The HURT of the MATTER

By Nita H. Umali



Selected columns from The Hurt of the Matter

published in This Week
the Sunday magazine
of the Manila Chronicle
1950 to 1951 by Nita H Umali
(Nita Umali Berthelsen)

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Nita H Umali

(Nita Umali Berthelsen)

Some notes before you go further . . .

This compilation remains as true as possible to the original text of the columns with very minor corrections. The reader may be uncomfortable with unfamiliar words, such as: envolve, unumbilical, misdoers, crashings, and others. They did exist once in common usage, but are now labeled as "rare."

Inconsistencies of punctuation will also be noted and they appear mostly because the columns were published in the 1950s, when newspapers were typeset using hot metal linotype machines, which affected punctuation use. Typesetters adjusted spacing and often omitted punctuation to make lines fit within justified text and keeping spacing tight to save on newsprint.

The punctuation has been retained and has not been corrected for modern computer usage.

At the end of each piece is the date of publication, if known. Anything after the date has been added by me, for when deemed necessary notes have been included for those who may not be familiar with writers or celebrities in the 1950s. The persons or events are noted at first mention.

While newspaper columns generally had no titles, I have included titles in this compilation, as a means of directing the reader to a particular topic or personality that may be of interest. In most cases, the title is a line from the text itself.

I have not included any sort of review or analysis of mom's writings, as this is meant as a primary source—a compilation of some of the articles that I have been able to track down, merely for archival purposes for my grandkids and also so that they can become readily available for any researcher, either of my mom's work, or the type of writing in the 1950s.

Thank you for your interest and I hope you enjoy a glimpse into the world of Manila journalism in the 1950s.

This week, the Sunday Magazine of The Manila Chronicle

The Manila Chronicle was one of the major English-language newspapers in the Philippines during the postwar period. It was founded in 1945 and was regarded as a quality newspaper seeking to rebuild press freedom in post-liberation Philippines. It eventually became part of the media empire of the López family, which also owned broadcasting interests that later became associated with ABS-CBN.

The paper was widely regarded as influential in politics, culture, and journalism during the 1950s – 1960s. It was shut down when President Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law in September 1972, revived in 1986 after the People Power Revolution, and finally ceased publication in 1998 after labor and financial difficulties.

The Chronicle's offices were located in the famous Chronicle Building in Manila, and many important Filipino writers, journalists, and columnists published there during the "golden age" of Philippine magazine journalism in the 1950s. The paper was known for combining serious political reporting with strong literary and cultural coverage.

"This Week" was the Manila Chronicle's Sunday magazine supplement. It functioned similarly to American Sunday newspaper magazines of the era: a weekly featuring essays, fiction, society coverage, arts, culture, celebrity profiles, travel pieces, humor columns, and literary writing.

Many Filipino writers and intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s contributed to it. Although detailed archival information online is limited, "This Week" is frequently referenced in memoirs, literary histories, and newspaper archives as one of the important English-language magazine supplements of mid-century Manila journalism.

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I On Writers and Writing

Newspaperwomen, when they get together, are always something to watch.

Newspaperwomen, when they get together, are always something to watch. And to listen to.

They have the confidence of the very wealthy and secure even if most of the time they do not possess the kind of backing that the latter possess; the flair for fashion that all women desire without having to go to all the expense that fashion pages and idle-idols have to go through; the vocabulary of a twentieth century Shakespeare, all jokes and asides included; and the ability to enjoy themselves at anytime, any place.

Newspaperwomen have been known to have appetites too. But at the first gathering they had at the Overseas Press Club[1] several days ago they had to practice the virtue of temperance, long neglected because of various invitations offering more than received for Nebuchadnezzar feasts[2]. At this last meeting though, the girls decided they were going to pen out their own handwriting on the wall, and to the tune of a fitting but definitely not rich lunch, talked.*

There are times when women make sense when they talk, and regardless of what men say, there are instances when they make even better sense than men.

Take this question of lipstick, man's pet peeve when the talk gets around to import control. They say, why buy the stuff? Why not stop using it?" No words are necessary to defenestrate this theory of theirs. Lipstick on men's lapels after a night's carousing cry out men's practical choice against their theoretical arguments.

Then why not buy locally made lipstick? they argue. All right, we admit, there is one kind being made here that is actually of good quality. But the price exceeds that of imported lipstick. So where does that get us?

Yet this is by no means an apology for women to then go right ahead and spend whatever they wish to, to get what they want. Because there are ways and ways.

And trust newspaperwomen, when they put all their heads together to figure out some way.

Clothes. Ahh, there's the rub! As our friend Franz Arcellana[3] once so aptly punned, "The sty is the limit." Because women can certainly be piggish in the way they gloat over the amounts they spend on dresses. And yet by this time all attractive and not attractive women should know that it is not clothes that make them. It may even unmake whatever future they plan if they don't go slower on the bills. I have even known men who because I have such a good sympathetic ear have tearfully poured out their confidences about women whom they liked to look at because they were like shop windows but whom they could never love enough because their price tabs coincide with Saks Fifth Avenue. Besides, it's the figure inside the dress and the brains under the coiffure that we go for, not the dollars signs printed all over them, they claim.

But men, as we say, are very capable at times, if not always, at saying one thing and meaning another. Not that we blame them. There are altogether too many characters who warrant such treatment. At the same time it helps if women actually use their heads.

The President and other men may try to push through an austerity program, but nothing will ever happen so long as the very wives of these well-meaning men go on with their frivolous attempts to prove their worth only by exterior manifestations. A thousand peso terno, to any intelligent mind, proves nothing but a twenty-five per cent I.Q., a five hundred peso one a fifty per cent I.Q., and so forth proportionally. And because a woman wears a twenty peso dress five times to five different parties does not mean she is not well-dressed. In fact it proves the fact further that she is, because any dress that can take that wear and tear has certainly something to stand on. And any woman who lives under the dress proves that she is not merely a dress-up doll but an individual whose attractions does not stem from three yards of expensive material and multiple dressmakers' fees but from her own personal worth.

12 February 1950

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[1] The Overseas Press Club of Manila was an elite postwar association of foreign correspondents, diplomats, writers, and prominent Filipino journalists that served as a major social and intellectual hub of Manila's press and political world in the 1950s.

[2]. Nebuchadnezzar feast refers to the famous "writing on the wall" banquet, which was actually hosted by Belshazzar, but later tradition, art, literature, and popular memory often transferred the event to Nebuchadnezzar II because Nebuchadnezzar was the far more famous Babylonian king.

[3] Franz (Francisco) Arcellana is a National Artist for Literature and is known for pioneering the modern Filipino short story in English.

A writer is like any other citizen.

A month ago, a local magazine published the selection of one man of the best short stories of the year. Though we cannot agree with him in the manner he graded most of the stories—with one opinion of his we agree most vehemently, that there was very little good writing, if any, accomplished. Universal standards would hardly pass a number more than our fingers as good literature.

One thing that we looked for, in the appraisal of the literature of last year, and in the face of the multiple asterisked short-stories, was a little conjecture, if not positive reasoning on the ways and wherefores of the artistic sterility of most of the writers.

Lack of talent, we think, is hardly the answer.

Lack of material even more improbable. As far as wealth of material still unexplored in the ranks of fiction is concerned we may consider ourselves millionaires. Who has really written a good novel or short story centering around the Philippine Revolution? Who has treated the death of del Pilar with enough drama and fictional imagination? Who has looked honestly into the hundred American eyes roving in the Philippines and found the hundred answers for their being here? And who has taken time off to be a complete Filipino and a complete writer and tried to evolve out of that, both stylistically and substantially, a genuine Filipino story—

And yet we cannot lay the blame on writers alone for the non-existence of what we look for. True there have been Thomas Wolfes—men who have starved, have locked themselves up in cold damp cellars for years just so they could write. Artistic giants who fought against all odds and came out victorious. But they are few and far between.

A writer is like any other citizen. He too is a product of society, whatever accusations may have been heard against him. He too must eat, sleep, ride jeepneys, and breathe the same kind of dust that the rest of the country does. When he gets tuberculosis it is not because all writers are consumptive, but because his profession does not pay. His is a glorified job with starvation returns.

While others labor with payment in signs, the writer gambles—believes that what he writes is good, hopes that the publisher recognizes it, and the public welcomes it.

So far magazine editors in Manila have been quite cooperative, it has been easy for them. There have been so few manuscripts to choose from. They don't even have to trouble about the problem of popular taste as against 'new' literature, because there hasn't been any such discriminatory choice made possible.

What then can the Filipino writer do by himself to improve his art? That it is still in an immature stage is hardly to be doubted. That it may reach maturity with the proper impetus is unquestioned.

Our local writers need a lot of things. They have to be sincere, must possess integrity — not only in their art but as men. They have to have 'guts', to use a non-scholarly term which nevertheless so aptly fits the purpose, and enough objectivity not to flare up or caress a hurt when any part of their work or style is criticized.

They need friends In their own profession, people who will understand what they are doing, and who like them will eat, sleep, live, love, writing, and do nothing as much as write or talk on writing.

They need the environment. And over and above all they need the Time. And to have that, ironically, not only writers but all human beings in the world need MONEY, that circular planet so out of reach of most writers.

But there are other entities for whom MONEY is not merely an illusion. Universities, to whom we must give due credit for having sponsored literary contest with tangible prizes.

So far the greatest encouragement of them all has not yet been given however. That in the form of a government sponsored literary contest patterned after the Commonwealth Literary Contest in the past.

A nation's culture, its progress, is not written down in history books alone. Man's manner of thinking and living is best set down in records of everyday life as sifted through the writer's imaginative cloth. And any country who wants to disseminate to future generations and other nations not only dates and historical places but the lives of its people, their struggles, their weaknesses, the rising and falling, and their greatness, have literature as their medium.

If the Philippine government makes use of this facility, it will not be the first country to do so. If it does not hurry, it may be the last.

19 February 1950

This is the distinction we ask the reader to make.

Literature, we were taught in school, is life. An artistic representation of it.

Literature is not propaganda. It is not the mere expression of an ideology, a faith. It is not any man's subjective confession of the sorrows of his soul.

It is an experience sifted through a writer's eyes, conveyed to a reader's mind. It is not the haphazard combination of words to produce a euphonic sound nor is it the mere recounting of a tale.

The writer is no pleasure fiend.

Neither is he the slave of his work.

For inasmuch as writing is a "craft" and insofar as we call a genuine masterpiece a "work" of art, so we must assume that it is not merely a sweet pastime that the writer is after when he writes. And yet the writer does enjoy what he does. Either in the process or the fulfillment. That is something no one else, not even the non-literary editors who hand out the rejection slips, can ever take away from this group. For as the function of all literature is primarily the sincerity to themselves, as such they find joy in their own being.

However, writers too are human. They seek understanding of their works. It is not enough that a story gets accepted and one's by-line appears on a literary page. That is the ambition of the publicity hound, not the writer. The latter seeks affirmation in the hearts, the minds of his readers.

We do not presume to educate the public, nor to shape their whims and tastes. But some way, we feel, a bridge must be built to allow for the passage of more understanding between one group and the other. For although the writer wants to please everyone, over and above everything else, he strives to please his own self first, and this no mere concession to an inflated ego or a selfish interest, but in the desire to be honest. Altruism, genuine altruism, can be based only on a fulfilled self.

There seem to be several grudges that the reader holds against the writer. One, a complaint we heard some time ago, was that most of the stuff being written today was "morbid." All stories were gloomy, dark. There were no happy stories anymore.

We do not argue the statement. If there are any happy stories these are very few and far between, and more often than not, they are spiced with some tragedy. And yet easily enough this can be explained. Because this is the postwar age. This is the unhappy age. Whatever little of the brighter side of life there is comes in superficial lumps or in spiritual ecstasies that defy all the writer's capabilities except maybe the divinely inspired. The writer is sensitive to joy and sorrow. He, perceives more of the latter today. The tragedy of fiction is only the tragedy of the present world.

Moral censorship too has had its swing at literature. Only recently a local magazine found itself driven to reject stories that touched on some of the more natural functions of life. This does not worry us too much. A decade ago a kiss on print was considered immoral. We still consider it so if it is there for pure erotica's sake. Then it has no business being in a literary page. But if a fact, an incident, is not the story but part of the story, is not an emotion for passion's sake but part of the artistic unity of a whole, then we can see no viciousness in it.

We sympathize with hunger though we condemn gluttony.

Can we not understand desire while condemning lasciviousness?

True, we must agree that some of the present day authors seem to make it their business to use bedroom scenes to make their works sell. Nowhere do we find such a profusion of trash as in many historical novels of today with their multiplicity of Forever Ambers[1]. Yet any true mind can distinguish between these works and let's say the works of Ernest Hemingway.

The characters do the same things — they eat, sleep, mate. In one, these are normal activities; in the other mental indulgence on the parts of frustrated intellects.

This is the distinction we ask the reader to make.

A writer is not an irresponsible individual who carelessly corrupts the world. His words are merely the vices and virtues, not of his own self, but of the whole of mankind. How he records them proves him the artist or the historian – or a mere failure. It is to the reader's interest to distinguish between the three.

19 March 1950

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[1] Forever Amber (1944) is a historical romance novel by Kathleen Winsor set in 17th-century England and made into a film in 1947. It tells the story of an orphaned Amber St. Clare, who makes her way up through the ranks of 17th-century English society by sleeping with or marrying successively richer and more important men while keeping her love for the one man she can never have.

Estrella Alfon-Rivera, Lina Espina, Kerima Polotan Tuvera, N.V.M Gonzales

"I owe it to my public" sounds such a magnanimous, grandiloquent gesture and I wish I could fling my arms and bow and say it in just such a manner, and then proceed.

But then I don't owe what I am going to write on to any public, which public after all is not mine, as will be discovered by their request to me which I shall try to comply with as best I can.

These past months have seen a series of letters which I have received, with vari-toned, vari-colored requests, some of which were positively blindingly colorful; and consequently prohibits my writing anything on them in a column which after all is supposed to appeal only to the finest instincts of the Filipino male and female.

But because I have received a multiplicity of requests asking me to, as some correspondent puts it, "reveal" intimate glimpses into the lives of our contemporary writers, I have to roll up my sleeves, pin my hair back, turn my coat collar up, put on dark glasses, line up about ten hearts for myself which I am willing to have broken, probably have several sets of false teeth ready for any emergency – then only am I ready for figuring out on some aforementioned glimpses.

Because they are the most glamorous of their breed, and because women in this age of double standards usually get the worse of most bargains, I shall start with two who some ways make the best of them, even without getting what is bargained for at a discount.

First is Estrella Alfon-Rivera[1], who to date I have received most inquiries about and who at present gives Grant Advertising[2] a more enchanting connotation than all their slogans could put together. She hasn't been writing much this year, but has been getting the itch of late, which is truly welcome news. Of Estrella there are many stories told, most of which she herself recounts with vivacity accompanied by that laughter which so belies whatever tragedy is contained in a tale.

Lina Espina[3] who signs herself Austregelina, is really more Lina. And I hope I don't sound too vague. The last time we saw her she was sitting on the steps of the new Barranda apartment, with that smile on her face that is a mixture of wistfulness and daring which is only hers. Once she took ballet lessons, but now she merely swings it, sometime to the consternation, sometimes the pleasure of the general public. Also once she had a job, now she just pleases herself.

Kerima Polotan Tuvera[4] , the writer who has not used make-up for about a year, is happy. It is so seldom that one can state such a thing of any person that one knows quite well, and yet it is the truth Mimay is happy. And everything else to be said about her is anti-climactic beside that fact. She has a cozy, solid looking chalet in Pasay, a job, a dog who dislikes females, and Johnny Tuvera[5]. Newest acquisition is a pair of potted plants with pink blossoms that stand flanking her doorstep. Something there is about Johnny and Mimay that spells magic, a dream come true, even at those times when very prosaically Johnny goes around the house with an ice bag perched on his head like a bird's nest while

Mimay kicks off her slippers and goes around bare-footed, for no other reason, we suspect, except that she likes to relish the feeling of her feet on the cool floors of her own home.

Another couple that has us still hoping that there actually is something in wedded life besides being wed are N.V.M Gonzales[6] and Narita. Of them too many stories are told, one of whichN. V. M. himself has a particular love for, when in the States, he found himself suddenly thirsty and with no visible fountain in sight, except one standing in the middle of — was it Washington Square? — to which he quickly proceeded and quenched his thirst on a small, typical, park fountain, well splotched and decorated with bird's leavings. But as he was gulping down the water he slowly noticed people staring at him , wondering probably what peculiar sort of bird this was, taking his fill at what he found out later was a bird fount.

N.V.M. and Narita stay somewhere in San Andres, and gatherings in their house always bring some nostalgic memory of days spent in America with writers sitting around cups of coffee,
glossing till midnight over important and unimportant things, laughing always at their own expense and making fantastic plans that were never meant to come true.

21 May 1950

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[1] Estrella Alfon was a pioneering Filipino short story writer and playwright whose psychologically sharp and socially observant fiction became foundational to Philippine literature in English.

[2] Ron Grant Advertising was a mid-20th-century Manila advertising agency associated with the cosmopolitan postwar Philippine business and media world of the 1950s, though detailed surviving records are scarce.

[3] Lina Espina-Moore was a Filipino novelist, poet, and educator known for lyrical historical fiction and works centered on women, memory, and Philippine identity.

[4] Kerima Polotan Tuvera was an acclaimed Filipino novelist, essayist, and journalist celebrated for elegant prose exploring class, morality, and postwar Manila society.

[5] Johnny Tuvera was a Filipino journalist, editor, and public relations figure associated with Manila's postwar media and political circles and was the husband of writer Kerima Polotan Tuvera.

[6] N.V.M. Gonzalez was a major Filipino novelist and National Artist whose fiction portrayed rural life, migration, and the tensions between tradition and modernity in the Philippines.

The really mature writer is also the most mature of men.

We once had a friend who became so enamoured of writing and of Thomas Wolfe, that, unable to succeed in any original pose as an author, he decided to adopt the Wolfe way. He tried to find out everything about Wolfe's writing habits—the hour, the dress, the position, the place—everything. Next thing we knew, he had bought rolls of paper instead of reams because he claimed Wolfe used rolls. Then he built himself a strange-looking desk similar to a musician's stand, and a footstool, because it seemed that Wolfe did most of his writing standing up. Then to top it all—as an added innovation of his own—he bought a green eyeshade.

Whether he has succeeded or not, we do not know, but he certainly has tried his best adopting all the outward trappings of the conventional idea of how one should appear when busy with that strangest of professions—writing.

Perhaps we should offer a similar formula—and without tongue in cheek either—to all those who inquire into how one writes. Because that seems to be the only answer—get to a typewriter and start pounding or pick up a pen and start scribbling. Whether the Muses are there or not, sweat it out. In a few months' time, if you are really sincere with yourself, and detached enough as all writers have to be, you will find out whether you have the makings of a writer or not.

Are writers special beings with peculiarities that set them off from the rest of the world? We do not know. That they take on certain habits, or that certain habits make them what they are—that is a fact. Whether their art is the effect of their character coupled with a certain talent, or whether their character is developed out of the art which they have dedicated themselves to, is as redundant a problem as the chicken-and-egg interrogation.

The writer, we presume to judge, is one of the cruelest and kindest of all beings. He can observe the slow pains and tortures that some other living organism has to go through, condition himself to empathic reaction which enables him to fully comprehend the suffering of others and hence offer the most sympathetic understanding since he has the sensitivity to follow the aches that others feel. At the same time, he is by nature detached from it all, stands apart and, with analytical eye, absorbs the potential material evolving before his eyes.

But if that is cruelty, the almost materialistic approach to events, or a selfishness that may be accused as the undervaluing of all human emotions, still it is not a mere selfishness that involves other people alone. For if the writer is cruel, he is perhaps cruelest to himself. As all honesty and truth have to be cruel in the very process of cutting to the core, of scraping off all the outward trimmings that make up romantic veils to one's knowledge of oneself.

The writer's first subject matter is himself. Only later, when the emotional subjugation and perceptive keenness have been developed, can he transfer his material into the field of strangers—only when he has fully matured and is able to lose himself in the personality of others. It is not a matter of the

writer absorbing the world into his own limited mind. It is a matter of the world absorbing the writer into its kaleidoscopic, ever-changing scope. It is self-forgetfulness as one being in the world. It is non-existence in moments when the world is recognized.

This seems to be an almost monstrous picture that we are building up of the writer—as some unemotional robot whom one cannot affect, or hurt, or get a personal reaction from. But then we are speaking of the perfectly developed artisan. When he is that, he takes in some other level, the properties of a Saint. It is being capable of transcendence of the ordinary ties that bind a man to earth. Some call it to escape the more harrowing demands of the world. But to all who have reached that state, or who have had even little moments of it, they recognize it as their own world—and in it is no hypocrisy, nor denial, nor self-pity, nor the feeling of martyrdom for the sake of the world.

It is the acme of egoism that finds cognizance in the world in the form of altruism. Yet it is when one understands, loves humanity most, that one is most free from it, and hence less exacting.

The really mature writer is also the most mature of men.

4 June 1950

The Philippine Poetry Annual covering the period from 1947 to 1948

Manuel A. Viray[1], who probably stands out in the contemporary literary group of the country as one of the best equipped to handle the criticism of poetry—and conclusively the compiling of a collection that should merit some attention of all word-lovers—has come out with a new volume that is further evidence of his keen sensibilities and perceptive faculties.

The Philippine Poetry Annual covering the period from 1947 to 1948 is about as good an anthology as one can arrange under the present circumstances in which poetry of the Philippines survives. The lack of more outstanding selections in the volume cannot be blamed on Viray, whose only role is to gather, to sift, and then synthesize the individual productions into a coherent evaluation. Neither can the poets be dealt with too heavy a hand.

English poetry in the Philippines probably reflects less than most other arts the contemporary conditions of the country and in other ways suffers disadvantages unparalleled by any other following in the artistic field.

Combining the difficulties that face the composition of a good musical form and the subtleties of sensitive prose, the majority of our local poets seem to bypass unconsciously this problem by the more romantic, more spontaneous inspirational basis that enables them to produce form intuitively melodious and content naturally meaningful. But more often than not, the slips show, the lack of technique or at least enough time given over to the study of technique reveals itself.

Some readers have accused our poetry of being imperfect phonetically. This is a sound observation which tallies with the critical attitudes of poets themselves who have perused our poems more closely. The reasons behind this fault are obvious. Although not really possessing generalized and legitimate colloquialisms, we have just the same evolved pronunciations of words in the English language which are peculiarly our own, and which occur side by side with a quaint juxtaposition of words that result in attractive Filipinisms. In prose, especially in fiction, this tends to add to the quality of our work, as long as not overindulged in, giving a sensitive effect that is more than local color since it becomes part of the style.

But where prose is less subject to if not completely free from the demands of harmonious sounds, poetry depends a large deal on it.

There has been much argument on the nationalization of poetry, much in the same way as there is a distinguishable Filipino literature arising not alone from content, from tangible manipulations and nuances, but from the more undefinable elements which make it our own. Is such a thing possible in poetry? Can the use of certain peculiarities of sound make a piece more Filipino?

If poems were made to be listened to, put down in records, we can imagine an easy answer to this question. Just as the British accent would in some ways form part of the substance of a poem, so

would Filipino linguistic traits. But poetry is more read in silence than otherwise. As soon as it is put down in print, it belongs to the reader who absorbs it with his own individual subjectiveness.

Yet all this is but a fraction of what the Filipino poet must overcome. There are a hundred other obstacles to be surmounted—the lack of enough encouragement from a public that would rather understand right away what is written than work with the poem and appreciate not only the matter itself but the experience that goes with it in subject as well as form; the subsequent shackles imposed by the reading public or the editors who can hardly afford to give space to poets; the microscopic returns that poetry gives—these and so many others.

For this reason we feel humble in the face of such attempts as are included in Mr. Viray's anthology. Here, we feel, are sincere efforts of artists to express themselves thru a medium that accrues no profit to themselves insofar as it is understood in the ordinary sense. There's the highest form of egoism, the kind which others call altruism.

The path they have made which leads to our future poetry is rough—at times attractive, at times negligible. But it is still a path made through the heavy underbrush that has tended to hide the now visible road.

9 July 1950

[1] Manuel A. Viray was the leading proponent of "New Criticism" in the Philippines. advocating advocated for a shift away from the sentimental, romanticized era toward a more rigorous, ironic, and complex poetic style influenced by the American New Critics.

There is something in provincial life that those who have lived in cities all their lives will never understand empathically

Some day some enthusiastic young writer will go to stay in the provinces to live for some time. It will be either due to health or finances, if he goes there voluntarily, since therein lies the Magellan's knee [1] of all artists. Or because he has been exiled in some form or another.

At any rate we warrant a guess that the provinces will do one of two things to writers: either they will degenerate into some form of country esquire, and generate future country esquires whose only claim to fame is that they frequent the best night clubs when they get to Manila and that they have an ancestor who once got published in local magazines. Or they will write a novel.

And if they do the latter, we hope that at least one will think of writing the saga of provincial life—we do not mean rural, back-into-the-backwoods Arguilla[2], Fresnosa[3], and so forth local color, nor do we mean the Joaquin, Sionil Jose and so forth absorption in their characteristic Filipiniana, nor the at times sensitive, at times sophisticated treatments that most of our writers have for things Filipino. In fact, I am not quite sure I can put into words what I mean.

But I know it is something that French writers can do to perfection, write about with just that right proportion of affectionate tolerance, sarcastic sense of humor, and human understanding of the people who live, and rule and are ruled in the provinces.

To some extent Zola did it in his novels depicting several strata of society in localities, but no one can really compete with the full exploitation of the idea as Balzac did. His successive volumes of the "Human Comedy," as he called the series, were so many revelations of society made base and sordid by the leveling mediocrity of democratic ideas.

Of course, Balzac was at times if not always prejudiced in his treatment of the middle-class form of society which he wrote about, finding in the triumphant prestige of that class a deadly blight on all true refinement and beauty. As Balzac saw it, life under the existing social state was brought about only by the baser passions, disguised by either ignorance or hypocrisy.

We do not say that that is the case in the subject which some day we would like to read about. A sincere analysis of provincial society cannot ignore the best elements that necessarily exist in it, as in any other form of group. But, of course, writers of the country, with that tinge of what is called, rather fallaciously, "realism," pick out mostly the more sordid, the more quaint, and also the more characteristic, to paint a true picture of lives but bringing the focus on the more grotesquely normal aspects of it.

There is something in provincial life that those who have lived in cities all their lives will never understand empathically. Sympathetically, maybe yes, and even that would mean a great deal of sensitivity on their parts.

But people who have lived in the provinces all their lives will never fully comprehend some of the things about it either—all the thousand and one virtues and vices and the so many types of character, from the town madman to the provincial governor, the local priest and region's prostitutes, and all the things that tie them together and what make them appear different, and the reality of their identity as well as the truth of their individuality.

Contained in the story of all mankind, in provincial society we have all these in a more concentrated form, and in our times, in even more complex a manner than at other epochs. Squeezed together by limitations of space but still containing the essence of the matter as a slice of salami would, we would have, if someone would, a written work the value of which has no need to be further stressed.

19 November 1950

[1] Magellan sustained a serious knee injury during a campaign in Azamor, Morocco. The injury caused a permanent limp, which impacted his mobility for the rest of his life.

[2] Manuel Arguilla was a Filipino writer and resistance figure best known for lyrical short stories depicting rural Ilocano life, especially the classic "How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife."

[3] Delfin Fresnosa was chiefly known for his prolific short stories and essays depicting Filipino provincial life, folklore, and everyday social realities in postwar Philippine literature in English and member of the prewar/postwar Veronican literary circle. (The Veronicans were a highly influential group of young Filipino writers in English formed in the 1930s who sought to make Philippine literature more socially conscious, realistic, and distinctly Filipino rather than imitative of American models.)

People talk too much these days.

I was going through a copy of the New Republic when a friend of mine who had obviously taken notice of what I was reading patted me and said, "So you're a progressive."

It's funny about a word like that. For years it has no meaning except what you see in the dictionary, then someone picks it up and uses it for some specific idea, and a verbal myth is born, a myth which sooner or later is relegated to either bad or good.

To be "progressive" is "good." Today that is the accepted notion. When you are progressive you are "intelligent," you are "aware," you are "socially conscious." The words are all loaded. There are many others.

Cloaking the atom bomb with justification are words. To have a leg to stand on, "war" is fought for "peace."

In the beginning man discovered stone and fire and iron and steel—and from these fashioned utensils and weapons. Whatever else he discovered later passed through the same double-faced mold with the domestic front and the battlefront.

Now, in this stage of the century, man has discovered the science of words. From the naive, charming lass of the eighteenth century or the enthusiastic, fiery lad with high hopes and fiery emotions of the nineteenth, the Word has grown to full maturity, is the sophisticated, scheming, and effective power of the age.

It serves the same double purpose for the home and the battlefield. Take the word "love." That belongs to the "good" category. So one says to the mother, the husband, the child, "I love you." And on soap boxes and grandstands people shout, "love of country, love of people, love of God." You speak the word and ergo, a spring is released, the corresponding reaction must come.

People talk too much these days. We all do. In more experienced countries, words are spoken to the people with a wiser eye on the effect. Whether the aim is valid or not, is another question. But in our country the language is handled with carelessness. Speeches that are masterpieces of nonsense implemented with lies are poured on the people. And the people know it.

That is why in This Year of the Lord 1951 when words have become weapons for other governments, for us they are mere boomerangs.

18 February 1951

It may not be in the actual writing that we have changed.

One day we caught C. V. Pedroche with a tattered notebook, a collection of typed pieces bylined by such pseudonyms as freddie and artie and jolcar and identified as among the generation of writers before our own. Thoughts without presumptions, writings without intentions, we were nonetheless impressed by what we read.

In some way they tied up with two things we had just read, the first about William Faulkner's favorite animal, the second the accusation of extreme frivolity directed towards the French.

Because they were young then we cannot be certain that it was a conscious act which drove those writers in C. V.'s old book to choose their roles. It could have been because of the tradition they had been brought up in, earlier by a few years than ours, but distinctly richer, not in the sense of experience in terms of war or hunger or fear but in that which their own age offered. And it could have been their literary background, so removed from ours—so full of Rabelais and Anatole France and Henry Fielding and Balzac, tempered by the new Hemingways and Faulkners, whose "lost" people, after all, are twentieth century sober reflections of the earlier ones.

It is unfortunate that this group has stopped writing. Perhaps driven by that very mulish thought that there is no sense in fiction, reflection of reality that it is, they have now concentrated their talents on efforts which show some results. Writing speeches, comic strips, press releases, even headlines, they have entered a relatively more sensible phase of existence, to the detriment of literature.

Because now the field has been left to writers who create with either their heads or their blood. On the one hand they create a piece which shows perfection of technique, as witness the leading writer of the year, N. V. M. Gonzales, or like that old Filipino song, they scribble with blood and Paloma-like produce works of deep purple passion.

It may not be in the actual writing that we have changed. The styles, as styles are, have remained individualized. But it is the flavor that is lost—not enough as were the writings that had them in the past.

It may be because, being possessed of the wisdom of the mule, we do not now ascend to the French flair for life. Seeing the senselessness of the whirring world we take it too seriously, as seriously as we do our writing, leaving then no room for detachment, for humor, and consequently for a rich, full life. We gripe at the situations without seeing the humor in our own griping. We play our roles, and mistake it for life, thereby losing the laughter reserved for intermissions.

25 February 1951

Conrado V. Pedroche (C. V. Pedroche) was a Filipino fiction writer in English active mainly in the postwar period.

The Filipino writer of this age is perhaps the servant of the public.

In the seventeenth century, Molière, in reply to his critics, wrote, "The great test of all your comedies is the judgment of the Court. It is the Court that you must study if you want to discover the art of success. There is no place where opinions are so just…"

Molière wrote this, not alone because he depended on the patronage of the court of Louis XIV, but because it was the truth. The Court, that group of a very select few who controlled the economic lives of artists, in a sense represented the intellectual elite of the age. It was easy for the writer to please his patrons, because the patrons were of a mental position to be able to appreciate not alone the things that were said of them but the manner in which that and other matters were said.

What probably was most notable about the early centuries, besides the fact that writers were beginning to be recognized as a class by themselves, was that the writers in general were not at odds with the society around them. When they dedicated their works to the king or to some nobleman, it was due to genuine appreciation. When they praised the ruling system or at least wrote on it with no satirical implications or sarcastic innuendos, it was because they were satisfied. If anything, the writers of that age felt contempt not for royalty but for the class of society from which they themselves mostly came—the middle class. This feeling was to be expressed years and years later, at a time when the bourgeoisie had begun to make itself felt, by the English writer Arnold, when he accused the English middle class of "a narrow range of intellect and instruction, a stunted sense of beauty, a low standard of manners."

The class of writers, in a sense, had formed a "caste" of its own. An intellectual aristocracy which had not been obliged to rub minds in the past with any but those of royalty, who because of their very positions had found it obligatory to absorb a background cultured enough for the taste of the writers —this class that the writers belonged to now suddenly found itself obliged to look for patronage to the middle-class for which so far it had had only contempt.

It is not surprising that many of the writers were involved in the Revolution. Idealistic to an almost unlimited degree they had to fight for a cause which they believed in, a cause which deserved support. But even then, some of them rebelled against the cultural sensibilities of the individuals with whom they fought side by side against the common enemy, the royalty.

From the perspective of time we can look back now, perhaps understand the attitude of these writers, if not agree with them. But then it is always so much easier to understand the actuations of others whose lives no longer can touch us.

They were realists in their time; we can only observe them now as Romantics, whose lives were still unaffected by factual horrors of psychology, varying religions, and uncompromising science.

In their own time they were probably as honest as writers have always wanted to be, and we only call so many of them Romantics since we observe them from the perspective of contemporary conditions, when so many actualities have been unearthed, so many truths verbally theorized to leave no room for misty gauze veils over minds.

But from the purely economic level our condition still remains the same as those early glorified servants of the Court. It is only in very few instances in our country where we can say that it is not so. And where those exceptions are in existence, it is also with some degree of safety that we may make the conclusion that the independent writer, fully free from all manners of coercion, of enforced thinking, or at best limited only to certain theoretical streets—those writers are impoverished. Or, if lucky, protected by a patron who in the manner of the seventeenth century Court is fortunately provided with a background that has risen above the more general and rampant sort of mentality that tends to stunt creative freedom.

The Filipino writer of this age is perhaps, as has been so generally declared, the servant of the public. It is the public whom he has to please if he is to make provisions for himself economically.

If the "public" so-called were only the simple element that such a term initially seems to imply, the writer would not have too great a problem, accepting the thesis of Emerson that man is basically good. The writer could remain honest with himself and please the public too. The writer would be dealing with a mass of people free from prejudice, from clichés imposed by political and religious strategies, from all kinds of hypocrisies brought about by a generation infused with business culture, emotional unstability, and a hectic desire for self-assertion.

But the "public" has also been imposed upon, has been insinuated into having a taste which it terms "cultured" or "good" only because it is so felicitous to the propagation of the beliefs of a few who are either fanatics or opportunists.

Our public, recipient of all the disadvantages of an impoverished and slavish nation, has never quite realized the meaning of thinking for oneself. As much, the writer has to follow suit, making the best of the little freedom that he has, exaggerating it even, so as to better prove that this is a free nation we live in, made up of free men with free minds.

6 May 1951

For lack of a novel, an anthology is born.

For lack of a novel, an anthology is born. And like the stars there will be not one, not two, but legion. In other words, four or five. Most of them may be plain states of mind.

The PIC[1]—and who has not heard of the PIC that can put to shame the Tower of Babel, the Pentecost, the wisdom of Solomon and Jonah's whale all rolled into a bun—has a Treasury of Filipino Literature lodged in one of its brain compartments. They claim it will come out, fatigue of the synapses notwithstanding. Only connections under consideration purely financial. Plus, a certain degree of the philistine's attitude by some top men. It will include all the best, it is said.

We are almost inclined to believe that. Not that we are suffering from a Good Samaritan psychology but because we had a look at their Quarterly. (Which, by the way we hear, will be the first Quarterly of its type, covering only one season, this one. The other three quarters will also be relegated to the department of State of Mind.) That O.A.O.[2] of an issue is good. But then Armando D. Manalo[3], who has promised to perish with the Quarterly (such intellectual principles we thought had vanished with the days of Lord Byron) had to familiarize himself first with all the traditions of advertising and salesmanship reminiscent of only small sections of the PIC and which bids fair not to be repeated.

But maybe the Treasury will out, gold nuggets and all. The problem is, if they're going to have all the best, what happens to the rest?

Take the Women Writers' Anthology, brainstorm of some of the most stormy brains that ever ate a Businessman's Luncheon at the Boie [4] and designed baby dresses for the Dickens' dream children. They'll have stories, they'll have essays, they'll have poems and reportage. And they're out to prove that women too can do it. In the words of the old Betting on Hutton song, "Anything you can do I can do better…"

And it's not between the PIC and the WWs alone either. Some commercial establishment has been sending out those Name, Place, Date of Birth (Ha, Ha) slips, which means another anthological excursion. This will also include the Best.

The Best, from what we heard over the head of a girl with gardenias in her hair, is also the aim of Maning Viray, he of the critical, Foreign Affairs, and even Fonseca[5] fame. He too may come out with an anthology. Also, Franz Arcellana, it is said.

Now Franz, because he is one of our favorite people, we almost sympathize with. Beaten to the draw by the rest, what possible Best can there be left for his anthology? He might have to wait another five years, by which time the grammarian's Comparative Case in reference to literature may have aptly changed to bad, tolerable, and good.

But then, as I myself once recited in an oratorical nightmare, "Look to the past for inspiration, to the future for despair." There will be days and days and ways and ways for that. Ahhh, but once more to bite my teeth and gnash my nails, to type with my head on the ground and hope to produce the saga of the year and keep that one minute silence to the tune of "In Despair."

For such is the feeling that the anthologies have given, that all the good shall be a thing of the past. That today this year, one starts once more.

Which may be right at that. For from the ridiculous to the sublime—we hear that the Far Eastern University, long may its tribe increase, did awake one night from a deep dream of peace. And in the best Abou Ben Adhem[6] tradition found its name topping the single name list of backers of a literary magazine. An angel in the most terrestrial terms, it will put out something like Kenyon, like Partisan, like what can be, should be, is not yet except in small doses.

Maybe the Gordian Knot of the literary scene is on its way to being loosened. Maybe this is the year of the writer. Maybe belts may be loosened too quite soon and we can graduate from Number 3 in menus to Number 2.

24 June 1951

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[1] The Philippine International Club (PIC) was a prominent social, intellectual, and cultural gathering place in postwar Manila frequented by journalists, writers, diplomats, artists, politicians, academics, and Manila society figures.

[2] OAO - Official Organ Of, in that the publication is the official publication/journal/news organ of that organization.

[3] Armando Manalo — Filipino journalist, essayist, and diplomat known for his polished writing on literature, culture, and public affairs in publications

[4] Botica Boie was a historic Escolta pharmacy founded in 1830 that became a famed postwar Manila gathering place for writers, journalists, artists, and intellectuals because of its central downtown location and café-like social atmosphere.

[5] Fonseca Affair (or the Fonseca controversy) was a significant episode in Philippine literary history that took place between late 1950 and early 1951 in Manila. It centered on a series of literary critiques and a subsequent "trial" regarding the merits of modern versus traditional poetry, with Manuel (Maning) Viray as a primary figure.

[6] Abou Ben Adhem is a famous short 19th-century poem by Leigh Hunt about a humble man whose love for humanity earns him divine favor.

Franz, whom we have always regarded as a man as definite with his hesitations as he is with his certainties

This year's summation of last year's poetry by Manuel Viray caused a small ripple. His later review of the fiction picture of 1950 received greater audience reaction, half of whom claimed not to have understood what he was talking about, but who begged to disagree just the same on the more obvious points. His latest, which will come out in the PIC Quarterly, is more meat than aperitifs, may give rise to more thought than dissension.

But this year's major literary work, aside from the field of fiction about which we cannot allow ourselves any hasty conclusions, may still come from out Through-A-Glass-Darkly predecessor, Franz Arcellana.

Franz, whom we have always regarded as a man as definite with his hesitations as he is with his certainties, is going to run a series of twelve articles on writers in a local magazine. Scheduled to start sometime in July, seven will be dedicated to what he considers the literary giants of the country—namely Villa, Bulosan, Gonzales, Joaquin, Arguilla, Rotor, and Javellana. Scales tip heaviest when Villa is weighed, lightest when Javellana. Gonzales he thinks is "important," Joaquin the same, "and perhaps the most original of them all."

The five other articles will include discussion on The Older Writers, The Younger Writers, The Poets, The Critics, and The Literary Groups, No one, it seems, will be neglected. Neither will anyone be spared. Including himself, for he will be among, the critics.

Franz feels that later writing has not accomplished much more than the past in point of achievement, but that as far as greater consciousness is concerned, they have gone much farther than the old crowd.

Of course one may say that consciousness is in itself achievement, but that would be giving two meanings to one term. As it is, Franz himself is none too sure, at least not at the time when we talked, that this new consciousness has helped writing very winch.

This it seems would lead to the age-old question of the purposes of writing, where answers vary from the McKinley-like version of divine inspiration, to New Masses and Mainstream motivations, to Midas-touch ambitions, to even the Great Rigmarole theory. From the time of Don Fernando Bagong Banta[1]—who worked in verse of octosyllabic in Spanish and Tagalog, and who was the first author in the Philippines to be recognized in the work of another writer, a Spaniard—to the present, the question has still been unsettled as to the precise reasons for writing.

It is easy enough to say after one has done with the typing that he did it for money, or for love, or for sheer nerves. But why the subject that he writes on? What brings this about?

An empathic outpouring, as the “talindaw” or “diyona” which our forefathers originated in song during harvest time?

As an explanation of something that mystifies the limited minds of mere thinkers, as the story of the “Origin of the Coconut”?

As a protest against existing conditions, the way Rizal protested in his novels? .

One could go on and on, review the whole literary scene, from the “darangan” of the Moros to the latest stories in the Sunday weeklies — the answer would still be the same: “If you have to ask, you'll never know.”

Literature will always follow the same pattern that life does doing things because things must be done. Not for us to ask the rhyme or reason for the paths followed, the same that we cannot demand explanations for creation.

Of course within the circular framework where we all run our races, there must be some apparent design. It is a choice between a role with ambition or degeneration. And the latter has always been out of the question —unless itself chosen as another role.

And so we come to the almost childish thought that a writer writes because he writes, in the same way that another one who writes does not really write because he is not a writer.

And the cycle will go on and on. Once in a while, one will pause and ask, “What’s it all about anyway?” Maybe he will even question the validity of words against the inevitability of life. But for a certainty the blank sheet will be picked up again, accompanied by the shrug of the shoulders, and there will be the half-excited smile accompanying the thought of “So what’s to do, there’s only this.”

1 July 1951

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[1] Don Fernando Bagong Banta was a pioneering Filipino poet and 17th-century writer known for being one of the earliest "ladinos"—natives who had mastered the Spanish language and could write in both Spanish and Tagalog. As a bilingual scholar, he served as an interpreter for Spanish friars and assisted in the editing and printing of early religious texts, including *Arte y Reglas de la Lengua Tagala* (1610).

II The artist and the art

Can we separate the artist from the man when we view his work?

Twice we were faced this week with the same question, under different circumstances, but the question remained a constant.

Is the integrity of the artist separate from the integrity of the man? Are these two entities separable in the same person? Is such a quality definable as "the state or quality of being complete, undivided, or unbroken; honesty, uprightness"—can such a quality paradoxically assume selectivity in the parts of an individual's being? It sounds like a problem the only answer of which would be the existence of a split personality on the part of the artist concerned.

And actually it is not the problem which we, the masses who look upon the talent of others with awe, are to consider. Ours not the riddle of figuring out the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde nature except insofar as the origin of such a split comes from some unintended crime of society, which unfortunately almost all of us are guilty. But this is another deeper phase of twentieth century neuroses which we do not aim to bring up at the moment.

The question we really face now is—in the presence of such obvious discrepancy between the nature of "evil man" (to use any other words might lead to semantics, so we use this simplest of terms) and his genuine talent as an artist, should we, the masses, have any doubts at all as to which course to take in the true appreciation of his mastery?

The question posed sounds easy, even stupid. The obvious answer would be that any honest critic should consider the work, not the artist. And yet the critic, like the artist, is also a man. And unlike the artist can we say that the critic is being dishonest with himself when his attitude is influenced by his knowledge of the person who produced the masterpiece?

When Ezra Pound received a prize for his poetry there was a great to-do among even his most rabid followers. They felt that all democratic ideals were being trampled on in the selection of such a man who had flagrantly stood for everything that was against democracy.

But still Ezra Pound got the prize. Whether it does America credit or not we do not venture to judge.

What we consider is the present. For example, how much can one who appreciates art, wants to help it along, remain a sincere art-lover and an honest person at the same time? Knowing that by buying a really good masterpiece we are helping the cause of art in the form of artist and at the same time helping the career of a man who tries by fair and foul means to wreck the lives of innocent people, should we buy that ticket to pleasure for a few perceptive art-lovers as against the balance of aid for the man who causes pain to others?

To this we do not know the answer. We merely pose the question. But to another question we were faced with this same week we feel we have a more positive attitude. And that is, is it right to thwart

the career of an artist because to the observing eye he commits a sin against any of the conventional rules of living? It is right to condemn without being sure?

True, the best offense is defense, and as the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. But first there should be the certainty of the existence of a germ. We, society, cannot condemn a person for a crime before the crime is committed. If so, why breed men?

Society has been accused of very many crimes. Crimes that go unpunished because if they are, only fools and idiots would remain out of jail.

And one of the biggest sins that we all in some time of our life or another are guilty of is self-righteousness. For us, the peak of the mountain, for a few selected others, the slope, and for the rest of the world the valley below. The trouble is being up so high we think we are omnipotent, all-seeing. We forget that our feet look exactly the same as the feet the people down below have but which we cannot see.

It pays once in a while to descend. Then, maybe we shall end up following somebody's example, and start washing the feet of our fellowmen.

26 February 1950

Is the artist responsible for his work only insofar as it is a work of art or also its impact upon society and the lives of people?

A couple of years ago I saw a movie called "The Portrait of Maria Dolores." The story was of a talented painter who became so impressed with the face of a woman he decided to put it down on canvas. After several sittings he had the face but not the body, since he wanted to do a nude of her, she refused to have it. But the painter, not giving up his art, instead asked another woman, a common harlot, to take her place. After the piece was done, it stood as a commendable work of art, with the face of the beautiful Mexican, the body of another. Proud of his work, the artist exhibited it to a public whose morals were different from his.

The effect could have been the only possible one. All the conventional elements of the town rose against him. Only one person listened to the truth. But because he did, they stoned him, drove him out of town. Maria Dolores, too, had to run away from society. The artist, meanwhile, after shaking his head sadly, packed his bags and, contented with himself and his work, went off to further improve his art on some other part of the globe.

We have argued often that an artist should be given the freedom to write about whatever subject he wishes to write on. It may be life, reality, or fiction, or the combination of all. The artist is responsible only to himself as far as concerns his art, the basic ethics of his profession being the knowledge of his work and his sincerity to it. If he has done his work well, like our painter above, is he not then entitled to a feeling of fulfillment, of success? Should we not hold him responsible for the havoc he has caused in the life of Maria? After all, it was not his aim to paint her, the person, but to paint the idea in his mind of a character generated by the sight and the impression Maria's person made on him. That she was different from the whole image he had of her did not disturb him; that the effect he could produce on her life did not trouble him because, being an artist, the most consuming thing in his mind was not other people's but his own mental conception.

And yet we ask a question now parallel to a question we asked several months ago when the problem was: "Can we, mere laymen, separate the artist from the man when we view his work?" Today the question is similar, yet different. Is the artist responsible for his work only insofar as it is a work of art or also its impact upon society and the lives of people?

Taking it from the creator's point of view—is he a man before he is an artist or an artist before he is man? Or is he both at the same time, and maturely so? We cannot presume to make any judgments on artists because they usually have their own codes of ethics, and to each of them his own is the right one for himself. We admire a creator whose only concern is to produce a fine work of art with utter disregard of himself, his closest friends, and the world in general. We admire a man who can forget himself and lose himself in his understanding of others, their sensitivities, their lives, their problems. In their own fields each is a success. Is a combination of both possible? We think so. The portrait of Maria would have been different, but it does not mean it would have been less well done.

And what of the people whose lives are affected, whose fault was the fault of being different and whose shortcoming—the inability to be really understood or cared about by the artist whose creation was generated from her person—boomerangs only on herself? The detached gratitude of the painter, her own contribution to art, are they things she can view with objectivity when the wheels of society have been set in motion against her by her very own existence?

And lastly, what of society, of that most powerful group whose role is to judge by appearances—who as individuals probably are mere weak vacillating creatures that the artist finds uninteresting, for whom his searching Midas fingers sees as material, incontrovertible into beautiful conceptions—as the Marias are—individuals from whom Maria herself would not run away if she were faced by them singly, to whom she could probably explain the truth. Yet in one body they are strong, menacing, frightful. A combination of all the consciences of society forging any explanations. Judgment is without trial. Are they to be blamed for their cruel humanity and credulousness?

We pose this problem to a world of artists and laymen whose mission to create and judge is not over, and to a world of human beings whose power to hurt and cause slow deaths among the living still goes on.

25 June 1950

III Music and dance

Three cultural events: Sonia Rifkin, Mossesgeld's Traviata, the Korean War

This past week has brought us three "cultural" events. The first of them was the opening of a Drama School spearheaded by Sonia Rifkin[1].

The most interesting part of the occasion, we think, was an excerpt from a letter read to the guests by one of the most important figures in the school. In it the writer, a young Filipino boy, expressed doubt whether the school admitted Filipinos. We are glad to say that it does.

Whether the school will help much in the fostering of the proper spirit or the development of good drama in the Philippines, is another matter. So far, we cannot pretend to make any judgments on what we think the group of Mrs. Rifkin will be able to do or will not do. We have never yet seen any of her productions, although we have heard about them from people whose opinions we listen to if not always agree with. Seeing her personally, we feel in some small way that our friends have been as perceptive as they usually are.

Drama has far, very far to go in the Philippines. It is not for us here now to go into the innumerable faults it suffers from. Two weak lines, a whole thesis. We feel that we have a message to each and every director and down to the very electrician of the stage. But we are quite sure that what we have to say is only an amateurish mix of what this newly opened school and experienced stage-hands have in mind.

We hope that in a couple of years they will be able to present a play that is, if not as good as an experimental play produced by universities in the United States, at least a high-school experimental play that they have in that country. Americans, wherever else you want to judge them of or praise them with, produce better plays in their own country than what they have managed here.

All that we can do now is wish better luck to Mrs. Rifkin and her new group. It is a worthwhile attempt they are making. We look forward to worthwhile results.

This we found in the second event of the week—Professor Mossesgeld's[2] presentation of "Traviata."

Melodic opera for us has always been a hard lump to swallow, perhaps because it is a medium which, as someone said, hardly permits of audience identification. Hence we have to view it with an almost purely artistic approach, and whatever emotional reaction we may have has to be aroused by the masterly handling of the several tangents of their roles, plus the several affecting props that also make use of in opera in a similar degree that the legitimate stage does.

Our recent "Traviata," of course was not perfection. That would be asking too much from a group that is limited in many ways by lack of proper costumes and to some extent proper talent. But because the main roles were handled by a good singer and an outstanding actress combined, the presentation came through with a flourish. Cely Carrillo, the teenager with the voice, we discovered has at this

early age something more than merely that, and something which is most important in the success of the career of an opera singer. She is a very good actress—we expect some day that under proper direction she will become a great one. Despite the fact that, because of her youth, her voice does not still carry the power and strength which the mature role she played demands, and in spite of her very youthful face, Cely Carrillo played the part of the tragic heroine with all the tragedian's force. It was inside her, the part she was playing, and with consummate skill as an artist she put over her mood to the audience.

Another pleasant surprise in the presentation was Oscar Keese. Now we forgive him for some of the absurd roles he has played in the local movies. He has a voice worth working at—and if the only means to that end is celluloid histrionics, we cannot blame him.

The third event which we call "cultural" is the licensed participation of whoever may wish to in the Korean mess[3]. It appears to be another step taken for the cultivation of our civilization. We can think of no other reason than that. Of course it is a few people's opinion of what civilization and what cultivation should consist of. But let us be Platonic and say that the judgment of the few (wise) is commendable.

23 July 1950

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[1] Sonia Rifkin was a Russian-American theater director and acting teacher active in Manila in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

[2] Jose Mossesgeld-Santiago was a celebrated Filipino operatic bass-baritone who brought international recognition to the Philippines before World War II and his influence spanned through the 1950s as a revered figure in Philippine music.

[3] "Korean mess" refers to the Philippine decision in 1950 to join the Korean War by sending troops, which was one of the biggest political and cultural issues in Manila at the time.

Conductors: Clapp, Valencia, San Pedro

It is always with great awe and a sprinkling of envy that I have listened to an orchestra tuning up, heard the sounds coming from the several instruments clashing against each other, mixing in a medley of unrecognizable, apparently unpatterned, but at the same time compelling discordance, till finally they find their ways together to one path and one melody.

It is what seems to me the preliminary search of the musician for agreement with himself, with his sheet of music, and with the rest of the orchestra which has constantly attracted me, like a fire-hound, to wherever there are rehearsals.

I remember how on rainy days just like this a friend of mine and I would sneak into the rehearsals of the school symphony orchestra and sit far, far behind the hall, in one corner, to make as little noise as possible because the conductor was an impossible crank as far as noises went while he was rehearsing. Members came and took their several places, all young, all of them as if possessing something which no one else could lay any claim to. They'd sit there and pull their violins out of their cases and tune their cellos and very soon the old man himself would come in and shout at anyone who was chewing gum to for heaven's sake spit the thing out and whoever was talking would he shut up or get out, and then the rehearsing would start in earnest, once in a while with the conductor cursing and damning everyone all over the place, at other times verbally hugging all of them to his bosom.

And when the night of the big event came, it would be entirely different. They'd come into the brightly lit hall no longer smiling but with serious faces, and all dressed up as if they did not belong to the school like the rest of us, and Clapp[1], which was the name of the conductor, would bow stiffly from his oversized waist and wait for the clapping and then the program would start. And even when the music was very good, it still could never have that something which I went to rehearsals for.

A couple of weeks ago I went again to another rehearsal, after more than a year of having abstained. This time it was Luis Valencia's[2] turn to wave the baton, and to curse if he would. He did not. But one had only to watch his face to read what he was saying inside himself. Which was not always uncomplimentary.

For the orchestra was really making a good, concerted effort at putting over the Symphony in D Major for Violin of Lucio San Pedro[3], the first that the composer has ever made, and the first of its kind here in the country, for that matter.

The music is not great. We call Beethoven great and Mozart great and Bach great. In their own genre we even call Walton great and Stravinsky great.

But we do think San Pedro is good. And compared to the rest of the stuff we have heard around town, we would say he is very good. And we think too that Valencia is good. And compared to some excessive baton wielders we have seen in our time we think he is rather wonderful.

But that was in the rehearsal. With anticipation we look forward to this evening's fare. And with great anticipation to the next rehearsal, we can attend.

8 October 1950

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[1] Philip Greeley Clapp (1888–1954) was a prominent American composer, conductor, and educator who directed the School of Music at the University of Iowa from 1919 to 1953. During the 1940s, he regularly conducted the University Symphony Orchestra, earning major national awards for his interpretations of Germanic Romantic music.

[2] Luis C. Valencia, violinist and conductor, earned a diploma from the University of the Philippines (UP) Conservatory of Music in 1932 and in 1938, he became the first Filipino graduate of the Vienna State Academy of Music. He then pioneered the CCP orchestra, now known as the PPO.

[3] Lucio San Pedro was a celebrated Filipino composer and conductor best known for blending Western classical music with deeply Filipino lyrical and folk traditions.

Only at such a time when we can conceive of something as great ... can we really call ourselves free.

It was over a dish of stuffed fish which we were having for lunch at a friend's place that I was drawn back to days two years ago—of cool autumn blowing crisp winds, of green leaves turned yellow and pink, and evening sitting on the porch steps not talking, nor thinking, just listening. It was Mozart then.

And Mozart over stuffed fish brought it all back. Our friend said it was not right that one should get to appreciate music in that way. Which is true. It is not the memories which make anything great. In this instance, of course, it had been the other way around—that the things that surrounded the music were remembered only because they belonged together somehow. And it was not the music which was the background. Mozart was the principal actor. The rest was a harmonious backdrop.

It is different to disassociate one with the other, of course. Possibly because of sentimentality; maybe because of empathy, but most probably because of our ego we seek identity in each creative piece. Thus "War and Peace" has been qualified as great not alone for its inherent values but because readers are able to find themselves in at least one of the characters of the book or, if not themselves, what they wish they could be. And so has Robert Frost become a promise since he holds identity of nostalgic America within his poems.

"Night and Day" is beautiful. It holds the memory of love. But "Slow Boat to China" can hold so much. Therein lies one of the best examples. One is an effect. The other is a cause. One is beautiful of itself. We can share it only with those who to us have beauty. The latter assumes beauty, if we may call it such, only since it accidentally becomes connected with something that is of value to us.

There are instances too when because of what has surrounded some music, we are apt to hold a prejudice against it. But if it is great, it surmounts such a block. Thus, it was with Beethoven's Fifth. Not gifted with that detachment that transcends surroundings, there was a time when I could not listen to the symphony without some sarcastic remark. So much had it been identified with the triumph of democracy over totalitarianism, which in itself is laudable, but when one has to make use of some music persistently—and carried even so far as in movie cartoons with wild animals playing Fascist roles and further impressing us with the idea, not that democracy involves love of man for man but revenge, sadistic, brutal revenge, from what is purportedly an idealized form of humanity—then even Beethoven's Fifth held some bitter taste.

But because of its greatness one cannot have that feeling for long, and the obstacle of propaganda-used pedestrianism is vaulted and one, of necessity, is made to realize that a fine piece cannot be spoiled by all the muck surrounding it.

It is always a happy event when a great work of art is also 'human.' I do not use 'human' here to mean that quality which all masterpieces have or otherwise become null. Rather it is the quality which does

not demand technical ability in the listener, as in the case of music. Thus, the layman who appreciates Claire de Lune may at the same time like Brahms' Violin Concerto but be incapable of swallowing the Eroica. Such a piece stands as a 'golden mean' serving an end of itself, since it contains the elements of greatness.

But at the same time, it also serves as a means to a further ascent into that level of appreciation where one can fling off the outward trappings of circumstance around oneself and take a thing for what it really is, not how it ties up to our existence.

Only at such a time when we can conceive of something as great which promises nothing to us—nor serves our ends, whether emotionally, intellectually, or materially—can we really call ourselves free.

Only then can we truly appreciate what is good.

5 November 1950

Confidently, we think ballet is an art: Benny Villanueva, Pacita Madrigal Warns

Balletophile or balletomane, punsters and enthusiasts may have their choice. All we say is that we are impressed. The ballet, once a pretentious bastardization of our atavistic 'veladas' and the real classic form, now rises on its toes and assumes new stature—not much, not very much, that is true (except at those moments when Benny Villanueva[1] leaps in the air and sets us to thumb twiddling by the criss-cross us-cross-eyed-effect involvement of his feet as he rises in air. We even imagine we counted him doing it six at one time. The closest we ever got to such a feat was when we beat on the table six times after tossing a stone high up in the air before catching it again.)

And so we beg to reminisce. To that time last year when we first started writing for this magazine under a most owlish of titles (which reminds us that, nineteen-fifty-one coming along, we are thinking of shedding our titular appendage and sticking on a new one, but we don't know just what yet and we hope a new word is invented come new year because we like being original, the closest we have ever come to it being in relation to some matter concerning apples and snakes, and even then it was by no means original to have originality.)

And as we were saying, we beg to reminisce several columns back, to that time when we quoted Mrs. Guerrero of the Manila Times as having called Mrs. Warns' dancing "smooth." At that time we accused Mrs. Warnsof lacking freedom and exuberance, of intensity and passion, when she interpreted the leading part in Der Rosenkavalier. We do not go back on our words for last year.

But for this year we do not repeat. Pacita Madrigal Warns[2] is much, much better. Of course she did not have a cold this year and that could be part of the reason. Or it could be the threat of war. Or the Bell Mission[3]. We think it is just because we are all one year older. She too. We are all supposed to be one year better at the things we are doing. Mrs. Warns is a fulfillment of the supposition.

So is Benny Villanueva. When I cannot agree even now with Mrs. Guerrero of last year that Pacita Madrigal Warns is "smooth"—I think she has a technical mastery for her art, I think she has precision, form, enthusiasm, and other things—I do not think she is still smooth, the way Benny Villanueva can be. It's hard to say in word terms, but it's something like this, that she is like rain, when she dances—rhythmic, correct, harmonious, with its virtue lying in its staccato exactness. But Mr. Villanueva has the fluidity of running water, a molten smoothness that carries the watcher with the dance.

We do not know what goes on in the minds of the dancers while they perform. But if we were playing guessing games we'd say that Mr. Villanueva does not think when he dances. In fact I don't think he even realizes there is an audience, and so when he comes to take a bow after the curtain calls we feel like we are meeting a new person.

I remember last year when I was just a trifle irritated because Mrs. Guerrero said that the only dancers with any soul in the presentation of the Manila Ballet Academy were Mrs. Warns and Galya Lang. We said then that artists' souls were a bit beyond our ken. We haven't gotten any closer to the spirit world

through all these months, and so we say ditto as of that time, and also ditto about Benny Villanueva, who approached what we think is "soul" closest in his dancing.

This year's "Giselle" (that was what I was talking about all the time in case I forgot to mention it) is so good it also makes me feel like I did last year when I cursed the kind of life which enables only the moneyed (and people like us) to see such good stuff. Last year there was only Benny Villanueva to miss. This year there is also Pacita Madrigal Warns and to a minor extent, a very, very small part of the soloist, Leonor Rivera. We do wish there would be a repeat performance, with maybe lower price for tickets—and some improvements in the lighting of the stage.

And before we end—we heard that in the same night there was a dance which purported to be ballet as part of a program of some gathering of a provincial association. We do wish people would realize that ballet is not a social function where someone dons on slippers and a swish skirt, and presto!—Red Shoes!

Confidently, we think ballet is an art.

17 December 1950

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[1] Benny Villanueva belonged to the first generation of Filipino male ballet artists who helped establish classical ballet as a serious performing art in postwar Manila.

[2] Pacita Madrigal-Warns (María Paz Paterno Madrigal-Warns) was a prominent Filipina socialite, ballet patron/teacher, beauty queen, and politician in mid-20th-century Manila. She later became one of the first women elected to the Philippine Senate. She was born in Manila in 1915 into the wealthy and influential Madrigal family, daughter of businessman and senator Vicente Madrigal.

[3] "Bell Mission" refers to the economic survey mission headed by American banker and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel W. Bell that came to the Philippines in 1950 at the request of both the Philippine and United States governments. Its formal name was the Economic Survey Mission to the Philippines, but it became widely known simply as the "Bell Mission."

What is disturbing is that I have to eat my words.

We have to break last week's word about going on today with verbosities on this year's Roll of Honor stories, first because we do not have the complete file on hand yet and we think it unfair to say anything more on the stories till after a few readings, and second because we have just received a message which transfers our mind into another groove.

The message comes from Mr. I. P. Soliongco[1], who censures us for "liking beyond reason" Mozart's Don Giovanni and Verdi's Traviata.

It is hard to technically define my choices and hence justify myself through any means but pure emotional response. It is only with more familiarity with musical values that one may approach music in other than the mere layman's capability at appreciation.

But it is now not preferences that disturb me, or which kind of music is superior to which. Such stuff one leaves alone unless armed with more or less expert knowledge.

What is disturbing is that I have to eat my words, addressed to Mr. Soliongco a few days back, that he should not get involved in world or political situations but concentrate on music if he wishes to remain unfrustrated. With chagrin, humility, and a hint of rebellion I take back what I said. Because the octopus arms of whatever situation he may have been talking about has also reached into the field of music, and though by itself that form of expression when reaching perfection cannot frustrate, placed in the middle of an economic and social specimen as import control and dollar shortage, even music is not free.

This great outburst in more practical terms, comes from the fact that I made one phone call after another to record stores. The prices are such and such, Miss, they said. Import control.

What was partly amusing too was that some stores demanded a much higher price than others. But however low they tried to make it, it was still high, far beyond my earnings since I am not a ten percenter.

We cannot blame the store owners. We do not even blame the import control. In fact, blaming is not much in our line.

If anyone, we have only ourselves to blame for thinking there is still some manner by which we can retreat and be happy by ourselves. We did not realize that even for a satisfactory solitude we have to pay.

But such is the fashion, I suppose, that for peace, all kinds of peace we pay with money.

11 March 1951

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[1] I.P. Soliongco (Indalencio P. Soliongco) was a sharp, intellectual Filipino journalist, columnist, and essayist of the postwar Manila press, known for his literate, skeptical, and often acerbic commentary in the Manila Chronicle.

Artists for a Generation: Benny Villanueva and Hernando Ocampo

The season for culture is almost over. Manilans have been given their fill of art, ballet, opera, drama, concerts, and Katy de la Cruz.

Reviews have been written, prizes awarded, scholarships granted. Some praises have been extravagant, others modified by favoritism or prejudice. In each field certain luminaries have been pronounced as the best exponents in their own genres.

Looking at it historically, in the sense of personalities who really matter—not for the season, not for the decade, but for a whole generation's existence, not alone within the boundaries of the country but all over the world—we can think of only two who really matter: Benny Villanueva and Hernando Ocampo.

We do not here infer that the rest of the artists of the generation are of no account. But they have not yet proved themselves, except maybe to themselves and to a following of their own.

Perhaps of the two, Benny Villanueva[1] has the more uncontested title, because no matter what adjectives have been heaped on other ballet dancers of the country, no one has as yet publicly disputed the statement that Benny is the best of them all.

The position of Hernando Ocampo[2], on the other hand, has been the subject of more argument. It is possible that this is so because clear appreciation of the classical dance does not necessitate as much of an intellectual, technical approach that modern art does. True, there are certain forms the familiarity of which may enhance one's pleasure at watching a good dancer. But that is not a necessity. Without it, the pleasure still remains.

But whatever may be said against Ocampo's work, we have to admit that it is art and that it is his—not a mere compilation of influences, not imitation nor reflection, but an attempt to find new forms and manners, Filipino because he is a Filipino and as such cannot escape its peculiar temperament, however subtly expressed in his painting, and universal because he is an artist.

If either Ocampo or Villanueva decide to go native, if one were to paint rice and dried fish and the other dance the 'tinikling,' familiarity would make them appreciable to many, but for them and for those who wish to understand art this would merely be incidental.

Maybe it is for this reason that it was not the Philippine government that finally sent Ocampo abroad to further his studies and at the same time act as a cultural emissary. It had to take a foreign government to do that. Our own prefer the obvious and as such choose a different kind of personality for foreign relations.

18 March 1950

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[1] Benny Villanueva belonged to the first generation of Filipino male ballet artists who helped establish classical ballet as a serious performing art in postwar Manila.

[2] Hernando Ruiz Ocampo (HRO, HR Ocampo) is a National Artist in the visual arts, a leading radical modernist painter. He was also a fictionist, poet, and editor.

Two listeners arrive at the same deserved conclusion.

A couple of weeks ago we had the chance of once listening to an old favorite, Brahms Violin Concerto in D. Due to an attachment springing from association with certain seasons, certain moods, the work could not help evoking pleasant, even nostalgic, remembrances.

This was especially so in the first movement, when the initial sounds were so familiarly close and so long unheard that memory outraced analysis. The second movement, beautiful and beautifully played, helped the emotional past-raking along, despite the fact that the use of the microphone and minor defects once in a while intruded into the general illusion.

But in the third movement something disastrous to our historical meanderings occurred. Somehow, we could not identify fully what we were hearing with what we used to hear. Discrepancies might have been minor, the defects not too noticeable to ears that had not listened as consistently to the same piece, but we could not help overlooking the flaws. From the appreciator content to use the music as an instrument for bringing back pleasant incidents to the mind we had perforce to turn into amateur critic, shrinking each time the soloist played his notes a trifle too fast, losing the smooth brightness of the movement.

Music, on the one hand, is like a scent, having the power of evoking memory with painful clarity, and on the other a scientific formula challenging and begetting beauty out of its complex exactness. And any diminishing in the perfection of the latter will disallow further activity with the former.

It has been said that there are two ways of listening to music, and hence two kinds of listeners. The first kind, listening to something like, say, the Violin Concerto of Beethoven, revel in its lyricism, in its deep emotional values, and because of these identify the piece with the beautiful, the romantic, the highly poetic.

The second listener, picking on the same piece, rather than feeling through the composition, watches out for the rhythmic patterns of the movements, the entrance of the different instruments, the developments of sections, the winding up of the finale. He listens for its form and pattern, in his mind's eye watching the weaving and interweaving of melodies, for the depth of colors and subtle differentiations of space and time. And finding perfection in all of these, also identifies the piece with the beautiful.

Two listeners arrive at the same deserved conclusion. There is only one difference. That the emotional appreciator will probably react in the same way he did to Beethoven's Concerto to Debussy's Claire de Lune or Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2, and he will not understand why the other listener can rave over such a thing as Mozart's Jupiter or Bach's Brandenburg Concerto.

It is not, we think, because the latter is deaf to emotional elocutions that he chooses the more difficult piece as against the sweet, easy one. It is only that, armed with the technician's instruments, he cannot

help but with scalpel and lens seek for the more challenging, and indirectly the work that is more complementary to his capabilities as a student of music.

And yet it does not mean that he does not listen every now and then with some kind of pleasure to the companionable, even at times mellifluous, varieties best exemplified by popular Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Chopin. True, the reception is different. It demands neither concentration nor any significant amount of background, which the more superior masters would demand for the full enjoyment of their compositions.

But the enjoyment is still there. Though there is one thing that matters. Even these "understandable" pieces must be played as close to perfection as possible or else they will defeat their purpose.

Among the many performances given now, there are quite a few which indulge in the easier repertoire, and with reason. Among these, there are a few who do not quite reach the mark even then. Perhaps we should not blame them. Primary stages of development do not allow for perfection all the time.

But what in this case is puzzling is the response of quite a number of critics who, we are sure, belong to the second category of listeners, it being understood that they know more about music than the ordinary layman. Why, in spite of what they cannot fail to realize, do they have to heap praises quite undeservedly, so that when the time comes it is hard to distinguish a Bobesco from any hypothetical minor violinist, a Genty from a local pianist?

To appreciate the efforts of an artist is laudable, but this does not mean that one necessarily has to say that the results of these efforts are always good. Rubinstein would not heap abuse on a listener who discovers him playing a false note; he would heap abuse on himself. Any genuine artist would.

It is not a matter of our baring our claws too much, but of being careful that we do not pare our nails right down to the cuticle.

12 August 1951

IV Criticism

When judgment is passed on the book of Messrs. Ramos and Valeros . . .

The critic, that literary necessary evil, will be faced with another task shortly, with the publication of an anthology of twenty five short stories, compiled by Maximo Ramos[1] and F. Valeros[2].

We are very curious what the consensus of opinion will be, not for the sake of the stories themselves, but because we take a morbid delight in perusing reviews on local publications and literary works. We see in this book a challenge to Filipino minds to think for themselves, and say why they like a story or why they do not.

Once long ago we rose in the defense of critics. We still think criticism is an integral part of all literary history. Without tying ourselves up to any absolute, didactic standard of judgment we negate a ranking based on the flux of generation upon generation. True, the greatness of a piece can never be determined solely by literary standards, and yet it is only by these standards too that we can determine whether it is literature or not. Hence, we approach the golden mean, try to view a literary work from the perspective of certain set fundamentals given the plasticity of human responses.

And yet, in spite of all those or maybe because of them, we tend to agree with a certain friend of ours who one time said that writers should not pay attention to critics. We presume to add to the statement—One should listen to all valid criticism. One should not listen to all critics.

When judgment is passed on the book of Messrs. Ramos and Valeros, it is not actually criticisms of the twenty five stories that will be written, but judgment being passed on the two critics who chose the stories.

We wonder what the basis of judging will be. How will the critics come out in the eyes of other critics? And will their basic material be the same? Will there be a criterion of judgment?

The standard of literary criticism in the Philippines is all jumbled up. We can hardly blame one single group alone for this. Literature, which is such a quaintly true reflection of the social and intellectual condition of a nation, honestly mirrors our nation's state.

We have not yet learned as a people to face things squarely, to call a spade a spade. The Filipino people is an AFRAID people. We are like the mice who had a caucus on how to defeat the destructive cat. We all want to hang a bell around the cat's neck. But who will do it? We are all little voices crying in a complete vacuum. We are the hollow men, to rob T.S. Eliot of a phrase, who knowing how hollow the blocks are we sit on, still are afraid to move and be left sitting on air.

Our literature, like our nation, is swiftly beginning to take on the glitter of a gem in the pawnshop. While East and West go on playing old maid's solitaire, peeking over their shoulders all the time to see nobody is watching them pull a fast one, we play the joker. And while ideologies and politics have

their merry play we curtail our literary verbosity as per their needs.Our literature is as free as our nation.

Our literary critics are as tied down as our government censors.

Why? Can we point with one finger, or even, ten to the reasons? And even if we could, would it help?

In every community of people there is a group between the intellectuals and the masses who call themselves the upright, the honest, the backbone of the nation. Theirs may be not the middle-class economy but certainly the middle-class mentality.

Their choice is the choice of further security—for themselves. Their truth is the limited truth of self-comfort.

Then there is another group, more intelligent, but just as chained. By the mores of society, of conventions, of economics. They know they see, but they are tied. Loving truth they still have to live a lie or at best a mental reservation. From them could come the valid critics—of literature, of institutions, of government.

When will the Filipino realize the stature of a free human being?

12 March 1950

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[1] Maximo D. Ramos was a Filipino folklorist, editor, and scholar best known for preserving Philippine myths, legends, and supernatural traditions in English-language collections.

[2] Florentino B. Valeros was a Filipino educator, editor, and literary anthologist who helped shape postwar Philippine literature in English through influential school and university anthologies.

Philippine Cross-Section: Viray, Joaquin, Gonzales, Alfon, Tiempo, Santos, et.al.

Jarrel[1] calls the story of Garcia Villa and the group of Edith Sitwell[2] "The Legend of the Perfect Fools." But there is no such danger for the collection of Filipino short stories entitled Philippine Cross-Section[3] and its host of critics, who, with due regard to such a noteworthy attempt as this publication, still went through the arduous task of going through it with a tooth-comb, picking out the dirt and honey from it all in one plowing motion.

That the book is a good case for Filipino writers is unquestioned. In it has been set down the obstacles which our literary talents have had to face—the lack of financial help which has driven some to indiscriminate writing; the very sparse genuine and well-based literary appreciation which has pulled down standards from quality to mere concessions to the reading public; the absence of intensely absorbed, financially unhampered literary circles which can give some real encouragement and impetus to our writers—these and a hundred other stumbling blocks that lie in the path of the production of really good literature.

If only for this, we think that the collection is praiseworthy. Although of course we presume to make the conclusion that it was hardly put together to ease the minds of the talents therein presented. In fact, proof of the contrary is evinced by the opinions of some writers of their respective stories which were chosen for publication. Manuel Viray, for one, holds no great love for his story, "Bureaucrat's Morning." Of it, he says, "It is one of my lousiest." Conrado Pedroche holds a similar opinion for his story, "Amor Seco."

But to Nick Joaquin whom we have never seen but would like to and for whom we are balancing a hundred-fifty peso chip on one shoulder, we still give the bouquet. "Summer Solstice" was one story, which, though lacking the almost completely perfect technique of N.V.M. Gonzales' "The Blue Skull and The Dark Palms," had both passion and meaning which most of the stories missed. Estrella Alfon's story had, for example, a deeply felt emotion that most Filipinos would understand, but the plot misses completely and we were left a mature emotion and an immature story.

Between the two stories with the United States as setting, Edilberto K. Tiempo's "Creole Song," and Bienvenido Santos' "Scent of Apples," the latter is the story, the former a personal effusion. Both undoubtedly at one time impressed American professors or could have. Americans have a flair for the foreign which sometimes takes on amusing, almost irritating proportions.

For the presence of most of the stories in the collection we can find some justification for, but there are some which are completely baffling, as for example, "The Love of Virgil and Cely." And yet the volume is carried over with the presence of the others, of the stories of Gonzales, of Joaquin, of Garcia Villa, of Ligaya Victorio-Reyes, and of course the much imitated inimitable Manuel Arguilla.

Because the book seems to be slanted for school consumption we have wondered at one great lack in it. Biographies are present, and though incomplete it is always a possible task to get more material on

the authors; even a questionnaire is available at the end of the volume for the guidance of students. There are a foreword and a preface, both of them not really too necessary, although both are quite fitting to the volume. But a historical survey of Filipino literature would have been most gratifying, especially to teachers who might someday handle the book and try to get through to the students the progress literature has made. It would indeed be a sad fact were students to take the word of Hartendorp alone on this, without due recognition of the forward steps literature has taken, from the simple, naive, plotting of yesterday to the more complicated, self-conscious, broadened scope of the present; from the almost, pastoral "Patricia of the Green Hills" to the class conscious "The Fight." From a fumbling, wistful art, to a wishful, fulfilling occupation.

14 May 1950

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[1] Randall Jarrell, the influential sharp, witty American poet and critic, who could be devastating toward what he considered over-refined literary posturing. In 1949, he wrote an unfavorable review of Villa's *Volume Two*.

[2] Edith Sitwell, an eccentric and very prominent British literary figure who championed experimental and stylized poetry and admired Jose García Villa and helped promote him internationally.

[3] Philippine Cross-Section is a seminal 1950 anthology of outstanding Filipino short stories in English, edited by Maximo Ramos and Florentino B. Valeros. Prominent editor and publisher A. V. H. Hartendorp wrote the foreword, recognizing the collection's significance in capturing a critical and comprehensive view of Filipino literature and culture

Having treated my own story with neither modesty nor self-love ...

Manuel Viray pretty definitely stated his choices for the short stories of the year. It was a hard task, and however arbitrary the decisions may seem, the attempt is worth recognizing. Reading good short stories is one thing, reading this year's crop another.

That is why it is with some hesitation that we act on the request of readers and friends to write on what Viray has said. Being the critic of a critic is a following we enjoy when the tongue in our cheek is allowed some salt to melt on it. But to do a serious-faced debunking is another thing. So, we have invited others to become accomplices to the crime and conferred on each story in the roll of honor for 1950 of Mr. Viray.

All the stories, that is, except The Choice, which unfortunately was authored by myself, and for which I have taken the full responsibility not alone of creating but of tearing to shreds—so much so that nothing is left for me to say about it but that it should never have been included in any Roll of Honor. Why it was included I shall never know. If it was because Mr. Viray thought it was good, I can only say that I disagree with him. If it was because he thought it represented any new phase in writing despite its faults, I disagree with him. If he thought it was a well-made story in the sense that a play is called "well-made" according to stage tradition, I disagree with him. The characterization was not exceptional, the plot not new. It may have had unity and coherence and emphasis but only to a degree where an editor accepts it because readers will read the story through and not blame him for printing it. The story may have had virtues, but if so, they are few and far between, not enough to warrant inclusion in a select roster.

And if I may be unkind and think that Mr. Viray might have included the story because he is a friend of mine, which he is and for which I am glad, even grateful, then all I can say is that there are a couple or so of stories I have written which by some stretch of critical tolerance may be more justifiably included.

Having treated my own story with neither modesty nor self-love I hope that the others whose turns will come in this column will realize that I neither claim to be infallible, a friend, or an enemy. Whatever I, with the help of a few, may say about the stories has nothing to do with their other writings and their own personalities—something which perhaps need not be mentioned except that past experience has taught me to tread softly in certain matters.

4 March 1951

On the validity of the role of critics in the world of literature

Question has often been raised on the validity of the role of critics in the world of literature. Once upon a time we even received a letter from a quite respected mind and gratefully recognized editor stating that one mediocre short story was worth more than any number of critical works.

We neither agree nor disagree, seeing as argument of this subject might so easily degenerate into mere semantics.

But it would seem that one of the main complaints that might be made against critics, and especially our critics, is that their role is mainly derivative. The superiority of short story writer over critic is the superiority of creator over discoverer. At least we must admit that this is so in most cases. The critic is more often an appendage than an individual institution: he depends more on the production of rich material by the creative writer for the wealth of his own statements. Where the meat is lean, the pickings are small, and hence eventually may bring about the annihilation of both entities.

This, perhaps, is one of the more unfortunate truths about the present literature of the land. That where we are still in a groping, actually still unblossomed age, our critics have to depend on the buds for their own sustenance. The writers, instead of being able to fasten on fertile minds and find in them the soil which encourages creative growth, find themselves feeding even before they are ready to live by themselves.

In that case then, it seems nothing is really left for the writer to do but follow the advice of our one time correspondent and ignore critics completely as unnecessary, even irritating specimens intruding in the literary picture.

And yet, should we then destine to damnation the critical career because at the moment we feel that there is no sufficient body of literature that they can fasten themselves onto? Or even if there were such literature, would it then mean that criticism can continue playing the derivative role which it has most of the time occupied with very, very few exceptions? Will it still go on being what it is, depending on what is written for its food, analyzing what is set down in print, using as guide the literary standards set forth by a school or by an age or by personal logic?

Or will criticism, being the discoverer, also turn creator? For in the past few years, that role which has been more or less stuck so assiduously in the country has been changing in other places. The critic is no longer a mere commentator on letters but has taken upon himself the burden of life as well. And taking it up, it has had, in the fashion of all writers, to evolve an original manner which pertains to such kind of work. Using current creative material, he has shifted position from mere judge of the visible, the story in itself. Creative literature now is used as a jumping board, as a slim foundation from which the critic may catapult himself into the more exciting, varied, and broader study of human conditions, progress, and uncertainties of the present age.

It is now not merely the problem of the author as a writer that is interesting, no longer just the style and the plots at evaluations. It is more the author as a man, surrounded not by the literary atmosphere but by the air that the rest of the world breathes and by which he is affected, in the manner that all other people are, while at the same time not excluding his own peculiar reactions to it by virtue of his following.

Thus where in the past there was the fiction writer interpreting life in his own varying, elusive way, and the critic interpreting the writer interpreting life, criticism has now embraced both fields, differing only in technique from the writer in that his approach is more direct, his study of life more factual.

Of the old type of critic, who is fast becoming an anachronism and who at his best would make a very good reviewer, we are inclined to agree and say that he is not worth one short story writer. But we do feel that it is a mistake to ignore the good that the critic could do in interpreting to the writer the position that the writer is made to occupy by the vast brutal age he may encourage; in the producing works which so far have remained stagnant, even unrecognized, in a number creative of minds.

19 August 1951

For from the moment you make public what was before a private opinion . . .

A few weeks ago a request came in for a column-length statement on a recent musical performance. Chief among the demands of this reader was that I should state whether I liked what I heard or not and if so, then why.

To this the only statement I can volunteer is the Louis Armstrong classic made in answer to a query on the nature of jazz—"Man, if you gotta ask what it is, you'll never know."

That's the way I feel about music. I don't say that that is the way everyone should feel. Maybe mine is an evasion, a confession that I do not know enough about the art to expound on it. Of course I could pick up a book and explode with such good-sounding words as persiflage and fortissimo and the rest of them. But my fear is that if I do, I may end up by convincing myself that I really know what I am talking about.

At the same time I am convinced that whatever I say now will not help anyone to a greater understanding of music. A subjective appraisal is useless, an objective one only for those readers who have as much understanding as that who knows enough to justify his writing about it.

Here, I do not discount the value of legitimate musical critics. They serve their purpose for those select few who really understand, a sort of threshing ground that puts the abstract authoritative comprehension of a subject into some concrete form.

But it is to the appreciative layman who dares to make scientific evaluation for the reading of other laymen that I pose the question—"Don't you feel guilty at the risk your are taking?"

For from the moment you make public what was before a private opinion, it ceases to be a mere thought and becomes an influence. Because a columnist can read a musical score and scour a few terminologies from an elementary book is not enough basis for musical criticism.

What could have been at the start a harmless self-deception may very easily lead to a pernicious conviction.

Of course fallacious art criticism is not unforgivable and it is to the world's advantage that the weakness of some lie along these lines instead of humanity-rending poses. On the side, it is quite amusing to note that these who after some time persuade

themselves that they are one kind of critic soon run the gamut of all thought and make, not comments, but pronouncements, not alone in one single line of culture but also in almost all others, lumping in their system painting, literature, music, drama, designing and society.

As long as art is the subject matter we still feel pretty safe. It is almost with wonderful clarity that the revelation of a critic's real field comes through when all he has to say of anything always is that it is good. Of course it is the safest way since if one cannot praise the fastidious reader, one can at least curry favor with the artists.

But it is when one more step is taken that such commentators stop being ineffectual and turn into fearful institutions. When unarmed with real knowledge of facts, of what goes on in backyards of homes, governments, nations, ideologies and what goes on inside political demagogues, philanthropic personalities, prejudiced fanatics, and suffering people—the pen wielder with the average mind tackles subjects not in his province and thereby takes the risk of slashing at the truth and transforming it, unwittingly perhaps into some form of distortion—it is then that we stand in fear of characters who once could have been concerned only with mere art criticism.

It is then that we become afraid to write, because knowing that we know more than others who get atrocities published, still we realize that we are still very far from knowing enough.

Date unknown

V Reviews

Film review: Hantik & Kilabot Sa Makiling

With enough acclimatization local goods have actually tasted better in our prejudiced mouths, even looked quite smart to our Westernized tastes. The springs may not be Simmons[1] but they jump just the same.

But we still have some stubborn habits. The movies is one of them. As long as it is made in America, even if it is Hedy Lamarr[2] going through the contortions of emoting expression on her beautifully deadpan face we still search for its finer values, which it inevitably has, if only in its color, gigantic proportions, and monstrous crashings that satisfy our childhood instincts for destruction.

That we may be witnessing a glorified fairy tale does not disturb us. For who at one time or another does not use a fairy tale for an escape? That we are faced with a colossally magnificent icing over an insincere slice of life we do not bother to realize. Anyway we go to the movies for entertainment, not dogma. Besides, can we afford to be choosy?

Perhaps the French can. As one French critic observed once, Hollywood movies, with a few exceptions, were a lot of dollars covering a lot of crap. The French have done away with both—the money part and the crap part, if not wholly, only as necessity and nature demand the existence of both in the movie industry. Contrary to general belief, especially in this country, French movies are not made of semi-nude cavorting females and male maniacs. That they are realistic it is true; that they are immoral may not be accepted as a generalization. They certainly are not more immoral and degenerate than some of the movies that have been shown around town.

Even the English can intellectually afford to turn down their noses at Hollywood. Of course in practice this is causing quite a problem within the British movie industry. Not every production is a "Hamlet" or a "Brief Encounter" or a "Henry V".

And yet their problem is not as large as ours. Because for every "Hantik" and "Kilabot sa Makiling" we have a hundred others that cry out against their celestial director for having seen the light of kliegs.

It was a relief to witness movies like the two former. We must confess that we went to the second one, "Kilabot" with a few misgivings. A friend had told us that it was good, but we reserved our own opinions. We came out very agreeably surprised. Also quite pleased at especially two very sincere factors in the whole thing, which as a unit we have to admit was still pretty defective. The first good thing was the knife fight. Not only did it appear genuine, but the camera moved in such a way that the audience shared the tension of the fight with the struggling couple, who did so efficiently without the usual dramatic crescendo of music. The second thing which was even more impressive in the long run because of its consistency was Lilian Leonardo's[3] manner of dress and make-up. It was reminiscent of some fine Italian movies where heroines did not go around ruins as if they were on the way to Malacañan to attend a NEPA[4] ball.

"Hantik" we thought an even finer piece of work. Except for one single error in miscasting, the combination was perfect to the last supporting character. The photography and props spoke for the well-thought out and artistic direction. Salcedo[5] more than redeemed himself for the other movie he had made previously where we were forced to walk out after the first half hour. Even he could not save that one. But "Hantik" proved Salcedo as one of the really top men in movies. It proved quite much too about a few of the supporting actors, and of Avellana[6].

And yet even in both of these films, we find an echo or maybe we should call it a threat, that is so frighteningly present in most of the Philippine films recently produced. Here we do not even mean the small details, like too much pomade on men's hair or too much make-up on women or the clothes they wear or the props or camera angles or dialogue, and the hundred other things that make a movie a work of art. It goes beyond that, into the rather horrible prospect of the way the audience is being influenced, especially the more impressionable ones. Bloodshed, cruelty, brute force, power lust —even presented with a good and evil angle will soon sink into the young mind.

Torture scenes, killing, degeneracy, violence for violence's sake are the meals we are being fed. Hate, revenge—these are the emotions being glorified.

Has not the war been long over for us? Are we going to share in the Western hate-program?

26 March 1950

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[1] Simmons Bedding Company was a well-known American mattress and bed-spring manufacturer famous for high-quality coil springs and mattresses.

[2] Hedy Lamarr was a glamorous Hollywood screen star of the 1930s and 1940s known for films such as Algiers, Boom Town, and Samson and Delilah.

[3] Lillian Leonardo was a Filipina film actress of the 1940s and 1950s known for dramatic and supporting roles in postwar Philippine cinema.

[4] NEPA ball in the 1950s was an elite, highly anticipated social gala and fashion show sponsored by the National Economic Protectionism Association (NEPA) designed to promote the **Filipino First** economic policy, which advocated for self-sufficiency and buying locally produced goods.

[5] Leopoldo Ganal Salcedo Sr. was a Filipino film actor dubbed as "The Great Profile" who specialized in portraying dramatic heroes.

[6] Lamberto Avellana — Acclaimed Filipino film and stage director later named a National Artist for Cinema for pioneering socially conscious Philippine filmmaking.

Film review: Gulong ng Palad[1]

Adaptation, so far not a forte of local movies, got a boost just the same when it happily chose "Gulong ng Palad," to date the best-advertised of all movie productions. Not alone to the vicarious listeners of the radio play did the movie version hold unseen promise, but to all those who had followed the story for the story's sake, trying to find in it sufficient justification for the popularity it rated, and later, when news came out that it was being made into a movie, to find out its potentialities for transference onto celluloid.

It is a Filipino story. So Filipino, in fact, that a careless judgment may accuse it of sentimentalities, clichés, pedestrianism. There is the eternal triangle, the eternal poetic justice. And the eternal traditions which all Filipinos treasure as the English would their coat-of-arms. The other woman, the villain, the erring hero, the patient heroine, these and all the other supporting characters that make up Filipino life as imagined by the Filipino daydreamer are there. Is this prosaic-sounding qualification then cause for condemning the story as a story? We think not. In fact on them rest the very recommendations for the story. Because somehow the whole plot which may be a seeming collection of tragedies and coincidences is in reality a careful gathering of high points in a lifetime. It is the life of one crowd sifted from the reality of the lives of all Filipinos.

It is one of those exceptional stories which can lend themselves to several versions, play upon varying sympathies. That the movie version bungled the job is one of the biggest misfortune that has happened in the struggle of the movies to get a better footing in the artistic world. From the business point of view, we have to admit that they left no stone unturned—the music, the advertising, in fact the very fundamental action of having picked the radio-play. But where discretion would have asked them to set a limit, enthusiasm goaded them on. The result was a series of choppy scenes which tried to include as much of the high points in the radio version as possible.

And then technically the movie version suffered several setbacks. It was almost painful to see the several ladies marching in and out garbed like May Day queens. What is wrong with reality anyway? What is wrong with dressing people in the Philippines the way they should be dressed? If the reason behind all the costuming—because we cannot but call it such even in this instance if it is our own native dress—is the hope of sending the film abroad, then this very fact would help in its downfall. Too, the profusion of beautiful faces, made up so much in the same way that it was difficult to follow which was which, was quite irritating. If the reason behind it was to announce the up and coming stars of the future, who later may be described as "that luminary in Gulong Ng Palad," then we think it is extremely unfair to this vehicle, which would have been better left alone with the proper casting instead of the beauty-studded reel it tried to be. In fact, until now there is one pretty face in that movie we have not yet really identified. She was in most of the scenes; just hanging around and showing her profile if not her teeth, but what she added to the story we do not know. And we would like to hear one give sufficient excuse for her presence.

There are still so many things we feel we would like to say about the movie. Some may wonder at our rebirth from indifference, but we cannot help feeling quite chagrined at the waste of good material. Waste, we repeat, not as far as the business side is concerned, but as far as the making of a really good movie goes.

Even the very characters suffered a change. Where in the radio version we felt that there was an inherent dignity in most of them—Luisa, the different mothers, the friends—in the play all they become are glamorous fishwives, either too sharp-tongued or in the case of Luisa suffering from an overdose of the martyr-complex. Carding's mother was just a cranky old woman in the play. In the movie, though we do have to grant she presents amazing possibilities, she certainly strays far from the original, turning instead into an ogre-like character with a Jocasta-complex to whom Carding refused to play the Oedipus.

Yet, we hear almost all people who should be satisfied with the movie have expressed their pleasures. Could it be because they knew all about it before they saw the movie? Or because they had never heard the play and had no standards to try to make it live up to?

2 July 1950

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[1] Gulong ng Palad was a soap opera written by Lina Flor and aired on DZRH from 1949 to 1956 and sponsored by Camay beauty soap. It was one of the most successful radio dramas in the history Philippine radio. A movie was made in 1950.

This is what I liked: Books, Movies, Local Movie Actors, Art, Newspapers

Because I have always felt it unhealthy to think for others—unhealthy not alone to those who without questioning are liable to take what I say as gospel truth, but principally to myself—it is with some hesitation that I try to fulfill the request of several readers who have asked me to give periodic recommendations on things to read, see, follow up—in short, look forward to.

My only guarantee is to myself and it does not necessarily follow that my tastes should exclude a variety of others. So to those who have made the request I do not say, "This is what you should look up" but rather, "This is what I liked."

Books: There's one just published by Alfred A. Knopf and which may not have reached local bookstores as yet, "The Outsider" by Ernesto Sabato, an Argentinian painter and young writer. Written with more dramatic intensity than Kafka's "Metamorphosis," it left me with the same feeling of breathless unreality that the former did. And yet there is almost a scientific reality to the whole story that negates the fantasy of a nightmarish loneliness of one man feeling himself separate from the whole world, forever alone, not understood, except by one woman whom he killed, whom he had to kill.

Movies: After being shown at the Avenue theatre at a world premiere, Orson Welles' "Macbeth" is scheduled for a regular run in a few weeks. After having seen it twice, the first time with the Elizabethan trappings which Welles did away with in the new version, I feel I must see it a third time. Like "Hamlet," it improves with familiarity. That is one of the things about movie adaptations of Shakespeare's plays—that the first time we see them we are so completely overwhelmed with the seeming heaviness of the whole spectacle that we are unable to appreciate all their other finer points. With photography capable of building an atmosphere of sound, space, and character that the stage cannot duplicate, the audience tends to be so absorbed by the mood built, that it is difficult to get away from it into the more technical appreciation of acting, delivery, and other aesthetic standards for movie productions. With mood and feeling predominant at the first time we see a picture, technical devices at the second, it is only at the third that we feel the integration of the whole piece and we appreciate it fully for what it is. And yet had we been able to see "Hamlet" only once, we would still have preferred it to a hundred other fickle attempts of Hollywood to be classic. We feel about "Macbeth" as we do about "Hamlet."

Local Movie Actors: From the sublime to the ridiculous? We don't think so. Local motion pictures, which could be an art, is not. But we feel Leopoldo Salcedo deserves a couple of lines because he being a good artist, we think he should not allow a graphic industrial art to drag him down to its standards.

Art: Common noun that our local painters are doing properly by, still is not getting enough boost from the public as proved by the sales following most exhibitions. And yet if any art of ours has gained reputable standing in foreign countries, this is it. Newest news is that Hernando R. Ocampo

has been given a scholarship to France. He being one of the best of the new school we are surprised that not more people are taking the chance to buy his paintings before he is fully recognized and by all amusing human standards his craft becomes worth much more.

Newspapers: This is just a reminder to read them more closely. The headlines don't include everything—all the motives, the causes, the sentiments. Reuther, Vishinsky, Dulles, and President McKinley who once got a divine message to take the Philippines—each is as human as the next one.

War, too, is human.

16 July 1950

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[1] Walter Reuther was a powerful labor leader and president of the United Automobile Workers (UAW). He was a key figure in the mid-20th-century American labor movement, fighting for civil rights, fair wages, and pushing for an alliance between organized labor and the liberal wing of politics.

[2] Andrey Vishinsky (Vyshinsky) was a prominent Soviet diplomat and politician who served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the chief Soviet delegate to the United Nations. He is historically recognized for his role as the prosecutor in Stalin's infamous 1930s show trials and for his fierce, confrontational rhetoric against the West during the early Cold War.

[3] John Foster Dulles was a major American foreign-policy figure associated with hardline anti-communism and postwar diplomacy. In 1950 he was frequently in the news because of escalating Cold War tensions, debates over U.S. foreign policy, NATO, Japan peace treaty negotiations, and the developing Korean War, and his influence on post-war liberal politics. He later became Secretary of State under Eisenhower.

[4] President William McKinley: The 25th U.S. President, who served from 1897 until his assassination in 1901. His presidency predates the others by several decades. He is best known for leading the nation to victory in the Spanish-American War, steering the United States toward an imperial world power status, and establishing the gold standard

So here are the things maybe you should not agree with.

Sense of humor being the better part of living, even its essential part—as the parentheses is to the side comment, the capital letter to the proper noun, the peeling process to the eating of lanzones, the hair follicle to a strand of hair, the Christiane Vulpius[1] to a Goethe, the rig sans horse to Penn Warren[2], and hypocrisy of hypocrisies, the snow to a Christmas—we sometimes wonder at celebrators complete seriousness, and unsobriety, joy and apprehension, budgetation and extravagance, masquerading and uninhibitudinizing (a word for which we wink to make you understand that it was especially coined to meet exigencies of definition for the gamboling some people indulge in) come New Year.

But not to be left behind in the worship of that classic and Romanesque tradition we hasten to mark our cognizance of the great event, painstakingly trying in the meanwhile to adopt all the nuances of its celebration as we ourselves have daringly in the Don Quixote mannerism of courage, catalogued above.

And since the shift from one year to another is like the inspection of the inside of a box before closing it and starting a new collection in another box, we take our last peek at the debris, to see which of the glistening decorations still retain their shine. But we hope you do not agree with us. Accommodation, and especially accommodation to what pretend to be aesthetic opinions, is the Barmecide[3] way of being cultured.

So here are the things maybe you should not agree with: that Conchita Gaston[4] is definitely the singer of the year; that there was really not one very good play the whole year round and a few mediocre ones; that Don Giovanni was all right and Madame Butterfly all right and so was Fournier, but I would not have taken my grandmother, who is fond of music but who has the gout, to see any of them; that the ballet dancer of the year, and it seems for the next few years and all the past years, is Benny Villanueva; that the San Pedro-Valencia[5] a combine in the former's Concerto presentation was good; that Nick Joaquin[6] is the most and curious and curious-about writer-of-the-year because he is never seen, and that Jim Austria[7] and Ben Santos[8] and Gonzalo Villa[9] and Vic Rivera[10] and Pablo Dizon[11] are the best writers of a year in which very little good writing was done.

And so I'm left handed, so what.

14 January 1951

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[1] Christiane Vulpius was the wife of Johann Wolfgang Goethe

[2] Robert Penn Warren was an American poet, novelist, literary critic and professor at Yale University.

[3] Barmecide is an old literary reference meaning something illusory, imaginary, or falsely promised — especially a feast or reward that does not really exist, from One Thousand and One Nights

[4] Conchita Gaston was a pioneering Filipina mezzo-soprano from Silay, Negros. In 1950, she made history as the first Filipina to sing the title role of Carmen at the New York City Center.
Benny Villanueva belonged to the first generation of Filipino male ballet artists who helped establish classical ballet as a serious performing art in postwar Manila.

[5] San Pedro-Valencia refers to Lucio San Pedro's patriotic choral work, "Sa Mahal Kong Bayan", premiered On October 8, 1950, at the Far Eastern University. The performance Maestro Luis Valencia conducting.

[6] Nick Joaquin was a Filipino writer and journalist and was awarded National Artist for Literature in 1976.

[7] Jim Austria (Jimena Austria-Manalo) was a Filipino diplomat and the wife of veteran Philippine press attaché and Ambassador Armando D. Manalo; and mother of Ambassador and former Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Enrique Manalo. She was one of the best women journalists before her early death in 1961 at the age of 38.

[8] Ben Santos (Bienvenido N. Santos) was one of the major Filipino writers in English of the postwar era. A short story writer, novelist, essayist, teacher, and later an important chronicler of Filipino migrant life.

[9] Gonzalo Villa (Gonzalo A. Villa), a Filipino short story writer associated with postwar Philippine literature in English and associated with Zamboanga literary circles,

[10] Vic Rivera (unfortunately I have been unable to find anything that may lead to Vic Rivera.

[11] Pablo Dizon was a Filipino short story writer, humorist, poet, journalist/editor, and public-relations writer. He later became news editor of the United States Information Service in Manila.

VI Society

If I can't side with the Huks and I can't side with this system of democracy which hunts them down, something must be the matter.

Dear Miss Umali,

WITHIN my own four walls I read the newspapers. And they say that newspapers don't tell anything. Well, I'm glad. Because if they did I would probably commit suicide. As it is I hardly dare step out of my house for too long.

Economics I do not understand. All I know is that prices of everything have gone terribly high up, so I've had to resort to eating watermelon seeds instead of peanuts because the former take a longer length of time to consume. In about a month's time I shall not even have watermelon seeds to eat.

This is the way the present-day economics works. I do not know about the rest of the world, because I don't want too much to do with them anymore. Everything scares me now. I'll explain why later. But first this problem of money.

They say I should be austere. Well, I am. I can't help it as prices have gone up.

Newspapers advise me to be enterprising. Go into business. Is there any kind where I can start with nothing, which is the only capital I possess? I have even toyed with the idea of borrowing money. But even if the unexpected happens and someone does lend me some, what if whatever business I think of fails? Then I would be in a bigger mess than ever. I don't have enough connections to assure me that whatever thing I go into will be a sure-fire proposition.

I have only one stable hope as far as my economics go. I have planted some sweet potatoes in my two by four backyard.

I have been advised by some friends to go out and mix with society. They said this after they saw some clothes of mine, relics of more prosperous days. I could get ahead with those some way and my honest face, they said.

They do not know that I have tried. Tried till my back ached. I approached some old friends of mine. Sorry they said. We're in the same state.

Maybe I might have gotten somewhere if I had stayed long enough hobnobbing with the elite. But it isn't very easy to stand those people. You hear them talking and they're not even funny. They're just plain tragic. Like one woman says she's glad of the import control because now she will have a good excuse to go around bare-legged. She had always wanted to go around like that but it wasn't exactly what was being done. But now was the time. That was import control for her, a good excuse for

showing her legs, while here I was with practically no legs to show anymore, getting leaner and leaner every day.
The thing too is that I don't even merit charity awards. Because I do still own a shack better than some unfortunate have. And some few clothes. Besides I have neither spouse nor children. I'm no social problem.

Sometimes when I'm very angry I think, Why not make myself a social problem? That would be easy. Society anyway was made up of such dastardly people and I wouldn't mind at all giving them a bit of a headache.

There was a good way, I knew. All I'd have to do was join the Huks. It was a good idea. After all I had always been a true believer in democracy, a society with no haves and have-nots. You see, I'm an idealist.

But then I thought harder and worked my ears more and my eyes better. The view was not so good either. There were way too many people I knew who called themselves Huks—whether they are or not I do not know— but they were just plain no good. They went around tapping death taps on people's skulls because sometime in their lives they wanted a hen from such person and were refused.

What of the ideals? I think to myself. They sound pretty good. But the more I think the harder it is to think clearly. The trouble with me is I demand proof. And so I have not yet been convinced.

Then I lectured to myself. You have to take a stand somewhere. You can be one way or the other, but nothing. Why don't you help search for dissidents? Maybe that is what they call doing the country a good turn. Here was a chance at being a virtuous person.

But then things did not look too good again. In the first place how was I sure I was right ? After all when a man gets too hungry can he be blamed for turning against the landlord that makes him so?

I have been thinking and thinking because I am still confused. If I can't side with the Huks and I can't side with this system of democracy which hunts them down, something must be the matter.

Sincerely,
Luisa Moreno

5 March 1950

Poverty: We have to stop being theoretical.

A few months ago "Fountainhead" came to town. It was a success, maybe because of Gary Cooper, maybe because of Patricia Neal, though we are more inclined to believe it was the roles they were portraying which spoke so sugar-coatedly well for the present fad of democracy versus Communism. To us, however, the most catching instances in the film were the shots of the shining, towering, honest creations of architectural genius.

The book itself does not elucidate too much on the practical matters pertaining to these constructions, but with a little reading from other books we found out small items on new trends in architecture, how one could reduce costs without sacrificing comfort, how one could plan homes in a crowded city—these and a hundred other things that architects have more knowledge of.

These beautiful homes, conceived by men with free minds, portrayed in the movie by a man endowed with integrity, with love of democracy, with the true understanding of altruism, which can only be realized by the most honest egoism—these beautiful homes have been admired, desired, planned for, and built by rich men. Only by rich men.

It is understandable. It is also within reason. The age old contention that beauty belongs to everyone is not contradicted. Man-made beauty necessitates capital and it naturally follows that only capital can produce man-made beauty and possess it. And so breath-taking glass-walled air-conditioned well-furnished offices rise from the ground, monuments to men's realizations of dreams of grandeur, of a reaching for the sky almost fulfilled.

A small distance behind St. Luke's Hospital, cordoned on one side by green stagnant water deeply green with death and fertile only for the hardy water lily and shaded by the poetic Philippine tree, the bamboo, Man too has built monuments. Like King Midas' counterpart Man here has touched the earth and changed it.

Several hundred families, with magic fingers, touched the ground, and for them sprang two faucets, two eternal wells of water from which the thousands of people could daily quench their thirst.

Now again they wait with eager eyes for a new enchantment. They are expecting five new outhouses to supplement the couple that they have.

. . . . . I could go on and on. I could say that the people here are as children, simple in their wants, hopeful in their misery, faithful to their families, loyal to their country. I could give what people want to hear. That this is a wonderful country. That we are a happy people.

But we are not. Small groups come to this district. Other groups go to others. They do what

they can. It is better than nothing. That is their consolation. In their own small unobtrusive way, they are heroes. But even they cannot do enough.

In those filthy, stinking, dark, polluted, repugnant canals that breed mosquitoes, over these same canals linger the air breathed by children, and older people, whose situations may soon drive them to despair. Not all the well-intentioned well-meant plans of all the world will do them a bit of good. Not even the United Nations can stop a hungry man from stealing if the UN does not know, or is not directly aware of its existence. Individual entities are not enough.

Something has to be done, must be done, to provide these people, not with "Fountainhead" abodes, but with places where they can realize that they are human beings.

We have to stop being theoretical. Theories sound good on paper. But people cannot substitute papers for food, clothing and shelter.

A definite plan must be evolved. Numbers, statistics, research—the Waterloo of most idealists —must come to life. Otherwise all the careful planning for peace and order will be mere lollipops crammed into a crying child's mouth.

2 April 1950

The Fountainhead is a 1949 American film adaptation of the bestselling 1943 novel by Ayn Rand.

Commuting: On whom rests the solution?

Through the long paved street Rachmaninoff burst forth in all the fury that only buses can manage when they careen wildly through traffic—heavy or light. Rachmaninoff was never witness to our sitting on edge of our chair except at that time.

And for all the circumstances involved it might as well have been Rossini's Overture to William Tell being played. We felt like 'Hi-Yo Silver Away,' with all the chips stacked against us as we raced madly forth. The Holy Grail that speeded us forward was no other than a monstrous looking steel affair with the label of Leleng's Transit.

We ourselves were in no less honorable conveyance, called Antipolo something or another. It was a mad trip. One would rush, the other would run after. One would stop, then jump forward, the another would make wild zig-zag movements that reminded us of Flash Gordon movies. What the reasons behind the whole thing were is beyond we.

It could not have been the passengers because everyone was in an eye-popping, seat-gripping, silent-swearing, prayer¬murmuring, you'll-see-you-driver-you-if-something-happens-to-me stage.

It could not have been lack of time either because we were keeping to schedule.

There were no bandits behind us, there was no bag of gold in front.

There was only one conclusion I could draw—that Rachmaninoff must do something to the bus driver. Something like what fire bells do to certain individuals who dash out of their homes every time they hear these arsonic warnings.

But even when Rachmaninoff said good-bye, the driver was still in the same mood. And by this time we were really involved in some traffic. Jeepneys like bedbugs, cars like flies, busses like cockroaches—we felt like fleas completely surrounded, overwhelmed, ready to be trodden down.

My wild imaginations of death defy writing down when it is in that setting—the blaring horns, the screeching brakes, the Quiapo advertising din, the rushing forwards, backwards, left, right—it soon looks like a surrealistic dream.

(Someday someone is going to hit on a wonderful idea for movies. A Jean Cocteau-like affair of somnambulistic significance all set in the district where all kinds of transportation get entangled—and Heaven save the horse in the story.)

Where lies the danger? Anyone who has ridden a bus will know. Or anyone who has walked in front of it, behind it, or beside it. On whom rests the solution? That, again, as all other solutions involve, entails a lot of entities. No single Individual can be put on the stand. We can say the drivers. They

actually are most directly at fault. In some instances they are the sole misdoers. Some irresponsible devil gets into them and unthinking of their passenger's safety, or the value of human lives whether it be linked to them or not, they go on a mad spree of courting death, if only to satisfy some illegitimate vanity that wants to prove to themselves and others that they are good drivers.

But there are others to be blamed. The owner of the transportation company, the passengers themselves at times with their frequent unreasonable demands, and over and above all these, the muddled up traffic situation in the city.

People have died of such accidents, as caused by these anomalies. A hue and cry from some quarters has been raised. But because this kind of death does not come wholesale at it does in wars, it has not deserved the headlines. Only obituaries, and now and then, a small story, an editorial.

When will death really open the eyes of the living to create effective preventive measures?

But the overall cure probably rests in the hands of those who stand the least danger from this sort of thing, from authorities who ride in cars low-numbered enough to merit privileges and who are therefore not subject to the daily rigor of daredevil rides in the struggle to get nowhere fast enough.

Death is democratic, but there are measures that men can take to give it even the properties of an aristocracy. But we can only conceive of the most undemocratic individuals to bring this about.

Even sinners respect death. So do saints.

9 April 1950

A genuine appeal stemming from varied emotions . . .

This was the story I once heard.

It was Christmas evening. The priest of the parish, through with the whole day's religious duties, went to the church, there to kneel and pray and be really at peace. But as he entered, the first thing he noticed was that the Infant Jesus was missing from his crib on the altar. Quickly the priest rushed out of the building and out into the cold night. At the same time that he stepped out of the door around the corner away from the church, a little boy of five was pushing a toy wagon, inside of which was the holy image. The priest hurried after him, but decided to see first what this little child, so young, could be up to. He followed the child around the church block and found himself going back on the same route leading to the front door again. At the entrance the child paused, then as if deciding to go on again with the Christ Child took another turn around the block, the priest still following him. A second time the child stopped at the entrance of the church and walking around his wagon, bent over the image. The priest, in no mood for a third round, approached the child and sternly demanded from him what the idea was of taking the Holy Child away from his church.

Innocently, and happily, the child looked up at the minister of God end explained "I asked Christ Jesus to give me a wagon for Christmas. And He did. So now I am taking Him for a ride to thank Him."

I heard this story first from an American girl in the United States, a graduate student in one of its universities. She was a grown-up, sensitive, intelligent, and at the same time, extremely cynical person. Hearing this story from her, told the way she told it then, with a genuinely impressive mixture of wonder, hope, and despair, was touching. Even then it had its effect on me.

We had been talking about the atom bomb, about the neurotic stage of civilized populations, of almost complete spiritual desolation existing in so many, of unhappiness no longer a positive emotion, but a negative approach to life. And then she came up with the story, with no prelude, no direct reference to anything we had talked about.

Last week I found myself in the same frame of mind as I was then, two years ago. Except that now I was alone sitting at a white cloth-covered table in a college restaurant managed by Chinese.

In front of me was a glass of Coke and a newspaper. Death was in the headlines. Places familiar to me were being scenes of killing, of burning. Peaceful haunts could no longer evoke the same memory.

The hydrogen bomb. Two giants pushing upwards and upwards till their heads touch the sky and their feet turn too large for the world to hold.

Punishment of criminals. Electrocution.

In the government headlines being made. Names becoming more important than deeds. Bickering. Self-interest.

Through all this the balloon slowly getting larger and larger. And those who blow, they seem to be still blowing. We feel terror bordering on despair, resignation more honestly called cynicism.

Yet while we claim that we are Christians, we act like hedonists. In the gravest of times,
in the borderline of panic, we retain our calm. I wish I could believe that for all it is a calm brought about by faith, by a belief in another kind of future.

But is it so? Is it not mere hedonism that becomes even more pathetic because of the disguise it takes that is more habit than honesty? We say we prepare for the next world, yet while we are here the rush for power, for money, even at a time when that appears to afford no future security, grows.

This, maybe to the surprise of all my friends who at one time or another have judged this column as coming from a most cynical mind, is an appeal. A genuine appeal stemming from varied emotions—from fear, from hope, from love. We need good Catholics. We have many Catholics. We have many duty conscious Catholics. But I say, we still need Catholics. We need people like the child who took the Child Jesus for a ride in his wagon,

We need love—not as misers feel it, not as maniacs desire it, not as the fashionable adopt it, but as God, whatever God each one of has and believes in, would have us understand.

16 April 1950

Education: Will the leadership then rest with the wealthy?

We had a chance to look over some test papers of high school students who, according to their principal, a man of rather long years of experience with enough knowledge of existing conditions in education to be able to speak with authority, were an average representative of all the students in the archipelago at present, with a few exceptions among private schools, notably exclusive, expensive schools in the city.

The papers were horribly entertaining. They were also merely horrible. One first year student spells things as "I" into "ay". "My" becomes "may". There are other mistakes of which these are the most flagrant by their very simplicity.

Biology, with its numerous complicated and strange-sounding names has even less chance of being understood. The history exams showed memorized words with no notion of the meanings behind them. It was a dictionary jumble of meaningless sounds. Even things as simple as dates were atrociously out of reason.

The puzzle behind it is 'How did these students ever get into the high school?' Their records show, when we investigated, were all there. Some were in because of certificates given by registered teachers. Their former records were allegedly burned and the government had to be satisfied with the certifications of their former instructors. Others had even all their former reports intact and showed their grades, most of which, when observed more closely, showed that they barely made the grade. But they did.

Long contact with public schoolteachers of small towns makes us feel sure that it was not the highly polished system of giving is receiving, practiced only in the mere select circles that prompted their generosities. More often, it was a kind of affection, almost noblesse oblige, twisted out of proportion, that were the reasons behind these almost moronic intellectuals in the high schools.

There are a few instances when teachers may have been guilty of mere impatience. After all, when you have had a student for two years, see him day in and day out, pound and pound and get nothing, no intelligent results, and when you can't just tell the student to go and never darken your classroom again, there seems to be only one loophole—pass him on and let the headache pass on too.

Then comes high school. With such material, with the nooks used, and with facilities that we have, it is probably unfair for us to expect intellectual giants to come out of those places. As it is we cannot even expect averagely educated citizens.

At the same time we have the private schools in Manila. Going through the assignment notebook of a first-grader in, let us say, La Salle College, we found out that he knows about as much as an average elementary graduate. A fifth grader in a private girls' school knows enough for a third year high school student. Of course there are a few things that might not make this a very exact statement, and

yet ask any honest high school teacher in one of the average public and provincial high schools of today and they will agree.

Are the private schools to blame for this fact? Certainly, emphatically, not. They are only giving to the students what is their due.

And yet, again, are the rich going to be educated, and only the rich? Is it not enough that those who cannot afford it have to do away with comfort, with luxuries, and oftentimes even with beauty, but do they have to do away with education too? For every student in a good private school, how many are there in the other kind? And is this the generation that the country is building up its future with? Will the leadership then, as is natural (because to the intelligent and well educated must go the leadership) rest with the wealthy? Is that the kind of democracy that we are building up to?

Governments have duties. This is one of their most pressing ones – it ranks with the problems of peace and order, with the problems of economics, and all the sundry others that make our authorities nurse their fevered brows in these days—our educational system should be revised, our books should be revised, our teachers should be "rejuvenated", our schools should be rebuilt in all ways.

If the government cannot do that, then let them read Plato's Republic and start an entirely new system.

23 April 1950

Appropriation: Nothing is beautiful that is not true.

It was with misgivings that we went to witness the eliminations for the "cumbancheros" contest[1], held at the San Lazaro race tracks several weeks ago.

Dressed in gay, gaudy costumes notably un-Filipino, the boys waited in their respective places for the time when their turn came. Almost all of them sat quietly, perhaps even nervously or with a tinge of excitement. Then, when their names were called, they stood up, filed in an orderly manner to the mike and went through their performance.

We do not pretend to be connoisseurs in music. To quote one man in reference to his art, "We merely follow our instincts." That our instincts have coincided with the choice of the well-versed in music is fortunate. That we enjoy Bach and Beethoven and Brahms and rave over Mozart and Franck does not mean that we do not tap our feet on the floor when we hear Louis Armstrong and Charlie Spivak and the rest of them. Or that we don't feel subtly graceful and romantic (as long as we remain seated) when hearing Bimbo Danao[2].

Everything taken into account, we do feel that we have quite a catholic taste, maybe commendable, maybe not, but agreeable to our own selves insofar as it allows us to enjoy a wider variety of things than the more choosy and well-versed would.

But the music that we heard that afternoon at the San Lazaro race track left us cold. Completely, irrevocably cold. There were instances when for a moment we literally clung to our seats, in the hope that we were about to hear the faint beginnings of something that would lead to better things. We were always let down.

It was noise. A rather studied, monotonously modulated, naively neurotic imitation of everything that could not be Filipino.

And yet through it all, through the performances which left us dazed there was something. Some very big, important thing which makes me say now, with all the enthusiasm and hope one can muster—the Cumbancheros must go on!

The reason lies in one boy's graceless move as he played his maracas, or in another man's sincere efforts to play his accordion perfectly. Or in the absorption of all of them in what they were doing, in their enjoyment of their own music. For if what they produced was almost all noises, behind these lay a certain craving for harmony, for beauty. That this found expression in the poor imitation of Latin-American dishes we were given is unfortunate. It is the people who listen, who pass judgment, who will actually make of these groups something or nothing.

Several years ago, I went to an exhibition given by some Negroes*. They were dressed as everyone else was. They were gathered around casually, with no fanfare, no glitter. And they sang—they sang Joe

Hill and Swanee River and Ol' Man River and Banjo on My Knee. We sat quietly on one side having gooseflesh and on the verge of tears. Sometime later the same songs were sung on the stage by some white folk in black-face. We were disgusted.

Nothing is good that is a flagrant imitation. Nothing is beautiful that is not true.

The Philippines is rich with music of its own. Because we are a musical people. It is in our blood. The boys who play with the cumbancheros, it is even more in theirs. It is in their gait as they walk to the front, in the glint of their eyes, the lilt in their voices.

Most of these boys had nothing much to do before they joined these groups. Most probably they stood around in corner stores, idle and discontent.

In an age of defeatism, it is good to feel that these are those who under the most adverse of conditions have found their way of expression.

Because this manner, we must say honestly what we feel, is nothing as yet that is creditable to our country or to the paying public's personal interests, the cumbancheros may someday find themselves defeated too.

But this must not happen. Because they are Filipinos, because they are of our blood and our temper we expect them to find their ways to our real music, to the kind that we feel is our own and which foreigners will respect and give their due.

7 May 1950

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[1] Cumbanchero (from Spanish *cumbancha*, or a lively, impromptu party or musical gathering.) In the early 1950s, cumbanchero bands surged in popularity across Manila. Following the earlier contests sponsored by the Japanese-controlled *Manila Shimbun-su* during WWII, these energetic percussion and string groups became a staple of postwar fiestas, broadcasts, and social dances.

[2] Bimbo Danao (Rodrigo Custodio Danao) was a highly celebrated Filipino actor and crooner who rose to fame as LVN's lead actor in the post-war years.

* Using "negroes" as a modern descriptor for Black people is generally considered inappropriate and offensive. However, the word remains contextually acceptable in specific historical discussions (such as reviewing mid-20th-century literature…)

Transport: After circling around with "Romulo," I found the place unchanged.

"ROMULO" is a bus. A gaudy yellow affair. Its name is written in a bright clear blue unmistakable even to my nearsighted eyes a hundred yards away.

"Romulo" was parked under Quezon bridge waiting for passengers. I had nothing to do. Even in this age of high-pressure salesmen and low-blood-pressure society matrons there are still a few who have nothing to do. (Like for example the people who have no big homes. One room. One two by two room, that's all, and they can clean it up with one twirl of the finger. And no food to cook. And no clothes to launder—so what's there to do.)

I had nothing to do so I was walking along looking wishfully at the yards of cloth and thinking how many times would they go around the world, and thinking what do the vendors do when the stuff they sell isn't sold, do they let it rot or do they make themselves eat it all, and when do they ever get enough time off to live another kind of life uncomforted by a basket of wares and screeching buses and yelling mouths. And I was thinking of Chinese and Filipinos, because that is what Echague is like to me at times.

Then along comes this bus. I had not planned on going anywhere. (It's kind of nice never to plan because all of a sudden you find yourself doing something you had planned all along in your weaker moments—like, you say, I love riding buses to nowhere, and if you decide to do it, then you never get into a bus. You'll probably get into a taxi and listen to ominous ticking sounds and end up a nervous wreck. But if you don't plan, you most usually get somewhere, and you never say: But I planned to go some other place.)

"Romulo" ambles in quite attractively and slowly, sort of like saying, Come up and see me. It's not as big as other buses. It even looks friendly. Newly painted too. It almost looks like a clean well-lighted place.

Give "Romulo" a try, I thought. It doesn't look too suicidal anyway. So, I boarded the bus. Ten centavos. Costs as much as other means of transportation for getting nowhere.

There were other people, of course. These ones though, knew where they were going.

We started off, stopped, picked up some others, went off again, stopped again. Then off again till we were going on pretty steadily with no more stoppings and picking up people. "Romulo" was already full. Then people started going down. On to the end of the line, till I was alone.

I had seen quite much of the city. (It's different when you ride a bus with no destination. You have time to look around. Even though you have as much time as the other passengers.)

Manila is nice. It is funny. It is rude. It is admirable. It is exasperating. I could go on and on.

People also laugh too much. I don't mean laugh inside.

Then the bus turned back. Of course, the conductor and driver thought I was slightly mad, and I could not explain to them it was because of "Romulo."

We drove on a different route and now it was the passengers I looked at. If I speak about them, it will be a cliché.

Then finally we got back to Quiapo and I went down.

After circling around with "Romulo," I found the place unchanged. The beggars still there, the cripples still there, the pious still there, the artificial flowers still there, everything still there.

One hour had gone by.

And so what does this all mean?

15 October 1950

Red Tape: Once in a while the escapist mood hits us.

Once in a while the escapist mood hits us, which makes us start plans for going to Switzerland, or Indonesia, or any other land besides our own—not because we have any false illusions that government or people will be any different in these distant places—but since we do not really belong, are not part of a foreign country, we can have the detachment of guests, not feel the anger and frustration which we experience in a country to which we belong. If people kill themselves turning democratic handsprings, heads flattened against the ground and eyes peeping between their arms looking at a topsy-turvy world and seeing every normal two-legs-on-the-ground individual as a menace to individual freedom, that is their own circus.

But then going to Switzerland or Indonesia or Afghanistan or Timbuctoo means getting a passport, and getting a passport means having some authorities pronounce that you never stole, forged, raped, murdered, dealt in ten percent, slandered the government, left a thumbmark in Samanillo Building[1], are free from germs, not afraid of injections. Getting a passport also means having a lot of patience—something around fifty-four pesos, knowing someone who can help you in the dollar twists and squeaks, and so forth and so on.

And since we start from the premise of wanting to escape all this folderol, going to such places just gets us more involved, before we know going through such grueling experiences as having to figure out what an income tax means, what subversive means, and handing out to strangers who take it all as a matter of course, or as the case may be, not as a matter of course, which makes it worse, personal intimate information on things like what can identify me from the rest of the world, and how are my daily health habits.

But still having to get away, we figure to take the steps of Mr. Alcott (father of our own Little Women Alcott, who fed his family on what he earned peddling and what his daughter did), Mr. Hawthorne, even Mr. Emerson after a fashion, and of other dreamers including Spaniards, French, Mexicans, and two Filipinos who started their transcendentalist movement with such sincerity that some of them refused to eat potatoes because they grew downwards, not with eyes turned to the skies.

We thought we would start a Brook Farm[2] experiment of our own, with none of the high ideals—how can we with such a nomenclature; none of the fastidiousness in eating habits—our financial status will not allow that; with none of the high intellectual gropings and grapplings with Kant and Fourier—abstractions are only for the philosophers—of the renowned Brook Farm experimenters.

23 November 1950

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[1] The Samanillo Building refers to the Perez-Samanillo Building on Escolta Street — today known as the First United Building. It was one of the best-known commercial buildings in downtown Manila and served as the gateway and symbol of old Escolta elegance. It was built in 1928 by businessman Luis Pérez Samanillo and

designed by architect Andrés Luna de San Pedro, son of painter Juan Luna. It had the same kind of symbolic resonance as New York's Fifth Avenue and Paris's Boulevard Haussmann.

[2] Brook Farm was an experimental communal society founded in 1841 in West Roxbury, Massachusetts associated with transcendentalism, intellectual freedom, equal labor sharing, and a cultured but anti-materialist way of life. By the 1950s, "Brook Farm" was often used symbolically or ironically in essays when discussing leftist intellectuals, social idealism, bohemian reform culture, et. al.

And Christmas came and went but people used mere substitutes.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful land where people were very happy. All day long they sang, even while they worked, and when the sun set and they ceased their labours they were all contented even if tired.

Their king, a wise old man though not without faults, being after all as human as his subjects, still loved his people more than kings usually love their people. So even if he did make mistakes the people always forgave him, knowing that what he did he did not because of any malice against them.

But one day the king died. And like the story of the Sleeping Beauty, all the land lay in an unconscious state for some time, feeling as if the end had come with the death of their ruler.

But because people cannot sleep forever, little by little they arose from their stupor and looked around them. The land was still as beautiful, the green and purple mountains still reaching to the clouds, the young green plants still curled like unborn beings under the rich earth-loam, and the winds still carrying sun and rain, fine rain like spun glass dust that, falling on the soil, invited the green world to rise again.

And the people, looked around among themselves, and thinking to find a king as of old, chose one among themselves who gave the same promise as all good rulers of old did.

But when he was crowned and given the purple robes it did not look as good on him.

However, the tailors said, "We'll fix that."

But the slim sceptre still kept falling from his pudgy hands.

So, the craftsmen said, "We'll fix that." And they gave him a bludgeon.

The crown was too big for his head. The surgeons fixed it. They operated on his head to make it bigger.

There were still many things that needed fixing, but always somebody came along and provided a remedy till finally the new king appeared to have all that was necessary.

But by then he was so much indebted to his makers, and like a robot that was slave to the individual windings of each mechanism, his actions were relative to their wishes.

And slowly the country changed. There was sighing louder than the wind and weeping stronger than the rains. Mountains became the refuge of men who no longer hunted for wild boars or deer but

their own people. Life was made up of getting what you could from each other and the blood of men was as the blood of chickens, spilled to satisfy each man's hunger.

The gods, seeing what man had made of himself in this land, conceived of some punishment by which no man would really be hurt but would still not be happy.

And so, the season of cold suns and glittering night stars came around. Campfires burning orange were surrounded by men shivering and wishing to go home but not being able to. And in towns and cities, paper lanterns were being made. Stores were full of tinsel and gaily wrapped packages. Old men in red suits with pillows on their bellies and long white beards sat around in corners singing songs and smiling as children. And then the people looked at each other and tried to say they wished well to each other and tried to look happy but it was difficult, because they were so busy trying to catch the words that should be used to say such a thing but they could not because the gods had stolen the words away from them.

They thought and they thought and they said, "We wish you happiness," and they said, "May you be joyful this season," and they said other things, but somehow the right words were never there.

And Christmas came and went but people used mere substitutes.

24 December 1950

Malacañan: Art is limited by neither time, space nor artists.

You don't quite know where you are when you are in Malacañan. That is probably the secret of its success.

Let the external hold the clue to the internal. What you have is a geographical, historical, sociological confusion.

First the problem of placing the nationality of the fabulous historical landmark of the Philippines, so well landmarked that each decade finds a new aesthetic sense to denote its international relationships. The main building—shades of Spanish architecture? Pasig River?—whispers of Venice flanked on one side by Malayan roofs, overrun not with gondolas but motorboats carrying select players of poker and polo across the river. Two statuesque lions reminiscent of Royal British hearts, a gasoline station in the lines of the best USA jukebox tradition, and a social hall which thanks to Mr. Soekarno[1] had undergone monstrous changes in what someone probably supposed is the dream of an Indonesian who never wanted to leave home. To add to the same confusion in same social hall a genuine or imitation French antique, several iron chairs à la Arte Español, and arts of all sorts, a mural over the bar reminiscent of Joseph's varicolored coat, featuring calisthenically desirable women with aesthetically unimaginable concepts.

And what of history?—We start from the time when the first building was made—time of cornices and chandeliers and tall columns—the time when Spanish grandees, well-moustached, well-fed potentates sank halfway into thick carpets—to the present when unmoustached, well-fed executives, desiring to be in line with the times, take on the trappings of twentieth century architecture—and between then and now we have the influence of the Gilded Age, that age when gold was the favorite color, distasteful lavishness the fashion, then the age when newspaperman's buildings were cooked up by some genius to look like a morgue and the year of the Great god Gas when stations were influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright.

People: Guards doing much of nothing with the usual élan vital. Newsmen making much of much with enthusiastic sophistication. Ladies doing much of little with nothing much. And great men making much of nothing and much of much and little of little. And nothing of much.

Moral of the story: Art is limited by neither time, space nor artists. And agreed: that Malacañan is still one of the showplaces of the country.

28 January 1951

[1] Soekarno / Sukarno (born Koesno Sosrodihardjo) was the first President who served from 1945 to 1967. Soekarno is the older, Dutch-based spelling, which the president himself used for his personal signature, and it remains the official name for prominent landmarks.

If one looks for true sophistication, the "backwoods" is the place to find it.

In the certitude of her own sophistication, the city female is sipping her cocktail, smoking her cigarette, wearing her high-heeled shoes, while she says, while staring indifferently at the visitor, "Obviously she's a provinciana."

The contempt is not conscious, but it is there. The derogatory attitude is not intended, but it exists. The "provinciana," the girl who does not dress well, who has an air of hesitation, who gapes rather than yawns, who splurges in Manila rather than scrimps, is damned. At least as far as her city aunt is concerned.

You may call a city girl "naive," that would still be all right. Or you may call her stupid, or childish, or bizarre, or vulgar even, but don't call her provinciana. That would be the unkindest cut of all.

Of course, ask her what goes into the making of a country mouse, and she wouldn't have the slightest idea. The province, as far as the city character is concerned, is some nebulous part of the archipelago where rice and coconuts grow and where people speak with funny inflections that sound like Chinese, or French, or Timbuctooan, but not correct Filipino.

In a sense, probably that is right. The province is a foreign country, so foreign to the city that for the escapist who wants to get away from it all, a dose of the outside-Manila air could be recommended. Of course it is not exactly New York, and it can be ohhhh so bohhhring. People never talk of anything much except small-town gossip and one has to be a non-parasitic intellectual and social character to enjoy them.

Of course, this isn't at all as bad as it sounds. Because there aren't too many of these happenings. There are more in Manila. But city people don't know how to enjoy what they have. They take their deaths for granted. After it's over, all they'll do is go to the funeral and that's the end of that. No "apatan," no "siyaman," no "pabasa." A dead man's dead and that's all. Not in the provinces. One eats and drinks and sympathizes by playing mahjong or poker and "panginggue" and forking over the tong with a happy smile.

City sister will probably say, "Ha! Highly uncivilized." But certainly not unsophisticated. In fact, if one looks for true sophistication, the "backwoods" is the place to find it. The small town is where the mistress says to the wife, "But I am only borrowing your husband," where women smoke cigars and men stand outside of church during sermons, and where even children are not afraid of death.

High points in small town life are celebrations, of course. Town fiesta, Christmas, New Year, birthdays, baptisms—and, most exciting of all, killings. Now, somebody gets killed in Manila and all you can get about it is what appears in black and white several hours later. But in the provinces first you hear the shot, so you crane your neck out of wide windows that look out to mountains and lakes and skies,

and yell out to your neighbors, "Hoy, did you hear that? Who got killed this time?" Or you run out in the street bare-footed, hair uncombed, half-slip showing, and accost the next running person in sight.

Victim identified, place set, you run back to the house, announce with relish to the rest of the family just what happened, and then rush off to the municipal building, where the body is to be taken so you can get a first-hand view of the whole event, plus all the other sordid details. This time you take the trouble to comb your hair and put on some footwear. But never mind the half-slip. Of course, half of the town will be there too, but everyone is allowed a look. It's always bloody and gruesome, hands and feet sprawled in a dance-macabre pose. There won't be any whispering around in the presence of death. There will be loud-voiced comments, questions instead. Whodunnit? Why? You get all the facts. Maybe he had a wife. Maybe the wife didn't like his appointments. Maybe he owed some money. Maybe he said a cuss word. Maybe some girl did not like to dance with him. Maybe it was all a mistake. He was not really the one supposed to be killed.

Of course, the killer has not yet been caught. But everyone knows who he is. The law is not too necessary to get him either.

You go home knowing that justice, or maybe revenge, will have its course. Supper in the evening is fun. Everyone is excited about the death, and there are plenty of guesses on what will happen next.

Most often the guesses are right. The friends or relatives of the injured (highly so) party get back at the killer.

And so another shot is heard some time or another. Off you rush again. Same rigmarole goes on. Maybe that's the end of the chapter. Maybe not. The cycle will go on in all probability.

8 July 1951

Education: The unseen anomalies

SOME DAY some enterprising party interested in the progress of education in the Philippines will go disguised from classroom to classroom to find out first-hand just what is going on. With neither cloak of authority nor of juror in his disfavor, he will be allowed to catch glimpses of the nourishment which students are being fed with from day to day.

There will be quite a number of good things he will find out, some so good that he may make a try at having salaries of teachers raised. But there will be a number of faults which will never be discovered by mere inspection of university records, by mere interviews with deans and teachers, by mere reading of a university curriculum.

If our college visitor has enough time, there may be facts like the following which he may find out. For example, he may get to know that the Reader's Digest has been made compulsory reading in an English course in one of the local universities, examinations even being given about its contents. Now, any literate person of the year 1951 knows by now what the Reader's Digest is—reputable, yes, readable, yes, entertaining, yes, but certainly not the basis of any educational standard—a standard which incidentally expressly forbids its student body from reading The New Yorker.

Another very reputable university—and this case is one that causes more chagrin, to say the least, on our part—has a head of some department or another forbidding the reading and study of books by Ernest Hemingway, Erskine Caldwell, William Faulkner, and James Joyce, for the course in Contemporary Literature. A favorable eye in this case is cast upon writers like G. K. Chesterton, Joyce Kilmer, and John Galsworthy. We have nothing against the latter. They certainly can stand on their own merits, without having the morals of upstanding professors to back up their value. But we fail to understand the attitude showered on the former writers.

At a certain age students cannot help realizing the realisms of life, to use language which may be approved in all institutions. Also at a certain age, and arriving at certain persuasions, students will tend to buy the very books which are forbidden them, especially when such books receive applause from contemporary critics and teachers. One may ban Hemingway, but Hemingway will go on being read. James Joyce is not read for his pornography, almost all of his readers will assert, because he has no pornography at all, except as wrapped up in challenging and ultimately decipherable and admirable mannerisms. (We use the word here not in a derogatory sense).

The anomalies of educational habits extend to the field of history, too, where we have a very lovable old professor giving his theory on why the war of the Spanish Armada was fought. Seems Philip wanted to marry Elizabeth and Elizabeth kept saying no, in spite of all the persuasions the former could use. Of course, the ardent suitor did not realize that Elizabeth could never marry him, even if the wish had been there. You see, so our educator says, Elizabeth was a man. And not knowing this, the disappointed suitor launched the war. But that was not all! Why do you think Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, was beheaded? Because one day she came to visit cousin Elizabeth, and when night-time

came, urged by the traditional female curiosity, she went and peeped into her cousin's room, and what did she discover? Right! Yes, Elizabeth was as female as her grandfather was. So, the discovered Elizabeth had to put an end to sweet cousin Mary's life or else the secret would out.

One could go on and on. Unfortunately, these things will never be heard by our official investigators, not first-hand at least. All the ceremony and fanfare that include the arrival of great people will accompany the visits which they make in the form of extravagant preparations for the week's lesson plan, either jotted down in notebooks or the mind. It may even be accompanied with previous exercises by some on the correct way of speaking English.

We have to admit that the country can boast of a number of very good, even great, educators. But there are also a number which could do with some reviewing. We are sure they know what they are about, to a large extent, but in between their truths they do manage to scatter a few falsehoods, unwittingly and unintentionally it is true, but falsehoods just the same. And there are those who because of standardized morals actually push students to a more detailed study of immorality by their very prohibitions.

Having to find Faulkner on their own, they find that their search does not end there. And it is with no thanks to the institutions where they came from if when later they discover people like Luoys and Rabelais and Miller, that their attitude is healthy and not colored with the blushing-bride tints of early nineteenth century morality.

5 August 1951

VII Musings

A few days ago a friend of mine accused me of hedonism.

A few days ago a friend of mine accused me of hedonism.

I countered with “Aren't we all?” Semantics would provide such an easy loophole in the case of an argument from a Christian point or view. For after all what is pleasure to the Christian might be torture to the atheist and enjoyment is no criterion of sin. And if we think of the ancient concept of hedonism we are doubly saved from committing transgression against our own souls through another semantic rationalization.

But even more than the ethical values of this philosophy, what is interesting, even vital, is the path that leads to it—not as it was understood years ago, but its present connotation: A life dedicated to pleasure, even reaching an extreme of day by day grasping at the world’s thin straws of laughter.

What kind of despair gives up everything except the seconds of perfumed breathing according to each one’s stink? What combination of life’s acids numbs one, first to real happiness and later, more damnably to real pain?—until tears and laughter come as concessions to the existence of human emotions, to prove that a man still is human, still subject to fire and ice of a once consciously regulated, later habitually involuntary temper.

The shell might be so well-built, the outer wall of defense, so finely, strongly done, that we lose sight of it, take it for our real, sincere selves. We think that what we do, say, think, stems from genuine altruism, from true Christianity. Avarice is disguised as an instinct for self-preservation; capitalistic dictatorship as the right to exploit opportunities; lust as the right to pursue happiness. As long as the illusion lasts man is free from despair.

But once in a while one of the world’s rocks hits its objective, and the shell cracks. Man gets an inner glimpse at himself.

By some subhuman manifestation some can save themselves. The only pity is that a great number of those who do, retreat from the world into their private truths. In the discovery that true unselfishness can be realized only in serving one’s God-created humanity first with principled integrity, man hides from the world. Only saints can do otherwise.

And then there are those who see through the crack, retreat swiftly, not liking what they have seen, and forever blindfold themselves. To some extent they are lucky. Even if they remove the covering of their eyes the light blinds them so they are unaware of what lies in the brightness.

But the real hurt lies for the insatiable, for those who peering into the softness that lies underneath the brittle shell of their and society’s making, forever dig and scratch and dig and scratch trying to get to that man that was once a child. To the reality of an existence.

It hurts.

From the beginning it does. From the moment one faces the mirror of one's mind and asks the questions that bit by bit destroy the protective armor. As children we have asked the questions of why, and what and how and whence. Through the tangled web of life and death that comes while we grow, the questions get lost, till the time we see the child again.

It hurts to ask oneself the million questions—not even concerning others or life or God, but of oneself. How honest have I been? How motivated by greed, by self-interest? It sounds so prosaic, even preachy in words. But take a human being, take each little minute of life and the various self-deceptions that have gone on—it hurts to discover them.

And where are we going? Why the mad rush; the frantic frenzy—all for what?

They say we are a Catholic nation. I keep telling that to myself. But still the despair mounts. Every day the commercial din in Quiapo of people who have no other choice in their need to feed themselves. Every day the red lights of life winking. Every day the killing of man by man. Every day the growing strength of man-made machines and monsters. Every day man's insecurity for his own self finding release in hatred of others.

Someday we hope that some lost sob will find its echo and recognize it. But before that happens we can only wish and hope, and wait, cry, and despair, and die.

30 April 1950

Big people, small people, all kinds of people, settling the fate of the world.

Times there are when everything in the world seems amusing. Maybe it's the way you woke up, maybe it's the first sound you heard in the morning, maybe it's some gastronomical activity, or maybe just the moon. Whatever the whys and wherefores of such a state interests us little now. The only fact that remains is that it is the mood we are in at the moment, and since all attempts at seriousness have failed, we shall be our natural self—or the natural self that we are at the hour. For there is no such thing as permanence.

And because of this light, flighty and highly imaginative temper we are in, we shall not risk writing now on what we had promised ourselves last week—on writers. It would be courting the annihilation of peace for almost a month to do so.

Besides, something more interesting in this period has turned up, and something which very well fits the almost fantastical mood that has invaded our otherwise well-meaning brains.

It is the image of groups, small groups and big groups. They form a most amusing conglomeration. Because there are so many of them, all so much in earnest, or thinking that they are anyway. They are all making big talk. Big people, small people, all kinds of people, settling the fate of the world.

There is one group—one that's got good weather in its favor, settling the question of the Orient, or at least trying to, right now in Baguio[1]. The kind of talk there will be undoubtedly interesting, culturally uplifting, mentally stimulating. There will be a lot of good resolutions. There will be a lot of brave words. There will even be much willingness.

Then there is another group. This one has got good weather in its favor too. They are all gathered in some mountain top, most probably somewhere around the vicinities of Tayabas and Batangas. There will be a lot of talk there too. Also gesticulating. A lot of plans. The fate of humanity is being settled. Ideologies are being discussed. Democracy talked on. They too will have many brave words. They have probably heard of what is going on in Baguio. Maybe they are laughing. Or maybe not. But they are aware. For theirs the dreams, theirs the hopes. Personal hopes, things that touch them directly. Little events that have brought them to where they are. That is why there is more immediacy and urgency in their protestations. The glass tower has been long broken for them.

But there are other groups besides. In some hideout probably another band. Thinking—who will the next victim be? Who the next host? They are strong, they are conscienceless. They too are out to get what they want. They also talk.

And then in small towns, in big ones, in cities, the myriad others. Some knowing, some unknowing. They also talk. Hope, wish.

—And again I beg pardon for the mood—but it is all funny—strangely, stupidly funny as the questions that once in a while pop in our heads. As for example, Why do we have noses instead of just two holes to breathe through? … or if my father had not married my mother would I exist, and if so whose child would I be?

That's the way it is—all these little earnest groups. All of them fighting for something. All of them ranting about equality.

In the meantime others suffer and bleed and starve and wait and hope while dying. They—and all those who discuss the fate of the world and who juggle the wishes of people in semantic terms.

Living in the tiny enclaves of their own isolated groups, little knowing what happens in the circle of others, speaking in generalities, planning in large proportions, while the small proportions called human beings writhe in the torturesome state of the nation.

Somewhere on Mount Olympus some ambrosia-fed nectar-imbibing characters are having a wonderful time, laughing at the cavorting of the pale wraith-like figures down below.

28 May 1950

[1] The 1950 "Baguio Conference," was an international meeting held in Baguio from May 26–30, 1950. It was convened by Philippine President Elpidio Quirino, with strong involvement from Carlos P. Romulo. The conference brought together representatives from India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Thailand, Australia, the Philippines, to discuss regional cooperation and peace in Asia during the early Cold War period, especially concerns about communist expansion in Asia after the Chinese Revolution and amid tensions leading toward the Korean War. Some historians consider it an early precursor to later Asian regional alliances and conferences.

Whom we would want to be with if we knew we were going to die in a couple of hours?

Death is always a fascinating subject—to those who are afraid of it, to those who hold no awe for it, to those whose indifference is bred of a living familiarity with it—to these and all the rest, including myself.

That was why one day I found myself discussing the subject of my last moribund minutes with a friend of mine. As is usual among unphilosophical approaches, we ended up with realistic clichés—the last being the job of figuring out whom we would want to be with if we knew we were going to die in a couple of hours.

The long list of friends I conjured up was no help. What could I possibly have to say to any of them? Friendships are only for the living. Some kind of ego, no longer mortal, not yet immortal, must needs be satisfied at this threshold. Not all the theories in the world could be of any interest when I am on the verge of complete forgetfulness and knowledge, so even the most satisfyingly intellectual relationships would be of no avail. The physical may even arrive at the border of being contemptible. Trivialities may be the best approach because they are the most casual. And yet could one stand talk on the Riviera even if one's resolution is to let the last hours pass as normally and ordinarily as the most normal and ordinary day would be?

What of the people we love—those with whom we have shared our lives, and made part of us? Because with our death a part of them ceases to exist, are we in all practicality capable of being comforted by them? This of course, is a very personal inquiry to which everyone may have a different answer.

But still does not the nearness of death make the line more distinct between one individual and another? Even love, the deepest that man can be capable of, cannot withstand the promise of complete disintegration of one of the individuals, which then suggests the lack of necessity of the physical presence of the living beside the dying. Besides, if one is practical and realistic, the death of one person does not mean the fading out of another, however magnificent the attachment. Man lives, needing other men, picks out one individual to fill the need at a certain time. But if that one suddenly disappears, the days pass, the absent recede, and the living take their place.

The proximity of death, it seems, would reduce man to the fundamentals, to the simplest of terms. In some ways I would hate to see the inner workings of all men's minds if they knew their time was up—their desires and motivations in life being extended from the mortal plane to the immortal—and to the unbeliever, from the mortal to complete annihilation.

Because the concept of death is so broad but yet so unknown, it is impossible to base one's attitude towards it with a forward outlook. The best one can do it seems is look backwards. Which brings us

back to the old question of who we would wish most could be with us then, to share with us whatever peace we can conceive of at the moment, when so close we are to the real peace.

That someone of necessity has to be one that belongs to the past.

It is hard to choose. One is almost on the verge of saying, "I would like to be alone." That is the first choice.

The second choice is neither friends nor the loved ones. In their own planes they are important, but not in this.

—There is perhaps a man, someone we have never seen nor of whose existence we have never really known, someone we never strove to do anything for as an individual and from whom we asked nothing. But in our span of life, when fired with ambition and love of all human beings, we tried to do good, somehow out of all the thousands we reached him. And helped him.

If there is such a one, to him in all humility I would go in mind if not in body, a few seconds before I leave, to ask from him a cloak of valor to justify my existence in the world and my entrance to another.

18 June 1950

The Korean war: Little words thrown into one vast empty space of desperate darkness.

This is one of those days of inadequacy, when I feel that whatever I may say or do is really of no importance. It will all be just little words thrown into one vast empty space of desperate darkness.

There could be the usual theories on literature—yet today if I did it I would feel as if I were trying to escape into a self-imposed confinement because I am most comfortable there, because in that world no one can touch me and harm me. Or I could talk about the past, wax nostalgic for the days of peace. That too would be escape.

There is so much to do today. So much to be said. Mine, I admit, neither the intelligence nor the verbosity with which to express everything. All I can do is probably talk of the small things which will hold the larger things in their shadows…

There's a family living in a shack of old tin and wooden boxes living not very far from us. Now that the rains have come, their one-room house leaks and they have to huddle together in one corner to keep dry. But rather than do that, the coughing children run out in the rain, their spindly legs finding pleasure in the soft sinking into mud. Yes, I said, finding pleasure. They have to make their own kind of pleasure, finding no other—not in regular meals or sufficient clothing or even people who will really understand their plight. People in the same state as theirs have neither the time nor temper for sympathy. And people who only see what they go through but who do not realize it have not the sympathy to give their time to other people's miseries.

There are of course the social workers, the nice silk-complexioned ladies of our country who go around every now and then doing mercy to these people of the slums. Among them we find a few sincere ones, really concerned about the people they go to, ready to help. But the rest are others who just go around with perfumed breaths not really knowing what it is all about. Mercy is not mercy if it entails distance.

Near our house, too, there is another family, living in a six-room, three bathroom building. Two or three cars in the family. They go to church regularly, even make sojourns on Fridays and Wednesdays to their respective patron saints. In between I have heard them curse the Jews. They even turned to me with a sly grin expecting me to take up their prejudice. Then the next breath they are cursing the Chinese. Communists—you know—they say with a gasp. I don't know what our country is coming to, they say. With the Chinese here, and the Koreans acting the way they are, and America not using the atom bomb yet. Why, America should, and stop these reds from their foolishness.

These people, the ones who say these things, are incidentally people of means, of influence. What they say, others possibly take as truth. Unhappily, all they can quote from are newspapers.

As an experiment I sent to them the book of John Hersey, "Hiroshima." When I talked to them a few days later they expressed their thoughts quite volubly—Wasn't the atom bomb horrible? To think that

your skin could come off like a glove as an after-effect of that weapon! You even lost your hair (the girl of the family giggled. What if her boyfriend started getting bald, she sighed). Then, to conclude it all, they said—as some senators of the United States of America have said—Why don't they start using the atom bomb? What did they make them for anyway?

And so that's the way it is.

It is not all clear in my mind today. Outside, it rains hard and in a few hours the estero not far from our place will be full enough with mud so the poor can get out in bancas and enjoy themselves in it. The rich in the meantime will look out and curse the damned government for not doing something to their particular part of their locality. Pave it or something, they say.

In the provinces, too, it is raining. Even in the south, hundreds of miles away. Perhaps also in Australia, America. Everywhere. Even in Korea.

It rains, while we sit in our private cubicles, tossing futile words which take to the air for some short space of time, whizz through men's minds, then boomerang back and hit us on the head.

6 August 1950

The Korean War began in June 1950, and the Philippines officially sent troops later that year through the Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea (PEFTOK). The first Filipino combat contingent departed in September 1950 and arrived in Korea on September 19, 1950. The Philippines was the first Southeast Asian country to send combat troops to support South Korea under the United Nations command.

Whatever you may think is your own reason for existence.

A couple of years ago Robert Frost [1], speaking to a small group of students of creative writing, came out with the advice that all human beings should have some sort of "rig."

"You know, a rigmarole," he repeated, smiling. "Whatever it may be. Just so you have something to stand on in your life, whether you're serious about it or not."

Actually most writers have already discovered their own peculiar sort of rigmarole. T. S. Eliot has his hollow men, James Joyce his dead, Hemingway his lost generation. Tolstoi had his search for religion and God, Zola his paradoxical reformist literature as against his naturalistic philosophy, Aeschylus his high degree of moral law.

Our local writers have theirs too. There is T. D. Agcaoili[2] with his death in life, Vic Rivera with the discovery of the beautiful in everything, and Nilo Quesada with his everything that is funny is good —and everything is funny—ergo, everything is good (of course what he has written he keeps out of publication so we do not have the opportunity of tearing his rigmarole to pieces.)

Yet rigs are not for writers alone. Maybe even before you heard the term, you possessed one. If in the time of the Greeks, Sophocles said that "it was hope that kept half of humanity alive," this being the twentieth century—the age of science which has revealed so many truths without being able to explain and rationalize away the emotional quotients involved in the truths—there is the rigmarole to take the place of hope.

When we hope, we have to look to something else that is beyond us. It is an admission of incompleteness, of dependence on outward forces, of some kind of faith in others besides ourselves.

A rigmarole does away with that. The rigger's chief concern is himself, his basic theory of life having had to stem from his own nature and temperament. And because this is the twentieth century, the age of cynics, skeptics, existentialists, emotional nihilists, we look to the moderns and find that science has indeed accomplished much. Godless, yet divinely true, it has left body undisturbed but has invaded the mind.

And so we find the moderns brooding—everything is nothing. All is zero. Emotions start from the glands. Love is a matter of habit. Man from birth is all …alone. Right and wrong are mere social developments. The three basic drives are what rule men's lives. Nobility is mere fashionable egoism. Altruism is hypocrisy.

Starting from these thoughts, we arrive at concoctions that make life tolerable. There are the modern hedonists, whose understanding of the philosophy is limited to the word pleasure without the foresight that the originators included with it. Then there are the individualists, those who—capable

of twisting this rig to a proper shape so it conforms to conventional patterns while at the same time serving materialistic purposes—use it as an effective conscience-slayer.

There are hundreds of other rigs—as: I am a writer, so I can do what others cannot; or I am lost, help me find myself; or I am a philanthropist, come to help others; or I am persecuted; or a neurotic; or this or that.

On one side Frost's advice may easily turn a man into some kind of mental hypochondriac. I suspect that this was not what the writer meant though; in spite of the smile on his face, I think he was serious. One has only to read his poetry to know. There are rigs and rigs, as there are all kinds of people. It is a matter of its being part of you though, of your really believing in whatever you may think is your own reason for existence.

It is not for me to say what others should live for, nor for me to argue that life is not a zero. Times there are when I try to be as honest with myself as possible—so honest about it that I almost go crazy, yet still I cannot answer these problems.

Maybe this is my own peculiar rigmarole. That one never does really find the answers. But one keeps looking just the same.

24 September 1950

[1] Robert Frost, American poet, played a pioneering role as an early guest lecturer and visiting writer at the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop, when it was under the directorship of Paul Engle. It was at this time that the author was taking her Creative Writing Masteral Degree and was attending the workshop.

[2] T.D. Agcaoili was an important Filipino writer, editor, anthologist, and literary figure associated with Philippine writing in English during the late 1940s and 1950s. He is best remembered today for editing "Philippine Writing: An Anthology"—one of the significant postwar anthologies attempting to define Philippine literature in English.

The theory of honor today entails one's being truthful.

Yesterday I found myself telling a lie.

I caught myself as I was half-through with the statement. Why I said it I do not know. It was no big deception. It would not affect to any notable extent either my life or the life of my friend. It could be classified more as a casual act of politeness. Nonetheless it was a lie. And if I had told the exact truth, it would not have made much of a difference anyway.

Of course, I do not view myself now as a monstrous creature with a pair of horns and fangs because I committed what borders on a sin. In fact, I think that it makes me more "normal" in the contemporary (and by this, I mean from the age of Eve to the present) sense of the word. And that is why I hazard to make the assumption, with no deprecatory significance, that almost all human beings tell lies.

Given an extra personality that is also myself but free from all the obligations and demands of existence that I necessarily have because I am a human being—in other words, asking, not really for a dual personality but a dual person, the one being me, now, and the second, one who has neither need for food or sleep or social contacts or anything that binds—I think it would be a thought for that me to enter into an all-out investigation of lying, experimentation included.

It is not why people lie, of course, that is of much interest to me. That belongs to the realm of psychology or business acumen. One lies, I think, either because one enjoys it or is bound to enjoy what comes after it. So that the reason for deception tallies with the basic theory that man does what he does in pursuance of what he deems is good for himself.

That lies in their own negative way actually bring more evil to the earth, is of course accepted. All the same, since the liar feels that he, at the time being the undeceived, will reasonably escape the effects of what he has perpetuated, he feels no immediate and direct hostility for the practice. It is only when he is the victim of the lie that it becomes a vice to his eyes. Practised by himself, it turns into some kind of dubious virtue, or at least practical wisdom.

At times we wonder, who originated the lie? Who perpetrated the first deception? The snake in the Garden of Eden? Actually, it does not really matter. What is more important is that human beings seemed fashioned just for it, picking up what at present almost amounts to a habit, even a parlor accomplishment.

It is interesting to figure out how the world would be if people just naturally could not tell lies—as naturally as people could not help speaking if unhampered by dumbness. Would it be a duller world, each one not having to figure out just how much the next one is taking him for a ride? Or would it be a more exciting one? Would there be peace? Or more frequent wars?

The theory of honor today entails one's being truthful. Yet it would be dishonorable for any man to say that he has never told a lie. He would then become an undiplomatic provincial, an impractical dreamer, and an impertinent fool. Or a very great liar.

1 October 1950

Is it so, then, that we kill ourselves in the process of living?

Cells keep changing, and pretty soon what we were several years ago is an entirely different person from what we are now.

Some ways I see myself as a group of different people of different ages and wonder how much they would like each other. Friends I have known from childhood I look at in much the same manner, otherwise the reason for their being what they are would be a constant puzzle.

And so one looks back to the things, the people one has left behind, and traces some kinship to the one that is now.

At five I was avidly leafing through the crisp, nice smelling pages of the Liwayway, and music was made up of college songs and cheers I heard from my brothers and sisters. Whenever I got scared I hid under the table or the bed.

At ten I was pouring tears over "Stirling Castle," still engrossed with fairy tales, but started on Marie Corelli. I loved them all. Music was made up of hymns and songs from school.

At fifteen there was Charlotte Bronte, still Corelli, G.K. Chesterton, Dumas. I was still with the fairy tales. Also I was running the gamut of all mystery stories from Sherlock Holmes to Rex, was it Beach or Stout? Also, and this I shall remember the rest of my life, there was a magazine with thick paper and the cover of which showed a man and a girl in the most romantic pose. This magazine was passed on to me as I sat in the back of the class during the study period. I looked it over hurriedly, at pictures of nicely clothed people with marcelled hair and seductively pouting lips, and men who all looked like Ramon Novarro[1] or Ray Milland[2]. I looked at them with the top of my desk lifted and did not realize the moment of damnation was close by till the voice of the nun came to me from a distance, calling my name. I remember banging the desk, and remember her softly walking to me and opening my desk and getting the magazine. I remember having kept my mouth shut on any information concerning the magazine not because of heroics or any such thing but because it was easier to have superiors than our own friends, mad of you.

At twenty I liked Glen Miller and Tchaikovsky, and could stand Schubert's Serenade, though Claire de Lune always drove me slightly crazy and I went raving mad when I heard Dream of Love. But I loved Rachmaninoff and I thought the Warsaw Concerto was incomparable.

And then five years later everything that had gone before seemed to be what I was not anymore. It was hard to connect things that I liked then to the present. So it is from that time to now there is one person, but before that there were other, familiar strangers, but strangers just the same.

Is it so, then, that we kill ourselves in the process of living?

While to one there is given life, in the same body one dies—and who is to say which is the better person, which the worse? The last can only look back on the first with nostalgia, even with fairy-tale eyes—as I do that first memory of my existence, when all I remember was a hill beside our house covered with different colors of bandera espanola in bloom, where I used to run up, and in front the sea, of clean mornings and lighted nights.

And so we grow old.

And some become harder. One set of values is exchanged for another. One kind of smile to another form of grimace.

Some gain in the losing while others lose in the gaining.

But never can change be arrested. And while we say to one we love today, "I shall never change," and it may be truth, yet we die and tomorrow it is another person who tells another kind of truth, though still lodged in the same body.

And so of people we humbly ask—Believe our sincerity. But for tomorrow do not believe everything we say today.

29 October 1950

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[1] Ramon Novarro (Ramón Gil Samaniego) was a Mexican actor. He began his career in American silent films in 1917 and was promoted as a sex symbol—"Latin lover" and was the first Latin American actor to succeed in Hollywood.

[2] Ray Milland was a Welsh-born Hollywood actor and director best known for his Oscar-winning performance as an alcoholic writer in the 1945 film The Lost Weekend.

How myths grow one can never trace clearly.

THERE WERE times when I loved listening to myths and tried to believe that they were true. There was the myth of the lanzones, and the myth of the small people who lived in molehills, and the myth of the flowers that bloomed only once a year. I thought myths were always such beautiful explanations that existed. I wished them true while knowing that they could not be because in school I was taught accuracy about how things had started.

That moonlight looked like silver because it was made of molten silver, I could never accept although it would have been so nice to be able to. But there were other myths I accepted. Only, then I did not give them that name. Rather they were facts. I grew up with certain notions, from childhood up, and surrounded by people who believed in these notions, I learned to accept them without question, without even suspicion of their untruth.

I grew to have a feeling, ingrained from one generation to another, that whites were superior. There was no wonder in my mind nor the reason why there should be an awed hush in the room whenever the American who lived in our small town entered. Even as I learned to reason more it was still a wish of mine that I had fairer skin than I had. Somehow, even my aesthetic sense had been conditioned by what I was later to find out was called color consciousness, stemming or playing a part in social prejudice.

The feeling that I was a better person than working people remained in me also for a long, long time. All the generations ahead of me had lain stone upon some stone to build up that myth, and generations of our laborers had helped build that strong wall that I thought set me apart from them.

There were many others—because I was Tagalog I did not know what stigma attached to us, but of the others I heard much—that Ilocanos were stingy, that Visayans were not very clean, that Bicolanos were not very conventional, that Pampangos were dog-eaters.

Like the legendary Americans who states of Jews, "… Well, I really like them, in fact some of my best friends are Jews…" I accepted these myths as generalizations as humorously apt for parlor jokes, without realizing that it was just that manner that the belief could become more concrete, more vicious with the years. The individuals were just people, but as a class they belonged to some classification or another.

How myths grow one can never trace clearly. That they stem from frustrations of some people is true. Or from ambitions. The Jews are what they are in America because Anglo-Saxon businessmen did not like the competition they were being given in business. Only by building a myth of greed, of unholiness and whatever social stigma they could upon the Jews could they get away with the numerous blocks they placed in the way of these Jewish Americans living in the land of the free and the brave.

Frustration, which plays a large part in all human activity, perhaps is the largest cause of myths. In some ways it is some sort of wishful thinking. Hence, we know of a man who loved a woman of not very beautiful face nor reputation so much that he had a portrait of her painted playing up practically nonexistent good points and believing in the portrait more than in the reality. And on the other hand, there is another who so disliked a woman that, taking reality, he put all his fantastic notions of all the evil things he could think up, and had it daubed into a portrait of her, in an effort to convince himself that his unfounded statements about her were justifiable.

It is of such imaginative portraits that the stuff of which pernicious myths are built—stemming from imaginations that should be intelligent enough to realize that it is only themselves they fool, and that group of credulous people who without any interior motives still cannot rise above pedestrian thinking and would accept as a fact the conclusion that women have three legs in this century because a certain hosiery factory in the United States is producing stockings not by the pair but in threes.

It is only when a man has learned to like himself without having to dislike other people or use them to further his own motives, either making a pose of altruism or out and out tyranny, can others really like him. It is only then that he can say to others he likes them without being a hypocrite.

12 November 1950

Everything reverts to man's search for happiness.

WE HAVE READ somewhere that new China has made some sort of code in love which states that "love should be fundamentally subordinate to the interests of the Revolution. It should not be based only on personal feelings and on the gratification of desires. It should not proceed from the individual's biological desires."

Lovers are enjoined to bear in mind two principles: "(1) Political considerations must come before personal considerations" and (2) Love must be mutual and spontaneous, "for then only can the two parties help each other in the road of progress and in the improvement of their work."

Because of preconceived notions about this new form of government, our initial impulse was a condemnation of the promulgation as another of those unumbilical, coldly pragmatic ideas which may easily leave man gasping to prove his identity to himself as a human individual.

And yet looking backwards and viewing marriage in the same light as some form of institutionalized love, we find very little difference between this new concept and the age-old humanly civilized ones which people at all times and all ages have evolved.

Of course, here we use the term "Revolution," but still it is a mere pinning down of an ideology into a proper noun. Other times saw other forms of ideologies, mostly religious, concerned with love. It is thought that now we have a political ideology tackling the problem of this emotion and taking a line of approach parallel to those of the others.

"…not for biological desires…" What is new about this? The same idea is the story of a man who was punished for having married for this reason. New China has nothing original.

"…must be mutual and spontaneous…" This we brush off with the thought of "terminologies too vague." Subject to discussion but only over cocktails or peanuts.

The greatest difference, it seems, is that while one places the good of the country and common welfare above all, the other places the glory of his deity and his soul as most important.

What is most interesting in this case, however, is not the subject of love—that much exploited, highly disorganized belief whose existence is vaguely proved only by those in the midst of its throes and is disproved as soon as they are thrown out of it—but the fact that it stands as a good example of what we think of as varying concepts being traced to fundamental values that work the same ways in the guise of different words.

Everything reverts to man's search for happiness. One level above that, and where the divisions start being formed, are the differing ideologies with which man proposes he can achieve the greatest good

for the greatest number of people. We cannot claim that the sincere Platonist, or Machiavellian or Marxist, or Jeffersonian is more enlightened than the next one.

It is these ideologies alone that it is also detected. In the beginning it is man's recognition of all men that drives him to theorize. In the end, it is man's failure to recognize the man next to him that makes the generalization, whatever it is, impeachable.

22 October 1950

A short bio

Ines Umali was born on 21 January 1923 to Tomas Recio Umali of Lipa, Batangas, abogado and Concepcion Herrera of Gasan Marinduque, mujer de casa, at the Hospital de San Pablo, Laguna.

She was baptized at the parish of Intramuros on 8 February 1923 as Maria Ines Juliana Umali. Her godparents were Primitivo Recio Kalaw (the cousin of Tomas) and Eufresina Guevarra.

She began her schooling in 1929 at St Scholastica's College Manila as Nita Umali. In 1932, she transferred to Tiaong Elementary School, where she graduated in 1935.

She began first year of high school at Philippine Women's College (later known as PWU) and later returned to St Scholastica's, where she graduated high school in 1939. She began her tertiary education at the University of Santo Tomas, but that was interrupted by World War II. She returned after the war, and continued her studies and was also a member of the faculty even if she had not yet completed her degree. She graduated in 1946. In July of that year, she was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Arts (AB), Summa cum laude. In November of the same year, she was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Literature in Journalism, Magna cum laude.

She then left for the United States in 1947 (her passport indicating Maria Ines Julianita Umali) to study at the State University of Iowa (University of Iowa) where, as Maria Inez Julianita Umali, she obtained a Master of Arts in English in February 1949.

She then returned to Manila.

In December 1949, at age 26, she won third prize in the Philippines Free Press Short Story awards for "The Moneymakers". First prize that year went to Nick Joaquin's "Guardia de Honor" and second prize to Gonzalo Villa's "Death of an Illusion."

In 1956, at age 33, the National Press Club of the Philippines awarded her a Certificate of Merit for distinguished and significant work in the field of journalism for the year 1955.

From 1950, after the award for The Moneymakers, and barely a year after her return from Iowa, she began writing for major Manila newspapers and magazines in both English and Tagalog.

I cannot be absolutely certain of the dates, but it appears that from 1961 she began working for Philcoa (Philippine Coconut Administration.) I am not sure in what capacity, but it would have been writing, and I recall visiting the offices by the Quezon Circle often to submit articles and vouchers.

In 1963, she took the Civil Service Exam for Press Relations Officer, and passed. She began working at the Malacañang Press Office under Jose Aspiras, then Press Secretary.

In 1970, she was made Project Director of the Population Information Education Office of the National Media Production Center (NMPC), with main offices at Solana Street, Intramuros Manila. In 1971, at the East-West Center in Hawaii, she attended a course which was a Pilot Seminar in Communications in Family Planning. I believe she was the first who used the medium of comics in the Philippines to push an agenda - at the time it was the message of Responsible Parenthood.

In 1973, the family moved to Copenhagen. In 1976, she was assigned as Special Assistant of the National Media Production Center in Europe.

From 1978 – 1986 she was assigned as Officer in Charge of NMPC offices in Europe and Consultant to the NMPC USA area. In 1978, she was named Honorary Tourism Representative of the Department of Tourism in Copenhagen.

She continued to contribute articles to magazines in the Philippines and newspapers and journals in Denmark.

She married Poul Berthelsen in Manhattan, New York City on 12 January 1952 and then on 23 January 1956 in the parish of San Juan, Rizal.

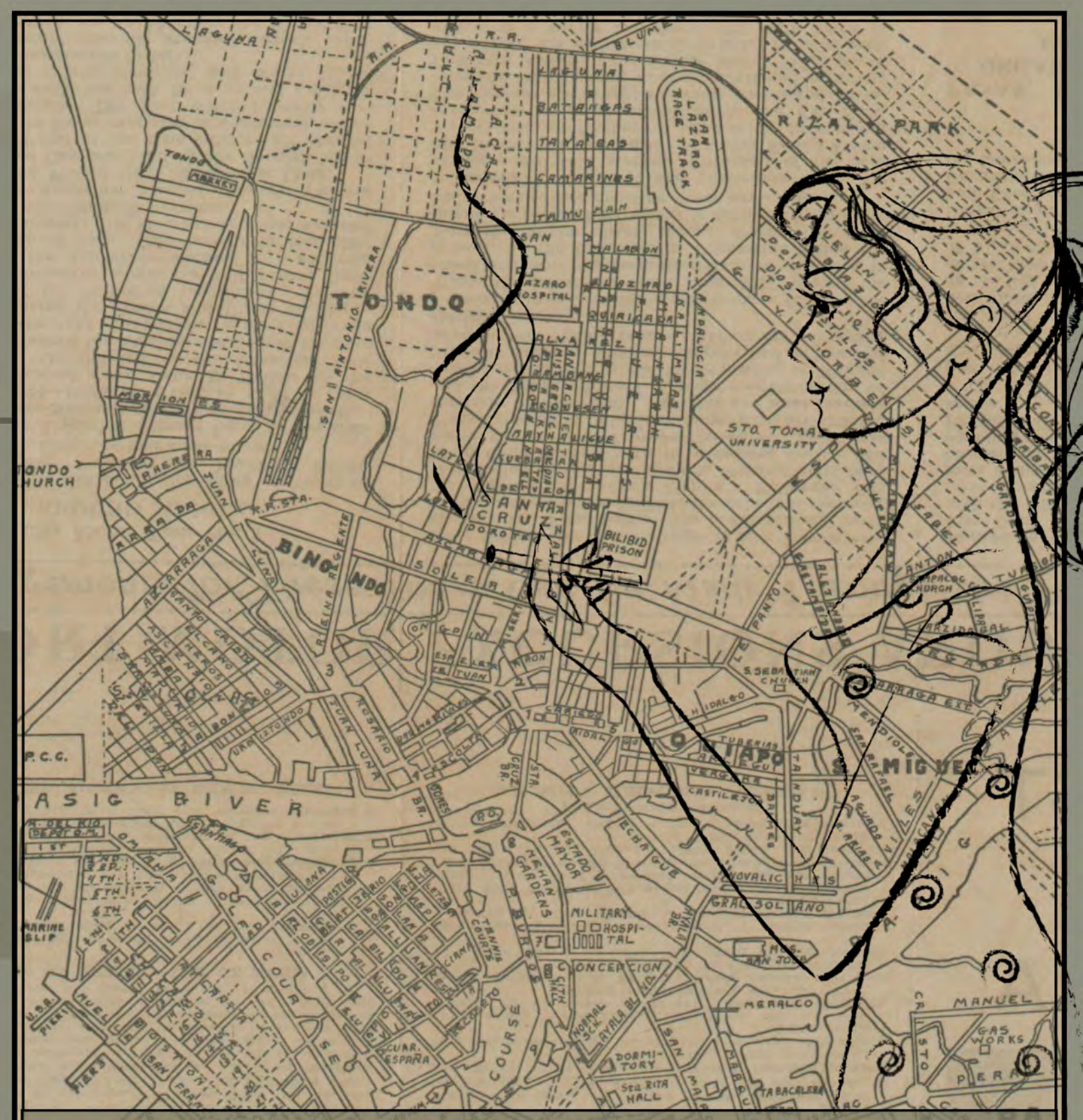
Nita had three children: Janice born in 1953 who now lives in Milan, Karen Marie born in 1955 who now lives in Vancouver, and Jan Emil born in 1964 who now lives in Edinburgh. She has five grandchildren: Tania and Marc Viarnaud, Thomas Cardenas, Nicola and Sean Berthelsen.

In 2000, she suffered a stroke in Copenhagen, and returned to the Philippines in 2005.

In 2002, she received the National Book Award for Translation for *The Tayabas Chronicles: The Early Years (1886-1907)* based on *Fragmentos de mi Juventud*, the memoirs of her mother, Ma. Concepcion Herrera vda. de Umali.

In 2009, she received the *Parangal Hagbong,* the lifetime achievement award in letters from the University of Santo Tomas, her alma mater.

Nita Umali Berthelsen passed away in 2014 in Quezon City.



Collection #1
The Hurt of the Matter

by Nita H Umali (Nita Umali Berthelsen)