

Introduction

THE ESSAYS CHOSEN for this issue feature the diverse interests of the junior faculty of the department. Some of these essays were papers presented at a Junior Faculty Conference sponsored by the department. These essays have been refereed by experts in each area.

Anna Melinda De Ocampo explores the fascinating world of exploration in the 16th century as reflected in European travel narratives on the Philippines. She observes in her essay that these travel narratives — Pigafetta's account of the Magellan expedition, as well as accounts of Maximilianus Transylvanus, Ferdinand Olivier and Gines de Mafra — show the shift from the marvelous, the strange and inexplicable phenomena recorded in travel writing since the time of Pliny the Elder, to the miraculous, actions and outcomes attributed to God as part of the divine plan.

Frances Abao reflects on the transformation/evolution of Filipino children's fiction by comparing the national award-winning children's stories in two anthologies: *The Golden Loom* (1997), which contains stories written from 1990 to 1996, and *Night Monkeys* (2008), which contains stories written from 1998 to 2007. The stories in *The Golden Loom* depict protagonists with traditional values and concerns, who give importance to respect for their elders and their heritage and to religious devotion. In contrast, the protagonists of the stories in *Night Monkeys* have concerns which are more closely identified with Western culture, such as individualism, self-fulfillment, and social success. The writers of these later stories, however, still attempt to incorporate a Filipino dimension in their works by using Philippine settings, traditions, and supernatural figures and by tackling socially relevant issues.

In her essay, Anna Sanchez defines speculative fiction as a useful term for describing the entire spectrum of genre literature which includes fantasy,

horror, alternative histories, and science fiction. She observes that the genre's use of the "unreal" has gained for it the reputation of being escapist, but it is this very element of the fantastic that creates spaces of subversion that shed light on realist problems of gender, culture, and politics. She traces the origins of contemporary Philippine speculative fiction to American and European works. To make their mark, Filipino speculative fiction writers face the challenge of using the unreal to confront their distinct cultural or socio-political realities. By analyzing elements of setting, character, and theme in sample short stories from recent anthologies of Philippine speculative fiction, Sanchez shows how the writers have handled the genre's potential for exploring conditions relevant to Filipinos.

Celeste Coscolluela, a creative writer, discusses the problems of using autobiographical material in fiction, particularly in her own stories. *Autobiographical Fiction* for her is a paradoxical term: "this strange thing that calls itself fiction but actually draws material from the author's life...." She admits that she feels uncomfortable over revealing embarrassing details about her life which prevents her from being "too honest." However, she points out that a good number of noted authors admit that they draw from their own life experiences and include these incidents in their stories. Hence, she is in good company when she does likewise despite her scruples.

The first four essayists study different genres in Philippine literature, from early travel writing dating back to the time of Magellan to contemporary stories for children, speculative fiction, and fiction with autobiographical elements. They show how Philippine writing has evolved from its early beginnings to the present. The last two essayists veer away from the Philippine scene to focus on American literature, their area of specialization as English Studies: Anglo-Am majors.

Raymond Falgui analyzes the use of allusions in contemporary Native American fiction. He classifies what he calls "obscure allusions" as those meant to be overlooked, those intended to be misinterpreted (or subject to two different interpretations), and those that refer exclusively to a Native American framework as their source of associations or meanings. By placing this use (or misuse) of figurative language within the context of existing theories of minority discourse and post-colonialism, he shows how these

theories draw a connection between the unorthodox use of allusions and issues of racial and cultural identity currently faced by Native Americans,

The last essay, Michaela Atienza's "American Limbo," examines canonical American texts written during the early twentieth century to show how they reflect the spiritual decline in America. Robert Frost's "Once in the Pacific," T.S.Eliot's "The Hollow Men," and Hart Crane's "Chaplinesque" and "Black Tambourine," according to Atienza, "reflect the American reaction to the massive, rapid changes it was undergoing in the early twentieth century." She notes that of the three poets, Hart Crane is the most hopeful as his personas "cling to the possibility of a world beyond limbo."

So, too, do we end on a hopeful note, realizing that Philippine literature and the critics of Philippine literature are alive and well as attested to by the first four essayists who, young as they are, have remarkable insight. Interest in canonical as well as ethnic American literature also remains strong among the junior faculty of the department, as the last two essayists affirm.

This is the first refereed journal of the department. We hope the journal will continue to attract contributors who wish to share their research interests with the academe as well as those who wish to publish to earn tenure or to merit a promotion.

NUR