

DILEMMA ON THE MEDIUM OF PHILIPPINE LITERATURE

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Through victorious in the Battle of Mactan, the year 1521 marked the beginning of the end of Filipino autonomy. What followed were three hundred years of Spanish colonization and several more years of American occupation. To survive, the native Filipino adapted and learned. He assimilated to their ways and spoke a foreign tongue. The once monochromatic Filipino culture with its varied tones across the Philippine archipelago was variegated and enriched by intercontinental hues. Consequently, those chapters in Philippine history evoked periods in Philippine literature. In the time of the Americans, when more freedom was given, we were mainstreamed and became exposed to a wider collection of literary pieces – mainly Anglo-American texts. With rigorous instruction and continuous reading of their texts, the Filipino learned to tell his stories in the English language.

In its earliest years, George Pope Shannon, head of the English Department of the University of the Philippines and adviser of the UP Writers Club pointed out that Filipino writings are very imitative of Western literature (Garcia, 2020). Further, in 1986, the language issue in the Philippines intensified due to the declaration of Filipino scholars and writers who were working in Tagalog and Filipino that English would soon diminish in the country. They added that Filipino was to be the language to express Filipino sentiments, and some even went so far as to say that Filipino scholars and writers who wrote in English had to apologize for it. Thus, the question arises, whether true Philippine literature could only be written in the native tongue. And given the context based on our long history, the Filipino is not an isolated ethnicity but an accumulation of rich and

diverse cultures and languages (Arighi, 2017). Hence, to tell our stories in any of our languages, including English, would be an authentic expression of ourselves.

What we are is a multitude of races amassed through years of social and biological interaction with the world. Our culture is a compilation of varied traditions and beliefs that we developed ourselves and acquired from our neighbors and colonizers. Hence, to define our identity as Filipinos is to list every contributing factor that shaped us; and, to determine our true literature is to consider our bilingualism and multilingualism. Over the years, world-class literary pieces written in the many languages of the Philippines were produced by Filipinos. “Florante at Laura” by Francisco Balagtas was written in Filipino, “Noli Me Tángere” by Jose Rizal was originally written in Spanish, and “Dead Stars” by Paz Marquez Benitez was written in English. Regardless of what language they used to express their artistry, they all depicted the Filipino image and identity.

References:

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