

philippine studies

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

The Proper Study of Literature

Rolando S. Tinio

Philippine Studies vol. 22, no. 3-4 (1974) 346–362

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.

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

The Proper Study of Literature*

ROLANDO S. TINIO

The title of this paper is largely misleading. No theory of literary studies will be advanced; no particular approach for studying or teaching literature. Neither will I concern myself with literature teaching as a specific kind of professional act. The difficulty consists precisely in avoiding the habit of thinking that literature teaching is a profession or career much like nursing or engineering or singing in nightclubs. It makes more sense, really, to regard literature teaching as a vocation, like priesthood or parenthood. Thus, there is no point to the distinction between literature teachers and literature students; teaching and studying are mere phases of the same act. The best way is to think of literature as a way of looking at the world, and of the literature teacher as a way of *being* in the world.

But I seem to be speaking in riddles. I realize that there are great practical concerns we are being asked to address — curriculum revision, problems in language proficiency, program objectives, and so on. I have my eyes trained on them, but I am convinced that the most effective way of talking about them is by talking about something else. We tend to be bogged down by the trivial details of the practical world, pressed upon by deadlines, smothered by paper correction and grade computation, tormented by the presence of deficient students, and deadened by the inexorable clockwork of organized learning — so that we are made, without our knowing it, technicians, mechanics, and trouble-shooters, rather than the men and women of literature as which we were enlisted in God's creation.

*Paper read at a Faculty Seminar.

We might begin, nonetheless, the way we always begin. Let us consider a practical concern such as the literature core curriculum. Let us raise the questions we always raise in a series. Why should we teach literature as part of the core curriculum? How can we shape our courses so that they become a valuable part of the core curriculum? What should the objectives be in these courses? What should the students develop and gain? What sort of literature should they read? What academic standards should be used for determining their success or failure in these courses? Invariably, we find ourselves considering what we call — with a triumphant air — the “nitty-gritty of things”: textbooks (Are they reactionary and to be discarded, and shall we have a committee to prepare new progressive ones?), quizzes (How many a week?), term papers (To give or not to give?), semestral exams (Is it better to give them in the classroom or in the Covered Court?). Do we allow smoking in class? Do we mark latecomers absent? Do we give make-up tests? Is there ever an end to this line of questioning?

But, notice how, whether the voice is active or passive, and the verb transitive or intransitive, we have actually moved from questions about us to questions about things to be done. We have slipped out of the center of attention, and filled it with a pile of objects and objective considerations. We have transferred the weight of responsibility from the individual self being questioned to the whole department giving a consensus of answers. The moment we sense that we are floundering, we demand directives and positions from the government or university administration so we can be on our merry way to salvation and — salary increase and promotion.

I have suggested often enough that, if the Ateneo does not seem to be getting on superbly enough (for the Ateneo does superbly or not at all) despite the spirit of progress and change which is its guide and demon, it may be because when we speak of progress and change, we think only of changes in buildings and building facilities (from natural ventilation to air-conditioners to electric fans), or in the composition of students (from upper class to lower class, from high I.Q. to medial I.Q.,

from English speakers to Pilipino speakers), or in the curricula we offer, the subject listing in those curricula, the syllabi for those subjects, the bibliographies and library acquisitions in aid of those syllabi. We rarely ever think — perhaps, never — that what needs repair is neither building nor student nor curriculum but us, the faculty. Somehow, in our perception of the world as dynamic, we leave ourselves out, set ourselves apart and in brackets, as if we were a fixed point, a stasis and camera-eye, a Prometheus against whom all are measured, and around whom the constellations perform ever-changing dances.

For instance, the phrase “faculty development” appears and reappears in faculty conversations, convocations, position papers, committee reports, and all other rituals of language in which academic folks love to exert their professorial-most. As all can witness, the phrase is old and beginning to lose its ardor. “We should have a faculty development program” has begun to sound meaningless and ludicrous.

Come to think of it, it is both ludicrous and meaningless. For a faculty development program is not anything we *could* have, the way we could (and should) have a barrio rehabilitation program or a nutrition program for the malnourished. In the latter cases, you have a situation where A does something for B because B is unable to do anything for himself. The situation of a faculty is nowhere like that, which is the reason, I think, that university administrators, even before or since 1968, have not been able to set up any such program; it cannot be done. A logical contradiction is involved. A faculty that is in the state of B (i.e., “unable to do anything for themselves”) cannot be rescued by A which is not B (i.e., not “faculty”). For it is of the essence of “faculty” to be in a *constant state of development*; else, how can they teach students how to develop? Else, what meaning is there in the hallowed phrase “community of scholars” — that shibboleth and amulet with which we demolish, in an instant, whoever or whatever threatens to limit our capacity for self-indulgence?

One might speak meaningfully of a “faculty development coordination center,” which is, I gather, what Faura Research

Center has been, and the Center for Philippine Development will be. But the meaning of these Centers will depend entirely on a situation where faculty members are "developing" so excessively and duplicatively, albeit impoverishedly, and it is necessary for a university structure to structure the activities and put some kind of order and money into such enthusiasm gone berserk.

But if such a situation does not obtain (the Dean speaks of thousands of pesos in funds that are announced annually and remain unspent), I do not think it is because Ateneo faculty members are hostile to the idea of faculty development. Nay, it is ever at the core of our preaching to all the intellectually deprived and intellectually undernourished on the other side of the intellectual tracks. As for ourselves, our existence in the Ateneo seems to assure us that we do not need to — we cannot — develop further. There is nothing to add to our plenum. We have reached high tor; the next step can only lead to apotheosis.

That is why projects of re-orientation, Filipinization, Pilipinization, and all such occupations for lesser persons, make little sense to us, provoke little soul-searching, and change neither winds nor horses.

Of course, the Department of Literature is a colorful exception. It has always been a book of changes. It has changed courses, programs, chairmen, teacher nationalities, sectioning methods, class sizes, standards, approaches, instructional media, textbooks, departmental names, and, more recently, even teacher class-origins. These achievements have been sufficiently acknowledged; our department has been lavishly praised by students and colleagues, in and outside the university, for being at the forefront of change. Where other faculties are just beginning to suspect that something might be amiss in their presuppositions and categories, we are already liberated from the seductive tyranny of Coleridge and James. Re-orientation has been going on for the past six years.

As we all know, there are two distinct phases in the process of re-orientation: the first negative, critical phase which is largely system-destroying and polemical; and the second positive, creative phase which is largely system-building and evangelical.

In the first phase, you break down the inherited system of ideas by showing, not that they are false or bad, but that they are irrelevant and, therefore, meaningless to us. Thus, we discriminate between values and non-values, between sense and non-sense. In other words, where the first phase seems iconoclastic — and it is — we break icons, not with the degenerate joy of vandals, but because we cannot recover or discover our true icons unless the false ones are completely destroyed. In the second phase — and keep in mind that we speak of phases, not “steps” in a time sequence — we set up a new and enlightened system of ideas — what to us are the *real* categories of literary perception, the *real* theories and definitions, the *real* criteria, and the new anthologies that embody this *real* literary world-view.

At the present time, we like to think that we are at a mid-point between the two interlocking phases. But since there is no such mid-point, as in a time sequence, my fear is that we are merely betwixt and between.

The secret of real progress is relentless scrutiny and self-flagellation. We must be severe in judging whether or not we have actually crossed the waters and landed on the coastal plains of the enchanted isle. There are mirages at sea as much as in deserts. It is possible to think, as in some cartoons, that we have hit solid ground, where we have merely disembarked and started to set up house on the backside of a whale.

The business of re-orientation is not so simple that it can be accomplished in six years. This is the seventh year, come to think of it, and it may be that some of us have now assumed positions of repose, like God.

Re-orientation involves a real re-birth and conversion analogous to the experience of mystics and saints. It is not sufficient that we recite a new canon, read new breviaries, and change around the holydays of obligation in our literary calendar. As in actual spiritual conversion, we are asked to exercise a distinctly new kind of conscience which will make us see everything in the world — both the literary world and the non-literary, practical world — according to a new ethic and esthetic. At mid-point — assuming there is one — it is a condition full of deep anguish and

fear, as when a piece of wood (so Rilke says) wakes up one morning, and finds that it has turned into a violin.

In the concrete, what our department has achieved so far may be outlined as follows: (1) We have recognized the absurdity in assuming that Philippine literature reaches its plenitude in our English writers, and that we relate to American literature the way American literature relates to British literature; (2) We have recognized that our literary history is — how else could it be? — constituted entirely by vernacular works which have been shaped by Spanish, or largely European, traditions; (3) We have begun to do frenetic scholarship in and sporadic criticism of vernacular works; (4) We have expanded our literary horizons beyond the merely English-and-American.

Yet, these achievements are vitiated by complementary failings, or — put it more generously — the still-to-be-achieved: (1) For although we realize sufficiently that Anglo-American literature is not the catalyst and matrix for our literature, we continue to regard the English language as our only “link language” — isn’t that what our social scientists call it? — with the rest of the literary world; which means that foreign non-Anglo-American literature will be available to us only through English translations and commentaries — that is to say, versions and interpretations already filtered by the English language, the preferences of English speakers, and the special relationships which those works bear to Anglo-American writers and readers. (2) Although we recognize the formative influence exerted by Spanish culture on our literary history, we remain apathetic and/or hostile to the Spanish spirit, regard the learning of Spanish as a torment or a joke, and systematically sabotage the Hispanic-Filipino character of traditionalism and authoritarianism in aid of an essentially American, originally Protestant, spirit of individualism and irreverence for the past. (3) Although we pore over vernacular texts, and write articles and theses about them, we continue to regard them with secret disdain, with no real pride, with the self-congratulatory attitude of one who has forced oneself to embrace a life of tedium of deprivation, when one could very well have revelled in the more festive, more

fashionable complexities of Robert Bly and Vonnegut. And (4) Although we have proposed to expand our imaginative frontiers beyond the merely English-and-American (i.e., written in English and by Americans), we have continued to look at the non-English-and-American world through the star-spangled spectacles of Welles and Sontag.

What are indices to these shortcomings? Let us isolate a few: (1) We make little attempt to excel in any Philippine language beyond the ability to read and speak it fluently. Even those who boast of teaching fluently in Pilipino continue to regard themselves as mere teachers of Pilipino or in Pilipino, rather than as writers and producers of Pilipino. Granted, the tendency springs from a habit cultivated during decades of enslavement to a foreign language we could never really catch up with, whose grammar and style books, thesauri, and codes of idiomatic phrases we had to serve hand and foot, heart and soul, lest we be deprived of our special badges as "English teachers." Naturally, we could not create in English. The reason is simple: *we do not create English*. (2) We make no attempt to learn any other foreign language, so that we can go on our own and mine any part of that whole mountain of international letters. (3) We continue — as I am doing at this moment — to use English in all our literary exercises, apparently unaware — as I also am, perhaps — that a foreign language can only express foreign thoughts, and that the richness in the deepest portions of our minds remains untapped by our most felicitous turn of phrase. And (4), Continuing to — let me invent a word — "literatize" in English, we remain as disoriented as before, since we cannot really see or feel what we *ought* to see and feel. The Filipino world becomes translated into a glossary of English terms. Filipino relationships are forced into the logic of English sentences. The world — we tend to forget — is never anything to us except as it becomes a world of words.

I shall now cite a specific situation, if only to assure you that the things I have been talking about are real toads in real gardens.

Up to this point, I do not think that all of us are uniformly appreciative of the value in the semestral faculty seminar. I am

not completely convinced that those who sign up for a paper are doing so for the right reason. I suspect that some are merely afraid that, if they did not sign up, they would either lose points and never get promoted or increased in wages, or lose face because everyone else who matters is signing up regularly.

What is the "right reason" I have in mind? Simply this: the sense of inner ache one experiences as one wrestles with an intellectual problem, and the desperate need to be disgorged of "something," to give it objective size and shape and, thus, declare it vanquished.

Why do I feel that the embattled spirit has not been raging from within? I could offer two indications: (1) Through the past three semesters, I have not noticed that we get preoccupied enough with what is discovered through papers read to us. Involvement, if any, lasts only for the duration of the seminar hour. At best, involvement lasts until the next morning — especially when a paper has been watery or downright illiterate, or if its reader did not pronounce his f's with appropriate upper-class flair. I suspect that most of us respond to the papers in the same way we handle student papers. We give them due attention, grade them and, soon enough, toss them into a mental incinerator. And (2) I have not felt in those who are in the process of writing papers that they are consumed by their explorations for months on end, such as when a bacteriologist is on the verge of isolating a virus, or a painter is groping towards the architectonic of a mural. In other words, I do not feel that many of us are much better than our own students who drag their tails from one term paper to another, meeting deadlines punctually, but with the same dread and repugnance one usually reserves for visits to the dentist's chair. The appalling thing is that we demand that our students, especially our graduate students, experience and exhibit far greater ardor for literary exploration than we are capable of doing.

What — you might ask — am I desperately looking for?

During my first meeting with the department as chairman — in the summer of 1972 — I complained about the general tawdriness of conversation in the English Room. I remember ex-

pressing a wish for "aristocracy of spirit." I remember the perplexity of those listening to me. I remember one faculty member asking seriously and sincerely what the phrase meant. I remember being forced to pretend that I had merely cracked a joke, and never mind if the punch line was a bit obscure. Later, I proposed — nay, imposed — the writing of seminar papers, for I thought that this would serve as a way of stimulating the more aristocratic portions of our nature by compelling our attention toward literary subjects — for do we not often say that literature is a garden of such exquisite beauties and delights? After a year and a half, I cannot see that much success has been achieved in that direction. I have not frequently heard sustained and deeply involving conversations between teacher and teacher, only between teacher and student. Literarizing seems to be an act we perform only when we are faced with paying customers. Among ourselves, as ourselves, our compulsions take us to our true obsessions.

Perhaps, the situation can be attributed to the belief that we are essentially teachers for classroom consumption; that is to say, we exist for the benefit entirely of our students, and we become most noble and most grave when we are explaining the uses of a preposition, correcting quizzes and bluebooks, computing marks, listening to student problems, and so on.

I do not mean to trivialize these activities; I think the teacher can gain a great deal from intercourse with students. For is it not often the case that students have to be ignorant and stupid so that their teacher might truly learn? Does it not happen often, that a teacher finally gets to understand what he has been teaching for ten, twenty years, only because, at last, there is a particularly recalcitrant young man or woman who refuses to be assuaged by the teacher's recitation of words that have gotten unplugged from the sockets of his own consciousness, or probably, have never been connected there, until this moment when a fool stands in the flesh before him, forcing him to repeat his explanation a dozen times, forcing him to find a variety of ways, and perhaps languages, or what C. S. Lewis calls "magistral metaphors," for expressing what the student cannot see, and will

not be able to see, until the teacher, before collapsing in exhaustion and despair, hits upon the magic words that illuminate the student — and illuminate the student because they are the words that carry the teacher's first *real* and own-most thought on the matter?

But there is something disoriented about the belief that one's tutorial function is central to one's professional life. It is, at least, a throwback to that era when we thought that literary knowledge — along with every other kind of knowledge — has been completely packaged between the covers of graduate school books, and inventiveness lay only in finding colorful ways of unpacking our imported chinoiserie before the eyes of astonished philistines.

The situation has changed drastically. The teacher's central problem is no longer *how* to distribute effectively his literary canned goods. With the re-orientation of the university, the greater problem is finding out *what* it is the teacher should be teaching well. The truly re-oriented teacher must question every single thought that settles in his mind, lest it be tainted by his previous orientation. He must re-read all his textbooks to make sure that they no longer mean anything to him, or, at least, that they no longer mean to him in exactly the same way. It is simply not possible to read Gaspar Aquino de Belen or Jose de la Cruz, believe them and accept them as the norm, and then go back to Pound and Eliot without a sense of alienation. It is simply not possible to be devoted to *Banaag at Sikat* and *Women in Love* equally and at once. Art demands more exclusive fidelity than Life.

Hence, re-orientation does not merely mean that rather than use an anthology of English and American authors, we substitute an anthology that includes Tagore, Li-Po, Joaquin, Hernandez, and Constantino. We are not re-oriented simply because we now talk frequently of Mishima and Anwar, where we used to drop the names of Rimbaud and Hesse. Re-orientation does not mean a mere widening of our reading experience and a greater catholicity of taste. Literary works will always appear in the firmaments of our critical gaze like a galaxy of spatially-arranged

objects. If we were God, we could prescind from the logic of geometry. But being human, we are forced to set up ourselves at some geographical point, and view the whole universe from that single point — which means that some objects will be nearer to us, brighter and warmer than others.

Thus, re-orientation really means that what was lit with a blue lamp is now lit with, say, an orange lamp. For to be re-oriented is not only to be able to view Philippine vernacular literature with sympathy and understanding, and even pride, but also, and most importantly so, *to be able to view all of literature from the perspective — through the filter — of our national literature*. As a result, Plato's *Ion* and *The Republic* might become more important to us than Aristotle's *Poetics*, Arnold more than Richards, Sara Teasdale more than Emily Dickinson.

If we asked a respected group of editors from various countries to prepare, individually, a listing of the most significant authors and works to be included in an anthology of world literature for their own countries, I am sure that no two lists will be the same. The difference will not be due to personal idiosyncrasy but to the differing relationships of world authors to each country's national literature.

But, in this business of re-orientation, it is even more important that we regard ourselves, our profession, our obligation, our lives, in a completely different way. The library should no longer be a warehouse but a field to plough; the classroom no longer a relief center for the culturally indigent but a laboratory and testing ground; our articles and lectures no longer exercises in Cicero and Turabian but surgeons' lancets probing *our* world's anatomy.

In short, the backside of re-orientation is re-search.

And by re-search, I do not mean that we are, essentially, looking for lost works, but, rather, that we are looking for a lost consciousness, a lost literary sense, a lost key to the lost door of a lost Temple of Art.

But the problem in all this looking is that we have no other precision instrument of search but our selves, our personalities, our souls. Unlike archeologists who can be totally astonished by

the suddenly uncovered, as readers of literature, we find only what we bring to the excavation site. Literature, as even the positivistic Wellek is forced to say, does not exist outside but in the experience of the reader and in the collective experience of many readers. Or, put it in another way — the way I have preferred to put it to my students — it is not entirely true that *we* read literature; rather, it is literature that reads us, that exposes what we are. The meanings we find in stories and poems, the themes we attribute to authors, are nothing more than meanings we find in our lives, themes by which we live and try to be happy. That is why it is possible for a degenerate mind to see eroticism in the Lord's Prayer, a mystical mind to see apocalypses in doggerels, a political mind to see class strife in fairy tales, a trivial mind to see metaphysics in abstractionist art. If the New Critic found only verbal arrangements and ambiguities in poems, it is because they grew up in a world where the rule of morality had been sufficiently destroyed and replaced by the rule of grammar.

I am emphasizing here the oft-mislaid (because unfashionable) principle that literary meanings are moral meanings. But truly, what else is there worth talking about in literature? Poems reflect how the world meant to the poet, and readers share in that meaningfulness when poet and reader share a moral world. I am not saying that Christians should not read the work of pagans, Buddhists, Muslims, or communists. I do not refer to systems of moral meaning as outlined by specific religions or philosophies. It is, in fact, possible that present-day Filipinos share the moral world of the Muslim or communist rather than that of the present-day Christian in Paris or New York. For I am referring to the kind of morality whose seat is intuition, the undifferentiated unconscious, before it has been formulated into doctrine or ideology.

The point is: every time we say "This poem means . . ." or "This line means . . .," we should realize that we are not really talking of the meaning *of* the poem, or the meaning *of* the words in a line of poetry. Poems — and all of language — have no meaning *of* themselves; Wittgenstein has finished off that non-

sense. It is more accurate to speak of the meaning *in* a poem or *in* a symbol; that is to say, the meaning *of* our lives as mirrored *in* the poem or symbol. It is ironic that the New Critics, who tried to make literature respectable by turning it into objective science, have really made literature more irrelevant in the technological age. For let us face it — oppressed by tremendous crises in the modern world, who can waste time worrying about the expeditions of a punctuation mark?

Surely, if some poetry is truly meaningful to us — that is, truly and in the most personal and subjective level — it is because that poetry reflects the special kind of relationship which we enjoy with the external world. What we call artistic form is nothing more than an objective formulation of *our* sense of teleology in the universe. Remember that the Aristotle who says that a tragedy must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and preaches the rule of logical inevitability, is the selfsame Aristotle who speaks of efficient and final causality, and the pyramid structure of organic and inorganic forms. Also, consider the fact that Professor Aristotle was not only professor at the Department of Literature, nor his students, students only of En 25 or Lit 119. Rather, he was also professor of the departments of Biology, Physics, Mathematics, Music, Fine Arts, Communication, History, Linguistics, Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, Philosophy, Theology, and heaven knows what else. So, do not suppose for one moment that, to him or to his students, that lecture which has come down to us as the *Poetics* was an important utterance, a crowning work; I would suspect it was meant merely as a footnote, a parenthetical remark, an appendix, which made no sense in itself, but only and always in relation to all his other lectures on all the other subjects. The *Poetics* is perfunctory, exploratory, uncomprehensive, lacking in scholarly scope, extremely prejudiced, and often incoherent; the extant text is, of course, incomplete and unreliable. It was delivered at a time in Greek literary history somewhat akin to ours; some masterworks remained in the repertory of Greek theater, but a lot more had not been recovered from the Age of Pericles. The professor had seized this known model and that, in order to

demonstrate certain loosely connected points of poetic construction, but everyone knew the points constituted a seminal and tentative theory — and, besides, what did it really matter? Those young men were not going to graduate as drama majors or solicit careers as literature instructors or scholars and critics. They were intended to become citizens of Athens, and for as long as they were upright citizens, what did it matter if they did not possess a comprehensive literary philosophy? What did it matter if they liked Sophocles more than Euripides, or Euripides more than Sophocles, or the epic more than tragedy, or tragedy more than the dithyramb — for as long as their moral fiber was as solid-golden as the apples of Hesperides?

I labor on this point because of the prevailing attitude in universities that the study of literature is a playground surrounded by granite walls, independent from and impregnable by other studies. Our greatest fear is to be caught red-handed, talking morals or politics, or psychology, and be scolded with that all-shattering, all-demolishing kill-all: "But, my dear, you are not teaching literature *as* literature!"

I submit that there is no such thing as teaching literature *as* literature. Brooks and Warren and the whole lot of them have got it all wrong. For if you talk of denotations and connotations, metaphors and symbols, verbal ironies and verbal transformations, then, you are *not* teaching literature but grammar, logic, rhetoric, philology. The literary experience is not the understanding of *how* words come together in a poem, but, these words having come together, how the poem illuminates the human condition — *my* human condition, *my* moral world. Literature is like food to my state of hunger. The literary experience is my eating and digesting it and, hopefully, my growing because of it. The recipe may be colorful and complicated, and I am certain that there are enough cooks and dieticians in the world to worry about cooking skills, but my concern as eater and reader is what happens in the dining room, not the travails of the scullery maid.

To "literate" is to see the world as a mirror of *my* meanings. To love literature is to love the vision of the world in the pristine

light of my intuition and common sense before that pristine light is polluted forever by the scientist and technologist. To understand literature, one does not read more literature. No, one needs only to *live* in the purest sense of the word, unshackled by habits of utilitarianism which, as Bergson would say, veils reality and hides from our gaze the authentic syntax of things.

The true literary person is, therefore, one whose soul can echo the majesty of creation. The scholar and the critic, the professor and the editor — they are not true literary persons. Much less are they lovers of literature, as E. M. Forster points out in the fable, "The Celestial Omnibus." It is not love of literature when one maniacally collects literary data; that is love of gossip. Neither is it love of literature when one collects rooms-full of books, bestsellers, rare editions, first copies; that is mere avarice. For the pure love of literature does not revolve around literature but around Life. The lover of literature deepens his sense of life, ennobles himself and the people for whom he lives, forces his impulses — and theirs — into patterns of inexplicable beauty. The metaphoricality, the intricate ambiguities, the ironies and symbolic tensions — these must be, not in poems, but in one's life, carried around by one in one's own soul, but lightly, and imperceptibly, the way will-o'-the-wisps are carried in the wind. The opposite of Poetry is not Prose, but vulgarity of spirit, pettiness, materialism, hedonism, triviality, crassness, banality, self-indulgence, lethargy of mind and body — the qualities of the unmitigated philistine. For Poetry, as Robert Rozhdestvensky says, is not an arrangement of words but a state of soul.

And if the lover of literature happens to be a teacher, then, his principal objective is — simply stated — to develop in his students a majesty of spirit, a repugnance for the baubles and bangles of social existence, an enduring passion for — and relentless pursuit of — Byzantium. The poems, the stories, the plays they read are mere catalysts, occasions, points of departure, mirrors.

I have said once or twice before that the teacher is the medium

of instruction. It was a witticism, and like all witticisms, it was a half-truth. For the teacher is not only the medium of instruction; he is the subject of the course itself, the textbook and model, the chart, table, and graph. In a very real sense, the teacher has nothing else to teach but himself. And the students have nothing else to learn but themselves. The poem or the novel is not being taught or studied; it is there as a presence and a non-partaker — like the marble groins in Rilke's archaic torso of Apollo, concealing, where the genitals have been effaced, a burst of candelabra glaring at us, subduing us, crying "You must change your Life!"

Thus, I have maintained that teaching efficiency cannot be evaluated. There are those whom I respect who maintain that it can be. There is no contradiction in our positions. They point out that a teacher's manner can be shown to be effective or not; I suggest that a teacher's exemplary manner can be most effective in destroying his students when that manner conveys, so clearly and seductively, the teacher's immorality and emptiness.

In the Philippines, in this university, through this period of re-orientation, this matter is of such grave concern. For the teacher of literature is the most competent teacher of Filipino life, and, consequently, he has the potential for being the most devastating destroyer of Filipinohood. I do not, by any means, suggest that literary anthologies be confined to works by Filipino authors; that would be a catastrophe. For it is in the presence of foreign works, because they posit another kind of life, that we can most easily see the contours of our selfhood. Do not forget that the universality of great art is inextricably bound up with his locality. But, in many cases, it is not even great foreign art that we carry to our classrooms — only what is fashionable and shallow like our souls. Our students, who are fine when we get them, do not understand us, are not illuminated by *our* kind of art, for we are intent on supplying them with answers for which they do not have, and should never have, the corresponding questions. But, through the years, we break down their common sense, replacing it with the jargon of our trade, and shatter their moral views with our deeply researched, thickly documented

sophistry. Thus, we send them out into the world, beclouded as in the comedy by Aristophanes, perfect images of our moral ineptitude. And we pat our backs, wipe our mouths, take our vacations, and wait for the next batch of innocents to be defiled.

I have written this paper with no hope that any of that will change, or that we can now march to our literature classes tomorrow more like Prometheus and less like Oedipus. But then, none of the papers read in the seminar have really amounted to much, except a bundle of manuscripts on the way to the typesetter.

In conclusion, I would like to indulge in a trivial remark. Perhaps you find this paper more obscure, more excessive, less logical, rather — in the classical sense — rhapsodic. It is all that, and deliberately so. In the past, I had pretended to be a scientist (as in my paper for the Human Development Committee), a logician (as in the paper on poems of pure description), a critic and theorist (as in the paper on the possibility of Philippine literary theory), even a pedagogue (as in last semester's paper on the English language problem). As a matter of fact, through all these years in the Ateneo, I have deliberately deceived everyone into thinking that I was a practical man, an able manager of affairs, a coldly analytical judge of cases, a logistician — and, perhaps, there is enough of each in me to do moderately well in those exercises, and even to enjoy myself in those charades and masquerades. With this paper, I decided to write and speak as an artist and a poet. It has taken many years before I could take courage to reveal, in an academic context, that a poet is really all I am, because from the first moment I entered this campus sixteen years ago, almost to the day, I knew at once — just by wetting the tip of my little finger and holding it up to the wind — that if it was realized that I was essentially artist and poet, no one — not even its vaunted English Department, would ever have given me the chance to be taken seriously.