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E. Vallado Daroy



European powers, notably Britain, France, Portugal and Spain, have had their imperial expansionism discussed through the obvious influences on their colonial countries' politics and economics. Although less obvious but pervasive nonetheless, the experience of colonialism had radically influenced the perceptual framework of the peoples of Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific countries and Sri Lanka, which comprise more than three quarters of the people living in the world (Ascroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989). Because the United States of America, a former colonial country, has emerged as a neocolonizing power itself, its postcolonial nature has been largely ignored.

For historical convenience "colonial and postcolonial periods" distinguish the national culture before and after a colonized country has attained its independence. In the gigantic fabric of a country's "national culture," literature, among the other arts such as painting, sculpture, music and the dance, carries this perceptual framework of a people as synthesized by the literary artist. Undoubtedly each of these former colonial countries has its own distinctive regional characteristics as expressed in its postcolonial literature, but Ascroft, et al, contend that their postcolonial literatures are paradigmatic of a tension between the former colony and its former imperial power. This tension was produced and is continually maintained by explicit or other means of the erstwhile imperial power which is construed as the "center," the position of hegemony, while the former colonial country is, again explicitly or otherwise, pushed to the "peripheral," the "marginal." One result of this tension, albeit an extreme one, is, in the words of Edward Said (1984), "a conscious affiliation in the guise of filiation." Said decries the efforts of those "marginalized" people to completely immerse themselves in the culture of the "cen-

ter," denying their origins, and in the process, becoming "more English than the English."

On the other hand the same tension has produced a strong and inevitable desire to dismantle the "center" of power, in spite of political independence, the center of canons in literature, the center of values, and in its place establish a nexus of power coming from the perceived "marginal" and peripheral. In other words, these post colonial countries comprising the "Empire" strike back. . . . in the words of Salman Rushdie, ". . . the Empire writes back."

There are many strategies of striking back without the use of the sword. The postcolonial peoples have realized the fact that the language of the Center, which is defined as the erstwhile colonizing power, is the medium of power. In this note the language of the Center is limited to the perceived language of power, English, and does not include the languages of the other past colonizing powers, France, Spain, or Portugal. For the past four hundred years of colonization, the English language, specifically the RS-English (Received Standard), the English spoken and written in the south-east of England, has been held up as the universal norm, and therefore any variants of the language are considered impure. Even the term given to such variants, "english" with the emphasis on the small "e," is an imperial oppression which actually relegates the postcolonial literatures to a marginal and subordinate position. With such an assumption, even the American English or that English spoken by the Australians or New Zealanders would be variants, as are the englishes of the Canadians, Indians, the Maoris, or the Kenyans, and by extension through the American experience, the english of the Philippines.

After almost four centuries, Shakespeare's "The Tempest" continues to be subjected to postcolonial readings (Lamming, 1960; Cesaire 1969; Miller 1970) to exemplify the postcolonial writers' efforts to subvert a canon. Even as late as April 1990 when Asian Writers in English met at a symposium in Hongkong University, the metaphorical and prototype Caliban was discussed by S. Manzoorul Islam of the University of Dhaka, (India) and Chelva Kanaganayakam of the University of Toronto.

"The Tempest" narrative thread runs through the adventure of Prospero and his son shipwrecked on the island owned by Caliban. As early as Shakespeare's time, the Eurocentric claims of superiority as personified by Prospero were already evident in his dispossession of Caliban in exchange for knowledge and the gift of lan-

guage. Postcolonial rereadings have invariably dismantled the imperial-marginal relations between Prospero and Caliban and have restructured the plot and characters to conform to the newly awakened consciousness of the former colonials. From these readings Caliban (who could be any native of the West Indies, of Africa, or the indio of the Philippines, for that matter) is no longer the "savage," or a creature outside of the "white" civilization on "whose nature/Nurture can never stick," but a human being. His possession of language makes it possible for him to "profit on it/Is, I know how to curse."

Such a Eurocentric standard for the use of language as the medium of power is now rejected. The emergence of postcolonial literatures in "english" all over the world has radically questioned such an assumption of cultural superiority and its attendant notions of "universality." Although Ascroft, et al., uses "english" to distinguish it from the English of the British, other writers (Platt, Weber & Ho 1984) do not denigrate the variants of English in other parts of the post-colonial world by resorting to lower case, "english," although they use "Englishes" for these variants. Similarly, King (1980) refers to these postcolonial writings as the "new literatures in English." Since I do not intend to make a comparison between one "english" and another country's "english," I shall refer to Philippine writings in English with a capital E.

Abrogation and Appropriation

Textual strategies refer to the writer's use of linguistic structure of the borrowed language, English, and his manipulation of the syntactical structure and its semantics to convey his peculiar stance against the Center (Ascroft et al. 1989, 59). Among the strategies of striking back at the Center are abrogation and appropriation, abrogation and protest, abrogation by inversion, colonialism and silence, which Ascroft, et al., identify as the tools with which the postcolonial writers seized the language of power, the received English, to reverse whatever assumptions of power the language had. After defining each strategy, Ascroft, et al., used particular literary works found in the postcolonial countries enumerated earlier to substantiate their contentions.

Abrogation is a "refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or "correct" usage,

and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning "inscribed" in words" (Ascroft et al. 1989, 39). While abrogation is a mental stance, appropriation is a process by which the language (the Center's) is consciously brought under the influence of the vernacular and its cultural nuances. Raja Rao (1938) has expressed it more succinctly: "to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own."

Abrogation and protest do not only mean resistance to political and economic pressures but more importantly resistance to the dominating cultural values. Thematic similarities in many forms of protest are found in the novels of Kenya's Ngugi, of Jamaica's Reid, of Nigeria's Achebe, of India's Santha Rama Rao, of Guyana's Wilson Harris, to cite a few of the postcolonial countries and their respective writers.

One of the manifestations of the power of the Center is its power over the means of communication, specifically writing. (Ascroft 1989, 84). Silence, or the world of nonverbal signs, is imposed on the marginalized natives of the country. South African writer Lewis Nkosi uses this tool of abrogation and protest by the silence imposed on the colonized consciousness. In his novel *Mating Birds*, Nkosi writes of a South African black who is jailed and executed for attempting to rape a white woman. The story is significant in its total absence of communication between the two, the black man seduced by the woman, who then cries "rape." This absence of communication between the two cultures—the black and white—is a metonymy of the gulf of distance between the Center (white culture) and the marginalized (the black).

Abrogation and authenticity is defined operationally, as the perceived authenticity or the validity or the accepted value attributed to the Center and the corresponding unvalidated, inauthentic periphery, the marginalized, the postcolonial experience. Trinidad writer V. S. Naipul's "Mimic Men" dwells on the notions of power in the imperial world, the Center, and the "nothingness" of his country in the periphery.

In the attempt of the marginalized people to restructure language in order to validate their own cultural experience, they run the risk of "inversion" (Ascroft et al. 1989, 175), which in effect inverts the structure of domination, i.e., the Center is placed on a subordinate level while the marginalized is declared the Center. This runs counter to the goal of reinstating or seeking an identity of postcolonial cultural experiences on a separate but equal footing.

Postcolonial Writing in English in the Philippines

With this global background of the postcolonial literatures, I intend to explore some of these textual strategies in the "striking back" of some Philippine writers in English at the imperial power, the Center.

About postcolonial writing after the end of World War II, one is led to ask: How were the notions of power perceived in the model center (American) expressed by Filipino writers in the appropriated language? How have they abrogated, replaced or otherwise reconstructed it to conform to the postcolonial perception? In other words, how did they "strike back" at the so-called center of power?

Postcolonial Philippines was in a peculiar situation in that as the country had shaken off the shackles of one colonial power, the Spanish imperialists, before the turn of the century, and another imperialist country by historical manipulation had managed to put the country back in shackles. The imperial center may have shifted some degrees west but the perception of the center was still "far out there." Ascroft (1989) states that in postcolonial societies, the Philippines not excepted, it was not the language, Spanish or English, of the imperial center which had the greatest effect on the people, but the writing itself. It is the presence or the absence of writing which he considers the most important element in the colonial situation. Jose Rizal and his contemporaries had amply illustrated the appropriation of the center's language for the process of self-assertion and the reconstruction of a world for their own place so marginalized by the Center.

Over a period of about two decades after World War II, 1945 to 1960, I have chosen four stories among the many others that in effect "strike back" at the notion of power at the center. My attempt to analyze the narrative content of the four prose works—Severino Montano's play *"Sabina"* (1945), Nick Joaquin's *"Summer Solstice"* (1950), Juan T. Gatbonton's *"Clay"* (1951), and F. Sionil Jose's *"The God Stealer"* (1960)—is not intended to totalize the Philippine experience. An exegesis of these specific texts is merely a symptomatic reading designed to reveal some ideological forces, notably the notion of center and the marginalized, and how the writers with the appropriated language of the colonizer, dismantled the perceived hegemony through a reconstructed world.

Abrogation and Protest: Severino Montano's "Sabina"

"Sabina" is a one-act play whose main character is a young farm girl who gets involved with and then gets pregnant by an American trader in spite of the warnings of her family. Mr. George is perceived as the outsider, as one who comes from the center, one with power which, except for Sabina, the family views with doubt, with disdain. There is the dichotomy of city life and farm life, the white trader coming upon "my little dark woman." The American trader does not give a damn for the native ways and customs which he marginalizes as tolerable background, just as he does the vegetation and the farm animals on the farm. Sabina, his "little dark woman," the naive gullible young woman, is presented as Mr. George's "the other," and is relegated to just that place, not worthy of being elevated to the position of wife, since Mr. George, is already a married man. The "place" is more than mere geographical ascription, for Mr. George shares the other white men's notion of "shouldering the white man's burden" by keeping the natives in their natural state. Absorption of the marginalized into the center would "spoil this natural state" (Ascroft 1989, 85).

All throughout the narrative he remains "Mr. George" even when he whispers and swears his love for "my little dark woman." Sabina calls him Mr. George, as if the "Mister" is designed to keep the distance intact between Mr. George, who comes from the center of power, and the people on the farm and its animals (the cry of the black turtle), at the periphery. "Mister" implies the impotence of the indignation of Sabina's family. She expresses her wish to go to the city with him but Mr. George insists on keeping her in the farm. Whether consciously or not, Sabina reaches out from her peripheral world to the center, represented by this white trader, "worldly wise merchant man from the city."

He communicates this power through his instrument of domination, his phallus. She is used, then rejected and kept in her place at the periphery. But the author rejects this "rejection" in a negative way. Sabina's mother dies of heartbreak over her daughter's disgrace, and Sabina commits suicide when she finds out that Mr. George will not marry her but "will come once in a while to see her in the farm." (The narrative strains disbelief too much. How can a gun be found as a matter of course in a nipa hut?)

"Sabina" posits the deception and exploitation by the center as concretized by a white man, a trader of goods and; by extension, of

other material and physical things, which the farmer's family and neighbors warn Sabina about. Sabina "does" something about it, though, and the play ends with the family and neighbors mourning over her, performing the same ritual they have earlier performed on the death of Sabina's mother. The acceptance of death, with nary a look nor voice lifted against the white trader, is an affirmation of the emptiness, the impotence of the marginalized people and of the power of the center.

Paradoxically, this form of acquiescence is a protest. It arouses indignation, not in the consciousness of the character, but in that of the reader who perceives the relation between knowledge and control. The marginalized people, specifically Sabina the country girl, come into knowledge of a certain evil, but as marginalized persons, they are deprived of control over the situation, over Mr. George, an obvious metonym for white society and its values.

Abrogation by Inversion: Nick Joaquin's "Summer Solstice"

Dona Lupe, in Nick Joaquin's "Summer Solstice," another obvious metonym of the marginalized, comes into knowledge of the awesome potential of woman and "does" something about it. Joaquin writes from the center, which in this case is the authority, the power, the control of the world—the male—and the subjugated "other." With the setting of the story in the 1850s, Joaquin goes back to the source myth of the western civilization when Mother Earth was the Power in the Tadtarin spirit in the story. In many postcolonial texts, striking back at the imperial center takes the form of seizing control by "rewriting" canonical stories, like Timothy Findley's "Not Wanted on the Voyage" which rewrites the biblical story of Noah and the Ark.

"Summer Solstice" is a two-level story of socially diametrically opposed couples: Don Paeng and Doña Lupe at one end of the pole, and Entoy and Amada at the other. Their positions intersect and overlap when the dominant males at both ends are suppressed and at the antithesis of their powers. The Tadtarin, an all-woman procession, becomes not only a celebration of the woman-creation principle or the salvation of "nature," the spirit of reproduction, but also the destruction of the male principle. The women in the procession, as if unleashed from marginality, claw and attack any man who dares join the procession. Their St. John is a grotesque image of the "normal" St. John of the Center, obviously ridiculing and undermin-

ing the power of the colonizer, the male. In the end Don Paeng, for all his notions of dominance, of his "protectiveness" over his woman, is forced to assume a position (crawl on all fours to kiss the foot of his wife), which is radically repugnant.

In an attempt to reinstate the marginalized, early feminist and national postcolonial discourse exhibited similar tendencies. To invert the structures of domination—female dominance over the male—the colonizer becomes the colonized, the oppressed and suppressed become the oppressors. But such an inversion only brought as much harm and alienation as the politics of sexism and oppression and repression. However, in the subsequent postcolonial discourse which includes enlightened feminist literature, the proposed scheme of things strives towards dismantling the hierarchy and acknowledging the "difference in nature but equivalence in value."

Colonialism and Silence: Juan T. Gatbonton's "Clay"

Even after its political independence in 1948, the Philippines lay prostrate and devastated with its economy and communications largely held by the colonial authority. The society then was caught between the desire to be free and literate, yet struggling on the one hand, and to be quiescent and comfortable, on the other. Gatbonton's "Clay" is an example of post-colonial perception of the power held by the imperial center. The story is told through the persona of a young teenage boy, taught to be polite in the ways of the natives and polite in the language of the conquerors. The American soldiers who are purportedly the saviors of his country come from the center, a perceived role model for the young narrator.

Significantly, the story is told mostly in the characteristic communication of an illiterate, insensitive G.I. whose behavior is gross. Clay the character is too much clay, and there is a gulf of silence between his garrulousness and Imaculada, the staid, stereotyped small town school teacher. All throughout the story Clay reveals his grasp (shaky and vulgar) of communication in the language of the center with which he is identified. "Jesuschrist! Jesuschrist!" he says when he is awed by something which is entirely devoid of religious fervor. The boy narrator undergoes his own epiphany, for he discovers Miss Imaculada "was just like the other women, succumbing to the wiles of the G.I.s." Clay says, as overheard by the boy: "She don't worry me none . . . Boy, I sure learned her . . . She didn't know how to kiss . . ." The silence and the lack of communication between Clay

and the boy narrator, between Clay and Imaculada, suggests a chasm not only between two cultures but also within the hierarchical structure such as found in a communicative metropolitan area and the less communicative fringes of the metropolis. Yet Clay seems to have triumphed in the end, for his communicative skills, however polluted, prove to be his persuasive powers over the "playing hard to get" Imaculada.

Clay's possession of communication is a phallic symbol. It is his instrument of rape, and marginalized people like Imaculada despite her being better educated, are deprived of communicative skills—skills that intrude, are invasive, even corrosive of the values of the colonials.

Abrogating Authenticity: F. Sionil Jose's "The God Stealer"

Authenticity is produced by a set of prejudices coming from the canon of the center, and usually postcolonial societies still hold on to these prejudices to the detriment of the post-colonial discourse. The privileging of certain experiences and declaring these as "authentic" is explored in this story by Sionil Jose. The dilemma of authenticity is confronted frontally and on the literal level.

The story ostensibly deals with an "authentic" Ifugao god which an American, Sam Christie, is determined to have through the help of his citified Ifugao assistant. This white man (Uncle Sam?), coming as he does from the imperial center, insists on the authenticity of the souvenirs he has gathered from the different countries he considers the periphery of his center of power. He rejects as inauthentic the exact copies of the gods in tourist shops, because this man who is metonymic of his society and its values has imposed the categories from the center. He has marginalized these countries into souvenirs of his conquests—authentic Japanese samurai sword, authentic Thai mask, authentic Grecian urn, and now an authentic Ifugao god, used in tribal ceremony. He displays a characteristic insensitivity to the lifeways of the tribal people of the islands, and to their tribal customs and traditions, with Philip Latak the Ifugao, confirming this unvalidated periphery.

For the greater part of the story we find Philip Latak denying the authenticity of his marginalized position by rejecting his own relatives, their tribal ways and by convincing himself that indeed the "god" of his forefathers is nothing more than a wood carving. So he steals the god whose caked blood of the sacrificial pigs becomes

the patina of the many generations of Ifugaos. It is tempting to read the story simply as an allegory of the colonizer (Sam Christie) and the colonized (the native, Philip Latak) and how the colonizer's privileged norm is made to prevail over that of a former colonial who has not shed the norms, the prejudices of the center. Philip Latak may have discarded his native name Ip-pig, changed his manners and beliefs, but there is need to abrogate this experience (his grandfather dies from heartbreak over Latak's deed) before the experience of his own peripheral world can be validated.

This story as a postcolonial discourse abrogates the colonizer-center's notion of "authenticity," not by Sam Christie's eventually getting his "authentic" god, but by Philip Latak's realization that the norms of authenticity by which Sam Christie operates from the center (his opportunism, his materialism) cannot be made to work at the level of Latak's centuries' old traditions. His staying behind in the mountains, donning the attire of his tribe to carve another god seems to be self-conscious symbolic patterning. It, however, is a repudiation of the values imposed by the center.

The text consistently positions Sam Christie and Philip Latak. (Filipino?) in opposition, suggesting perhaps that integration is not possible in a world whose assignment of values comes from the center to the periphery, and reciprocity is absent. Thus the author has reconstructed a world in which authenticity is challenged and the norms of the center, and the likes of Sam Christie, are dismantled, and the norm of hundred-year-old validated traditions, is upheld.

Conclusion

In this second half of the twentieth century, much of post-colonial literatures have emerged with characteristics beyond the simply dismissed exotic. The reading of this body of post-colonial writing in English has toppled the notion of a Eurocentric standard, and has questioned the assumption that the study of English literature with all its national, cultural, and political grounding, is the "center" of universal values, of the canon of "classical texts." Many writers from Great Britain and continental Europe themselves have acknowledged the fact that in no sense should the writings of postcolonial countries in English be construed as mere adaptations of European models. Although this exploratory note has been mainly influenced by Ascroft, et al (1989), other writers seem to confirm the thesis set forth by Ascroft. Informal talks with delegates at the 1990 Symposium on

Asian Voices in English at Hongkong University which I have synthesized in "Asian Writers in English: Cultural Frankenstein?" (The Quill, Dec. 1990) also confirm the thesis .

On the whole, scholars argue that post-colonial literatures are not simply a collection of texts, but that these are characterized by "counter-discursive rather than homologous views of the world" (Slemon, 1987). The decentering of standard English has paved the way for acknowledging the fact that literatures are not immutable "truths" but are products of the dynamics of social and political realities.

Instead of simply dismissing post-colonial writings in English with pejorative descriptions based on Anglo-centered assumptions, readers and scholars of literature have identified the textual strategies postcolonial writers have used in asserting their opposition to the perceived center and thereby redefining their writings in order to embody their cultural experiences, their value systems. The two most important strategies uncovered so far are abrogation and appropriation. Abrogation is a denial of a preconceived standard set by the colonizer and the process by which this denial is utilized in emasculating the language of power. Strategies of abrogation and protest, inversion, colonialism and silence, and authenticity are most intriguing. Four stories of four Filipino writers in English published from 1945 to 1960 seem to bear this symptomatic reading: Severino Montano, Nick Joaquin, Juan T. Gatbonton, and F. Sionil Jose. These Filipino writers in English utilized the language of the center and replaced it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonial experience. Their "english" involves the rejection of the power of the metropolitan and the remoulding not only of the language but also the colonial experiences as form of protest, the inversion of authority, or the abrogation of authenticity.

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