

# Directions for the Humanities

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The historical context occasioned by the centenary of the Philippine struggle for independence provides a nationalist perspective in reviewing the humanities program in higher education. The teaching of English in a public school system installed by the Americans as part of their pacification drive has led to a western-oriented humanities curriculum. This should now give way to a Filipino-centered study of culture and the arts as part of a national agenda for the recovery of our integrity, as well as of our humanity as a people.

**A** HUNDRED YEARS AGO, ON 18 OCTOBER 1898, THE FOUNDING fathers of the first Philippine Republic in Malolos established the *Universidad Literaria de Filipinas* (Literary University of the Philippines), patterned after the University of Salamanca. Besides the fact that the academic tradition then was Spanish, it is worth noting that the word literary is appended to the name of the first state university in the country. Is this an indication of the pre-eminence given by the *ilustrado* founders of the state university to culture or the humanities?

While Filipino scientists like Jose Rizal, Antonio Luna, Anacleto del Rosario and Leon Ma Guerrero were making their mark in the scientific world, local science education had yet to be fully developed. The University of Santo Tomas opened its medical and pharmacy colleges only in 1871 — among the earliest in Asia.

The students of the *Universidad Literaria de Filipinas* were those whose studies at the University of Santo Tomas had been interrupted by the 1896 Revolution. Because of the ensuing Philippine-American War the university had to move its campus from Malolos to Tarlac where it held its first and last graduation in 1899. This university had for its faculty *ilustrado* members of the Malolos Congress. Some of the *ilustrados* were, like Jose Rizal, virtually Renaissance men schooled not only in the professions like medicine, law, and pharmacy but also in the humanities — philosophy, lit-

erature, and the arts. The first president of the *Universidad Literaria de Filipinas* was Joaquin Gonzalez, the father of Bienvenido Gonzalez who became president of the University of the Philippines (UP) in 1939.

The first Asian republic had fallen and the United States, as its new colonizer, established the University of the Philippines in 1908 in order 'to give instruction in literature, philosophy, the sciences, and the arts.' As Thelma Kintanar noted, the liberal arts tradition had been written into the UP charter just as the word *literaria* was inscribed in the name of UP's predecessor in Malolos.

In 1983, the UP launched a Diamond Jubilee book *Keeping the Flame Alive: Essays in the Humanities*, edited by now professor emeritus Pacita Guevarra Fernandez, an original member of the Humanities department set up in 1955 through the efforts of Alfred Hayes of the University of Chicago.

Fernandez (1983) in her essay 'The Humanities — a Spiritual Investment', defines the concept of the humanities as 'coming from the Latin word *humanitas* — which is Western in origin but the meaning of *humanitas* as the fact or quality of being human is universal regardless of race, or creed, or ideology, or even politics.' Fernandez points out that the humanities 'covers fields of study like religion and philosophy, literature and language, fine arts and music as areas of knowledge dedicated to the pursuit of discovering, and understanding the nature of man not as a biological specimen or a qualitative chemical element, but man as a person, as a human being — as thinking, choosing, reasoning, dreaming, envisioning human being... trying to discover or create new ways and means to make life not only livable but more meaningful for himself and others.'

In a pre-feminist age, one could still get away with quotes from the classics like Protagora's 'Man is the measure of all things' or Shakespeare's 'What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form, in moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!' Feminist outrage at these lines is not mitigated by what Shakespeare then says, 'And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me, no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling, you seem to say so.' Women critics would consider these lines and earlier statements on 'man' perfect for deconstruction.

We in the academe seem to have neatly categorized the disciplines into natural and physical sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. From the three-way split of what was originally the Liberal Arts College and later the College of Arts and Sciences in UP, we now have the College of Science, the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, and the College of Arts and Letters. And what is Philosophy — traditionally found in the Humanities — doing in the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy? Yet would Philosophy be considered part of Arts and Letters?

What used to be the Humanities Department in UP in the College of Arts and Letters is now the Art Studies Department which better describes what they are doing. However the College of Fine Arts has its own claims to some courses in that department. The Department of English and Comparative Literature and for that matter the other language and literature departments like Filipino and Philippine Literature and the European Languages Departments will not yield to becoming part of a Department of Humanities. To a person the faculty members of the original Department of Humanities came from the Department of English that had spawned other departments like Speech and Drama, Journalism, Filipino and Philippine Literature, and Art Studies.

The academe is in a sense a Byzantine world, that is to say, a complex environment where power relations are at play in issues of domain, of ideology and influence, and of personality. Hence, what Fernandez calls the fragmentation of knowledge has resulted in the creation of solitudes or quite simply the breakdown in communication among otherwise articulate scholars. Specialization has been the trend in a larger world that calls for specific expertise.

Since the founding of the UP in 1908, a number of new professional courses such as business, agriculture, veterinary medicine, dentistry, engineering, and education and more recently mass communication, electronic and computer engineering, tourism and hotel and restaurant management have been added to the traditional professional courses like law, medicine and pharmacy. It was only the College of Arts and Sciences that held the fort, as it were, for the humanities through its General Education (GE) program until the split into three colleges in the early 1980s. But the University has managed to implement the GE program which has become a

kind of model for other universities and has been adopted by the Commission for Higher Education.

The humanities however is demarcated from the other components of the GE program in the sense that it is only in the study of philosophy, literature and the arts that 'significant questions of man's being', according to Fernandez, are asked: 'Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? What is man's journey from birth to death?' Here we are reminded of some of Shakespeare's soliloquies like 'To be or not to be...' or the philosopher's musings, e.g. 'I think, therefore I am.' But some would simply dismiss all these as bourgeois angst — incongruous in a Third World country where the significant questions relate to poverty and human degradation.

However, there are those who do not eschew the word 'humanity' for this is precisely what is denied the greater number. They also use the term 'humanism' in another context, as in the 'new humanism' that the late Dolores Feria (1983) ascribes to Frantz Fanon, the author of *The Wretched of the Earth*. To Fanon, the 'new humanism' is a 'question of the Third World starting a new history of Man, a history that will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will not also forget Europe's crimes, of which the most horrible was committed in the heart of man, and consisted of the pathological tearing apart of his functions and the crumbling away of his unity.' In the Philippine historical context, it is America's foisting of the policy of benevolent assimilation — even as her troops were burning down villages, herding the people in concentration camps, applying the water cure on hapless Filipinos they called insurgents, or turning Samar into a howling wilderness.

In a society where more than 60 percent live in grinding poverty the appropriate pedagogy would have been Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* but this would only come much later and not in the academe. The academe has been nurtured rather in the liberal arts tradition which inception Thelma Kintanar (1991) traces to the College of Liberal Arts, the 'catch-all' college that housed departments like pharmacy and music among others. Kintanar sees the concept of a liberal tradition and a liberally educated individual as inherently contradictory in the Philippine context. She asks: 'How was this concept, traditionally seen as the education of a free man, yet carrying its own contradictions as having been developed

by the Greeks in a slave-owning society, translated in terms of a university for Filipinos, run under the supervision of a colonial master?'

It took a Filipino UP president, Rafael Palma, to stress 'the importance of a liberal education in the emergence and growth of the Filipino nation' and to describe liberal education in ensuring 'a broader outlook on God, man, and events' and to see the 'particular practices of a profession or technical activity' as 'nothing more or less than the specific utilization of general cultural attainment'. In Palma's view, the University should produce 'men of broad culture and open mentality' with 'a solid basic culture in the higher studies' and 'strong mental discipline' (Kintanar 1991).

Liberal arts education in UP has its roots in what has been called 'liberal humanism', with academic freedom as an implicit concept. This concept of academic freedom is said to 'have been defined and tested during the Palma administration at the time of the debate of the Hare-Hawes Cutting Act during the 1930s. The issue was independence, the national sovereignty that was taken away during the American Occupation and which was now being struggled for within the parameters set by the colonial masters' (Kintanar 1991). In any case, the exercise of academic freedom had its sacrificial lambs, notably Palma himself who took a position opposed to Commonwealth President Manuel Quezon. Then there were Bienvenido Gonzalez who incurred the ire of President Elpidio Quirino over the issue of granting honorary degrees, and Salvador Lopez who delivered a speech in Hawaii critical of the martial law regime.

#### THE IDEA OF GENERAL EDUCATION

It was during the tenure of UP president Vicente Sinco (1958-1962) that the idea of general education was institutionalized as a program immediately after the visit of the survey team headed by Michigan State University's President Hannah. Such a program would be the 'basic intellectual training for every man and woman who must be enlightened and free citizens of this republic' and general education was the 'intervening factor that works for harmony, order, and understanding among the different elements constituting our social system' (Kintanar 1991). The key words here are 'harmony, order, and understanding' which lend credence to the observation that the teaching of humanities or culture, defined by Matthew

Arnold as 'the best that is thought of and known', is basically a stabilizing factor.

It is not coincidental that the institution of the GE program in UP followed the recommendations of the Hannah Survey Report in the early 1960s — a period of nationalist resurgence. The Hannah Survey Report established the criteria for higher education within the ideological limits of what the Americans considered as essential for 'enlightened citizenship and leadership' in a 'free and democratic society'. The quoted phrases were consistent with the Cold War rhetoric of the time (Ordoñez 1996).

If we were to trace the origin of the efforts to 'stabilize society' this would take us to the turn of the century — exactly a hundred years ago — when Americans who had occupied Manila in 1898 ran the existing bureaucracy with officers and enlisted men. Aside from a more effective public health service, they also set up a public school system with English as the medium of instruction. The projected image of the American soldier teaching English to a Filipino child sitting on the soldier's lap tells us the beginning of a program to develop a new generation of Filipinos as willing wards of American 'benevolent assimilation'.

The teaching of English, and through it American culture, was part of the general strategy for the pacification of the Filipinos during the Philippine-American War. Many of the *ilustrados* who crossed over to the American lines were the first to feed upon the trough of Anglo-American culture. In 1901, Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, an *ilustrado* who joined the Philippine Commission in calling Filipino patriots bandits, had this to say:

After peace is established, all our efforts will be directed to Americanizing ourselves; to cause a knowledge of the English language to be extended and generalized in the Philippines in order that through its agency the American spirit may take possession of us, and that we may so adopt its principles, its political customs, and its peculiar civilization that our redemption may be complete and radical (Ordoñez 1995).

Tavera and his other like-minded colleagues had formed the Partido Federal the year before. Their party's primary objective was annexation of the Philippines to the United States. By 1904, the Americans were ready to send 39 *pensionados* (five of them women) to study in the US. They would later return to become leading professionals and government officials. The

establishment of UP in 1908 provided local training of future professionals and colonial bureaucrats who were proficient in the English language. The products of the public school system set up by the Americans would be alienated from the Filipino cultural and nationalist tradition. Instead of studying our literature and history, they were reading English and American authors.

The English curriculum brought by the early American teachers (then called Thomasites although they were preceded by the Faustians — both named after the boats that brought them to the country) was their own legacy from Victorian England. As Terry Eagleton (1984) noted: 'English literature as an academic subject in Victorian England fulfilled a number of ideological purposes. "English" was, among other things, a project designed to pacify and incorporate the proletariat, generate sympathetic solidarity between the social classes, and construct a national heritage which might serve to support ruling class hegemony in a period of social instability.' Indeed, what is a better way to divert the attention from the ongoing war than to teach the natives a new language that would make accessible the fruits of American occupation — consumption not only of US-made goods, as well as assimilation of American values, ideas and customs. By 1925 the Monroe Survey of Philippine Education found that the courses being offered by Philippine schools reflected American culture rather than that of the Philippines and recommended a radical change.

The teaching of English produced writers who have tried to render the Filipino sensibility in the adopted language or as Gemino Abad says, to colonize English for our own purposes. Others argue that English may also be a means for decolonizing ourselves or shedding our colonial mentality. Historically it would be in the 1930s that Filipino writers in English like Arturo Rotor, Manuel Arguilla, and Salvador Lopez would become conscious of 'forging in the smithy of (their) soul(s), the uncreated conscience of (their) race.' On the other hand, the writers in the native languages like Lope K Santos, Jose Corazon de Jesus, and Amado Hernandez and to some extent the writers in Spanish like Cecilio Apostol and Claro Mayo Recto had all along been using their pen in the struggle for independence.

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In 1927 UP professors Vicente Hilario and Eliseo Quirino did their share of introducing Filipino perspectives in the prescribed readings by publishing *Thinking for Ourselves*. The title suggests that thinking had been done for them by the colonialists in an educational process of inculcating American values such that, as OD Corpuz noted, 'rooted deep in the Filipino mind (is) a predisposition, in the resolution of political issues, to appreciate and understand the American point of view' (Ordoñez 1989).

The Commonwealth Period (1935-1941) in Philippine history saw new directions in writing in English — now geared to comprehending the social and political issues of the times, the agrarian unrest in Central Luzon, class conflicts, the rise of fascism. Some of these writings suggested that President Quezon made social justice the cornerstone of his government program. He did, but this did not prevent the Philippine Constabulary from mowing down landless peasants in Tayug, Pangasinan, and Sta Rosa, Laguna.

UP's president Jorge Bocobo tried to instill nationalism by introducing the study of Philippine culture and history and cultural retrieval, i.e. the collection of folklore, songs, and dances from all over the country. This of course had been done earlier by Jose Rizal who also did a major work in his annotation of Antonio Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* in his effort to define a national identity. So did Isabelo de los Reyes whose '*El Folklore Filipino*' was completed in time for the Madrid Exposition of 1887. De los Reyes' work was a comprehensive survey of Filipino folk culture, emphasizing repeatedly the need to correct Spanish misconceptions about Filipino folk culture. As American professor Paul Kramer (1996) points out in a paper during the international conference on the 1896 Revolution, de los Reyes demonstrated 'the subversive effect that folklore would have in colonies in revolt.' On the other hand, Kramer noted the ethnographic work of Dean Worcester at about the same time. Later, as member of the Schurman Commission, Worcester used his racist study to justify the American occupation of the Philippines.

Norberto Quisumbing, a judge assigned to various places in colonial Philippines, also collected songs that he would include in the *Philippine Progressive Music Series*, a grade school text used before World War II. However, as Ricardo Trimillos (1996) noted, the native songs were secondary to the predominantly western and American songs in the text. The



Caucasian-looking young characters in Camilo Osias' *Philippine Reader* were illustrated by Fernando Amorsolo himself. It was a time when school-children had to sing both the Philippine and American national anthems in flag-raising ceremonies.

#### THE COLD WAR

THE post-World War II period saw the Philippines regain her independence on 4 July 1946 but tied to onerous economic and military agreements with the US. It was also the period of the Cold War between two super-powers struggling for world hegemony. In the Philippines the Huk movement was at its height. Intellectuals, academics, writers and artists were being co-opted to support the anticommunist crusade. In literary and art studies the formalist approach was emphasized and so was the Arnoldian concept of an hierarchic culture, e.g. the idea of high art and low art, such that culture was seen as the 'best that is thought of and known' and the study of art, literature and music was basically curatorship. Here the word 'canon' comes to mind. It refers to works which the literary/art establishment considers 'major' or the 'best'. In canon formation there would be (a) the repeated references to an author or work by critics; (b) the currency of their work within the general community; and (c) the inclusion of the author or work in the school curriculum (Childers & Hentz 1955).

The list of so-called 'great books' (like *Harvard Classics* or Encyclopaedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World*) was arrived at by a 'privileged elite group of male white critics and teachers' and necessarily 'excludes works and voices of other significant but marginalized groups as women, homosexuals, or people of color.' As pointed out, this is 'basically putting ruling class ideology to work by reproducing the very intellectual conditions that marginalized excluded works in the first place' (Eagleton 1984). In the 1950s the text prescribed for all UP students taking the GE course, Introduction to Literature, was *An Approach to Literature* by Brooks, Purser and Warren who believed in the autonomy and organicity of a literary work. Background, authorship (called intentional fallacy by a New Critic) and reader response (also called affective fallacy by the same critic) are extraneous matters in the 'objective' analysis of a poem or story. The formalist reading is seen by Eagleton (1984) as insulating the students from

'the contexts of literature, possible only if historical or Marxist criticism were employed.'

The literary or critical establishment that pushed the formalist approach at the time seemed to be responding to fears generated by the Cold War, anticommunist fears whipped up by McCarthyist witch-hunting. Liberal humanism associated with New Criticism or formalist criticism was deemed a safe ideology and became the foundation of an entire hu-

manities program with 'an anthropomorphic view of the world that asserts the existence of a universal human nature informing all actions and decisions' (Childers & Hentz 1955). It seems that the literature and humanities components of today's GE program are still premised on liberal humanism which is described by Eagleton (1984) as 'elitist, idealist, depoliticized and socially

marginal' and as a discipline 'complicit with the formal systems of reproduction.' Nationalism appears to be the frosting on the cake and is invoked in relation to internationalism or, more recently to globalization (as in 'English for global competitiveness', the theme of a national conference on English in 1995).

#### NATIONALIST RESURGENCE

EVEN as the humanities program developed along the lines of liberal humanism, the nationalist resurgence during the 1960s and 1970s also nurtured the 'new humanism' inspired by the writings of Third World writers like Lu Hsun, Frantz Fanon and Paolo Freire. The assumptions of liberal humanism were questioned and formalist reading became suspect. So-called universal values were tested and found wanting in the specific context of a semi-feudal mode of production and social contradictions.

Comparative literary studies as developed in the UP enabled professors to open up the literary canon to include Third World and revolutionary literature. Formalist reading no longer had a critical monopoly, for literature majors were also reading Mao-Zedong's *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Art and Literature* and Amado Guerrero's *Philippine Society and Revolution*. Research on revolutionary art or committed writers were undertaken

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by students who found hierarchies in literature and art meaningless. Literary studies and texts were reoriented away from curatorship, i.e. appreciating only the 'best that is thought of and known', and towards emancipatory practice.

In what is said to be the age of globalization has recently arrived the crunch of falling currencies and the collapse of 'tiger economies' — the result precisely of West-sponsored free trade. This is an opportune time to heed the lessons of our centenary of struggle for independence. One of these lessons is that to survive in a world where the rules are dictated by the dominant countries our nation must be consolidated, with a leadership that can stand up to foreign pressure. Alice Guillermo (1997) of the UP Art Studies Department puts it more elegantly: 'It thus becomes clear that we must position ourselves as Filipinos and lay claim to a sociohistorical ground from which we respond or act with regard to external influences and interventions. It is a position which foregrounds our interests, needs, struggles, and aspirations as a people vis-à-vis the hegemonic strategies of the West.' In conclusion, the historical context occasioned by the Philippine centenary should provide us with a nationalist perspective in reviewing our humanities program. A Filipino-centered study of culture and the arts may well be part of the agenda for recovering our national integrity as well as our humanity as a people.

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