

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

---

## Philippine Writings: A Mixed Salad

Joseph A. Galdon

*Philippine Studies* vol. 26, no. 3 (1978) 317–320

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies@admu.edu.ph](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>  
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## Review Article

### Philippine Writings: A Mixed Salad

JOSEPH A. GALDON, S.J.

PHILIPPINE WRITINGS: SHORT STORIES-ESSAYS-POETRY. Edited by A. G. Hufana. Manila: Regal Publishing Company, 1977. xi, 466 pages.

Anthologies are tricky things to play with – hard to compile and harder to sell. The critic or reader will always be dissatisfied with the selections, complaining that this or that piece should have been included, and this selection omitted. Without a clear focus, the anthology often peters away into a meaningless collection of items that the editor happens to like, or which are included for various and disconnected reasons. The result is all too often a mixed salad that pleases no one. *Philippine Writings*, edited by A. G. Hufana, suffers from the problems of most anthologies. It is an interesting collection of Philippine short stories, which is spoiled by a lack of focus and poor editing. It is rather impressive in aspiration but almost pitiful in execution.

The anthology is a cooperative venture between Regal Publishing of Manila and Horst Erdmann Verlag of the Federal Republic of Germany and is copyrighted by both publishing firms. The English version was printed by Regal in Manila, and a German translation is to follow in Germany. The volume includes short stories, poems, and essays. But what could have been a scholarly and reputable anthology is spoiled by some rather unscholarly lapses of focus and taste.

### ESSAYS – POETRY – CRITICISM

In a 465-page volume only four essays are included, and they occupy only 70 pages of the anthology. The essays are good, but their number is too small and their content too “literary” to be truly representative of Philippine writing in the essay. The De La Costa essay and the Joaquin (Quijano de Manila) essay make a good pair, but they describe Philippine culture and character rather than illustrate the essay as a Philippine literary form. The

Yabes essay on "Pioneering in the Filipino Short Story in English" should more properly appear as an introduction to the collection of short stories in the volume. "Philippine Poetry" by the editor of the volume, A. G. Hufana, is interesting for its emphasis on the native tradition in poetry, but it is hard to see how it fits the pattern or focus of the anthology.

A reader would get the impression from the inclusion of these four essays in a volume entitled *Philippine Writings* that Philippine writing in the essay is very thin and is limited to literary criticism and culture. The Philippine essay in English deserves an anthology of its own if it is to be truly represented for scholarly readers. Its history is actually older than that of the short story and would include far more than four authors if it were to be representative. (see Leopoldo Y. Yabes, "The Filipino Essay in English: 1912-1941," M.A. thesis, University of the Philippines, 1949; and Estela Anna Fernando Reyes, "The Filipino Informal Essay in English: 1918-1963," M. A. thesis, University of the Philippines, 1977). Although one would miss the insights of the four essays, especially those of Joaquin and De La Costa, the present anthology should have remained faithful to its focus on Philippine writing and should have eliminated the section on the essay completely, or used the Yabes essay alone as an introduction to the short stories, though even there it would have been incomplete since it covers the essay only to 1940.

The section on poetry is even worse. The editor gives a selection of Philippine poetry in English that consists of six poems! It is difficult to see how six poems and 20 pages of an anthology would be a fair representation of the Philippine poetry in English. The authors included - Villa, Baroga, Viray, Angeles, Hufana, and Bautista - are hardly representative of the whole sweep of Philippine poetry. It would have been better to leave out the whole section on poetry rather than to misrepresent the tradition as the present anthology does.

The volume also includes an appendix on "Philippine Literature - As Seen by German Literary Critics." The title is deceptive, for none of the authors are really literary critics. They are book reviewers, and almost all of the reviews are from newspapers, rather than from literary or critical journals. The only review quoted with some pretense to literary scholarship is *Neue Volksbildung*, which reviews books for libraries. The editor's notes indicate that his interest is not scholarly but propagandistic - "one of the most prestigious German national dailies," "Switzerland's largest-circulation German-language daily," "... influential daily's view of contemporary Philippine writing," and "the most reputed Austrian daily."

The title of the appendix is further misleading for the selections are not comments of German literary critics on Philippine literature, but newspaper reviews of a single volume of short stories - *Rice Wine: A German-language Anthology of the Best Contemporary Philippine Short Stories*, edited by Pura Santillan-Castrence and translated by Guenther Birkenfield. (*Reiswein*.

*Die Philippinen in Erzählungen ihrer zeitgenössischen Autoren*, Herrenalb, Schwarzwald, 1965). The appendix also includes a selected bibliography of German publications on the Philippines, which is pitifully short and contains everything from geography to agriculture, and mining. Only one book on literature is listed (*Rice Wine*). The appendix is pathetic in its self-adulation and should have been omitted.

### THE SHORT STORIES

Eliminate the essays, the poetry and the appendices, however, and the remaining volume would have been most impressive as a collection of Philippine short stories in English. In his essay on "Pioneering in the Filipino Short Story in English (1925-1940)" which is included in the anthology, Professor Yabes comments that from Philippine writing in English "one can pick out at least twenty-five stories . . . which are entitled to a permanent place in the national literature, and in the literature of any nation for that matter" (p. 370). *Philippine Writings* contains 23 stories from the period 1925-1975, and all of them deserve Yabes's accolade. They are excellent stories and provide a good cross section of the development of the short story in English in the Philippines. The stories reflect the six schools of Philippine short story writers that Yabes enumerates for the period up to 1940, the de-Maupassant, Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, William Daniel Steele, William Saroyan, and Dorothy Parker schools, as well as the Social and Existentialist schools that are revealed in Philippine short stories in the period 1945-1975. The anthology would provide an excellent textbook for a survey course on the development of the short story in English in the Philippines. Yabes's article is the classic on the prewar period. (There is unfortunately a glaring misprint on the final page as well as several other typographical errors.) Add another critical commentary on the stories of the postwar period and the text would be complete, and a good introduction to the Philippine short story for foreign readers.

I presume that *Philippine Writings* does not repeat the stories included in *Reiswein* (I have not been able to see a copy of it), so the expert in Philippine writing looks in vain for Arguilla's "How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife," Daguió's "Wedding Dance," Nollado's "Rice Wine," Arcellana's "The Mats," Hamada's "Tanabata's Wife," and perhaps one or two others.

But even with that editorial limitation imposed by the first collection of nineteen stories, the present selection is excellent and does credit to both the editor's critical perceptions and the literature it represents. Reading through the present collection is a thoroughly enjoyable exercise as one notes the development of the short story from Paz Marquez-Benitez's "Dead Stars" to Florentino Dauz's "The Expatriates."

One final note: the volume is expensive, printed on excellent book paper

and solidly bound, but the editing is dismal. I counted over one hundred and fifty typographical errors before I gave up in frustration. It can be taken for granted, I imagine, that typesetters in the Philippines do not know correct English, but the editor or the publisher must take ultimate responsibility for correct English. Such poor editing is a disgrace, especially when a volume is intended to illustrate the state of literature in English in the Philippines for a foreign market. The final impression of *Philippine Writings* is that it is a good, even an impressive anthology of Philippine short stories in English, but it has been spoiled by poor editing – both in its selection of extraneous material, and in its production. Philippine writing in English can hold up its head in any company. One should not have to apologize for it, nor for its publication. Unfortunately, one must apologize, not for the content, but for the editing of this present volume.