



The Virginia Quarterly Review
A National Journal of Literature & Discussion



The following article originally appeared in Vol. 60:1 (Winter 1984): 102-118. Widely considered one of the best single articles on Gonzalez and Philippine culture, it has been widely reprinted, including in a University of the Philippines commemorative box-set of Gonzalez's work, and in *Asian American Writers*, a collection by Yale University's Harold Bloom of what he considered the best 15 contemporary articles on Asian American writing.

"As in Myth, the Signs Were All Over": The Fiction of N. V. M. Gonzalez

Richard R. Guzman

Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. —Roland Barthes

Magellan made his fateful landfall in the Philippines at Cebu on March 16, 1521; and, with the signal exception of his slaying some six weeks later, it has seemed possible to read the bulk of Philippine history as a series of capitulations. Politics became Spanish, religion became Spanish (the Islands were an Archdiocese before 1600), and in 1850 when, to ease tax-collecting problems, Governor-General Narciso Claveria decreed that all *indios* be given Spanish surnames, even given names became Spanish. One of the Philippines' greatest modern writers, Nick Joaquin, has said:

... there is as great a gulf between the pre-Spanish drift of totem-and-taboo tribes and our present existence as one people as there is between protoplasm and a human creature. The *content* of our national destiny is ours to create, but the basic *form*, the *temper*, the physiognomy, Spain has created for us.

Yet I wonder if even Joaquin believes form and content to be so separable. And what of the Americans, who accomplished in just over half a century a transformation of Philippine culture perhaps more spectacular than Spain managed in just over three and a half?

In 1900 the Partido Federalista, the first political party organized under American jurisdiction, had as one of its planks eventual annexation to the U.S.; and in general Filipinos so embraced American ideals that Americans found it natural to refer to them as "little brown brothers." So far the most successful Filipino fiction writer in America has been Carlos Bulosan, whose 1946 best-selling autobiography was entitled *America Is in the Heart*.

Naturally, then, many Filipino writers have long been haunted by the sense of a buried, perhaps irretrievably lost native past. In the December 1940 issue of *Philippine-American News Digest*, journalist P.C. Morante wrote:

In myself I am often at a loss to account for the genuine native. To be sure, I have the physical quality of my race; but I feel that the composition of my soul is thoroughly soaked with the alien spirit. Of course . . . a great number of my people . . . are aware that even their virtues are borrowed and that their thinking, their dreams and their aspirations have been influenced so much by American and Spanish ways that the indigenous substance of their true being has been crushed or lost. . . My actions and reactions, my thoughts and ideals, even my complexes and inhibitions—all this seems to revolve around a foreign pattern that is easily recognizable as intrinsically of the West.

On the other hand, N. V. M. Gonzalez writes in a recent letter: "At the moment . . . I'm reading history and a whole ton of it. I can say with some sense of responsibility now that the Filipino today has not changed from the way he was circa 1400!"

He is an optimistic man. Born in Romblon, Romblon Island, on Sept. 8, 1915, he turned before his twenties from the study of law to the life of writing, first as a staffer at Manila's *Graphic Weekly*. Some of the early years are recounted in his first novel, the autobiographical *Winds of April* (1940), and his turn to writing in "On the Eve," the story which begins his latest volume, *Mindoro and Beyond* (1980). Believing in the efficacy of storytelling and the power of the past, especially of childhood, Gonzalez has, amid heavy demands also as an influential editor and teacher, produced a body of work that has won all his country's major honors, been translated into several languages, and shown him worthy of being considered among the finest English prose stylists to have come from the Third World. He also makes guitars.



NVM Gonzales
(1915-1999)

In 1974 he found an old, broken guitar in a junk shop and bought it for \$1.50. His account of the incident in a newspaper article titled "Reflections on an Old Guitar" is worth quoting at length.

Some five hours and a half later, along with a roll of paper towels, a couple of brushes, and a quart of denatured alcohol, the box began to reveal its worth.

To be sure, we recognized its mark, "C. F. Martin & Co." branded on wood in 12-point caps, sans serif, followed with "New York" similarly imprinted on the cross grained center lining of the back. A check with the published records of this maker showed that it was the practice of this firm to place its brand name in two places as well: on the block that joins the neck to the body; and on the back, where the heel joins the body.

Our cleaning job revealed that all but the letters "C" and "N" of the firm name, and the "K" in "New York" had been scraped away. . . .

"For this," said the proprietor of a music shop we visited, "I can give you a real classic guitar, and some cash besides." Forthwith, he took from the rack a signed Yairi guitar worth four hundred dollars . . .but of course, we had to decline the offer. . . .

Now the responsibility of owning a gem like this one involves not so much material values but ethical and artistic ones. We decided, for example, to undertake the restoration job ourself. . . . But what were we now to do about being faithful to the guitar's original appearance.

. . . What songs it must have strummed to, no one can tell, but the ivory fingerboard remains to this hour a small monument to perfection. An ambitious repairer had wanted to protect it from wear by varnishing it, which, of course, had been a blasphemy. We had to remove the coat with care, revealing a board on which minor chords had been much favored, judging by the rubbings of the fingertips on the ebony.

Now, the Philippine past is, as it were, the battered guitar. So many things are irretrievably lost, it is true; but Gonzalez' intense, patient devotion to detail and history has seemed to strip so many colonial overlays, to reveal clues—some as subtle as the rubbings of fingertips but powerful enough to impel the ethical and artistic urge to restore. Gonzalez says he has even found a transcendent reason for the Philippine peasant's seemingly easy acceptance of his landlord's usury:

The acceptance of the practice [of doubling unpaid debts], I now seem to understand, was (and is) not traditional but transcendental. For exactly the same practice was observed in pre-Spanish Philippines, the logic of those times being this: that when a measure of rice was planted, harvest rewarded the effort at the least a hundredfold. The "dublihan" practiced then was actually generous. It is this sense of generosity that appears to have transcended time. . . . Perhaps it is the nobility of the peasantry that has allowed its members to acquiesce to the practice

. . . and the gentry's sense of guilt that has led it to devise other means of exploitation.

He is, as I have said, an optimistic man. Yet under the continuing scrutiny of sociology, anthropology, and history a unique—and, yes, "transcendent"—Philippine past is rapidly disclosing itself; and the Philippines even possess, after all, a somewhat respectable, if fragmented, revolutionary tradition complete with mystic overtones and fiery, colorful leaders who moved their people to stand against a multitude of foreign indignities. Gonzalez' optimism is not, in short, mere optimism. It, too, is severely tempered by that dark sense of loss and concession that haunts the best Filipino writers. But in most instances Gonzalez is able to balance cultural pessimism and personal optimism so tightly that his works are generally, though not completely, free both from the facile hope and melodramatic romanticism that otherwise plague a literature so obsessed with its people's lost identity. Furthermore, while he is a master of high drama, Gonzalez' very prose style works against the overly dramatic, the imbalanced. "Every volume since Gonzalez's first," writes the American critic Leonard Casper, "is so noticeably underwritten that he runs the risk of being misread, of having subtleties overlooked, of leaving unmoved those readers used to bathos."

Such restraint is the product of a vision which blends detail and history with pattern and cosmos. Gonzalez' narrative style intends to deemphasize the forward-moving, the linear, in favor of a complex, often near-static time frame, a frame which seems to shimmer gently as Gonzalez moves easily, with minimal transitions, between past, present, and future, between conscious time and the less-metered times of memory, dream, hallucination, or reflection. In turn, this handling of time makes more natural the creation of confluences between the realm of myth and the minutiae of daily living. Besides its restraint and complex timing, what typically impresses the reader of Gonzalez' work first is its abundant and lovingly given detail. More than any other Philippine writer, Gonzalez concerns himself with names, with the building of houses, the catching of fish, the harvesting of rice, the sharpening of knives used in that harvest. Then in the midst of detail will often come a kind of time warp making us realize that certain facts, certain rhythms of action, somehow rise from some ancient memory, some cosmic pattern, and, more important, have the potential of connecting us to those things from which they arise.

Gonzalez' best works are thus significant ventures in mythmaking, or, more precisely, countermythmaking. For a society establishes meaning and interprets its history by dint of its myths, those signs and stories which seem to it to be immemorial; and it is the seemingly timeless, dehistoricized, depoliticized naturalness of myth which creates the illusion of naturalness in any given social order, any given history. Myth, then, is a kind of metahistory, the very premise of historical constructions. In essence, the writer who proposes really to "re-vision" history must offer us a countermyth, must select new facts, images, actions for elevation to a transcendent plain or create narrative contexts in which old material takes on new meaning. It is in countering the myths of the Philippines' irretrievably lost native past, of her people's

weakness, of the near-total triumph of the foreign that Gonzalez' fiction is unique. Such countering is most beautifully realized in *A Season of Grace*, his masterpiece, and surely one of the four or five most beautiful novels to have come from the Third World.

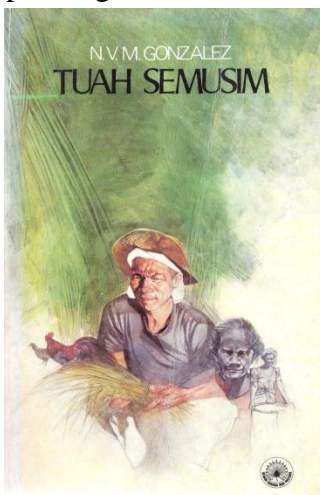
II

The novel revolves around the contrasting of two couples who live on the island of Mindoro. One couple is Epe and Tiaga Ruda, the establishment, the supervisors, the people of means to whom others become beholden. The other couple is Doro and Sabel Agnas, poor folk who leave the Rudas' employ to seek a life for themselves on a frontier farm, or *kaingin*. Their life is hard. Crops often fail:

There was a week when they lived on nothing but mushrooms; and there was the week of the bamboo shoots, which tasted quite all right, pickled in vinegar that Blas Marte's wife sent over.

Still, can one go on that way? The thought was like a temptation. It said further: Leave the clearing for once! And, mouse-like, it gnawed at Sabel's mind.

Gonzalez does not at all romanticize their hard lives, yet it is impossible not to sense that, because of the sharing among the poor folk and because of their closeness to the earth, people like Doro and Sabel maintain vital connections to those elemental rhythms of life that sustain communion and make them more whole. For the Rudas, especially Tiaga, the story is different. They are *not* portrayed as villains. Rather, because they are unconnected with the earthy rhythms of planting and harvest, they also partake only superficially in real sharing with people. They are



Malay edition of
Season of Grace

lonely, and one notices in Tiaga a growing paranoia which is accompanied by an increasingly frantic rhythm in her movements and speech. In the end, in contrast to Sabel, we also confirm the fact of Tiaga's physiological infertility as we learn, sadly, of her third miscarriage.

A Season of Grace—which consists of a prologue, epilogue, and three long, unnumbered chapters—follows the Rudas, Agnas, and others through just over one cycle of planting and harvest. Yet the feeling of time is expansive, so much so that the *Philippine Free Press* reviewer described the book as, “. . . a poem about an island—and so full of myth-making images that it recovers for Mindoro, poor island with a wondrous name—something of the mystery . . . with which the conquistadores and the early navigators saw it.”

This feeling of expansive mythmaking comes largely from those things previously mentioned: Gonzalez' handling of time, his constant recourse to the memories and dreams and reflections of his characters. It comes, too, from a lyricism in the narrative voice and the speech of the Philippine peasant which laces the story with poetry. Thus the first chapter begins:

Man and woman were walking one morning in the sun down a trail that cut across the bed of the empty river Alag.

The woman carried a baby, using a hammock slung over her shoulder. The cloth was the same piece of chatcha which last night had served as her little one's blanket. The baby whimpered inside the hammock-pack: the woman couldn't seem to make him quiet. The man said:

"Why don't you fix it, Sabel, so that it will not hurt?" He wanted to add: "Is it heavy like a yoke?" But he realized that she looked pretty enough with that hammock-pack; it was quite an ornament.

"Doro," the woman said, "please have the kindness to wait for us."

Whereupon Doro stopped and looked back. Without either slowing down or hurrying, Sabel lifted her hammock-pack a little and began rubbing the back of her neck with her palm, hoping in some way perhaps to relieve the strain there. Doro was all the more reminded of the yoke. This had been a carabao's trail. Now it was a man's trail. Ferns raised their arched fronds on all sides and a patch of cogon stood now a little way off to the right, waving bright tassels in the sun.

Or, when Sabel first arrives at a harvest site, we read:

Sabel was about to go when she saw a girl in the hut, seated in the middle of the floor. The girl's dress had been dyed with tanbark so that it was dark brown, like the thatched wall behind her.

Without any shyness, the girl asked: "You are Manang Sabel?"

Surprised, Sabel said: "Yes. How did you know my name?"

"Someone will come from over across the dry bed of the Alag, I was told. Someone with a baby, and she will be called Sabel, they said."

Sabel pondered for a moment. She liked the girl for being talkative.

In the first passage the near-Biblical tone quickly gives way to a scene of domestic friction, which in turn alternates with Doro's reflections, some selfish ("she looked pretty enough"), some which ponder the mythic yoke. We have, too, a restatement of the man-animal-plant hierarchy which Gonzalez had established early in the prologue to give us the feeling, present here, that man and animal make their way through life by the grace of the earth and its vegetation. The color of dress and thatch in the second passage suggests again the man-earth bond, but more noteworthy is the tone of the girl's reply to Sabel. That tone itself, one feels, might send Sabel searching through her memory. Indeed, she does just this shortly. For now,

though, she pauses—ponders—on the verge and is quickly called back by a commonplace: she likes the girl's "talkativeness."

Such passages abound in *A Season of Grace*, and most (like the scene of a dream and lovemaking following a day of clearing the fields in chapter three) weave together the domestic and mythic, the memorial and mundane in extraordinarily beautiful and complex ways. In such a stylistic atmosphere so many images become mythmaking, become— or seem on the verge of becoming—transmuted upward into timeless signs that give meaning to history. Whether it is an object (like a coconut), an action (the weaving of buri mats), or a relation (between Filipino manual labor and American mechanical harvesters, for example), one feels in Gonzalez' work a subtle, gentle, yet monumental retooling of signs for different ends. Let us take, for example, the coconut.

For a multitude of historical, commercial, and geothermal reasons the coconut has long been associated with the Islands. My brother, Jose Enrado, was given (for reasons I could not then fathom) the nickname "Coconut Joe." And a recent TV commercial tells us that company X is bringing the coconut halfway around the world—"From the Philippines!"—as a guarantor of moist skin. In *A Season of Grace* its function is less cosmetic.

Early in the novel a coconut is found and planted, and though there are other references to it throughout, it is only near the end of the book that its full meaning becomes apparent.

. . . [Nay Kare] was standing, her feet wet, not more than ten yards from him. The coconut she had picked up looked small in the crook of her arm. Its husk glistened more than ever now that it was out of the water, a rich dark brown that was the color of one's skin.

Doro walked up to her. "Will that ever grow, Nay Kare?" he asked, although what really crossed his mind was: "What wind and wave have sent it to this shore?"

"Why, yes, of course. You can ask Sabel."

Her patadiong wet against her breast and hips and legs, Sabel stepped out of the water, saying: "Yes, I remember. The one you picked up last time—why, it has sprouts already, I believe. And Doro," she assured him, "we planted it at once and it grew."

"Soaked in salt water as it was?" Doro could not believe her.

. . . "How else do you think can coconuts go from island to island?" Nay Kare said. "Oh, well, let's be on our way."

Because so much of the book has concerned the poor folk going from clearing to clearing, island to island, working in the saltwater sweat of their brows for whatever the earth will yield, one realizes that the coconut is a metaphor for the Philippine peasant's survival and growth—but not

only that. It is a sign meant to re-vision history by joining together certain qualities of a people with certain other historical facts about that people's creation.

Except for the Negritos (themselves relatives of the natives of the Australian bush), the Philippine people are an amalgam of travelers. A Philippine village, in fact, is called by a name that suggests not settlement, but journey: it is *barangay*, the name of a coconut-tough little boat on which many arrived from Polynesia, Malaysia, Micronesia, China, the Indian subcontinent. Philippine history, then, is shaped largely by those who arrive. This includes the white man, too, and thus *A Season of Grace* begins with an epigraph from *New Voyage Around the World* by the English seaman and pirate William Dampier (1652—1715). "The 18 Day of Feb." it begins, "we anchored at the N.W. end of the island of Mindora, in 10 Fathom-Water, about 3 quarters of a Mile from the Shore. Mindora is a large island. . . ."

"Will that ever grow?" asks Doro. Some travelers come, plant themselves, and grow—some do not, either because they do not really plant, or because, like the corrupt officials in *A Season of Grace* who take buri mats from Sabel in the beginning and Clara at the end, they are flagrant robbers. Those qualities which do spur growth Gonzalez wants to identify as the spine of Philippine character, the essence of a genuinely native past. They show most clearly, though certainly not without a great deal of tarnish, in the generosity, patience, and nobility of the Philippine peasant. The coconut becomes a mythic sign as it links the qualities of peasant life and the historical origins of Philippine society to its own immemorial travel and endurance of the salty sea. In many quarters of the Southeast Asian world the coconut is, of course, an already sacred sign; what Gonzalez adds to it is a new, pointed historicity. He uses it, that is, to reshape subtly, but significantly, an old story; and thus the fruit of the palm goes beyond even its more significant meanings, to say nothing of the way it surpasses its other familiar function as a sign of the carefree, exotic tropics, of Coconut Joes and luscious complexions. It helps make "natural" that generosity, patience, and nobility which makes more likely the overcoming of the hardships of travel, landing, and growth— or, more important here, the overcoming of colonialism.

In a recent lecture at the University of Hawaii, Gonzalez speculated that in terms of the literary imagination the Comic Rhythm might be the best way for the Third World to deal with the historical circumstances of imperialism; for the Comic Rhythm celebrates community, integration, the overcoming of fragmenting alien spirits. *A Season of Grace* leaves the Rudas inclining toward the Tragic Rhythm, toward loneliness and disintegration. The poor folk, for all their faults and the often desperate straits of their lives, incline toward the comic. In fact, the novel ends with a joke which involves not only a sailing ship but rice, one of the book's most crucial, mythic signs. In the epilogue Tata Pablo, the first villager we meet in the book's prologue, is slowly going blind, and his wife, Nay Rosa, searches an old almanac to find an appropriate saint to pray to:

Nay Rosa, unused to the weight of paper in her hand, could not keep her arm from trembling. "*Tiempo variable*, it says," she said. "And after the first quarter of the moon, clear skies with light winds from the southwest."

Tata Pablo blinked his eyes and leaned forward, turning his head a little to one side. "Louder."

"I need better light," Nay Rosa said moving toward the door.

"All right. Go on, though. What does it say about the southwest monsoon?"

"Nothing more, it seems," Nay Rosa said. "Can I look now for a name of that saint?"

"It's now a week since the batel came and loaded Epe Ruda's rajitas."

"Exactly a week. Don't you think it's San Juan?"

"I don't know. "San Jaun for the blind?"—that doesn't sound familiar," the old man said. "Was it a big batel?"

"With two masts," said Nay Rosa. "Maybe, it's San Pablo."

"It seems I can still hear the sound of the pulleys when the men hoisted up their sails," Tata Pablo said. "It was painted white?"

"White, like boiled rice," Nay Rosa said, putting down the *Almanaque Panayana*. "Maybe, it's San Lorenzo."

"You make me hungry—thinking of rice," Tata Pablo said. "Try another saint."

Against the failing of crops, of dreams, even of eyesight, such an attitude is strangely powerful. At its best, Gonzalez' mythmaking moves to this comic rhythm. It is one of the most steady, hopeful rhythms in Third World literature. The native culture will survive, it seems to say, and by an inner strength that antedates colonialism.

III

Until some enlightened U. S. publisher takes it on, *A Season of Grace* is available as an inexpensive import from The Cellar Bookshop (in Detroit at 18090 Wyoming). Now at least the University Press of Hawaii is making available Gonzalez's latest book, *Mindoro and Beyond: 21 Stories*. In part, the book is a retrospective collection culled from 40 years' work. It contains some of the Third World's finest short stories—"Lupo and the River," "Children of the Ash Covered Loam," "The Sea Beyond," "On the Ferry," "The Wireless Tower," "The Tomato Game"—and Gonzalez has arranged them not only to reflect a growing range of concern (symbolized by the distance between Mindoro and the U.S.) but also to parallel his abiding interest in the act of storytelling itself. (Coincidentally—or maybe not—the stories also fall

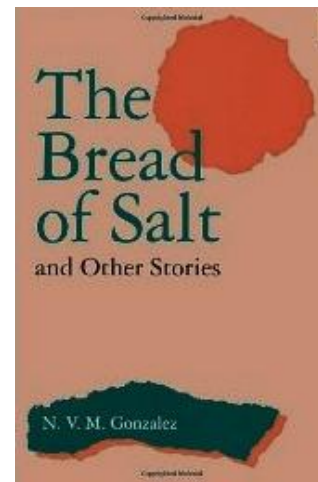
roughly in chronological order.) In the book's preface Gonzalez reproduces this passage from one of his notebooks:

It is because of our access to storytelling that the confusions and the incomprehensible realities round and about do not overwhelm us with despair. We find in due course a way of ordering the experience we go through (as, indeed, others do), and somehow come to understanding Reality as we live it—until swamped once more by fresh confusions and perplexities. Then comes a new surge of hope, and, again for him who must give an account of how things are, a search for form.

Several of Gonzalez's characters can be taken as symbols of the artist, the storyteller. Twenty-five years ago Francisco Arcellana singled out this passage from "Lupo and the River" in order to praise Gonzalez's own craftsmanship:

Lupo taught him [Pisco] how to work the rattan this way and that, never sacrificing pattern for strength, never losing your purpose, and yet taking care to make out of something ordinary a beautiful thing.

Significantly, Sabel, in *A Season of Grace*, is a mat maker whose habit it is to weave the word *Recuerdo*—"Remember"—into the center of her design. As she works with buri, so Gonzalez the writer can be seen working words, weaving on the warp and woof of myth and detail stories which declare to his people that there is indeed some unique past, something worth remembering.



Most of the stories discussed here are now available in *Bread of Salt*.

Mindoro and Beyond, then, begins with the semiautobiographical "On the Eve," about a young man's decision to become a writer, and the book ends with an historical essay on Philippine storytelling, followed by an often whimsical glossary of Philippine terms. As "On the Eve" begins, Greg Padua is a proofreader for Commonwealth Publishing Co. His father is a salesman. Says Padua: "As proofreader, with lines of type before my eyes, or galleys in my hand, my commitment was to the present. It is now rather easy to see things in this light. I stood for the text of the day, Father the pages of tomorrow." As he moves toward the literary life, however, he realizes, as he says, that "I was transgressing my commitment to the present, that I was in fact making a dubious step to the future, a territory of promises. . . ." One Mr. Campo, as the editor of a company named "Commonwealth" might be expected to do, rebukes Padua's poetic ambitions. Padua quits his job, as well as his nighttime study of law, and as the story ends is handing his father a folder of his short stories and poems. His father is uncomprehendingly silent, and Padua tells us: "The Chinese fiddle across the street began once more to wring its heart out. Father and I had changed places."

Very early in the story Padua had listened to that fiddle and told us: “My untrained ear could not grasp the melody, which resembled tortured cries and yearnings; but I imagined that it told some enchanting story inspired by the exotic aroma of narra wood and the unarticulated patience of the lives round and about....”

It seems as if, in this 1970 story, Gonzalez were summarizing the inspiration, mission, and pattern of growth of virtually his entire literary output. The stories in *Mindoro and Beyond*, which are grouped in six sections, may in fact be seen as growing in melodic complexity and evocativeness, "On the Eve" comprises Part One. In Part Two are pieces from the late thirties, some of which are more sketches than full-bodied stories. As melodies they are simple, with a folk songlike depth and transparency. In Part Three, given the growing complexity of Gonzalez' handling of time, the stories begin to resemble a kind of frozen music. And the music darkens. One critic has pointed out that "The Sea Beyond," which ends Part Three, shows how man, though he may overcome the evil in nature, cannot overcome the evil within himself. Part Four consists of the long story "Serenade," which ends with the main character, Pilar, contemplating her new piano,

a brooding presence that made the moment alive once more with the music that Pilar knew by heart—"Love and Devotion," "Flower Song," "Poet and Peasant"—music with which she must learn to woo the world into being less harsh and, perhaps, less rude.

(The songs here are highly appropriate to themes which span Gonzalez' entire work.) In Part Five, tensions between and within individuals begin merging more noticeably with the theme of tensions between cultures, especially the culture based more upon the Philippine peasant as opposed to one based upon the Americanized, Hispanized "city." Yet Part Five ends with "The Wireless Tower," which paradoxically images both a total breakdown of communication (the tower, a radio tower, has been struck by lightning) and a celebration of the light and dark sides of life—both personal life, and, one presumes, cultural life as well. It is by striving to understand the inextricable entanglements of light and dark, good and evil, victory and concession, that communication might one day be restored. Yet this must surely be the hardest of human tasks.

"Dear Greg" (Greg Padua?), begins "The Tomato Game," the first story in Part Six: "You must believe me when I say that I've tried again and again to write this story." Two of the six stories in Part Six take place in America, and this setting accentuates virtually every conflict that has appeared thus far in the book. Clearly Gonzalez has had to struggle hard for the momentary victories afforded by art. "As in myth," the writer in "The Tomato Game" says, "the signs were all over. The wooden bridge, the fork of the road, the large track all around us which earlier had been a tomato field, the rich crop as indicated by the harvesting machine to one side of the field, a menacing hulk... You can see how hard I try."

This passage puts us in direct contact with Gonzalez' effort to re-vision history by creating alternate mythic possibilities. Here the mechanical harvester, so devastating to the manual labor in which Filipinos played so large a part, is reshaped into a sign of technology's inability to eliminate the human factor. It does a bad harvesting job, finally. It is also linked metaphorically to certain unscrupulous Filipinos who engage in bride-selling schemes. Their victim this time is an elderly Filipino who, though victim, rises in character above his conniving compatriots. His generosity, patience, and nobility clearly link him to those people and ancient qualities celebrated in *A Season of Grace*.

It has been Gonzalez' aim to foster such links through art; and he has realized that one of the greatest obstacles to establishing a nourishing relationship with the past is that that past is, in Robert Frost's words, so "unstoried, artless, unenhanced." Or, perhaps, it is just wrongly storied.

The problem with the main character in "In the Twilight," the last story in the book, is that he has lived so long remembering a key incident in his life incorrectly. He literally has the wrong story. A fiddle player in his youth in the Philippines, he is now, in America, "Dan," a jazz saxophonist. The character through whom he inadvertently learns the truth was a Philippine guerrilla. Now he is a security guard—Union Carbide, night shift—hoping for U.S. citizenship in three years. Such transformations are jarring; they seem too forced for a story otherwise so delicately crafted. Yet such changes, especially in music, seem common among Filipinos in America. "In the Twilight" is a somber echo of "On the Eve," but even amid darkening sounds and shadows Gonzalez seems to suggest that a more accurate memory of the past would help his people define who they are as a people and thus be less prone to such far strayings and cultural pessimisms. His message is still *Recuerdo*. But facts take us only so far: we live in a world of contending *stories*, of myth and counter-myth. What a writer ultimately says is, Remember *my* vision of our past. This is the great artist's privilege and obligation. "Unhappily, the spiritual welfare of this country depends upon the fate of its creative minds," wrote Van Wyck Brooks of the American situation in 1918. "If they cannot grow and ripen, where are we going to get new ideals...Discover, invent a usable past we certainly can, and that is what a vital criticism always does."

Thoughts like these reach obsessive proportions in the Third World, for there artists and critics face baldly redemptive and recreative relationships to native pasts which have been pressed so hard, sometimes so nearly annihilated, by the colonial experience. Fortunately for the Philippines, Gonzalez' vision—even in its twilight, somber hues—is strong, complex, and daringly hopeful.