The Crisis of New Criticism

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This paper explores the limitations of New Criticism as a critical instrument in Philippine literature today. The introductory part of the paper traces briefly the development of the Formalist method and the important revisions of its scope in our time (Neo-Aristotelian Criticism, Mythographic Criticism, Historicism).

The main report deals with a running evaluation of the important works in local criticism: Lopez' Literature and Society, **Bernad's** Bamboo and the Greenwood Tree, **Casper's** The Wounded Diamond, **and Manuud's** Brown Heritage.

Proceeding from the premise that the critic must not only analyze but militate, the paper ends with a discussion of the need for a critical revision, and the charting of the broad outlines of a Radical Historicism responsive to the needs of the moment.

The title of this paper is in a sense misleading. For what we have in the Philippines today is not so much the crisis of a particular school of criticism as the lack of sustained criticism itself, a crisis not of plethora but of poverty—or of imagined plethora in a condition of poverty.

This paper then has a curious purpose: it imagines disasters.

Leonard Casper, in a recent **Solidarity** review, hopefully noted the growing acceptance of New Criticism in the country. The comment is sad not so much because the New Critics have come so late to the scene as because they will never come to occupy the stage at all.

It is then that we turn to these questions: What exactly is the protracted crisis of New Criticism abroad? In what ways are the revisions of, and oppositions to, the Formalist school relevant to us here today?

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2.

New Criticism is the mode of critical judgment which has largely engaged the academic passion of the most prominent critics of our time. (And here, one thinks of the American critics because it is to their culture that our own is most sensitively tied.)

This interest in the close analytical study of aesthetic structure can be said to have its beginnings in our time with T.S. Eliot (whose first important essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," was published in 1917) and I.A. Richards (**The Principles of Literary Criticism,** 1924). Their reaction to the anarchy of impressionistic criticism created, and partly fulfilled, the need for a critical theory that will do justice to the integrity of the text and thus save criticism itself from being degraded into history, politics or sociology. Thus, in 1929, William Empson, a student of Richards, published **Seven Types of Ambiguity,** projecting an interest later refined by the "Kenyon School of Criticism"—or the "New Critics" as announced by John Crowe Ransom in 1941—which included, aside from Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and—in varying degrees of commitment—Kenneth Bruke, R.P. Blackmur, Allen Tate, Austin Warren, and Yvor Winters.

Because of the socio-political crisis of the 30s, the Formalists were the rebels to the reigning Marxists. But with the stabilization of the social order, and the widespread disenchantment over the exposure of the Soviet myth, the Formalists returned to prominence in the 40s.

3.

The 50s brought about a growing impatience with Textualist goals, with the entrenchment of the academic establishment that Ransom had earlier called "a Criticism, Inc., or Criticism, Ltd."

This impatience was expressed by F.O. Matthiessen (**The Responsibilities of the Critic,** 1952) when he said: "We should realize that we have come to the unnatural point where textual analysis seems to be an end in itself." Van Wyck Brooks (**The Writer in America,** 1953) expresses the same misgivings. Warning against the "excess of the academic," he says: "The universities have become what monasteries were in the dark and hazardous world of the early Middle Ages."

Both were acutely aware of the problems posed by "a split society"—

a society which technology, economics and politics had split into "mass civilization" and "minority culture." Arguing against isolation, Matthiessen underscores the need to come to terms with the needs of society thus:

> The series of awarenesses which I believe the critic must possess lead ineluctably from literature of life, and I do not see how the responsible intellectual in our time can avoid being concerned with politics.

Matthiessen's importance, for us, lies in the way he aspired to resolve the historical-aesthetic dichotomy at the heart of literary criticism.

> I do not mean for a moment to underestimate the value of that school (Formalism). It has taught us in particular how to read poetry with an alertness and resilience of attention that were in danger of being altogether lost through the habits set up by an age of quick journalism. All I would suggest is that analysis itself can run to seed unless the analyzing mind is also absorbed in a wider context than the text before it.

"Judgment of art," Matthiessen says, "is unavoidably both an aesthetic and a social act, and the critic's sense of social responsibility gives him a deeper thirst for meaning."

In the early 50s, Philip Rahv (**Image and Idea**, 1957), continuing the dialogue, gave a more particularized expression to the impatience with autotelic study. Rahv attacks the "critical sectarianism" of the epigone-like disciples of Tate, Ransom and Blackmur. Rahv says:

> Their attachment to the text is what is appealing about the "new critics"; what is unappealing is their neglect of context. Only in the medium of historical time is that context to be apprehended; and there is a dialectical relation between text and context, which, if ignored, in principle, must eventually lead to the impoverishment, of the critical faculty and a devitalized sense of literary art. Thus, in the long run, the neglect of context is paid for by the increasing misuse and misreading of the text itself.

Rahv is especially critical of those who practice **technicism** in the criticism of fiction (e.g., Mark Schorer, Robert W. Stallman, and others). "If the typical critical error of the thirties was the failure to dis-

tinguish between literature and life, in the present period, that error has been inverted into the failure to perceive their close and necessary relationship." ("Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction," **The Kenyon Review,** Spring 1956).

Rahv would transfer the emphasis from narrow formalism— a concern with the autonomous aesthetic structure—to historicism—a concern with the artist's vision of life, of his age, and more specifically with "the depth and intensity of the contradiction (the historical v. the aesthetic, the social v. the personal) of which (the artist) is the carrier and which more often than not proves to be the wayward secret of his power over us."

What we have in Matthiessen, Rahv, and others is a groundsweil towards a definition of the division between the historicists and the "grimly thin-lipped disciples of a more rigorous analysis." As Walter **Sutton (Modern American Criticism,** 1963) expresses it: ". . . the main problem of new theory is the relationship of historical and formalist criticism."

4.

To this day, Formalist analysis continues to be dominant. But the debate concerning its adequacy, both as a goal and as an instrument, also continues. Exposed to this dialectic, the Formalists—afraid of being frozen into "methodological orthodoxy"—have extended their limits.

Mark Spilka ("The Necessary Stylist: A New Critical Revision," **Modern Fiction Studies, 1960-61)** says that the reaction has followed two critical lines. One is that taken by the **eclecticists**—those who "would buttress formalism with an eclectic or synoptic mixture of methods." And the other is that taken by the **formal revisionists**—those who "would broaden the base of formalism by showing that quality in verbal art depends partly on external elements, like history and language, and on shared awarenesses of those elements."

We can note three principal revisions in our time.

One is **Neo-Aristotelian Criticism** (R.S. Crane and the Chicago critics). Crane and his group define the limitation of New Criticism as an absence of a theoretical framework that would make possible its extended application. And Crane finds such a framework supplied by Aristotle's theory of literature. This theory, the Chicago critics propose, would make possible close analytical study not only in poetry, and "cer-

tain kinds of poetry," but also in the other forms as well.

But the Neo-Aristotelians, despite their disavowals, have not really acquired a personality distinct from the New Critics mainly because their obsessive interest in aesthetic structure lies outside of the more crucial dilemma (the historical v. the formalist) in literary criticism today.

The second extension is **Mythographic criticism** (Maud Bodkin, Northrop Frye, the later Ransom, Tate, and Brooks). This is also known as the Archetypal or Totemic approach. Here, the New Critics (aided principally by C.G. Jung) have elevated their interest from the level of aesthetic structure to that of mythic constructs.

(This extension was foreseen early by the old New Critical masters. In "A Burden for Critics" (**Lectures in Criticism,** Bollingen Series XVI, 1949), R. P. Blackmur says that for the critic, there is a hierarchy of interlocking interests: the study of (1) the **executive,** (2) the **conceptual,** and (3) the **symbolic** techniques. In the 40s Blackmur was content to simply describe the broad outlines of what he calls "symbolic techniques ("I mean those forces which operate in the arts that are greater than ourselves and come from beyond or under ourselves."). He sees the joining of the three—executive, conceptual, and symbolic—as the total artistic, and critical, performance.)

Critics Philip Rahv and Roy Harvey Pearce have both voiced their objections to the Totemic approach. Rahv objects to this mythographic interest because it conceptualizes the object to the degree that it is drained of its existential qualities. Pearce, on the other hand, sees in this an instance of "the eschatological fallacy" as the historical is subsumed under the ahistorical.

It is here then that the third approach presents itself: **Historicism** (Philip Rahv, Roy Harvey Pearce). It has come in the wake of voices of protest (Van Wyck Brooks, F.O. Matthiessen, Edmund Wilson) against the asocial nature of much of modern criticism.

Because the so-called "historical method" has long been in disfavor, equated as it often is to the interests of the pedant, the new historicists usually begin their studies by making the distinction between "historicism" and the old "historical approach."

Rahv makes this distinction, setting apart "creative historical insights" (as in—Rahv cites—Herder, Goethe, Marx, Nietzche) from the

laborious tracing of sources and documentation of facts. The historical imagination—which is vitally committed to the present—is, for Rahv, "an analytic instrument and a bracing resource of the modern sensibility."

Roy Harvey Pearce ("Historicism Once More," **The Kenyon Review**, 1958) believes that we are moving toward a kind of criticism which is historical not in the usual sense of the word (i.e., the historical placement and elucidation of the literary work) but in the sense of establishing between ourselves and the work "a direct, existential relationship." Calling for a "critical historicist" (instead of an "historical critic"), he underscores the need for historicism.

Pearce sees his theory as an extension of New Criticism. He says that the New Critics have saved the literary work from disappearing into context but that they themselves are in danger of falling into another heresey—that of divorcing it from context. "Literature," he says, is not an expression of (or above) history, but rather an expression **in** history. In this sense, literature must be viewed not only as the product of an author's own creative ability but of the creative potential of his culture."

The historical sense in Pearce refines Taine's concepts and recalls T. S. Eliot's definitions in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." But in Pearce, the existential character of the work also runs the risk of being subsumed under the academic. Where the Mythographic critics are tending towards a kind of psychoanalytic and theological exegesis, Pearce tends towards some form of anthropological analysis.

5.

Among Historicists, Neo-Aristotelians, and Mythographic critics, the passion for the comprehensive construct manifests itself, first, as the interest in the technical organism, and, second, as the interest in the larger aesthetic construct (the **conceptual** and the **symbolic**, in Blackmur's terms) as illumined by the tensions and balance of Myth (as in the Archetypal approach) and Culture (as in Pearce's Historicism).

What is curiously unsatisfying about these approaches is that, despite their declared compass, the weight of their argument falls on literature as **object** rather than as **instrument**, as **form** rather than **function**, as **methodology** rather than **act**. This objection does not revive the old Form-Content dichotomy; it does not speak for a compartmentaliza-

tion of the literary work but for a shift of emphasis in artistic and critical purpose.

This dissatisfaction has not as yet been given full expression in America. It is for this reason then that we can profitably turn to the literary activism of France, specifically to Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes.

1. Barthes finds a fellow-theorist in America in Susan Sontag (**Against Interpretation,** 1967) in whose writings New Criticism finds a strange consummation. Sharing with the New Critics a contempt for the Form-Content heresy, Sontag takes the Formalists themselves to task by maintaining that they, despite their protestations to the contrary, have not really succeeded in ridding themselves of the consciousness of this split. Sontag would obliterate such a distinction by seeing Art not as Form but as Act. In the opening essay of her book, she then announces the need for "an erotics of art" to take the place of an overworked hermeneutics. Hence, we have her propulsive interest in authorial biography and milieu to explain the shape of the "gesture" which is the work of art.

What Sontag and Barthes (whose **Writing Degree Zero** was translated into English and published in 1968 with a preface by Sontag) have in common is the conception of art as "gesture." What they argue for is the shift of emphasis from message to act, from the conception of literature as an autonomous world of meanings to that of literature as the artist's mode of action to ward off the obliterating influx of the Unconscious.

The literary concepts of both Sontag and Barthes are mainly apolitical. Writing within a technocratic society, they have defined the enemy as a cosmic alienation that the artist appeases by the shining gesture of his art.

2. As alternative to the limited applicability of Sontag, we have the Neo-Marxists.

Marxist aesthetics has become disreputable since the disenchantment of the 30s. Its most distinguished critical work in America—Granville Hicks' **The Great Tradition**—is now referred to as "a monument of naivete."

But in retrospect, F. O. Matthiessen, in 1949, had said: "I believe the instinct of that moment was right. . . I still believe that the princi-

ples of Marxism—so much under fire now—can have an immense value in helping us to see and comprehend our literature."

That this is so, independent Marxist thinkers of our time have persuasively demonstrated. It is unfortunate that we do not have here the English translations of the works of George Lukacs, Lucien Goldman and Walter Benjamin. But we have in Jean-Paul Sartre's **What Is Literature** (1947) a tightly reasoned-out exposition on the nature of literature from the existentialist-Marxist perspective. Because Sartre does not forsake the politics-existential basis of human action for a rarefied schema of universals, he is most relevant to our literary problems here today.

What Is Literature begins with a discussion of the motive and the nature of writing. Writing, he says, is a demonstration of the writer's freedom as it is also an appeal to the freedom of his readers. The writer liberates a truth from the darkness of the unconscious, or from the prisons of suppressions, and places it on the plane of the conscious for the reader to witness and to confront with a corresponding action.

With the existentialist's distaste for absolutes, Sartre maintains that a writer wages a struggle for **contested truths** and not for given universals. It is here, therefore, where it is demanded that a writer be a perceptive student of his society for him to discover the **particular** alienation which delimits the self in a particular society. It is then that he will know what concrete liberation he must offer his readers.

This is the crux of the question of relevance. **Relevance** is a term relative to the framework within which the question is asked. Sartre sets the framework right by asking the question: For whom does one write? Castigating writers who speak as members of the great fraternity of the dead, Sartre stresses that the writer writes for his own place and time.

And reaching this stage of the argument, Sartre launches into application by discussing "the situation in 1947."

Sartre's fidelity to the historical moment would relate him to the historicists. But he crucially diverges from them (1) in his political perspective and (2) in his existentialist recalcitrance to be drawn into an ideal construct.

6.

We have covered a large ground in a summary fashion. It is not the intent of this paper to establish a preparatory argument that would make

for too burdened a framework the content is squashed even before it is analyzed. The purpose rather is to apply a perspective to illumine a lack of significance which is significant.

It is time for us to turn to our own literary scene.

Salvador P. Lopez' **Literature and Society** (1940) is perhaps the first important commentary on local writing in English. It is the first extended presentation in this area of the premises of "committed literature." It is, unfortunately, a very bad book.

Its initial limitation as literary criticism owes to the fact that it was not conceived as a full-fledged treatise. Only the second part of the book treats centrally of the problem announced by its title.

What detracts from the seriousness of the book is that its organization does not body forth a clear central commitment. Had the author been truly moved by his argument he would have excised certain portions from the work; he would have reorganized the ideas contained in the pertinent parts. As it is, it seems that the author, in composing the work, was more interested in laying to press a mental journal rather than in arguing for a compelling thesis.

The second part of the book is curiously thin and overextended. Lopez' statement in the preface ("If it should appear to the reader that the method is over-emphatic, let him consider that the idea is comparatively new in this country. . .") does not really absolve him of a serious lapse in thought. The book remains repetitive, rhetorical, and delimited.

Because of its concepcion—or lack of it—the work is very uneven in thought. For instance: Lopez executes an almost complete about-face from "So NO: A Theory of Poetry," which virtually dismisses Villa as a presumptuous poseur, to "The Poetry of Jose Garcia Villa," which is heavily adulatory.

If the book is read as a journey towards a greater awareness (the education of the Filipino writer himself), the book still suffers from the fact that its final illumination is not so bright.

And this is where its central failure lies: the impoverishment of its critical concepts. Its call for a proletarian literature, as a result, does not go too far beyond the level of abstracted exhortation. It is based on simplistic premises: Lopez is overfacile in his distinction between "form" and content." It is prone towards sloganeering: "social

commitment" is not well-defined beyond the call for writers to treat of social problems and dedicate themselves to the cause of progress with the proletariat as its vanguard.

Lopez defines "proletarian literature" as "the interpretation of the experience of the working class in a world that has been rendered doubly dynamic by its struggles." And he says that, as a rule, proletarian literature is produced only when the writer is equipped with "political orientation and class-consciousness." He cites four characteristics of this kind of literature: it is one of hope and growth (the proletariat being the progressive class); it is revolutionary (revolution being a part of the historical process); it is functional (since literature as communication is an instrument of social change); and it is realistic in material and function.

Lopez' attitude towards these dicta is uncritical, unpardonable in the light of the fact that in 1940, there was already a fair body of critical works assessing the values and limitations of Marxist aesthetics. An example is Max Eastman's vociferous critique of Soviet aesthetics, **Artist in Uniform,** which was published in 1934.

There is a thick overlay of easy romanticism which prevents the book from being truly radical. Lopez' failure to transform this contradiction into solid insights makes his book tread the line of faddism, as is sadly the case among many of his young admirers today.

7.

As proletarianism has its expression in Lopez' work, Neo-Humanism has its vehicle in Fr. Miguel A. Bernad's **Bamboo and the Greenwood Tree** (1961). That it still remains one of the most popular commentaries on our literature indicates an absence of seriousness among our teachers and students of literature.

The book is designed as an introduction and is therefore preoccupied more with description rather than evaluation. Recalling its declared purpose, this is not, of course, its important defect. After all, description can be evaluation.

The book's crucial failing is in its perspective, Bernad's tranquil vision of "western humanism." In the second essay of the book, "Western Humanism and the Filipino," he cites three salient points as frame of reference: (1) "the concept of man himself as a free being, with an innate dignity and an eternal destiny, with inalienable rights which no

human power can destroy;" (2) "the correlative concept of society as a help to man, not as his master;" and (3) "the concept of art as man's way of creating beauty."

And he suggests that the success of the Filipino writer may be judged according to the measure of his achievement in meaningfully shaping the contradiction between a culture which is Occidental and a temperament that is Oriental.

The summariness with which Bernad sets his premises is what makes his work unpromising for the serious student, and it is what would explain, in the end, the lapses he commits in his reading.

It is this cursoriness, for example, which leads Bernad to stock praise for "authenticity and circumstantial detail," "the flavor of the countryside," in Arguilla's rural stories while summarily remarking that though the proletarian stories are competently written they are lacking in "the freshness or the lyricism of his earlier tales of barrio life."

Nowhere is Bernad's failure of perspective most evident as in his judgments on Joaquin. He sees in Joaquin "a confusion of values" and he ascribes this to a lack of **serenity** in the artist's vision of life. He sums this up neatly.

> Serenity produces clear vision; the lack of serenity results in distorted vision—distortion, not of landscape or the physical aspect of people (for these are described with vivid detail), but of ideas and moral perspective.

Bernad is disappointed that though Joaquin's stories are "definitely Christian—definitely Catholic—setting and in atmosphere. . . Yet one looks in vain for the genuinely Christian values and attitudes: such as faith, filial love, charity towards one's fellow man, sympathy, joy in the Holy Spirit. . ."

This judgment is hasty and patently ridiculous. Joaquin's vision is more complex than Bernad supposes. The development of Joaquin's thematics can be divided into two stages: eschatology and ethics. In the first stage (comprising the short stories of **Prose and Poems,** 1952), Joaquin explores the first principles and final ends of human existence. In the second (comprising the novel and the novellas), Joaquin sets forth to cover the middle-ground of existential encounters. Joaquin is not always successful because of technical deficiencies (primarily the handling of point of view) and an exuberant temperament that trips

him into disconcerting self-display, but a fair judgment on the achievement of the man must rest primarily within the framework the artist creates for himself and not a facile philosophy the critic extra-textually imposes.

8.

A firmer grasp of the resources of Textual Criticism makes Leonard Casper's **The Wounded Diamond** (1964) a more valuable work than Bernad's. But the book also illustrates the limitations of the formalistic method.

The Wounded Diamond is eclectic, placing the emphasis on autonomous structure but also availing of the insights given by the interpenetration of history and literature, biography and art (as most promisingly illustrated by the critical commentary on the novels of Rizal).

The book is restricted by its length (143 pages) and by its scope (it treats not only of Rizal but also of Estrella Alfon and D. Paulo Dizon).[1] But what makes it unsatisfying is that it is lacking in a significant center, in a sustaining thesis beyond an author-to-author structural analysis and the illustration of commonplaces, both critical and cultural.

The first chapter of the book is entitled "Diamond-Cutter Country," the second, "Plane of Cleavage: Kaingin/Metro Mart," the third, "Plane of Cleavage: Plural Past/Multiple Self."

The titles indicate a perspective that is more fancy than fresh. Casper's historical sense does not go far beyond familiar cultural concepts and conventions. Hence, he is led to epigrammatic conclusions (e.g.: "Present history lies around and within the writer. He is Time's eye: he will be its record." Or: "For him, truth has become more important than desire: he is the person/nation in direct confrontation with himself.") which are not very profitable even when taken in context.

One has the impression, reading the book, that the critic is more conscious of his writing style—and of the New Critical style—rather than in achieving a well-mortised vision concerning literature and

[1] Perhaps the real limitation is not this but that of the mind circumscribed by method, as can be judged from the limited compass of his criticism, the retracings one finds in **The Wayward Horizon** (1961), **The Wounded Diamond** (1964) and **New Writing from the Philippines** (1966).

society. The critic's explorations are often deflected from extended analysis to felicity of phrase, from original insight to the clever metaphor. This, among other things, leads the critic to falsify the importance of certain works (e.g., the poetry of Alejandrino G. Hufana, the play of Nick Joaquin). The book is prone to transfer interest from the work-under-study to itself and to leave certain promising insights not fully explored (e.g., the statement that Villa "may prove to be even more conservative than his society; and far more anachronistic.")

In retrospect, therefore, **The Wounded Diamond** is a rehashing of critical commonplaces (e.g., literature as the discovery of the universal in the native, and vice versa, of self-in-society, etc.) constructed around the metaphor of the creative writer as a diamond cutter who proceeds with caution to free the truth from encrustations, along the flaws of a "multiple self." In the end, Casper seems less interested in the landscape than in his telescope.

9.

Antonio G. Manuud's **Brown Heritage** (1967) derives from a growing awareness of the need for a historical perspective both in literature and in criticism. In his foreword, Manuud defines the problem of his book as two-fold: the exploration of the culture which conditioned literary form in the Philippines and the threshing of problems relative to the need of bringing literature to a wider audience by explaining the cultural context which contains the trinity of work, writer and reader.

The weaknesses of **Brown Heritage** have already been pointed out by Nick Joaquin in his perceptive essay, "Expression in the Philippines" (**Philippines Free Press,** April 20, 1968). The book, Joaquin says, has not completely realized its stated purpose because of the uncritical liberality of its selections.

Brown Heritage is a thick book, but its conception is timid. This is immediately evident in the first question the critic poses in his foreword: "Can we begin to know and evaluate the culture which, in any one segment of time, conditioned literary form in the Philippines?" And for his second purpose, Manuud rides a tired horse: attempting to instill a larger cultural awareness to bring about a widening readership for Philippine literature.

The book would have been truly significant had Manuud decided to begin, as Joaquin suggests, with the premise of the interpenetration

of culture and literature, and from thence collected essays which discuss how both the weaknesses and strengths of culture and literature are mirrored in each. It would have been doubly significant had Manuud committed his effort to a militant goal, to the task of explaining the fact of tenuousness in our literature and the placement of a radical perspective that will raise our sights.

Like **Literature and Society,** the critical humility is largely a mask for a lack of **seriousness,** the absence of a bold commitment. But, hopefully, like Lopez' work, it is a failure along a significant direction.

A contribution of the book is that it brings within covers some of the most worthwhile critical essays of our time. And here, Bienvenido Lumbera deserves special mention.

Lumbera has made Tagalog literature his field of study. His interest in literary history lies not in simple documentation but in explaining how an uncritical attitude towards tradition can foster a stasis of mediocre works. "The problem of literary paralysis is serious," Lumbera says as he points out the lamentable withdrawal of vernacular writers from the "openness" to milieu to the mechanical repetition of conventions.[2]

In "The Folk Tradition of Tagalog Poetry," Lumbera refers to the tyranny of conservatism as a vicious cycle: "A limited view of experience results in limited technical resources which, in turn, perpetuate the limited outlook."

In "Philippine Literature and the Filipino Personality," he compares the achievement of the Tagalog writers to that of their conuterparts in English. The writer in English, exposed to a vital Western tradition, has acquired an "ironic temper"—"that quality of mind which recognizes experience as a flux of meshed data that the human mind seldom quite adequately grasps." On the other hand, the Tagalog writer is prone to the uncathartic simplification of experience (1) bound as he is to the insular tradition of the folktale, the corrido and the awit, and (2) sharing as he does that generally passive attitude of the Filipino towards experience which makes him prone to follow the worn rote of custom and ceremony.

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[2] Nick Joaquin gives this a larger expression in his historical articles on our common "heritage of smallness," our perpetuation of mediocrity—in Bernanos' terms: the refusal of the large intellectual risk.

But Lumbera, for the moment, is more interested in genres, in the development of literary form, rather than the play of social, political, and historical forces in the shaping of literature. What Lumbera does for Tagalog literature is the kind of performance needed for local writing in English today. But this must be carried out not only in the confines of literary history—e.g., the transmutations of genres—but also in the larger context of history itself.

10.

Philippine literary criticism is—to use Bernad's term—inchoate, but not so much because literature itself is nascent but because the critics themselves, despite their pride in their supposedly free valuating minds, are timid creatures of conventions, forfeiting the larger task of militating for the large excellence for the smaller one of analytically studying and suggesting small excellencies.

Without necessarily negating the value of New Criticism, one has to recognize that our society cannot afford the leisurely academicism of most American universities. A passionate cramming of lessons is necessary for the Filipino critic to meet the pressure exerted on his discipline by proliferating social events and non-events.

The need, both in literature and in literary criticism, is a **radical historicism** attuned to the problems of our own historical moment.

Formalist study must be moved from the position of ends to the position of means to bring the interest to where it is now crucial: the definition of the larger ends. As it is, there is already the discernible outlines of two perspectives to signify this shift. These are the perspectives that now demand to be widened and sharpened.

One is the re-emergence of "proletarian" aesthetics as signified by the journalistic pronouncements of Ninotchka Rosca and the critical essays of Petronilo Bn. Daroy. Incomplete in conception, it does not only tend to sacrifice effective form for declared purpose, it tends to simplify history itself by latching on to a dogmatic class-struggle view.[3]

[3] This is partly a simplification for purposes of argument. Rosca has not, as evidenced in her **Graphic** articles, really applied herself to theory although she stands as the most promising spokesman for literature within the so-called Second Propaganda Movement, promising as she does that artistic intelligence needed to widen the restrictive dogmatism of Jose Ma. Sison. Daroy is the more cautious thinker. But his essays still suffer from the fact that they do not collect their largely valid insights into a fully worked-out theory of national literature. (See **Against the National Grain,** 1966; "Aspects of Philippine Writing in English," **Philippine Studies,** April 1969.)

Another is represented by Bienvenido Lumbera, a perspective which is limited by the fact that it has not as yet gone beyond the preoccupation with genres to a discussion of the sociology of literature.

The need for a historical perspective has become the regnant impression concerning the state of local letters. Fr. Horacio de la Costa ("The Responsibility of the Writer in Contemporary Philippine Society," **The Background of Nationalism and Other Essays,** 1965) expresses this as "that gathering of all our diverse cultural strains in one common remembered experience." Though Fr. de la Costa rightly defines the broad goal (the sharing of remembered experience which results in "an increased awareness of what we are and should be, both individually and together"), he is mainly non-activist in his outlook.

The limitations of Fr. de la Costa's non-specific prescriptions can be seen in the operation of the historical sense in the works of Nick Joaquin.

Of all the Filipino writers in English, past or present, Joaquin is credited as the writer equipped with the richest **historical consciousness.** But this judgment is best seen as a provisional impression for the historical sense in Joaquin as creative arts is still developing towards a truly propulsive realization.

Joaquin's short stories establish a powerful but limited system of ideas which is **ahistorical.** While it is true that Joaquin makes use of historical materials (the tadtarin rites, the obsolescent Spanish order, the Naval procession, the miraculous tales), his thematic interest is eschatological (i.e., the matter of the first and final principles of existence). Thus, while historical parallels are, of course, available to the reader, the focus is not so much on the field of national experience as on the scene of archetypal encounters. The central figure in his stories is that of the Self threatened by the withering forces of God (as in "The Legend of the Dying Wanton" and "The Mass of St. Sylvestre"), Earth (as in "Summer Solstice," "The Difficulties of a Diplomat," and "After the Picnic"), Fate (as in "May Day Eve" and "Guardia de Honor").

Joaquin's play achieves a historical perspective but it is a perspective which is lame, not only because of technical defects (e.g., a shaky conception that emasculates the force of farce) but because of conceptual narrowness (the proferred ethics is formulistic and tepid).

The Woman Who Had Two Navels is symphonic in conception, an

orchestration of the personal-national-metaphysical dilemmas confronting the Filipino as National and as Man. But the total effect is creaky because Joaquin, the Romantic Propagandist, desiring to address not only his contemporaries but also posterity, gets lost in self-conscious, manipulated form.

In the novellas, Joaquin enlarges, to better effect, his eschatological consciousness (as in "Doña Jeronima" and "Candido's Apocalypse") and his historical sense (as in "The Order of Melkizedek"), and these stand as his best realized works to date. But Joaquin's major achievement still lies ahead of him.

11.

A radical historicism comprehends the existence in literature of a double dialectic. The first is **the formalist v. the historical:** the mediation between the recognition of art's integrity as an autonomous structure, on one hand, and the recognition of art's position in history both as cause and effect, on the other. The second is **the eschatological v. the existential:** the mediation between the recognition of final ends and first principles beyond history, on one hand, and the recognition of the ethics of existential encounters within history, on the other.

It is not the purpose of radical historicism to subject this to the levelling process of the tepid liberal intelligence but to sharpen the tensions of this dialectic, instilling fierce partisanship for certain values according to the needs of the historical moment.

To take the Philippine situation as our instance.

The crisis in Philippine society today derives from its neo-colonial character: an artificially-structured economy which preserves, to a lopsided degree, the vices of a prematurely deteriorating Capitalist society. In the social sphere, this manisfests itself, among other things, in the petty individualistic pursuit of profit and pleasure. In Art, this expresses itself in academicism and dilletantism: the cultivation of the elitist formal intelligence.

The nationalists will blame our colonial education for this but this reading of the tragic flaw, while true, is partial. Our ills, flourishing on unnatural intellectual and economic grounds, have roots traceable to a darker substratum. Uncovering the layers of implanted economies, both American and Spanish, we find ourselves confronted with an amorphous

racial consciousness feeding on the largely self-diminishing soils of geography (our insular and archipelagic construction), religion (our proneness to substitute sign for the spirit, constructing the eschatological prison where man is alien in a god-infested universe), and the common memory of what Nick Joaquin has called our "heritage of smallness."

What we confront, therefore, is the self mutilated by lethargy, a moral kind that is both inborn and imposed, ancestral and contemporary.

It is within this context that the critic (as well as the writer)—knowing that Art is "a permanent revolution"—arrives at an understanding of the truths that must be wrested from the unconscious and placed on that plane of collective awareness to engender the galvanic action.

At this stage of non-creative crisis, the crisis must be deepened and the intelligence must be partisan.