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PHILIP JOSEPH HOLDEN

Between Modernization and Modernism Community and Contradiction in the Paracolonial Short Story

The significance of short stories in the imagining of national communities has often been understated, with short stories seen merely as apprentice work for the novel. A reading of short stories by Filipino Manuel Arguilla and Singaporean S. Rajaratnam written during the transition from colonialism to national independence illustrates that the short story is not only a more common form but also, because of its formal qualities, perhaps better equipped than the novel to foreground the contradictions of bourgeois national thought and the filiations between colonial and national governmentality.

KEYWORDS: MANUEL ARGUILLA · S. RAJARATNAM · SHORT STORY · SINGAPORE LITERATURE · PHILIPPINE LITERATURE

In Manuel Arguilla's short stories, magazines are dangerous things for young men. Their production drives consumptive typesetters to an early grave. Their consumption dramatizes the ennui and alienation of the middle classes of Manila between the wars: the act of reading a magazine on a verandah turns a man into the passive object of a female gaze, while books and magazine cuttings line the bedroom of a man who no longer feels desire for his wife. Yet there is a strange contradiction here, for Arguilla's short stories were all disseminated through such magazines—the *Graphic*, *Herald*, *Tribune*, *Philippine Magazine*—that constituted elements of an Anglophone colonial public sphere in Manila. Why do Arguilla's stories and others like them so vociferously disavow their means of production and distribution?

The Short Story and the Imagining of Community

To answer this question, we need to reflect on the historicity of textual genres. Benedict Anderson's (1991) influential account of how the spread of print capitalism in the colonial communities of the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies enabled the imagining of new national communities concentrates on two of these genres: the novel and the newspaper. This essay explores the possibilities of a further genre: the paracolonial short story,¹ examining the early literary production of two Anglophone Southeast Asian writers, Arguilla in the Philippines and Sinnathamby Rajaratnam writing of Malaya in the 1930s and 1940s. Like the novel and the newspaper, the short story is indisputably a "modern" genre, initially disseminated through magazines, newspapers, and periodicals, and then gaining greater canonical presence through its publication in collections and anthologies. The role of short stories in bourgeois communities under colonialism has been neglected by studies of postcolonial and modern literature alike, yet it is surely significant: these texts often appear earlier and in greater quantity than novels, and they are also more widely disseminated in many colonial and protonationalist educational systems.² Yet these short stories do not simply repeat the actions of the novel on a miniature scale. Rather, their unique situation within colonial print culture, and the generic features of the short story itself, result less in the imagining of a community than in an—often unconscious—exposure of its constitutive contradictions, in particular the manner in which the modernizing project of the nationalist bourgeoisie was an extension as much as an antithesis of colonial power.

A comparison of Arguilla's and Rajaratnam's writings raises an initial problem: the status of Southeast Asia as a descriptive category uniting both texts. At the time of the texts' production neither writer would have thought of himself as Southeast Asian: the term evolved from the name of an allied theater of operations in the Second World War, and was then taken up as a regional descriptor by independent nation-states in the postwar period, a process illustrated by the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, and its subsequent expansion over the next three decades so that all countries in the region are now members. My argument below is not dependent on the Southeast Asian identity of the short stories discussed, and indeed is largely developed on a comparison of two very different Anglophone colonialisms. Nonetheless, comparing the two writers may enable tentative steps, largely through inductive rather than deductive logic, toward conceptualizing a shared literary history of English-language writing from the region. Such a literary history has a heuristic potential, challenging the exclusions of national literary histories, on the one hand, and the homogenizations of overarching categories such as the postcolonial or transnational, on the other.

Indeed, both writers discussed here have been retrospectively, and with some conceptual elasticity, emplaced within national rather than regional literary historical narratives. Rajaratnam at the time of writing his short stories in the early 1940s was attempting to draw on the experience of Indian anticolonial resistance to imagine a parallel Malayan nationalism; two decades later, after briefly serving as Minister of Culture for the State of Singapore within the new nation-state of Malaysia, he would become the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of the independent nation-state of Singapore in 1965. His stories have similarly migrated between different national traditions: one was initially published in the London-based journal *Indian Writing* and a number were collected in the first English-language anthology of Malaysian literature. In this anthology he was praised as exhibiting a growing "Malayan consciousness" (Wignesan 1964, 235), leaving behind the influence of a metropolitan "romanticism" and concern with "art form" to "tackle life in the raw," his encounter with "matters of political and social significance" inevitably "increasing the naturalistic flavour of his writing" (*ibid.*, 236). After 1965 Rajaratnam's stories were anthologized in collections of Singapore literature and identified as marking the beginnings of the "rise of the Singaporean short story in English" (Yeo 1989, x); they have also been

evaluated, through the perspective of Rajaratnam's long political career, as having a capacity to defamiliarize readers from the contemporary tenets of Singapore nationalism (Holden 2006, 138). Public discourse at the time of Rajaratnam's death in 2006, however, again folded his literary activity into an imagining of "multiracialism"—a racial governmentality foundational to contemporary Singaporean state discourse of nationhood—emphasizing how he had always placed his "writing in the service of an embryonic Singapore" (*Straits Times* 2006).

In a parallel if less convoluted process, Arguilla and his writings have been written into national literary historiography in the Philippines. Arguilla published most of his stories in the 1930s, and the best-known of these were collected in 1940 as *How My Brother Leon Brought Home A Wife*, one of the first publications of the new Philippine Book Guild, a nonprofit organization expressly founded to publish "books written by native authors" (Lopez 1940, 199) as part of the formation of a national literary tradition in English. The author's wartime resistance activities, which led to his early death at the hands of the Japanese in 1944, have provided the raw materials for the narrativization of his life as that of a national "martyr," marked by the posthumous awarding of the Republic Cultural Heritage Award in 1972 (NHI 1992, 34). Critically, every effort has been made to fit Arguilla's short stories into a dominant critical paradigm used to explain prewar Filipino literature in English: the breaking of the "bonds of narrow aestheticism" caused by an overreliance on metropolitan American models (Lopez 1940, 119), and a resultant movement toward a proletarian "red-blooded literature" describing a "virile people winning victories towards freedom" (*ibid.*, 229). This has often involved considerable critical ingenuity. Joseph A. Galdon (1975, 448), aware that the presence of romantic and pastoral elements in much of Arguilla's work would seem to undermine his credibility as a writer of proletarian literature, argues that the stories exemplify a "social or proletarian pastoral" in which "the underprivileged poor, the proletariat, are substituted for the simple shepherds" of tradition. A commoner interpretation is to see Arguilla's craft as evolving from a formalism "shaped by colonial education" in his earlier stories to later "socially-conscious pieces" in which "the oppressor and the oppressed are locked in struggle" (Lumbera 1994).³

The manner in which Rajaratnam's and Arguilla's short stories have been read within their respective national literary histories is driven by common assumptions concerning a trajectory of national artistic emancipation.

As writers develop, they exchange a focus on aestheticism—glossed as symptomatic of colonial metropolitan influence—for a more authentic engagement with the people who will constitute the new nation, marked by a privileging of content over form. This trajectory, indeed, is not simply confined to national literary histories, but also underlies much postcolonial criticism and theory. It informs Frantz Fanon's (1994, 40–42) much-referenced three stages of development of a national literature, from “unqualified assimilation” of the colonizer's culture through the “borrowed aestheticism” marked by only “exterior relations with [the] people” to an art that accepts that “the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities.” Rajaratnam's and Arguilla's stories do show development, and indeed a movement, toward greater engagement with the uneven effects of colonial modernity. Rajaratnam moves in setting from colonial Ceylon to Malaya, Arguilla from rural La Union to Manila and then, in his final stories, to a juxtaposition of metropolis and countryside. Yet it is difficult to argue that their trajectory represents a movement from self-referentiality to mimeticism or verisimilitude; if anything, the stories become more consciously artful, more modernist, in order to register and represent the contradictions of life under late colonialism, faced by an incipient nationalism that offers the possibility of “a different discourse, yet one that is dominated by another” (Chatterjee 1986/1993, 42).

The Short Story and Colonial Contradictions

The contradictory nature of bourgeois nationalism, which presented itself as colonialism's antithesis and yet “accepted the very intellectual premises of ‘modernity’ upon which colonial domination was based” (ibid., 30), has been discussed extensively by historians and other social scientists in the two decades since the publication of Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought in the Colonial World* (1986/1993).⁴ Writers found themselves at the heart of this contradiction. As Leo Ou-fan Lee (2001, 106, 112–14) illustrates with reference to Chinese intellectuals living in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai, such writers frequently migrated from provincial centers to colonial port cities where the power of colonialism was conspicuously visible as an ongoing sign of national humiliation. At the same time, technologies of communication in the city provided the possibilities of distribution of texts, the constitution of a reading public, and indeed the imagining of a national community. The very city that serves as an enabling precondition for the production of the literary text is thus frequently represented in the text itself as decadent,

corrupt, fallen, in contrast to a countryside reimagined as the repository of a dormant national consciousness, the “enthusiasm and a strange excitement” that future Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1942/1962, 51) discovered on his first encounter with the Indian peasantry, which was waiting to be awoken by the actions of vanguardist politics. For writers in English in the British and American colonial world these contradictions were, if anything, more acute. They were frequently products of a modern education system established under the auspices of colonialism—Rajaratnam attended Victoria School, the most prestigious colonial school in Kuala Lumpur, while Arguilla was an undergraduate at the University of the Philippines, the flagship institution of American efforts to transform the lives of the colonized. Literary magazines that published short stories in English were associated with comprador communities, or with the university itself: the earliest group of English-language short stories in Singapore appeared in the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, while in the Philippines the first short stories in English by Filipinos were published in the university magazine, the *College Folio*.

At this moment, it is appropriate to introduce some caveats. The Anglophone public sphere in Malaya was established earlier but grew more slowly than in the Philippines. The *Straits Chinese Magazine*, published from 1897 to 1907, was a quarterly with a circulation of perhaps a thousand copies. The daily newspaper with the largest circulation, the *Malaya Tribune*, which was often seen as a voice for the “domiciled” (i.e., non-European) communities in English, sold 4,800 copies in 1932, rising to 16,000 in 1940, on the eve of the Pacific War (Chua 2001, 24). In contrast, a weekly magazine such as the *Graphic*, in which Filipino writers published short stories, had already achieved a circulation of 24,000 in 1937 (Mojares 1983/1998, 364). English-language writing at elite Anglophone schools, such as Raffles Institution in Singapore, was firmly established in the late nineteenth century, but tertiary education in British Malaya was not introduced until Raffles College opened and admitted its first class in 1928, and its prewar intake would never exceed a few hundred students. The University of the Philippines was founded in Manila in 1908 with sixty-seven students; within two decades this number would grow to nearly 8,000. Figures for literacy also diverge sharply. The 1931 *Census of British Malaya* gave literacy in English in the Straits Settlements, a Crown Colony and the most urbanized part of British Malaya, as only 8 percent, or 89,080 out of a population of 1,104,012 (Chua 2001, 144). In the Philippines the 1939 census indicated that

over 25 percent of the total population of the Philippines, or 4,264, 549 out of just over 16 million citizens of the Commonwealth, claimed literacy in English. Even allowing for differences in methodology, it is clear that the Anglophone elite in Malaya in the 1930s and 1940s was much smaller than that in the Philippines.

A second caveat concerns the presence of public spheres and literatures in other languages. In Malaya a vibrant public sphere in the Malay language existed in Singapore in the early twentieth century, and the city was also an important center for Chinese diasporic self-fashioning, visited by such luminaries as the reformer Kang Youwei and the future “father of the [Chinese] nation” (*guofu*) Sun Yatsen. In the Philippines Spanish declined in public prominence in the twentieth century, but was still important: indeed, one study has hailed the period from 1900 to 1942 as the “Golden Age of Philippine Spanish Literature” (Mariño 1989, xix), and José Rizal’s novels, written in Spanish, remained constitutive documents in the imagining of a national community. Tagalog and other indigenous languages remained vibrant, and indeed the circulation of the Tagalog weekly *Liwayway* was three times greater than comparable English-language weeklies; after the passing of the 1936 National Language Law, Tagalog took on new prominence in struggles over the conceptualization of a new national language (Gonzalez 1980, 61).

Related to the two caveats above is a third, concerning the notion of nationalism itself. In Malaya recent revisionist history (e.g., Chua 2001) has emphasized that notions of Malayan identity, both bourgeois and radical leftist, had their roots well before the Second World War, yet it still made sense to describe Malayan nationalism at Rajaratnam’s time of writing, in the late 1930s and 1940s, as emergent. In the Philippines the revolution of 1896–1898 and subsequent resistance to American colonialism had done much more extensive work of forging the imagined community of the nation, with the *ilustrado* elite now entering “compadre colonialism” in collusion with the occupying power. If for Rajaratnam the Malayan nation needed to be imagined, for Arguilla the Philippines needed reimagining, particularly in the context of the failure of leftist movements in the 1930s and the founding of the Commonwealth in 1935.

Yet, in both cases, such differences also serve to illuminate the contradictory and fractured nature of colonial public spheres in Malaya and the Philippines, marked by the shuttling of bourgeois subjects between different

linguistic and cultural lifeworlds. The paratextual context of the colonial short story magnified these contradictions.⁵ Published in magazines, the short story was embedded in the lifeworld of the bourgeois reading public. On a magazine's pages, the fictional narrative jostles for space with editorials, snippets of news, and advertisements for the material comforts of modernity: unlike a novel, it cannot—unless published as part of a collection—be easily abstracted from these surrounding paratexts. Arguilla's (1933) celebrations of rural life in early stories, such as "Midsummer" in the *Philippine Magazine*, thus sit uneasily next to advertisements that thrust the pleasures of urban consumption on the reader: the author's description of the slow progress of a bull cart is juxtaposed with pictures of a modern mode of transport, the bicycle (*ibid.*, 212, 213); his account of water drawn from a rural well contrasted with an advertisement for toothpaste (*ibid.*, 213). The colonial novel, of course, was also sometimes serialized and would have been offered to its readers in a similar discursive frame. Yet even in this context there is a difference. The novel's progressive narrative and its "world of plurals" sketch the project of the nation (Anderson 1991, 32), producing "a hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community, embracing characters, author and readers, moving onwards through calendrical time" (*ibid.*, 27). If the serialized narrative is interrupted for now, the reader knows that, like the narrative of the nation, it is ongoing, and will resume its progress through time in a week or a month. The short story, in contrast, ends and is as finite and singular as the other articles in the magazine. Rather than constituting a narrative whose denouement the reader awaits in the future, it offers only a moment, an image, or a section of narrative: collectively, short stories show a community as a mosaic of pieces, however metonymic or proleptic these pieces may assert themselves to be.

The possibilities offered by the short story in a colonial public sphere are very much related to the properties of the genre. Short stories as a genre have received much less attention than novels, and much short story theory and criticism have tended to be formalist rather than historical in nature.⁶ Yet such attention to form may tell us something about the nature of the genre itself. In the short story a reader is made aware of formal shaping and constraints, of what narratologists such as Seymour Chatman have termed the "discourse" of the literary text. Given the shortness of the reading experience, efforts toward verisimilitude, in which the reader looks through the formal elements toward an apparently unmediated "story," are likely to

prove more difficult to achieve than in longer works of fiction such as realist novels. In a perceptive review of theoretical and critical work, Dominic Head (1992, 23) notes a recurrent contradiction in short story theory and criticism: much commentary emphasizes an aesthetic of formal unity, yet simultaneously puts forward “theories of mystery and uncertainty” concerning the effect of the genre. Head (*ibid.*, 24) makes use of this observation to theorize that “a resonant dissonance between order and disorder” is central to the short story. The short story’s generic nature, he notes, makes it peculiarly suitable for a reading inspired by Althusserian Marxism, in which the text gains relative autonomy or partial distantation from the ideological fields in which it is produced and consumed. If the realist novel at the beginnings of nationalism enacts a progressive narrative of modernization, then we might say that paracolonial short stories exemplify a kind of modernism, opening to the reader “determinant contradictions” of the conditions of their production that “appear as unevenly resolved conflicts in the text” (Balibar and Macherey 1981, 87). In the analysis that follows, we shall examine how these contradictions are amplified by an interplay of discourse and story, and between formal and referential concerns.

The Body of the Colonized

Both Rajaratnam’s and Arguilla’s stories celebrate the physical. Products of an information technology that disembodies, they paradoxically strive to reclaim physicality through a spectacular, gendered representation of human bodies. In particular, the male body in labor is celebrated. In Rajaratnam’s “Drought” (1941, 497), set in a rural Tamil community in colonial Ceylon, the harshness of the natural world is counterposed by the vision of the villager Rasu, “a giant of a man”; as he works in the fields Rajaratnam’s normally reticent narrator experiences “sheer delight to watch his muscles ripple like seawaves.” Arguilla’s stories are similarly marked by the presence of hypermasculine figures. When the hunter Ato returns to his village he strides forward, “the muscles of his thighs straining against his indigo-dyed trousers” (Arguilla 1940, 36).⁷ Characters such as Ato, Ondong in “The Strongest Man,” or the protagonist of “Elias” struggle in the pages of Arguilla’s collection to outdo each other in feats of physical strength: Ondong carries five sacks of rice at one time, far in excess of his companions (*ibid.*, 73), while Elias cuts sugar, the narrator of Arguilla’s story notes, “as no one we have ever seen or would ever see again cut the long juicy canes” (*ibid.*, 147). At times the pres-

sure to register the “magnificent body” (ibid.) of these rural subaltern figures exerts pressure against the formal constraints of the story. Arguilla’s much-celebrated “Midsummer” in the version published in the 1940 short story collection *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife* shows formal control in that it is almost entirely focalized through a nameless male protagonist who, pausing to draw water from a well, is entranced by a pastoral vision of female beauty. The only moment when formal unities are violated—when the focalization switches—is when his own body comes into focus, when he draws water and the female character has “time to take in the tallness of him, the breadth of his shoulders, the sinewy length of his legs” and how, “in the small of his back, two parallel ridges of rope-like muscle [stick] out against the wet shirt” (ibid., 21).

As we might expect, such gendered discourse is matched by a parallel representation of the female body, which emphasizes fecundity, and an association with the fertility of the earth. In Rajaratnam’s “The Locusts” (1964b, 61) the shopkeeper Thulasi admires the “broad hips” of “Annamal, the milkmaid” as she passes him by; his later story “The Tiger” (1989, 1) wanders quickly from focalization through the central character, Fatimah, into the observation of a more distant third-person narrator, describing the “wet sarong” that “clung to her plump, brown figure, and accentuated the full breasts and womb of a pregnant woman.” In Arguilla’s “Midsummer” (1940, 17) the female character’s “wet bodice” provides a vision of flesh “warmly brown through the wet cloth.” In many of his other stories, women performing domestic labor are celebrated in descriptions close to those of male characters performing labor in the external world. Thus in the short story “Heat” (1940, 49), the young man Mero watches his neighbor’s daughter Meliang pound rice, noting “the way her smooth calves hardened into muscular definition as she raised her pestle overhead.” And this celebration goes beyond sight: just as the child narrator of “The Strongest Man” (ibid., 80) describes with approval the smell of Odong’s sweat, so he also notes the “sweet odour” of his aunt Onang’s body, or registers her voice as “clear and low, like the cool palm of Mother on the forehead.”

Such representations at first sight seem symptomatic of the gendered nature of early nationalist discourses. Arguilla’s and Rajaratnam’s muscular peasants, we might argue, are discursive responses to the emasculation of the colonized by the colonial state. As idealized projections, they are of a piece with the revival of gymnasiums to encourage the physical regenera-

tion of Bengalis in the late nineteenth century (Sinha 1995, 21), the Zionist Max Nordau's (1995, 547) dream of a race of "muscle-Jews," or indeed the emphasis on physical training of an earlier colonial elite in the Straits Settlements, the Straits Chinese. The stories' persistent representation of women with reference to child care and domestic labor, indeed, would reinforce such a reading: in Chatterjee's (1993, 9) influential formulation, men venture into the public sphere of modernity, while women watch over a reconstructed private sphere of culture and tradition, "the inner domain of national culture" that is protected from the influence of colonial power. Yet this superficially attractive reading is undermined by two aspects of the stories. In order to prepare the ground for nationalism, Rajaratnam's and Arguilla's short fiction depicts an unjust social order,⁸ yet its celebration of the perfection of subaltern bodies means that social injustice cannot be marked on the body itself. The carved and sculpted peasant bodies in Rajaratnam's and Arguilla's stories do not resist colonial power or strive for modernity: the work of inaugurating the modern, of indicating—albeit proleptically—a new order of social justice that can only be the nation, is done by characters who are physically or morally enfeebled, and whose enfeeblement results from internal failings rather than, as we might expect, the environment in which they are placed.

In Rajaratnam's stories, as titles such as "Famine," "Drought," and "The Locusts" indicate, the harshness of the natural environment is used as a metaphor for the oppression of a feudal social order sanctioned and indeed mummified by colonial indirect rule. Yet while the stories describe the effects of natural disasters on the natural world, they do not mark their physical consequences on human bodies. In "Famine" (1964a, 56) starving villagers confront the rich farmer Murugasu, but we see only Murugasu's "dark, muscular . . . strength," not the physical effects of starvation. This is particularly puzzling, given that Rajaratnam wrote his fiction under the influence of Mulk Raj Anand: although the stories mirror Anand's social concerns, they are devoid of Anand's vivid description in novels such as *Coolie* of the corporeal squalor beneath the surface of colonial order. In Arguilla, we see a similar omission. "Rice" describes events leading up to an attack on a departing rice truck by starving tenant farmers on a hacienda. The narrative describes the hunger of its protagonist, Pablo, and his family, but cannot represent it physically: instead, it continues to celebrate the physicality of the body in labor, the "thick-muscled" arms of Pablo's comrade Andreas

(1940, 241). And if we seek for descriptions of physical weakness and debilitation in these narratives, we find them not in the depiction of suffering peasants, but rather in the presentation of characters who seem to be agents of modernity. Rasu, the clumsy and patient “giant of a man” in “Drought,” is contrasted with his brother Suriar, who talks “about rights and justice for the oppressed” (Rajaratnam 1941, 497). Yet despite the fact that Suriar expresses Rajaratnam’s own politics, he is represented as physically weak: he has “a fragile constitution” that makes him stoop “like a consumptive” and he is thus “prey to frequent illness” (ibid.). A similar malady afflicts the university graduates in Manila who form the subject matter of many of Arguilla’s later stories. The “bony chin, the hollow cheeks, and the damp clammy forehead” of the overworked typesetter Alfredo Santos in “Caps and Lower Case” might at first seem to dramatize the iniquities of colonial capitalism in Manila, but the story seems to suggest that Santos’s tubercular body parallels a moral failing—here a lack of courage in confronting his superiors about salary and working conditions. In other stories with urban settings, modern men are all sight, their bodies entirely absent; these characters are frequently passive in relation to women, and thus unmanly in terms of the symbolic economy of the whole text. In a story set in the provincial barrio such as “Heat,” Mero Cruz of the “powerful shoulders, . . . flat, narrow waist, and high, lean hips” claims the object of his desire Meliang by pursuing her, “catching her around the waist” (Arguilla 1940, 52). The urbane, anonymous narrator of “The Maid, the Man, and the Wife,” in contrast, spends much of his time observing events in his household from the porch or bedroom window; he is the object of desire of his housegirl, Perfecta, newly arrived in the city; the household servants attribute his avoidance of her as a sign of “some definite lack” in him “as a man” (ibid., 133).

To explain such contradictions, we might turn again to Chatterjee. In his short essay “Our Modernity,” the Indian political scientist explores a puzzle similar to the one we have located above. Chatterjee (1997) is intrigued why contrasts between past and present in modern Bengali texts focus persistently on a perceived decline in the strength of the body, in contradiction of all evidence pointing to substantial improvements in health because of the impact of modern medicine. This “factually baseless” contrast between “these days” of the present and “those days” of the past, Chatterjee (ibid., 3) notes, has existed for well over a century. Present-day texts locate the time of physical strength as thirty or forty years ago, but texts written at that time that

complain of degeneration project “those days” further back into the past; if we read texts written a generation earlier than this, “those days” are now shifted to an even earlier period. Looking more closely, Chatterjee identifies the source of this discursive trope as a disquiet about a modernity brought from elsewhere, a suspicion that the forms of modernity adopted through colonialism are unsuitable for the colonized—and later the formerly colonized—because they are tainted with colonial power. If Western modernity, Chatterjee (*ibid.*, 20) argues, “looks at the present as the site of one’s escape from the past, for us it is precisely the present from which we feel we must escape”: the past is not endorsed in its own right, but rather as a mark of difference from the present.

While we might be skeptical of Chatterjee’s generalizations concerning “the modernity of the once-colonized” (*ibid.*), his formulation surely holds true for Rajaratnam . . . and Arguilla.⁹ Rajaratnam’s political radicalization occurred not in Malaya but during his sojourn in London, at the heart of the colonial metropolis: only here did he see the contradictions that clustered around “race,” the manner in which colonial modernity excluded him.¹⁰ Arguilla, living in the 1930s in the Philippines, saw the beginnings of a transition to independence marked by the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 and the creation of the Commonwealth of the Philippines in 1935: the independence promised in the year 1946 seemed contingent on taking on the forms of American modernity. Yet what is interesting in both Rajaratnam’s and Arguilla’s stories is that the temporal distinction between “those times” and “these times” collapses: both exist within the same diegetic field. The brevity of the short story makes a long historical narrative or a spatial separation between the city and country—which might be possible in a novel—untenable. And the short story form thus brings the unevenness and the contradictions of paracolonial modernity to the surface, so that the characters in the narrative present, embody, and enact the contradictions.

The Body of the Text

The registering of such contradictions is also indicated by the manner in which the texts are written. Arguilla’s early stories, it is true, are marked by a certain artlessness, which makes them appear less textualized or self-reflective. The story time of the early short stories is brief: a few hours in “Midsummer” or “Morning in Nagrebcan,” a few days in “The Strongest Man.” Plot is often minimal, with the denouement often projected beyond the end

of the story itself. The meeting between the nameless “man in the cart” and the young woman in “Midsummer” occupies the whole of the story: it concludes with him following her to her home. “The Strongest Man” commences with the visit of the narrator’s aunt, Onang, to her relatives. The narrative describes a growing attraction between her and the strong man Ondong, yet it ends with their first moment of physical contact. The early stories are frequently told by a nonintrusive third-person narrator, or by a naïve first-person narrator, often a child. Despite detailed description, perhaps more characteristic of realist narrative, the stories frequently begin and end in imitation of the rhythms and features of folklore or oral narrative. For instance, on hearing of his wife’s death, the hunter Ato walks into the river to commit suicide. Arguilla’s (1940, 46) story concludes with the statement that “people say that Ato still walks on the river-bottom when the water is high. And it is also told that in the night when the wind grieves through the hollows of the Katayaghan hills and above the valley of Nagrebcan, one may yet hear Ato’s great voice booming through the air like far-off thunder.” This embedding of the events of the narrative within a mythical, unchanging time is also demonstrated in the beginning of the “Strongest Man”: “Onang, Dal-le, Atang and Om-me were their names: four women who came to Nabrecan from Alaminos across the sea” (ibid., 70). Collectively, these elements of narrative tend not so much to provide a sense of verisimilitude as an immersion in a society that is presented as organic and devoid of internal contradictions, despite the contrary paratextual elements that surround the stories on the pages of the magazines in which they appear.

Arguilla’s later stories, however, engage in more complex representational strategies, and are frequently marked by layered narratives. The stories set in Malate and Manila in general frequently end in narrative disappointment, in that the denouement is unexpected. A young man certain of reconciliation after a quarrel with his wife in “Though Young He is Married” finds she rejects him; a planned holiday in “The Long Vacation” is revealed as a suicide bid. Narrational strategies are also more complex: “Mr. Alisango,” for instance, revolves around a wife’s reactions to a narrative reported by the husband that is exaggerated and at times unreliable. The last set of stories in Arguilla’s collection, we have noted, attempts to connect city and country, to remap the country in terms of a growing nationalist discourse, and to engage with issues of class difference. Yet their narratives again end indecisively: “Apes and Men” concludes with the violent suppression of a strike, “The

Socialists” with a vision of incommensurability between urban bourgeois radicals and provincial peasant movements. Again, narrational strategies contribute to the ambivalence of the stories. “Epilogue to a Revolt” commences with a banquet held in a village to celebrate the pardoning of four of its inhabitants who have been involved in the Sakdal uprising of 1935. The narrative explores both the public and private reception of the men; it then contrasts a hypocritical welcoming speech from the town president with the words of the least repentant of the Sakdalistas, Ansel, who reprimands the villagers for the feast they have prepared “with food bought with money that is borrowed” (Arguilla 1940, 224). At the end of the narrative, Ansel comforts a boy who has been mocked by others for playing at being a Sakdal, but we are given no access to his consciousness: it is thus unclear whether this is a moment of consolation among the defeated, or a foreshadowing of the ongoing possibilities of resistance.

What precise contradictions are at work in these stories? They are, of course, informed by specific historical circumstances. The ambivalent ending of Arguilla’s “Epilogue to a Revolt,” for example, arises from a lack of options for the left in the late 1930s, after Commonwealth forces had crushed the Sakdal revolt, but before Quezon’s release of communist leaders in November 1938 made participation in electoral politics possible again. In the later stories, there seems to be greater pressure from emergent (or in Arguilla’s case reemergent) nationalist discourses; the narratives must become elements of a larger national allegory, which predicts the arrival of a nation-state that will realize the aspirations of the people. Yet the brevity of the stories themselves, and their situation of production and consumption within a bourgeois print culture, militates against such efforts. Of the two writers discussed here, Rajaratnam is perhaps less aware of the restrictions imposed by medium and context. In the last story he wrote before he moved into the world of journalism and political activism in Singapore after the Second World War, the author changed his setting from Ceylon to Malaya. “The Tiger” (Rajaratnam 1989, 8), for example, bears the burden of national allegory. Its narrative describes the encounter of a pregnant Malay woman, Fatima, and a tiger near a remote village in peninsular Malaya; Fatima escapes, and the tiger is hunted down. At the end of the story, Fatima gives birth at the same time that news is received that the tiger has been killed guarding three cubs “no more than a few hours old.” Allegory here works through an empathetic connection between Fatimah and the tiger; a new

nation will be born, and yet its birth will be accompanied seemingly inevitably by violence.

Yet in moving to Malaya, Rajaratnam's story enacts more conspicuously than his earlier narratives the contradictions of a new Malayan national imaginary. The setting of the story is surely an attempt to embrace the people of the new nation, here the inhabitants of a Malay *kampung*, or rural village. Yet in doing so, Rajaratnam erases a central problematic that vexed him and others in commentaries and analysis at the time he wrote his short stories: the place in a future Malaya of domiciled communities from East and South Asia who would also claim citizenship of the new state. Indeed, in putting forward a rural Malay *kampung* as embodying the essence of a forthcoming Malayan nation, Rajaratnam in many ways repeats the "Malayophilia" of British colonial discourse, which attempted to museumize Malay culture as in need of protection against the rapacity of modernization.¹¹ The opening descriptive passages of "The Tiger," describing the "round, high-cheekboned face, so typical of the Malays" and Fatima's "ethereal melancholy" in her "black oblique eyes" (*ibid.*, 1) recall the anthropological protomodernism of Joseph Conrad; later passages describing Malay martiality might almost have been lifted from the short stories of colonial official Hugh Clifford. None of this is to suggest that Rajaratnam is a cryptocolonialist, but rather to postulate that the story reveals how an emergent nationalist discourse, despite its putative antithetical relationship to colonialism, appropriates elements of colonial governmentality, and puts them to new uses.

Arguilla's later stories show a greater awareness than Rajaratnam of the contradictions confronted by bourgeois elites within nationalism; rather than attempting to smooth over such differences, they frequently open them up for display. One story that clearly does this is "The Socialists," which was initially published in *The Philippine Magazine* in 1937, and then collected in *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife* in 1940. In an editorial comment, the magazine's editor A. V. H. Hartendorp (1937, 188) noted that Arguilla had told him that the story was based on an incident he had witnessed "in the main, true" although "touched up in parts for the sake of literary effect." "The Socialists" resembles Arguilla's early stories in that it is a single, continuous scene shaped by plot; the lyrical pastoralism of the early stories is, however, now replaced by acute situational irony. The story narrates a visit by the Socialist Club of Manila to a rally organized by the socialist *Frente Popular* in their rural stronghold on the slopes of Mount Arayat in Pam-

panga. The visitors from Manila are discomforted by the heat and, rather than standing in the sun as the crowd does, they retreat to benches under the shade of a *camachile* tree. While an early recitation of an Edwin Markham poem is in English, the fiery political speeches are in Pampango, which the visitors cannot understand. When the gist of the speeches is translated, the Socialist Club's secretary, Comrade San Diego, objects that the speakers "do not even know the ABC of socialism" (Arguilla 1937, 184). The narrative concludes with the members of the club sharing "liverwurst sandwiches the size of shoe-heels and costing 25 centavos apiece" under the tree, "their voices smoothly juggling with words and phrases: ideologies, planned economy, Marxian dialectics, the proletariat, the underdog, labor and capital, society of the free and equal, *et cetera, et cetera*" (ibid., 187): a greater illustration of hypocrisy would be hard to find.

"The Socialists" is made more complex, however, by the central consciousness of the story, Comrade Lirios, who bears many similarities to Arguilla himself.¹² Lirios is in many ways symbolic of the incommensurability between the rural masses and the metropolitan bourgeoisie. He wears "perfectly creased white wool trousers and [a] glossy double-breasted coat of alpaca" (ibid., 167), and carries a copy of *Das Kapital*, which he examines "feverishly" during the speeches that he does not understand. When told by one of the rally organizers that the people have little to eat, he remarks that they "look quite robust and well-fed" (ibid., 183): at times he has an almost unbearable desire to laugh at the naïve absurdity of the proceedings. He, like Comrade San Diego, looks for ways to explain "that the theory of socialism expounded so passionately" by a young woman who addresses the crowd is "all wrong" (ibid., 184). Yet as the story develops he is affected by the enthusiasm of the crowd: he finds the proceedings a "revelation," and is moved by the hypnotic personality of a Sakdal leader who speaks, even though the latter's appeal to religion offends his doctrinal sensibilities; later he feels "transported out of himself" (ibid., 186). Accompanying this growing power of affect, however, is Lirios's parallel awareness that the world that inspires him is one he cannot enter. Alone with his rural socialist hosts, Lirios finds the exchanged glances and the "silence of his companions disconcerting" (ibid.); they seem to share a secret knowledge that he can never comprehend. On one level, he finds the primary school song "Planting Rice is Never Fun" sung by a quartet of "untutored" girls comic, but that he finds it comic only serves to emphasize his own alienation:

How earnest they were! . . . Not in a thousand years could it have occurred to anyone of them that they were—comic. Comic? Comrade Lirios had a sudden vision of 14,000,000 people of the same cast and mold, capable of the same direct, unself-conscious, child-like simplicity and earnestness. They till the soil and plant rice and they know the quality of rain and sun. The feel of pure honest earth is in their work-hardened hands; they stand on it with bare feet, toes spread apart. What then if they sang the Internationale and recited Edwin Markham's poem upon a burning hillside under the midday sun? (*ibid.*, 187)

Overcome by his own marginality, Lirios retreats to the comfort of his group from Manila and their shared sandwiches.

Yet there is a further twist to the alienation experienced by Lirios. When Arguilla prepared “The Socialists” for publication in his collection in 1940, he substantially revised the story. Given the circumstances of the production of *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife*, and its place in the project of the Philippine Book Guild to establish a national canon of literature in English—in part to counter the notion that only Tagalog could represent “the soul of the nation” (Lopez 1940, 239)—one might expect the revised version to move toward a more coherent vision of nationhood. Yet the opposite is true. Lirios is made more, not less, anxiously self-reflexive. In addition to his copy of *Das Kapital* he now carries an “expensive German-made camera in a brown leather case,” emphasizing both his relative wealth and his role as someone who views and records the scene from the position of a spectator. And two more members have now been added to the party from Manila: an American woman and “a handsome Jewish boy” (Arguilla 1940, 204). Betty, the American woman, is now contrasted with the girl who speaks to the crowd. The latter symbolizes subaltern energy: “a rush of words” issue from her mouth “like angry waters through a break in a dike during the rainy season” (*ibid.*, 206). Watching his provincial counterpart, Comrade Bautista, gaze at her, Lirios notes “a proud light in his eyes that never left the figure of the girl” (*ibid.*). Betty, in contrast, smokes a “cigarette, shin in hand, elbow on knee” (*ibid.*). Almost pruriently, Lirios recalls “a glimpse he once had of the fair breasts of the American girl when they were out bathing in Sunset Beach” in Malate (*ibid.*, 214); she seems to be bound up with the pleasures of middle-class consumption, and her presence in the group further distances them from their hosts. At the end of the story, Lirios does not simply reach for a sandwich, but also for a “can of beer,” which he finds to be flat and warm.

The increased distance between the central consciousness and the masses in Arguilla's story magnifies a contradiction faced by many anticolonial nationalist movements. "Bourgeois-nationalist" historiography, as Ranajit Guha (1983, 4) has noted, interprets all resistance to colonialism as a "pre-history" of a national awakening expressed as "the necessary antithesis of colonialism" (ibid., 2). Yet it also frequently portrays such resistance and mobilization as irrational, brought about by a collective experience of affect. Thus Nehru (1942/1962, 201), after being elected president of Congress in 1929, experienced the "overflowing enthusiasm" of the crowd "for a symbol and an idea, not for me personally; yet it was no little thing for a person to become that symbol, even for a while, in the eyes and the hearts of great numbers of people, and I felt exhilarated and lifted out of myself." This, indeed, is true of other nationalisms that one might less readily identify as bourgeois: Kwame Nkrumah (1957, 188) in Ghana would feel "giddy at the sight" of a crowd "almost delirious with excitement, waving arms, flags or garments, singing, shouting, dancing and drumming" that greeted him at Takoradi in 1953. Such enthusiasm is intoxicating, but can only be temporary. Nationalist discourse sees the party, and later the nation-state, as training and channeling this enthusiasm through governmental technologies, inciting what Rajaratnam (1970, 1) himself would later call a "modernizing nationalism" to "reintroduce into Asian society a sense of social discipline and social responsibility." Nkrumah (1957, 215) noted that colonialism could only be brought to an end "by a united people organized in a disciplined political party and led by that party." Nehru (1942/1962, 206), more reflectively, would comment on the effect that this produced in him: the "barriers of individuality" that separated him from the crowd were too solid to dissolve, and he "peeped over them with wondering eyes at this phenomenon which I failed to understand." In an earlier phase of nationalism in the Philippines, Caroline Hau (2000, 92) has noted, José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* similarly pictures crowds as embodying an excess the novel, and thus the national narrative, strives to yet cannot fully contain. Arguilla's story, written half a century after the *Noli*, perfectly captures the contradiction between the affect of the nation and the rationality of the state on the level of an individual subject.

Conclusion

The argument made and illustrated above, that both the situation of publication and the formal nature of the paracolonial short story make it par-

ticularly sensitive to the determinant contradictions of emergent national projects, might be readily extended beyond the examples of Arguilla and Rajaratnam to writers who became part of a canon of Commonwealth literature and later postcolonial literary studies. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been justly celebrated as an important narrative that reappraises the legacy of colonialism on the eve of Nigerian independence and finds it wanting; yet Achebe was publishing short stories in *The University Herald* in Ibadan half a decade before he produced his first novel. If nationalist and indeed early "New Literatures in English" readings of *Things Fall Apart* have seen the novel as simply giving voice to the formerly colonized, other readings have stressed how complexly mediated this voice is, even as the text attempts to conceal the work of mediation.¹³ It is arguable that a short story such as "Chike's School Days" expresses more openly the contradictions of colonial pedagogical modernity, which simultaneously alienates and at the same time offers, for an elite few, "a strange magical new world" (Achebe 1972/1991, 42).

The privileging of the novel in the study of the fiction of decolonization and early nationalism, of course, has not always resulted in the taking of modernizing and nationalist critical frameworks at that historical moment for granted. Although ambivalence was initially more readily found in colonial discourse and in later literary texts that, if never entirely "postnational," explore nationalism's occlusions or failures, more recent scholarship has attempted to read novels engaged in the process of constructing national communities against the grain. Hau's (2000, 70) reading of the "curious double address" of the *Noli* as embodying the contradictions of a modernity that must both claim to come from elsewhere yet be authentically Filipino is exemplary in this regard. Yet the short story perhaps offers itself to such readings more readily than the novel. If we are thinking of Rizal and revolutionary consciousness, for instance, we might contrast the reinscription of a romantic narrative of revolution in Maximo Kalaw's *The Filipino Rebel* (1930/1964) with its deconstruction in the early short stories of José Garcia Villa, in which ordinary Filipino lives—exemplified in titles such as "Son of Rizal" or "Daughter of Rizal"—parody the revolutionary scripts that they imitate.¹⁴ Reading paracolonial short stories in their contexts of production perhaps enables a more ready engagement with the problematics of emergent national modernities. For Rajaratnam, Arguilla, and all writers in parallel situations, there is a tension between modernizing narratives and modernist

narration, yet neither of these can be given up easily; the formal qualities of the short story serve to make this tension visible.

Notes

- 1 For the neologism “paracolonial” I am indebted to Stephanie Newell. In *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana* Newell (2002, 29) examines the manner in which a nonelite group of newly-educated young people formed “literary and social clubs” in West Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, appropriating literature in English but reusing it “to make their own statements about their own social authority and modernity.” Although Newell uses the term to focus on local nonelite groups, I use “paracolonial” in a slightly different way to include migrants, such as Rajaratnam, and in order to escape the colonial/national binarism that marks much of the critical reception of the works I discuss in this essay. The term enables me to describe a social field that is not simply reflective of the imprint of colonial power, and yet simultaneously to resist the temptation to read all signs in texts within this field as symptomatic of a growing national consciousness.
- 2 The first body of English-language short stories in what would become Malaysia and Singapore, for instance, was published in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* from 1897 to 1907. Twenty years passed before the first novel, Lim Boon Keng’s *Tragedies of Eastern Life* (1927), emerged from this social milieu, and even then it was published not in Singapore but in Shanghai. Similarly the earliest short stories in English by Filipinos were probably those published by *pensionados* in American college magazines, followed later by the three stories included in the University of the Philippines’ *College Folio* in October 1910 (Santillan-Castrence 1967, 549), while the first English-language novel, Zoilo M. Galang’s *A Child of Sorrow*, was not published until 1921.
- 3 Martin Joseph Ponce (2005, 80) develops Lumbers’s account further, arguing that the three sections of the short story collection represent stages in “Arguilla’s movement towards the ‘Lopez’ side of the [Salvador Lopez vs. José Garcia Villa, ‘proletarian literature’ versus aestheticism] debate” and noting that the stories from the first and, in this account, least “proletarian” section were those that were republished to critical acclaim in the United States.
- 4 For an account of the complexities of colonial bourgeois cultures that nationalism would later reconstruct in Manichean terms, see Stoler and Cooper (1997). Chatterjee’s later volume, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993), gives a detailed reading of the contradictions of emergent nationalism in Bengal and, in particular, its efforts to incorporate the experiences of women and subaltern agents into its narrative. In more recent work, both Anderson in *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998) and Chatterjee in *The Politics of the Governed* (2004) have moved to consider how what Anderson terms “bound serialities”—nonelective community affiliations such as “race”—are taken up and put to use by the national state that emerges from the collapse of the colonial state. Examining the manner in which the concept of “reason” was put to use in emerging nationalism, Gyan Prakash (1999, 7) illuminates how the nationalist elite reinscribed much of the apparatus of colonialism “under the authority of science.”

- 5 In coining the term "paratext," Gérard Genette (1991, 263–64) divides it into two components: the "peritext," which includes blurbs and introductory matter appearing in the same volume as the literary text itself, and the "epitext," which would include reviews or interviews with the author published in newspapers or magazines. In devising his terminology, Genette clearly has a novel or short story collection in mind. Yet if we think of short stories that are originally published in magazines, the distinction between peritext and epitext breaks down. Peritextual elements such as advertisements that appear within the text of the short story may be completely unrelated to its subject matter, while elements such as reviews that in Genette's model would be epitextual are frequently peritextual: Arguilla's short stories published in the *Philippine Magazine*, for instance, were often commented on in the editorials of its editor, A. V. H. Hartendorp.
- 6 See, for example, influential essays such as Mary Louise Pratt's "The Short Story: the Long and Short of It" (1981); the contributions to Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey's edited collection, *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads* (1989); and recent work such as Lohafer's *Reading for Storyness* (2003).
- 7 I am grateful to my graduate student Jeremy Chavez for alerting me to Arguilla's short stories as productive sites of self-fashioning through the use of masculinist tropes.
- 8 Thematically, Arguilla's stories evolve from simply depicting and celebrating rural or barrio life despite the presence of poverty to a more acute encounter with social injustice in later stories such as "Rice," yet the stress on physicality remains.
- 9 The hypostatization of "the modernity of the once-colonized" leads, in Chatterjee's (1997, 20) argument, to an apparently uncritical endorsement of national projects as "efforts which reflected both courage and inventiveness" "to reject the modernities established by others," in contradiction to the critical perspective on nationalism displayed in much of his other writing.
- 10 In a 1992 speech Rajaratnam recalled attending the launch of *Half-Caste*, a book by the "Malayan Eurasian" Cedric Dover in 1937, soon after his arrival in London. This, he noted, made him aware of "the politics of nationalism and the politics of race. Until then, I had accepted the problem of race and nationalism as simply a natural relationship between god-like white men on the one hand and inferior Asiatics on the other" (Rajaratnam 1992).
- 11 The phenomenon of British administrators' identification of Malay culture with an idealized vision of feudal England is well-documented, and influenced colonial policy decisions. See Butcher 1979, 173.
- 12 Lirios is accompanied by his wife, just as Arguilla was often accompanied by his wife and fellow-writer, Lydia Villeneuve. Hartendorp's (1937, 188) editorial mentions that Arguilla was present at the event, gave his friends who attended the meeting "fair warning at the time" that he was going to "write them up"; without a conscious effort to change focalization it would seem likely that Lirios's impressions and perceptions are based on those of Arguilla himself.
- 13 See, for instance, Abdul JanMohamed's (1934, 38) argument that *Things Fall Apart's* formal blending of "oral and chirographic cultures" contradicts "the substance of the novel" that "laments a loss and points an accusing figure at colonialist destruction."
- 14 Villa's and Kalaw's writings, of course, are separated by much more than simply form. The two writers occupied diametrically opposite positions with respect to tertiary education in the Philippines: Kalaw was for many years Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University

of the Philippines, while Villa was expelled from the same institution because of the alleged obscenity of a poem. Yet form, content, and context are surely linked: Kalaw's choice of the novel form was no doubt dictated by the need to produce an epic national narrative, while Villa's exploration of the short story form in the collection *Footnote to Youth* enables radical formal modernist experiments in texts such as "Untitled Story," which hover on the border between short stories and prose poems.

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