispense judgment upon subservient mortals. His criteria were unimpeachable:

(25) In selecting the best stories of the year, I have followed the double standard of form and substance. The test of substance requires vitality of subject, significant selection of facts. Genuine substance is achieved only when a pulse beats through the correlated facts, for significant substance alone, if without the beat of life, remains dead substance. To achieve validity, therefore, substance in fiction should be living as well as significant.

(26) The second test that I employ is that of form. This requires vigor of structure and artistic finish. Although form and substance in literature are a creative one, and therefore are indivisible, still they are distinct, thus making feasible this test of form. Form, in literature, is the adequate and beautiful externalization of substance; it is not a restrictive mold, but is the free, yet artistically disciplined presentation of substance.

(27) For the best story, which had achieved "the artistic externalization of living and significant substance," Villa gave three asterisks; the second lower category two asterisks; the lowest, but still in the honor roll, one asterisk. In 1934 a story, "Postscript," I had submitted as a college sophomore in a short-story writing class and published in *Graphic*, was given three asterisks by Villa and listed as one of the best 20 best stories for that year; in 1935 "Silent Seas," printed in *Philippine Magazine*, the leading monthly then, was listed among the worst. A few other stories appeared in the honor roll until Villa's annual selection stopped with the start of World War II. It seemed that Philippine fiction writers were aiming for recognition by Villa.

(28) In 1946, my first year as a writing fellow at the University of Iowa, Writers Workshop director Paul Engle chose "The Tuba Gatherer" one of three stories for discussion at a special session to which three prominent American critics were invited to constitute a panel, aside from the resident Workshop staff. Two of the visiting writers were Robert Penn Warren, two-time Pulitzer prize winner, for the novel and for poetry, and Cleanth Brooks, co-author with Warren of *Understanding Fiction, Understanding Poetry*, and *Understanding Drama* (the last by Brooks and Heilman), textbooks that revolutionized the teaching of literature. I sat in the middle of the second row to be easily identified as the author of "The Tuba Gatherer," the only Oriental in the Workshop. Robert Penn opened his remarks by saying the author's prose was competent. I was exultant: here was a foreigner who could use the English language as well as the best in the Workshop. But the story, Robert Penn Warren went on, indicated its author did not seem to know short story structure; in fact there were two stories in "The Tuba Gatherer." I wanted to sink under the floor. I realized I didn't know how to write a short story — after having published 25 of them in Philippine magazines before going to Iowa. In the next three years as an Iowa Workshop fellow I concentrated on learning short story structure. I have included only four, completely revised, of the 25 stories printed between 1934 and 1946 in the four short story collections published since the Iowa days. "Postscript," which Villa chose as one of the 20 best stories

in 1934, and several others he asterisked, I find not only embarrassingly mawkish but beyond salvaging.

(29) To be told the truth is healthier than to be flattered.

(22) It is also healthy to stop being awed by Jose Garcia Villa and even to recognize the flaws in his fiction — indeed the significant number of flaws are obvious that they must have embarrassed Villa himself — and to question the accuracy of O'Brien's judgment that *Footnote to Youth* "places him among the half-dozen short story writers in America who count." After his first book one wonders why he stopped writing fiction.
To include Nick Joaquin here is no denigration to his status as a national artist. But there are responsible people like Teodoro Locsin who think Joaquin can do no wrong. Here are some more Locsin remarks in the *Prose and Poems* introduction: "No Filipino now writing matches his stories in power and beauty; their wedding of primitive emotions with sophisticated treatment is beyond the power of local practitioners of the art. Here are the dark, instinctive drives of men and women caught in a cage of glittering words." I'll discuss only two stories which could be the bases of Locsin's unrestrained pronouncement: "The Legend of the Dying Wanton" and "The Summer Solstice."

(23) The central character in the first story is "a wild young soldier named Currito Lopez (with the "swart, bearded face of a Lucifer") who was as evil as Doña Ana was good." Forget the facile polarization in the characterization. Currito's ship, on an expedition from Manila to Ternate, is dashed against the rocky coast of Mindoro; the native soldiers "who had been impressed to the service…now turned against their cruel masters, pushing, pushing the Spaniards off the cliffs and hurling great rocks at them until they were all dead and dying…. The poor Currito lay on the flooded ground, unable to move; all his bones being broken and his whole body crushed to a pulp." Why is Currito still alive if all his bones, which of course include his skull, were broken and all his body crushed to a pulp? What is most intriguing and incredible about the shipwreck scene is told by the omniscient author since the story is told in the omniscient point of view. Currito is lying in the mud after he has been pushed off the cliff.

(24) "The night is alive with presences… He knows what they are: people out in the world were praying for him. Girls in school, old women by the wayside, priests at the altar, families gathered round the hearth were praying for him, and for all sinners now, and at the hour of their death. From the towns and cities of Spain, from Europe and from Africa, from the new worlds in the West and from the old worlds in the East — came the voices, choiring and clamoring and imploring God to forgive him for his trespasses… In that instant the voices vanished, and looking down the still shore where the ragged palms leaned on each other, their long boles black against the moonlit sky and the shattered glass of the sea…."

(25) If he were flat on his back in the mud, all his bones broken and his whole body crushed to a pulp, how could he see the coconut trees and the shattered glass of the sea? And why mud? The ship, we have been told, had been hurled against the rocks, and there couldn't have been coconut trees between the cliffs and the sea, and sea sand can't turn muddy. The choreography is all wrong. Is Currito hallucinating when the Virgin Mary and the Child appear? The appearance of fellow soldier Salgado thirteen days after the shipwreck is real. "Its [Currito's] body was bloated, the face horribly mutilated, and the entire carcass, from head to foot, a single enormous grayly gaping, hotly odorous wound, swarming with flies and oozing pus and a foul oil so thickly matted with worms you could scoop them out by the fistful, as the moist flesh seemed to have been scooped out indeed, having fallen away from the bones in so many places the skeleton already glittered triumphant though the decayed rags of mortality." And yet how could "it" — "this pile of rot" — call out to Salgado by name, "proclaim itself Currito Lopez," and beg him "to go and fetch a priest from the ship that he might properly confess himself and be absolved, since for this reason had the Holy Persons sustained him alive these many days, but now he felt his hour upon him?"

(26) Joaquin has overstrained himself in the story, as in a number of his stories, for effect, consequently imprisoning himself "in the cage of glittering words." Whereas Hemingway's handling of the interior monologue in the mind of the hunter dying of gangrene in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is not only poetic but compellingly credible, Joaquin's melodramatic delineation of Currito's thoughts before dying is meretricious for lack of internal consistency.

(27) Now let's consider "The Summer Solstice" which Locsin calls a masterpiece. There is a mass lunacy in the story. The first victim of the Tadtarin ritual is the cook Amada who has been screaming like a demented woman; the reason for her weird behavior: the night before she had played the Tadtarin role herself. "The cult of the Tadtarin is celebrated for three days: the feast of St. John and the two preceding days. On the first night, a young girl leads the procession; on the second, a mature woman; and on the third, a very old woman who dies and comes to life again. In these processions, as in those of Pakil and Obando, everyone dances." Amada is seen by her mistress Doña Lupeng as a woman with "soft, big arms and legs, noiselessly quaking with laughter… the moist pile of her flesh like brown jelly… saliva dribbling from the corners of her mouth," exuding intimate odors, Doña Lupeng averted her eyes from the laughing woman in the bed, "in whose nakedness she seemed so to participate that she was ashamed to look at the man [Amada's husband Entoy] in the doorway."

(28) Guido, educated in Europe, is also unhinged. He tells Doña Lupeng, whom he adores, that the Tadtarin he saw the night before (Amada herself) "was a figure out of a flamenco… She is beautiful." On the third day, on her insistence, she goes to the Tadtarin procession with her husband Don Paeng. The women "pulled off and waved their shawls and whirled and began dancing again — laughing and dancing with such joyous exciting abandon that the people in the square and on the sidewalks, and even on the balconies, were soon laughing and dancing, too. Girls broke away from their parents and wives from their husbands to join the orgy." Suddenly Doña Lupeng pulled free from her husband's grasp, darted off, and ran into the crowd of dancing women.

(29) She flung her hands to her hair and whirled and her hair came loose. Then, planting her arms akimbo, she began to trip a nimble measure, an instinctive folk-movement. She tossed her head back and her arched throat bloomed whitely. Her eyes brimmed with moonlight, and her mouth with laughter.
Don Paeng ran after her, shouting her name, but she laughed and shook her head and darted deeper into the dense maze of procession, which was moving again, towards the chapel. He followed her, shouting; she eluded him, laughing — and through the thick of the female horde they lost and found and lost each other again — she, dancing and he pursuing — till, carried along by the tide, they were both swallowed up into the hot, packed, turbulent darkness of the chapel. Inside poured the entire procession, and Don Paeng, finding himself trapped tight among milling female bodies, struggled with sudden panic to fight his way out. Angry voices rose all about him in the stifling darkness…
"Let me pass, let me pass, you harlots!" cried Don Paeng.
*"*Abah*, it is a man!"*
"How dare he come in here?"
"Break his head!"
"Throw the animal out!"
"Throw him out! Throw him out!" shrieked the voices, and Don Paeng found himself surrounded by a swarm of gleaming eyes.
…He struck out savagely with both fists, with all his strength — but they closed in as savagely: solid walls of flesh that crushed upon him and pinned his arms helpless, while unseen hands struck and struck his face, and ravaged his hair and clothes, and clawed at his flesh, as — kicked and buffeted, his eyes blind and his torn mouth salty with blood — he was pushed down, down to his knees, and half-shoved, half-dragged to the doorway and rolled out to the street. He picked himself up at once and walked away with a dignity that forbade the crowd gathered outside to laugh or to pity. Entoy came running to meet him.
"But what has happened to you, Don Paeng?"
"Nothing. Where is the coach?"
"Just over there, sir. But you are wounded in the face!"

"No, these are only scratches. Go and get the señora. We are going home."

(30) Back home, like everyone else in the procession, like the crazed Amada and the unhinged Guido, Doña Lupeng and Don Paeng must have been placed by the author under the spell of the Tadtarin. Doña Lupeng is transformed into an imperious woman who brooks no denial. She demands absolute obedience. "Unless you have said it [that he adored her] to me, them can be no peace between us." Because of the outrage and the humiliation he had received at the procession, we expect him to slap her or belt her as befitted the nineteenth century lord of the manor, but incredibly, against all reason and logic, "he sank heavily on his knees, breathing hard and streaming with sweat, his fine body diminished now in the ravaged apparel."

(31) "I adore you, Lupe," he said tonelessly.
*She strained forward avidly. "*What? *What did you say?" she screamed.*
And he, in his dead voice: "That I adore you. That I worship you. That the air you breathe and the ground you tread is holy to me. That I am your dog, your slave."
But it was not enough. Her fists were still clenched and she cried, "Then come, crawl on the floor, and kiss my feet!"
Without a moment's hesitation, he sprawled down flat and, working his arms and legs, gaspingly clawed his way across the floor, like a great agonized lizard, the woman steadily backing away as he approached, her eyes watching him avidly, her nostrils dilating, fill behind her loomed the open window, the huge glittering moon, the rapid flashes of lightning. She stopped, panting, and leaned against the sill. He lay exhausted at her feet, his face flat on the floor.
She raised her skirts and contemptuously thrust out a naked foot. He lifted his dripping face and touched his bruised lips to her toes; lifted his hands and grasped the white foot and kissed it savagely — kissed the step, the sole, the frail ankle… [while] the huge moon glowed like a sun and the dry air flamed into lightning….

(32) The Hollywoodish inclusion of the lightning and the huge moon, at first *glittering* (?) and now *glowing*, at the instant of absolute prostration, compound the melodrama. No sane reader can accept the premise of mass madness stemming from the Tadtarin ritual. All the critical reader can see is that all of the authorial manipulation results in a nauseous pathetic melodrama.

(33) A summary of Locsin's critical approach is seen in his comment on "Guardia de Honor": "The quality of 'Guardia de Honor' that may repel some, but attracts me, is its lyricism. The characters are two-dimensional? That is no matter. What matters is the passion that informs every part of the story." Lyricism in itself is not a decisive factor in successful fiction. What Locsin calls Joaquin's "cage of glittering words" has indeed become Joaquin's prison. Chekhov, Dostoevsky, de Maupassant, and many, many other great fictionists are not lyrical. Passion? Yes, if it has integrity, if it is artistically controlled. But Joaquin runs amok in such stories as "The Summer Solstice" and "The Dying Wanton." How do we read Nick Joquin?

(34) With a suspension of disbelief, in the words of Coleridge? But Coleridge used the term in connection with his explanation of his contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads* (co-authored with his friend Wordsworth): whereas "Mr. Wordsworth was to propose to himself as his object, to give the warmth of novelty to things of every day…my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural [as in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*], or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination the willing suspension of disbelief for the moment."

(35) Are we to read Joaquin the way we read Kafka? There's nothing Kafkaesque in Joaquin's fiction.

Do we consider him in terms of Ruskin's pathetic fallacy in mind? Here's how Ruskin analyzes two lines of a poem by Oliver Wendel Holmes:

(36) The spendthrift crocus, bursting through the mold
Naked and shivering, with his cup of gold.
"This is very beautiful and yet very untrue. The crocus is not a spendthrift, but a hardy plant; its yellow is not gold, but saffron. How is it that we enjoy so much the having it put into our heads that it is anything else but a plain crocus?"
Coleridge gives another example in Alton Locke:
They rowed her in across the rolling foam —
The cruel, crawling foam.
"The foam is not cruel, neither does it crawl. The state of mind which attributes to it these characters of a living creature is one in which the mason is unhinged by grief. All violent feelings have the same effect. They produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the 'Pathetic Fallacy.'
"….But I believe," [concludes Ruskin], "that we shall find the greatest poets do not often admit this kind of falseness, — that it is only the second order of poets who much delight in it…. The temperament which admits the pathetic fallacy…is that of a mind and body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them or upon them, or overclouded, or overdazzled by emotion…. It is still a grander condition when the intellect also rises, till it is strong enough to assert its rule against or together with, the utmost efforts of the passions; and the whole man stands in an iron glow, white hot, perhaps, but still strong, and in no wise evaporating; even if he melts, losing none of his weight."

(37) Indeed good literature is intended to move (an American professor of mine had a crude way of saying it: creative writing most seduce), but a work's emotive quality must not assault the sensibility, it must be undergirded by reasonableness, by logic (critics call it interior logic, inner consistency), it must complement and satisfy the intellect, it must have inevitability. Sophocles, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Henry James — and the truly responsible writer — demonstrate it in their works. The list includes Cervantes and his Don Quixote and Sancho Panza fighting windmills and Jonathan Swift and his flying island and the land of the Houyhnhnms, intelligent horses who are the masters of the Yahoos, a race of degenerate human beings. Arnold, however, ranks the satirists below those with "high seriousness." He considers Shakespeare greater than Chaucer, the so-called father of English poetry, for that reason; one example of contrasting attitude and temper is in Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida* and Chaucer's narrative poem with the same title and subject.

(38) As I said earlier, my remarks are not a denigration of Nick Joaquin as a writer. He has been applauded by people like Teodoro Locsin for the wrong reasons. Many of his stories — "May Day Eve," "The Legend of the Virgin's Jewels," "The Legend of the Dying Wanton," "The Mass of St. Sylvester," "The Summer Solstice," even "Guardia de Honor" — may be classified as tales like those of Washington Irving whose fascination for the Alhambra when he was American ambassador to Spain finds echoes in Joaquin's nostalgia for Manila of the nineteenth century and earlier. He should have written more stories like "The Order of Milkezedek." After 14 stories in two books, *Prose and Poems* and *Tropical Gothic*, he stopped writing short fiction. Why? If such stories as "The Summer Solstice" and "Guardia de Honor" were masterpieces, as Locsin claims, why did not Joaquin produce more of them?

(39) and his feature articles are sparkling essays. In non-fiction, as in his biographies, he stands head and shoulders over his contemporaries — and biographical writing, if done like Joaquin's, become a part of the body of Philippine literature. For these accomplishments he deserves the title of national artist perhaps more than any other Filipino writer.

(40) Another disturbing element in critical thinking in the country is the bias for oversimplification. One reason for this has been the traditional policy of magazine editors to limit short story manuscripts, for instance, to about 12 manuscript pages, double-spaced. The *Philippine Magazine,* a

pioneering monthly put out by the highly respected and congenial American editor A. V. Hartendorp, was the outlet for a considerable number of promising young writers who wrote stories, many of them merely vignettes. I suspect Mr. Hartendorp did not have a full understanding of the short story genre. The other magazines, most of them weekly supplements of dailies, more or less followed a similar regulation on manuscript length. Consequently, the pioneers who understood the short story form — Paz Marquez Benitez, Manuel Arguilla, Jose Garcia Villa — were cramped by lack of elbow room. Arguilla's "Midsummer," a moving story, is perhaps the best example of oversimplification. One may examine one anthology after another of the world's best short short stories, and he will find most rarely stories as short as Chekhov's "Lament" or Pirandello's "War," but even these cover more than 12 manuscript pages. Minimalism? Minimalism, which has sprung as a fad, is an unfortunate retrogression of the short story.

(41) Related to oversimplification is the too-neatly structured story whose life is choked by obvious manipulation. Time and again young writers, who have won Palanca and other awards, come to the National Writers Workshop at Silliman with well-made, correctly structured stories articulated in almost flawless prose, and show artistic sensibility. They are counseled: Learn to unloosen. To mirror life is to include its little inconsistencies, its divagations. The fiction writer aims, as it were, not only at a circle of light but also its aureole radiating from its center.

(42) Another way of looking at oversimplification is to think of a flute rendition without a counterpoint. The effect of Jean-Pierre Rampal's flute playing is reduced without even a minimum accompaniment of a couple of violins, a viola, and a cello. Literary work, particularly fiction, must produce symphonic resonance. A Greek tragedy mesmerizes by its emotional intensity; Shakespearean tragedies, on the other hand, with their underplots and divagations, have a greater dimension because the author dramatized complexities that Aristotle did not see enough of in Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides. Short fiction, in the hands of a skillful writer, can, and should, produce resonance. The stories of Henry James illustrate the best examples of work with reverberated content. I have an essay on this matter in this book, "Poe's Unique Effect and Trilling's Tangential Approach."

(43) "The Centipede," a Palanca award winner by Rony Diaz published in the 1953 *Literary Apprentice*, is a good example of oversimplification. This is a story of a boy and his elder sister Delia, who has a weak heart. She beats up his dog Biryuk unjustifiably; in a series of flashbacks we are told that she had his monkey killed because "it snickered at her one morning while she was brushing her teeth," that he had to give his pigeons away because she couldn't stand the smell of the pigeon house, that she has destroyed his collection of butterflies. In each instance he keeps his control because of her weak heart. The beating of his dog is the final straw, and he has his revenge when he lets fall a dead centipede on her lap. She screams and collapses, and the story ends thus:

(44) My sister did not move. I held [sic] the centipede before her like a hunter displaying the tail of a deer, save that the centipede felt thorny in my hand.

(45) The author's obvious intention: the realization of a growing boy that revenge is not sweet. The characterization of the boy and his sister is not only crude but one-dimensional. There is a kindergarten quality about the content and the narration. The meanness of the girl, like the cruelty of the father in Manuel Arguilla's "Nagrebcan," is meaningless. She is portrayed as all demonic impulses. Even Milton's Satan is not completely satanic; he is partly humanized. Delia is a completely unbelievable character, unbelievable in her cruelty and meanness, there being no justification for them. Does she die, having a weak heart? We are not told. There is no pathos in her dying, if she dies at all, because she has been shown as possessing no redeeming quality.

(46) The clumsy characterization is matched by the inept diction. The boy's "throat swelled, and I felt hate rear and plunged in the cage of ribs." "The flesh of my back and thighs *sang* with pain," "I held the centipede before her like a *hunter displaying the tail of a deer*…." Why should there suddenly be introduced a hunter displaying the tail of a deer?

(47) In this essay I have discussed four misconceptions about literary criticism in the Philippines: the definition of a writer's intention, literary evaluation through emotional reaction alone without considering the artistic necessities, the tendency to lose perspective because of a confused focus in assessing a writer and his work, and the limiting factors in oversimplification. In subsequent essays other issues related to the topic here are discussed, among them, the intentions of literature, the fallacy of expressive form, the emergence of the New Criticism in the country, the tangential-peripheral approach, point of view as a definer of meaning, the role of the arts and literature, the role of the writer, and the reader as co-creator.