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**Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo and Priscelina Patajo-Legasto (eds.),
Philippine Postcolonial Studies: Essays on Language and
Literature**

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REVIEW ESSAY

Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo and Priscelina Patajo-Legasto (eds.), **Philippine Postcolonial Studies: Essays on Language and Literature**. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2004. 155 pages.

Of the many ideas that have emerged in this poststructuralist era, postcolonialism is probably the most embattled. Critic Stephen Slemon (2001, 100) says, “Probably no term within literary and critical studies is so hotly contested at present as is the term ‘post-colonial’”; and Terry Eagleton (1999), noting the extreme caution postcolonial critics have taken when discussing the concept, has commented that “the idea of the post-colonial has taken such a battering from post-colonial theorists that to use the word unreservedly of oneself would be rather like calling oneself Fatso.” Several Philippine academics have also been fervently and consistently critical of postcolonialism. E. San Juan Jr. (1995, 57) sees postcolonial theorizing as “a symptom produced by poststructuralist theories when regurgitated and worked over by intellectuals from former colonies”; and Alice Guillermo (1997, 16) believes “there is little political value in declaring oneself as a postcolonial subject while existing within a situation profoundly imbricated in neo-colonialism and imperialism.”

It is curious, therefore, that *Philippine Postcolonial Studies: Essays on Language and Literature*, first published in 1993, has been reissued with no revisions other than a very thin “Preface to the Second Edition” and a very fat “Notes on the Contributors.” One naturally wonders about the relevance of the reissue.

To be sure, all of the essays included in this collection are still useful, even if only as texts that reveal the concerns of literary scholars of the early 1990s when postcolonialism first came into vogue. Still, there are questions that must be answered to gauge the value of the reissue. Will it help readers come to an understanding of the phenomenon of postcolonialism? Does it track the significant changes postcolonial critical practice has undergone in the past ten years? Are the essays good models of postcolonial criticism?

Like most collections, this one is uneven, so that the answers to these questions are ambivalent.

Six of the ten essays introduce and propose new (post-1960s) approaches to the study of both mainstream and marginalized texts (oral culture, emergent literature, English studies, people's theater, and so on). The essays overlap and convey essentially the same point: marginalized texts need to be studied. Two of the essays are "readings" of Philippine literary texts. One essay is an overview of Philippine-Chinese literature; and one essay, Helen E. Lopez's "The Filipino Encounter with American Literary Texts in a Time of Crisis," presents a seemingly new but actually pre-postcolonial approach to mainstream literature.

The central concern of "The Filipino Encounter with American Literary Texts in a Time of Crisis" is how American literature can be relevant at a time when "themes addressing the regressive impact of American imperialism on the growth of our nationhood in much of Philippine writing in recent years have become as familiar as stereotypes" (110). Instead of assuming that American literature is an instrument of domination, however, Lopez's program rests on premises that are a throwback to the time of Horace: literature as a source of inspiration. She says, for example, "To comprehend what kept the American people together during the dark days of their civil war . . . we can find meaningful answers in Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* or John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*" (112). Although she does mention the new interest in American minority literature and the use of the new approaches to reading literature, the focus of her discussion remains the potential of literature to "foster in us a largeness of spirit" (112). Even given Legasto's already broad and gratuitously accommodating definition

of postcolonial discourse—"a critique of Western hegemony" (9)—this essay cannot seriously be considered postcolonial.

As the subject matter of "The Chinese Margin in Philippine Literature" by Lily Rose Tope is a marginalized literature, this essay can be considered postcolonial (per Legasto's definition), though only very tenuously. The first half of the essay reads like a Civics or Social Studies lesson on the contributions of the Chinese to Philippine culture. The second half is a brief overview of the development of Philippine-Chinese literature, in which Tope expresses her desire to see Philippine-Chinese literature move out of the literary margins and into the mainstream.

The inclusion of Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo's essay in this collection is premised on her proposal to read the autobiographical writings of Carmen Guerrero Nakpil and Sylvia Mayuga as "minority discourse," that is, reading and writing based on women's marginality but using the dominant language and forms of expression. Hidalgo claims to examine the concept of deterritorialization, but this examination consists of a paraphrasing of the narratives and a liberal peppering of quotes (sixty-two in all) from Nakpil and Mayuga. The reader, however, inevitably wonders where, within the range of critical approaches used by Hidalgo (somewhere between what can be charitably described as "feminist" and more realistically as "thematic") postcolonialism lies.

The essay "Dogeaters, Postmodernism and the 'Worlding' of the Philippines" by Caroline S. Hau is the collection's most competent contribution and addresses postcolonial issues most thoroughly. It begins with an attempt to explain the postmodern condition and the features of postmodernism through an engaged discussion of Frederic Jameson's take on postmodernism and Linda Hutcheon's response to Jameson. Hau then demonstrates how the novel *Dogeaters* by Jessica Hagedorn shares a lot of the preoccupations attributed to postmodernism. This is followed by a brief discussion of Gayatri Spivak's "The Rani of Sirmur," followed by a reading of *Dogeaters* as a text that "others" the Philippines as exotic.

The six essays that propose new approaches to literary study are by Alaras, Villareal, Patajo-Legasto, Santos, Mabilangan, and Jose.

“The Concept of English Studies in the Philippines” by Consolacion R. Alaras appears to be mistitled. The focus of this essay is orality and the central argument is that English studies has to accept and understand orality and oral cultures. It is through this, she argues, that English Studies can be relevant and liberative.

“Instructional Materials for Cultural Empowerment” by Corazon D. Villareal attempts to answer the question, Can English sever its links from elitism and cultural imperialism? Informed by Foucault, her answer comes through a discussion of, first, the teaching of English in the general education curriculum (a proposal for a shift in focus from ESP or English for Specific Purposes to a crossdisciplinary EAP or English for Academic Purposes); second, the three positive outcomes of this shift (the possibility of seeing errors in Philippine English in its proper light, a more critical understanding of how language evolves, and the chance to “make our mark on the English language” [36]); third, the reexamination of the concept of a “classic”; and, fourth, the inclusion of regional literature in the curriculum.

Anne Marie Mabilangan’s “Approaches to a Criticism of Emergent Literature” defines emergent literature (a term first proposed by Raymond Williams and discussed further by Elmer Ordoñez) as “people’s literature, protest literature, resistance literature, feminist literature, minority literature, and, even broader in scope, Third World or postcolonial literature” (67). She provides a broad overview of the history of approaches to emergent literatures, from evolutionism (measuring emergent literatures by Western standards) to universalism (focusing on what emergent literatures have in common with Western literature) to relativism (belief not in a common culture but in cultures). Pointing out the effect of the relativist’s approach of “deradicalizing” literature, Mabilangan proposes that the study of emergent literature “must be given historical, social, and political weight” (72). Its criticism, she insists, must be one of “specificity.”

“Philippine Oral Traditions: An Introduction” by Angelito L. Santos begins with a discussion, adapted from Raymond Williams and Marx, of the three kinds of popular culture—folk culture, mass market culture, and an uneven culture that is both backward and advanced. Santos does

not make a clear enough link between oral tradition and popular culture but does, however, provide a good discussion of popular culture in Third World settings and an accurate description of popular culture in the Philippines. He contrasts two views of oral culture, written ten years apart, by E. Arsenio Manuel and Nick Joaquin. He critiques Joaquin's view for its lack of a sense of historical reality and calls upon scholars to approach oral tradition with cogent sociohistorical-anthropologic research.

Heuristically, the most useful of the essays that propose new approaches is Legasto's "Literature from the Margins: Reterritorializing Philippine Literary Studies." It provides an account of the dramatic transformations in literary studies as well as a helpful explanation of crux of the change—the idea of literature as discourse. Using Lloyd and JanMohamed's discussion of major, minor, and minority literature, Legasto examines these same categories as they apply to the Philippines and comes up with a different formulation. For Legasto, "major" literature in the Philippine setting is still Western literary texts that are taught in school. Legasto's category of "minor" literature refers to literature that "elicits the Filipino acquiescence to what are actually iniquitous social relations" (50). For Legasto, "minor" literature in the Philippines is that which is predominantly written in English. Finally, "minority" literature, for Legasto, refers to not just literatures written in "languages of 'minoritized' peoples" but to articulations of "individuals and groups whose identities have been fractured by the imposition of a 'common (Western) norm' of identity" (51). Her examples for these are underground literature and people's theater. She calls for the "celebration of minority literatures," the opening up of literary studies through the study of literature as discourse. This call seems to be the organizing principle of the collection, somewhat tiresomely repeated throughout most of the essays. It is a call that in the mid-1980s was radical but which, by the early 1990s (when this book was first published), had gained acceptance and which in the new millennium is de rigueur.

In 2002, more than fifteen years after she first published *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Toril Moi reissued her ground-breaking work sans

revisions. She says that, although she was tempted to rework the original text, she elected not to because the questions raised in the book "are now considered necessary starting points for understanding later developments in feminist theory" (173). She does, however, for her 2002 reissue include a lengthy afterword that includes a comprehensive account of the change in the cultural context from when it was first published to when it was reissued. This account explains why her book, which was cutting-edge in 1985, is now a textbook. The book may not have changed but the world around it certainly did, and Moi's afterword is an honest estimation of the value of the book then and now.

One wishes the same could be said for *Philippine Postcolonial Studies*. In the eleven years since it was first published, the changes not only in the field of postcolonial studies but also in feminist criticism, English-language studies, regional literature, Chinese-Philippine literature, and cultural studies have been far-reaching and transformative. Publication outfits have been built around these new discourses, syllabi have been radically changed, English departments have been beleaguered, and advocates discredited or fired then lionized. "Post—" anything has become obligatory—to the point that there are now whole discourses doubting the worth of these new discourses. This dynamism is absent in this reissue. The "Preface to the Second Edition" would have been a perfect venue to track these changes and to offer an analysis of the current state of postcolonial criticism and its future directions. Instead, one of the collection's editors, Priscelina Legasto, gives us a laconic "I stand by my assertions articulated in this book's 'Introduction' and 'Literatures from the Margins'" (viii). This is followed by the remark, "The Editors deliberately included a rather lengthy 'notes on the contributors' section to give our readers additional bibliographic sources including titles of publications . . . past conferences, symposia, and lectures, here and abroad, where new insights on Philippine Postcolonial Studies were disseminated by our scholars" (viii). From a tasteful two sentences per contributor in the first edition, the reissue now has an indigestible two pages per contributor. Indeed, one wishes that the dynamism in the contributors' careers could have rubbed off on this reissue's portrayal of Philippine postcolonial studies.

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